# LUTHERAN SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AT CHICAGO

THE ING THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

A JOYOUS EXCHANGE

AN INTRODUCTION

CLASS PAPER

FOR

GRADUATE THEOLOGCAL SEMINAR I:

19th CENTURY BACKGROUND

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MT. MORRIS, ILLINOIS

DECEMBER, 1991

#### INTRODUCTION

On October 12, 1992 Americans celebrate Columbus' arrival in America 500 years ago. This is a watershed event in history. Because of this the world turn in a new direction. This is not the only watershed event in history. Other are the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese on December 7, 1941 (50 year anniversary celebrated in 1991), the Holocaust (remembered each year on April 26), and the bombing of Hiroshima by the United States on August 5, 1945.

Each of these events involves a ling of some line, political, geographic, or moral.

The theme for 1992-93 at Lutheran Outdoor Ministries Center is "The ing that Changed the World - a joyous exchange." The subject is singular, and the word is symbolized rather than written out. Thus, the emphasis is not on the above mentioned historical events, but upon the event of Jesus Christ in history.

One of Martin Luther's Christmas carols acknowledges this ing.

From heaven above to earth I come To bring good news to every home Glad tiding of great joy I bring To all the world and gladly sing.

To you this night is born a child Of Mary chosen virgin mild; This new-born child of lowly birth Shall be the joy of all the earth.

This is the Christ, God's Son most high, Who hears your sad and bitter cry; He will himself your Savior be And from all sin will set you free.

The blessing which the Father planned The Son holds in his infant hand, That in his kingdom, bright and fair, You may with us his glory share.

Welcome to earth, O noble Guest, Through whom this sinful world is blest. You turned not from our needs away! How can our thanks such love repay?

O dearest Jesus, holy child, Prepare a bed, soft, undefiled, A holy shrine, within my heart, That you and I need never part.

Though the focus is on the Christ event these aforementioned events can give us some insight into the Christ event. Ironically they all involve human suffering and death. There are enemies. Abuse of power, authority, and truth are a common denominator.

In each of these events there are "exchanges." Dieters know what that means. One entity is substituted for another.

When Luther describes the Christ event he speaks of a "joyous" exchange. Out of the ashes of hopelessness and despair emerges not only restitution but change. The change is both corporate and personal. Though we might be hard pressed to describe these exchanges in the other events mentioned above as joyous there were both positive and negative consequences and results.

Positive consequences from dastardly deeds do not affirm dastardly deeds. To say something good comes from these exchanges does not allow the ends to justify the means. Evil does not occur so that good can come.

I am sure the reader is aware how the crusades were a time in history when people were mercilessly treated who were outside the Christian faith. People were annihilated who did not embrace nor

demonstrate faith in Jesus Christ. In reaction to this behavior there are those who have chastised the Church and expressed doubt of a loving God as they reflect on the atrocities.

Before engaging the theme before us, "The ing that Changed the World - a joyous exchange," I want to reflect on three questions:

What is religion?

What is history?

What is humanity?

These topics are not new. Theologians have been debating them for years. However, it was at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries that Christian thinkers began to struggle with them in a very aggressive fashion. Why? Because there was a boon of intellectual development. A new scientific world view was emerging, a world view from which we benefit technically today, but from which the church continues to shutter. Prior to this time religion explained the unexplainable. Something was a miracle or something occurred due to God's intervention. With this new world view explanations could be given for particular phenomena, and God was no longer needed for understanding.

Chances are that at the heart of many of the teachings of many of the churches today are either criticisms or affirmations of the thoughts that emerged during the 19th century.

We are on the eve of the 21st century, but we are not out of the 19th century woods yet. The debates go on. Because this theme engages some of these ideas expressed in these questions it will be helpful to reflect on and glean from them.

What is significant in the 19th century is that the human being

became the focus of attention. Theology stepped out of the sky and the box and came to the human level. Thus, we see a shift from metaphysics to physics, orthodoxy to piety, intellect to feeling, doctrine to practice, abstract to concrete.

In the material that follows I feel it is important to take seriously the 19th century emphasis on human experience, but I think we need to move on to focus on how God's activity is perceived as well within this context.

To peak your interest I have given tentative one word answers to each question, in part to startle you and thereby motivate you to read on. However, these words can become hooks upon which the meat of the ideas can be hung.

What is religion? Piety.
What is history? Freedom.
What is humanity? God.

### WHAT IS RELIGION?

It may seem peculiar to raise this questions because we already know the answer. Religion is a group of beliefs, a practice, a lifestyle, a worship style. One can have it or not have it. There can be many or one God. One can believe in Jesus Christ or Satan, the Bible or the Koran, the sacredness of personality or the sanctity of a bull. Religion is not constrained to or by much. There is an infinity of possibilities under the term "religion".

I realize that in some circles the word "religion" is not used in reference to Christianity and Judaism. It has been taught that these

two belief systems are unique in that they embody revelation from God.

This puts them in contrast with systems that are derived from human enterprises, experience with nature, and personality cults. The latter are called "religions." Christianity and Judaism are called "faiths."

I do not want to enter into this debate right now because it does not serve our purpose. I want to retain the question as stated because a) most people understand and treat Christianity as a religion and b) there are some tenets of the Christian faith that can only be understood as created by humans. Concepts created by people and dubbed a part of the church's teachings need to be sorted out.

I am also concerned that the experience of and the instruction in the Christian faith not be a study of a religion that is outside of our experience or that the Christian faith is merely an emotional/spiritual high which becomes the norm and criteria for the Christian faith experience.

Religion has an objective side. There is knowledge, content, doctrine, tradition, etc. At the same time there is the personal, subjective side with emotion and commitment.

When the Christian religion is discussed one must begin with faith. What is it?

Faith is defined in several ways. It means to believe, to accept an idea even though it cannot be proved. It is a substitute for demonstrated knowledge. The car in which we ride away from our home is somehow demonstrated. We see it, feel it, trust it, etc. Even the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>I have begun to think this discussion is Christian arrogance anyway.

house we leave is not questioned. As long as we can see it as we drive away we can point to its existence. But once the house is out of sight can we any longer prove our house is there? Belief is this trusting that something exists though we cannot prove it. However, we believe so thoroughly that when we return home we drive our car in a way that acknowledges that assurance. Here faith is a substitute for demonstrated knowledge.

Faith is also defined as dependence. This has already been suggested in the preceding paragraph. We depend upon an object's existence (human and non-human). However, faith as dependence is also putting one's fate into the hands of another, allowing the other person to shape, if not determine, one's destiny. Faith is put in the parent, the teacher, the doctor, and so on.

More will be said in subsequent chapters about faith that falls into the category of our theological understanding, namely that faith is initiated by God and that faith is the presence of the risen Christ in our lives. But these themes will need to wait.

The concern here is that religious faith be treated as something more than an intellectual exercise and rational experience. Faith has the dimensions of feeling and consciousness. Religion has a personal dimension, something that touches the quick of our being, our thought, and our behavior. It means something to us.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) was a pastor who had the capacity to talk with the intelligentsia of his day, people who, for the most part, had "made a universe for" themselves and were "above the need

of thinking of the Universe" that had made them. Scientific knowledge was coming of age.

These words are appropriate for today. There is no age group exempt from the notion that one is in total control of themselves and that self reliance whether for good or ill is our god. People can just about do anything their hearts' desire. Thus, the Earth, the Universe, the God from whom we emerge is of little or no consequence. "Who needs God?"

We live in a world that we can explain and manipulate quite well.

If certain things are not possible now, because some secrets of the

universe still remain, it is just time before humans can conquer them.

It is to these kinds of people Schleiermacher spoke. A historical period called the Enlightenment had just preceded him. During this ear humans discovered a vast array of learning. Science emerged. Knowledge of the universe began to expand. One system of knowledge was replacing another. Reason took the place of religious faith. Superstitious thought was being debunked.

To these people Schleiermacher addressed himself, ". . . belief must be something different from a mixture of opinions about God and the world, and of precepts for one life or for two." He could have argued that religious experience was necessary for justice and order, or religious experience is the fear of the eye of God upon us, or religious experience must help people deal with mortals being sinful, short

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>Keith W. Clements, ed., <u>Friedrich Schleiermacher</u>, <u>Pioneer of Modern Theology</u>, (London: Collins, 1987), 67.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>Ibid., 79.

sighted and mismanagers of the creation, or religious experience makes one feel better.<sup>4</sup> No, he had something else in store.

For him, religion is found in both human knowledge and human activity, intellectual and emotional. Religion is the "feeling of absolute dependence," i.e., the "consciousness of being absolutely dependent." To him this is being in relationship with God.

The feeling of absolute dependence is a recognition of not living life alone. There is a reliance of all our being upon others outside of ourselves. The relationships are reciprocal, one affecting the other.

Schleiermacher discusses the feeling of dependence and the feeling of freedom. Of the latter he says that there is no such thing on its own. Everything exists in some type of dependent relationship. There is the experience of spontaneity, of freedom, of independence. One can move on and away from reliance on another. But this can only be a shift in the objects of our dependence.

We essentially live in dependence upon the world outside of ourselves. The question is: are we conscious of it? Let me illustrate. The reader is more than likely in a sitting posture on a bed, in a chair, or on the floor. Think for a moment. Whatever you are sitting in or on is also holding you up. You are dependent upon its support. Chances are, however, not until you read this did you shift your consciousness of your brain to your buttocks.

When Schleiermacher is discussing consciousness, the feeling of dependence, he is making the assertion that one possesses self-conscious

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>Ibid., 74.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup>Ibid., 102.

of this. Herein is one of the staples of religion, the feeling of absolute dependence.

Schleiermacher would say that it is in this feeling of absolute dependence that one experiences God. The dependent relationship with the other has its source in God. Schleiermacher is not trying to prove that God exists. For him the whence of this experience, i.e., what is the source of this experience, is "designated by the word 'God'." His argument is that if one assents in any way to an idea of God, ultimately this is what one is experiencing. "The immediate self-consciousness" of absolute dependence "becomes a consciousness of God."

How does one have this consciousness "awakened" in oneself? For Schleiermacher it is found by participating in the community of believers. As people abide together and converse about and share their own faith so one's awareness is peaked.

The feeling of being religious has often taken upon itself an ecstatic type of behavior, an emotional binge. For some this means a consciousness of God. Somehow one is to feel God as water pours down over one's head or wine warms the stomach. "Feeling" for Schleiermacher is not this at all. Not to say there cannot be an ecstasy. Feeling is a consciousness, a living knowingly in dependence, a reliance upon another. We recognize the chair that holds us up.

Schleiermacher uses the word "piety" for "the consciousness of ultimate dependence" and says that once this characteristic of a person

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup>Ibid., 103

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup>Ibid., 104.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup>Ibid., 106.

is attainted it becomes "the essence of (one's) human nature."9

At the heart of my concern is the necessity to enable Christians to be religious, pious, conscious of God. For many the Christian faith is something handed down, expected, a part of the family tradition, a way to behave in the social world, a liturgical way to deal with life and death. But does it ever become something that one embraces and senses being embraced by? Something owned?

In order for this consciousness of ultimate and absolute dependence to succeed Schleiermacher presupposes a community of believers.

Yes, the Church becomes integral to this scheme.

There are people who profess to be Christian because they believe in Jesus Christ. One does not quite know what the word "believe" means, but my hunch is that this is really a means to address "God of the gaps." Jesus, or some deity, fills the void, the unexplained in human experience. It could be someone other than Jesus, but in most contexts such a personality is culturally accepted.

The problem is that often the "Jesus believers" will hold that the church, as a community of faith, is not necessary. They cite incident after incident that justifies their position against the organized church from the crusades to the Spanish inquisition, to the bureaucracy and "politics" of the church, to the church's liberal and conservative positions on one or more social issues.

Listen carefully to Schleiermacher. If one is going to be conscious of one's ultimate dependence upon God a community of faith is necessary. I would push it to say that if one wants to really live out

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup>Ibid., 173.

a life of faith and piety in Jesus Christ participation in the Christian community is a must. This piety cannot exist outside of the church.

It is in this community that two things happen. First, the community is the source of the understanding of God. It is the community's "story" that acknowledges that this is how reality is understood. God is the source of dependence. Therefore, the experience of dependence is the experience of God. Second, within this community one's profession of this consciousness of dependence is made. For whatever reason it is motivated, the individual now has both the support of others in the community and the reminder by the community that this profession was made.

What is religion? My tentative answer is "piety," i.e. religion is a "pious consciousness of dependence upon God," a sense of ownership of God and ownership by God.

#### WHAT IS HISTORY?

When dealing with a theme like "The ing that Changed the world - a joyous exchange," that takes seriously historical events, it might be helpful to ask about history itself.

History is more than reports, more than occurrences. History is the word for the interaction itself that takes place within all of creation, the continuity of these actions, and their development. History can be written on pages of books and etched into rocks. It can be seen in the traces of prehistoric organisms. History is simply life

unfolding, documented and undocumented, interpreted and uninterpreted.  $^{10}$ 

For many, history is solely human: wars, politics, nations and empires rising and falling. We are discovering that the nonhuman world has a history, too. And it may be significant when some day both human and nonhuman history are seen as one history, natural histories or the history of nature.

The reports of history can be pessimistic. The unfolding of events can often point at the evil that prevails in the world. It can lead people to draw the conclusion that once things get bad enough the end of the world will come, the final consummation of all things.

However, I would like you to reflect on a more optimistic world view because it seems to me to say something to our age that puts the movement of history in God's hands rather than in humanity's. It is not an idea without problems. It does not easily answer the questions of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup>This stands in contrast to Hegel's idea that the only history is written history.

History combines in our language the objective as well as the subjective side. It means both the historiam rerum gestarum and the res gestas themselves, both the events and the narration of the vents. (It means both Geschehen and Geschichte.) This connection of the two meanings must be regarded as highly significant and not merely accidental. We must hold that the narration of history and historical deeds and events appear at the same time; a common inner principle brings them forth together. . . .

The periods, whether we suppose them to be centuries or millennia, which peoples have passed before the writing of history, may have been filled with revolutions, migrations, the wildest transformations. Yet, they are without objective history because they lack subjective history, records of history. Such records are lacking, not because they have accidentally disappeared during those long ages, but because they never could have existed.

<sup>(</sup>G. W. F. Hegel, <u>Reason in History</u>, a <u>General Introduction to the Philosophy of History</u>, trans. and ed., with an introduction by Robert S. Hartman (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1988), 75-76.)

sin, death, and the power of evil.

The source of this idea is Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). Some who have studied philosophy may remember him for his historical method of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Those who know him better would remember him as the one who "unchained the most irrational and irreligious movements - Fascism and Communism" and "inspired the most democratic: Walt Whitman and John Dewy." There were people who went to both the right and left of Hegel. Some considered him the pure philosopher.

