

# The Representational and Doxological Ground of Human Mimesis

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## ABSTRACT

*Recent scientific interest in human imitation, particularly as elaborated in the mimetic theory of René Girard has drawn attention to the role of mimesis as an important anthropological datum. This paper attempts to explain human mimesis theologically. In the first part I will present the idea, in reference to the imago Dei, that human mimesis is derived from an intense correspondence between the Creator and his creature, and that human mimesis is related to humanity's representational and doxological role in creation. In the second part I shall reflect on the possibility that human mimesis may be grounded ultimately in the divine life itself. Mimesis, so understood, would constitute our capacity for "resonance" with the divine, for worship and the apprehension of beauty.*

**Key Words:** human mimesis; *imago Dei*; trinitarian theology; creation; René Girard; James Alison; David Coffey; Hans Urs von Balthasar, theological anthropology.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, several scientific breakthroughs have been discussed at conferences and in the literature about the often overlooked yet enormously important role of imitation of *mimesis* in human life and culture. As interest in imitation research has grown, the range of disciplines so engaged has greatly expanded. It includes today such diverse fields as child development, primatology, neurophysiology, social psychology, and philosophy of mind.<sup>1</sup>

Decades earlier, French-American cultural theorist René Girard began to develop his own Mimetic Theory. He recognized in particular the generative role of mimesis in the formation of human desire and motivation, and the critically important link between imitation and the origin of human culture and religion. In other words, human mimesis presents itself as a defining anthropological datum. According to Girard, its inner dynamic, which enables human beings to "open themselves up to the world and engage in loving relationships", distinguishes humans from animals.<sup>2</sup>

When mimetic openness is presupposed, it throws light both on why humans on the one hand are so susceptible to the potentially conflict-prone influence of others, and why on the other hand mimesis gives rise to genuine accessibility, artless simplicity,

childlike trust and learning, in short, to the “good imitation” of which Girard speaks. Here, it seems to me, we touch on that incommunicable core of the human person, that innermost depth from which arise our true longings for life and love – “where only God can enter”.<sup>3</sup> How, we might ask, is this nonconscious imitation of others with its limitless desiring to possess what is desirable especially in the eyes of another, this inherent striving after transcendence grounded theologically?

I propose to approach this important question in two ways: first, to search for imitative patterns in the creation account in relation to the image-of-God metaphor of Genesis 1; and secondly, by way of extrapolation, to examine three modern trinitarian models with the hypothesis in mind that human mimesis may be grounded ultimately in the divine life itself, that is, in the eternally self-constituting mutuality within the Trinity.

### I. IMITATIVE PATTERNS IN THE CREATION ACCOUNT

When exploring the creation narrative, the question of how to read it arises. Modern scholarship has asserted that a variety of social and religious traditions lie behind the text, but what stands out is the curious fact that, despite this “admixture”, the ancient texts *as we have them* tell a remarkably human story. While this story is not historical in the modern scientific sense, it is nonetheless history-like. Its narrative conveys in powerful images the story of God engaged in the work of creation.<sup>4</sup>

One of the striking features of this story is the responsiveness existing between Creator and creation. Creation appears in response to divine utterance, but God also responds to what he has created. Seven times he pronounces it good, on three occasions he names what he has created and continues to remain engaged with his handiwork by observation and evaluation.<sup>5</sup> However, caricatures of traditional Christian theology suggest that God’s creation is reducible to categories of causation and control which fall far short of the richly dynamic and interactive model suggested by the biblical text.

According to Michael Welker, God not only causes and produces, but also confronts what he has created in its otherness and potential independence with ongoing evaluation, new acts of shaping and divine blessing. At the same time, he implants creaturely activity (not just human) in the process of creation so that what has been created emerges as co-creators with him. Creation itself participates in the rhythms and processes of unfolding and ruling. In short, a much richer matrix of interaction than a simple causation/dependence model comes into view. Even a one-to-one reciprocity between God and individual aspects of creation is an inadequate picture, notes Welker,

for God brings “diverse creaturely realms” into “fruitful, life-promoting associations of interdependent relations” with each other.<sup>6</sup> Walter Brueggemann comments similarly that the “interpretive center” of Genesis is God’s call and promise designed to provoke a faithful response on the part of the creation to its Creator.<sup>7</sup> Turning to the human creation, Donald MacKay reminds us that God himself remains active within the drama of human existence through self-disclosure as he dialogues with his creature.<sup>8</sup>

It is from this dynamic perspective that I propose to explore the creation account for a theological grounding of human mimesis.<sup>9</sup> My approach is not exegetical; rather, I will describe allusions to imitative patterns where they appear as enabling structures corresponding to humanity’s role in creation.

