Truth Versus the New Humanism and the New Theology

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'Those who assigned this topic understood that there is a *new* kind of humanism and a *new* theology. Where did they come from and what is our relationship to them? Unless we understand the new forms of humanism and theology, we are not discussing the real issue of the day. Luther reminds us: "If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides, is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point."

What is the new theology and what is its relationship to the new humanism? I will assume some knowledge of my books Escape From Reason and The God Who Is There in which I dwell at length on this question.

As we come to a critique of any kind of liberalism — the old-fashioned or the new-fashioned liberalism — we must stress clearly that the reason we reject liberal theology is not because we are opposd to scholarship. Constantly through the years great Lutheran scholars have dealt with what is usually called lower criticism — the question of what the best text really is. The same has been true for my own Presbyterian tradition — for example, such men as Robert Dick Wilson at Princeton Theological Seminary before liberalism took over that institution. Textual study is important to us. It is natural that we as biblical Christians should be especially interested in the best text, because we believe that the Scripture really is the propositional communication from God to men. Consequently our scholars have labored through the years in the area of lower criticism. Our rejection of liberalism is not a rejection of proper scholarship.

Higher criticism, of course, is quite a different matter. Higher criticism picks up where lower criticism leaves off. It brings in subjective elements in an attempt to determine upon its own subjective basis what is to be accepted and what is to be rejected of the text after the best text has been established. The "new hermeneutic" is a case in point, for in the "new hermeneutic" there is no real distinction between the text and the interpretation. It is all run together.

Let us identify the real place of struggle. It is not a matter of scholarship. It is rather a matter of presuppositions. Both the old liberalism and the new liberalism operate on a set of presuppositions different from those of historic, orthodox Christianity.

In order to understand this, we must go back about 250 years to Germany when the German liberalism was born. At that particular time the German universities and the German faculties were moving over into modern naturalism.

The basic presupposition of naturalism, as it was born at that particular time, is the uniformity of natural causes in a closed system. This is now the basic presupposition of our own generation. Normally, it is not argued, but simply accepted. Everything else in our generation is considered unthinkable except the fact that everything starts and operates within a total cosmic machine. Where did this notion come from?

I have elsewhere written about the distinction between what I call modern science and modern modern science. Modern science derives from the work of men in the time of Galileo and includes the work of Francis Bacon and others up to and including Newton. These men believed in the uniformity of natural causes. Otherwise they could not have produced a science at all. This notion of the uniformity of natural causes was linked with the Christian intellectual framework then dominant.

Alfred North Whitehead, in fact, once said that modern science could never have been born except in a Christian setting. The reason for this, he pointed out, is that these early scientists believed that the world, the universe, was created by a reasonable God and, therefore, the nature of the universe — the truth of the universe — could be discovered by reason. But the early scientists did not assume the uniformity of natural causes in a closed system. They held a uniformity of natural causes in an open system. They believed the system could be interrupted by God and man. They did not see God as caught in the machine nor did they see man as caught in the machine.

This is what I call modern science, the uniformity of natural causes in an open system. In contrast to this is modern modern science which is naturalism; here we have the uniformity of cause and effect in a closed system.

On this basis modern man sees himself as only part of a cosmic machine. Science (not only chemistry, astronomy, and so on, but also the modern social sciences and modern psychology) works on the basis of the uniformity of natural causes in a closed system. So even man himself is a machine caught in the cosmic machine.

Therefore, let us understand that at one particular era in the German universities there was a shift. In the academic disciplines surrounding the faculties of theology there was a moving over from what had been the view of the older science (the uniformity of natural causes in an open system) to modern modern science (the uniformity of natural causes in a closed system). A new dominant view was coming in — a total consensus. The result back in Germany was that the theological faculties were isolated from the other faculties, and at that time theology itself capitulated by accepting the naturalism of the other faculties.

I believe that the reason they capitulated is that their theology was already less than it should have been. By the time you get to about 200 years ago in the German universities, the theology of the Reformation with the burning heart was coming to an end. Largely it had become only a repetitive theology. Such a thing, of course, can never long stand.

