

Beyond Ecological Security: Intimacy and Risk.  
*Imago Dei* as a Theological Resource for a More Creative Encounter with the Earth.\*

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Part I: Introduction.

Increasingly ecological security is recognized as a fundamental aspect of both national and global security.<sup>1</sup> Military assaults inevitably become ecological assaults; indeed, even without the active use of weapons, the arms race impoverishes and kills not only people but ecosystems. Conversely, environmental degradation produces environmental refugees and can even itself precipitate military conflict. Thus, peace among nations today is an illusory pursuit unless it explicitly includes peace with the earth as well (McFague 116-117; Ruether 102-111).<sup>2</sup> Further, ecological security--or the lack thereof--is undeniably linked to issues of cosmology and religious values. Even today religion continues, consciously or merely culturally, to shape at the most primal level the way we see ourselves placed in the world (Rasmussen 173-179; Hall 14-18). Thus, a religious perspective on ecological security has an important contribution to make at a conference on "Religion, War, and Peace."

My particular perspective is *Christian*. This is not because I think Christianity has the only or even the best insights into ecological security, but simply because it is the tradition that I know best, the one to which I hold myself accountable, and the one for which I claim a share of responsibility. In fact, charges abound of a specifically Christian complicity, even conspiracy, some would say, in the eco-crisis,<sup>3</sup> but today my intent is neither to indict nor to exonerate the Christian tradition. It is simply to argue that within this tradition, despite its often ambiguous and at times disastrous heritage of regard for the material world, we do find powerful resources able to help us encounter the earth in a new, more positive manner. I will do this by exploring a single theological theme, that of *imago Dei*,<sup>4</sup> which creatively informs--and, I believe, ultimately calls us to recast--the whole paradigm of ecological security. I will conclude by suggesting some implications of this for communities of faith and learning.

Succinctly stated my thesis is this: By reclaiming an authentic understanding of *imago Dei*--the notion that somehow we humans *are* in the image of God--we can find a self-understanding rich with new opportunities for engaging the earth, opportunities that can be characterized as an ecological ethic grounded in intimacy and risk.

Part II: *Imago Dei* as a theological resource.

A great many biblical and/or theological themes have been developed in recent years by Christians concerned with the environment.<sup>5</sup> Without discounting the important contributions of these varied efforts I choose to focus on *imago Dei* for two reasons.<sup>6</sup>

First, the ecological crisis is fundamentally a crisis of self-concept; it has less to do with how we see the world around us than with *how we see ourselves* (Hall 5-13). Certainly we need to learn to see the world in a very different way, but how we regard and treat the world follows directly from how we see ourselves.<sup>7</sup> And religious traditions remain paramount among the many influences that shape our self-concept. They offer

us a vision of authentic humanity that serves as a sort of anthropological compass (Hall 14-19). Thus, I begin with a theological theme central to how we fashion our self-concept.

Second, within the Christian tradition, from its introduction in Genesis to its christological interpretation by Paul in the new Testament, no biblical concept can rival *imago Dei* for its evocative power in the project of constructing human self-identity (Hall 19-20)--though not always with positive results! In fact, seeing ourselves as *imago Dei*--under a vastly mistaken sense of this, I would argue--has had often devastating consequences for a world not sufficiently resilient amidst our 'divine' pillaging (Moltmann 303-304; Hall 16).<sup>8</sup> If the Christian tradition is to refashion a sense of what it means to be human vis-a-vis the earth, we cannot avoid asking the more basic question of what it means to be *imago Dei*.<sup>9</sup>

For these reasons I believe that *imago Dei* is a fruitful place from which to begin theological reflections that lay the framework for a Christian approach to ecological security. Turning to this concept itself, I want to highlight two motifs--intimacy and risk--that are central to how *imago Dei* can shape an eco-friendly Christian anthropology.<sup>10</sup>

### Part III: *Imago Dei* as Intimacy and Risk.

*Imago Dei*, as a foundational symbol for Christian anthropology implies an ethic grounded in intimacy; it suggests an understanding of human self-hood that is contingent on relatedness to others. To live in the image of God is to live *intimately* with God, with one another, and with creation.

