

**“EcoSpirituality”**

Or What Happens When You Sit Down With A French Historian,  
A Swiss Theologian And An Apache Shaman.

*An Odyssey in Essay Form*

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“At a Lyceum, not long ago, I felt that the lecturer had chosen a theme too foreign to himself, and so failed to interest me as much as he might have done. He described things not in or near to his heart, but toward his extremities and superficialities. There was in this sense no truly central or centralizing thought in the lecture. I would have had him deal with privatest experience, as the poet does.”

-Henry David Thoreau<sup>1</sup>

The proposition that mimetic theory had something to do with the environment at first blush seemed, well, far fetched. Had we so quickly run through the humanities that we now had to turn our attention to something else? Or, perhaps, has the romp of mimetic theory through the humanities not indeed set us up precisely for this conference? For in the end, we are talking about ourselves, the survival of the human race and the equally important survival of our planet. And we all pray that we are not witnesses to the apocalyptic scenario found in the gospels of the ‘war of all against all’, the ultimate mimetic crisis.

That mimetic theory has to do with the environment, and thus with us, indicates two areas of exploration, the cause and effects of negative mimesis and the cause and effects of positive mimesis.<sup>2</sup> The first are the negative effects of mimesis with regard to our use and abuse of the environment. Deforestation, water wars<sup>3</sup>, stolen harvests<sup>4</sup>, the toxification of the environment<sup>5</sup>, the ozone hole and global warming<sup>6</sup>, all of the waste at

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<sup>1</sup> Walden and Other Writings

<sup>2</sup> From the beginning of my use of mimetic theory I have sought to ask about both positive and negative mimesis. Dr. Ed Hallsten of North Park Theological Seminary and I spent countless hours one year discussing all of the possibilities we could think of. His expertise in neuro-psychology and psychiatry allowed me to think outside the training a typical Seminary candidate might have. I will always remember those conversations, with a grateful heart, as my seminal baptism into mimetic theory.

<sup>3</sup> Vandana Singh. Water Wars

<sup>4</sup> Vandana Singh Stolen Harvest (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> We can date our awareness of the toxification of the environment to the publication of Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring (Cambridge: Riverside Press) in 1962. Frank Graham Since Silent Spring (New York: Fawcett, 1970) chronicles the substantive debate that arose around her revelations in the 1960’s. Some 40 years later, it seems as though far too many ‘civilized’ people ignore the consequences of our continual poisoning of the Earth. The environment is just another political hot potato like war, foreign

the bottom of our life source, the oceans and, oh, so much more. These are extraordinarily negative effects all right and they are all mimetically conceived.

Christians, as well as others, might conceivably turn their attention at this point to Walter Wink's The Powers<sup>7</sup>. In these three volumes, Walter lays out a very convincing case that we must broaden our perspective on the many-layeredness of the mimetic 'principalities and powers.' The State, corporation politics, economics, media, violence and religion are all expressions of darker powers<sup>8</sup>. From the perspective of Christian dogmatics, Walter joined together what theology had rent asunder, in its separation of ethics from eschatology. But this also meant that one could talk about positive mimesis. This, of course, for the Christian, means taking the life of Jesus seriously.

But how do we do that in an age of skepticism and nihilism? Me, I guess I'm a bit of a pragmatist. If it doesn't work, I'm not interested. So I test things, I work problems through to solutions. I say to myself, this works, this makes sense. I'm reasonably certain that I am sane, ergo, I trust my perceptions. I feel no pressure to be either a skeptic or a nihilist. I've been down the Cartesian road many times, and eventually it got to be a long boring ride every time. I have often wondered how Rene's theory felt for others when they first saw its implications for their discipline. For me, it was a rush. When I survey the array of literature written in the past twenty years on mimetic theory, I am astounded<sup>9</sup>. I see mimetic theory being applied all over the place, in short, across the domain of the principalities and powers.

Is there a mimetic theorist among us who did not think about the scapegoat after 9/11? Is there a theorist here among us who, when reading the news, has to worry about running out of examples of negative mimesis?

Up to this point in our academic conversation mimetic theory has made enormous and important contributions to anthropological studies. But at this conference, the rubber meets the road, for what it is we confront in a mimetically conceived humanity is a species that is self-destructive. The proof lies in the fact that we have been put on notice: the planet is in very bad shape, in fact it is dying because WE ARE KILLING

policy, trade, the economy and the like. Those who take an interest in the earth are pejoratively referred to as tree huggers, whale lovers, left wing liberals or new age fanatics. More's the pity.

<sup>6</sup> It has recently been said that it is possible that we can actually reverse the growing ozone hole. The United States evidently does not care. Witness U.S. refusal to sign the Kyoto treaty as well as the Bush administration's utter disdain for the environment. In a recent radio interview Robert F. Kennedy Jr., argued that the Bush administration has reversed almost 40 years of ecological policy since Carson's revelations. Every single federal law that was designed to protect the environment has been subverted or changed.

<sup>7</sup> Walter Wink. Naming The Powers, Unmasking The Powers, Engaging The Powers (Philadelphia: Fortress Press). See also Vernard Eller Christian Anarchy: Jesus Primacy Over The Powers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

<sup>8</sup> Mimetic theorists have major disagreements among themselves as to where to draw the line beyond which society and culture move from good violence to bad violence. For me there is no line because there is no good violence.

<sup>9</sup> A comprehensive (although not exhaustive) bibliography can be found on the website for the Colloquium on Violence and Religion.

HER. We persist in destroying the very environment that feeds and nurtures us. Native Americans said that the white man starves his grandchildren to feed his children. How stupid are we as a species anyway? Can I get an Amen?

We might ask about the influences that shaped such a way of viewing the creation. What is the natural world and what is it there for? We have been programmed to believe that humans are to dominate the planet. We are the superior species. We act as though the Earth and ourselves are completely separate entities, as though we are not of the same substance. The species that was meant to be the caretakers of the earth has turned into her killer.

So, yes, mimetic theory has something to say with regard to the environment. The exposure of the principalities and powers is why we are gathered. And mimetic theory does that. In pointing out the lies, it exposes the liar. But we are not without hope. For we also know there can be positive mimesis. Raymund Schwager opened the door for us to connect Jesus' life with positive mimesis<sup>10</sup>. Willard Swartley has followed this up utilizing the valuable language of 'discipleship'<sup>11</sup>. James Allison has demonstrated positive mimesis in Jesus' spirituality<sup>12</sup>.

I knew that I could connect all of this to something near to my heart: the trinitarian conversations I have had over the years, mostly with Karl Barth. Yes, Barth has been dead since 1968. But I find myself returning over and over again to the Church Dogmatics as a conversation partner<sup>13</sup>. Here, too, I found positive mimesis done in the context of dogmatic Christology. Jesus' humanity was taken seriously. Indeed, it was The Humanity of God<sup>14</sup> that truly captivated Karl Barth.

And then, a final piece of the puzzle came to me a few years ago in serendipitous fashion. My daughter and my wife encouraged me to read a book. If I had a nickel for every book someone told me to read I would be rich. Now one does not lightly refuse the women of the house. So I read the story of Grandfather<sup>15</sup>, born into the Apache

<sup>10</sup> Raymund Schwager. Must There Be Scapegoats? Jesus In The Drama Of Salvation Jesus of Nazareth

<sup>11</sup> Willard Swartley Violence Renounced

<sup>12</sup> James Alison Raising Abel Although I occasionally don't find myself on the same page as Alison, nevertheless Raising Abel will remain important because it brought to the forefront of our consciousness that we have to stop talking about what Jesus believed about God, as though God was as abstract for Jesus as God is for us. Not so. Jesus had a spirituality that can be explored in the Gospels but it takes more than just scientific criticism to discern this. It also requires the commitment and discipline to go on a spiritual journey oneself and discover what Jesus discovered. This is his gift to us.

