

GRASPING GOD: Philippians 2: 1-11 in the Light of Mimetic Theory

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“A mimesis pattern lies at the heart of New Testament thought. Any theology or ethics of the New Testament should make this point foundational.” Willard Swartley

Philippians 2: 1-4

“If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.”

This essay explores the concept of mimesis gathering insight not only from Scripture but also from science. We moderns are accustomed to framing our worldview primarily from a scientific perspective, but Rene Girard has brought science and biblical literature into conversation through his understanding of mimesis. The current reactionary stance of ‘conservative Christianity’ demands that we continue this conversation.

We begin with the implications of the larger human story and then move to exegesis. This reverses the usual approach to papers that invoke biblical texts, but conforms to the literary character of Philippians 2:1-11, where the Apostle Paul first explores the character of ‘Christian relations’ and then grounds these insights in the soteriological work of Jesus Christ. In our modern world, torn apart by violence, the peacemaking implications of mimetic theory are as important as our exegetical work.

Contemporary humanity is going through significant changes; we are consciously experiencing our own evolution. We are currently being led into deeper insights of what has happened throughout our history and is happening now in our world. As we assimilate this information and view the sum total of human experience we begin to see ways to build a model that might be our hope in leading us out of the present world crisis.

The apostle Paul had no knowledge or understanding of evolutionary biology. Nevertheless, Paul sensed and intuited what evolutionary biologists have recently come to realize; that consciousness was and is at the source of life. The Latin root of conscience means "joint or mutual knowledge." It is the same root that underlies the word consciousness.

Recently the co-discoverer of mirror neurons, Vittorio Gallese has stated that the basis of consciousness might not be our vaunted "sense of self", but our intersubjectivity, a combination of self and other-hood. We believe this is a very Pauline perspective. Paul naturally was not looking at tiny sub-atomic particles. He was looking at Jesus to come to an understanding of the universe. But before we delve into this profound Pauline insight it is helpful to restate the obvious. Human beings haven't always been conscious of their surroundings, of the way all life is interconnected. On certain levels we are not unaware of what is happening and how what we do or who we are affects so much of life as we experience it, yet we continue to act as though we are autonomous separate entities somehow unconnected from one another and the creation itself.

Consciousness is a priori to existence. It is part of the reality of existence. We should not be surprised that evolutionary biologists and physicists have seen that consciousness is not a recent emergent development of material evolution. The exact point that our spiritual forebears, the authors of Holy Scripture, were making is now being described in new languages and on different levels but it's the same Reality of which they speak.

For well known historic reasons we have a separation of spirituality and science. The importance of consciousness has been too readily jettisoned in materialistic viewpoints. A reading of the Psalms, the

book of Job and other wisdom literature from numerous faith traditions awakens us to the recognition that our spiritual forebears had a better grasp on a living universe as emerging from consciousness rather than from non-life and non-consciousness as asserted by many within the scientific community. Our spiritual forebears may not have been able to conceptualize the earth itself as a giant living cell but the early Hebrew people recognized that they were a part of the Whole. Their 'less than highly developed' articulation of continuity in creation, constantly changing and recreating itself into greater complexities is simply stated in a few verses in the book of Genesis. It introduces in narrative fashion that which biologists refer to as *autopoiesis*, a living entity that continually recreates itself as it grows and changes.

Whatever language we use – be it spiritual or scientific – all that is, emerged from a unity, an undifferentiated place, from which the entire universe and everything in it came into being. This unity is expressed in the ancient Hebrew prayer, the Shema: *"Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One."*

Individuation happened from a unity – diversifying and branching out. As evolution biologist Elisabet Sahtouris puts it,

"The early Earth differentiated into bacteria and they developed different lifestyles and they became competitive. They invented technologies in order to carry out their hostilities. They created (in their microscopic world) enormous problems including global hunger and global pollution. They had to solve those problems eventually by negotiating differences, moving on around the cycle, and working out cooperative schemes that ultimately lead the ancient bacteria that ruled for the first half of Earth's life to form a new kind of cell as a community of different lifestyle bacteria working together. That's the nucleated cell that we're made of, that all these trees are made of; all the things in the waters are made of. Everything we see around us is made of this wonderful big cooperative cell."