Central to this thesis is the conviction that *imago Dei* is a *quality of relationship to God* rather than an attribute which we possess making us *like God*. In the Hebraic tradition in which the term is first used, to name humans *imago Dei* affirmed a fundamentally relational quality to our existence (Hall 66-75).<sup>11</sup> It is precisely *not* linked to our capacity to think or speak or fashion tools--or any other attribute that we possess and are able to use independently, according to our own often ill-chosen pursuits. This is not to deny the importance of these attributes to who we are and how we assume our place in the world, but it is to insist on setting them in the service of a living relationship with God; they are means to an end only (Hall 98, 107). Thus *imago Dei* is characteristic of our living *only as we live well*; only then do we image God (Hall 107).<sup>12</sup> The import of this for eco-theology is that it reclaims *imago Dei* from those who would consider it a theological "blank check," a gift once given and now at our free disposal. Instead, this relational understanding posits God as providing the defining character of our *imago Dei*. Because of this, *imago Dei* has an intrinsically ethical character to it; it is not something we *have*, but something we *do*, it is *the practice of intimacy with God*, living in such a way that our lives reflect or *image* the divine life (Hall 104-105). Further, it is the subject of decidedly 'practical' knowledge. That is, we come to understand *imago Dei* only as we live into it; it is knowledge gained by doing (Hall 80-86).

For Christians, fundamentally that divine life we seek to image is love (Hall 113-123).<sup>13</sup> Indeed, one might argue that the doctrine of the Trinity, behind all its assorted endeavors to say something metaphysically profound about the nature of God, is finally the simple attempt to name God's being as "being-with"--that is, as being which is intrinsically intimate, being which is essentially and freely "being-for," that is, an existence which *is* Love (Hall 120).<sup>14</sup>

That these qualities of "being-with" and "being-for" should find expression in the very structure of the cosmos--from theories about the big bang to the intricacies of an ecosystem to the paradoxes of particle physics--all of this should come as no surprise to Christians who confess that ultimately all creation has its source in a fundamentally

social God (Hall 120; Moltmann 306). Science tells us today the *fact* of a universe intrinsically social in its material character, but Christians affirm the *truth* that matter itself is built upon intimacy because the cosmos echoes in its very structure the divine voice which brought it into being.<sup>15</sup>

It is this same divine quality of "being-with" and "being-for" that shapes the ethical character of our lives. Like all material creation, we exist in intimacy. But as creatures of freedom, we exist either denying or affirming this fundamental truth. To live *imago Dei* our "being-with" must be confirmed by a choice for "being-for" (Hall 127-128).<sup>16</sup> Thus, we image God only as we love (Hall 122; Moltmann 306). We have a long tradition of understanding and aspiring to this with respect to God and our human neighbors, but we have too long ignored its importance for our relationship with nonhuman creation, despite the deep Biblical tradition of God's loving concern for all of creation (Hall 123-127).<sup>17</sup>

Finally and most concretely, intimacy is revealed as a core character of true humanity in the ministry of Jesus who is named in the Christian tradition as the perfect exemplar of *imago Dei* (Hall 76-87).<sup>18</sup> Jesus' practice of parables, healings, exorcisms, and inclusive table fellowship all evidence a commitment to restoring the possibility--indeed creating the reality of intimacy (McFague 163-170).<sup>19</sup> If the early church was able to so emphasize the message that Jesus in some way *spiritually* reconciles us to intimacy with God--to the point of eclipsing for future generations the equal commitment to material intimacy with others--it was, at least in part, because this theme of material intimacy rang so loud and clear throughout the entire course of his ministry that it could be safely taken for granted.

To summarize thus far: *Imago Dei*, as a foundational symbol for Christian anthropology implies an ethic guided by the goal of intimacy. To live in the image of God is to live *intimately* with God, with one another, and with creation. However, and here I turn to my second motif, to do this, to encounter the earth *intimately* inevitably involves risk--and this from a number of angles.

First, to pursue intimacy with creation is to affirm that somehow creation stands before us as a Thou, not an It. Intimacy presumes a *mutual* subjectivity--it requires that we live open to a future that we share *with* creation, not one that we dictate *for* creation. Intimacy is a joy that can only be tasted in the midst of real openness to the other, that is, in the midst of risk.