<sup>13</sup> Karl Barth Church Dogmatics (London, T&T Clark)

<sup>14</sup> Karl Barth The Humanity of God

<sup>15</sup> Tom Brown Jr. writes about Grandfather in every single one of his eighteen books. He has narrated Grandfather's story in Grandfather (New York: Berkley, 1994). Tom kept extensive journals throughout his time with Grandfather and is there is plenty of oral tradition still circulating. Old Jersey "Pineys" that knew Grandfather have been interviewed by Kevin Reeve. New stories about Grandfather are one of the more fascinating aspects of being able to share in the class experience at The Tracker School. Grandfather's birth name was Nuachano; he was later 'given' the name Stalking Wolf. 'Grandfather' is what Tom called Stalking Wolf. It should be noted that in native tradition the title Grandfather does not necessarily indicate blood lineage, but is expressive of respect for wisdom.

Nation, of the Lipan tribe, shortly after the American civil war and who lived until around 1970. And the 'lightbulb' of positive mimesis went on again and I began to see that just as it is possible to speak of positive mimesis in the language of inter-personal relationships, it was also possible to see the gains that a positive mimesis would bring to spirituality and Christian existence and especially to our relationship with the creation.

Rene Girard, Karl Barth and Grandfather are the three figures I would like to juxtapose. A trio of mentors, if you will. I believe I can correctly assume that you are all acquainted with the life and work of Rene Girard. So I can presuppose this. Karl Barth will need some introduction. A few of you will be acquainted with his reputation and theology. But I would be surprised if any of you knew of Grandfather, so I will supply the most biographical information about him as is available<sup>16</sup>.

Kierkegaard said that life is lived forward but it is only understood backward. In this essay, I will weave many strands together, each of which illumines the other. Looking back on almost fifty years of life with the Church and theology, I can see a tapestry where previously I had only seen chaos. Unlike most academic essays, I believe that when talking about the creation, the more personal we get, the more authentic our speech becomes. In short, this essay is an exercise in self-understanding. It is an odyssey. So I propose to navigate what I see as profound consequences for Christian theology when Rene Girard, Karl Barth and Grandfather are brought together. Very different folk from very different backgrounds, yet whose theories form a unity of perspective.<sup>17</sup>

Each of us has a story to tell about the way we have learned from mimetic theory. Most of us have integrated mimetic theory into our professional disciplines and have found it profitable as an illuminating tool. And each of us, in our own way, has been exposed to the effects of mimesis in our own lives, so we also value mimetic theory for its wisdom. For those who have ears to hear, it is the wisdom of the ages. Nothing secret, nothing hidden. Not something discovered as much as uncovered, ergo, revealed.

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<sup>16</sup> My sole source of 'historical information' regarding Grandfather is Tom Brown Jr. Tom's friend Rick (Stalking Wolf's blood grandson) died in a horse accident in Europe many years ago. The historian in me wants to cringe at some sense of paucity but frankly, the cumulative evidence is overwhelming and in my best judgement, Tom is accurately passing on Grandfather's story, legacy and vision. The Lipan Apache are the least known and written about in literature on the Apache. Much more familiar are the Chiricahuas, the Jicarillas, the Kiowa-Apache and the Mescaleros. I scoured the databases at the Research Center of the Mashantucket Pequot Nation and could find almost nothing about the Lipan. Part of the reason for this is the separation of the tribe during the smallpox outbreaks of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Grandfather's people, led by Coyote Thunder were completely separated and isolated not only from the encroaching civilization of the white man but also from other Apaches. The need to find suitable habitation with water, fuel and food sources that would remain isolated was the task of the Scout. See Tom Brown Jr., The Way of the Scout (New York: Berkley).

<sup>17</sup> I remind the reader that this is not a scholarly essay in the usual sense. Early reviewers of this essay did not find the argument tightly woven. But then, neither am I. It is an 'odyssey in essay form.' If you seek a detailed argument this paper is not for you. If however, the convergence of anthropological theory, Christian theology and Native American shamanism interests you, this paper is a modest proposal for articulating a way to conceive our relation to the creation and the Creator.

As I have previously mentioned, one of the more astonishing aspects of mimetic theory is its application to every form of human discourse, every discipline, every walk of life. Mimetic theory is a gold mine. Those of us gathered here are simply the first ones at Sutter's Mill, but the word has already gotten out and many others are on their way. We have barely tapped the rich vein of gold that is mimetic theory. We are so grateful to Rene for having the courage to ask the tough questions even in the face of the virtually complete disapproval of his academic peers. It takes courage to ask the important questions for these questions are usually the stuff of life.

But the floodgates have been opened and we have the Colloquium on Violence and Religion to thank for that. These yearly gatherings and the research and dedication of so many like minded souls has proven that not only is mimetic theory here to stay, but it has a stake in what can only be termed the truth. Those of us who have appreciated the insights of mimetic theory do not use it as simply another theory in an avant-garde sort of way.

In the discipline of theology, mimetic theory has laid a strong challenge to previously held Christian orientations. On the website Jeff Krantz and I host, [www.preachingpeace.org](http://www.preachingpeace.org), we have utilized the many and wonderful publications of the 'Girardians'<sup>18</sup>. Christian theology, for the most part, has been exposed as the emperor with no clothes. But there are reasons for this, not the least of which is the covert influence of negative mimesis and its effects on early Christian theology and church practice<sup>19</sup>. We can no longer afford to simply parrot the ecclesial party line. It is important to apply mimetic theory across the board to the science of religion in all of its multitudinous sub-disciplines.

What we find when we apply mimetic theory to Christian theology is that there is a deep and lasting influence of dualism that runs through virtually all Western Christian theology. Christian dualists or Gnostics, as is well known, denigrate the material world and exalt the spiritual or inner man. They are anti-creation. They perceive the creation to be flawed. Who is to blame? A lesser god, a demiurge, and there you have it, the creator and the creation are rejected as unworthy of respect. Philip Lee has clearly and coherently articulated the thesis that modern American Protestantism and ancient Gnosticism are virtually identical<sup>20</sup>. It is the contemporary Babylonian captivity of the

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<sup>18</sup> [www.preachingpeace.org](http://www.preachingpeace.org). This site was conceived at the COV&R conference held at Purdue in June of 2002. Jeff and I had been having intense discussions for two years on many interrelated theological topics. Our concerns merged after September 11, 2001 when we realized just how far the Church had moved away from the gospel of Jesus. PreachingPeace.org is essentially tackling several interrelated topics: 1) those having to do with the historical Jesus, 2) those having to do with the development of Christology, 3) the nature of the gospels and the gospel tradition, 4) the role of mimetic theory in biblical interpretation and its hermeneutical application, 5) the consequences of the aforementioned research for systematic theology, particularly in the Christian understanding of God as trinity, 6) the importance of the Anabaptist emphasis on discipleship and 7) Christian spirituality.

<sup>19</sup> See my essay "The Biblical Testaments as a Marriage of Convenience."

<sup>20</sup> Against the Protestant Gnostics (London: Oxford, 1988).

Church. It is also true, in one degree or another, for the greater part of Christian theology and history, both orthodox and heretical<sup>21</sup>.

The effects of dualism can be found virtually everywhere in Christian theology not the least in that we attribute to the Creator a malice that is not really there at all. This malice is all over the western doctrine of election and can be found especially in certain atonement theories as Anthony Bartlett has shown<sup>22</sup>. The malice of God becomes translated into ‘acts of God’ (a disputable actuarial category) and the creation is seen as dark, foreboding, untamed, something to be conquered. Yes, the church has contributed to western culture’s devaluation of creation. And look what we have done to Her. Environmentalists are not doomsday forecasters. They are prophets. The human species is dealing a mortal wound to the earth. Humans have become a plague on the earth. And Christian theology has been a major contributor to our pillaging of the planet. It need not be so.