I believe that one can see an often repeated cycle in church history: living orthodoxy moves to dead orthodoxy and then to heterodoxy. I think that is exactly the case in the German universities at that particular time. The German faculties did not accept the presupposition of the uniformity of natural causes in a closed system because they were forced to by the facts. They did so simply to conform, and liberal theology has been conforming ever since. We must understand that liberal theology from that day to this has been a theology of naturalism. It had a naturalistic perspective. This is totally opposite from the framework of historic Christianity and the Bible.

The Bible has a perspective, a presupposition. The infinite-Personal God created the external universe; the external universe is there and is not an extension of God's essence. It is a reasonable universe and therefore something of its nature can be detected by reason. There is order: the universe is not chaotic nor random. There is cause and effect.

But even so the Bible's viewpoint and historic Christianity's viewpoint is contrary to naturalism in that God can work down into space-time history. This is miracle. God is able to work into the cause and effect flow of history. Man as made in the image of God can also work into the cause and effect flow of history. (This, by the way, means man is not dead; he is not a machine.) But more importantly, God can work into the world and change the cause and effect flow of the world, and this is miracle. This is the biblical view.

More than this, the Bible emphasizes, and historic Christianity has always emphasized, that God not only can work into the world but that He has spoken to men in the historic space-time situation. He has given a propositional, verbalized communication to men that is true about Himself, true about history, and true about the cosmos. That's what revelation is.

This should not take us by surprise. Modern anthropology stresses that what distinguishes man is not that he is a toolmaker, but that he is a verbalizer. If God has made man in His own image and made us so that we can verbalize propositional facts to each other on the horizontal level of communication, we should not be surprised that God would also vertically communicate to men, made in his image, propositional truth on the basis of verbalization.

We must understand that the Bible says God works in history and speaks to man in history. These both are opposed to naturalism. In other words, the presuppositions of historic Christianity and of naturalism are in complete antithesis.

Of course, we must be careful to make a distinction here. The Bible never says that God gives us exhaustive truth, but it does claim that he gives us true truth. He gives us true truth about Himself, true truth about history, true truth about the cosmos. Consequently, the nature and grace problem did not exist in the Reformation because there was a unity, not on the basis of man's wisdom, but there was a unity because God has told truly of Himself and God has told truly of the world and of history. So the Reformation had no dichotomy between nature and grace.

Liberal theology was born in the German universities by theologians giving in to the surrounding secular naturalistic thought. From that time to this, liberal theology has followed secular thought.

The new humanism is different from the old humanism, and the new theology is different from the old form of liberal theology. Basically both the old and new humanism, and the old liberal theology and the new liberal theology are all of one piece in that they all are naturalistic. Yet we must understand within this unity the shift that has taken place between the old and the new or we will never understand exactly what the discussion is in our own generation. There has been a change from the old humanism to the new humanism, a change from the old liberal theology to the new liberal theology, and we must understand that change.

I believe four men are the watershed into the modern world: Jean-Jaques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, Hegel, and Kierkegaard. After these four men we have a completely new world, and now it has boiled over out of the philosophical discussion, down into the streets, out into the violence of the street. The modern generation gap is a generation gap of the different way of considering truth. As I have written elsewhere, I believe that the generation gap is not one of morals, but of epistimology. There is a complete dichotomy between how the different generations look at truth and at knowledge.

1. First, let's consider secular, naturalistic thought prior to Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, and Kierkegaard. What was thought like then? Basically men were optimistic: they optimistically believed that on the basis of rationalism, man rationally could find a unified answer to all knowledge and all of life. Let us notice the definitions here: Rationalism means that man can understand the universe by beginning from himself without recourse to outside knowledge, specifically outside knowledge or revelation from God. Rationally sounds something like the word rationalism, but in reality the two have no real relationship. Rationalism means man beginning only from himself. Rationality means that reason is valid. The first axiom of the classical concept of rational methodology is that "A is not non-A." That is, on the basis of reason, if a thing is true the opposite is not true. And in the area of morals if a thing is right the opposite is wrong. That is rationality.

The old secular thinkers believed optimistically that they could begin only from themselves (rationalism), apply reason, and come to a unified concept

of knowledge and of life. They thought this would lead them to find true answers. They were optimists at this place on the basis of reason.