He had one notion that fits into this discussion. He says, "World history is the progress of the consciousness of freedom." Freedom is God acting out God's own self-consciousness.

In a sense, for Schleiermacher it is in the self-consciousness of absolute dependence that human fully realizes the self. For Hegel, God is fully realized when God's self-consciousness of freedom is actualized in history.

Hegel spends a lot of time using philosophical notions to arrive at this point. He acknowledges in a rather arrogant fashion that "only the German peoples came, through Christianity, to realize that man as man is free and that freedom of Spirit is the very essence of man's nature." He hereby acknowledges that his source is in the teachings of Christianity.

According to Hegel, God acts out the process of freedom in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup>Ibid., xi.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup>Ibid., 24.

 $<sup>^{13}</sup>$ Ibid., 24.

history. This reaches fulfillment in a one world community.

Hegel says:

The perpetual misunderstanding of freedom is this: that one knows it only in its formal subjective sense, abstracted from its essential objects and aims. Thus the limitation of impulse, desire, passion - pertaining merely to the particular individual as such of caprice and willfulness, is taken as a limitation of freedom. On the contrary, such limitation is the very condition leading to liberation; and society and the state are the very conditions in which freedom is realized. 14

You may wonder what "State" means. It is an ideal community of people living together.

So what is history? One answer is that it is the unfolding of God in the world as expressed in freedom.

To some this may be a fearsome thought because it can open doors for revolution. Nonetheless, it is acknowledging both on a personal plain and a historical plain the fulfillment of people to be who they are as individuals, communities, nations, and races.

When we think in these terms, the role of Christ, He who comes to set creation free, takes on dimensions of great proportion. The crucified and risen Lord has broken the bonds of sin, death, and the power of evil. Jesus Christ reigns! The victory is accomplished.

Freedom!

When speaking of history as the unfolding of freedom there are two additional points to be made. The following are ideas espoused by Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930).

First, Harnack presents the notion of the Kingdom of God as having two realities: an internal and an external. The internal reality is

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup>Ibid., 55.

that the Kingdom of God comes to the individual and lays hold of the person. The external reality is that God rules, God is God's own power. The Kingdom of God is also something that is future, as expressing the ultimate, eternal rule of God. But it is also inward, within the person, making itself known in the present moment. 16

For Harnack the inner coming to the individual is the dominant notion. The first meaning of the Kingdom of God is that the kingdom and the power of the devil is vanquished. Secondly, it means that the sick are healed. Third, the Kingdom is God's forgiveness of sins. 17

It is at this point I want to introduce my own thinking. In a sense I am taking ideas from both Hegel and Harnack: "freedom" as the activity of God and "moment" as the event of God.

Harnack uses the idea of "moment" in relation to the individual. I would like to understand "moment" in a broader historical sense.

There are "moments" in history. There is the glimmering of something that might only be a "piece of heaven" or a "slice of hell." It is not everything in a nutshell. Life and order are affected, but things do not always make radical changes. Sometimes these moments can be elongated, but they do not last. Why? Because other aspects of life begin to impact upon and impede them. The moment cannot only live itself out, and then it is no more.

An example is the bursting forth of a beautiful flower. It lasts

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup>Adolf von Harnack, <u>What Is Christianity?</u>, trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders, with introduction by Rudolf Bultmann, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986). 56.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup>Ibid 59-61.

just for a while, and then it dies. It influences other things and is influenced by them. It makes a contribution to the natural world, but it is absorbed in the on-rush of the natural process when its flour-ishing life ceases. It had its identify and then dies and becomes a part of another series of natural occurrences. That does not mean falling into meaninglessness. "All flesh is grass," says Isaiah ". . . The grass withers, the flower fades . . . " (40:6-7). But death is not the end of the contribution of the grass as the ecologist will tell you. The plant joins with other particles of matter to create humus.

What I want understood is the significance and worth of the "moment." It is a way to say there is a brief elapse of time when something flourishes. The measure can be small, the interval brief.

The second notion is "freedom." Hegel uses this word to express the self-realization of God in a formal institution called the State. While we look for and await the ideal State I believe there are "moments" of freedom, of people being set free, of people experiencing fulfillment in the process of history.

When Harnack describes his understanding of the Kingdom of God is he not stating dimensions of freedom: evil overpowered, hope renewed, and relationships restored?

As we ponder the unfolding of history today it appears that the rule of God, the self-realization of God, freedom, are snippets, moments of this reality. It is something for pious persons conscious of their ultimate dependency upon God to focus on and celebrate.

The second idea that emerges from Harnack which I feel is necessary to reflect upon is the idea that history is a part of our own

personal existence. It is not aloof from us.

I am human and consider nothing human alien to me can also be expressed as I am human and consider nothing historical alien to me. But that still says little. Everything which has happened and is still happening is history: that you are yourself and everything depends on your appropriating it consciously. That is why whatever happens in history is not only much more understandable for us than nature and its processes but also can become our own inner possession and meld perfectly with our higher life. We are allowed for that reason to illumine history by means of our own experience and life circumstances, assured that from them we will surely understand history in growing measure for it is spirit the unveils spirit. 18

Harnack is seeking to tie a consciousness of history in the very being of a person. History, be it genetically or culturally derived and conveyed, has much to do with our very being. And to be able to be conscious of it is important to human existence.

What is religion? Religion is a pious consciousness of dependence upon God. Piety! What is history? History is God actualizing God's very nature. Freedom!

## WHAT IS HUMANITY?

The tentative answer to this question is "God." A broader answer is this: humanity is what God has become and does become. The intention here is not to make humans divine, but to understand the humanity of God.

Humanity is the precise and explicit way in which God engages and intersects with the world in a most concrete fashion. One might even say that the humanity is Jesus Christ both as the historical event and as God in history. This is to say that humanity is both the historical

<sup>18</sup> Martin Rumscheidt, ed., Adolf von Harnack - Liberal Theology at Its Height, (London: Collins, 1988), 57.

Jesus as well as the human race.

Let me give some explanation. We need to take seriously the humanity of God. This is unique to the Christian religion. But it has some pitfalls.

Humans are self-conscious beings. Humans are real. Humans operate by senses. Humans have the capacity to speculate, to project, to anticipate the future. In fact humans can wish and imagine living in another person or place or time. "Quantum Leap" is possible in our imagination. Humans are flesh and blood, sense and desire, thoughts and dreams, etc.

In fact, humans have the capacity to choose to be like God or even act like God. (This problem is discussed in Genesis as the source of sin.)

It is not uncommon to describe humans from a negative position. The theology that prevails the air waves and many conservative Christian communities is a revivalist theology that says in effect that in order to talk about God one must talk first of human sin. After this is acknowledged by the individual then there is the need for repentance (change of direction) and the opening of self to faith in Jesus Christ. The initial image of the human is pessimistic and negative. (This way of thinking has roots in the Erlangen school of theology in the 19th century. 19)

Another thrust in our world is to affirm the unity of the human species with all of creation and to affirm the blessings of the human

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup>Claude Welch, <u>Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century</u>, Vol. 1, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 218-227.

race, a positive understanding. This is found in movements like creation spirituality.

I would like to approach the idea of what it means to be human by sharing with you some insights from a man named Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872). There are two reasons for doing this. First, he has a positive opinion of humanity. Humans are worthwhile. Secondly, when he critiques the understanding of God as a projection of humanity he raises an issue with which the Christian community must wrestle.

For Feuerbach religion is found in feeling or emotion and in wish. God is really a projection of oneself, what one wishes and desires, but does not have. Religion is putting to fullest use ones imagination. Feuerbach does not condemn this type of thought process. In fact he would affirm that there is value in this. His concern is that people are capable of distinguishing between what one imagines in the mind and what one perceives with the senses. 20

A good illustration of how religion belongs to the imagination comes from the recent experience of Americans being held hostage by the Iranians from 1984 to 1991. Among their assets was the ability to live outside of the reality of what they experienced. Chained, beaten, left out in the cold and frostbitten, isolated, unconscious of the outside world, ignorant of years of history – all these things composed their world. How did they survive? Among various contributions was their ability to imagine beyond their experience. Of one of the hostages, Terry Anderson, the one American in captivity the longest, it was said he became a believing and practicing Catholic. There was for him

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup>Ibid., 74.

something outside of himself that was for him a reality, a truth.

Feuerbach would call this imagination, wishful thinking. The present experience of a person in captivity would say there is only hopelessness and despair. The imagination on the other hand can project another reality; there is hope.

Now it is this issue that Feuerbach addresses and for which he is criticized within the Christian religious community. You have heard it said that Communism teaches that religion is the opiate of the people., i.e. religion makes people feel good. This has been stated by Lenin, but Feuerbach would say of religious experience in the language of today, "If it feels good, do it."

However, it is necessary to look more seriously at what Feuerbach is saying because, though he may be used to criticize religion, he may be saying things regarding the human race that we need to hear.

Feuerbach says that God is really the projection of ourselves, our best selves. What humans say about God is really what humans believe about humanity itself.

What does Feuerbach say about human beings? Humans are different from all other creatures by virtue of the human consciousness. Feuerbach makes a distinction between instinct and science, the infinite and the finite. The nonhuman world is conscious, aware of its world. Species are knowledgeable of their own species. If one would use the concept of adaptation today, species make adjustments in their physical being in order to survive and procreate. If species do not adapt they do not survive. Feuerbach would call this kind of consciousness instinct. Instinct is a finite consciousness, i.e., it is limited to

the time and space of the creatures existence. He illustrates it in this way.

The consciousness of the caterpillar, whose life is confined to a particular species or plant, does not extend itself beyond this narrow domain. It does, indeed, discriminate between this plant and other plants, but more it knows not. A consciousness so limited, but on account of that very limitation so infallible, we do not call consciousness, but instinct. Consciousness in the strict or proper sense, is identical with consciousness of the infinite; a limited consciousness is no consciousness; consciousness is essentially infinite in its nature. 21

What he is saying is that human consciousness is radically different. Though we have the consciousness of the caterpillar in every day practical existence we have the thought process to perceive humans as a species and the existence of other species. This is called "science."

Human consciousness is infinite. We have heard it said, "There is no limit to what one can know." Today, we talk about a boon of knowledge. What has happened in the last 100 years, 50 years, 10 years is an explosion of information humankind has never had before. The way Feuerbach would understand what is happening is not that humans are acquiring knowledge, but that the obstacles to human consciousness are being removed. Consciousness is infinite. In its pure form it has no bounds. "Consciousness is essentially infinite in its nature." 22

So what is the nature of man? Feuerbach uses the words Reason, Will, and Affection.

To a complete man belong the power of thought, the power of will, the power of affection. The power of thought is the light of the intellect, the power of will is energy of character, the power of affection is love. Reason, love, force of will, are perfections—

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup>Lawrence S. Stepelevich, ed., <u>The Young Hegelians - an Anthology</u>, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 130.

<sup>&</sup>quot;Ibid.

the perfections of the human being - nay, more, they are absolute perfections of being. To will, to love, to think, are the highest powers, as the absolute nature of man as man, and the basis of his existence. Man exists to think, to love, to will. Now that which is the end, the ultimate aim, is also the true basis and principle of a being. But what is the end of reason? Reason. Of love? Love. Of will? Freedom of the will. We think for the sake of thinking; love for the sake of loving; will for the sake of willing - i.e., that we may be free. True existence is thinking, loving, willing existence. That alone is true, perfect, divine, which exists for its own sake. But such is love, such is reason, such is will. The divine trinity in man, above the individual man is the unity of reason, love, will. Reason, Will, Love, are not powers which man possess, for he is nothing without them, he is what he is only by them; they are the constituent elements of his nature, which he neither has nor makes, the animating, determining, governing powers - divine, absolute powers - to which he can oppose no resistance. $^{23}$ 

Feuerbach puts the human experience so beautifully. You must hear him say it:

How can the feeling man resist feeling, the loving one love, the rational one reason? Who has not experienced the overwhelming power of melody? And what else is the power of melody but the power of feeling? Music is the language of feeling; melody is audible feeling - feeling communicating itself. Who has not experienced the power of love, or at least heard of it? What is the stronger - love or the individual man? It is man that possesses love, or is it not much rather love that possesses man? When love impels a man to suffer death even joyfully for the beloved one, is this death-conquering power his own individual power, or is it not rather the power of love? And who that ever truly thought has not experienced that quiet, subtle power - the power of thought? When thou sinkest into deep reflection, forgetting thyself and what is around thee, doest thou govern reason, or is it not reason which governs and absorbs thee? Scientific enthusiasm is it not the most glorious triumph of intellect over thee? The desire of knowledge - is it not a simply irresistible, and allconquering power? And when thou suppressest a passion, renoucest a habit, in short, achievest a victory over thyself, is this victorious power thy own personal power, or is it not rather the energy or will, the force of morality, which seizes the mastery of thee, and fills thee with indignation against thyself and thy individual weaknesses?<sup>24</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup>Ibid., 130-131.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup>Ibid., 131.

This is exciting stuff that is being said about being human. Can we deny these feelings Feuerbach expresses?

Another proposition Feuerbach lays out is this. "Man is nothing without an object." In other words, humans learn about the self from what human's perceive. There was a school of thought that taught that what one perceives and experiences is first created within the human mind. The tree is not a tree unless I think it is a tree. How silly? We just did not live in those days. We are products of another school of thought, Feuerbach's. The object itself creates the thought of it. The tree is a tree because it tells us it is a tree. 26

You see, this is some of what got Feuerbach and his kind into trouble. He believed, as mentioned earlier, that one needed to be cautious about what one perceived and what one imagined. Feuerbach understood perception as a fact. Sense tells truth. He was reluctant to speculate and call speculation "fact." (He leaves room for speculation, but it must be in dialogue with empirical reality. 27)

Now what is going to be said will sound a little strange, but this is what he says. Consciousness of an object is the consciousness of the self. When a person contemplates something outside of oneself one becomes acquainted with oneself. The objects that are outside of oneself are both spiritual and sensuous.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup>This notion is at the heart of the definition of the word "discover." This word does not mean something a person does when an object is realized for him/her the first time. "Discover" means that the object reveals itself, makes itself known to the observer.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup>Ibid., 110.

What this may sound like is that everything outside of the human being is a mirror. Life is just like one of the rooms at the carnival which is one series of mirrors reflecting from every angle.

At the depth of this ideas are two things. First, when we affirm the existence of something outside of ourselves we affirm ourselves. This is very positive. I see you and greet you and affirm your existence and at the same time I affirm my very being. You may have heard someone say, "He/she acts as though no body else is around." Are they in existence to themselves? Probably not.

The second aspect of this notion is that when we perceive things and their reality we must realize we are receiving the information through our own senses. And in our senses we have our own filters. You may have heard of selective hearing and seeing? We receive what we want to receive.

You also are aware that our consciousness needs to be sensitized before we can perceive and understand something. Ask anyone about world hunger who has traveled in Africa. Senses must be roused before some information will be processed in the human psyche.