One of the important assets Karl Barth brings to the table is that he is one of the most significant theologians of the twentieth century. He has been compared to Luther, Augustine and Irenaeus. He has been called a modern church father<sup>23</sup>. Barth had to deal with this malice that had been attributed to the Creator. The traditional structure of theology demanded it as virtually every Western theological system has Augustine’s fingerprints all over it. Barth is able to get behind and thus beyond Augustine by viewing election through a christological lens where God in God’s freedom does not reject humanity but elects himself to be rejected by humanity. This rejection has a specific history with a specific people and so Barth begins his exegesis of the biblical

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<sup>21</sup> The finest book I have read on the history of dualism is Yuri Stoyanov [The Other God](#) (New Haven: Yale, 2000). It stands apart in that the comprehensive research that went into this book is so excellently distilled. Stoyanov leaves no stone unturned.

<sup>22</sup> [Cross Purposes](#) (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 2001). We might note here that there are discussions of the relationship between mimetic theory and the atonement at [www.preachingpeace.org](http://www.preachingpeace.org). We tend to follow those who value the *Christus Victor* model in some combination with the *Exemplary* model, most notably found in the Mennonite tradition. A fine Reformed perspective on the atonement is given by Jacques De Senarclens, [Heirs of the Reformation](#) (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959). De Senarclens however, finds the heart of the debate in the question “Who accomplishes our salvation, he or we? There seems to be no third possibility. Jesus is either our Saviour or our Example.” This either/or need not be imported into atonement theory if the atonement is coordinated with the incarnation as suggested by Robin Collins “Girard and Atonement: An Incarnational Theory of Mimetic Participation” in Willard Swartley ed., [Violence Renounced](#) (Telford: Pandora Press, 2000).

<sup>23</sup> Among the literature I value see Hugh Ross Mackintosh [Types of Modern Theology](#) (New York: Scribners, 1937); Hans Urs von Balthasar [The Theology of Karl Barth](#) (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1971); Thomas Torrance [Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology 1916-1931](#) (London: SCM Press, 1962); Eberhard Busch [Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts](#) (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976); other helpful resources include Eberhard Jungel [Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy](#) (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986) and [The Doctrine of the Trinity](#) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976); Jeffrey C. Pugh [The Anselmic Shift](#) (New York: Peter Lang, 1990); Martin Rumscheidt [Revelation & Theology: An Analysis of the Barth Harnack Correspondence of 1923](#) (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972); Charles T Waldrop [Karl Barth’s Christology](#) (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1984); Thomas Torrance [Karl Barth: Biblical & Evangelical Theologian](#) (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990); Mark L. Wallace [The Second Naivete: Barth, Ricoeur and the New Yale Theology](#) (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1990); George Hunsinger [How To Read Karl Barth](#) (New York: Oxford, 1991) and [Karl Barth and Radical Politics](#) (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976).

doubles that function typologically of the electing God that elects sinners but rejects sin<sup>24</sup>. This God freely chooses to be for humanity, there is no God against us. This was an important theological breakthrough, it asserted that there is no God behind God, there is only one God. This is also known as Rahner's rule: the economic trinity is the immanent trinity and vice versa. Much modern Christianity on the other hand is Sabellian in disguise<sup>25</sup>.

In order, however, to really appreciate the legacy of Barth, it is essential to notice the complete freedom with which Barth wrote about God's freedom. In the face of a lot of 'God against us' kinds of thinking and preaching, Barth reached back and articulated the thesis that God is for us. God in complete freedom chooses to be for us, and for Barth, this is seen in the love shared with us in the person of Jesus Christ.

In the Church Dogmatics (12 volumes, over 8,000 pages), Barth revisits virtually every major theological question asked by the Church in its long history. And from its initial publication in 1932 to the fragment on baptism in 1967<sup>26</sup>, there is a remarkable consistency in its thought. At the heart of that consistency is the consistency of God, God's faithfulness. This was the good news of the gospel that Barth heard. God is on the side of humanity. More than that, God is our champion.

What has been important for me, as I have read Barth, is to watch him as he wrestles with Augustine. I wouldn't want to get in the ring with Augustine. So I appreciate that Barth has done this. For example, Barth's doctrine of election still retains both election and rejection; but it is not humanity in general that is elected or rejected. Specifically, God chooses to elect himself to be rejected in the humanity of Jesus, so that he may elect us to be with Jesus in his resurrection. The God of the gospel is all about self-giving love.

In his volume on creation, Barth comes at God the Creator from a fresh perspective. Barth sees in the two creation narratives (Genesis 1-2:4 and 2:5ff) two sides of a coin. The shift from EI in the first creation narrative to YHWH in the second narrative signals to Barth that one reality is being discussed two ways. The reason for this is because they belong together. So Barth brings into conversation God the Creator and God the

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<sup>24</sup> Church Dogmatics II/2 The thesis statement of paragraph 32 reads, "The doctrine of election is the sum of the Gospel because of all the words that can be said and heard it is the best: that God elects man; that God is for man too the One who loves in freedom. It is grounded in the knowledge of Jesus Christ because He is both the electing God and elected man in One. It is part of the doctrine of God because originally God's election of man is a predestination not merely of man but of Himself. Its function is to bear basic testimony to eternal, free and unchanging grace as the beginning of all the ways and works of God."

<sup>25</sup> Sabellius was a second century 'heretic' who taught that "God the Son is nowhere mentioned in the Old Testament; the divine Sonship was revealed only at the incarnation; why suppose that the Person of Jesus Christ embodies any new disclosure about the being of God?" God is "one reality with variable appearance." G. L. Prestige, Fathers and Heretics (London: SPCK, 1940). Thus, there is a God behind God.

<sup>26</sup> The 1960's saw Rene developing mimetic theory and publishing Violence and the Sacred, Barth completing his life's work and Grandfather mentoring Tom. The 60's were a very special time.

Redeemer. Inasmuch as we are speaking of one God, Barth can say that the creation is the external basis of the covenant and the covenant is the internal basis of creation.

By insisting that creation and covenant belong together and cannot be separated, Barth deals a mortal blow to any form of Marcionism. Marcion separated the Creator from the Redeemer. By contrast, in these opening narratives, Barth recognizes that the God who creates is the God who has redeemed a very specific people. This drama of redemption recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures is full of God's promise to be faithful to His people. And the fulfillment of all God's promises occurred in Jesus Christ. Barth's reconciliatory hermeneutic is at work even here. Unlike the way in which Calvin, e.g., linked the Testaments, Barth brings the two Testaments together by weaving them into the trinitarian history of God. Creation and redemption cannot be separated.

The consequence of this Barth calls "The Yes of God to creation.' I know of no other Christian systematic theology that accents the doctrine of creation this way.<sup>27</sup> This Yes! of God for Barth is the essential consequence of the Covenant-Creator's act of creating. God saw that everything was good. Barth asserts that the creation is a benefit for us. The Creator is a beneficial God in an intentional relationship with us.<sup>28</sup>

By bringing covenant and creation into a relationship, Barth has provided a method for us to understand what Grandfather calls the relation between the flesh and the spirit or as I might put, it the wilderness of creation and the wilderness of the soul. There can be a direct correlation between experience of the Creator in the wilderness, Jesus in worship and the Spirit-that-moves-in-all-things. The Creator has covenanted for us to be with us. The gospel asserts that the Creator did not abandon humanity but so imbued one life that it could be said that the behavior of the Rabbi from Nazareth was the behavior of God. Jesus is not unique because he is divine. Jesus is not the only one to ever teach about the Creator. He is distinct in the non-retributive posture and spirituality of his mission. And therefore, he brings to revelation a truly different God, a God not created by mimetic victimage, the Covenant Creator, the 'abba.'

The Church has made the mistake of trying to argue for Jesus' identity with God in terms of Hellenistic philosophy, in terms of an already posited dualism. Identity in Judaism, however focuses on behavior. It is Jesus' behavior that is at stake in the question of his relationship with God not just some metaphysical equation. The New Testament does not ask "Is Jesus like God?" This is the question asked by those 'outside', who presuppose they know God but not Jesus. The New Testament asks the

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<sup>27</sup> Daniel Migliore of Princeton Theological Seminary is an exception. While not a systematic theology as such Faith Seeking Understanding clearly articulates the necessity of taking ecological considerations seriously when framing a doctrine of creation. But then, Migliore was influenced by Barth.