Where did liberal theology stand in that same period prior to these four men? Liberal theology simply echoed this. If we were to make a graph, we would find secular thinking or secular naturalism on a curve always followed by liberal theology following the same curve only a few years later. Thus liberal theology is to be understood as secular thinking that uses different terminology and yet says almost the same things just a few years later.

In this period the liberal theologians also were optimistic. They believed that on the basis of rationalistic scholarship they could find the historic Jesus while eliminating the supernatural from the biblical account. They believed that they could take reason, apply it to the Bible, and come up with the historic Jesus even though they rejected the supernatural elements. By presupposition they were naturalists, and the supernatural made them uncomfortable. But notice that they were simply following exactly that which secular thinking had already said several years before.

2. What's the next step? The next step takes us to Rousseau, Kant, Hegel and Kierkegaard or Kierkegaardianism. At this particular place rationalistic philosophers decided that on a rational basis they could not find a unified answer to knowledge and to life. Their end was failure. It was like Satre's No Exit.

Now what happened to liberal theology? Liberal theology has always been the tail on the dog ever since it accepted the presupposition of naturalism. It has always followed secular thinking and has never blazed a way of its own. Liberal theologians had been optimistic about being able to separate the historic Jesus from the supernatural Jesus of the Gospel accounts. With Schweitzer's quest of the historic Jesus, however, they found they were not going to be able to do it. This was the end of an era. They found that the supernatural and the historic Jesus were so united that if you removed all the supernatural you had no historic Jesus. And if you kept the historic Jesus, you had to have the supernatural.

Now we have moved through two steps. We have moved first through the step of optimistic secularism, that somehow rationalistically they would be able rationally to arrive at a unified system of knowledge and life. But when with these four men rationalism came to the conclusion that it was not going to go, liberal theology followed the same curve. Liberal theology had thought that on the basis of reason and scholarship they could separate the supernaturalism in the Bible from the historic Jesus. They then came to the conclusion that this could not be done.

3. In this situation what did secular rationalism do? Rationally, there were two possibilities. The first was to become nihilistic—to believe that one can know nothing. (It is a step taken by a number of 20th Century thinkers. But it leads to the confusion of reality and fantasy and a complete pessimism about knowing.) On the basis of reason they could therefore have decided to give up all hope. The other thing they could have done if they were to consistently follow their reason was to conclude that their rationalism was wrong, that they as finite could not gather enough particulars to make universals, and that therefore they needed knowledge outside of themselves if they were going to find an answer to life. In other words, they would have to accept the concept of revelation. They could have done either of these and have remained reasonable men.

Instead, something new came. There is something new in the world, the new humanism, a different concept of truth, a new epistemology that is really new. If we don't understand this, we will not understand the liberalism which we are facing today in the area of theology. They did what would have been unthinkable to all previous educated men — they split the field of knowledge.

Philosophers had thought they would have a unity, but they gave up this hope. So what did Rousseau say? Prior to him, in the high renaissance, men had faced the problem of nature and grace. The high renaissance concept of

grace had nothing to do with the Christian concept of grace. Rather it was the universal that gave a meaning to the particulars of life. With Rousseau the formulation changed: instead of the problem of nature and grace, with him there was the formulation of nature and freedom.

Rousseau saw that rationalistically on the basis of reason, everything about the cosmos, including man himself, is a machine. This could be a machine governed by chemical determinism (as has been held by the Marquis de Sade and now by Francis Crick) or by psychological determinism (as held by Freud). And, of course, if man is a machine, then he has no freedom. And since it was Rousseau's central desire for man to have autonomous freedom, Rousseau had to abandon reason as giving a unified understanding of the world. At just the point where Rousseau should have abandoned his rationalism and held on to his reason, he abandoned his reason to cling to autonomous freedom. In this one can see that Rousseau is the key to the hippy movement and to the modern hedonism.

In his revolt against God, therefore, man held on to his rationalism and gave up his rationality. And that's the mark of the 20th Century, and the mark of the *new* humanism and of the *new* theology as well. Out of this autonomous freedom came the Bohemian life. Gauguin becomes a hero when he goes to Tahiti, even though he leaves his children home to starve. And the modern generation is permeated with hedonistic thought.

It is no wonder that the church cannot talk to hippies: The church doesn't understand where they come from; it doesn't understand their origin in philosophy and therefore does not understand who they are.

