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Gaia Spirituality

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Gaia spirituality: a Christian critique

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We are witnessing the emergence of a new metaphor for the earth and our relationship to it: that is, the picture of the planet as a self-organizing, self-regulating and, to some degree, a self-conscious entity. Many refer to that entity as sacred, and call it by the name of 'Gaia', ancient Greek goddess of the earth.

The idea of Gaia, the sacred earth, was particularly evident at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992. And increasingly, 'Gaia' thinking provides a framework for both political and religious discussion. Politically, because it seems to provide a biological rationale for 'thinking globally'; religiously, because the idea seems to fit both with Eastern monism (the idea that all is one) and with various kinds of New and Old World paganism.

I am going to discuss three of the dimensions of Gaia thought — scientific, religious, and feminist — and then suggest some of the ways Christians might respond to this complex and important idea.

The science of 'Gaia'

The Gaia hypothesis is first of all a serious scientific theory, suggested in the mid '70s in several papers by James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis, and seriously set forth in 1979 by Lovelock in his book *Gaia: A New Look at Life.* A mark of the seriousness with which the theory has been taken is that the American Geophysical Union, an international association of geologists and geochemists, devoted its entire 1988 conference to discussion of the idea. At that meeting, though the idea received vigorous criticism, it received equally vigorous support, and continues as a fertile hypothesis linking the concerns of those who study the earth with the concerns of those who study its life.

In Lovelock's words, the Gaia hypothesis states that 'the biosphere is a self-regulating entity with the capacity to keep our planet healthy by controlling the chemical and physical environment'.[1] Lynn Margulis, the 'mother' of the theory, summed it up with admirable precision for that 1988 conference. In her words:

> The Gaia Hypothesis states that the Earth's surface conditions are regulated by the activities of life. Specifically, the Earth's atmosphere is maintained far from chemical equilibrium with respect to its composition of reactive gases, oxidation-reduction state, alkalinity–acidity, albedo, and temperature. This environmental maintenance is effected by the growth and metabolic activities of the sum of the organisms, *i.e.*, the biota. The hypothesis implies that were life to be eliminated, the surface conditions on earth would revert to those interpolated for a planet between Mars and Venus. Although the detailed mechanisms of Earth surface control are poorly understood, they must involve interactions between approximately thirty million species of organisms.[2]

James Lovelock was working for NASA in the early '60s when he stumbled on the foundation of the Gaia idea. He was involved in designing the experiments which would test the Martian soil and atmosphere for signs of life. His conclusion — before the *Viking* spacecraft ever set out — was that even an earthbound analysis of the Martian atmosphere precludes the likelihood of life there. For it (like the atmosphere of Venus) is in a state of chemical equilibrium. All of the possible chemical reactions have already taken place. In particular, there is little free oxygen: it already exists in stable combination with other elements, particularly carbon — hence the very high (95%) CO_2 content. On the other hand, observes Lovelock:

> The earth, our living Earth, is quite anomalous; its atmosphere has the reducing gases and oxidizing gases all coexisting — and this is a most unstable situation. It is almost as if we were breathing the sort of air which is the premixed gas that goes into a furnace or into an internal combustion engine. Ours is a really strange planet.[3]

His conclusion: the gases of the earth's atmosphere *are* 'pre-mixed' — by living things themselves — in order to sustain life.

Apart from pointing out the earth's weird atmospheric chemistry, Lovelock makes his point in many ways. The most significant of these is evidence that, though the sun's radiation output has increased by some 30% over the time of life on the planet, the earth's surface temperature has remained roughly the same over that same period. Manipulated by living things, the unstable chemistry of the earth's atmosphere has provided a stable environment. Thus the planet seems to function as a single living entity, to which Lovelock (at the suggestion of his neighbour, novelist William Golding) gave the name 'Gaia'.