<sup>28</sup> Church Dogmatics III/1, 331-32. "We cannot understand the divine creation otherwise than as benefit. We are not free to think and speak in this matter otherwise or even uncertainly or equivocally. The Christian apprehension of creation requires and involves the principle that creation is benefit. It shows us God's good pleasure as the root, the foundation and the end of divine creation. It suggests the peace with which God separated and protected what He truly willed from what He did not will, and therefore from the unreal. It implies that God Himself, in and with the beginning of all things, decided for his creation and made Himself the responsible Guarantor of it. Creation, as it is known by the Christian, is benefit."

question: “Is God like Jesus?” What is startling and new about the gospel is that it brings to the forefront of our awareness that it is possible to say that in the behavior of Jesus of Nazareth we see the very character of the covenant Creator.

So where do we go from here? If mimetic theory helps us to understand the cause of our relentless consumerist lifestyle and its deleterious effects on the planet and Christian theology takes a lesson from Barth and courageously advances the thesis that the Creator is merciful, then we might ask how we can be reconciled with our own flesh, the earth.

From the outset, we must confess that we are hermeneutically challenged. We must admit we have been reading the Genesis narrative through the eyes of a persecutor and that we have been sucked into an anti-Christian way of thinking precisely by the Church. These early Genesis narratives are instructional not only for what they contribute to the deconstruction of mythology, they also carry an important dimension of positive mimesis. Dietrich Bonhoeffer has shown us that the ‘image of God’ in Genesis means that we are created in relationship.<sup>29</sup> Our relationships are as real as we are. Or, We are our relationships. Or perhaps one could say that we are interdividual?

In our relationship to the creation, Douglas John Hall has reminded us in his many books that any ‘dominion’ humans were to have over the earth was as that of stewards. We were meant to be careful caretakers of God’s good creation, not its lords<sup>30</sup>. This creation-stewardship is part and parcel of the larger servant/slave motif found in the Jesus tradition as well as the Apostle Paul. Service is the essential category by which we were meant to be in relation to the creation, each other, and, the Creator.

In our intellectual arrogance we all too frequently understand nature as chemical reactions, electrical impulses and mathematical equations. We are capable of slicing and dicing the tiniest aspects of the physical world, from the pion to the gene and we are also capable of projecting mathematical hypotheses billions of years into the future. Everything science has to say about the natural world may well be true but it is not truth. Truth is more than just scientific explanation.

On the other hand, the natural world is an aesthetic proof of God for molecular biologist and theologian Alistair McGrath<sup>31</sup>. For McGrath there is an order, a harmony, a sense of transcendence nature brings. The beauty of nature is signaling us all of the time that we are in the presence of Something greater. Everyone has some experience of this.

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<sup>29</sup> Creation and Fall (London, SCM Press, 1959)

<sup>30</sup> See especially Imaging God (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986). In his 1978 address upon accepting the Templeton Foundation Prize for Progress in Religion, Thomas Torrance theologically describes humanity’s relationship to the creation as priesthood [The Ground and Grammar of Theology (Belfast: Christian Journals Ltd., 1980)] The utilization of this category is important not only on an intellectual level, which is important for Torrance, but also in our approach to the creation itself. We will sacrifice the creation all day long as she gives her life for us to feed us. Priesthood is the theological way of expressing the Native American understanding of caretaking our Mother Earth. It is something we all share (hence it is a priesthood of all believers) and it is characterized by gratitude (Eucharist).

<sup>31</sup> The Enchantment of Nature (New York: Doubleday, 2002)

This experience is as true as that of scientific explanation but together they do not constitute the truth. Science and theology do not yet know the creation as a gift.

All Christian theology, whether white or black, male or female, Catholic or Protestant, medieval or modern, North American, Asian, African, liberal or conservative or anything else is civilized theology.<sup>32</sup> Even the New Testament is urban.<sup>33</sup> The human experience of virtually all Western theologians is sharply defined by the simple fact that they were born into, lived, and died in the context of civilization. To be sure, there are bright beacons in the Christian tradition that reflect the virtues and glory of time with the creation. Anthony and elements of Egyptian monasticism, Celtic spirituality and St Francis are a few notable examples. So what is it that appears to be missing in so much of Christianity? Part of the answer lies in what we lost as humans as we became 'civilized' or as mimetic theorists might put it when we succumbed to the generative mimetic scapegoating mechanism.

The Genesis narrative indicates that an aspect of the 'cursed existence' was the transition for humans from wilderness (the garden) to civilization (Cain's city). Jacques Ellul offers a penetrating reading of this text.<sup>34</sup> He points out the connections to be made in the developing relation between the dominance of technology and urban civilization. Technology or *the appropriation of technique as an exercise of power* begins to separate us from the earth.<sup>35</sup> Ellul's warnings about the dangers of technique have gone largely unheeded and worse still is that Christianity is falling in lock step with civilization and thus, with the powers of the victimage mechanism. And so the Church continues to contribute to our corporate human journey away from the creation. What does this mean for us? Shoshone Glenn Wasson puts it this way:

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<sup>32</sup> I am not aware of a single Christian theologian who practices the ancient ways. I confess to having limited knowledge of Native American-Christian dialogue. Two interesting books from quite different perspectives and times that I found helpful are Julia M. Seton The Gospel of the Redman (Santa Fe: Seton Village, 1937) and William Stolzman The Pipe and Christ: A Christian-Sioux Dialogue (Chamberlain: Tipi Press, 1986).

<sup>33</sup> Wayne Meeks The First Urban Christians.

<sup>34</sup> The Meaning of the City (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970). In addition see The Technological Society (New York: Vintage, 1964); The Technological System (New York: Continuum, 1980); The Technological Bluff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); The Betrayal of the West (New York: Seabury, 1978); The Political Illusion (New York: Random House, 1967); The New Demons (New York: Seabury, 1975). Mimetic theorists might also take note of the congruencies between Ellul and Girard in Ellul's Violence (New York: Seabury, 1969). Girard's analysis of mimesis fits hand in glove with Ellul's analysis of the consequences of technique. It would appear from Ellul's books that he read Girard's Things Hidden sometime in the 1980's. He appreciatively utilizes Girard's insights on the covetous dynamics of mimesis. See Jesus and Marx (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) and Anarchy and Christianity (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988).

<sup>35</sup> See Jurgen Moltmann, Experiences of God (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980). Moltmann has a quote that can be heard through the lens of Girard as well as that of Ellul. "When we try to get to know something by the methods of modern science, we know in order to achieve mastery, to dominate. *Scientia est potestas*, said Francis Bacon, 'knowledge is power,' For by means of science we take possession of the object, becoming what Descartes promised the scientist would become - *maitre et possesseur de la nature*, the master and possessor of nature. And then nature becomes mute."

“In Indian terms there is no equation in dollars for the loss of a way of life...you cannot equate dollars to lives. The redmen are the last people on Earth who speak on behalf of all living things. The bear, the deer, the sagebrush have no one else to speak for them. The animals and the plants were put here by the Great Spirit before he put the humans here. There is a story the old people tell about the white man. That they are like children. They want this and that, they want everything they see, like it's their first time on Earth. The white men have all of these tools but they don't know how to use them properly. The white people try to equate national defense with human lives. There can never be an equation between the dollar bill and living things – the fish, the birds, the deer, the clean air, clean water. There is no way of comparing them...The white people have no love for this land. If we human beings persist in what we are doing we will become like a bad cancer on Mother Earth. If we don't stop ourselves, something will stop us.”<sup>36</sup>

Was there a time in our evolutionary history when in fact we were as close to the earth as were any of the animals and yet still somehow untouched by the effects of negative mimesis? Was there a time of peace where we had not yet learned pillaging and plundering?<sup>37</sup> Were we not developing the skills that would keep us alive? But with the dawn of so-called civilization these skills began to be passed on less and less. And now at the dawn of this new century, these skills have virtually vanished from memory.