Sahtouris suggests that we can see and understand now how other species matured out of a youthful competitive phase into a mature cooperative phase. Her thesis as a biologist is that the human species

must similarly move through adolescence where there is competition and hostile rivalry to maturity where we can share a hospitable future.

This is the preface then to our story – the human story in which we too begin by acknowledging that vulnerability and weakness are traits that humans have just as all life has. We acknowledge as well that we are competitive in every way from the earliest that we can remember, and that our competition, as that of bacterial life early on, is still going through a phase of hostility and domination. We are adapting to the problems we are creating but adaptation is not what is called for, new ways of thinking and acting are what is necessary now.

We all know that, in order for a human newborn to live, it must be protected longer than any other species as it matures more slowly and it takes longer to mature than other species (part of that has to do with the size of our head and the formation of our brain). Outside dangers and influences threaten newborns, infants, and young children. Slowly humans come to the place where the person is not only individuated from parent or guardian but also truly able to step out into the world with a degree of confidence, security, self-assuredness and ability to fend for himself/herself. By that time in life, at least in western culture (though not necessarily in indigenous tribes)¹, the character of an individual has been so molded and adapted to the cultural milieu that what the young person has learned in most cases is that fending for the self is the chief organizing principle of life.

What has enabled this survival is something far deeper, more necessary, and instinctual. It is trust. We have two major components of personality development – the instinctual need to stay close to a guardian for protection because of our vulnerability and weakness, and secondly, the trust of the guardians good will in protecting and guiding the young one. But trust becomes displaced into prominence.

The reason why this background which we all know and understand on elementary levels is important to recall is because during the time

¹ For example, the Lakota have no terms for I or me; it is the “us”, the collective, the tribe that creates subjectivity.

of individuation there develops from the guardians protection an uncanny translation of what is being transferred to the child. A primary element in the maturation process is what we might call – the great “watch-out”, “be careful,” the realization that danger lies beyond the bounds of the protective guardianship. The teaching of the human guardian seems to be, “if you are not for yourself, then who will be?” This teaching is at odds with the spiritual insight, “if you are only for yourself, what can you expect to become?”

Our point of difficulty as we delve into the social sciences through anthropology, psychology and beyond into the realm of metaphysics, spirituality, and theology is this – the need to survive finds the human being not fully present with the most acute sense necessary to move beyond survival into the realm of full life. Why? Simply put, the past trust is slowly being absorbed into an expanding cultural awareness. The future while spoken of incessantly, really begins to vanish. Trust, the original key to survival, gives way to differentiation and competition that will ensure survival.

The unfolding story from Genesis to the Gospels of “grasping” and becoming conscious rather than existing in a mechanical and unconscious fashion takes into consideration 1) our original vulnerability and weakness, 2) our desire to overcome weakness by developing mechanisms for survival that replace original trust 3) the problem of an unsustainable way of life that is the result of unconsciously continuing our patterns of negative behavior and 4) the potential to see our way clear to grasp God without clutching in a negative sense our desire to be gods.

In the beginning of the ancient book of Genesis, God is proclaimed as the Creator of all life. The Creator establishes a living and sustainable future and confers human beings with the care, tending and guardianship of the created order that still is in the process of unfolding. Everything that is created has been pronounced good. An original blessing is central to the original creation. Placed into a delightful garden, Adam and Eve are instructed to live in it and enjoy it fully and completely. There is only one prohibition: that the humans not eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. After all, if we know without a doubt what is good and what is evil then we don't need God to tell us.