### **The Image-of-God Metaphor**

In daring language, the text of Gen 1:26-28 announces the origin of the human race. It also declares something crucially important to our understanding of man’s divinely appointed role and mission.

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it, have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”<sup>10</sup>

While the primary evidence for the phrase “image and likeness” is relatively sparse, it is nevertheless theologically significant. The first reference occurs in the above passage. It follows a solemn self-exhortation on God’s part “Let us make man ...” Taken as a theological statement, it reflects the Creator’s intent that human beings should have caring dominion over the rest of creation. The second reference (Gen 5:1-3) appears in the context of procreation and the succession of the generations. The third (Gen 9:5-6) presents man as an especially dignified being (albeit a sinner by now) whose blood may not be spilt because of the image of God that is in him.

In parallel with ancient mid-eastern ideas of royal representation, von Rad proposed that man as the image of God was to represent and “enforce his [God’s] claims to dominion over the earth”.<sup>11</sup> This view intertwines two strands of meaning, the “royal” and the “functional”. Both views locate meaning in the purpose of man’s creation, to have dominion, albeit with different emphases. The former suggests a vice-regal position pointing to God’s sovereign rule and witnesses to his presence.<sup>12</sup> The latter, representing the majority view of scholars today, stresses stewardship.

Another proposal which considers the “image” reflects man’s capacity to relate to God thus emphasizing a divine human partnership. That is to say, God and man may interact in covenantal dialogue, even disputatiously with each other.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, we note that the text is not concerned with the individual but with the species, for it is humanity as a whole that is created to correspond to the Creator.<sup>14</sup>

When the priestly agenda is taken into account, additional features of the *imago* emerge, namely the twin ideas of holiness and humanity. Together they reflect the intuition that humanity’s potential may be realized by imitating the Creator through sanctifying worship. Edwin Firmage, for instance, has suggested that God puts man in charge of his creation in the hope that, aided by divine gifts and instruction as to God’s nature, humanity will enter its holy vocation and “mirror its Creator”.<sup>15</sup>

### **Creative Openness**

Christian theology, in its interpretation of the image-of-God metaphor, has placed traditionally greater weight on the text of Genesis 1. God was seen, consistent with the causation and control model of creation, as the omnipotent and radically transcendent Other who works in total independence from creation.<sup>16</sup> However, when the dynamic model suggested in the introduction is taken into account, a different “image” emerges. Here God is seen as calling forth diversity and relationality (rather than a single event and final product) so that the conception of the Creator shifts from absolute initiative and omnipotent control to power-sharing. God himself is perceived as genuinely interactive. Hence, God’s creative activity calls into being a process of interaction suggestive of purposeful openness that includes freedom and independence for the sake and enablement of such relational interactivity. This creative openness is powerfully reflected in the creation of human coexistence (in the image of God) as male and female in their difference, mutual relatedness and intimacy. Yet, the creature may be called to fidelity (Gen 5:24; 6:8-9) and is therefore capable of being conformed to God’s character. Discovering and adapting to it is to live in perpetual open reciprocity with the Creator.<sup>17</sup>

### **Humanity - God’s Counterpart**

In creating humanity in God’s image and likeness, God has brought into being a genuine counterpart able to respond to the Creator. God speaks and now there is a creature who will answer in dialogue. This too is the “image” of God. Man, the only creature out of the entire creation is equipped with the capacity for speech, and this capacity comes from the Creator. In the divine/human dialogue, human speech is called upon to express the Word of God.<sup>18</sup>

As the *eikon* of the invisible God, the fulfilment of humanity's vocation thus depends on an abiding consciousness of the divine which had to be lived out in corporate and social existence compatible with God's presence in creation.<sup>19</sup> To act responsibly in relation to God (and by implication to other human beings and the rest of creation), human consciousness had in some manner to "mirror" the supreme consciousness of the Creator.<sup>20</sup> Psalm 104 magnificently reflects this Old Testament intuition of the relationship with Yahweh. The psalmist, meditating on the great works of God, recognizes the divine order in all that exists. Through his personal conformity to the divine pleasure (v. 34), he expresses his relationship to God in praise and worship (v. 1, 31, 33, 35b).