Bob Johannes asks, or rather implores us, to reconsider our understanding of aboriginal skills and their value to our modern world.

“Much of what we know about the nature and management of natural resources in developed countries can be found in libraries. [Among native communities], however, much of it resides only in the heads of older men and women in the villages. Scientists have come to realize within the past few years that such knowledge concerning the forest, the garden, the plains, and the sea, is both encyclopedic and of major scientific value, particularly as it relates to natural resource management. But it is being lost rapidly as a result of westernization, industrialization, urbanization and the concomitant alienation of the young from their tradition...Recording this knowledge is an urgent matter. Allowing it to vanish amounts to throwing away centuries of priceless practical experience.”<sup>38</sup>

Many of you have heard or read the story of Ishi, the Yahi Native American who only knew and practiced the ancient ways, the aboriginal skills<sup>39</sup>. The anthropologists who had custody of Ishi were beside themselves, for here, for the first time, was someone who practiced the skills that produced their ancient artifacts. Sadly, Ishi died just a few

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<sup>36</sup> Cited in Jerry Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred*. (San Francisco: Sierra Books, 1991).

<sup>37</sup> Following the lines laid down by Riane Eisler in *The Chalice and The Blade*.

<sup>38</sup> Cited in Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred*.

<sup>39</sup> Theodora Kroeber. *Ishi in Two Worlds* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1964); Robert Heizer and Theodora Kroeber, ed., *Ishi the Last Yahi: A Documentary History* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1979).

years later in 1916. He was the last ‘wild man.’ A small window had been opened. But with Ishi’s passing the ancient ways were now lost to history. The white man had forbidden the practice of the ancient Native American ways and had taught the Native American to ostracize those who practiced these skills. On the dreary reservations the only hope was now the white man’s hope. We had stripped the Native Americans of their land and thus their future. We made damn sure we civilized them so they could be just like us<sup>40</sup>.

At about the time Ishi was discovered Grandfather had already been wandering the Americas, from Argentina to Alaska and back and forth across North America. He had been trained in an elite Medicine Society, the way of the ancient Scouts. Grandfather was an anthropologist in his own way. He perceived his mission in much the same way a Levi-Strauss might. He collected and distilled everything he could learn about the creation. Grandfather sought to find that which all human ‘philosophies’ had in common. And so, he sought out the old ones wherever he went to learn as many of the ancient skills from different native peoples as he could. He was a treasure trove of earth skills. He learned from the best of the best. He knew Geronimo. He spent his entire life learning from any native elder who practiced the ancient ways. And he lived his entire life in the American wilderness. Grandfather’s life spanned from Ulysses S. Grant to Richard M. Nixon. That’s a long time, especially for someone as devoted to learning as Grandfather was.

Grandfather met Tom Brown Jr. when he was eighty-three years old. For ten years, from the time Tom was eight until he was eighteen, Grandfather mentored Tom and his friend Rick (the last few years just with Tom). Today, at 53, Tom is arguably the nation’s foremost survivalist expert. He has himself spent extended periods of time wandering North America and shares his experience in over 17 books. He founded and directs The Tracker School in the Pine Barrens of Central New Jersey<sup>41</sup>. He is involved in high profile tracking cases. Students come from all over the world to learn the skills Grandfather taught Tom. What do they learn? They learn to live with the earth and to thrive in the wilderness. But more than that, they learn a philosophy that enables them to share in the whole reality that is the creation. A central tenet of this philosophy is that we humans are called to be caretakers of the earth.<sup>42</sup> We no longer approach the

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<sup>40</sup> James Wilson, *The Earth Shall Weep: A History of Native America* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1998); Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999). See also Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred* for some disturbing contemporary examples. Sadly, similar distress has been visited on aboriginal cultures around the planet.

<sup>41</sup> [www.trackerschool.com](http://www.trackerschool.com) For those who cannot make the journey to New Jersey, there is an excellent home study course offered by Jon Young, the Kamana Program. Jon was Tom Brown’s first student and directs the Wilderness Awareness School in Washington.

<sup>42</sup> As Europeans came to the shores of this beautiful continent and as they made their way west, they constantly marveled at the wide range and diverse forms of environments they encountered. It was so beautiful from sea to shining sea because the Native Americans had been cultivating it for over 12,000 years. Kat Anderson (quoting R.F. Heizer and A.B. Elasser) says, “The California Indians were highly accomplished practical botanists, perhaps as knowledgeable about subtle differences in form, color, and behavior as some university professors who have spent their adult lives reading and making field observations. But they were also knowledgeable in a different way – a way directed at understanding nature in such a manner as to use it without destroying it.” “Native Californians as Ancient and

natural world as a resource to be exploited but as a gift to be treasured and through this perspective we live as grateful children of the earth cared for by the Creator.

You see the common thread in all of this is that the Creator is benevolent. First, as Rene has pointed out, Jesus' renunciation of retribution is consonant with his vision of God's rule. Jesus' renounces the juxtaposition of God and violence. As we have demonstrated in preachingpeace.org, this has profound consequences for our theology, ethics and worship. Second, as Barth has observed, the intimate connection between creation and covenant means that there is benefit that comes our way in the creation, in our humanness. That benefit is the benevolence of the covenant expressed as creation. And third, following Grandfather, is the development of a creation consciousness, of the oneness that is our world so that we may celebrate the One who creates us, gives us the Spirit and calls us children.

Practice of the ancient skills has an added benefit. It is like an insurance policy. They will allow one to survive apart from the economic system if that were one's choice. I have often wondered how Jesus survived apart from the economic system (that craftiest deception of the Powers). I am not satisfied by the explanation that wealthy women supported him. I suspect that Jesus had a comfort zone in the natural world, that he could take care of himself with his knowledge and skills, whatever they might have been.<sup>43</sup> The generosity of the women would have been an essential support for the other mouths especially the Twelve. Some might object that Jesus had no contact with those who practiced ancient skills, but such is not the case. The Dead Sea Scrolls reveal an herbalist's awareness of plant life and it is quite plausible that Jesus, either on his own or through John the Baptist, had some connections to the Essenes.<sup>44</sup> But more than that there are only four basic skills to learn to survive in the wilderness. These are the skills related to the sacred order, the skills Grandfather passed down: Shelter, Fire, Water, Food. You can learn them in a week, if you want. Almost every other lesson you learn after that comes back to one of these four elements.

So it does not seem far-fetched to me to perceive Jesus this way. Jesus' overwhelming preference for nature analogies in describing the Father's kingdom should already

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Contemporary Cultivators" in Before the Wilderness: Environmental Management by Native Californians. Thomas Blackburn and Kat Anderson (Menlo Park: Ballena Press, 1993).

<sup>43</sup> Jesus is walking alone one night in the wilderness. It is getting cooler. Does he know how to make a fire? Shall he just he just pull out his Bic or a book of matches? How did he make fire? If he was thirsty do you think he knew how to find water? Wild edibles? When scholars imagine Jesus alone in the wilderness they have a tendency to imagine themselves as civilized humans in the wilderness and so project their own insecurities or else they jump on the 'Jesus was divine' bandwagon and single Jesus out as one with special privilege. Both of these are understandable but incorrect. They fail to take into account Jesus' potential 'shamanistic' (wilderness) background.

<sup>44</sup> James Charlesworth, Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls. (New York: Doubleday, 1992). See also his essay in Jesus' Jewishness (New York: Crossroad, 1991). We might also note here Morton Smith's research placing Jesus in the category of 'magician.' In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries it was more common for clergy and theologians to be naturalists and so literature from that period also reflected the romantic relationship civilized humanity had with the natural world. I got news for you: the honeymoon is over.

indicate to us that he spends time with the creation<sup>45</sup>. This is expected behavior of a shaman. In the gospels he spends a lot of time in the wilderness. It is in the natural world that Jesus is able to perceive the goodness of the Creator, the beneficence of the love of Israel's covenant God, the one whom he called 'daddy.'