Immanuel Kant spoke in the same way as Rousseau but used different terminology, the noumenal and the phenomenal world. Then Hegel came and said our whole metholology had been wrong. He wanted us to stop talking about methodology of antithesis and instead said: If you are going to find truth, it is always in the area of synthesis. Thus modern relativism was formed.

There is no use talking about truth in the midst of the 20th Century until you hammer down the fact that truth can exist. Many use the word truth today and do not mean what we mean by truth. In many, truth is always relative whether it is in the field of government, sociology, sexual ethics, or theology. Following Hegel there is thesis and antithesis that leads to a synthesis but that itself is only then a further thesis. One never arrives at anything that can be said to be true. Kierkegaard and Kierkegaardianism took it a step further, saying that on the basis of reason we will always come to pessimism. Man is a machine and meaningless. Therefore they projected a concept of non-reason, an attempt to have a way for man to achieve meaning and significance outside the framework of rationality.

You who were raised in the old Christian viewpoint and in the old middle-class way of looking at things may find it hard to believe how completely this predominates today in the arts, drama, newspapers and journalism, how completely it is carried by the mass media to your own children. In this view, hope always comes in the area of non-reason, and you must not think there is any interchange between the reason that leads to despair and the non-reason that gives some optimistic hope. Picture the line between reason and non-reason as a solid reinforced concrete wall ten thousand feet thick with a barbwire in the middle charged with ten thousand volts of electricity. Then you can begin to understand how there can be no osmosis between the lower-storey with reason which leads to despair and the upper-storey of hope without reason. That's modern man's problem. That's what the new humanism and new theology brings. Every thing that is worthwhile — meaning, values, love — all these things are always without reason in the new humanism. What is left is a semantic mysticism with no facts.

The problem developed first of all with the existentialists, Sartre, Heidegger, and Karl Jaspers. Each of them basically says the same thing: We live in an absurd universe but we try to find some authentication of life in the upper-

storey without reason. This led to horrible results. Sartre, for example, said that since we live in a totally absurd universe, we must try to authenticate life by an act of the will. But it doesn't matter how the will acts, because reason has no place in it. So if you see an old lady by the side of a road and you pick her up, you have authenticated yourself though the meaning is absurd. But if you speed up your car and you kill her, it is an equal authentication in the midst of an absurd situation. That's our modern generation.

One must realize that this was the birth of the whole drug movement. Aldous Huxley said that reason will lead us nowhere, so let us give well people drugs in the hope that they can have an experience without reason that will give meaning to their lives. Every serious drug taker I have ever talked to has recognized this as the basis of his drug taking. You are not going to deal with your own children or the children of your congregation or in your community in the area of drugs until you understand the philosophic basis of modern drug-taking.

How does liberal theology fit into this? You must understand that Karl Barth never to the end of his life gave up his acceptance of the higher critical theories. He brought in the new variety of liberalism. With Schweitzer the liberal had given up a hope of finding a historic Jesus on the basis of rationalistic scholarship. Karl Barth, as it were, turned this over. In his first Römerbrief he indicated his relationship to Kierkegaard, and in his Dogmatics, II, it is plain that he is an existentialist as far as epistemology is concerned.

His basic position was: Of course, the Bible has all kinds of mistakes in it, but it does not matter; believe it religiously. That's the birth of the new theology. At the end of his life Karl Barth struggled to hold back the natural direction which he had opened to a man like Tillich and the death-of-God theology and all the rest. Nevertheless, he was the one who opened the door.

The new theology which dominates the situation today in this country and throughout the world is an existential theology. It is a theology that is related to the new humanism, a humanism that is separated from the concept of unified truth whether it is in drug-taking or saying that the Bible is full of mistakes but that we should believe it as "religious truth." The new theology says it really doesn't matter if the Bible has mistakes in it because you can believe it religiously anyhow.

4. Now let's come to the dilemma which the new humanism and secularism faces. At first the new humanism seems like a great hope. For even though reason leads to despair, what does it matter? I will seek meaning and hope in the existential experience. But there are thousands of young people who are never coming home from Morocco or east of Turkey simply because they have been caught in this search and have been carried down into it. It has not proved a hope. It has proved a real damnation. It is not just an intellectual problem. It is a problem of our culture, a problem of our government, and it is why I believe that unless we return to the Reformation base there is nothing ahead for us except further disintegration. I believe that unless we have a new Reformation there is only one thing that can come in the chaos which we face — some form of totalitarianism. What I am saying is not theoretical nor abstract.