Likewise, human "dominion" needs to be understood along such intensely relational, even imitative lines. It was to be modelled on God's dominion. Marsha Wilfong puts it this way: "If humankind is to carry out the task of dominion as God's representative, then the exercise of human dominion should *imitate* God's own ..."<sup>21</sup> As God's counterpart, humanity was called to be the mediatorial link between God and creation, the embodied representation of the divine. To fulfil this calling, humanity was to "mirror God to the world".<sup>22</sup> Being in-the-image meant to so imitate the divine life, word and character on earth that the latter may be the place that God intends it to be.<sup>23</sup>

### **Mimesis: the Mark of the Maker**

Other imitative patterns of divine/human interaction are easily discernable in the biblical account. The description of day-to-day life centred as it is on a primal correspondence between God, the worker, and human work is a rich source.<sup>24</sup> In Genesis 2:7, we see God as the potter metaphorically with his hands in the clay forming from the ground a male figure to which he imparts "something of God's own self [as] an integral part of human identity ..."<sup>25</sup> Similarly, God acts as a gardener planting trees, and out of his fount of knowledge sets boundaries to creaturely desire and activity (Gen 2:16-17).

But there is more. Images of God such as artist, composer, metal worker, garment maker, shepherd, builder, etc., come to mind. These cannot simply be dismissed, argues Robert Banks, as anthropomorphic projections, but must be seen for what they are: analogies formed by the theological intuition of Israel into the revealed character of God. According to Banks, an important dimension of God's revelation would be missed if these analogies did not engage the imagination to draw us deeper into God's pattern of life.<sup>26</sup> Such images are designed as "a journey ... into the heart of God's creative work ... a journey that takes place not for its own sake, but that we might become

*imitators* of God.”<sup>27</sup> Conversely, it bears mention that the nature of man’s work like tilling and keeping seems to parallel such divine activities of creating and maintaining.<sup>28</sup>

What stands out, however, is the doxological aspect of the narrative with the Sabbath as its most notable liturgical marker. The Creator worked for six days and rested on the seventh. Humans, to complete their mandate, were to participate in the Sabbath celebration. They were to emulate the rhythm of the Creator in his creative activity and follow his pattern of work and celebration. Worship rather than rest stands at the centre of sabbatical activity.<sup>29</sup> Keeping the Sabbath, “the feast of creation” as Jürgen Moltmann calls it, emerges as a symbol of man’s imitative participation in the life of God himself, while “work” finds its meaning when offered as an act of worship to the Creator.<sup>30</sup> Jewish scholar Jon Levenson, commenting on the meaning of the Sabbath in the Priestly source, writes: “It is now Sabbath ... on which creation is completed, consummated and *mimetically* re-enacted by the worshipping community, the people of Israel.”<sup>31</sup>

Finally, there is the music-making of Israel. Its very existence points to the creative/artistic side of God’s creation and ongoing inspiration. In the Psalms, the interplay between the life of God and the invitation to sing is constant. Spontaneous worship often results. In other places, the Old Testament pictures all creation singing together with the angelic host (Job 38:7) and even God sings over his people with joy (Zeph 3:17) so that human music and song emerge as imitative patterns of divine artistry. Man’s worshipful participation in God’s creative activity occurs, therefore, on the basis of “good mimesis”. Humanity was especially equipped to be the image of God in this way – above all other creatures.

To summarize, underlying the image-of-God metaphor we find a conception of God’s relation to humanity that is characterized by creative openness and “intense mutuality”.<sup>32</sup> Human mimesis may thus be seen as a significant aspect of God’s creative ordering. Corresponding to humanity’s high calling as mediator and representative of the divine, mimesis is God’s enabling gift. As God’s finite temporal *eikon*, humanity is destined to be conformed to the divine character through a mimesis that desires God above all things.

## II. THE TRINITY AND THE DOXOLOGICAL GROUND OF HUMAN MIMESIS

Because there is a trinitarian aspect of creation in that all created things are inscribed with a vestige of the Trinity and its “image” in the human creature, a more nuanced theological meaning of human mimesis may be developed. I am going to ask whether

the notion of pure mimesis can have a place in the way we conceive of God as a communion of Life and Love. In exploring this question, I propose to look briefly at three quite different trinitarian approaches. Before proceeding, some qualifying comments are in order.

Christians worship the transcendent Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the God who we believe appeared in human form in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and who now manifests as the inner spiritual dynamic that unites human life with the divine life; in other words, one God in three different modes of existence.

However, this simple trinitarian statement is not to be taken as an objective description of God's innermost being. Such naïve realism would mean adhering to a highly problematic philosophical commitment. It presumes that things as they appear *to us* must be as they really are in themselves. In relation to God, naïve realism is untenable, as it supposes that human cognitive faculties are sufficient to contain full knowledge of God.