One of the real rewards of learning at the feet of Grandfather is that we are taking a journey back in time. We learn the physical skills that our human ancestors used for millions of years as they evolved and came to know the benefits of creation. The contemporary knowledge and practice of these skills puts us in a unique place vis a vis our ancestors, since we bring to these skills a more fully developed consciousness<sup>46</sup>. This next section reflects my personal experience of this inter-relation between modern consciousness and pre-civilized awareness. Been there, done that, got the buckskin. Thought I'd tell you about it. And the upshot is a new appreciation for the creation and the Creator, the reason we have gathered here.

For me, being one with the earth is nothing less and nothing more than honoring all that has been made. It is the embracing of the natural world as a gift, freely given, as from a Father or Mother's hand, given in love. This shift of perception is the essential element. It is a real shift. The discipline of Ecopsychology has begun to study what happens to people when they are out of doors. There are changes that occur on a physical level, an emotional level, and a spiritual level. Their studies indicate what is called 'the wilderness effect.'<sup>47</sup>

And here is what I have discovered for myself: I have found in the wilderness that I am constantly stripping off layers of false comfort on all levels. The wilderness does that to you. It helps you differentiate between want and need. I may want my warm cozy bed in my nice cozy house but all I need is a debris hut or a scout pit to stay plenty warm and dry and thus alive. I may want pizza and beer but find that the earth provides me with plenty of trailside edibles and thus meets my need. I may need water and find some collecting the early morning dew. What are wants anyway but mimetic desires? The wilderness doesn't give a damn about desire; instead she meets our needs.

In the wilderness you are often alone even if you are with other people but you are never lonely. At a minimum you are there with yourself. The wilderness will bring you face to face with yourself (a sort of interior mimetic doubling) and in so doing catalyzes an integration process. Alongside and through this process a second process is taking

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<sup>45</sup> Michael Goulder arguing that Matthew is a liturgical midrash on Mark has a fascinating chapter on Jesus' (Matthew's) use of natural phenomena as analogies. Midrash and Lektion in Matthew.

<sup>46</sup> Perhaps what I am seeking to do in this next section is well expressed by Eugene Webb Philosophers of Consciousness (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988): "Unless a way can be found to make sense of the idea of the new life in Christ in a way that is neither objectivistic nor subjectivistic there will be no possibility of hearing the liberating truth Girard thinks the Gospel expresses. One of the rare figures in the Christian tradition who has not only addressed this issue but has made its paradox the center of his own philosophical reflections on human subjectivity, is...Soren Kierkegaard." See also my essay "Reflections on the Spirituality of Soren Kierkegaard".

<sup>47</sup> Theodore Roszak, Mary Gomes and Allen Kanner Eds. Ecopsychology (San Francisco: Sierra Book Club, 1995).

place. The wilderness humbles you. The wilderness does not tolerate ego or arrogance. It will take you as far down the ladder as you need to go in order to get your attention. (I've gotten to know the bottom rung as a good friend)

As I took classes and began developing my skills, I discovered a freedom I had never enjoyed before. In the wilderness it is just me and the wind, me and the sun, me and the night, me and the snow, me and the rain, me and the swamp. The freer I felt the more I began to ask about Jesus' relationship to the creation in the light of Grandfather's philosophy. And then I began musing about the possibilities of discipleship as living in harmony with the creation. I already had an explanation in hand that illumined how we got into such a mess to begin with in mimetic theory. And in mimetic theory I had the roots for developing a positive mimetic model that could envision life in a wholistic fashion, a true and real peace.

However, as I look out over the vast corpus of published research on mimetic theory, which I have by no means mastered, I sense a certain lack of hopefulness. So I wish to engage hopefulness from a Christian perspective but from a Christianity forged and purified in the fires of mimetic theory and the wilderness. Grandfather taught Tom that if something were pure, it would have to work for anybody in the wilderness.

What do we in the civilized world believe regarding our survival? We have secured our futures with real estate, good paying jobs, tenure and retirement plans. We have no worries. We can always find work. As long as the economy stays healthy. But what if it doesn't? What if we find ourselves out of work unable to support our families or ourselves? These what ifs are more and more of a possibility as we watch mimetic conflicts destabilize the globe. We are at war with each other and in the process we are at war with the planet. There is nothing more unstable than war.

Need a scapegoat? In 1900, the earth sheltered just over a billion people. In a scant hundred years, in the fastest blink of an eye in terms of the life span of the planet, we humans are now around seven billion and growing. Here's a question: how many people can the planet sustain? Here's another question? How many people can the planet sustain if we are all of the American consumer mentality? Is the answer the same? It has taken us less than 200 years to radically alter the nature of the planet.<sup>48</sup> What will this mean for us for us in 10 years? 20 years?

For the first time in recorded history scientists have begun to put timetables on the earth's supposedly unlimited resources. We have found that the earth is rapidly losing its ability to sustain such a large population of humans. We have brought the pollution that has poisoned our waters, burned our skies and tarnished our soils. We are the species that has brought a multitude of other species to extinction. We are the species strip-mining the skin of the earth, stripping her by deforestation, and pumping all kinds of deadly toxins through her bloodstream. If we were to do to a human being what we do to the earth, we would be arrested, charged and convicted of murder in the first degree. Not only is God a scapegoat, as we have observed in both mimetic theory and

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<sup>48</sup> Bill McKibben, The End of Nature (New York: Doubleday, 1990).

Christian theology, but the creation is also the target of our wrath. We have not learned our lesson. We still think we are the gods. Humans in their self-exaltation commit the basest form of idolatry. What then must we learn in order to escape the vicious circle of our mimetic spiritualities?

One of the most valuable lessons to be learned in the wilderness is the exact same lesson taught by Jesus with regard to discipleship, viz., it's all about surrender. Surrender is not a theological category and we are loath to use it. Too many of us are still enmeshed in a theology of glory, a theology that needs a *deus ex machina*, a powerful savior. We believe that a powerful God will make us powerful. And our spiritualities are just displays of this belief. Our spiritualities are mimetically conceived. On the other hand, a positive mimetic spirituality is characterized by surrender.

When we listen to the Spirit, the One that moves in the world of the creation is also moving in our interior world as well. In the same way that we must surrender to the creation in order to be able to be led in it, so we too must also surrender to the Spirit-that-moves-within-us. This surrender can be described as a complete trust, a giving over, as a setting aside of our egos. It involves developing awareness of what Paul Ricoeur might call our 'fault', that is, the mimetically conceived self<sup>49</sup>. Surrender is the ultimate expression of love not only in relation to humans but also in relation to the creation. In a sense, it is a theology of the cross applied to our experience of creation in both its human and non-human aspects<sup>50</sup>. It is to begin to know the Creator as Jesus, Barth and Grandfather knew the Creator, as a benevolent non-retributive loving Other. It is to be fully human.

The Church has tried to neuter Jesus by absorbing his humanity in his divinity.<sup>51</sup> We, who are not divine, really have no chance to be like him. The gospels do not make this mistake. The whole point of telling the story of his life was because we are given such a possibility in the light of God's vindication of this human, who he was, how he lived. And the proof of this was the gift of the Holy Spirit in his name.

Eugene Bianchi writes about the ecological challenge to Christianity and explores a number of recent writers who have contended that ecology is central to Christian spirituality. Bianchi writes that "the greatest deficiency in Christian nurture today in most churches is their almost total neglect of cultivating our mystical potential...Few

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<sup>49</sup> [The Symbolism of Evil](#) (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967).