It appears that this is the very first statement against competition and rivalry. The Creator is aware that desire carries with it seeds of destruction. Enter the serpent into the garden story. The serpent is not evil, not loathsome, just crafty and clever as Paul recognized in his use of a midrash that the serpent could appear as a shining light (2 Cor 11:14). The serpent speaks to the human(s) and says, *“Did God say, “You shall not eat from any tree in the garden and you shall not die?”*

These two simple lines are the most powerful in the story for they challenge the entire relationship based on trust between the creatures and God that they are to be the guardians of creation.

“Did God really say, “Don’t eat the fruit?” (Did God really prohibit you from being a god, a rival, and a competitor?) *“You won’t die!”*

So Eve eats the prohibited fruit. She convinces her husband to do the same. When he is caught, he blames the woman and Eve blames the snake. Nothing terrible has happened. Nobody is hurt, yet. But from this primal story comes the essential truth so well explained by Rene Girard and mimetic theorists, namely, that negative desire, negative mimesis, begins with wanting what is not rightfully ours and is complicated by the fact that another also wants it. This problem results in breaking trust, breaking the covenant of the Whole to part relationship. When the part seeks to make himself/herself the Whole (an absolute impossibility), disastrous consequences follow.

Their spiritual Guardian gives the children in the Garden of Eden stewardship over that garden but rather than do as instructed they desire to be co-equal with the Creator. They test and defy their Guardian rather than trust and obey. Out of their own mimed desire they will cause ruin that threatens their own existence and their progeny will continue this pattern of competition among themselves with horrific results. The “fall from grace” of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from the garden, sets the pattern for the next generation when their offspring Cain desires to receive what his brother Abel possesses and kills him to get it. The spiral of negative mimesis is off and running but all of the negativity is derived from competition in

these foundational stories. Grasping God in the acquisitive sense leads to competition, rivalrous hostility, and eventuates in murder.

Therefore thousands of years later when Paul takes up his pen and begins to recount the human race's long history of hostility and war he can reference both scripture, human life and his own sordid history to write to his friends the Gospel truth that they must *"do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, (you must have no competition among you) but in humility regard others better than yourself."* Paul beckons for a reversal in commonly held cultural ideology. Paul is calling the Philippians back to earth, literally, as he calls for humility (from the Latin word humus, meaning ground, the rich, fertile soil that gives freely to all creatures). He calls men and women back to the root of humanness, beseeching them to humble themselves, to no longer esteem pride or dignity.

"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus."

This is Paul's call to "a metanoia", a conversion, a profound change of mind, To be 'in unity with God and others Paul emphasizes adopting a new mind (real consciousness), the mind of Jesus Christ (Rom. 2:16). Paul is saying that through adopting Jesus' thinking we receive a new identity, a new way of being; a divine identity that participates with God in God's way of being. This is a reestablishment and a fulfillment of the Trust relationship.

Many argue that trust must be self-possessed, and not externalized. They will suggest that another or others will detract from the opportunities to arrive at a specific goal or attain a desired object, therefore, one must strive with all diligence and with full capacity to differentiate, to become better than the other, and to will the self into a place of prominence and promise. It is this desire that promotes competition rather than cooperation. This then is the attitude that Paul confronts when he writes what is among his most important messages.

The opening words of Philippians 2 focus on compassion and sympathy, having the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind; the undifferentiated unity exemplified in the Shema. The new mind of Christ puts an end to pitting oneself in

deadly competition against the other. Such behavior betrays trust in God and our innermost being. Resentment, jealousy, suspicion, revenge, hatred and violence all issue from the disunity of the self to the Whole and stem from the non-conscious.