Lovelock's analysis of planetary atmosphere provides the most dramatic evidence for the theory of planetary self-regulation, but the work of Lynn Margulis, a microbiologist, has furnished a clearer indication of the process. Margulis was an early champion of the idea — now largely accepted — that the components of the cell were once independently existing bacteria which are co-operating for survival. This principal of symbiosis on the microbial level is evident not only in the cell. Margulis' conclusions are based largely on extensive research into the functioning of symbiotic bacterial systems — such as the mats of different kinds of algae that form on saline lakes and work together to create a livable environment for each of them. The result has been the discovery of a principle of co-operation for the benefit of the whole which Margulis and Lovelock have extended to the whole planet.

The science of the Gaia hypothesis thus comes from the very large and the very small: at the large end, the atmosphere of the whole planet is constituted in a way which strongly indicates that its mixture of gases is being maintained 'artificially' by living things themselves. And at the small end, we find in every living cell evidence of mutually beneficial co-operation for the control of the environment. At the planetary end we see a planet which is regulated; at the cellular end we see mechanisms of symbiosis which show how such environment-preserving regulation can take place.

A variety of consequences and controversies has resulted from the scientific Gaia theory. Here are a few of them.

1. Certainly one of the largest consequences of the idea is a growing public awareness of the chemistry of the atmosphere, and how it is maintained. Thus, the idea of the tropical rainforest as 'the lungs of the planet', an awareness of the 'greenhouse effect', and a concern for the effect of CFC gases on the ozone layer are all direct or indirect consequences of the Lovelock/Margulis hypothesis of a dynamic interrelationship between life and the planet where it finds itself. There are few examples in recent history of a scientific idea invading popular culture with such pervasive force.

2. A controversial aspect of the Gaia hypothesis is ironic: it is the idea that Gaia can take care of herself. As Lewis Thomas (who

was an early – and continuing – supporter of the hypothesis) puts it:

> . . . it is illusion to think there is anything fragile about the life of the earth; surely this is the toughest membrane imaginable in the universe, opaque to probability, impermeable to death. We are the delicate part, transient and vulnerable as cilia.[4]

Such a conviction of life's toughness is not entirely welcome to everyone in the environmental movement, some of whom have spoken as though current environmental crises threaten the very existence of life on the planet. Central to the scientific Gaia idea, however, is evidence that it thrives on crisis, which speeds up the evolutionary process of adaptation. Both Lovelock and Margulis are regularly accused of being too sanguine about the ability of the earth to absorb any and all environmental deprivation.

3. Another of the controversies accompanying the Gaia theory is endemic in the words used to discuss it. Its defenders find it easy to slip into language which seems to attribute purpose or intention to the planet-sized entity 'Gaia': 'Gaia adjusts . . . adapts . . . compensates . . .', *etc.* It is quite possible to avoid such implication of intention (we regularly use such words about organisms and ecosystems). But the Gaia hypothesis brings to the surface a teleological oddness central to evolutionary theory. How can the random, purposeless processes which are said to underlie the process of evolution achieve such exquisitely purposeful results? This argument has been going on for a long time; the Gaia hypothesis simply brings it to a focus. Careful proponents of the hypothesis are careful to avoid language of purpose and intent. But it is very difficult, even for them. In the preface to the second (1987) edition of his book, Lovelock says, 'Occasionally it has been difficult, without excessive circumlocution, to avoid talking of Gaia as if she were known to be sentient. This is meant no more seriously than is the appellation "she" when given to a ship by those who sail in her.'[5]

But for the less careful culture at large, the idea of the sentience of Gaia has proved to be irresistible, hence the massive religious dimension of the Gaia concept.

4. This leads me to a final consequence of the theory. The scientific Gaia hypothesis has been overwhelmed by the sheer poetic and religious power of the idea. Anticipating such overtones, Lovelock was at first reluctant to give the name of the goddess 'Gaia' to the planetary organism he was describing. Margulis has been more outspoken: 'The religious overtones of Gaia make me sick', she said in 1986. But despite these misgivings by the 'parents' of the hypothesis, an extraordinarily potent idea has been unleashed. As anthropologist Mary Catherine Bteson puts it, 'Gaia is the supersystem. . . . It is intellectually irresistible.'

