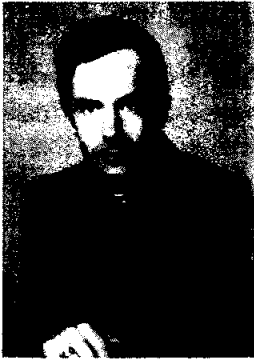


## Chaplain's Corner, Hughes Camp Chaplain Richard W Rudd



Inflation has become the dominant issue on Americans' minds because all of us must deal with it on a daily basis. Especially harmful to the poor and indigent, it is a self-inflicted malady for which those who can be categorized in three major groups share culpability. For this reason, the

term "excuseflation" has been coined. The most prominent group responsible for inflation is composed of politicians. All government spending bills must originate in the House of Representatives. Now that Republicans control that body, they are locked in contentious debate with Democrats about how much to spend and what to spend on in the budget for the next fiscal year. Because all politicians have excuses for inserting expenditures into the budget, whether for altruistic or selfish reasons, the national debt has now reached \$31 trillion and interest payments on the debt are consuming more of the budget. We are faced with two choices. Taxes could be raised or government spending could be cut, reducing government services. Neither option is painless.

The second group responsible for inflation is a composite of individual Americans. Excuses are as varied as the individuals. Some use death and mortality. You only live once, so why deny yourself? Others have engaged in what is being called "revenge spending." Because the Wuhan virus forced the delay of certain indulgences, vaccinations and the subsiding of the virus are allowing spending to return with a vengeance to make up for lost time. Credit cards placate the appetites of those who demand instant gratification and create the expectation that eventually you intend to spend. Technology has become another factor contributing to over-spending. Shopping by phone and on line is made easier and one customer admitted that it beguiles you into treating cash like Monopoly money. Needs and wants make all of us vulnerable. Not knowing the difference between the two and lack of self-discipline can result in bankruptcy. Gluttonous consumption fuels the inflation that harms all of us.

The third group responsible for inflation is

composed of the business and corporate sector of the US. Politicians seek votes and consumers seek gratification. This group is motivated by greed. I have long suspected that corporations are unjustifiably raising prices beyond the point of making a reasonable profit that verges on extortion. Now, analysts and researchers are seeing a pattern of such activity. When this type of corporate behavior becomes widespread, consumers cannot shop around for lower prices. Corporations find excuses for raising prices by taking advantage of news reports by the mass media that intimidate consumers, be it the Wuhan virus, bird flu, Russia's invasion of the Ukraine, or other incidents that can be blamed for disruptions in the supply of products and services. They watch for times when it is felt excusable to raise prices and profits without consumer complaints and gauge how much we will tolerate. They also seek higher profits through price increases over volume of sales, thereby cutting labor and other production costs and perhaps even orchestrating shortages.

Using excuses to conceal actions taken for economic motives with no regard for their adverse effects on helpless victims is nothing new. In the WBTS, slavery was used as an excuse to prosecute an unjustified attack on the South. The economic motive was the loss of tax revenue for the US government from tariffs on southern trade. The port of NY did not want competition with the port of New Orleans and northern industrial development needed southern products and cheap labor. Thus, the North had not only to defeat the South, but decimate it at all costs to prevent future competition from a potential rival.

Looking farther back in history, Micah described conditions in ancient Israel that could apply to current economic conditions in the US. 'Woe to those who devise wickedness and work evil upon their beds! When the morning dawns, they perform it because it is in the power of their hand. They covet fields, and seize them; and houses, and take them away; they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance.' (Mic. 2:1) Covetousness replaced compassion. Those driven by personal financial gain continually and deliberately plotted and schemed, using their advantageous positions to victimize consumers and ruin families.

Later, Nehemiah, who became governor of Judea, dealt with a similar situation. The people of Jerusalem complained to him, saying, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards, and our houses to get grain because of the famine." (Neh. 5:3) Tobiah and Sanballat, who controlled cities on the route between Jerusalem and the Mediterranean Sea, had influence over Jerusalem's economy and vehemently fought against Nehemiah. Lenders used the famine to take advantage of people for their own financial gain, charging as much as 12% interest. Referring to usury, the practice of willfully taking advantage of one's fellow man for personal gain by charging exorbitant and excessive rates of interest over what is legal or reasonable, Nehemiah resisted this practice and accused them of their crime, saying, "You are exacting interest, each from his brother." (Neh. 5:7)

St. Paul wrote, "But those who desire to be rich fall into...many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all evils..." (I Tim. 6:9) Many misunderstand what Paul is saying. Money is not the subject of the statement; money and wealth are not evil. Love is the subject; it is the inordinate obsession for money that leads to evil deeds and corrupts the perpetrator. The ruin and destruction of which Paul speaks is a two-edged sword. One edge injures the avid pursuer of money and the world's goods and pleasures. Such distorted obsession is idolatry that perverts good judgement, encourages callous insensitivity toward others, and never realizes contentment. They are always calculating, conniving, conspiring, and thirsting for more. The other edge of the sword is the harm done to those who are victimized for monetary gain. Paul teaches we are not only to avoid the love of money, we are to do the opposite. We are to "...aim at righteousness (how we treat others), godliness (obedience to our Creator), faith, love (principles to live by), steadfastness (determination to do what is moral and right), gentleness (being caring and considerate)." As applicable to us in the 21st century as it was to Americans in the 19th century and the contemporaries of Nehemiah in the 5th century BC and Micah in the 8th century BC, Paul's admonition is timeless.

**Fr Richard Rudd, Hughes Camp Chaplain**

**Hughes Camp Chaplain**