A far less problematic position, which I am adopting here, is 'critical realism'. In relation to the Trinity it holds that the objective reality of God exists and that this reality gives rise to our perception of God's three ways of being. But believing that this scriptural reading is not misleading does not warrant the assumption that what we perceive reflects precisely what God is like in the innermost essence of his being. It will be helpful to keep these thoughts in mind when elucidating human mimesis via trinitarian references.

### **Mimesis and the Analogical Imagination – James Alison**

Alison begins his reflection from a dogmatic perspective, but later anchors it in the gospel narrative as he teases out the changing understanding of God among the apostolic group after the resurrection of Jesus. This shift, he argues, involved a complete undoing of what they had thought about God and about human beings in relation to him. He calls this emerging consciousness "the intelligence of the victim" which becomes the determining factor behind the actions and articulations of the first post-resurrection community.<sup>33</sup>

Until the resurrection, Jesus' followers possessed little comprehension of God's salvific plan, as the Gospels repeatedly stress.<sup>34</sup> Only in the light of the resurrection were they able to see the life and death of Jesus from another perspective altogether. Not only did this new understanding mean the deconstruction of the principles that had heretofore governed their lives, namely the subject/object dichotomy of desire with its resulting rivalry, but also the re-constitution of their way of thinking and being. Death

was no longer the defining limit. They were now able to see everything from the “insider’s view”, that is, from the view of the risen victim. Now also the other crucial dimension of the reality of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection became clear: the one who all along had been the motive force of Jesus’ life and mission was the Father, while Jesus himself, as the unique and beloved Son, was his *eikon*, his perfect imitation.

Alison arrives at this understanding through a Girardian interpretation of both the biblical data and the dynamics inherent in human existence. Personhood is presented, not as punctual or static, but as a more holistic and developmental *Gestalt*. Human persons are “being brought into, and maintained in being by another anterior to ... [them] and to whom ... [they are] constantly related”.<sup>35</sup> Following French psychologist Jean-Michel Oughourlian, Alison posits a new analogate called “holons”, instead of “persons”.<sup>36</sup> These are perceived at the human level as psychological entities reciprocally constituting each other’s existence by modes of interaction and continuous exchange. They are *interdividual* selves whose existence is not disclosed by introspection but in the “mimetic rapport” between holons. Alison appeals to this notion of the relational self as a key analogy for trinitarian theology. God the Father is the origin of all desire, unoriginated love and pure giving. And, since there is no other source of desire either human or angelic, the Father is beyond all rivalry. Alison writes,

The Father loves his image, his likeness, one who is exactly like him in all things except being unoriginated. The Son is not unoriginated, because that would give two origins, and unoriginated giving can only be one, beyond number. He is not exactly unoriginated either for he shares completely in the pure gratuitous givenness (itself originated) of the Father. He receives it completely, because he is the exact image and likeness of the Father, able therefore to receive the Father and, as a perfect likeness, completely reciprocate the giving.

He continues,

The holon Father and the holon Son are therefore constituted by a *rapport interdividuel*, [which is also a holon] called the Holy Spirit. This is the unoriginated love giving and imitating that giving (reciprocating that love) fully and perfectly and simultaneously.<sup>37</sup>

In keeping with traditional theology, Alison invites us to understand this reality of God spiritually. In the generation of the Son, God the Father is not to be understood to produce a creature in an Arian sense. He is equally careful to avoid any Modalistic implication, as though God were differentiated in reaction to an external stimulus, or in regard to successive temporal phases. Instead, he regards the divine persons as inner realities that belong to God *in se*. In other words, this intra-trinitarian “mimesis” is to be understood in terms of immanent acts of the divine transcendence. The unoriginated love of the holon “Father” generates the holon “Son” and their “rapport interdividuel”

flows as perfect mutuality whereby the Father's giving (of the Son) and the Son's imitation (of the Father) are the same thing, so that they share in the same giving except that the Son and the Holy Spirit are not unoriginated origins.<sup>38</sup>

The key to a trinitarian understanding of "holon" is the idea of imitation that allows for no difference between holons and is thus perfect and free from any "over and against". It only knows the "distinctness" that comes from acceptance and enjoyment of giving. These divine holons, Alison argues, "constantly foster and cherish one another in ever more joyous imitation of radical self-giving to the other." He is convinced that that his analysis is able to "bear the full weight of the Church's doctrine on the Trinity at least as well as "persons" ..."<sup>39</sup> In other words, what Alison presents as the dynamism of inner-trinitarian mutuality is mimesis between holons, the giving and receiving, the knowing and being known, the loving and being loved in absolute surrender and attraction.<sup>40</sup>

### **The Mutual Love Theory – David Coffey**

While Coffey admits that the traditional psychological analogy has merits, he (like von Balthasar) rejects metaphysical categories. Instead, he looks for his starting point to the trinitarian structure in the scheme of salvation.<sup>41</sup> He is convinced that the biblical data permit a more comprehensive trajectory than the traditional taxis of Father > Son > Spirit. Coffey calls this model the "model of mission" which at the level of the immanent Trinity becomes the "model of procession". However, since this is not the only model to which the New Testament data (particularly in the Synoptic Gospels) point, he posits a second, complementary model with the extended taxis of Father > Spirit > Son > Spirit > Father. While this model has been known since Augustine and Richard of St. Victor, it was largely ignored in systematic theology.