Second, intimacy *with* the earth presumes a willingness to practice some measure of sacrifice *for* the earth (Hall 195-198; Bratton 19-24).<sup>20</sup> Of course, to speak of sacrifice on behalf of nature immediately raises eyebrows--or more likely elicits frowns. So let me be clear: I am not suggesting an ethic that exhorts Christians to lay down their lives for whales and such (though I am equally hesitant to dismiss out of hand the potential holiness of such acts).<sup>21</sup> But intimacy grounded in love, that is, intimacy which flows from life *imago Dei*, will surely be shaped in part--and to no small extent--by the needs of the other. This suggests a pattern of relating to creation independent of (or at least not driven solely by) material balance sheets and a preoccupation with profits. It suggests that dispositions of patience, nurturance, and even prodigal care-giving without any hope of repayment of any kind ought to be among our *normative* and not merely our eccentric responses to the world (Bratton 23).<sup>22</sup>

Finally, this motif of risk offers an essential paradigm for any ethics that seeks to respond to the eco-crisis. Too often because of the enormity of the crisis before us, the apparent paucity of our numbers (i.e., in our society, most often we see ourselves as a community of one), and the seeming inadequacy of any single possible response-----we do nothing. We frame the question of responsible action within parameters of an "ethic of control" (Welch 23-29).<sup>23</sup> If we cannot control with a high degree of certainty

the outcome of our actions we relieve ourselves of responsibility to act. We do not require of ourselves ethics as a matter of risk. But the social character of reality itself, the theological insight offered by our understanding of *imago Dei*, and the scope of the present crisis in creation all suggest that it is time for us to do otherwise.

Any responsible action that addresses the eco-crisis will be inevitably incomplete--and thus offered in the risk *and the hope*--that others among our contemporaries of the present or in the future will build upon the choices we make and carry them further.<sup>24</sup> Such efforts can be realistic because we need not accomplish everything ourselves; we need only act in ways that maintain or enlarge the range of creative choices for those who act alongside us or come after us. Such efforts can be idealistic because to live *imago Dei* is to act in the welcome awareness that interdependent ethical responsibility is inherent in the best of our destined humanity. Indeed, such efforts manifest the intimacy with one another to which we are divinely called.

#### Part IV: Conclusions.

Thus, *imago Dei* has a clear contribution to make, and at the foundational level, for a Christian approach to ecological security. It decisively shapes the anthropology which frames all subsequent discussion. It suggests an ethic marked by the pursuit of intimacy and guided by a paradigm of risk. In terms of shaping a specifically Christian vision of ecological security, *imago Dei* suggests at least the following:

Such a vision *cannot* mean the safeguarding of limited resources necessary to *our* way of life independent of the interests and needs of other members of the global human community. And such a vision *cannot* mean the anthropocentric pursuit of sustainable life, even for the entire human community, in a way that values non-human creation only as a means to our ends.<sup>25</sup>

An ethic shaped by this understanding of *imago Dei* says that neither of these is nearly enough; what we need *theologically* is a conceptual language which carries us beyond self-interest, whether nationally or humanly--and does so both in theory and in practical commitment. We need a whole new paradigm, or, rather, a vital reclaiming of an old paradigm: a way to make the discomfiting claim that we secure life by losing it--or, at least by sharing it.<sup>26</sup> *Imago Dei* is a resource, too long neglected or misused, that can lead us in this direction.

As such, an ethic characterized by intimacy and risk tends to subvert the very idea of security as often understood. It suggests the pursuit of *vulnerability* (Soelle 4-8, 16-22). It is the claim, made not with mere rhetoric but with daring *praxis*, that real security is never achieved by hegemony but by solidarity, that the pursuit of security by means of heightened independence is *not* a path to a more secure life but a path to more certain death. It is the lived conviction that only as we seek to deepen the relatedness of our own lives do we correspond more closely to true reality as intended by God.

#### Part V: Intimacy and risk: challenges and implications.

Although it has been important to spend the bulk of this paper making the argument that religion, in this case, Christianity, offers essential insight into the concept and pursuit of ecological security, I am keenly aware that simply making the argument is not enough. That *imago Dei* might creatively revitalize and redirect the energies of the church is a point of theoretical merit; that it actually begins to do so is a matter of some practical urgency. Therefore, I conclude with a brief agenda for action. My thoughts here are hardly sufficient, but they offer at least a beginning--and a clear acknowledgment of the work needing yet to be done.