In the ancient story of the Garden of Eden the breakdown in the relationship between the Creator and humans occurs when the humans do not regard relationship with the Creator as primary. But there is another Garden story. This garden is no Eden. One beloved of the Abba Father is grappling with his imminent death. His self - struggle involves his will to survive and yet his desire to do what the Abba wants. He is anguished. He is in deep distress. The man calls out to his Guardian in desperation. All that he has done and taught has come from the Abba. He has always taught that the most important thing is to do the will of the Abba. He has taught the importance of trust and obedience and love. Deeply grieved, even to death, Jesus prays in Gethsemane, *“ My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.”* He prays this three times. (Matthew 26: 39,42,44) Shortly thereafter he is taken by force, arrested, led away, put on trial before the religious council, put into the hands of the state, scourged, tried in front of a mob that screams for his blood, is sentenced to be crucified, is placed on a cross, and dies an agonizing death between two criminals who are executed Roman style on his right and left. His dying words are, *“ Father, forgive them for they know no what they do.”* (Luke 23:34)

At no point does this Jesus of Nazareth in his public ministry and public death ever distrust his Guardian. Never does he act mimetically toward those who have scapegoated him and called for his murder, though he is an innocent victim. While it might appear that he is wavering in his trust, in fact he is pointing to the false accusations lodged against scapegoats long before his time. And so he quotes ancient scripture (Psalm 22: *“For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; and he has not hid his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him.”*)

According to Girard, Jesus' message, particularly in the Sermon on the Mount, combines a new worldview and a new ethic. A new kind of conduct is required from humans because of the way God acts

toward them. Because God as Father sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous, Jesus' followers are called to love their enemies and to pray for those who persecute them. This parallel between a new ethic and a new revelation about the nature and behavior of God echoes throughout the Sermon on the Mount. If "you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not the gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect," (Matt. 5:47-48).

Jesus is teaching not only a new ethic but also a new experience and message about God. Jesus addresses God as "Abba," the heavenly Father who shows compassion to all. Jesus' experience of God as Abba has significant ramifications for the way he relates to those around him, and for the kind of relationship to which he calls his followers. This new experience of God is the basis for Jesus' relationship with tax-gatherers, sinners, and outcasts. His experience and proclamation of God as a God of love and unconditional forgiveness are the basis for his authority to forgive sins.

Everything about Jesus has to do with mimesis. So behind everything we have stated are the categories of both negative and positive mimesis. We suggest that Philippians 2: 1-11 is one of those passages where we can point with the exclamation, "*this is a key text which illuminates mimesis, negative and positive.*" This is what we mean and understand Paul to be saying.

Philippians 2:5-11

⁵τουτο φρονειτε εν υμιν ο και εν χριστω ιησου, ⁶ος εν μορφη θεου υπ αρχων ουχ αρπαγμαν ηγησατο το ειναι ισα θεω, ⁷αλλα εαυτον εκενω σεν μορφην δουλου λαβων, εν ομοιωματι ανθρωπων γενομενος: και σ χηματι ευρεθεις ως ανθρωπος ⁸εταπεινωσεν εαυτον γενομενος υπηκο ος μεχρι θανατου, θανατου δε σταυρου. ⁹διο και ο θεος αυτον υπερυ ψωσεν και εχαρισατο αυτω το ονομα το υπερ παν ονομα, ¹⁰ινα εν τω ονοματι ιησου παν γονυ καμψη επουρανιων και επιγειων και καταχθ ονιων, ¹¹και πασα γλωσσα εξομολογησηται οτι κυριος ιησους χριστο ς εις δοξαν θεου πατρος.

⁵Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

⁶Who, being in very nature God,

did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
⁷but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
⁸And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death—
even death on a cross!
⁹Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father. (New International Version)

Phil 2:5-11 is a hymn. This may seem a trite observation as it is well recognized but it is very significant. The early church, in its hymnology, was already reflecting on the character of this Jesus whom they worshipped. More than simply a piece of tradition, the use of a hymn indicates the liturgical character of the passage. It is the gathered community that sings this song of praise. We are reminded that 'the one who sings prays twice' and so it is the context of Christian worship and community life to which this hymn belongs. To limit our observations to dry and dusty exegetical minutiae deprives the text of its power. Certainly the Philippian Church did not spend hours and days debating Christological formulae, as do modern scholars. They sang this hymn as a gathered community. It had the emotional and spiritual component of worship to the living person of Jesus that is often lacking in modern commentaries.