So while scientists continue to debate the details of the scientific Gaia hypothesis, 'Gaia' has irrevocably become a part of the religious longings and language of our culture. Which takes me to the second major reason for the spread of the Gaia idea: the desperate spiritual climate of our time.

The religion of Gaia

The Global Forum in Rio was opened by a ceremony marking the arrival of a replica Viking ship, carrying messages from the world's children. The ship was named *Gaia*. And in her remarks at that opening ceremony Hanne Strong, wife of the conference organizer, Maurice, suggested that the day of the ship's arrival, Tuesday, be changed to 'Gaia-day', substituting 'Gaia', goddess of the earth, for Tiw, Norse god of war. Both Strong's suggestion and the name of the ship suggest the growing force of the name and image of 'Gaia'. And pictures of 'Gaia' from space have become, in the last couple of decades, something like a religious icon.

As a unifying religious symbol, 'Gaia' fills voids left by the very nature of modern life. One such void comes from our lack of a feeling of community, our excessive individualism. And another is our growing secularity – our determination to live as if there were no God, and hence no purpose to life other than what we give it.

The result has been the large-scale reaction sometimes called 'post-modernism'. In response to the individualism, we have looked for connections, relationships, communities. And in their response to secularization – the elimination of the sacred – many have made a determined effort in the last couple of decades to recover a spiritual dimension.

A 'Gaia' spirituality seems to meet both needs. For the toxic effects of individualism it provides a feeling of participation with all living things. For the consequences of secularization it provides the conviction that the whole which those things make up is sacred, divine. (Some add the idea that we humans are the consciousness of the earth itself – the place where the Gaian divinity becomes self-reflective.)

A good outline of the content of the new Gaia religion is contained in the one-page declaration issued by 'The Sacred Earth Conference' to UNCED (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development) participants. Many religious leaders met on the Sunday before the earth summit officially opened, and issued a declaration which includes the following statements:

> . . . The ecological crisis is a symptom of the spiritual crisis of the human being, resulting from ignorance.
>
> . . . We must therefore transform our attitudes and values, and adopt a renewed respect for the superior law of Divine Nature.
>
> . . . Individuals and governments need to evolve 'Earth Ethics' with a deeply spiritual orientation or the earth will cleanse itself of all destructive force.
>
> . . . We believe that the universe is sacred because all is one.

The last statement expresses a key premise of some sort of Gaia religion – that is, the idea that *all is one*. The notion seems to be supported by ecology in general, the study of connections between living things and their environment. John Muir, at the turn of the century, observed, 'When you try to pick out anything by itself you find it hitched to everything else on the planet'. The scientific Gaia hypothesis gives substance to that statement. It seems to justify what Aldous Huxley called 'the perennial philosophy': monism, the notion that all is one, and that separateness is only illusion.

Accompanying these post-modern pressures towards feelings of connectedness and the sacred is a pragmatic push, evident in the curious declaration that individuals and governments need to 'evolve "earth ethics" '. There is a growing realization that we need an ethical base for action – and an acknowledgment that ethics may require religion. Thus as Maurice Strong – the secretary general, guiding genius and chief visionary behind the UNCED conference – observed at the beginning of the Rio conference, 'any workable decisions made at UNCED will have to have deep moral, spiritual and ethical roots if they are to be successfully implemented'.

A religion based on Gaia, the earth goddess, seems to provide such roots. But it is a religion which grows from the leaves down, and not from the roots upward, hence the pragmatic element: it is an ethic searching for a religion. Thus it bears a curious resemblance to the institution of emperor-worship in the late-Roman empire, which was adopted because something, anything, was needed to preserve the empire. In a similar way, various Gaia-nurturing religions are being proposed today, not because they are true, but because they might help preserve the earth. We will return to this pragmatic question when we consider Christian responses. I want first to consider another major aspect of Gaian thought today: that is, its connection with feminism.