I will be decidedly short on details because *imago Dei*, as a quality of relationship, is a sort of practical knowledge (Hall 80-86). It doesn't lend itself to detailed plans of action. It is an ethic that must be learned in the doing, by the simple disciplined practice of relationship. Nonetheless, I will try to highlight here, without claiming to do so exhaustively, what I see as the central challenges and implications involved in practically employing *imago Dei* as a theological resource for a more creative encounter with the earth.

First, let me speak with reference to the church itself, the community of Christians for whom *imago Dei* already holds primary symbolic status. Foremost here is the challenge to the church to increase substantially the biblical and theological literacy of its members. *Imago Dei* as an ethical principle can bear no practical fruit among persons who share an uninformed--or, more often, a misinformed--understanding of this core anthropological claim.<sup>27</sup> Also, the church must take responsibility for some minimal level of scientific literacy on the part of its members. If Christianity is to be engaged with ecological concerns--or any contemporary social concerns, for that matter--it is incumbent on the church to equip its members with the knowledge to engage these issues with a degree of responsible sophistication.<sup>28</sup> Finally, in line with this conviction that the church must marshal more effectively both the resources of its own tradition and those of modern science, a deepened affirmation of the Pauline concept of the priesthood of all believers is required. This notion, developed by Luther to mean that every human vocation can be the arena of authentic response to the call of God, suggests that any responsible Christian ecological vision will come from an interdisciplinary conversation within the church and beyond it (as exemplified in the model of this conference).<sup>29</sup> These ideas offer only the barest sketch of the commitments necessary to bring *imago Dei* to bear on the practical life of the church. Obviously they would manifest themselves across the whole spectrum of the church's life from liturgy and homily, to education and mission, to parish administration and personal lifestyle. Ideally, a religiously based activism for ecological security would be grounded in this entire matrix of church life, not simply in the individual embrace of a few key ideas.<sup>30</sup>

Second, as an extension of the concept of the priesthood of all believers, important places appear where the communities of church and learning stand appropriately in close partnership. For those colleges and universities formatively shaped by the Christian tradition through institutional connections and religious convictions an explicit commitment to an interdisciplinary approach to ecological issues seems warranted. Also, in many ways the worship life of campus congregations provides a forum more open than the average parish to making links between our lives as learners and as liturgists. Done well, this campus worship life can become a leaven in the church at large.<sup>31</sup> Further, church and church college communities might constructively include in conversation even colleges and universities where no formal religious ties exist, finding in them willing partners in a shared pursuit of no small intellectual and practical urgency.

Finally, I suggest that a Christian community committed to a *praxis* of life *imago Dei* with respect to the earth, may offer a model to be adapted by secular institutions. Christians, because *imago Dei* sits so prominently in their symbolic universe, have ample reason to explore its consequences for our life. As noted above, the concept of a social dimension to the universe itself finds increasing support within the scientific community. Therefore, even those who do not share the theological underpinnings of our actions may find in the creativity of our *praxis* a model of how one learns and lives meaningfully--via intimacy and risk--in an earth community sorely in need of our friendship.<sup>32</sup>

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## Notes

\*I owe a debt of gratitude to numerous persons for the insights developed here and for the manner in which I express them. Many of these ideas germinated in conversation with my students in two classes on eco-theology at the University of Notre Dame in the spring of 1996. This paper itself benefited from comments by my colleague, Stephen Scharper, and a current student of mine, Anne French. Neither is responsible for the remaining shortcomings, but both contributed significantly to the improvements made.

Also, with some embarrassment I notice that the endnotes for this paper exceed the primary text itself. By way of explanation I can only suggest that this bears witness to the interdisciplinary nature of the project as an attempt to converse on multiple levels with a diverse audience. The primary text is a complete argument in itself, and it was a condensed version of the primary text that I presented at the Wisconsin Institute (November 1, 1996). The endnotes provide additional explanations, discussions, and bibliographical references. As such they aren't essential to the paper itself, but will carry the conversation a step further, in some cases for the theologian and in others for the nontheologian.

<sup>1</sup>Noteworthy because of his present position as Vice-President of the United States, but hardly unique in his view regarding ecological security as an integral facet of national security is Albert Gore, Jr., *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1992, esp. 269-360).