While the Father's love for the Son and the Son's love for the Father are each identified with the Holy Spirit, it is in their *mutual love* that Coffey locates the Holy Spirit, or rather in the "objectivization" of that mutual love. He thereby re-introduces, perhaps unwittingly, a psychological ontology and analogy which can profit from a more scriptural and historical placement. It is the circuitry of this love that points most promisingly to my thesis. Because this love is mutual, it is a double or mutual bestowal. It is both "simultaneous and coincident" with, and yet predicated on the priority of, the Father's bestowal to which the Son's love is always the perfect response and it is in that response that it becomes mutual.<sup>42</sup> In another way, it is the Father's love that calls forth the Son's love in response to the Father's personal bestowal of himself. In his response the Son's love and the Father's love become one love yet without exchange of roles in

the giving and responding because the Son forever “draws his entire existence from the Father and hence remains always in an attitude of response to him”.<sup>43</sup>

Coffey sees very clearly, though, that the Son’s response is also *his* giving as he bestows *his* love upon the Father which is the return of the Spirit to the Father. In the perfect adaptation of Father and Son to each other they each “breathe” the Holy Spirit as their mutual love, although they always remain distinct in the act of their bestowal.<sup>44</sup> These acts may also be understood as absolute reciprocal self-communication as each bestows on the other everything that they are, while remaining who they are in the absolute freedom of their eternal personhood.

### **The Inner-Trinitarian Event – Hans Urs von Balthasar**

Von Balthasar’s work belongs to a recent development in Catholic theology which in its treatment of the Trinity rejects the classical Latin starting point.<sup>45</sup> While von Balthasar’s approach may be loosely grouped among the “social models” of trinitarian theology, it is his doxological emphasis that is of special interest here. Seeing the glory of Jesus Christ in the paschal mystery is the same as beholding the icon of the triune God. Hence, no other analogy can compare with the revelation of this inner-trinitarian love and the relationality of God’s being.

Von Balthasar’s project aims to acknowledge the dramatic character of trinitarian revelation as it culminates in the paschal mystery of Christ’s death, descent and resurrection. In the light of the pathos of the Old and New Testament witness, von Balthasar holds that God cannot stand on the periphery of the “play” (theo-drama). God’s triune life – the archetype of all being and hence of all history – must “be mirrored [at the centre]” where the play unfolds.<sup>46</sup>

What puts von Balthasar at odds with the Augustinian-Thomist starting point is his view that “an essentialist ontology ... fails to convey adequately the sheer glory of the divine being revealed in the paschal mystery.”<sup>47</sup> Yet he works within the traditional procession model which implies an eternal movement in God, “the eternal event of divine processions”.<sup>48</sup> It encompasses not only the possibility of the incarnation and the paschal mystery, but also of all creation in its contingency and in God’s dramatic relation to it.

That God as Father can so give away his divinity that God as Son does not merely receive it as something borrowed, but possesses it in the equality of essence, expresses such an unimaginable and unsurpassable ‘separation’ of God from Godself that every other separation (made possible by it!), even the most dark and bitter, can only occur within this first separation.<sup>49</sup>

As the Father brings forth the Son's consubstantial divinity, the Father "empties himself" of what is his own. For von Balthasar this grounds the separation and union of the paschal mystery in the primordial supra-temporal inner-trinitarian event. Since God "has nothing apart from what God is",<sup>50</sup> the Father's *kenosis* expresses from all eternity a radical openness in which every possible unfolding of the drama between God and his world is already allowed for and transcended, including the possibility of sin. He explains:

We are saying that the 'emptying' of the Father's heart in the begetting of the Son includes and surpasses every possible drama between God and the world, because the world can only have its place within the difference between the Father and the Son which is held open and bridged over by the Spirit.<sup>51</sup>