The feminism of Gaia

'Ecofeminism' as a term was first used in 1974 by French writer François d'Eaubonne. Though the term and the movement it describes is modern, some would argue that the attitude it describes is as ancient as humanity: an attitude of care and nurture which the environmental threats of our time have helped to reawaken. An important anthology of ecofeminist writing, *Reweaving the World*, is dedicated to Rachel Carson, whose *Silent Spring* is widely acknowledged as one of the first works to alert the general public to ecological problems. Many see Carson as a prototypical ecofeminist, and the dedication reflects some of the ecofeminist movement's main themes:

> Men of science have believed for hundreds of years that naming preceded owning, that owning preceded using, and that using naturally preceded using up . . . Rachel Carson thought that loving the world was what science had to be about.[6]

'It is not coincidental', say the editors of *Reweaving the World*, 'that a woman was the first to respond both emotionally and scientifically to the wanton human domination of the natural world.'

One of the most striking things about the Global Forum in Rio was the presence and voice of women. (This is still in marked contrast to UNCED itself, where debate and decisions were still made mainly by dark-suited men.) But at the non-governmental Forum, women clearly had a leading role. The importance of women in the environment/development discussion is indicated by the fact that clearly the best-organized, best-attended, and most lively of the 35 tents of the Forum was the one called simply, and significantly, 'Planeta Femea', 'Feminine Planet'. The sign behind the stage announced this as 'World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet'. Though Planeta Femea did not make abundant use of the word 'Gaia', its central symbol – an abstract painting of a woman nursing a child, in which woman and child together depicted the round earth – certainly evoked the nurturing planet goddess idea.

Here then are some of the principles of ecofeminism pertinent to understanding Gaia spirituality. We may or may not agree with them, but they have become axiomatic to many women and men, and hence a powerful support to Gaian spirituality.

1. Women are uniquely responsible for nurturing life

Perhaps the most basic and least controversial aspect of ecofeminism is a recognition that women are, both by tradition and biology, more involved in care-taking and nurturing. Women first carry children in their own body, then nourish them with their own milk. Many have noted the parallel between a woman's carrying and nursing a baby, and Gaia's supporting of its millions of interlinked species. This affirmation of a basis for nurturing in the very nature of a woman's physiology transforms an earlier feminist principle – a rejection of the Freudian notion that biology is destiny. In ecofeminism that limitation becomes something positive: an acceptance of the fact that woman's more immediate involvement in the cycles of fertility, birth and nurture give both a greater understanding of those cycles in nature, and a greater responsibility to embody such care in human institutions and practices. Indeed, 'nature' is related to the word for 'natality' and 'nativity' – giving birth.

2. Patriarchal attitudes and institutions produce environmental degradation

Along with this ecofeminist recovery of the importance of maternal care-taking has come the hypothesis that male domination – patriarchy – has been the main cause of environmental degradation. But prior to that patriarchy (so the theory goes) there flourished a primal, non-patriarchal culture which worshipped the goddess Nature. Riane Eisler describes such a culture in an article titled, significantly, 'The Gaia Tradition and the Partnership Future':

> ... this reverence for the life-giving and life-sustaining powers of the Earth was rooted in a social structure where women and 'feminine' values such as caring, compassion, and non-violence were not subordinate to men and the so-called masculine values of conquest and domination. Rather the life-giving powers incarnated in women's bodies were given the highest social value.[7]

The ecological crisis, according to this argument, is the inevitable result of the violent replacement of societies dominated by female values with war-like 'dominator' societies, characterized by male values. The most destructive of these cultures, so the argument goes, have been those rooted in Judaism and Christianity, which worship a transcendent and detached male God.