Furthermore, this is a hymn sung in the context of the small nascent Christian community in Philippi, a community undergoing some sort of persecution. This fact is also of significance, for it underscores the perspective of the victim, the hermeneutic from below. To sing this hymn was an act of courage, an act of resistance. Ivo Lebaupin observed that 'persecution forms the backdrop of early Christianity' and we would do well to remember this as we read the apostolic literature. With this in mind we can first turn to a number of important questions raised in the exegesis of the hymn.

Paul, or his tradition, uses the rare word (a New Testament *hapax legoumenon*) ἄρπαγμοσ , which some translate as ‘the object to be grasped’ and others as ‘the act of grasping.’ When put this way, the question tends toward asking if Jesus was equal with God; was equality with God something inherent in Jesus or something he lacked? But from mimetic theory we know that there is no desire without an external object (το εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ , ‘equality with God’) and that the acquisitive character of mimesis stems from a previously desired valuation (what equality with God consists of).

We might inquire as to what significance this makes for our interpretation of Phil. 2: 1-11. We suggest that the text is making an anthropological statement. The introduction to the hymn is very strongly anthropocentric but the hymn (2:5-11) reflects something of the originary Human story in the book of Genesis. In other words, we cannot help but think of the original Adam who ‘grasped’ in light of Paul’s statement that the Christ of God renounced ‘grasping’.

Ralph Martin’s masterly survey of the research to 1967 (reprinted 1983) concludes with relation to the Philippian hymn and the creation account in Genesis that “the linguistic agreements between the LXX and the Greek text of Philippians 2 are impressive.” Martin tabulates the parallels:

Adam

Made in divine image
 thought it a prize to be
 grasped at to be as God;
 and aspired to a reputation

And spurned being God’s
 servant
 seeking to be in the likeness
 of God;
 and being found in fashion as
 a man (of dust, now doomed)

He exalted himself
 and became disobedient

Christ

Being the image of God
 thought it not a prize to be
 grasped at to be as God;
 and made himself of no reputation

And took upon himself the form
 of a servant
 and was made in the likeness of
 humanity
 and being found in fashion as
 a human

He humbled himself
 and became obedient

unto death.
He was condemned &
disgraced

unto death
God highly exalted Him & gave
him the name and rank of Lord

These parallels are impressive. And whether one seeks the background of the hymn in some Primal Man myth, or a Heavenly Man myth or Adam speculation in Judaism, the fact remains that we are first of all dealing with something anthropological, the assertion of that which true humanness consists. In particular, we might observe that we are given virtual mirror doubles in Adam (Humanity) and Jesus, the one distinction being that Jesus disengages the process of negative mimesis and chooses the will of God engaging a new process, a process of positive mimesis.

This leads us to the difficult problem of ἑαυτον εκενωσεν. What does it mean 'he emptied himself?' 'Emptying himself' is the obverse of ἄρπαγμοσ. They are connected by the adversative ἀλλα, "but." The act of emptying oneself is an act of 'not-grasping' they are, therefore, one and the same. It is the self-giving element that is being highlighted here. Grasping leads to rivalrous violence and sacrifice, non-grasping generates self-emptying which is self-giving. One recalls the Johannine words of Jesus, "No one takes my life from me, I lay it down on my own" or the use of φερ- verbs in Hebrews, where Jesus 'offers' himself². There is no sacrificial language in the hymn itself, and in fact the logic leads to the cross, which is the end of all sacrifice.