The intellectual thought today relates man only to a machine, an IBM card. And when man thinks man is a machine, he will treat him like a machine. And that is what we are going to see more and more. Mortimer Adler (of the University of Chicago) in The Difference of Man and the Difference it Makes said (though he has no answer to the problem) that if we don't soon find some way to show how man is different we will treat him like a machine. I think he is old-fashioned. We are treating men like machines. The young people are right in their screaming against the educational institutions where they are being treated like machines. We are treating man like a machine in all the areas of life. That's downstairs in the lower-storey on the basis of rationalism, rationally man is only a machine. What despair!

But what is the problem upstairs? Take Karl Jaspers who says the mean-

ing of life must be found in the final experience. But the final experience is completely separated from all reason and therefore you cannot talk about its content even to yourself. All you can say is that I have had an experience. I have had men come to me influenced by his thinking; they say they have had some experience two or three years ago. Think of the hell of their life. They stand there and say they understand the meaning to life, not on the basis of reason, but on the basis of a big experience. It's all right on the day of the experience and perhaps the next day. But what about the day after that, and the day after that, and six months after that, and a year after that, when the only meaning of life is a mystery that has grown cold and dead and gone. Cry! — because that is where our generation lives.

It is more than this, however. We must understand that because we have separated the meaning of life from any connection to reason, we are left with no categories of truth — what is true and what is not true — of right and wrong. The film-makers have done more with this than any other group. And the best of the films was Antonioni's Blow Up, advertized as "love without meaning, murder without guilt." What was Antonioni saying? He was saying, "Up here in the upper-storey without reason, don't you understand there are no categories of moral values and there are no categories of human values either." Down here in the lower-storey with reason man is only a machine. He may be expressed with a mathematical formula. Upstairs man has become something like a Greek shade. He cannot even be sure of the difference between reality and fantasy. That was shown in Juliet of the Spirits, The Hour of the Wolf and Bel de Jour. And many modern novels also ask, "Are you sure that the external world is even there?" This is where we are!

Wittgenstein in *Tractatus* came to this same place, saying that in the area of all values, all meaning of life, all ethics, there is nothing but silence. Then he turned from his positivism and gave birth to linguistic analysis where one only deals with language that leads only to language. Do some of you theologians begin to hear sounds that are familiar? You cannot stand against the new liberalism if you do not understand its source. It does not stand alone. It stands related to, and following and putting into theological terms, what the new humanism has become. This is where we are. The new liberal theology is still just following along — it is still the tail on the dog.

The death-of-God theology says in the area of reason there is no reason to say that God is there. On the basis of naturalistic theology they are not wrong, they are right. On the basis of liberal theology's presuppositions every liberal theologian should be a God-is-dead theologian. But they turn from reason to the upper-storey and say that here one can have an existential experience. But don't you understand what is upstairs? This existential experience is completely separated from reason or content about God, and all concept of a personal God is dead. Some liberals who did not like this newer God-is-dead theology objected loudly. They wished to continue to use the word God, but they were in the same situation as the God-is-dead theologians because, while these people say the word God, all content about God is dead; and any concept of a really personal God is dead. That is what we have left in liberal theology.

But we must understand that this situation has resulted from following the trend of secular thought. We are thus left with the new theology—"contentless connotation" religious words. Words like Jesus became a banner; they are separated from all reason and have no real base. So what is the word Jesus? A contentless banner which men take and say, "Follow me" on the basis of the motivation force of the word Jesus. That's all it is. And so it becomes Jesus-like to sleep with a girl if she needs you. They say this even though this contentless banner denies everything that Jesus said about His own sexual ethic. The new theology is not only wrong but dangerous. It destroys the truth and sends men to hell and, even in the present life, it opens up a complete field of manipulation. Religious motivation words that are separated from all content are used to teach the next generation to do that which

is completely contrary to Scripture. That's our battle today, and it should make us cry and act.