<sup>2</sup>Concerning the relationship between war and the environment see also "Peace, Security, Development, and the Environment," in *Our Common Future*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, 290-307). It might further be added that peace with the earth presumes an acceptance of life within finite limits. The utopian dream of an era of abundant technological goods for all is a vision of implicit ecocide; it presupposes a lifestyle which the earth itself simply cannot support. Thus, McFague defines sin as "the refusal to accept our place" (112-129). For a sustained theological treatment of this theme from an economic-ecological perspective see Sean McDonagh, *Passion for the Earth* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994). On the choice between forging an "ecozoic" rather than a "technozoic" era for the future see Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme, *The Universe Story* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992, 1-15).

<sup>3</sup>The classic statement of the charge against Christianity is by Lynn White, Jr. ("The Historic Roots of our Ecologic Crisis." *Science* 155 [1967]: 1203-1207). White's article has spawned an entire bibliography of responses. A very helpful critical overview of White and the varied responses to his thesis is Elspeth Whitney, "Lynn White, Ecotheology, and History" (*Environmental Ethics* 15 [1993]: 150-169).

<sup>4</sup>This is the conviction, found in the Priestly creation account (Genesis 1:1-2:4), that somehow we humans *are* in the image of God. Any standard introduction to the Bible will discuss the four literary sources present in the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible). Among them the Priestly tradition is the latest, dating from the latter half of the 6th century BCE after the destruction of the Temple and during the Exile. Ironically, this portrait of the human person, intended to affirm the worth of the Hebrews in the face of their powerlessness in a seemingly hostile world (Granberg-Michaelson 59), has, since the Enlightenment, become the rallying point for our arrogant attitude toward and relentless conquest of the earth (Moltmann 302-305). For a brief but well-done ecological reading of the two Genesis creation narratives through their socio-historical context see Granberg-Michaelson (59-67).

<sup>5</sup>Among the many eco-theologies at present one might identify the sacramental or creation-centered approach, the process or eschatological approach, and the Christian eco-feminist approach. These are not precise distinctions. Most of the authors noted below show features that overlap my categories, and even within these categories differing methodologies abound. I offer them only as a cautious attempt to organize these diverse approaches according to some of their prevailing emphases.

Broadly speaking, creation-centered eco-theology calls for a new understanding of creation as the material and good locus of God's activity. Central themes include (a) the cosmos as sacrament capable of embodying God; (b) the material/relational/ecological dimensions of sin--and

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resurrection; (c) the importance of scientific literacy as a theological prerequisite; and (d) an affirmation of the goodness of our earthboundness. See Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988); Berry with Thomas Clarke, *Befriending the Earth: A Theology of Reconciliation Between Humans and the Earth* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-third Publications, 1991); Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ: The Healing of Mother Earth and the Birth of a Global Renaissance* (San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1989) and *Creation Spirituality: Liberating Gifts for the Peoples of the Earth* (San Francisco, HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

Although seldom closely allied in method, the eco-theology that proceeds from an eschatological impulse and that driven by a philosophical tradition of process thought share a great deal of common content. In both cases the ethical imperative is rooted in the claim of the future upon the present. For some process thinkers like Cobb, Haught, and McDaniel the future lays claim to the present because it stands as the locus of God's promised activity. For more biblically rooted persons in this group, like Kehm, Moltmann, and Santmire, the future expresses its claim on us via the Sabbath or other eschatological imagery. See John B. Cobb, Jr. and Charles Birch, *The Liberation of Life: From the Cell to the Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); John F. Haught, *The Promise of Nature: Ecology and Cosmic Purpose* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993); Jay B. McDaniel, *Of God and Pelicans: A Theology of Reverence for Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989); George Kehm, "The New Story: Redemption as Fulfillment of Creation" (*After Nature's Revolt: Eco Justice and Theology*. Ed. Dieter T. Hessel. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, 89-107); Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1989, esp. 276-296); H. Paul Santmire, "The Future of the Cosmos and the Renewal of the Church's Life with Nature" (*Cosmos as Creation: Theology and Science in Consonance*. Ed. Ted Peters. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989, 265-282).

While sharing affinities with both of the first two groups, feminist theologians bring a perspective of analysis uniquely their own. See McFague and Ruether and Johnson.

<sup>6</sup>And while Hall does not say so, it seems quite possible, though beyond the scope of my work here, to set many of the themes of sacramental, eschatological, and feminist eco-theology as aspects of an *imago Dei*-based eco-theology in a way which cannot be claimed reciprocally.