3. For its own health and that of the earth, humanity needs to recover goddess worship

The rejection of patriarchal religion is accompanied by a call to worship the goddess of nature, the earth, one of whose names is Gaia. Riane Eisler declares this need for goddess worship in a kind of manifesto:

> Let us reaffirm our ancient covenant, our sacred bond with our Mother, the goddess of nature and spirituality. Let us renounce the worship of angry gods wielding thunderbolts or swords.[8]

More important even than this assertion of Gaia's peacefulness is the notion of Gaia's proximity. The male God – specifically the Christian God – is seen as distant, aloof, detached, transcendent. Indeed, Susan Griffin calls the idea of the divine as immanent

> a concept foreign to those raised in Judeo-Christianity ... The view that we've grown up with is that the divine and matter are separate and that matter is really dangerous ... Women, being closer to the earth, listened to serpents, made people eat apples, and made them commit other sins.[9]

Thus the new feminine spirituality affirms not a transcendent God, but an immanent goddess – a goddess who *is* the earth. As Charlene Spretnak puts it:

> ... We would not have been interested in 'Yahweh with a skirt', a distant, detached, domineering godhead who happened to be female. What was cosmologically wholesome and healing was the discovery of the Divine as immanent in and around us.[10]

Indeed, the appeal of the immanent Gaia goddess is that we are a part of her. Says Starhawk, a self-proclaimed white witch and chief liturgist of ecofeminism:

> The Goddess has infinite aspects and thousands of names – She is the reality behind many metaphors. She *is* reality, the manifest deity, omnipresent in all life, in each of us. The Goddess is not separate from the world – she *is* the world, and all things in it: moon, sun, earth, star, stone, seed, flowing river, wind, wave, leaf and branch, bud and blossom, fang and claw, woman and man.[11]

Or, more to the point: 'The symbolism of the Goddess is not a parallel structure to the symbolism of God the Father. The Goddess does not rule the world; she *is* the world.'

Gaia worship thus is harmonious not only with nature magic, but also with Hinduism in its various old and new manifestations: *Atman* is *Brahman*. All is one and all is divine; separateness is illusion; go deeply into yourself and you will discover your divinity.

Some Christian responses

Christians have tended to regard this complex Gaia movement either as a train to get aboard (shedding extra theological baggage as needed) or as a satanic force to be resisted at all costs. Both attitudes were evident at the recent UN conference. Typical of the first response were the Christians who sang 'Were you there when they crucified the earth?' outside the UNCED gates, but made no mention of Christ, since the usual Christian claim to salvation only through Christ would be divisive. The inclusive spirit is caught well by Matthew Fox, whose 'cosmic Christ', he says unabashedly, is the earth itself, 'the principle which connects'. The first section of *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* could be labelled, in his words, 'The Crucifixion of Mother Earth (which is also the crucifixion of Jesus Christ)'.

There is a strong pressure on many Christians to let the inclusiveness of the Gaia hypothesis compromise their belief in the uniqueness and particularity of the incarnation. As Matthew Fox puts it:

> There is only one great underground river, though there are numerous wells into it – Buddhist wells and Taoist wells, Native American wells and Christian wells, Islamic wells and Judaic wells.[12]

One ostensibly Christian response to Gaia spirituality seems to be to regard the earth as the universal Christ, the main source of salvation and enlightenment, of which the historical Jesus is simply one manifestation. One group has published a series of 'new icons' which portray Christ in various guises – as an Apache warrior, for example, or as an East Indian woman. In one of these a female Christ points at the 'Venus of Willendorf' – now widely thought to be an early sculptural depiction of the earth goddess – and says, 'I am She – Know me better'. Not surprisingly, many Christians reject not only this response, but also *any* attempt to revalue the long-devalued earth, as a kind of pantheism – an invitation to witchcraft.

What is a more orthodox Christian response to the Gaia movement? Much wisdom has been spoken on the subject in the last few years. Let me apply some of these insights to particular features of Gaian thought.

1. On the science of Gaia

Christians should fully welcome the more thoughtful and comprehensive science which recognizes (with Lovelock) in the anomalous chemistry of the earth's atmosphere an evidence of fittedness for life which far transcends accepted notions of planetary formation. And we can only welcome also Margulis' understanding that co-operation — symbiosis — plays a much more central role in creation than does competition. The resulting picture of a harmonious creation is much more in keeping with the goodness pronounced in Genesis 1, and with the intimate particularity of the creator's care described in (for example) Psalm 104.