<sup>50</sup> The book that helped me make the important connection between suffering and clear trinitarian thought is Arthur McGill's [Suffering: A Test Case of Theological Method](#). It was solidified as I read Jurgen Moltmann [The Crucified God](#) and Eberhard Jungel [God as the Mystery of the World](#).

<sup>51</sup> Over the past 200 years biblical scholarship has in various ways tried to address the issue of Jesus' spirituality. Most of the time they suggest it is impossible to gain any access to Jesus' 'inner life.' Christian conservatives on the other hand, project back into Jesus' story their own version of piety and then read it out again. In both of these stances, the discernible element that is missing is the humanity of Jesus. The spirituality of Jesus cannot be conceived apart from what he taught. Does what he taught work? It worked for him. Jeff Krantz and I have sought to address this issue head on in our website [www.preachingpeace.org](http://www.preachingpeace.org). On the shift in emphasis from the humanity to the divinity of Jesus in the early church see Joseph Jungmann, [The Place of Christ in Liturgical Prayer](#) (Staten Island: Alba House, 1965). Jesus' 'christology', spirituality, ethics and eschatology are all of one piece.

[Christians] have the sense of a personalized path that can be enhanced by regular meditation and other spiritual methods. Institutional religion in the west has generally been suspicious of mysticism because it is hard to control.”<sup>52</sup>

The West has little room for the Spirit. This is why Western Christian theology has not been successful in articulating Christology. The realm of the Spirit is not quantifiable, but it is open to description. The Church loses its authority in the realm of the Spirit for this is the place we are “all taught by God.” The Creator can personally mentor each of us<sup>53</sup>. Imagine that. There are many ways this occurs in the natural world to us all of the time if we will pay attention.

The wilderness, as I have mentioned, teaches a new perspective on spirituality. Let me give you one example. How many times have you been in the woods and not seen any animals? They are there, why don't you see them? Would you know where to look? More importantly, would you know how to look? Animals have ‘neighborhoods’ they don't just wander aimlessly, and they are only really active at certain times of day. But how you see is more important. Most people are aware of their peripheral vision when reminded it is there, but most of the time their eyes are focused in tunnel vision. You can see it everywhere you go. In the wilderness tunnel vision will get you hurt. You must readjust the way you see so that you are seeing the entire 180 degrees in front of you. Funny thing is that this doesn't come naturally at first, it is an attitude that becomes a habit that become natural. You chose to develop it. Same thing with your ears. It takes practice to learn how to hear nature's concentric rings in 360 degrees. Most of us are selective listeners because we are daily drowned out by noise. The birds are telling us all of the time what is happening around us. Do we listen? Your feet too must learn how to feel the earth and read the landscape. It takes a conscious choice to retrain the sensory organs. But when you do, the creation lights up. This experience Grandfather called awareness.

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<sup>52</sup> Eugene Bianchi, “The Ecological Challenge to Christianity” New Theology Review, Feb 1998.

<sup>53</sup> The language of spirituality may be bold language but it is never exclusive. Part of the problem of the narration of Christian experience has been that it is all too frequently done “from above”, from the perspective of an exclusivist ‘theology of glory.’ In developing a ‘hermeneutics of testimony’, Paul Ricoeur asks about the nature of ‘the absolute affirmation of the absolute.’ He contrasts the experience of original affirmation with ‘divestment.’ Of course, I automatically think of a theology of the cross here. The possibilities of positive mimesis are as varied as are those of negative mimesis, but positive mimesis, even or especially in its hermeneutics, will be conditioned by surrender. “Original affirmation has all the characteristics of an absolute affirmation of the absolute, but it will neither be able to go beyond a purely internal act not susceptible of being expressed externally, nor even of being maintained internally. Original affirmation has something of the indefinitely inaugural about it, and only concerns the idea that the self makes of itself. This original affirmation, for a reflexive philosophy, is in no sense an experience. Although numerically identical with real consciousness in each person, it is the act which accomplishes the negation of the limitations which affect individual destiny. It is divestment (*depoulement*). It is by this ‘divestment’ that reflection is brought to the encounter with contingent signs that the absolute, in its generosity, allows to appear of itself. This ‘divestment’ is not only ethical but speculative; it is when the thought of the unconditioned has lost all support in the transcendent objects of metaphysics, when it has renounced all the objectifications that understanding imposes. It is then that the claim of the absolute, reduced to the depth of an act immanent to each of our operations, remains steady for something like an experience of the absolute in testimony.” (Essays on Biblical Interpretation. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980)

Awareness in the wilderness is a conscious reality, but it involves the suspension of thoughts. In the wild, thoughts are a distraction. They are just interior noise. If you have ever tried any form of meditation you may have experienced the difficulties of quieting your mind. It seems to have so much to say all of the time, even when we are asleep. We are constantly at its mercy with thoughts that just randomly enter our head. Ever tried to turn it off? Sometimes we say we are 'caught up in a thought' or are 'lost in thought.' These are wilderness metaphors. One gets caught in brambles and one gets lost in the wilderness. When you are in a state of conscious awareness, it is as important to be interiorly aware, as it is to be exteriorly aware. Getting lost in one usually gets you lost in the other.

The fact is, if you stop to analyze your thoughts you will realize you are either thinking about what has happened to you or you are thinking about what will happen to you. Your thoughts are about the past or the potential future. We know we can neither alter the past nor control the future. By acknowledging that there is not a thought that is so important that it cannot wait, we are free to be fully in the present.<sup>54</sup>

Awareness might be called intuitive knowing<sup>55</sup>. In awareness, the self is not a center; it is simply part of all that surrounds it. The self is no more a center than is an oak or a fox. We are all part of a grand and glorious creation that when treated with respect shelters us, feeds us, gives us warmth and slakes our thirst. There are no other necessities. Life is brought up to its basic level. And this is the world full of Spirit because it is not full of negative mimetic desire. You learn how to live with nature and thus with Spirit.<sup>56</sup>

We have learned an awful lot about the human brain and the human mind this past 100 years. We have also learned about the importance of right and left-brain inter-connectedness. Unfortunately, psychology, theology and science have all seemingly joined forces to keep them apart. For example, I think Jung's concern was that Freud interpreted the non-conscious *in malam partem*. Jung couldn't do that. He saw

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<sup>54</sup> The theological work that best captures this is Dietrich Ritschl Memory and Hope. Ritschl shows in what specific ways the ancient and Reformation christological discussions have been hampered by Augustinian dualistic presuppositions. He also argues that these same questions, in different form, have entered the realm of scientific theology in both theology and biblical studies. The upshot is that the Church is called to live between memory and hope where the Christus praesens dwells, that is, fully in the present or in a state of awareness with regard to the Lord.

<sup>55</sup> Bernard Lonergan captures some what occurs in the state of awareness in his Insight. I am not aware of any Native American influence on Lonergan.

<sup>56</sup> Tom Brown Jr. has written an introduction to Grandfather's philosophy, Awakening Spirits (New York: Berkley, 1994). But it should be stressed that awareness is only one side of the coin. The external dimension of awareness is tracking. There have never existed better trackers than the Apache. The Apache identified over 4,500 pressure releases that can occur in a track. When I arrived back home from the Advanced Tracking and Awareness class it was as if little light bulbs were everywhere on the lawns and in the gardens of my neighborhood. Tom has explored the first six pressure release studies, about 800 pressure releases in The Science and Art of Tracking (New York: Berkley, 1999). It is the only book on tracking that I am aware of that deals with the Apache system of pressure releases (contrast e.g., the fine book by Richard Smith Animal Signs and Tracking (Harrisburg: Stackpole, 1982)). For every philosophical skill Grandfather taught that there is a corresponding physical skill as in the combination awareness/tracking or invisibility/camouflage.

something positive at work in the human soul (even if it was some sort of eternal dualism explored as a conjunction of opposites). The Church, of course, has its doctrines of original sin and total depravity, its mortifications, self-flagellations and intellectual taboos.<sup>57</sup> And Science has exalted the left brain and logic and reason to a disastrous dominance and theology has followed right down the line like mice after the Pied Piper. If we are such a rational species why are we killing the planet and ourselves in the process? And consider this: most of us only use about 10% of our total brain capacity. What's the rest for?