Some scholars have noted that the addition of θανατου δε σταυρου "even death on a cross" does not fit the alleged structure of the hymn and that these words are a Pauline addition. Even so if such is the case, Paul ties in more closely the sacrificial elements of the negative mimetic consequences, recalling the Passion of Jesus, the mob, the unjust verdict and the execution in this brief phrase. It would be Paul's contention that something other than negative mimesis was occurring throughout the Passion. Death is penultimate in the hymn. Life and vindication have the last word. The αρπαγμοσ and the εαυτον εκενωσεν thus describe for us the double-sided valence of mimesis, negative and positive. While the former is the background

² Michael Hardin, "Sacrificial Language in Hebrews", in Violence Renounced, ed. By Willard Swartley.

presupposed in the hymn, it is the latter that is highlighted and emphasized.

Now the story of the Creation and the subsequent spiral into violence of the first Human (the grasping Adam/Eve) is not the only potential Semitic background that has been referenced for our hymn. Some have seen in the hymn language reflected from Isaiah and Deutero-Isaiah, particularly that of the suffering servant.

There have been those who see the cosmic battle of Lucifer in Isaiah 14 reflected in the ἀππογμοσ of the hymn. Christ vs. Satan. Once again it is difficult for a mimetic theorist to retain composure and not jump for joy, for Rene Girard has spelled out for us the demystification of the devil. The satan is in the Adam and derives from Adam. The downfall of the devil, the defeat of the satan, or the liberation of humankind, whatever is stressed, was a key component in early Christian atonement theory. Can this simply be ignored or can it, in fact, enhance our broader interpretive strategy?

Some have turned to Isaiah 53, the Song of the Suffering Servant. This servant is 'figural' and representational. It is the Suffering Servant, the people of God, the figure of desolation that inherits the new creation and is thus recapitulated humanity; first Adam becomes last Adam in the Isaianic songs.

Again this is not an either/or. The early Christian community was as creative in their songwriting and literature as a Bob Dylan or a William Shakespeare. Both the Adamic/First Human background and the Suffering Servant are behind this hymn, for both are the significant corporate figures not only for the early Christians but also for Jesus himself. Son of Man is not only an eschatological figure but a protological one as well, as F.H. Borsch has shown; there is a first Adam and a last Adam, or Adamic doubles. Both function as corporate figures³.

³ We need not limit Jesus' use of Son of Man to a singular background but may notice that it's multiple layers of reference allow the Son of Man to function in many contexts. The Son of Man is the Suffering Servant in Jesus' teaching.

This is important. Corporate figures underscore the insight that we are interindividual. We are interconnected on many levels. In corporate personality, the one can stand for the many (all). James Williams has shown us the mimetic value of this phenomenon particularly with reference to the kings of the Hebrew people. If the king was good, the people were blessed, if the king were bad the people were cursed. The one stood for the many. The high priest is certainly a figure of corporate personality. Corporate personality exhibits a mediating function or role.

Figures of corporate personality highlight the sacrificial mechanism in that they are substitutionary figures. They stand in on behalf of all the people. They are representative and representation plays a strategic role in mimetic theory, seen clearly in the pillars of culture and language as Eric Gans has shown. Our modern blindness to this is proportionate to the degree that we have succumbed or been seduced by the romantic lie, the myth of the autonomous self, the deception of the undifferentiated individual. Jesus represents the True Adam as the Suffering Servant. The One stands in the place of the Many/All. This is the point about positive mimesis being made in the Philippians hymn.

Yet a further background has been argued for this hymn. David Seeley has proposed, “these verses are based on Isaiah 45, but they resonate with ruler worship as well, and deserve analysis from that perspective.” Drawing upon Isaiah 45 and ancient texts on ruler worship, Seeley concludes that the Genesis background is unnecessary and speculative.

We think Seeley makes a good case that early Christians would naturally think of their current political ‘representatives.’ Since we posit that the early church thought in terms of what we now call mimetic theory, reflecting on both positive as well as negative mimesis and that they did this in the context of corporate personality (interindividuality,) then Seeley’s proposed background does not detract from reflections of both Genesis and Isaiah, it highlights them. Jesus is as much an anti-model to Greco-Roman kings as he is to the Hebrew Kings. For the early church there was no distinction between spiritual powers and political ones. Jesus is “the name above all names” no matter where they reside.