Feuerbach acknowledges human limitations. But this is not his focus. He calls the idea of the limitation of human nature a delusion, an error. This does not mean that limitation is non-existent. His point is that limitation is recognized because one knows the sufficiency one has for oneself. One possess the capabilities of being complete.

In some schools of thought the idea of God is proposed once a person senses one's limitations. Once that is done then God can be

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup>Ibid., 134.

involved to overcome the limitation. However, Feuerbach is very helpful at this point because whether or not we accept his argument that beings are complete and sufficient unto themselves this is how modern people think and are taught. The success oriented mentality says that you can do anything to which you set your mind. Therefore, who needs God?

However, Feuerbach is being presented in this paper not as a spokesperson for modern humanity or to justify modern atheism, but as an advocate of a positive image of the human.

In his affirmation he says of all creatures, including humans, "That which makes a being what it is, is its talent, its power, its wealth, its adornment." 29

Humans cannot escape the nature of humanity. This is what it is like.

Ironically, this is affirmed by Feuerbach in what he understands humans say about God. We may think we are talking about God, but we are really talking about ourselves, says Feuerbach. "Consciousness of God is self-consciousness, knowledge of God is self-knowledge." He says that we do not experience it this way. What we say about God is really what we are saying about ourselves, but we think first that we are talking only about God, but then we realize we are talking about ourselves. "All the attributes of the divine nature are, therefore, attributes of the human nature."

Thou believest in love as a divine attribute because thou thyself

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup>Ibid., 135.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup>Ibid., 139.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup>Ibid., 140.

lovest; thou believest that God is a wise, benevolent being because thou knowest nothing better in thyself than benevolence and wisdom; and thou believest that God exists, that therefor he is a subject - whatever exists is a subject, whether it be defined as substance, person, essence, or otherwise - because thou thyself existest, art thyself a subject. Thou knowest no higher human good than to love, than to be good and wise; and even so thou knowest no higher happiness than to exist, to be a subject; for the consciousness of all reality, of all bliss, is for thee bound up in the consciousness of being a subject, of existing. God is an existence, a subject to thee, for the same reason that he is to thee a wise, a blessed, a personal being. 32

Remember that Feuerbach understands religion under the category of imagination, something projected. This is radically different from the experience of other things received in our senses. In the latter the object makes itself known to us. We do not project its existence. In the former with regard to God, God is the projection of humanity.

It is in this light that Feuerbach says, "Whatever man conceives to be true, he immediately conceives to be real . . ."33 This can account for why there are varying understandings of the qualities of God. For we can project our own nature into God whatever that nature may be and in effect say that this is God.

If Feuerbach is stating a truth only in part then Christians must take heed. It is conceivable that God is our self-projection, and, if so, then the God whom we profess may not be the revealed God we claim God to be. Bernard Martin, a psychiatrist in a mental hospital in the 1960's, wrote a book, Your God Must Die, in which he raises the point that for Christians it is essential that we look carefully at our own theology to be sure we have not created our own God which is comfortable

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup>Ibid., 143.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup>Ibid., 144.

to us, but in fact is not the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob nor the God revealed in Jesus Christ.

Martin puts the case dramatically:

IT IS NECESSARY TO KILL GOD!!
. . . One can, in all good conscience, kill God, for the true God does not let himself be killed. He is beyond all deicidal tendencies.

And yet, it is necessary to kill one's God!

It is necessary to kill the God that we have learned!

God is not learned. And if I have learned something about God, I can be certain that this is not truly he. The instruction that I received about God in my childhood was perhaps necessary. But today the God learned in my childhood no longer has any meaning. I am no longer young, and I need another God, the true God! Thus I must kill the God learned, even if it means that I can no longer proceed!

It is necessary to kill the God that I devise!

The God that I dream up is never God. The thoughts that I am able to come up with concerning him never begin to express his majesty. My understanding can be extremely cultivated, yet the God that I imagine is always inevitably other than what he truly is. So I must kill the God that I have imagined and conceived, or I will risk remaining in a sterile and permanent thought. This God that I have imagined must die.

It is necessary to kill the God of my faith!

Throughout my life I have been devoted to God with all my soul. In spite of appearances, I am still devoted to him, with all my soul. But what must dies is the God of my faith. My faith cannot reach God, and my theology, no matter how or why, will never be able to be a durable and absolute theology. And if I claim it because one day I made it my own, the I am condemned to no longer understanding what it is about. God is not dependent on my faith. He is, that's all. I must acquiesce in killing the God of my faith!

It is painful to have to kill God. I am afraid to kill him. I am afraid of losing my security and my peace. I am afraid when I see crumbling around me the one whom I have built as a fortress. I am afraid of crumbling with him. And yet it is indispensable that this fortress fall, for it hides God from me. I hide myself in this fortress; I speak of God only regarding the artificial security that this fortress provides. It is necessary to go outside, out to that which is unknown to me. I must go outside where I feel

naked, stripped, frozen to the bone. For the true God will be found there, outside of myself, in the world and its confusion, in the suffering of others. I do not know what God I will find. Perhaps I will find no God at all. For God is not found. He is not dependent on my seeking. But I will know that he exists even so, for God exists in spite of me. He does not have need of me in order to be. I cannot even know this, because the existence of God is not dependent on that which I can know of it.

One day a mental patient, trembling with anxiety asked me: When one SAYS that God does not exist, does that make God not exist? I had never heard the fundamental question posed in quite that same way. I had no reply, no explanation, no theory, no theology, to call to my assistance. All I could do was ask a question in my turn: When you close your eyes, does that extinguish the sun?

Thank God! - God is not dependent on me, or on what I think I know, or on what I try to conceive, or on anything that comes from me. HE IS, that's all.

All the rest, all that I fabricate, either by means of my human thought, or by means of my theology, or even by means of the Bible, all that must die.

It is necessary to kill God, even at the risk of dying oneself.

It is necessary to kill my God, otherwise the true God will die for me . . . and I could not stand that.  $^{34}$ 

Feuerbach serves two purposes for us. First, he surfaces the idea that God is something we create, a projection of the human. Of this we must be extremely cautious, as Martin indicates above. Second, Feuerbach helps us affirm the positive qualities of humans, a posture often held suspect in the church.

Humans are conscious, feeling, and imaginative species. Herein lies the affirmation of humanity. The species is complete in its own right. An ecologist would argue for the necessity of all species to fulfill their profession (what environmentalists call "niche") in the ecosystem. To accomplish this each species is endowed. This includes

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup>Bernard Martin, <u>If God Does Not Die</u>, trans. James H. Farley, (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964), 19-20.

humans.

What about sin? Is this not a part of the human experience? Has it been white-washed? overlooked?

It may be that sin has been misrepresented in two ways. First, it has been seen as the ultimate essence of human existence. Words like "total depravity" are used. We say the humans are "by nature sinful and unclean." Let it not be denied that sin prevails in all of an individual's and community's attributes, reason, will, and affection. But is that the whole story? To listen to some interpretations of Christianity it is. The human is absolutely worthless.

Second, sin has been presented as a condition and cause of God's action in Christ. This means that God responds to human sin with Jesus Christ. Because of our sin, so it goes, Christ comes into the world to save us from our sin.

Sin is alienation, rebellion, missing the mark (all the classical definitions). It is a reality of human experience. It enters into the whole dynamic of human life.

To be unconscious of sin is folly. Sin is not an accident. It is intentional. With the consciousness of one's dependence upon God one becomes aware of the human predicament. In this instance sin might be additionally defined as the limitation placed upon the "moment of freedom" as discussed earlier and the non-fulfillment or rejection of the human's niche in natural history to "be all that you can be."

My point is that sin is misrepresented when it is the sole description of humanity and the sole reason Christ comes into the world.

Before leaving Feuerbach there is one necessary observation to

make. For him, feeling is an integral part of human nature and not to be denied. However, when feeling is the only way a person encounters and knows God there are some consequences. Here "feeling" itself is God. For many, feeling, all feeling, is the essence of religion. This then rules out any other external data and doctrine. In a sense God's very existence is premised on what one feels or does not feel. (Often this is what a person means when they say that "religion" is very personal to them.)

What is humanity? First, I have sought to recognize human beings as a part of the natural world, a positive idea with no intention of being religious in this description.

Second I want to look at humanity as the means of God's intentional intersecting with the world. My thesis is that God's work in the world is not limited in time and space. It is universal and all involved in the world, but there is an unique manner in which God works and makes the God-self known and that is through humanity as we know God in Jesus Christ and the human being as we know Christians called to be the disciples and the witnesses of God, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, God's own people.

To help us to reflect on this topic I want to present some of the thoughts of David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874).

Strauss was a theologian in Germany who wrote a work called "Life of Jesus Critically Examined." This writing stirred a furor that impacted the political and social life of Germany. What was being done for the first time in history was an analysis of the Bible and a questioning of its contents that shook up the "theology" of many people

of that era. It's vestiges are seen today by the conservative Christian community's rejection of any literary or historical criticism of the Bible. Tampering with the Bible is meddling with the faith of the Church, according to them.

To be on the safe side let it be understood that the kernel of truth that Strauss presented was that the Bible can be analyzed and examined, but the historical Christ is not changed.

As Feuerbach took seriously the natural world, both human and nonhuman, Strauss took seriously the historical claims of Jesus Christ.

The premise from which Strauss operates is this:

A main element in all religious records is sacred history; a history of events in which the divine enters, without intermediation, into the human; [divine purposes . . . seem to be immediately materialized]. 35

The reason for using Strauss is that in my mind he does three important things.

First, he points out how the life of Christ has been used by the Church as an idea rather than as a historical personality.

Second, he describes that historical event of Christ as God <u>alienating</u> God's self.

Third, he has an understanding of the divine acting in humanity that is not limited to Jesus Christ.

Strauss' audience, like Schleiermacher's, had within it the audience that has responded to the new dimensions of knowledge and have developed a rationalistic system for Christianity. These people are seeking to harmonize an understanding of Jesus Christ with a scientific

<sup>35</sup>Stepelevich, op. cit., 24.

world view. According to Strauss the rationalists' view of Jesus is that he was a teacher of religion and an example of a religious life. Christ is not the object of this religion. This puts Christianity into alignment with other religious systems. This type of Christ as a distinguished person can be understood, says Strauss, but this is not the Christ of the Church. In this attempt to harmonize science and religion the Christ of the Church is undermined.<sup>36</sup>

Another group of people treat Jesus in a symbolic fashion. In one corner were those who held that Jesus is the ideal in terms of moral perfection. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) is the forerunner in this group. Christianity in this instance is living the moral life and following the steps of Christ. Strauss says that the advocates of this view hold this view about humanity:

To elevate himself to such a state of mind, man must depart from evil, cast off the old man, crucify the flesh; a change which is essentially connected with a series of sorrows and sufferings. These the former man has deserved as a punishment, but they fall on the new: for the regenerated man, who takes them on himself, though physically and in his empirical characters, as a being determined by the senses, he remains the former man; is morally, as an intellectual being, with his changed disposition, become a new man. Having by this change taken upon him the disposition of the son of God, that which is strictly a substitution of the new man for the old, may be represented, by a personification of the idea, as a substitution of the Son of God, and it may be said, that the latter himself, as a substitute, bears for man, for all who practically believe in him, the guilt of sin; as a redeemer, satisfies supreme justice by suffering and death; and as an intercessor, imparts the hope of appearing justified before the judge: the suffering which the new man, in dying to the world, must perpetually incur through life, being conceived in the representative of mankind, as a death suffered once for all. $^{37}$ 

Jesus is the symbol of the moral life.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup>Ibid., 38.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup>Ibid., 40.

In the other corner of the ring of those who perceived Jesus symbolically were those for whom Jesus' life is something to be emulated by humans. Strauss capsulates their thinking this way:

Christ on the cross is the image of humanity purified by self-sacrifice; we ought all to crucify ourselves with him, that we may rise with him to a new life.  $^{38}$ 

For those thinkers, the history recorded in the Bible is like a beautiful "poem of the human race." It is "what man ought to be." One knows the type: everything is just lovely, there are no problems, ills. Everyone and everyone is wonderful. Just suffer through the bad.

Strauss criticizes the symbolic view of Christ by saying that such a position cannot be reached by the human.

Strauss' view is that God has entered as a human into the human race. This is called <u>incarnation</u>. He accepts from Immanuel Kant that God has been incarnationally involved since the beginning of the human race. The word Strauss uses for this activity of God is "alienation." God alienates the self of God and appears as a human being.

As a man of Divine essence, he is the power that subdues nature, a worker of miracles; but as God in a human manifestation, he is dependent on nature, subject to its necessities and sufferings — is in a state of abasement. Must he even pay the last tribute to nature? Does not the fact that the human nature is subject to death preclude the idea that nature is one with the Divine? No: the God-man dies, and thus proves that the incarnation of God is real, that the infinite spirit does not scorn to descend into the lowest depths of the finite, because he knows how to find a way of return into himself, because in the most entire alienation . . . of himself, he can retain his identity. Further, the god-man, in so far as he is a spirit reflected in his infinity, stands contrasted with men, in so far as they are limited to their finiteness: hence opposition and contest result, and the death of the God-man becomes a violent one, inflicted by the hands of sinners; so that to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup>Ibid., 41.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup>Ibid., 42.

physical degradation is added the moral degradation of ignominy and accusation of crime. If God then finds a passage from heaven to the grave, so must a way be discoverable for man from the grave to heaven: the death of the prince of life is the life of mortals. By his entrance into the world as God-man, God showed himself reconciled [with the world]' by his dying, in which act he cast off [his state of naturalness], he showed moreover the way in which he perpetually effects that reconciliation: namely, [by remaining identical with himself throughout his alienation into the natural state and his subsequent sublation of the same]. Inasmuch as the death of the God-man is merely the [sublation of his alienation and lowliness], it is in fact an exaltation and return to God, and thus the death is necessarily followed by the resurrection and ascension. 40

Humanity, namely Jesus Christ, is how God interfaces, intersects with the world.

Strauss could not conceive of nor understand God's entering of history as isolated to one person. To him incarnation was a constant, continued act of God since the time humans became an unique species. The life of Jesus was merely an occasion to elevate this activity of God to universal consciousness and that humans can perceive the "idea of humanity" in a concrete form. There was no way in Strauss' thinking that this love of God found incarnate in Jesus Christ could be confined to nor contained within one person. 41

What is significant about Strauss is that Christ is historical, Christ is the event of God entering human history, and the exchange between divinity and humanity is highlighted.

As Christians we must take seriously that the Christ is not merely an ideal person. There is more to the Christ than knowing about His personal attributes which can be emulated. Jesus Christ is God.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup>Ibid. 45-46.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup>Ibid., 49.

