



The RAH! Journal

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Capitalism: A Leaf Story

The night before Palm Sunday, Tom and I watched Michael Moore's new five-hankie documentary on America's bailout blues, "Capitalism: A Love Story." It was a MoveOn.org event hosted by a neighbor and her living room was packed. The only open seats were beneath the low fronds of, yes, a giant indoor palm. Tom chose to stand. Five minutes into the film I was glad I had a place to hide.

The facts of our recent financial *coup d'état* are even more brutal than we thought. It was all hands on the treasury deck for one last greed-it-and-reap party. Not to mention a deregulation soirée that allowed corporations to take out million-dollar insurance policies on "dead peasants" (the legal term for deceased workers) which give nothing to the peasant's family upon his/her death. Don't say Bill Moyers didn't warn you.

Peering at this nightmare from my leafy glade, I suddenly felt like an American soldier taking cover under a Baghdad palm tree and wondering how we got into this mess. Suddenly the movie was in the Middle East too, but in the time of Jesus. "Master, how can we help the poor?" asked a follower. Jesus's lips moved but it sounded a lot like former US Treasury secretary Henry Paulson's voice saying: "Invest in derivatives!" "Would Jesus like capitalism?" Michael Moore then asked the Catholic bishop of Detroit. "Jesus would have nothing to do with it," the bishop replied with a gaze as unblinking as that of the serpents Henry Paulson loves to hold. Paulson, in fact, is a passionate conservationist who loves all wild animals -- the Nature Conservancy still hopes he'll take over as its CEO someday. He handles snakes and tarantulas like the rest of us handle puppies and kittens. This, he says, is because he was raised in Christian Science, "a faith that emphasizes love over fear:"

Love over fear? Then why on earth was Paulson so instrumental in creating the national financial meltdown that continues to strike terror in the hearts of those of us (98%) who aren't the wealthiest Americans and who therefore stand to lose our jobs and our homes, not to mention our democracy? But maybe that's not the right question. Maybe the real question is "love of what?" Could Paulson love money – and animals -- more than he loves people? Is this what keeps him brokering such stellar international conservation land-grab deals one moment while he stuffs his pockets with our hard-earned bailout money the next? Steal from Peter to pay Palau? (Paulson does have a soft spot for coral reefs). Could this be why he originally wanted to be a forest ranger?

Michael Moore, we learned, originally wanted to be a priest. And I don't think I'm the only one who was startled by this revelation. But why should we be? Has anyone in recent history been a better Christ-like model and done so much on our behalf for so little?...besides Moore's exasperated – and Christ-like -- request that we "do something!" In "Capitalism" we learn that somebody else sure tried to. On January 11, 1944, a year before his death, F.D.R. tried hard to get an economic "Second Bill of Rights" passed, a love-over-fear document if there ever were one. It guaranteed every American a job with a living wage, a home, medical care, education, and recreation. Oh, and also "freedom from unfair competition and monopolies," a notion that might strike a little terror in the hearts of the Henry Paulsons of the world. As it was, on our national day of love this year, Paulson seemed more than a little nervous about Obama's Valentine to America proposing to de-monopolize big banks and take more than a love-bite out of their Wall Street gambling habit. "These large institutions pose a dangerous risk," Paulson told the London Sunday Times, but he wanted "to see regulators deal with it, not politicians."

Regulators? You mean the guys who opened the floodgates on predatory lending and the whole derivative mess that led to the financial collapse in the first place?? He thinks we'll fall for *that* one again? Not if Obama starts acting like the president we elected him to be, which, Moore says, he finally is. And a true love-over-fear president leading a 98% majority that still believes its country is a democracy can be a pretty scary thing if you've still got your fingers in the bailout jar. Maybe it is finally time for the resurrection of F.D.R.'s radically patriotic Second Bill of Rights. Now, that's a new leaf the rest of us – and Jesus -- could really get behind.

Happy Easter.