The new liberal theology provides no concept of verification or falsification because it is completely separated from all history. When these men say that the Bible is full of mistakes, it is because they are being honest men on the basis of their own presuppositions. But any religious value is completely separated from all methods of verification. I would like to remind you of what J. S. Bezzant, the last of the old liberals at Cambridge University, said in Objections to Christian Beliefs. "When I am told that it is precisely its immunity from proof which secures the Christian proclamation from the charge of being mythological, I reply that immunity from proof can 'secure' nothing whatever except immunity from proof, and call nonsense by its name." And he is right. We must cry because this is where the whole modern stream of the new theology is in our own generation.

Now we come to the next step. There are many who would not stand with the liberal theologians concerning the whole Bible but, while saying they remain in the conservative camp, are applying the same methods to the first half of Genesis. They say "The whole Bible is not to be separated this way, only the first half of Genesis." This is the place where the battle is now being fought. Theological seminaries in America that for many years taught men to stand for the Bible and the Christian faith are now applying the same method to the first half of Genesis while liberal theologians apply this to the whole of Scriptures. I would remind you of what T. H. Huxley said in 1890: I visualize the days not far hence when faith will be separated from all facts, and especially pre-Abrahamic scriptural narrative, and then faith will go on triumphant forever. Of course, because it is separated from all facts, it doesn't mean anything. Grandfather Huxley said it as a jibe, but today the modern theologians act that way. In other words, modern theology in 1970 stands in the same place where agnosticism stood in 1890.

The only difference between liberal theology and secular rationalism is that liberals use religious terms instead of secular terms. When our children come home and say, "I hate God-words," if we are to be real Christians, we must also say, "I hate God-words, too," for they are words separated from all verification or falsification. The new theologians (Teilhard de Chardin is an excellent example) seem to be saying something more than secular thinkers because they use religious words. But they are really saying the same things.

In conclusion we must realize that liberalism is one unified system. In one sense, it did not change with the birth of the new theology, existential theology. It is rooted in the German higher criticism, and this has never changed. It is rooted in naturalism, and this has never changed. The new existential theology is not really any closer to historic biblical Christianity than is the old liberalism. It is really farther away. At least the old liberalism did deal with the normal meaning of words and the concept of truth.

When Harry Emerson Fosdick back in the 30's said that he denied the Virgin birth, we knew exactly what he was talking about. When he said he did not believe in the physical resurrection, he was using normal epistemology, normal words with normal definitions. The modern theologian is different. When the new theology speaks, we are left only with words totally separated from any normal usage. This is not really different from the modern Rock group's use of the word Jesus in their songs, not really different from the modern drug-taker's trip. When we can understand this, we can understand the battle that confronts us.

When you listen to Rock groups, what do you hear? Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. Listen to Joan Baez sing with a faultless voice, "Some call him Jesus, I'll call him Savior." Don't misunderstand. They don't believe that a single word of this has anything to do with reason or with truth. Jesus is a trip. The drugtaker takes a trip, and the new theology is a trip. It has no more relationship to verifiable truth and falsifiable truth than a drug trip, none what-so-ever.

The new theology denies the God who is there, it denies the divine historic Christ, it denies God's way of salvation, it denies the Bible as the verbalized communication of God to man. The new theology is simply modern thought using religious words, and it is under the line of anthropology. It only dwells in the world of men. It is faced with "a philosophic other" that is unknown and unknowable. The new theology is in the circle of the finite, and it has no meaning and it has no authority beyond the authority and meaning which finite man can give it. In other words, not having any propositional, verbalized communication from God to man, in the new theology man is on his own with only religious words rather than religious truth. Historic Christianity has nothing in common either with the old or the new humanism, and it has nothing in common either with the old or the new liberal theology. Historic Christianity and either the old or the new liberal theology are two separate religions with nothing in common but certain terms which they use with totally different meanings.

Books by Dr. Francis Schaeffer which supply background for this essay are:

Escape From Reason (Inter-Varsity Press)

The God Who Is There (Inter-Varsity Press)

Death In The City (Inter-Varsity Press)

The Mark Of The Christian (Inter-Varsity Press)

The Church At The End Of The 20th Century (Inter-Varsity Press)

Pollution And The Death Of Man, The Christian View of Ecology (Tyndale

House Press)