In terms of positive mimesis, one is given the option to interpret right brain awareness *in bonum partem*. In the wilderness, this awareness would be called a sixth sense, but it is more accurately described as a precognition of the total input being received by the five senses. In order for this to occur the left brain must be shut off. Neuro Linguistics has taught us that we are limited in our consciousness. Consciousness is a selective activity of the brain. Our senses are registering tens of thousands of different impressions a second. We would be on serious overload to be consciously aware of everything we sense. Go look at someone's desk for only three seconds. Turn your back and name everything you can recall seeing. Most of us have recall in the single digits. Now go back and look at what you 'missed.' Your right brain saw everything and under hypnosis you could name everything present, your left brain can only handle small portions or 'bytes' of the picture. Our ROM is not all that large.

In a state of awareness, your mind is sorting all of this sensory data but the data is not sent as a thought, as a form of discourse. In a state of conscious awareness, the mind communicates through emotion. It is a sort of like an internal gyroscope or guidance system. Our intuitive emotion is not, however, alone. In Native American beliefs, all creation shares in the Spirit-that-moves-in-all-things. We are as created as the rocks and the plants so we also share in the Spirit-that-moves-in-all-things. This is not panentheism or pantheism. The creation is not deified anymore than we are when God breathed the Spirit into Adam and he became a living being. To be spiritually aware is to share in all of the benefits of being part of God's good creation. It is to share in the joy of the Spirit-that-moves-in-all-things.

In short, anywhere you go in the created realm, you encounter the Creator, whether it is in the natural environment or the wilderness of your soul. When the two become one, then a marvelous reality occurs, and we discover our fundamental oneness with the earth and the Spirit. There is no lost here, there is no hungry, no thirsty, no fatigue and no danger. There is safety, peace, hope, joy and love; in short what the Apostle Paul would call the "fruit of the Spirit." To touch and be touched by this oneness is indeed a privilege.

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<sup>57</sup> These are nothing more than the disastrous results of dualism. Paul Davies God and the New Physics (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983) referring to the influence of dualism on the history of Christianity says, "Central to religious doctrine is the idea that the soul (or mind) is a *thing*, and a sharp distinction must be drawn between the body and the soul. This so-called dualist theory of the mind (or soul) was developed by Descartes and has been widely incorporated in Christian thinking. Indeed, so ingrained in our culture and language are the ideas of dualism that Gilbert Ryle in his book The Concept of Mind calls it 'the official doctrine.'"

Our oneness with the creation is not a metaphysical construct, nor is it an idealistic premise. It is the adoption of a positive mimetic posture. Christian theology can take a powerful cue from this orientation. First, by rejecting any notion of retribution in God, one is no longer forced to try and make economic distinctions in the persons of the Trinity, as though God was divided. Second, by removing retaliation from any notion of divine so-called justice, we are then free to follow Jesus as bearers of God's Spirit and believe that the Creator is beneficent. That is, we may actually behave as children of the Creator and thus bring the blessings of the Creator to others and the Earth. This has nothing to do with moral earnestness or religious piety, but purely with the peace that comes from a unified perspective.<sup>58</sup> Third, the Church may also eliminate the category 'wrath of God' from nature. Instead of relating to nature as an enemy, we may find that the reconciliation that Jesus brings also puts us in a right relationship to the creation, the natural world can be our dearest friend.

There is then a double lens that must be used in reading the gospels if one is to fully appreciate them. The tool is mimetic theory; the stereo-opticon effect is created by viewing both negative mimesis and its effects side by side with positive mimesis and its effects. This is precisely what the gospels do.

Mimetic theory puts the delusory stance of scientific 'assured results' on notice. Science has not made the world a better place, it has destroyed it. Mimetic theory also illumines Christian theology by virtue of the role the gospel plays within Rene's appropriation of mimetic theory. Other mimetic theorists may well diverge from Girard here and for good reason.<sup>59</sup> Christian theology and church life stink of far too many wrong questions and answers. But Girard is correct to also apply mimetic theory to the Gospels. In so doing, the heart of human civilization is exposed and so is God's.

I have also said that positive mimesis has implications on all levels of our human existence. This is a consequence of my understanding of the doctrine of the

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<sup>58</sup> It is rare to find a unitary perspective in theology. I have been quite influenced in this area by Thomas Torrance and John Polkinghorne. By Torrance see Christian Theology and Scientific Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); Theological Science (New York: Oxford, 1969); Space, Time & Incarnation (New York: Oxford, 1969); Space, Time & Resurrection (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976); Theology in Reconstruction (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975); Theology in Reconciliation (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975); The Christian Frame of Mind (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1989). By Polkinghorne see Belief in God in an Age of Science (New Haven: Yale, 1998); Faith, Science & Understanding (New Haven: Yale, 2000); The God of Hope and the End of the World (New Haven: Yale, 2002). The implications of quantum mechanics are just beginning to filter into theology and social science. There is an interesting discussion of quantum mechanics in relation to social science in Menas Kafatos and Robert Nadeau, The Conscious Universe: Part and Whole in Modern Physical Theory (Springer-Verlag, 1990).

<sup>59</sup> E.g., Lucien Scubla, "The Christianity of Rene Girard and the Nature of Religion" in Paul Dumouchel, ed., Violence and Truth: On the Work of Rene Girard (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985). In contrast, a more positive appreciation of Girard's appropriation of biblical texts within the framework of the scapegoat theory can be found in the article by Aidan Carl Mathews, "Knowledge of Good and Evil: The Work of Rene Girard" in To Honor Rene Girard (Saratoga: ANMA Libri & Co, 1986).

Incarnation. In Jesus, God fully assumes our humanness so that we may fully share in Jesus' relationship with the Creator. This is what the New Testament calls the gift of the Holy Spirit, that is, to be spiritually aware. It is not about religion, it is about the way creation is perceived and creation perceived apart from the Spirit is a poor, dark, dreary place indeed.<sup>60</sup>

All of us are standing by while the planet is dying and whether Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, Hindi, Muslim or anything else, it is the creation of our Creator that we are killing. We are all in this thing together. History will ask why we did nothing to stop it. Future decimated generations writing their dissertations (assuming things don't turn into some Mad Max scenario) may well wonder why we didn't see it coming? How blind could we have been? It is not apocalyptic speculation to say that the world is primed for some pretty major ecological crises in the current century. Maybe not in your lifetime, but in the lifetime of your children and grandchildren this is a virtually certain reality.

I believe it is possible not only to do good theology but also to live in peace. My concerns about the planet are addressed to Christians, the tradition in which I was raised. Others are free to eavesdrop as they wish. If the Church is to have any effect in the twenty-first century, let us hope that it will begin to address the issue of the relationship of following Jesus to the Earth, which we, after all, confess was made through Him. Just imagine what might happen should a billion Christians care for the Earth as part of their spirituality.

So what happens when you sit down with a French historian, a Swiss theologian and an Apache shaman? You see a sad vision of the way things are and how they got to be that way and at the same time you see a hopeful vision of the way things can be. Does mimetic theory have anything to contribute to the environment and environmental studies? You bet it does!<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Christologically speaking, George A.F. Knight (Christ the Center. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) concludes that the very earth itself, the creation which sustained Jesus is transformed in the resurrected body of Jesus. "We are left with the inference that Jesus in his person was now the first fruits of the new nature, the new cosmos, and as well as being such, victor over the powers of evil." Jesus' resurrection is the eschatological healing of the creation.

<sup>61</sup> I would like to thank Jeff Krantz, Lorri Hardin, Sarah Taylor and Kevin Reeve for commenting on earlier drafts of this essay. Their insights are invaluable to me and without them I am fairly certain I would not be able to articulate the bigger picture that I see.