

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Salvation Now Happening Sixth Week of Easter Friday, May 30, 2014 8:15 AM
Acts 18:9-18; Jn 16:16-20 (There is a God at work and we are called to respond to this God with a willingness to suffer when necessary to bring about God's providential purpose.)

The Acts of the Apostles relay to us various stories of the early Church and how it was utterly convinced that **God has saved the world—the world, the universe!** That was the message. Not just individuals, but the entire creation has been saved and is being reformed into a new creation. A new heavens, a new earth—all of this is in process, although they admitted they didn't really know what this really all entailed. It was like, well, wait-and-see. **It's going to be great. But there will be pain.** It's going to be great; but, meanwhile, it's like a woman in labor. A woman in labor suffers a great deal. So, yes, something new is happening. There's new birth coming, but the joy will be later more than right now. How are we to think of this today? We mustn't think that this was only about the past, or only about the apostolic age. That is a tendency that afflicted poor St. Augustine. I don't believe that **this process of giving birth to a new creation happened in the past. It is now happening, and will be happening for some time.**

This can go along with certain ideas of **evolution**, meaning onward development and growth, but not other ideas of evolution. When evolution is thought to be a process completely impersonal and completely undirected and completely by chance, that does not agree with this idea of a new creation, a new birth, a new life. So the **Christian view** is: yes, something new is happening; **yes, we are evolving, but toward a goal God has in mind and toward a goal God is guiding us toward.**

Yet, at the same time, **we have free will** and we can cooperate or not cooperate with all of this. And that of course is very significant. Its significance becomes clearer every day because human actions, **human choices, really do affect even the earth itself.** Many

scientists are very disturbed by what they believe to be fundamental changes in the temperatures of the earth that they believe are going to cause monumental changes and probably disastrous ones for the people living on earth. Well, that would be a consequence of sin **insofar as we have made wrong choices and we have not exercised stewardship**, which of course is an idea going back to the Book of Genesis. And the whole idea of God saving the world is all involved in this. If indeed God has saved the world, then **God has a plan for dealing with all of these so-called environmental issues**. It's all part of the universe and it's part of the creation. It can't be separated.

When many people, modern people, look at the universe as merely a mechanism working on chance, they will arrive at certain basic beliefs and perhaps **anxieties and expectations**. **How do we respond to that?** We should not be without expectations or without anxiety if indeed human actions are causing trouble, danger; in other words, **if sin is continuing on earth, which is rather obvious, how does the message of salvation affect this?** How do we cooperate with God's plan for addressing this issue, this problem, bringing salvation to this problem, redemption to this injured creation? That's all part of our vocation as Christian believers. We don't have the answers any more than St. Paul had the answers. What we have is the belief that **there is a God at work and that we are called to respond to this God**. And we had better be listening so that we can respond. We are called to hope that the promises for a new heaven and a new earth will be fulfilled and, therefore, to live with a spirit, not of grievous anxiety and terrible worry and what the Germans call *Weltschmerz*; but rather with a spirit of joyful anticipation, connected to a **willingness to suffer when necessary to bring about God's providential purpose**.