In the radical self-giving of the Father, all the "modalities of love" are contained. These include all interpersonal kenotic relations within the Godhead, the Son's suffering, death and separation from God as they are experienced in the incarnation, crucifixion and descent into hell. The idea that all forms of *kenosis ad extra* are contained within the primal *kenosis ad intra* runs like a refrain through von Balthasar's work. This suggests, as Anne Hunt notes, that the inner-trinitarian event "expresses the divine essence as constituted by this eternal relational process of reciprocal self-surrender, this unceasing giving and receiving, offer and response between the divine persons."<sup>52</sup>

Some striking parallels between our explanation of mimesis and von Balthasar's meta-theological proposal are not difficult to see. Since von Balthasar argues that the divine self-opening embraces all possibilities and contingencies of the world and God's dramatic and loving relation to it, his position throws light on the character of the trinitarian mimesis considered above. The openness of limitless desire in accord with the Other in the exchanges of trinitarian life are the eternal condition of God's creative openness to the world and of the divine ability to engage in loving relationships with what is other to the point of utter self-surrender.

### III. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

In the first part of the paper I traced allusions to human mimesis in the Genesis account. We found that these imitative patterns and their relationship to the image-of-God metaphor were grounded in a theological intuition that emphasized a genuinely reciprocal relationship between the Creator and the creature. Human mimesis may therefore be regarded as a constitutive part of God's creative order for the fulfilment of the human in its mediatorial and representative role. In other words, mimesis and representation go hand in hand. It is a gift of the Creator to his creature and touches on

the purpose of human personhood. It inspires in the human person the kind of learning and acting demanded by the vocation to be God's counterpart. Human existence expresses itself in speech and song joyously resonating with the Creator's benevolent intention in every aspect of creation. In this light and given that humanity's fundamental orientation is God-ward, human personhood can neither be understood in an external and static fashion, nor, at the other extreme, as self-determining and autonomous. As God-oriented creatures, the inner core of human beings consists in a divinely ordained indeterminacy that longs for further determination by means of a Spirit-guided mimesis.

A more nuanced specifically theological understanding of human mimesis was presented in the second part based on three models of inner-trinitarian communion: Alison's holographic model, Coffey's return model and von Balthasar's inner-trinitarian event model. Broadly speaking, all three proposals offer an interpersonal dynamic vision with emphasis on perichoretic exchange. Each in its own way speaks of differentiated inner-trinitarian movements characterized by reciprocal giving and receiving, by mutual self-communication, desiring and bestowal of "interdividual" triune love for which "mimesis" may be a fitting term.

A trinitarian ontology of mutual love illuminates a theology of human mimesis in several ways. Coffey's ontological presentation of the divinity of Jesus can be effectively linked to the role of mimesis in Jesus' life and ministry. Thus, what is incarnate in Jesus Christ is eternally verified in the Godhead itself. Von Balthasar's vision of the Father's radical self-dispossession in a supra-temporal, inner-trinitarian event may be effectively linked with the *imago Dei*. In that case the structural "openness" and the "desire according to the other" of human mimesis can be thought of as originating in that exemplary event. Von Balthasar's event model also supports an understanding of the nature of love "not just to give love, but to create the space for its reception".<sup>53</sup> For his part, Alison deals with "the intelligence of the victim" in such a way that it can be understood as the effect of divine love creating space in conflict-laden human consciousness. Human self-assertive addictions give way to an existence characterized by gratuitous receiving and giving of love, while Coffey's model of mutual bestowal introduces a more doxological nuance where mimesis may be understood as a structure of empowerment for worship, that is, the bestowal of worth and love upon another.

With its origin in the heart of the inexhaustible, self-communicative love of the Three, particularly in the primordial self-emptying of the Father, mimetic openness is a divine gift. Human beings, despite and even within their entangled historical experience,

are, in the final analysis, more determined by a yearning for wholeness and beauty than by its rivalistic distortions. If love creates the space for its reception, and if mimetic openness is understood as the structure of receptivity, then it anticipates the *pleroma* of the divine promise.<sup>54</sup> Human reality, then, indeterminate in its longing and aspiration, awaits a final conformity to the divine as its beatifying fulfilment. This is to say that the Trinity indwells creation and communicates itself to the human as “grace”, the gift that dynamically conforms the human person to the divine persons in their innermost life. The Trinity is in this sense “en-worlded”, and the world is “trinified”.<sup>55</sup>

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Scott R. Garrels (ed.), *Mimesis and Science: Empirical Research on Imitation and Mimetic Theory of Culture and Religion* (East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State University, 2011), ix.

<sup>2</sup> James G. Williams, ed., *René Girard: The Girard Reader* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996), 290.

<sup>3</sup> John S. Dunn, “The Ways of Desire”, *Cross Currents* Vol 40/4 (1990), 537-456.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce Birch, et al., *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1999), 40-44.