But Christians must continue to challenge the inconsistent and one-dimensional analysis which describes the mechanisms of biological change as though they were only random processes. Such an analysis makes the fatal error, common to reductionistic science, of conveniently bracketing out the person making the analysis. Yet it is only that person, in his or her faith, commitment and passion, which makes the explanation possible. The problem is not the evidence of gradual change and interconnection; the problem is rather a kind of analysis which robs the concept of 'evidence' of any force.

When we acknowledge the centrality of the personal consciousness, commitment and responsibility in which all science is rooted, we have no choice but to challenge the impersonal reductionism in which scientific discussion of the Gaia hypothesis is usually carried on.[14] We must challenge as well attempts by contemporary ideologues to turn evidence of Gaian interconnections into some other sort of monism, whether political, feminist, or Hindu/spiritual.

For central to the Gaia hypothesis — indeed, to any kind of science — is an inescapable duality which belies all declarations that 'all is one'. That duality is basic to consciousness, and all attempts to reject as patriarchal aberrations the feeling of separateness basic to consciousness must necessarily fail. For if one were to make a successful argument that humans were simply a part of the random cosmic process, one would have to include that argument itself as equally random, and hence not binding.

There *is* a fundamental duality, and it is between the universe and its creator. True, the more we learn about the earth the more we learn about its interconnections, as well as its connections (and our own) to the rest of the cosmos. We are made of the ashes of stars, we share DNA with all living things, we breathe the exhalations of plants. Thus we need to hear the 'new story' of the cosmos that cosmologists and biologists are telling us.

But they are *telling* it to us. Central to that story is language: which of course implies personhood, communication, by word, between selves. And the only thing which makes sense of that 'new story' is the old story we are reminded of in John's Gospel: 'In the beginning was the Word . . . Through him all things were made . . . without him nothing was made . . . The Word became flesh, and made his dwelling among us.'

For of course creation — and the Creator — is the crucial thing excluded from the Gaia hypothesis. An understanding of the Creator in a fully Trinitarian sense — the Creator Spirit described in Psalm 104; the biblical 'cosmic Christ' described in the NT — enables us to understand the science of Gaia. And especially, it enables us to make sense out of those indications of purpose and intention which defenders of the hypothesis go to such great lengths to avoid.

2. On the religion of Gaia

It is, as we have seen, largely an attempt to provide a basis for an ethic of care, stewardship, and responsible use. Yet such an ethic is impossible (as we have seen) if we are only and merely one more part of the process. The attempts to root an environmental ethic in a religion which says that all is one, and that we human beings are simply part of an evolving cosmic process, are doomed to failure. This failure is indicated in occasional 'deep ecology' criticisms of the concept of 'stewardship'. It is arrogant, so this argument goes, to speak of human stewardship, for one part of a web or process can't be steward of the other part. Precisely. Yet it is only human beings (not whales, rain forests, or ozone layers) who hold conferences about the fate of the whole process. Once again: ultimately an ethic implies a Creator — a Creator to whom, in all our organic rootedness, we are nevertheless given the privilege of responsibility, and hence the inescapable possibility of stewardship.

3. On the feminism of Gaia

We must acknowledge the truth of much of what is said about the arrogance of a science and technology rooted in concern only for power, rather than in love and nurture. It is not so clear, however, that such arrogant misuse of power is exclusively patriarchal or male. It seems rather to be a human characteristic, rooted in sin (a concept absent from Gaian discussion — recall that the 'Sacred Earth Declaration' quoted above says simply that we are ignorant).

What is clear is that in the relationship between God and creation which biblical revelation unfolds for us, God is not distant, detached and domineering. The intimacy of the Creator to creation is evident throughout Scripture: 'He makes springs pour water into the ravines . . . He makes grass for the cattle . . . When you send your Spirit they [all creatures] are created, and you renew the face of the earth' (Ps. 104). Or, as in the distinctly feminine image of Acts 17 (in which Paul quotes with approval a stoic poet): 'In him we live and move and have our being.'