We may not support the idea that the unique God-human characteristics of Christ are descriptive of the human race. Yet, when a Christian is called to act on God's behalf, to be a disciple, etc. is this solely a person doing what God wants to be done or is this God acting self-consciously in the world in humanity? The latter seems true to me.

It is of extreme significance that we understand that humanity is the way God works in history in a very precise way. To highlight, note how Christopher Columbus signed his name: xpo - Feren. The Greek letters stand for Christ and the Latin word means "bearer."

To reduce the activity of God to something outside of humans could be a denial of the incarnation.

In one form or another the interaction with the world by God through humanity has been abused. The Reformation at the time of Luther was an attempt to challenge the abuses of humans assuming divine power to further their own ends. A way to resolve that was to remove the incarnation of God in humanity (as seen in Jesus Christ and claimed by the leaders of the Church) to the incarnation of God in the Bible, "the Protestant perpetuation of the Divine incarnation," says Ernest Troeltsch, another 19th century theologian (1865-1923).42

The authority and saving power of the Bible alone were held capable of accomplishing what had been unattainable by the bishops and the Pope in consequence of the externality of the means which they employed, and the secularisation of the Church as an Institution.

Today, Christians struggle with this issue when claiming the

<sup>42</sup>Ernest Troeltsch, <u>Protestantism and Progress, The Significance of Protestantism for the Rise of the Modern World</u>, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 36.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup>Ibid.

inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible. When the Bible becomes the incarnation of God then the incarnation of Christ and God's work in his followers is demeaned.

Another facet of this story is the word "alienation." Alien means "other." It is a word to be used in the discussion that follows to describe the incarnation and the way the sinful person is made righteous in the eyes of God. Something happens from the outside. A foreigner enters in and things are changed. The story of Columbus, the Pearl Harbor incident, the Holocaust have the foreigner involved in one way or another and that "other," that alien self, brings about radical change.

The idea of God-human and the incarnation are brought together in a key passage for this theme. Paul writes to the Philippians:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (2:5-11 NRSV)

This is called Kenosis Christology. Kenosis means to empty. God is emptied when God becomes a human being.

Interest in this type of Christology waxed and waned during the 19th century.

A key proponent of this theory was Gottfried Thomasius (1802-1875) who dealt with this from the perspective of the Lutheran tradition.

What does it mean that God divested God's own self to become human? Does this mean that Jesus was human and not divine? How does one mix the divinity and humanity of Christ?

The effort of this thinking is to address the problems of who died when Christ died and who is received when the elements of the Eucharist are distributed? This becomes a complicated theological discussion, but it must be acknowledge that at the heart of what it means for God to enter human history is that both the divine and the human are involved in the event. The natural stage is encountered by the divine-human. It is in this arena the exchange occurs, "the divine actually accepting the limitations of manhood and the human actually receiving the properties of the divine."

### CONCLUSION TO THE INTRODUCTION

Reflecting on these three questions I conclude with comments by Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon in Resident Aliens.

They point out that the theologians of the 19th century, the persons discussed in this paper, had as their major concern, "How do we make the gospel credible to the modern world?" Schleiermacher, who is mentioned at the outset of this paper, is credited with setting the course of theology for the century.

<sup>44</sup>Welch, op. cit., 238-239.

<sup>45</sup>Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, <u>Resident Aliens</u>, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 19.

With good intentions and some misconceptions the concern has been to make Christianity something that can be in dialogue with other academic disciplines. At times this has been done at the expense of watering down and misdirecting the Christian tradition.

Hauerwas and Willimon hold that the intention of theology should be to reverse this position:

In the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, all human history must be reviewed. The coming of Christ has cosmic implications. He has changed the course of things. So the theological task is not merely the interpretive matter of translating Jesus into modern categories but rather to translate the world to him. The theologian's job is not to make the gospel credible to the modern world, but to make the world credible to the gospel. 46

As we discuss the theme, "The ing that Changed the World - a joyous exchange," we need to take into account first God's intersecting with the world specifically through humanity is for the sake of making the world free, freedom being the very nature of God. Secondly, the religious life is not simply an understanding of the idea, but a pious consciousness of dependence upon an intentional ownership of God.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 24.

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# LUTHERAN SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AT CHICAGO

A TRAIL OF TWO CONVERSIONS

A THEOLOGICAL POSITION PAPER

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY PROGRAM

ΒY

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OREGON, ILLINOIS

SEPTEMBER 1990

My story hinges on two experiences I have had with conversion. The first was when I was a high school student having attended a revival meeting. The second one was on a piece of native Illinois prairie.

I grew up in a Lutheran household. Each Sunday we went to "divine worship" and Sunday Church School. My father was the Sunday School superintendent as well as a member of the church council. My aunt, who lived with us, and my mother were active in the women's group and choir, and they taught in the Sunday School. The church was an important part of our lives, socially and spiritually.

I am told that I always wanted to be a parish pastor. I have no idea when I began to talk that way. But I do know that it was because of this choice I selected the high school I would attend, North Park Academy in Chicago, a school of the Swedish Covenant Church. I would also follow the same pattern and attend Augustana College, Rock Island, majoring in subjects that would be helpful to enter the seminary, namely language and philosophy.

North Park was a typical Chicago private school. The students were from upper class homes. Some were of the Covenant persuasion, but most of them were Lutherans, Swedish for the most part. We were required to take some religion courses, and chapel was at least three times each week. School parties were coed, but the girls asked the boys. Dancing was taboo. The theological posture of the school was of the fundamentalistic persuasion.

On one occasion I attended a revival meeting with some of my classmates. It was a frightening experience in some ways. I remember the preacher being very persuasive. He invited people to raise their hands if they were "saved." Then he asked for people to raise their hands who wished to be "saved."

I did not raise my hand the first time. I thought I understood the preacher's definition of being "saved," and I knew I had never had the type of personal experience he portrayed. I could not raise my hand. When he asked for those who wished to be "saved" to raise their hands I did not feel I understood the dimensions of that decision. So, I refused to respond. However, I recall the effectiveness of this preacher because I felt like he was trying to lift my arm over my head, and I had to use psychic energy to keep it down.

As we left the meeting I commented to my classmates that I really did not understand what was going on. Their response was to give me Bible passages to read. I read them and found myself still perplexed. The words were empty.

All experiences are contextual. In this case this was not my first exposure to the revival methodology, the idea of conversion for the sake of salvation, and the need to make a public profession of faith. This episode merely focused my thinking.

I went to my pastor, the man who had been my catechetical instructor. I shared my story with him, and then I asked, "Am I saved?"

He answered, "Yes, you are." "When?" I asked. "When you were baptized."

It was this encounter that was a conversion for me. As we talked my eyes were opened and things began to come together for me. Baptism as a means of grace is not an act which is human in origin. It celebrates and announces that God acts in spite of us and beyond our subjective experiences and is the initiator.

As the years elapsed I began to realize the meaning of prevenient grace. I wrote a Christmas carol in one of my first years in the parish

to put this concept to music:

The angels sang a song, that blessed holy night. Their lyrics praised our God, exalted in the height. They sang with great assurance, what God has done for men. That God has sent his peace, that He is pleased with them.

How can our God be pleased with men who 'gainst Him sin. How can our God so love us, rebels rejecting him. 'Tis not that man's won favor to stand before God's face. 'Tis God's own loving nature. His favor is His grace.

To save a raging nation, to make them His own race. This is the nature of our God, the purpose of His grace. Glory to God in heaven, who sent His son, our Lord. That we by faith in Him, might to Him be restored.

I realize that the gender of some of the lyrics raises the ire of some. However, this carol is dated, and it is shared here to indicate the impact of the insight I had as the result of my first experience with conversion.

The idea of conversion for me became an occurance of learning the meaning of salvation in my life rather than the eye-opening experience being the moment of my personal salvation. I am saved. Christ died for me. I entered into this new life event in my baptism. As a growing Christian I would discover that salvation had an impact upon all events of life. There is a trail, and along that trail salvation gives us understanding and insight into the encounters of life.

The conversation with my confirmation pastor opened the pathway for me that would lead to other discoveries as I shall point out.

The fundamentalist traditions to which I was exposed had a component that I felt was missing in the Lutheran tradition: excitement, enthusiam. I do not believe the Church is an entertainment center nor that enthusiasm can be equated with faith. The Church is that community of the faithful who worship, learn, and act. Sometimes that action brings us to our knees and causes us to bleed.

Yet, the faith that we hold can be expressed in ways that excite, inspire, give insight, and make day to day sense.

I often say that my involvement with fundamentalism in high school made me a good Lutheran, an excited Lutheran.

A good example of how this shaped my theology is evidenced in my understanding of the "Word of God." During my days in seminary this developed for me.

- 1. The Word is the means God used to create and redeem the world.
- 2. The Word of God is specifically Jesus Christ.
- 3. The Word of God is that which is proclaimed. It is an oral tradition before a written tradition. The implications are far reaching for the preacher and the teacher of Scripture. Where the Word is proclaimed there is the living Christ.
- 4. The Bible is the Word of God. As Luther said, "It is the cradle where the infant Jesus can be found." The Bible is the record of the proclamation through the years by faithful people. It is the norm and rule of faith and life. It is to be read with gusto and studied with abandonment. In the ambiguity of the words and concepts God is revealed.

I believe the above order is the way in which we should understand the meaning of the Word of God.

Having wanted to be a parish pastor since a child I followed the traditional route from college to seminary to internship to seminary and then to ordination in the Augustana Lutheran Church. Between college and seminary I married Janet Gunnerson.

My first call after seminary was the assignment to start a new mission in a new community in a western suburb of Chicago. It was a challenge because there were 300 homes at the time of my arrival and the

population was 96% Roman Catholic. We had the edge over other denominations because I was the first ordained pastor in the community. Can you imagine being a founding father at the age of 26?

One event that stands out in my mind shortly after I became a parish pastor was attending a pastors' breakfast sponsored by the Billy Graham organization. I had no interest in Graham. I did not like his subjective theology and his literal method of interpreting Scripture.

Nonetheless, I attended.

I remember Graham encouraging the listeners to "preach for conversion" and to have altar calls each Sunday. As we left the breakfast I announced to my friends, "Next Sunday I am going to have an altar call." When I mentioned that this was a regular practice in my Church and we called it Holy Communion, I was rebuffed. For them these were two separate items. But for me that was not true.

Holy Communion is a personal encounter with the risen Lord. We indicate our allegiance in a symbolic way by standing up and moving forward to show our response. My gut feeling is that most parishoners do not have this sense. They come forward because it is the thing to do, and they are there to receive forgiveness. Yet, our act is an affirmation of our faith in Jesus as the living Lord.

My understanding of Holy Communion is that it differs from the preaching of the Word only in style. Through preaching the Word is spread to the congregation at one time. This is an encounter with the living Lord. In Holy Communion the Word is delivered one on one. The Word is declared to each individual.

I think we need to emphasize this encounter within the Church. We are not simply expressing value in worship. We are going to meet our Lord

in Word and Sacraments.

With regard to "preaching for conversion," I retained this notion.

Conversion is discovering the depth and the dimensions of salvation in our lives. We might look at these experiences and become so excited about them they may be life altering.

I have carried this message with me, but I have also extended it. Not only are we to preach for conversion, we are to teach for it, too.

My second parish was an established congregation in a suburb in the outer belt of Chicago. This presented a new kind of challenge. We were involved in a coffee house ministry that became controversial in the community. The local newspaper was produced three times a week, and it was not unlikely to find stories about this conflict in at least two issues each week. These were not announcements on the Church page.

This parish was also a teaching congregation for seminarians. Each semester there would be students working in a specific area: pastoral care, educational ministry, preaching, etc. This is before the days of the "Teaching Parish." In fact, another pastor and I suggested to the seminary this type of program because we felt a lack of continuity between students and parishoners when they would be in the parish for only a semester.

It was during these two pastorates I spent at least two weeks at the church camp during the summer. It was a special opportunity for my family. It cost nothing. I had to work, but the routine was different than the parish. I was able to develop educational processes and design Bible studies and learning experiences for various programs and age groups.

While in my second parish I became excited about experiential learning. With members of the congregation and seminary students a new

style of Sunday education was established, "The Community of Chrisitian Living." The content of the learning grew out of our experience as a parish and our reflection on the Biblical tradition. The method engaged group dynamics. There was coordination between the worship life and what was being learned.

Little did I realize I was on the trail of my second experience with conversion. While I was in my second parish the position of camp director opened, and I thought I would apply for it. Someone else was hired. Knowing what I know today, I am glad it worked out that way. However, a few years later the Synod president called and asked if I would be interested in being the Program Director. I jumped at the chance. Here was an arena in which I could pursue praticing and experimenting with experiential learning in a safe climate.

In this new job I was caught up in the selling of two camps and the purchasing of a new one. The new site was 730 acres, the site for my second major experience with conversion.

I had heard there was native Illinois prairie on the site, and it should be preserved. But I had no idea what it was.

One would think my involvement in camping would have interested me in what was in the out-of-doors. Up to that time I had discovered there were plants that were different than the grass and the elm trees I knew in the city of Chicago where I grew up. But I could care less about their identity and how they fit into the ecosystem. I pursued a learning methodology that I call "kissy/huggy in the woods." One was to use the senses, taste, feel, smell, sound and sight, to develop an appreciation of the natural world. The process is called "acclimitization."

At that time in my career the other emphasis of camping was the

enhancement of physical skills, canoeing and backpacking.

At this new 730 acre site outdoor ministries would take on an entirely new framework for me. I put out the word that I wanted to learn about this prairie, and one day it happened. A man and his wife who were prairie enthusiasts and specialists took me for a walk. He was a teacher of outdoor education at the local state university. His wife was really the more knowledgeable biologist. Together they grew prairie plants for sale. This would be a day that would change my life.

It was humourous. I carried a pencil and paper to take notes. I jotted down a few words, but the man just laughed at me. At first I could not understand why. But eventually it became obvious. One does not write this information. One listens, learns, memorizes, and repeats. It is by repeating that one remembers. (How is that for one reason for telling the story of one's faith. We call this evangelism.)

What a day! I cannot remember the date, but I will never forget the moment. From that day on I would run to the prairie with books under my arm trying to identify everything I saw. I would listen and read so I had more than names. Stories began to develop that would depict the plants and set them in a specific context. There are the tales of the Freedom Tree, Lutheran Coffee, White Man's Foot, Pussy Toes, Queen Anne's Lace, etc.

I would take guests on hikes, the trail of my second conversion. I would share my knowledge. There were always a few fascinating responses that would come out of these excursions.

This event affected my vision. My eyes were opened to see plants and evidence of animal life I had never seen before. It was as if these plants never existed prior to this time, and now they had come into existence for the first time. (I know that is not true. But this is

often how eye-opening moments work.)

These are the two stories of my experience with conversion, one that gave me insight into the God who initiates in love and grace in spite of us and one that gave me insight into a world which is more than human history. These events have led me down some interesting theological trails. Here are some sign posts along the path.