<sup>5</sup> Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31; 2:5, 18.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Welker, “Creation and the Image of God: Their Understanding in Christian Tradition and the Biblical Grounds,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 34, no. 3 (1997): 436ff. Note that Welker does not attend to the great medieval principle of *bonum est diffusivum sui* [= the good shares itself] so that Aquinas can say *amor Dei est infudens et creans bonitatem in rebus* [= the love of God in-pours and creates the goodness in things] (*STh* 1, q. 20, a. 2). I owe this note to Prof. Anthony Kelly.

<sup>7</sup> Walter Bruggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 1-3.

<sup>8</sup> Donald M. MacKay, *The Open Mind and Other Essays: Donald MacKay, a Scientist in God's World*, ed. Melvin Tinker (Leicester, England: Intervarsity Press, 1988), 187.

<sup>9</sup> When I speak here of ‘reciprocity’ especially in relation to divine/human interaction, I mean not reciprocity in the strict sense, but more of dialogical responsiveness in which the finiteness of the creature and the transcendence of the Creator are respected. God’s relation to us is qualitatively different from our relation to God. On the Creator’s part, an “infinite relatedness” is exercised. In contrast, human relationality, either in regard to God or more generally to others, is circumscribed by particular

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embodiment including our historical, cultural and sinful condition [see also Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2000), 292].

<sup>10</sup> Gen 1:26-28, NKJV, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1988).

<sup>11</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 54.

<sup>12</sup> W. H. Smith and Wildberger pioneered the royal interpretation, while Holzinger and Hehn emphasized the functional view of the 'image'. The latter gained little support initially, but has grown in favour with scholars like Brueggemann, Clines, Dumbrell, Gross, Klein, von Rad, W.H. Smith, Wenham, Wildberger, Wolff and Zimmerli. [See also I. Hart, "Genesis 1:1-2:3 as a Prologue to the Book of Genesis," *Tyndale Bulletin* 46, no. 2 (1995): 315-336].

<sup>13</sup> Barth, Brunner, Hessler, Horst, Stamm, Vischer, Vriezen and Westermann are among its main proponents, but notably Brueggemann whose theological project turns on the "intense mutuality" between Yahweh and Israel.

<sup>14</sup> Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: a Commentary* (Minneapolis: 1974), 158.

<sup>15</sup> Edwin Firmage, "Genesis 1 and the Priestly Agenda," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 82 (1999): 97-114.

<sup>16</sup> Bruce Birch, et al., *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1999), 46.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. K. Barth, *CD III-1*, 184-185.

<sup>18</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, trans. Joyce M. Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 63.

<sup>19</sup> S. D. McBride Jr., "Divine Protocol: Gen 1:1-2:3 as Prologue to the Pentateuch," in *God Who Creates*, ed. W. Brown and S. D. McBride Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 29.

<sup>20</sup> Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1977), 57.

<sup>21</sup> Marsha Wilfong, "Human Creation in Canonical Context: Gen 1:26-31 and beyond", in *God who Creates*, 46 (emphasis added). Vawter implies a like meaning when he writes that this dominion was not to be exploitative, for man's food had been restricted to plants, i.e. man was not allowed to kill animals for food [cf. Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1977), 60].

<sup>22</sup> Birch, et al., *A Theological Introduction*, 50.

<sup>23</sup> See also David W. Cotter O.S.B, ed, *Genesis, Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry* (Collegeville, Min.: Liturgical Press, 2003), 18. His holographic language will give rise to further hypothesizing in the second part of this paper. Hamerton-Kelly suggests that God exercises his sovereignty by drawing to himself "all of human desires" [Robert Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence Paul's Hermeneutic of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 105]. The keenly sensitive and passionate relationship between God and his creature has obvious moral implications. It demanded integrity as well as form. Both found their reflection in the covenant experience of Israel. It meant that the fulfilment of humanity's role (including the enjoyment of God's benevolence) was set on a footing of a continuing imitative adaptation of human character to the will of God. This raises the question of risk. God risked that his creature might be overtaxed by direct exposure to his glory. The same risk exists at the moral level where it becomes the risk of deviation or of false imitation, a condition clearly recognized by Schwager. He interprets the Fall as a complex mimetic drama which ensues from a perverted imitation of a word from God via its negation by another. In that sense, original sin must be understood as the perverted imitation of God: "...you will be like God ..." (Gen 3:5). [Raymund Schwager, "Neues und Altes zur Lehre von der Erbsünde," *Zeitschrift Für Katholische Theologie* 116 (1994): 1-29].