Indeed, the greatness of the Creator, his power and might, are seen in his closeness to creation, not his distance. The 19th-century Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins makes this point in a striking way:

> God is so deeply present to everything . . . that it would be impossible for him but for his infinity not to be identified with them, or, from the other side, impossible but for his infinity so to be present to them . . . a being so intimately present as God is to other things would be identified with them were it not for God's infinity or were it not for God's infinity he could not be so intimately present to things.[15]

Such an immanence and intimacy is at the farthest remove from pantheism. Yet in the Creator's immense closeness we find great comfort — not that we are God, or part of God, but rather that God, wholly *other* than us, is yet (in Augustine's words) nearer to us than we are to ourselves.

Why, if such womb-like intimacy describes God's relationship to creation, does the Bible so overwhelmingly use masculine imagery to describe that relationship? There is obviously more to be said here than we have time to say. But one tentative answer might be that the masculine imagery of the Bible is used precisely to keep us from making the easy and obvious mistake of thinking that our relationship to God is the same as our relationship to the earth. The Canadian novelist Rudy Weibe makes an excellent observation here:

> . . . when man speaks of 'God as Mother' her acts usually become so closely identified with nature — the physical world everywhere — that he forgets the imageness and begins to think the words as physical actuality. For a person to say: 'All is brought forth from the womb of God' is so close to what actually happens every minute in animal nature that he starts acting out copulation and birthing and begins to think he's God while he's doing it. . . .[16]

The closeness of God the Creator is most evident to us in Jesus, who, being the divine Word in whom all things hold together, the transcendent Lord of the universe, nevertheless '. . . made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant'. We need to recapture this biblical understanding of God as Creator and Redeemer. It is an ancient one in the church. Irenaeus, in the first century, declared:

> For the Creator of the world is truly the Word of God: and this is our Lord, who in the last times was made man, existing in this world, and who, in an invisible manner, contains all things created, and is inherent in the entire creation, since the Word of God governs and arranges all things; and therefore He came to His own in a visible manner, and was made flesh, and hung upon the tree, that He might sum up all things in Himself.[17]

In such a theological framework we can perhaps recognize Gaia for what it is — an indication of the intimate care of our Creator and

Redeemer. And rooted in such a soil, we can begin to speak of care of the earth as an inseparable part of righteousness.

For an earthkeeping ethic cannot simply be invented, then propped up by pragmatically useful religions like much of the emerging Gaian 'spirituality'. It must rather be one of the fruits of a life rooted (like that of the righteous person described in Psalm 1) in the life-giving streams of the law of the Lord, the law which we encounter in Jesus, the Word made flesh, in whom 'all things' (including Gaia, the earth) hold together.

[1]James Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. xii.

[2]Lynn Margulis and Gregory Hinkle, 'Biota and Gaia', *Abstracts of Chapman Conference on GAIA Hypothesis* (March, 1988), cited in Lawrence E. Joseph, *Gaia: The Growth of an Idea* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1990) p. 86.

[3]James Lovelock, 'Gaia: A Model for Planetary and Cellular Dynamics', in *Gaia: A Way of Knowing: Political Implications of the New Biology*, ed. William Irwin Thompson (Great Barrington, Massachusetts: Lindisfarne Press, 1987), p. 89, cited in Joseph, p. 27.

[4]Lewis Thomas, *The Lives of a Cell: Notes of a Biology Watcher* (New York: The Viking Press, 1974), p. 3.

[5]Lovelock, *Gaia*, p. xii.

[6]Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein (eds.), *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990), p. iii.

[7]Eisler, in *Reweaving*.

[8]*Ibid.*, p. 34.

[9]Susan Griffin, 'Curves Along the Road', in *Reweaving the World*, p. 87.

[10]Charlene Spretnak, 'Ecofeminism: Our Roots and Flowering', in *Reweaving the World*, p. 5.

[11]Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, in Mary Olsen Kelly (ed.), *The Fireside Treasury of Light* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), p. 329.

[12]Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* (Harper and Row, 1988), p. 230.

[13]This assumption was reflected in the name of another of the well-attended tents at the Global Forum — 'Terra Christa'. It was filled with a variety of techniques for achieving enlightenment, wholeness, and oneness with the earth: and it was clearly the earth, Gaia, who was the 'Christa', the anointed one.