1. The non-human world is the environment of God's activity in the same way as God is active in human history. One can call all of history natural history.

The temptation in religious education and sermon illustrations is to use the events of the non-human world as parables of the God-human relationship.

It is my conviction that what we see in the non-human world is the evidence of God's work. Today, scientists help us see the world. We are always learning about new species and how interaction takes place. As we discover this we realize more and more what God does.

2. Christians look at the natural world, and the First Article of the Apostles' Creed comes to mind. Many will say that they believe in the Trinity, but the natural world applies only to the First Article.

However, restoration and redemption are not isolated to the human world.

The God revealed in Jesus Christ is also the God of the natural world.

Ironically, in spite of human abuse, the world is not falling apart.

Renewal is inherent in the system. Note Psalm 104, the classic environmentalist's Psalm.

Many deny that God created the world to operate on its own. Yet what many Christians say about creation belie that. The world for many is left to its own devices.

It is my conviction that God is near and God is at work in the whole natural system. The name for this activity of God is "Spirit." One can say "Spirit" is the ecological word for God (ecology, the study of relationships).

3. There is the tendency in the minds of some folks to use the natural world as evidence of God's beauty, love, and power. When one researches the natural world one discovers that within the system there is destruction and consumption. Paul refers to the world groaning in travail awaiting the new day.

For the Christian the non-human world does not reveal God. God is made manifest in Jesus Christ, in God's works of redemption. It is from this perspective that we look at the non-human world and understand the nature of God.

If one notices the entrance sign to the Lutheran Outdoor Ministries Center one can conceptualize what is being said. The sign is a piece of art designed by an atheist. The cross is vacant space in the butcherblock. The interpretation of the artists is that we look at the world through the cross.

4. I have come to the position that my understanding of the creation of the world is instructed by the New Testament rather than the Old Testament. It is John who parallels Genesis. Jesus is referred to as the Word. It is Paul who rewrites Proverbs in Colossians and substitutes Jesus for Sophia, the one who is created first and through whom all is created.

Our faith is not contingent upon a linear view of history. Creation is understood within the context of redemption.

5. One of the phenomenon in the non-human world is what scientists call adaptation. This is the process species use to survive and

procreate. The species develop and acquire certain characteristics and behaviors that can guarantee their future.

In the human world there is a process that God has given the human species to survive. We call this capacity forgiveness.

6. Galatians 5 has taken on new meaning for me. Paul speaks of the fruit of the Spirit as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, self-control.

In order for a fruit to develop a flower must be pollinated. There are two basic agents of pollination: wind and animals (which includes insects). The word "Spirit" in Hebrew and Greek is also used for breath and wind. What I hear Paul saying in this passage is that it is by the pollinating aspect of the Spirit that love, joy, peace, etc. occur.

I realize that Paul was not trying to set up such an illustration. Nonetheless, as I play with this idea I cannot help think that wherever and whenever we experience acts of love, joy, peace, etc. we are experiencing the work of the Spirit of God. It is at this point my two experiences of conversion converge, and I begin to ask other questions and extend my thinking in my understanding of God. God is the initiator. God is involved in all history (human and non-human).

7. One of the exciting discoveries and insights as the Word of God and the world of God crossfertilize for me is the subject of sacrifice.

Within the natural world there is the process of the food chain.

Organisms fall into an order in which the survival of one depends upon the demise of another.

Among teachers of natural history this process is called predator/prey. This is conceptualized with a pyramid where the population of organisms decends as one moves to the top.

The system can be perceived from a commercial perspective. The top of the food pyramid seems to dominate the process. In fact, species whose extinction gets the attention of many people are usually at the top of the food pyramid.

I have a hard time reconciling this consumer interpretation of natural history with a loving God. God does not shift into neutral so the natural world "can do its thing."

When I read the Biblical tradition I notice that the gift of Christ is His giving of Himself for others. The cross is the highest form of this gift. (In Matthew 16 Jesus announces that He must go to Jerusalem to suffer many things.) In fact, it is recommended that we should live our lives sacrificially (note Romans 12). This is the meaning of the Theology of the Cross over against the Theology of Glory.

Sacrifice is not unnatural. It is the process of life itself. It is the system. The predator does not willy, nilly take the prey with no sense of integrity. Rather it is the prey who gives of itself to the predator.

One of the insights from environmental studies is that the prey determines the destiny of the predator, not vice versa. Using this metaphor the victim is the factor in the outcome. How do we know Jesus Christ?

I realize that sacrifice in the natural world is not a selfconscious effort on the part of an organism. The truth of the matter is
that the prey adapt to avoid being the meal for a predator. However, the
predator also adapts. Sacrifice cannot be seen as an individual act. It
is systemic. Sacrifice is an alternative way to interpret the food chain.

When God becomes involved in history extraordinary means are not used. God enters through birth. God saves the world through sacrifice.

Both are natural.

What is extraordinary is what follows the death of Jesus, the resurrection. This is the greatest of all gifts both for the future as well as the hear and now.

Richard Cartwright Austin writes about the thinking of John Muir, a pioneer in the environmental movement, who speaks to this subject of sacrifice.

Muir saw that part of the religious problem was integrating death into life. Life in this world is food chains, each drawing life from consuming other lives. We may improve our own religious understanding if, as we eat, we reflect on how the deaths of some contribute to the lives of others. Though abuse can make it so, this need not be a hostile process. Beneath its tensions an ecology nurtures life for all. Jesus' death, morally distinctive in its religious impact, participates in this life-giving ecology. 1

8. This leads me to another issue. Christians involved in the study of nature look at the life-death-life cycle as evidence of the resurrection.

It is my understanding that resurrection is the rejuvination of life, the gift of life to the very being that has died. It is unclear what resurrection means physically, except that the person is present and recognizable. When an organism dies it gives life to other organisms in a variety of ways. For me this is a description of sacrifice, not resurrection.

9. When dealing with the place of the human in the world a very helpful ecological concept is "niche." Though this word has spatial meaning it is also used for an organism's profession, business. Every organism has a niche. Some we know, and some we do not know.

Richard Cartwright Austin, <u>Baptized into Wilderness</u>, a Christian Perspective on John Muir (Atlanta: <u>John Knox Press</u>, 1987) 57.

Where does the human fit into this? Some readers of Scripture would say that Psalm 8 cearly states that the human being is to dominate the created order. Another way to approach this is that Psalm 8 points at humanity's niche, profession, but not at the exclusion of the niches of other organisms.

Each creature has a place. Humanity is not at the top of the pyramid. We are a part of the vast circle.

10. The realm of God (once referred to as "kingdom") gathers together my two experiences with conversion.

I have appreciated what Thomas Gromme says on this issue. The realm of God ". . . is a symbol which refers to the concrete activity of God in history establishing God's sovereignty."

For the Israelites the (Realm) of God is already a reality in that it is Yahweh who rules all things and people. And yet the final completion of the (Realm) is still to come. It is promised and God is active on its behalf. Therefore it is already being realized and will be realized completely. But it is not an authoritarian rule by a caprcious God. It is instead a caring and trustworthy God intervening in history to transform the present order and bring creation to fullness and completion. In the triumph of God's vision for creation, 'Nature is wholly and wondrously transformed, the serenity of Paradise is renewed.'" 3

The realm of God takes various forms.

First, it is the whole creation over which God has authority.

Second, the realm of God is the expected new day, the new heavens, and the new earth.

Third, the Church is not the Realm of God, but it proclaims and introduces it.

There are two more perspectives which have emerged for me.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas H. Groome, <u>Christian Religious Education</u> (San Franciso: Harper and Row, 1980), 36

3
Ibid., 37.

Fourth, the Realm of God is where people experience freedom and justice. There are many moments in history where people have known new beginnings. The igniting of the movement and the possibility of the moment is within God's initiative and by God's authority. The realm is where people experience freedom either on a personal or community scale, a physical and a non-physical way.

The movement toward freedom is a taste. It is not the full meal.

Fifth, the Realm of God is where Christ is proclaimed. Jesus enters history and makes a difference. Mark reminds us that Christ Himself proclaims the Realm of God. In my humble view there is a connection between the realm/rule of God and Christ and Christ's proclamation.

I understand God's action as involving all creation. The Word of God and the world of God converge.

Finally, one of the trails my two conversions has led me on has to do with language. Though I understand the need to restructure our language with regard to its sexists and racist orientations I believe we have a language that is also very anthropocentric. This language impacts our theology which, from an environmentalist's point of view, is very humancentered. The world does not exist solely for human beings and God's saving power is not for the human species alone.

This is not the end of the trail. Maybe it is only the beginning. I would hope to take others with me to further explore a world in which the initiator is God and the whole ecosystem is God's sphere of redemptive action. As we travel we are also exploring the faith and especially the faith as it is expressed in our Biblical tradition.

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#### SEVENTH DAY ENVIRONMENTALISTS

It was 1502 when Christopher Columbus discovered and named a portion of Central America Costa Rica, rich coast. He assumed that the land created by volcanic activity was rich in precious metals. Costa Rica is rich, rich with natural beauty.

In January, 1989, I made a similar discovery upon my visit to Costa Rica. It is a land rich with diversity zoologically, botanically, and culturally. My arrival was not by water but by air. The land looked rich from the sky, tall rolling green hills, a never ending pattern.

Spaniards, who began to colonize Costa Rica 500 years ago, compose most of the population. There are fewer Native Americans in Costa Rica than in other Central American countries.

As a nation they have committed themselves to preserving one of their natural resources, the rain forest. As is noted later in this paper, however, such a commitment does not mean there is no destruction.

Most of the 2.7 million people live in the central plain. The hub of commerce is San José, a metropolitan area of several small towns.

The country is a land mass of 20,000 square miles, the size of West Virginia.

Costa Rica is the Switzerland of the Western Hemisphere. It is one of the oldest democracies in the Americas. Costa Rica has no army. By constitution the nation may not go to war.

Their president, who will serve one six year term with no eligibility to be reelected, is Dr. Oscar Arias Sanchez. When he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1987 he said in his acceptance speech.

"Weapons do not fire on their own. Those who have lost hope fire them. Those who are controlled by dogmas fire them. We must fight for peace undismayed, and fearlessly accept these challenges from those without hope and from the threat of fanatics. Nobody knows better than the honorable members of this (Nobel Peace Prize) committee, that this prize is a sign to let the world know that you want to foster the Central American peace initiative. With your decision you are enhancing the possibilities of success. You are declaring how well you know the search for peace can never end."

In 1848 a free and compullsory educational system was established. The literacy rate, as a result, is the highest in the world, 93%.

There are three symbols of Costa Rica. The colorful ox cart is the national symbol. It was used for transporting coffee to the market. The second symbol is the bus, the only rational means of travel in Costa Rica. A car has a tough time surviving. The third is the round ball-shaped stone. No one knows from whence these stones come. The hypotheses range from artifacts carved by the natives, although no one has ever found any evidence of instruments that could perform such an art, to natural phenomenon, to extraterrestrial invasion.

The nickname for Costa Rica is "Tiquicia." The people are called "Ticos." The nickname derives from the way the people put dimintives on their words. In other countries the Hispanic suffix for "little" is pronouced "tito," but in Costa Rica it is pronounced "tico."

The attitude toward the United States is varied. The population will side with countries opposed to U.S. policies. However, the country is very dependent upon the money from the U.S. in terms of tourism and exports such as coffee, sugar cane, and flowers.

The anti-U.S. spirit is subtle, but it has historic roots. The Ticos remember when a man named William Walker tried to annex the Central American countries to the U.S. under the direction of President Buchanan in the middle of the nineteenth century. Walker enslaved people, held doubtful elections, and broke promises to his friends. (And we point our fingers at Panama?)

A national hero is Juan Santamaria, a teenager. Though he was killed in the process he set fire to a building that housed Walker. This caused Walker's retreat, but not his demise.

The country is poor. People live sparingly. There is hope that tourism will enhance their lot.

For the most part people are Roman Catholic. However, Jimmy Swaggart is very popular because he pours money into their educational system.

My reason for going to Costa Rica was to explore a natural world which stands in striking contrast to the natural world in which I practice the unique character of my ministry, the Temperate Zone, that part of the earth that is located between the Tropical and the Polar Zones.

In the Temperate Zone seasons are noticeable and daylight and darkness vary in length every day. It is that part of the globe that moderates between two extremes where it can get cold and hot and be excessive because of the length of the daylight and night time periods.

The Tropcal or Equatorial Zone is a habitat uniqurely different from the Temperate Zone. So I visited Costa Rica and specifically hiked in two of the many rain forests there, the Monteverde Cloud Rain Forest and the rain forest in the Corcovado National Park. These two rain forests are distinct because of altitude. The former is about a mile above sea level; the latter is at sea level, along the ocean.

There are thirty or forty different types of rain forests. Most of them are in the Tropics. They are all characterized by temperature and rain. The temperature is relatively constant throughout the year because the daylight and night time hours are almost equal in length. It is not the strength of the sun that determines the season (fall/winter/spring/summer) but the variation of rain fall (dry/wet). It is the seasonality of rain fall that defines a rain forest.

The rain forests have been called jungles in the past, a word that comes from a Sanskrit word meaning desert. Later the word was used to describe scrubland. Still later it was used for a wild place.

We have visions of the jungle stuffed with underbrush and constantly green. But this is not entirely true. During the dry weather season green leaves on trees dry up and fall to the forest floor to help the trees retain their water.

This is contrasted with evergreen trees that are in the citrus family in warm climates, further removed from the Equaltorial Zone, which retain their leaves for several years.

A tree loses its leaves because the leaves have fulfilled their purpose. In a Temperate Forest the decidious (word means "falling down") leaves do their work in a few months. The conifer leaves (or needles) exist an average of seven years.

The rain forests are dark. Sunlight enters the forest floor very sparingly. The trees create a canopy as high as 130 feet above the ground. There are moments of sunlight that are created when a tree falls. But soon the canopy covers over the opening.

When observing the canopy there is a specific characteristic of the crowns of the tree. They stand apart. It is called crown shyness.

The fact this canopy exists introduces several phenomena to the rain forest.

First, there is a lack of wind. The shade from the trees allows cooling to occur. However, in order for most plants to be pollinated the plants of the understory depend upon insects, birds, and bats.

Secondly. the trees grow slowly when they are young, waiting for a chance to break through to the sun light when they can grow more rapidly.

Third, one would think there is a plethora of flowers in the rain forest, but the lack of sunlight inhibits this. Flowers are more readily seen on the tops of the trees. Thus, unless you are able to fly they are not observable.

The canopy shelters the forest hiker from many of the more dramatic phenomena in the forest. Thus, scientists have developed methods to study the canopy using moutain and rock climbing methods to ascend the trees and create walk ways between them with ropes and scaffolds. To make observations scientists will remain in these haunts for weeks on end.