<sup>7</sup>See Rasmussen for an interesting discussion of the nuanced interrelationship between anthropologies and cosmologies.

<sup>8</sup>The same argument, though with reference to a distorted understanding of "dominion," is made by Steffen (73-77).

<sup>9</sup>There are many metaphors by which the Judaeo-Christian tradition has sought to define humanity (steward, servant, priest, and king, come to mind), but none has the metaphysical, even mystical character of *imago Dei*. On the unique quality of *imago Dei* as symbol, see Hall (62-66). Indeed, if the corruption of the concept of *imago Dei* has been the unwitting means by which this symbol has become the driving force toward a humanity alienated from and standing as adversary against the earth, then perhaps its redemption from atomistic and dualistic influences and subsequent alliance with contemporary insights from theology, ecology, and science can afford us much needed new options in pursuit of rapprochement with the earth. This is Hall's basic thesis, as also the implication of the articles by both Moltmann and Rasmussen.

<sup>10</sup>In my discussion of *imago Dei* and its relevance for eco-theology I am deeply indebted to the work of Hall. Though my development of this theme moves beyond Hall or deviates from him in a few places, his mark on my thinking should be evident throughout. Of the two motifs I use to organize my work, "intimacy" is adapted from Soelle, and "risk" is adapted from Welch and Bratton.

<sup>11</sup>Steffen makes the same argument, again using the concept of "dominion" as his reference point (66-74).

<sup>12</sup>Classic Reformation rhetoric, with a thoroughly theological anthropology, suggests that to the extent we image God we *are human*; to the extent that we fail to image God we are not just a bit less human--we are *utterly inhuman*. Certainly, neither Hall, nor the Reformers, meant that failing to image God makes us scientifically or biologically other than human. Nor do they suggest that such failure means the loss of our free will or reason; they simply assert that no such capacity was ever the locus of our *imago Dei* in the first place (Hall 100-108). But the point, which bears

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pressing, even in stretching language to such extreme expressions, is that our created destiny as humans, to image God, is not a quantitative affair. It is not something we do on a scale of 1 to 10. It is, to borrow a phrase from Kierkegaard, a matter of either/or.

<sup>13</sup>As became apparent in the dialogue following my presentation at the Wisconsin Institute, this is by no means an obvious assertion to many outside the realm of formal biblical/theological training. Many of us were raised with a quite different notion of God, often shaped by categories of power, knowledge, and judgment (indeed these notions play directly into the eco-crisis [Moltmann 303-304]). It lies beyond the scope of this paper to dismantle these deeply ingrained (and, I maintain, caricatured) portraits of God. For a sense of the God I believe the biblical tradition does bear witness to see Joseph Sittler, *The Structure of Christian Ethics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958, 24-33) where he briefly recounts the biblical story of what he calls "God's relentless gift of himself in steadfast love." For a more popular but still well-drawn account (intended as a parish resource), see Daniel Erlander, *Manna and Mercy: A Brief History of God's Unfolding Promise to Mend the Entire Universe* (Minneapolis: Augsburg-Fortress Press, 1992).

<sup>14</sup>In this respect, the notion of triune existence means that God can be in relationship, in outward movement toward an other, without becoming dependent on the existence of a non-divine other. God alone can be love all by Godself, because only God's self has an otherness intrinsic to itself.

<sup>15</sup>For discussions that make this point by more detailed references to the scientific narrative of the cosmos, see Johnson (32-40), Ruether (41-58), and Denis Edwards, *Creation, Humanity, Community* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd., 1992).

<sup>16</sup>Soelle suggests that real security is a function of intimacy or vulnerability, because only thus do we affirm our true inter-relatedness (4-8, 16-22). In a similar vein, though a different context, agricultural theologian-poet Wendell Berry declares, "Conviviality is healing" (*The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1977).

<sup>17</sup>For an excellent brief review of this tradition, and its use as the ground for an environmental ethic, see Bratton (6-9). She concludes her review by stating, "In summary, we find, as with humans, divine love extends to nonhuman creation in blessing, providence, covenant, the work of the Spirit, redemption, and (in Romans 8) freedom from the oppression of sin. There are no more important vehicles of agape or covenant love than these" (9). Also, Steffen argues that dominion, rightly realized, is the expression of this love (64-71). He places dominion in the larger biblical context of God's plan for shalom among creation, concluding that it is a matter of *relationship with* rather than *power over* creation.