[14]In this defence of the personal in science I am in great debt to Michael Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge* (Chicago: University Press, 1958).

[15]Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Christoper Devlin, SJ (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 128.

[16]Rudy Weibe, *My Lovely Enemy* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1983), pp. 140-141.

[17]Irenaeus, in *Against Heresies: Early Christian Fathers*, ed. and trans. Edward Rocie Hardy (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), vol. 1, p. 385.

The image of God in humanity: a biblical-psychological perspective

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In 1984, Dr Ward Wilson and Dr Craig Blomberg, our N. American Reviews Editor, team-taught a course at Palm Beach Atlantic College in Florida entitled 'The Image of God in Humanity: Biblical and Psychological Perspectives'. In 1986, Ward presented his own perspective in two papers presented to the American Scientific Affiliation meetings at Houghton College in New York. In 1988, he refined them further in a presentation to the International Congress on Christian Counseling held in Atlanta. In the months just before his death from leukemia in 1991, he had written a preface, two chapters, and three appendices to what he had hoped would be a book entitled God's Image, Our Potential and Eternal Living. *He had projected several additional chapters for which he left no extensive notes. Because of Dr Wilson's earlier ministry as a staff member for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, his lifelong commitment to students preparing for ministry, and his special interest in international and cross-cultural studies,[1] it is particularly appropriate that this synthesis of his perspectives,[2] edited by Craig Blomberg, should be finally published in* Themelios.

Theologians and biblical scholars continue to debate the nature of the image of God in humanity.[3] The rapid rise of Christian counselling and psychology has produced numerous attempts to integrate the observations of the social sciences with biblical exegesis and systematic theology. Recent studies suggest the possibility of emerging lines of agreement concerning certain aspects of human nature.[4] But in the light of diverse theological and social-psychological views of the essence of humanity, those who would integrate biblical and social-scientific insights need a more refined picture of the qualities comprising the *imago Dei* within humans. This article briefly surveys several of the classic views of the image of God, highlights relevant scriptural data, proposes a view which is both moral and interpersonal, unpacks this perspective in the light of Exodus 34:6-7, notes correspondences with psychological and cultural-anthropological research and Christian apologetics, and suggests several practical applications of the theory for persons active in Christian ministry.

Influential views of the image of God

The view that God's image in humanity reflects certain physical characteristics has dominated various periods of church history but is now almost universally abandoned, inasmuch as Scripture, apart from anthropomorphic language, consistently denies bodily attributes to God the Father.[5] The first occurrence of the expression 'the image of God' appears in Genesis 1:26a, leading others to look in the immediate context of that verse for clues to its content. In 1:26b, God gives man dominion over all other creatures, which has suggested that God's image could be humanity's vice-regency over creation.[6] 1:27 describes the creation of male and female; perhaps the image involves our sexuality, our separation into two genders, or our need for interpersonal fellowship or community.[7] But although these concepts are the ones most immediately juxtaposed with the creation of people in God's image, nothing in the text explicitly links them together or identifies them as what the *imago* comprises.

The influential views of Augustine and Aquinas anticipate some of the approaches of modern psychology. Augustine supported a triune capability to know God by means of memory, understanding, and will, within the soul's rationality and comparable to God's Trinity.[8] Aquinas pictured our *imago* in three ways: (a) a natural aptitude for understanding and loving God; (b) our imperfect habits of knowing and loving God by conformity with grace; and (c) acting perfectly in knowing God, according to the likeness of his glory.[9] Reinhold Niebuhr held to this rationalistic tradition by identifying the image of God with our power of self-transcendence, which enlarges the reason's conceptions.[10] But all these views depend less on exegesis than on philosophy, as they try to answer the question of what humans and God have in common that sets them apart from the rest of created life. The contemporary evangelical theologians Lewis and Demarest identify metaphysical, intellectual, moral, emotional, volitional and relational aspects of the image,[11] but it is not clear that