Having discussed the backgrounds of the hymn itself, its authorship and structure, scholars then move on to ask about its function in the text of the letter to the Philippians. For the past century there have been two 'at odds' interpretations: the hymn was either an ethical exhortation or a soteriological proclamation.

This question was first put by Lohmeyer (so Martin, 73) who asserted that Phil 2:5-11 'has to do with the portrayal of a divine-human event, not a representation of an ethical concept.' This has been followed by both Kasemann and Bornkamm; the latter explicitly says, 'in no way is this context only one of example and moral imitation.' Now Bornkamm (112) is correct in saying that in 'no way...only' and he goes on to distinguish between a 'disposition oriented toward the ideal of a virtue' and a 'self-orientation toward a given and fulfilled reality that is determined and opened in Jesus Christ.' If Bornkamm is seeking to dismiss the secularizing of Jesus we couldn't agree with him more. However, when Bornkamm separates Jesus from humanity, there is no existential leap to be made, no ethical consequence follows.

We assert that for Paul, the incarnation is not an ethical ideal toward which one can strive. Does this then mean that something cannot be said about the incarnation of Jesus in the life of the church? Does not Paul call the church 'the body of Christ' (I Cor 12)? And does he not say to these same Corinthians that the Spirit that indwells the believers is the Spirit of Jesus (II Cor 3)? Is not Jesus in some fashion en-fleshed in the life, indeed, the flesh of the believing church? Does Paul not depend on this logic when dealing with the problem of *πορνεία* in I Cor 6? Bornkamm, it seems to us, is right in saying that the incarnation is not an abstract ideal but a salvific event. It is precisely salvific in the ethical soteriology/spirituality to which the hymn points us.

A further objection to perceiving an ethical interpretation of the hymn is offered by Martin (88) who says "there is nothing in the text which hints at the church's glorification with her Lord, however well attested elsewhere this idea may be."

It is our understanding that for Paul, the believer will be glorified, just as Jesus was, and is, glorified. Is it necessary for Paul to make this connection for the Philippian church, or is it possible that even while quoting this hymn (*in toto?*) Paul lays stress on the first part of the hymn, that is, attending to the believer's 'self-orientation?' Later in Philippians 3:10, Paul refers to himself and speaks of the relationship between glory and suffering in the same manner as the hymn of Philippians 2. As in the hymn where there is the order of preexistence in glory, incarnation, death and consummate glorification so also Philippians 3 evidences the chiastic order of resurrection, suffering, death, and resurrection (a-b-b'-a'). It seems to us that while the latter part of the hymn is not given a direct application by Paul, both the Philippians and Paul would have been aware that just as their Lord had suffered and was subsequently glorified they would be also.

We concur with Robert Hamerton-Kelly who sees the Philippians hymn as an example of 'the moral significance of the cross for the life of the community' (Hamerton-Kelly, 85). Does this mean that Jesus' life (that is, the stories of Jesus passed on orally and textually) is somehow to be slavishly imitated? No, rather as Hamerton-Kelly puts it, "the summary act of the crucifixion, the crucified Christ in his act of self-sacrifice rather than any specific pattern of ethics drawn from the memory of his life" is the point of imitation. The "fact of the divine self-emptying is paradigmatic" (Hamerton-Kelly, 176). Further we feel trust and obedience are the keys here. (John 14:1 ff)

We will not separate the ethical from the soteriological, stripping the hymn of its true salvific importance, namely, the realized promise of a transformed humanity, a humanity grounded in Jesus, the True Adam who desires only the will of his heavenly Abba. A purely soteriological interpretation of the hymn might satisfy those who are happy living in the abstract but it provides no real enfleshment of that salvation. There is no subjective correlation to the objective process with those who strip the ethical from the soteriological. However, as we saw with ἀρπογμοσ and εαυτον εκενωσεν, the hymn itself is descriptive of the incarnational process. This is the τυπον of 3.17, "the pattern, the example" given by Paul to his converts. He exhorts us to become συμμιμηται "fellow imitators" of this type of non-grasping/self-emptying. This choice, this spirituality is reflected

autobiographically when Paul says, “I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the Resurrection from the dead” (3.10).