A great variety of birds go unseen because they fly and feast above the canopy. Thus, bird watchers shriek with joy when they can get a glimpse of one of many birds for just a moment. Costa Rica is still a birder's paradise with 850 species.

Fourth, the canopy allows only about one quarter to one half of the rain to reach the forest floor. The portion that is intercepted by the canopy evaporates and returns to the atmosphere. As the water runs down the trunks of the trees the water collects nutrients which then support colonies of algae, lichen, and liverworts.

A portion of the water that reaches the ground is soaked up. The earth is a sponge. One of the rain forests near San Josè is Braulio Carrillo. This forest serves as the water source for the metropolitan area of San Josè. In the event the rain forest is "developed" (i.e. trees are cut down and fields and buildings

established) the San Jose community would find its water source dramatically decreased.

Another characteristic of the rain forest is its epiphytes. These are plants that grow on trees which do not depend upon the tree for food, water, and minerals. The tree is simply a place for them to grow. (They are not parasites, like mistletoe.)

Epiphytes familiar to Temperate Zone dwellers are orchids and bromeliads which appear in many homes in various forms. The most familiar bromeliad is pineapple, though this is not a epiphyte. Epiphytes are phenomenal growths because they can be seen all over the tree trunks and contribute to a great deal of the greenery of the forest.

Epiphytes of the Tropics are simliar in many ways to the lichens, mosses, and fungi of the Temperate Zone which also live on trees. However, they are much smaller and serve to break down dead organisms rather than mutually survive with the host.

One of the unique epiphytes is the Strangler Fig. The seed begins to grow in the debris in the crotch of a tree. It sends its roots down to the ground and the vine then climbs the tree. As the plant begins to intertwine around the host tree it develops a woody structure that appears to strangle it. However, the ultimate cause of the host's demise is that the leaves of the Strangler Fig shade the leaves of the host tree and prevent the sun from giving the tree adequate light.

The phenomena of the Strangler Fig, of which there are many species, is that as its wraps itself around the host it creates a structure that eventually in its own right becomes a tree. The host rots and the Strangler Fig becomes the home of insects, birds, bats, and lizards, an apartment building that would take a human lifetime to study. Someone has said that one can find as many as 405 unique species in one tree.

Some trees have adapted so that epiphytes will not adhere to them. One of these trees is the Naked Indian. The bark peals off from time to time discarding any growth that might be adhering to it in some way.

Epiphytes are often called air plants because they draw their nutrition and water from the dust and moisture in the air.

While observing trees and the decomposition of the debris of the forest several things must be noticed.

Decomposition is extremely rapid in the rain forest. Because of this leaves are very similar because they are shaped to hasten the shedding of water to prevent the early destruction of the leaves by lichens and other types of decomposers. Vains are usually quite deep, and the end of the leaf has a drip tip.

Rotting material is efficient in giving nutrition to all the plant life, and tree roots that grow along the surface of the soil rarely dig into the earth.

Through a series of tree roots and other links created by bacteria and fungal processes the tree is nurtured right on the top of the forest floor.

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Roots of many plants are invaded by a specialized fungi, mycorrhizae. These fungi absorb minerals and water more efficiently than uninvaded roots. Mycorrhizae is considered the cornerstone of mineral conservation in the tropical forest. It is more cost effective in the long term than artificial fertilizers.

Due to the roots not taking hold in the soil trees need a structure that will stabalize them. The roots are wide-spred to support the tree. A typical tree actually has flying buttresses to give the tree an underpinning so it can stand erect. Remember some of these trees, grow to 130 feet high.

So as not to be misleading, many Temperate Zone trees do not have deep roots either. They are supported by root structures below the surface of the soil. Oak trees are a good example of this. However, these trees have their structure in the soil and depend upon the soil for their nutrients.

It is assumed that rain forests have fertile soil. This is not true. There are two factors that contribute to this. First the nutritional exchange of the debris on the forest floor is so effecient with the plants that soil does not benefit from the fertility that is upon it. Second, the rock which joins with the water, air, and decomposed vegetation to make up the soil, is very old and acidic.

When the forest is slashed and burned to create agricultural lamd not only is the nutrition stored in the trees released, the natural fertilizing agent, mycorrhizae, is destroyed.

It may appear that fields for grazing will be very productive, but not for long. The soil rapidly loses what nutrition it has, and then the rains come down and erode the land.

In the Temperate Zone there are stands of trees of the same specie. My world in the Temperate Zone is an oak/hickory hardwood forest. In addition to these hardwoods there are probably a dozen or so species of trees. They pollinate and perpetuate themselves in clusters.

In the rain forest there are hundreds of species of trees. They do not thrive in clusters, but are scattered throughout the forest. In order to pollinate they need to not only depend upon insects, birds, or bats, but organisms must coadapt in order to guarantee survival of the particular tree.

Seed dispersal is as necessary for survival as pollination. To facilitate that in the rain forest fruits have adapted very colorful appearances and satisfying tastes. If one has ever been in the tropics one discovers a great variety of edible fruits and fruit drinks. Why? The fate of a specie lies in its ability to perpetuate itself on its own and needs a way for the fruit to be attracted so animals will transport it to another desireable location. Given the great variety of trees there are many types of fruit. And they do compete with each other.

One of the unique fruits of the rain forest is the cashew. The fruit, which we call the nut, grows on the end of a stem that swells and looks like and tastes similarly to a nectarine.

Insects are of great importance in the rain forest. Army ants are the most common. There are 240 species. Their task is to break down the debris in the

forest. Stories are told how these ants will march into a home, the inhabitants leave. Once the ants have cleaned out the house the human residents return.

Unlike army ants, termites are not nomadic. They chew up rain forest litter and build homes in the ground or on trees constructing tunnels from debris. They are among the few creatures able to convert rotting vegetation into living tissue, a crucial link for commuting nutrition from one organism to another.

Of great fastination in the rain forest is the leaf-cutter ant. Each ant chews off a piece of a leaf, the size of a thumb nail and carries it to the underground nest, a distance that might be several hundred yards. These ants produce a special food fungi by chewing the leaf and planting them in a reservoir of desired fungi. The leaf-cutter's larvae feed on the fungi. The adults need the enzyme to digest their main food, a sap from the leaves they have collected.

The relationship between the ant and the fungi is so strong that the fungi no longer produces sexual spores. The fungi depend upon the leaf-cutters for reproduction.

Ants also gather seeds from the flowers. Thus, they participate in the seed dispersal process. A plant of the Temporal Forest that is the result of ants creating a cache of seeds is Blood Root.

The rain forest has received a vast amount of publicity recently for a variety of reasons.

At one time between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn there existed five billion acres of rain forest, 14% of the earth's land surface. Today. humanity has slashed and burned one half of this.

Tropical rain forests are being destroyed more rapidly than any other type of natural habitat. Of the 2.4 billion acres of rain forest still in existence, approximately 14 million acres are being depleted annually. This is 30 acres every minute.

It is anticipated that in Costa Rica 80% of the 1981 rain forest will ultimately be wasted, in spite of their commitment to protect it.

Why are rain forests being cut down and burned at such a rate? People wish to harvest and sell the timber, mine the gold and iron, and create more agricultural land. There are those who also interpret this type of behavior as humanity's desire to conquer the natural world. This is the spirit of the political leaders of Panama, for example.

The chief culprit of forest depletion in Latin America is the desire to create ranches to export beef. What this accomplishes is taking five cents off the price of the hamburger in the United States.

What is sad about this behavior is that this process is bringing to extinction one of the most diverse ecosystems on the face of the earth.

A second reason for the popularity of rain forests is due to the concern for the greenhouse effect. Carbon dioxide and other elements trap heat that once would normally pass through to outer space. The concentration of carbon dioxide causes a rise in the earth's temperature. The notion is that the depletion of forest is

contributing to the build up of carbon dioxide. In part this is true because the rain forests are a reservoir of carbon, stored in the vegetation. The cutting and burning of trees contributes to the build up of carbon dioxide. Another facet of this is the fact that the trees of the rain forest absorb the carbon dioxide created by the decomposing debris in the forest. Under normal circimstances there is equalibrium. The problem of deforestation creates two problems, increasing the carbon dioxide and decreasing the foliage of the trees that inhibits the process of photosynthesis.

There is a need to maintain forests throughout the world. The tropics are not the only location. However, to combat the greenhouse effect life styles may need to change so that the production of carbon dioxide can be decreased world-wide.

The maintenance of rain forest may have more to do with weather patterns, particularly rain fall. There is a meteorlogical hypothesis that weather patterns and rain fall in North America originate in Central and South America. The depletion of the rain forest can be affecting the rain fall in the U.S. Thus, it could be that our unsatiable desire for beef has impacted our productivity of grain. We might be eating away our rain. And people thought it was acid rain.

Three reasons for maintaining the rain forest are probably more significant than the above, namely, pharmaceuticals, gene bank, and the preservation of the chemical and ecological processes which contribute to the system as a whole but are unknown.

Our knowledge of the flora and fauna of the rain forest is sparse. Few species have been named. There are organisms that no one has ever seen. Some of these may be the raw materials necessary for medicines that can bring healing to diseases and disorders that are causing great pain and suffering today. 70% of the 3,000 plants identified as having the capacity to fight cancer are found in the rain forest.

A notion that one might find disturbing is that the aboriginal folk of the rain forest live rather healthy lives though their longitivity is not the same as it is for others who live in the more "technological world." Aboriginese of the rain forest have developed from the plants of the forest that bring healing to a variety of disorders.

Because the pharmaceutical industry has not discovered the drugs nor do they trust the trial and error methods of the "primitive" people progress in these areas has been retarded.

Fastinating, too, is that aboriginese not only have discovered cures, but the process for their research involved themselves as the guine pigs.

And we call these people uncultured? Isn't that what the word "primitive" means to us? It originally meant "the first, the beginning."

The rain forest is possibly a hope for fighting disease.

The rain forest also serves as a gene bank. So far life has evolved in an orderly way. Speciation has kept pace with extinction, though evolution is more rapid in the tropics.

The rain forest is a most efficient environment, and its future is critical for the future of the world because it serves to preserve the essential chemical components of life.

Not only does our ignorance of the rain forest prevent us from knowing about various drugs and cures there are also many natural phenomena that are absolutely unheard of. There are many unique events going on in very small segments of the forest. If the rain forest is destroyed these activities will never be observed. Also, we do not know what role these phenomena play in the total system.

There is a specie in the Monteverde Cloud Rain Forest called the golden toad. It exists in an area probably no larger than a feetball field. It has become the symbol of the Monteverde Forest.

Its behavior in caring for its young is very interesting. The tadpoles are born on the forest floor, and then the toad carries each tadpole up a tree to a bromeliad where the tadpole is put into water in the axil. This is a means to protect the young from predators.

What we fail to realize is that though these islands of activity may seem isolated we really do not know what they contribute to the whole of the ecosystem.

So why bother saving the rain forest? Pharmacueticals. Genetic reserve The rain forests' contribution to the welfare of the world though the quailities are unknown.

I did not go to Costa Rica to deal with the ethical implications of the treatment of the rain forest. It was intended to be an emersion experience where I would be bombarded by the "natural" world and discover there how God works in that world. I wanted to make observations from an environmental/scientific point of view.

One of my concerns is that many Christians have a clockmaker view of God when dealing with the non-human world. The attitude is that God made this world, and it now runs on its own. Scientists identify the processes as best they can. It is my opinion that the scientists are not only describing phenomena they are telling us from their observation point what God is doing.

I realize that scientists interpret their data from a certain point of view. There is fraud in the gathering of information. Some folks decide upon the outcome before they do the research. Thus, one must take into account that when a scientist's data is reported it is presented from a point of view. There is also a great deal of speculation. Nonetheless, we must live with these distortions and recognize the pitfalls of this and try our best to ascertain the meaning of what they describe.

Be a person a creationist or an evolutionist or something else most people believe that the non-human world is the stage upon which God and humankind interact with one another. One of my many biases is that human history and natural history are one in the same arena for God to encounter all that is created.

One of my experiences in Costa Rica was an encounter with a Jewish lady on a

quiet lane in Monteverde. She had just ascended a slightly inclined gravel road. She stopped to greet me and observed, "When I look at this place I can see why people had so many gods." She had been celebrating the mystery, the complexity, and the power of the Monteverde Cloud Rain Forest. She was pondering that pantheists and anamists believe the way they did because there had to be some type of power or powers beyond their experience.

I reminded the lady of her Jewish heritage which I share with her as a Christian. One of the words for God in the Old Testament is "Elohim," a name that exists in the plural to encompass all the powers of the pantheon of gods that were common to the culture of the day in which the texts were written. This God is the most high God, the God of all creation, the God of all gods.

The First Commandment also says, "You shall have no other gods before me."

What is there to be recognized here?

We have laid claim to a monotheism that excludes the existence of other gods. What is frustrating is that it is the folk who profess monotheism who might be among the worst perpetrators of disrespect for the non-human world in contrast to those who practice some type of polytheism. The non-human world exists for the human world and has no tie with God.

We take the attitude that only God is divine. The quality of all things is less than divine. In fact, the tendency is to resort to the dualism of material and spiritual. The material is divorced from God and denied of spiritual qualities.

I am not supporting divine attributes of the non-human world. But I do believe that all of creation lives in a relationship with God and that God is as involved in natural history as in human history. It is important to sense the spirituality of the whole world. All creation is an expression of God. Note Psalm 104.

The issue of evolution always lifts its head when discussing creation. It is extremely difficult to deny evolution as an observable fact. The word used in its place today is adaptation. This distinguishes the process from the hypothesis.

Scientists talk about how a specie changes to enable its ability to survive and procreate. The role of each organism of the specie is to enable the future of the specie. Through the process of adaptation the organism responds to the reality of the environment and develops characteristics that encourages its survival and productivity. This occurs through the continuous birth of the specie.

An interesting aside is that Darwin himself was a creationist like most of the other scientists of his day. When he realized what he was observing in the Galapagos Islands he knew if he followed the lead of his observations he would go against the grain of the scientific thinking of his day. Darwin was not concerned with the reaction of the religious community. He feared the response of his peers in the scientific community. Thus, he kept his findings and the interpretation of his findings secret for fifteen years.

The issue of evolution is "where does it originate" and "to where does it lead?" The beginning is not necessarily a singular point. Scientific observation shows

many gaps. Do we know nothing because links have not been found, or do they not at all exist?

The drive to locate the missing link is not a concern of the scientific community. It grows out of the religious community. For the religious community there must be a singular starting point. Spontaneity is not easily understood.

What of the future from an evolutionary perspective? Teilhard de Chardin anticipates all things evolving to an Omega Point. However, this too may be a religious expectation. Scientific observations note that evolution is not a grand scheme. Though it cannot be said that evolution is haphazard or capricious the process of adaptation demonstrates there is no grand scheme. For example, coevolution benefits some organisms and is a detriment and expense to others.