<sup>24</sup> Robert Banks, *God the Worker: Journeys into the Mind, Heart and Imagination of God* (Sydney: Albatross, 1992), 10

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- <sup>25</sup> Birch, et al., *A Theological Introduction*, 51.
- <sup>26</sup> Banks, *God the Worker*, 10.
- <sup>27</sup> Banks, *God the Worker*, 23 (original emphasis).
- <sup>28</sup> Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: 1974), 221.
- <sup>29</sup> I. Hart, "Genesis 1:1-2:3 as Prologue to the Book of Genesis", *Tyndale Bulletin*, 46, no. 2 (1995): 315-336.
- <sup>30</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 276, following F. Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung* (Heidelberg, 1959), 63-69.
- <sup>31</sup> Jon Douglas Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), 77 (emphasis added).
- <sup>32</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1997), 454.
- <sup>33</sup> James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin Through Easter Eyes* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 81.
- <sup>34</sup> Mark 9:30-32; Luke 9:44-45; John 10:1-6; 12:12-16.
- <sup>35</sup> Mark 9:30-32; Luke 9:44-45; John 10:1-6; 12:12-16.
- <sup>36</sup> Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong* 50; [see also Jean-Michel Oughourlian, *The Puppet of Desire: The Psychology of Hysteria, Possession, and Hypnosis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991)].
- <sup>37</sup> Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong*, 51. Alison's "mimetic rapport" may be described (in the language of organic systems) as inter-personal adaptive resonance achieved through a loop of generative reciprocity operating between perpetual perception of and (rapt) attention towards another.
- <sup>38</sup> Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong*, 52.
- <sup>39</sup> Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong*, 53.
- <sup>40</sup> A recognisable feature of the Augustinian-Thomist tradition of trinitarian theology; though there is no implication of a "state of becoming" within the Trinity, contemporary theology takes advantage of certain "holographic development in our theological understanding and in our capacity to express what has been understood" [Anthony Kelly, "A Multidimensional Disclosure: Aspects of Aquinas' Theological Intentionality" *The Thomist* 67 (2003): 235-74].
- <sup>41</sup> David Coffey, *Deus Trinitas: The Doctrine of the Triune God* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 148.
- <sup>42</sup> Coffey distinguishes between two stages in the Trinity - "in the process of becoming" and "already constituted" - which are necessary because both the Son and the Holy Spirit draw their origin from the Father. But this "prevenient" bestowal by the Father is "only formal"; once mutuality of love is established "it plays no further role". In the same breath Coffey admits that "this distinction cannot be real in God in whom there is no succession in time. His being is paradoxically eternally the same and yet dynamic." [Coffey, *Deus Trinitas*, 51].
- <sup>43</sup> Coffey, *Deus Trinitas*, 51.
- <sup>44</sup> Coffey, *Deus Trinitas*, 58.
- <sup>45</sup> Anne Hunt notes that a "sophisticated critique of the Augustinian-Thomistic trinitarian theology pervades ... [his] work". Anne Hunt, "Psychological Analogy and Paschal Mystery in Trinitarian Theology," *Theological Studies* 59, no. 2 (1998): 197ff. Also A. Hunt, *The Trinity and the Paschal*

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*Mystery: A Development in Recent Catholic Theology*, New Theological Studies, vol. 5 (Collegeville, Min.: The Liturgical Press, 1997).

<sup>46</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, trans. Graham Harrison, Vol III, *The Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 505.

<sup>47</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, trans. with an Introduction by Aidan Nichols (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), viii.

<sup>48</sup> von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, viii.

<sup>49</sup> A. Hunt citing von Balthasar from the German original *Theodramatik III, Die Handlung* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1980), 302], in her *The Trinity and the Paschal Mystery*, 60.

<sup>50</sup> von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, III/518.

<sup>51</sup> von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, I/20.

<sup>52</sup> Even sin and its consequences are included in the “space” that the self-emptying of the Father “opened” in himself, while the obedience of Jesus is the freedom of the eternal Son who lays his life down in love for the Father. Because the Son’s mission and Person are identical, his action in the economy “represents the kenotic translation of the eternal love of the Son for the ‘ever greater’ Father” (Hunt, *Trinity and the Paschal Mystery*, 60).

<sup>53</sup> Damien Casey, “Luce Irigaray and the Advent of the Divine: from the metaphysical to the symbolic to the eschatological” *Pacifica*, 12, 1. (Feb. 1999), 27-54.

<sup>54</sup> Col 1:27; 2:9.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Anthony J. Kelly, *Trinity of Love: A Theology of the Christian God* (Wilmington, Del: Michael Glazier, 1989), 165-173.