<sup>18</sup>The central Pauline references are Colossians 1:15-20 and 3:9-15, Romans 8:28-30, I Corinthians 15:47-49, II Corinthians 4:4-6, Philippians 2:5-11, and Hebrews 1:1-4.

<sup>19</sup>This is one of the key movements in McFague's "christic paradigm," developed with respect to an environmental ethic on pages 186-190. It is also a central theme in most efforts to reconstruct a portrait of the historical Jesus. On this see Marcus Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision: Spirit, Culture and the Life of Discipleship* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1987); John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1987); and Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987).

<sup>20</sup>Such a willingness to sacrifice, to place limits on one's self on behalf of the other is essential in any authentic love relationship. Here again, Jesus is the expression of this *par excellence*--but not, I would argue, in the simple fact of his death; rather it is the motive behind his death, the refusal to break solidarity with the weak that defines his death sacrificially. It is his considered commitment to the weak and his willing decision to bear the costs.

Feminists have voiced a number of very legitimate concerns regarding *agape* as an often disempowering value for women in a patriarchal society. For a constructive attempt to place the sacrificial character of *agape* in a larger context of *agape* as mutuality see Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, "Agape in Feminist Ethics" (*Feminist Theological Ethics*. Ed. Lois K. Daly. Nashville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994, 146-159).



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Of indirect but related interest to this motif of risk and sacrifice is the Jewish tradition that the very act of creation itself rests on God's sacrificial self-limitation, God's withdrawing in some paradoxical fashion to make room for the cosmos. See Joel R. Primack and Nancy Ellen Abrams, "'In a Beginning' Quantum Cosmology and Kabbalah" (*Tikkun* 10 [1995]: 66-73, at p. 72).

<sup>21</sup>The leap to such extreme examples often merely distracts us from serious consideration of the more mundane sacrifices that do deserve our immediate attention--and may well enable us to imagine greater sacrifices later on. Thus, even Jesus sacrifice on the cross needs to be set in the context of his life of ministry. The cross was the concluding event at the end of a long path of increasing commitment to solidarity. In a similar fashion, to use the extreme case to distract attention from the mundane prevents one from ever doing the small things that may well prepare one for sacrifices previously unimaginable. On the issue of sacrifice for nature see Bratton (22-24); regarding the impact of a disciplined *praxis* of modest actions in expanding the "horizon of hope," see Welch (75-81, 110).

On the other hand, there may be positive merit in extreme examples as they provide us with a sort of prophetic incarnation of the ideals to which we are called to orient ourselves. I was reminded of this important possibility in conversation with Gary Boelhower following my Institute presentation. For a discussion that sets this possibility in the context of the church's corporate response to the eco-crisis, see John B. Cobb, Jr., *Sustainability: Economics, Ecology, and Justice* (Marttyknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992, 12-19).

<sup>22</sup>Still, it is worth emphasizing that because this sacrificial dimension occurs *imago Dei*, the sacrifice is not accurately portrayed as a sacrifice of the self to nature; it is more properly described as a sacrifice of the self to God (Bratton 23), a pursuit of life so wholly *imago Dei* as to become "transparent to," or "superconductive of" the activity of God. Thus, Christian self-sacrifice refers most directly to the submission of our wills to the divine will and only indirectly to the varied expressions this finds as it is shaped by the needs of the other. Søren Kierkegaard, throughout *Works of Love*, develops eloquently and at length the notion of God as the "middle term" in every movement of love (New York: Harper & Row, 1962 [orig. 1847], e.g. page 70).

<sup>23</sup>The following discussion is shaped largely by Welch. She argues (with respect to the arms race) that it is more constructive to frame certain moral issues under the rubric of "risk" rather than "control" (security), because they are, by their nature, scale, or context, beyond the scope of a single person's--or generation's--moral effort. Elsewhere I might argue at length that this preference for an ethic of control is in direct conflict with the intimacy of existence as lived *imago Dei*. It is born of the desire to find moral meaning independent of others (or only in very homogeneous groups), as a project entirely within our control. Mythically, it is the desire to hold the knowledge of good and evil in our own hands like a piece of forbidden fruit (cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* [New York: Macmillan, 1955 (orig. 1949)], 17-20; and Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics II.2: The Doctrine of God* [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957], 516-518).