A mimetic reading of the Philippian hymn allows us to see many of the larger academic debates as an unnecessary splitting of hairs. Insights previously at odds have been joined together, woven as a tapestry, by the logic of positive mimesis. In the light of mimetic theory, Philippians 2: 1-11 takes on strategic importance for Christology for it offers in a very brief form all of the elements needed to illuminate positive mimesis. Even beyond Christology, it just makes sense from the point of view of survival. It embodies and is entirely supportive of the incarnational spirituality of the gospels and letters of the New Testament and it has a function beyond religion and culture, it tells the truth about what we need to do if we are to live on this planet.

We part company with those who assert that an ethical interpretation of the text, and thus the church’s living in this mindset with her Lord, is not a real possibility. We further say that it goes to the heart of humanity both inside and outside the church. As we were composing this essay we happened to read an important contribution to this years COV&R meeting by Per Grande on “Girard’s Christology.” Per has judiciously written that,

“the imitation of Christ is each individual’s response to the process of dissolving violence and sacrifice. In this respect imitating Christ is the individual’s continuation of Christ’s work. While the Passion was clearly a sacrificial phenomenon, imitating Christ can be seen as the ethical implication of the Passion. This also means that imitating Christ is the practical step forward, derived from a reflection on Christ. In this sense imitation is a response to Christology and, at the same time, ethically speaking, perhaps the most important part of Christology.”

Norman T. Wright finishes his extensive survey of the Philippians hymn summing up it’s meaning beautifully by saying,

“the thrust of the passage in itself is that the one who, before becoming human, possessed divine equality did not regard that status as something to take advantage of, something to exploit, but instead interpreted it as a vocation to obedient humiliation and death; and that God the Father acknowledged the truth of this interpretation by exalting him to share his own divine glory. This means that the passage is well able to fulfill the role, which it has in Paul’s developing argument, namely, that of the example which Christians are to imitate. God acknowledged Christ’s self-emptying as the true expression of divine equality; he will acknowledge Christian self-emptying] in the same way.”

Paul writes to the Roman Christians that *this is the only way to discover the will of God and know what is good, what God wants, what is the perfect thing to do* (Romans 12: 2). It is with the new mind; that of positive mimesis where we can be compassionate, open to another’s pain, able to enter into the experience of the other who is not a rival but a fellow human being.

Paul is offering a profound expression of the truth that our real self is in God. Our truest identity is not measured against someone, it is not attained, not taken forcibly, acquired or grasped – but given.

Fr. Henri J.M. Nouwen while teaching a course at Yale University on Compassion stated,

“ The new mind that Paul refers to is not the self standing over and against God but the self finding itself in God as the source of all selfhood. The new mind is the compassionate mind precisely because in it other people and no longer ‘over there’ and hence difficult to reach, but they are with us in God...We are one before we are many; we are united before we are divided. It is this oneness, this unity that we need to uncover, affirm and celebrate. The good news is that the same God who created and redeemed me also created and redeemed my fellow human beings. We are not strangers to each other; we all have our being from the same God, who gave us life out of love. We indeed are bound together by the same love.”⁴

⁴ S. E. Berry notes on Compassion, by Henri Nouwen, 1977

It is this unity we seek at the beginning of the 21st Century. It is a new consciousness, a new mind in Christ, by whatever name people want to call it. This new way of thinking, this new mind is a calling forth to reestablish the covenantal relationship of Whole to part and part to Whole. It alone is the thinking and acting that can create a sustainable, hopeful and joyful future for us all.

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