

“Profound Need of the Human Soul”

by Maurice Lange

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*There are extensive properties...
...that are still in a relatively undisturbed state,
where wildlife is often abundant, where human predation is
limited, where the primordial impress of the divine can still be
felt, and where a sense of the sacred is available.*

*Preservation of such lands
is one of the great urgencies of the moment.
There is profound need of the human soul
for contact with **natural processes**.*

*These regions where wildflowers grow
and where birds nest
have become infinitely valuable as
places more needed than ever
by the human spirit.*

*Such regions might be thought of as
shrines where the pristine impress
of the divine can still be experienced*

To lose these lands to development would be an irreparable loss.

–Thomas Berry in “The Christian Future and the Fate of the Earth”

Here are two stories of “*natural processes*” (Thomas Berry’s words) that my wife Regina and I were blessed to experience during our recent time as Administrator and Director of *Lebh Shomea House of Prayer* in south Texas:

-The first was a November mass-migration of Monarch Butterflies! We were out for a walk on a very chilly late afternoon, just before sunset. The winds were calm, and the skies were a fading blue...and the temperature was dropping. Seeming from nowhere thousands of Monarchs appeared just above us! They were coming from the north and fluttering to the south. They descended by the scores right at Lebh Shomea and alit on the circle of palm trees just in front of the Big House. Clustered for warmth underneath the palm branches, they spent the night. Early the next morning, the temperatures were just above freezing, and these clusters of Monarchs were still bound together until the rising sun touched them, and then...they were off—continuing to fly south to their wintering habitat in Mexico. We were awestruck by this “natural process”!



“Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love & respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another.”

-Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, paragraph 42



**“I have set before you life and death... choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live.”
-Deuteronomy 30:19**

-The second story of a *“natural process”* occurred during Easter week of 2020 when several days of gusty north winds reached the lower part of Texas. One late afternoon, I looked out our south-facing window to see another amazing vision: a Springtime migration of hundreds of Hawks (*what type I am not sure of*)! I raced outside and was awed by such an enormous gathering of these lovely birds of prey soaring past each other to and fro. Do animals actually enjoy themselves and the company of others? These hawks appeared to be doing just that! For the next 30 minutes or so even more hawks kept coming from the south making their way north. I have heard of hawk migrations, but in my 57 years, this spectacular sight was a first! Gawking at hawks!¹

Thomas Berry’s prophetic words about the ***“profound need of the human soul for contact with natural processes”*** certainly is true. Our souls are enlivened whenever we are in direct contact with Nature and such processes! I believe

Thomas is challenging our deficient western perception with this statement: in our depths, we are not fully human unless we have contact with Earth.

What if we are deprived of Nature? Whether we are kept indoors or subjugate ourselves to screens---what is the soul-cost to being so distant to that which is kin and life-giving?

This reminds me of the concept “*Nature Deficit Disorder*”.² Indeed, we are *disordered* when there is a deficit of Nature within our experience and perspective

By and large we western humans live within a “human” world. We don’t perceive ourselves to be related to (nor inextricably bound up with) the natural world. We delude ourselves at our own peril. However, in this delusion we also imperil other-than-human species: to the extent that this planet is currently undergoing a great extinction spasm brought on by our hubris.³

What happens when a species of animal or plant or even a certain glacier goes extinct?⁴ One more revelation of God is forever vanished. To allow extinctions to continue to occur robs ourselves and future generations of a biodiverse and healthy Planet Earth. Human-caused extinctions hack away at the complex and interdependent web of life.

Let me engage your imagination for 2 minutes. What if we were born and raised on the Moon? Imagine if you can. Look around and take in this lunar habitat: *totally lifeless and gray, no change in seasons, no precipitation, no plants and no animals...*

If we were born and raised there on the Moon, tell me, what would our *image of God* be?

Hmmm: *lifeless...dull...gray...*

Indeed, there *is* a “**profound need of the human soul**” to have a color-filled, radiant, diverse, lovely and verdant planet. Clean rivers, clear skies, healthy humans, fruitful trees...tell me, where else does *our* image of God come from other than from this mysterious and life-giving Earth?



Endnotes

¹ Read my entire article regarding Lebh Shomea and Nature at:
[Religious Communities Meeting a “Profound Need of the Human Soul” – OMIUSA](#)

² The term “**Nature-Deficit Disorder**” was introduced in 2005 with the publication of “*Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*” by Richard Louv. [WHAT IS NATURE-DEFICIT DISORDER? - Children and Nature Network](#)

³ Heard of the “**6th Great Extinction Event**”? We are in the midst of it: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z9gHuAwxwAs>

⁴ When might *we* be added to the list?

This was just published (July 21, 2022): [Monarch butterflies are now endangered \(msn.com\)](#)