All of life is not in the process of becoming friends. I realize that the scientific discipline of paleontogy may cause a person to draw conclusions differently than one draws from the zoological or botanical world.

In the study of the environment and discussing ecological issues with some folks some interesting theological questions emerge.

First, there seems to be the notion that the human being is the sole actor on the stage created by the non-human world. This actor is both villain and potential messiah. Wallainous behavior is seen as inherent in human decision making and action by environmentalists. That the human can take a responsible stance is almost deemed unlikely unless there, is a major revolution.

Second, if a person is ecologically concerned and is a Christian the role of Christ, in human history is limited to time and space almost 2,000 years ago.

God in Christ is not God's redeeming work in the world today. What humanity is breaking assunder in the natural world is not reconcilable by Christ.

Does the Christ-event impact both the human and natural history?

When we talk about the natural world the tendency is to think God, the Creator and not God, the Redeemer/Reconciler. Also, though we know differently, if we listen to ourselves references are made to how the creation reveals the nature of the Creator to us.

It is my bias that using the natural world as a revelation of God is the inappropriate starting point. God makes Himself known in His redemptive act, Jesus Christ. Thus, when we talk about God's activity in the natural world we should begin with the Theology of the Cross.

It may be necessary to ascertain what we mean by the death and resurrection of Jesus. What type of atonement theory one holds may have some bearing. Is there sin? Has sin been overcome? Or has sin solely been paid for?

A position that looks at the natural world based on a Christus Victor theory of atonement challenges the thinking of many environmentalists since it suggests that sin is not in the driver's seat and hope prevails.

One can ask if such a view is this-worldly or other-worldly. It would appear that some of the existing trends described as ecological crises are irreversable.

Nothing short of a miracle can bring a solution. Or would it be better identified as a revolution?

For example: one way to address the greenhouse effect is to minimize the production of carbon dioxide. This would restrain the burning of fossil fuel. How would this impact transportation?

That the human world must take greater responsibility for the environment is obvious. But to think that God is not interacting with all of this world is a denial of our Christian faith. Where will God take us?

How does one demonstrate God's ivolvement in the now? Is it this-worldly or other-worldly? Who knows? However, isn't this what hope is? Hope is confidence in a God who makes things new but with no indication of what the ultimate result will be? Hope cannot be demonstrated. It begins with trust in the person of God. What God accomplishes is within His plan and scope.

Does this mean there is no human responsibility? By no means! The human is in a cooperative relationship with God.

Another musing is the tension between the behavior in the natural world that demonstrates coevolution and predator/prey.

Coevolution is the adaptation of two or more organisms to mutually benefit each other. A popular example of coevolution is the relationship between a Cecropia tree and an ant of the genus Azteca. This plant produces glycogen, an animal starch. The Azteca ants hollow out nests in the trunk and branches of this tree. The tree produces a nectar, called Beltian bodies, that feeds the ants. This is a protein that exists in a capsule where the leaves join the bark.

Much energy is expended by the tree to perform this task, thus taking away from its capabilities to reproduce. The advantage for the tree is that the ants protect the trees from their enemies.

Another illustration of coevolution involves the passion flower and the passion flower butterfly, Heliconiase ethilla. The butterfly feeds on the nectar of the passion flower and fertilizes it.

While coevolution tends to create a very limited system predator/prey behavior is characteristic of a greater food chain. It may be the choice of words, predator/prey, that is misleading. These words refer to an organism's maneuvers to seek food and develop routines to preserve themselves from predators. To treat this as evil, as diabolical, as consummerism is a mistake. Without this type of behavior there would be no food chain.

A substitute way of talking about this phenomenon is "sacrifice." This is the organisms' giving of one self for the sake of the whole system. At the heart of the whole process is the welfare and survival of a whole system. If a link in the chain or a block in the pyramid is deleted the system falters. Thus, sacrifice is essential.

Sacrifice is not based on taking something away, but making a contribution to a system. It is intentional on the part of the organism.

Coevolution and sacrifice exist within the same ecosystem and speak of God's

sustaining power.

When we look at our understanding of how God ultimately involves Himself in the world we point at the cross, the sacrifice of Christ. This has some interesting implications in our understanding. Is the cross best perceived from the perspective of natural history rather than human history?

To listen to environmentalists one would conloude that the natural world is best off without human intervention and involvement. When humans enter the system something goes haywire.

On the other hand from a biblical perspective humanity is a part of the ecosystem.

What needs to happen is that rather than holding to an utilitarian view of life we should recognize the arena in which we live as the sphere of activity of God and all of life and death. It is a rich arena in which peace can be the style and the end of life together. It is a wholistic view of life in which all things are respected as being of value in and of themselves and to the whole system. Lack of human knowledge of an organism's place does not mean its lack of value.

Is this not what God was about when He rested on the seventh day? Could He have not been valuing His creation? Is it not interesting that we could learn somewhat the same thing from our "primitive" brothers and sisters in the rain forest?

John E. Swanson May, 1989

### SEVENTH DAY ENVIRONMENTALISTS

It was 1502 when Christopher Columbus discovered and named a portion of Central America Costa Rica, rich coast. He assumed that the land created by volcanic activity was rich in precious metals. Costa Rica is rich, rich with natural beauty.

In January, 1989, I made a similar discovery upon my visit to Costa Rica. It is a land rich with diversity zoologically, botanically, and culturally. My arrival was not by water, but by air. The land looked rich from the sky, tall rolling green hills, a never ending pattern.

Spaniards, who began to colonize Costa Rica 500 years ago. compose most of the population. There are fewer Native Americans in Costa Rica than in other Central American countries.

As a nation they have committed themselves to preserving one of their natural resources, the rain forest. As is noted later in this paper, however, such a commitment does not mean there is no destruction.

Most of the 2.7 million people live in the central plain. The hub of commerce is San Jose, a metropolitan area of several small towns.

The country is a land mass of 20,000 square miles, the size of West Virginia.

Costa Rica is the Switzerland of the Western Hemisphere. It is one of the oldest democracies in the Americas. Costa Rica has no army. By constitution the nation may not go to war.

Their president, who will serve one six year term with no eligibility to be reelected, is Dr. Oscar Arias Sanchez. When he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1987 he said in his acceptance speech,

"Weapons do not fire on their own. Those who have lost hope fire them. Those who are controlled by dogmas fire them. We must fight for peace undismayed, and fearlessly accept these challenges from those without hope and from the threat of fanatics. Nobody knows better than the honorable members of this (Nobel Peace Prize) committee, that this prize is a sign to let the world know that you want to foster the Central American peace initiative. With your decision you are enhancing the possibilities of success. You are declaring how well you know the search for peace can never end."

In 1848 a free and compulsory educational system was established. The literacy rate, as a result, is the highest in the world, 93%.

There are three symbols of Costa Rica. The colorful ox cart is the national symbol. It was used for transporting coffee to the market. The second symbol is the bus, the only rational means of travel in Costa Rica. A car has a tough time surviving. The third is the round ball-shaped stone. No one knows from whence these stones come. The hypothesis range from artifacts carved by the natives, although no one has ever found any evidence of instruments that could perform such an art, to natural phenomenon, to extraterrestrial invasion.

The nickname for Costa Rica is "Tiquicia." The people are called "Ticos." The nickname derives from the way the people put diminutives on their words. In other countries the Hispanic suffix for "little" is pronouced "tito," but in Costa Rica it is pronounced "tico."

The attitude toward the United States is varied. The population will side with countries opposed to U.S. policies. However, the country is very dependent upon the money from the U.S. in terms of tourism and exports such as coffee, sugar cane, and flowers.

The anti-U.S. spirit is subtle, but it has historic roots. The Ticos remember when a man named William Walker tried to annex the Central American countries to the U.S. under the direction of President Buchanan in the middle of the nineteenth century. Walker enslaved people, held doubtful elections, and broke promises to his friends. (And we point our fingers at Panama?)

A national hero is Juan Santamaria, a teenager. Though he was killed in the process he set fire to a building that housed Walker. This caused Walker's retreat, but not his demise.

The country is poor. People live sparingly. There is hope that tourism will enhance their lot.

For the most part people are Roman Catholic. However, Jimmy Swaggart is very popular because he pours money into their educational system.

My reason for going to Costa Rica was to explore a natural world which stands in striking contrast to the natural world in which I practice the unique character of my ministry, the Temperate Zone, that part of the earth that is located between the Tropical and the Polar Zones.

In the Temperate Zone seasons are noticeable and daylight and darkness vary in length every day. It is that part of the globe that moderates between two extremes where it can get cold and hot and be excessive because of the length of the daylight and night time periods.

The Tropcal or Equatorial Zone is a habitat uniquely different from the Temperate Zone. So I visited Costa Rica and specifically hiked in two of the many rain forests there, the Monteverde Cloud Rain Forest and the rain forest in the Corcovado National Park. These two rain forests are distinct because of altitude. The former is about a mile above sea level; the latter is at sea level, along the ocean.

There are thirty or forty different types of rain forests. Most of them are in the Tropics. They are all characterized by temperature and rain. The temperature is relatively constant throughout the year because the daylight and night time hours are almost equal in length. It is not the strength of the sun that determines the season (fall/winter/spring/summer) but the variation of rain fall (dry/wet). It is the seasonality of rain fall that defines a rain forest.

The rain forests have been called jungles in the past, a word that comes from a Sanskrit word meaning desert. Later the word was used to describe scrubland. Still later it was used for a wild place.

We have visions of the jungle stuffed with underbrush and constantly green. But this is not entirely true. During the dry weather season leaves dry up and fall to the forest floor to help the trees retain their water.

This is contrasted with evergreen trees that are in the citrus family in warm climates, further removed from the Equaltorial Zone, which retain their leaves for several years.

A tree loses its leaves because the leaves have fulfilled their purpose. In a Temperate Forest the decidious (word means "falling down") leaves do their work in a few months. The conifer leaves (or needles) exist an average of seven years.

The rain forests are dark. Sunlight enters the forest floor very sparingly. The trees create a canopy in many instances over 130 feet above the ground. There are moments of sunlight that are created when a tree falls. But soon the canopy covers over the opening.

When observing the canopy there is a specific characteristic of the crowns of the tree. They stand apart. It is called crown shyness.

The fact this canopy exists introduces several phenomena to the rain forest.

First, there is a lack of wind. The shade from the trees allows cooling to occur. However, in order for most plants to be pollinated the plants of the under story depend upon insects, birds, and bats.

Secondly. the trees grow slowly when they are young, waiting for a chance to break through to the sun light when they can grow more rapidly.

Third, one would think there is a plethora of flowers in the rain forest, but the lack of sunlight inhibits this. Flowers are more readily seen on the tops of the trees. Thus, unless you are able to fly they are not observable.

The canopy shelters the forest hiker from many of the more dramatic phenomena in the forest. Thus, scientists have developed methods to study the canopy using mountain and rock climbing methods to ascend the trees and create walk ways between them with ropes and scaffolds. To make observations, scientists will remain in these haunts for weeks on end.

A great variety of birds go unseen because they fly and feast above the canopy. Thus, bird watchers shriek with joy when they can get a glimpse of one of many birds for just a moment. Costa Rica is still a birder's paradise with 850 species.

Fourth, the canopy allows only about one quarter to one half of the rain to reach the forest floor. The portion that is intercepted by the canopy evaporates and returns to the atmosphere. As the water runs down the trunks of the trees the water collects nutrients which then support colonies of algae, lichen, and liverworts.

A portion of the water that reaches the ground is soaked up. The earth is a sponge. One of the rain forests near San Jose is Braulio Carrillo. This forest serves as the water source for the metropolitan area of San Jose. In the event the rain forest is "developed" (i.e. trees are cut down and fields and buildings

established) the San José community would find its water source dramatically decreased.

Another characteristic of the rain forest is its epiphytes. These are plants that grow on trees which do not depend upon the tree for food, water, or mimerals. The tree is simply a place for them to grow. (They are not parasites, like mistletoe.)

Epiphytes familiar to Temperate Zone dwellers are orchids and bromeliads which appear in many homes in varioùs forms. The most familiar bromeliad is pineapple, though this is not an epiphyte. Epiphytes are phenomenal growths because they can be seen all over the tree trunks and contribute to a great deal of the greenery of the forest.

Epiphytes of the Tropics are simliar in many ways to the lichens, mosses, and fungi of the Temperate Zone which also live on trees. However, these Temperate Zone cousins are much smaller and serve to break down dead organisms rather than mutually survive with the host.

One of the unique epiphytes is the Strangler Fig. The seed begins to grow in the debris in the crotch of a tree. It sends its roots down to the ground and the vine then climbs the tree. As the plant begins to intertwine around the host tree it develops a woody structure that appears to strangle it. However, the ultimate cause of the host's demise is that the leaves of the Strangler Fig shade the leaves of the host tree and prevent the sun from giving the tree adequate light.

The phenomena of the Strangler Fig. of which there are many species, is that as its wraps itself around the host it creates a structure that eventually in its own right becomes a tree. The host rots and the Strangler Fig becomes the home of insects, birds, bats, and lizards, an apartment building that would take a human lifetime to study. Someone has said that one can find as many as 405 unique species in one tree.

Some trees have adapted so that epiphytes will not adhere to them. One of these trees is the Naked Indian. The bark peals off from time to time discarding any growth that might be adhering to it in some way.

Epiphytes are often called air plants because they draw their nutrition and water from the dust and moisture in the air.

Some ephiphytes, bromeliads, have water in the cup shaped at the base of the plant that serve as protective pools for forest critters. The orange and black poison dart frog takes advantage of this in caring for the young. The tadpoles are born on the forest floor, and then the frog carries each tadpole up a tree to a bromeliad where the tadpole is put into water in the axil. There the young are protected from their predators.

While observing trees and the decomposition of the debris of the forest several things must be noticed.

Decomposition is extremely rapid in the rain forest. Because of this, leaves are very similar because they are shaped to hasten the shedding of water to prevent the early destruction of the leaves by lichens and other types of decomposers. Vains are usually quite deep, and the end of the leaf has a drip tip.

Rotting material is efficient in giving nutrition to all the plant life, and tree roots that grow along the surface of the soil rarely dig into the earth.

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In the Temperate Zone there are stands of trees of the same specie. My world in the Temperate Zone is an oak/hickory hardwood forest. In addition to these hardwoods there are probably a dozen or so species of trees. They pollinate and perpetuate themselves in clusters.

In the rain forest there are hundreds of species of trees. They do not thrive in clusters, but are scattered throughout the forest. In order to pollinate they need to not only depend upon insects, birds, or bats, but organisms must coadapt in order to guarantee survival of the particular tree.