<sup>24</sup>In a roughly analogous sense, one might see the Incarnation and Passion, as well as the persevering presence of the Spirit in the long and far from ideal history of the church, as evidencing God's *praxis* of divine risk--as God's willingness to enter into the future as a joint and risky venture with humanity.

<sup>25</sup>In this meaning, "security" too easily implies a humanity distinct from the earth or at the top of an ecosystem that is better understood--not only scientifically, but also *theologically and ethically*--as a web.

<sup>26</sup>A number of eco-theologians, among them Berry (131-135), Haught (135-142), McFague (176-177), and Ruether (247-253) (as well as Welch [162-172] in a non-ecological context) all suggest the need to develop extended senses of the self, ways to conceive of interests larger than our own personal interests as part of a shared "personal-cosmic" interest. This is not portrayed as a simple extension of self-interest, an exercise in seeing how all things work to *our* benefit, but rather as a radical relativizing of the self. It is born of a respect for the subjectivity of the universe as a whole and the legitimate inter-subjectivity of its diverse members.

<sup>27</sup>Whether this is more likely to happen top-down or bottom-up is a tough question. Much of the laity seems quite content with their relative ignorance on matters biblical and theological, while much of the clergy seems equally satisfied with adult educational fare that 'fills the belly'

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without really nourishing the mind. These efforts, no less than eco-activism itself, will be guided of necessity by an ethic of risk; i.e., wherever and whenever possible small networks of persons, both lay and clergy, will need to find ways to explore the richness of their heritage together, risking that others will benefit from their small initiatives. Although I welcome whatever resources the institutional churches offer toward this task, it remains clear to me that what is ultimately decisive is not the bureaucratic machinations of the church (however well-intentioned) but the willingness of persons to respond to call of the Spirit. The only concrete guidance I can offer is, as noted above, that any facilitation gained regarding *imago Dei* will come as a matter of practical knowledge; book learning must be paired with hands-on doing.

<sup>28</sup>This is *not* an "add-on" to the church's work; it is a fundamental theological task. See Hall, "On Contextuality in Christian Theology" (*Toronto Journal of Theology* 1 [1985]: 3-16) and "Who Tells the World's Story? Theology's Quest for a Partner in Dialogue" (*Interpretation* 36 [1982]: 47-53). Also, cf. Thomas Berry's lament that theologians are utterly unprepared for the hermeneutical task of interpreting the claim by Jesus that "I am the way and the life" if they remain "unaware of the dynamics of cell division, of genetic language, of the elegance of photosynthesis" (noted by Brian Swimme, "Science: A Partner in Creating the Vision" [*Thomas Berry and the New Cosmology*. Ed. Anne Lonergan and Caroline Richards. Mystic, CT: Twenty-third Publications, 1987, 81-90, at 83-84]).

<sup>29</sup>Steffen suggests that dominion, properly understood as establishing and upholding harmony within creation, opens Christianity to new ecological dialogue with other faith traditions, especially to Eastern and Native American traditions (79).

<sup>30</sup>Again I must acknowledge a certain institutional pessimism, balanced by the conviction that though the whole spectrum of the church's life may become so invigorated only rarely or within "remnant" groups at the margins of the institution, the possibility of a certain leavening effect is reason enough to have hope.

<sup>31</sup>In this sense, the church college is perhaps the most important *seminary* in the church-- disseminating not clerics but worker-priests in the very best tradition, that is, persons with diverse training and career goals, but formed by an integrating Christian vision of life. (Indeed, perhaps "seminary" is not the best word, given its patriarchal baggage; maybe the church college as "vocational birthing center" is better.)

<sup>32</sup>Of course, one could go on at some length suggesting less direct implications. A church living *imago Dei* would find the rest of its own life equally impacted as it discerned, via themes of intimacy and risk, its ministry goals in areas as diverse as taking a public stance on national security concerns and developing a strategy of inner city outreach. On a secular level, one might hope that the church's experiment with intimacy and risk as grounds of authentic ecological security could offer a similar critique of the paradigms underlying most national and global security decisions, as well as suggesting new ways to envision local law enforcement options. Certainly, such alternative visions already exist, albeit as minority viewpoints. If the church offers a unique vantage point it is in the humble deployment of its, thus far underdeveloped, symbolic resources to evoke a response at something more than the intellectual level.

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