Seed dispersal is as necessary for survival as pollination. To facilitate that in the rain forest, fruits have adapted very colorful appearances and satisfying tastes. If one has ever been in the tropics one discovers a great variety of edible fruits and fruit drinks. Why? The fate of a specie lies in its ability to perpetuate itself on its own and needs a way for the fruit to be attracted so animals will transport it to another desirable location. Given the great variety of trees there are many types of fruit. And they do compete with each other.

One of the unique fruits of the rain forest is the cashew. The fruit, which we call the nut, grows on the end of a stem that swells and looks like and tastes similar to a nectarine.

Insects are of great importance in the rain forest. Army ants are the most common. There are 240 species. Their task is to break down the debris in the forest. Stories are told how these ants will march into a home causing the inhabitants to leave. Once the ants have cleaned out the house, the human residents return.

Unlike army ants, termites are not nomadic. They chew up rain forest litter and build homes in the ground or on trees constructing tunnels from debris. They are among the few creatures able to convert rotting vegetation into living tissue, a crucial link for commuting nutrition from one organism to another.

Of great fascination in the rain forest is the leaf-cutter ant. Each ant chews off a piece of a leaf, the size of a thumb nail and carries it to the underground nest, a distance that might be several hundred yards. These ants produce a special food fungi by chewing the leaf and planting them in a reservoir of desired fungi. The leaf-cutter's larvae feed on the fungi. The adults need the enzyme to digest their main food, a sap from the leaves they have collected.

The relationship between the ant and the fungi is so strong that the fungi no longer produces sexual spores. The fungi depend upon the leaf-cutters for reproduction.

Ants also gather seeds from the flowers. Thus, they participate in the seed dispersal process. A plant of the Temporal Forest that is the result of ants creating a cache of seeds is Blood Root.

The rain forest has received a vast amount of publicity recently for a variety of reasons.

At one time between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn there existed five billion acres of rain forest, 14% of the earth's land surface. Today, humanity has slashed and burned one half of this.

Tropical rain forests are being destroyed more rapidly than any other type of natural habitat. Of the 2.4 billion acres of rain forest still in existence, approximately 14 million acres are being depleted annually. This is 30 acres every minute.

It is anticipated that in Costa Rica 80% of the 1981 rain forest will ultimately be wasted, in spite of their commitment to protect it.

Why are rain forests being cut down and burned at such a rate? People wish to harvest and sell the timber, mine the gold and iron, and create more agricultural land. There are those who also interpret this type of behavior as humanity's desire to conquer the natural world. This is the spirit of the political leaders of Panama, for example.

The chief culprit of forest depletion in Latin America is the desire to create ranches to export beef. What this accomplishes is taking five cents off the price of the hamburger in the United States.

What is sad about this behavior is that this process is bringing to extinction one of the most diverse ecosystems on the face of the earth.

A second reason for the popularity of rain forests is due to the concern for the greenhouse effect. Carbon dioxide and other elements trap heat that once would normally pass through to outer space. The concentration of carbon dioxide causes a rise in the earth's temperature. The notion is that the depletion of forest is contributing to the build up of carbon dioxide. In part, this is true because the rain forests are a reservoir of carbon, stored in the vegetation. The cutting and burning of trees contributes to the build up of carbon dioxide. Another facet of this is the fact that the trees of the rain forest absorb the carbon dioxide created by the decomposing debris in the forest. Under normal circimstances there is equalibrium. The problem of deforestation creates two problems, increasing the carbon dioxide and decreasing the foliage of the trees that inhibits the process of pho tosynthesis.

There is a need to maintain forests throughout the world. The tropics are not the only location. However, to combat the greenhouse effect life styles may need to change so that the production of carbon dioxide can be decreased world-wide.

The maintenance of rain forest may have more to do with weather patterns, particularly rain fall. There is a meteorlogical hypothesis that weather patterns and rain fall in North America originate in Central and South America. The depletion of the rain forest can be affecting the rain fall in the U.S. Thus, it could be that our unsatiable desire for beef has impacted our productivity of grain. We might be eating away our rain. And people thought it was acid rain.

Three reasons for maintaining the rain forest are probably more significant than the above, namely, pharmaceuticals, gene bank, and the preservation of the chemical and ecological processes which contribute to the system as a whole but are unknown.

Our knowledge of the flora and fauna of the rain forest is sparse. Few species have been named. There are organisms that no one has ever seen. Some of these may be the raw materials necessary for medicines that can bring healing to diseases and disorders that are causing great pain and suffering today. 70% of the 3,000 plants identified as having the capacity to fight cancer are found in the rain forest.

A notion that one might find disturbing is that the aboriginal folk of the rain forest live rather healthy lives though their longitivity is not the same as it is for others who live in the more "technological world." Aboriginese, of the rain forest, have developed from the plants of the forest that bring healing to a variety of disorders.

Because the pharmaceutical industry has not discovered the drugs nor do they trust the trial and error methods of the "primitive" people progress in these areas has been retarded.

Fascinating, too, is that aboriginese not only have discovered cures, but the process for their research involved themselves as the guinea pigs.

And we call these people uncultured? Isn't that what the word "primitive" means to us? It originally meant "the first, the beginning."

The rain forest is possibly a hope for fighting disease.

The rain forest also serves as a gene bank. So far life has evolved in an orderly way. Speciation has kept pace with extinction, though evolution is more rapid in the tropics.

The rain forest is a most efficient environment, and its future is critical for the future of the world because it serves to preserve the essential chemical components of life.

Not only does our ignorance of the rain forest prevent us from knowing about various drugs and cures there are also many natural phenomena that are absolutely unheard of. There are many unique events going on in very small segments of the forest. If the rain forest is destroyed these activities will never be observed. Also, we do not know what role these phenomena play in the total system.

There is a specie in the Monteverde Cloud Rain Forest called the golden toad. It exists in an area probably no larger than a football field. It has become the symbol of the Monteverde Forest.

What we fail to realize is that though these islands of activity may seem isolated we really do not know what they contribute to the whole of the ecosystem.

So why bother saving the rain forest? Pharmacueticals. Genetic reserve. The rain forests' contribution to the welfare of the world though the qualities are unknown.

I did not go to Costa Rica to deal with the ethical implications of the treatment of the rain forest. It was intended to be an immersion experience where I would be bombarded by the "natural" world and discover there how God works in that world. I wanted to make observations from an environmental/scientific point of view.

One of my concerns is that many Christians have a clockmaker view of God when dealing with the non-human world. The attitude is that God made this world, and it now runs on its own. Scientists identify the processes as best they can. It is my opinion that the scientists are not only describing phenomena they are telling us from their observation point what God is doing.

I realize that scientists interpret their data from a certain point of view. There is fraud in the gathering of information. Some folks decide upon the outcome before they do the research. Thus, one must take into account that when a scientist's data is reported it is presented from a point of view. There is also a great deal of speculation. Nonetheless, we must live with these distortions and recognize the pitfalls of this and try our best to ascertain the meaning of what they describe.

Be a person, a creationist, or an evolutionist or something else most people believe that the non-human world is the stage upon which God and humankind interact with one another. One of my many biases is that human history and natural history are one in the same arena for God to encounter all that is created.

One of my experiences in Costa Rica was an encounter with a Jewish lady on a quiet lane in Montewerde. She had just ascended a slightly inclined gravel road. She stopped to greet me and observed, "When I look at this place I can see why people had so many gods." She had been celebrating the mystery, the complexity, and the power of the Monteverde Cloud Rain Forest. She was pondering that pantheists and anamists believe the way they did because there had to be some type of power or powers beyond their experience.

I reminded the lady of her Jewish heritage which I share with her as a Christian. One of the words for God in the Old Testament is "Elohim," a name that exists in the plural to encompass all the powers of the pantheon of gods that were common to the culture of the day in which the texts were written. This God is the most high God, the God of all creation, the God of all gods.

The First Commandment also says, "You shall have no other gods before me."

What is there to be recognized here?

We have laid claim to a monotheism that excludes the existence of other gods. What is frustrating is that it is the folk who profess monotheism who might be among the worst perpetrators of disrespect for the non-human world in contrast to those who practice some type of polytheism. The non-human world exists for the human world and has no tie with God.

We take the attitude that only God is divine. The quality of all things is less than divine. In fact, the tendency is to resort to the dualism of material and spiritual. The material is divorced from God and denied of spiritual qualities.

I am not supporting divine attributes of the non-human world. But I do believe that all of creation lives in a relationship with God and that God is as involved in natural history as in human history. It is important to sense the spirituality of the whole world. All creation is an expression of God. Note Psalm 104.

The issue of evolution always lifts its head when discussing creation. It is extremely difficult to deny evolution as an observable fact. The word used in its place today is adaptation. This distinguishes the process from the hypothesis.

Scientists talk about how a specie changes to enable its ability to survive and procreate. The role of each organism of the specie is to enable the future of the specie. Through the process of adaptation the organism responds to the reality of the environment and develops characteristics that encourages its survival and productivity. This occurs through the continuous birth of the specie.

An interesting aside is that Darwin himself was a creationist like most of the other scientists of his day. When he realized what he was observing in the Galapagos Islands he knew if he followed the lead of his observations he would go against the grain of the scientific thinking of his day. Darwin was not concerned with the reaction of the religious community. He feared the response of his peers in the scientific community. Thus, he kept his findings and the interpretation of his findings secret for fifteen years.

The issue of evolution is "where does it originate" and "to where does it lead?" The beginning is not necessarily a singular point. Scientific observation shows many gaps. Do we know nothing because links have not been found, or do they not at all exist?

The drive to locate the missing link is not a concern of the scientific community. It grows out of the religious community. For the religious community there must be a singular starting point. Spontaneity is not easily understood.

What of the future from an evolutionary perspective? Teilhard de Chardin anticipates all things evolving to an Omega Point. However, this too may be a religious expectation. Scientific observations note that evolution is not a grand scheme. Though it cannot be said that evolution is haphazard or capricious the process of adaptation demonstrates there is no grand scheme. For example, coevolution benefits some organisms and is a detriment and expense to others.

All of life is not in the process of becoming friends. I realize that the scientific discipline of paleontogy may cause a person to draw conclusions differently than one draws from the zoological or botanical world.

In the study of the environment and discussing ecological issues with some folks some interesting theological questions emerge.

First, there seems to be the notion that the human being is the sole actor on the stage created by the non-human world. This actor is both villain and potential messiah. Villainous behavior is seen as inherent in human decision making and action by environmentalists. That the human can take a responsible stance is almost deemed unlikely unless there is a major revolution.

Second, if a person is ecologically concerned and is a Christian, the role of Christ in human history is often confined to time and space 2,000 years ago. When considering the ecological problems of the day God's restoring work is left out of or ignored in the dynamics of an environment that is been broken and healed. What humanity is breaking assumder in the natural world is not reconcilable by Christ.

Do Christians believe that the Christ-event impacts both the human and natural history? Or is Jesus Christ the Redeemer only of the human world?

When we talk about the natural world the tendency is to think God, the Creator and not God, the Redeemer/Reconciler. Also, though we know differently, if we listen to ourselves references are made to how the creation reveals the nature of the Creator to us.

It is my bias that using the natural world as a revelation of God is the inappropriate starting point. God makes Himself known in His redemptive act. Jesus Christ. Thus, when we talk about God's activity in the natural world we should begin with the Theology of the Cross.

It may be necessary to ascertain what we mean by the death and resurrection of Jesus. What type of atonement theory one holds may have some bearing. Is there sin? Has sin been overcome? Or has sin solely been paid for?

A position that looks at the natural world based on a Christus Victor theory of atonement challenges the thinking of many environmentalists since it suggests

that sin is not in the driver's seat and hope prevails.

One can ask if such a view is this-worldly or other-worldly. It would appear that some of the existing trends described as ecological crises are irreversable. Nothing short of a miracle can bring a solution. Or would it be better identified as a revolution?

For example: One way to address the greenhouse effect is to minimize the production of carbon dioxide. This would restrain the burning of fossil fuel. How would this impact transportation?

That the human world must take greater responsibility for the environment is obvious. But to think that God is not interacting with all of this world is a denial of our Christian faith. Where will God take us?

How does one demonstrate God's ivolvement in the now? Is it this-worldly or other-worldly? Who knows? However, isn't this what hope is? Hope is confidence in a God who makes things new but with no indication of what the ultimate result will be? Hope cannot be demonstrated. It begins with trust in the person of God. What God accomplishes is within His plan and scope.

Does this mean there is no human responsibility? By no means! The human is in a cooperative relationship with God.

Another musing is the tension between the behavior in the natural world that demonstrates ocevolution and predator/prey.

Coevolution is the adaptation of two or more organisms to mutually benefit each other. A popular example of coevolution is the relationship between a Cecropia tree and an ant of the genus Azteca. This plant produces glycogen, an animal starch. The Azteca ants hollow out nests in the trunk and branches of this tree. The tree produces a nectar, called Mullerian bodies, that feeds the ants. This is a protein that exists in a capsule where the leaves join the bark.

Much energy is expended by the tree to perform this task, thus taking away from its capabilities to reproduce. The advantage for the tree is that the ants protect the trees from their enemies.

Another illustration of coevolution involves the passion flower and the passion flower butterfly, Heliconiase ethilla. The butterfly feeds on the nectar of the passion flower and fertilizes it.

While coevolution tends to create a very limited system predator/prey behavior is characteristic of a greater food chain. It may be the choice of words, predator/prey, that is misleading. These words refer to an organism's maneuvers to seek food and develop routines to preserve themselves from predators. To treat this as evil, as diabolical, as consumerism is a mistake. Without this type of behavior there would be no food chain.

A substitute way of talking about this phenomenon is "sacrifice." This is the organisms' giving of one's self for the sake of the whole system. At the heart of the whole process is the welfare and survival of a whole system. If a link in the chain or a block in the pyramid is deleted the system falters. Thus, sacrifice is essential.

Sacrifice is not based on taking something away, but making a contribution to a system. It is intentional on the part of the organism.

Coevolution and sacrifice exist within the same ecosystem and speak of God's sustaining power.

When we look at our understanding of how God ultimately involves Himself in the world we point at the cross, the sacrifice of Christ. This has some interesting implications in our understanding. Is the cross best perceived from the perspective of natural history rather than human history?

To listen to environmentalists one would conloude that the natural world is best off without human intervention and involvement. When humans enter the system something goes haywire.

On the other hand from a biblical perspective humanity is a part of the ecosystem.

What needs to happen is that rather than holding to an utilitarian view of life we should recognize the arena in which we live as the sphere of activity of God and all of life and death. It is a rich arena in which peace can be the style and the end of life together. It is a wholistic view of life in which all things are respected as being of value in and of themselves and to the whole system. Lack of human knowledge of an organism's place does not mean its lack of value.

Is this not what God was about when He rested on the seventh day? Could He have not been valuing His creation? Is it not interesting that we could learn somewhat the same thing from our "primitive" brothers and sisters in the rain forest?

John E. Swanson May, 1989

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