

SCOTT THOMPSON (continued)

tion of power, it's worth considering the following. This is the spirituality that nurtured humanity through thirty thousand years or more of an ice age - think that wasn't tough? - and that has endured immensely longer than the comparatively soft techno-civilized societies that are caught in a fantasy of endless resources, that have foolishly allowed themselves to get hooked on exponential growth, and that are therefore living on borrowed time.

The mainstream simply can't deal with indigenous spiritual values. They're too threatening. In order to continue functioning, it can only tolerate docile religions, meeting the following criteria: (1) a set of beliefs located within a believer's head that can be disconnected from the way she or he interacts with landscapes, and (2) a set of rituals that can be practiced, that is contained, on a relatively small parcel of land, so that (3) the rest of the landscape can be safely relegated to recreational use or the bulldozers.

We need a hypothetical to take us to the next level. Imagine that the Israeli government somehow approves opening a large shop to sell cell phones and wireless internet service inside the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, which is said to be the site of Jesus' birth. Imagine the outcry from Christians planet wide. That's the level of desecration that was involved in allowing the development of the Snowbowl ski area on Nuvatukya'ovi, about which Emory Sekaquapewa commented above.

Now imagine that the Israeli government, due to a shortage of fresh water in the face of escalating local population growth in Bethlehem, rules that the floors and other features of the Church of the Nativity must be cleaned with recycled wastewater in order to save the fresh water for direct human consumption. The stunned dismay from Christians everywhere would turn the world on its ear. And should.

Of course, we know the Israeli government isn't crazy enough to permit something this bizarre.

But the U.S. Forest Service is.

In 2005, after 3 years of considering the matter, the Forest Service approved using recycled piss and shit water (excuse me, "wastewater") for snow making at the Arizona Snowbowl ski area. This was followed by four years of litigation in federal court by various tribes to stop such a desecration on freedom of religion and other grounds, all to no avail. In 2011 construction began on the 14.8 mile piss and shit water pipeline from Flagstaff to the Snowbowl. The "snow-making" began in earnest in December, 2012, and pervaded the 2012-2013 skiing season. (See <http://protectthepeaks.org/about/chronology-1629-2011/>; statement issued by Senator John McCain on 3/28/13, "Arizona Snowbowl Bounces Back With Snowmaking").

Such a defilement, which should have provoked worldwide condemnation, can be explained in part by disrespect if not scorn for Native American religion by the dominant Anglo majority (nothing new about that, sadly). But over time other, urgent factors had emerged:

First, the massive customer base: by 2000 the population of Phoenix was over 1,300,000, while the population of the metropolitan area was over 3,200,000. That meant economic hardball in Anglo land.

Second, a growing local population: from over 18,000 in Flagstaff in 1960 to almost 53,000 in 2000; by the time the City formally refused to sell the Snowbowl drinking water for snowmaking in 2010, the population had grown to almost 66,000.

Third, extended drought and warming, related in part to climate change, reducing the snowpack on Nuvatukya'ovi. Snowmaking became essential both to protect and extend (must grow!) the skiing season.

Fourth, the insistent search for a snowmaking techno-solution. It HAD to be found, even if it was absurd, heartless, and racist. The bottom line, the actuality and credibility of growth at Snowbowl, was at stake.

I draw two conclusions from this piss and shit-water debacle. The first is that economic development - our real religion, as I said before - has the potential to override other cultural values that are essential to maintaining a democratic, egalitarian society. As we see, they're already in danger. And second, unless the wildness of the land is somehow made sacred, no landscape will be safe from the damage we humans can inflict and the lengths we can go to inflict it. In this, traditional indigenous people and the best climate and environmental scientists are becoming strange and benevolent bedfellows.

In an interview in 1977 the poet Gary Snyder said, "The only hope for a society ultimately hell-bent on self-destructive growth is not to deny growth as a mode of being, but to translate it to another level, another dimension." Earlier he had described that other dimension as "a non-acquisitive search for deeper knowledge of self and nature." (See *The Real Work*, 1980, pp. 108-109.)

As the consequences of climate change and other chronic environmental troubles accumulate, the credibility of exponential economic growth will erode.


He spoke these words in a more hopeful time, before the savage intensity of the Reagan Regression became apparent, and before the multi-national corporate core strengthened its grip on our government and our culture. Since 1980 alternative viewpoints have been marginalized to a remarkable degree, especially the viable ones.

But you never know about the power ideas may have. In the first century CE, the Roman Empire had its fist wrapped around most of the known world, having mastered every significant technique of power and intimidation. And then a peculiar, mystical movement of poor people with no money, political connections or force of arms, somehow filtered throughout the streets of Roman cities, despite repeated efforts by the Empire to stamp it out. Within three centuries it had cored out the epistemology of the Empire altogether. It was known as Christianity.

As the consequences of climate change and other chronic environmental troubles accumulate, the credibility of exponential economic growth will erode. At some point a more meaningful world view will have a significant chance to win people's hearts. I strongly suspect that the ancient indigenous religious vision will at least be a key source of inspiration to the new way.



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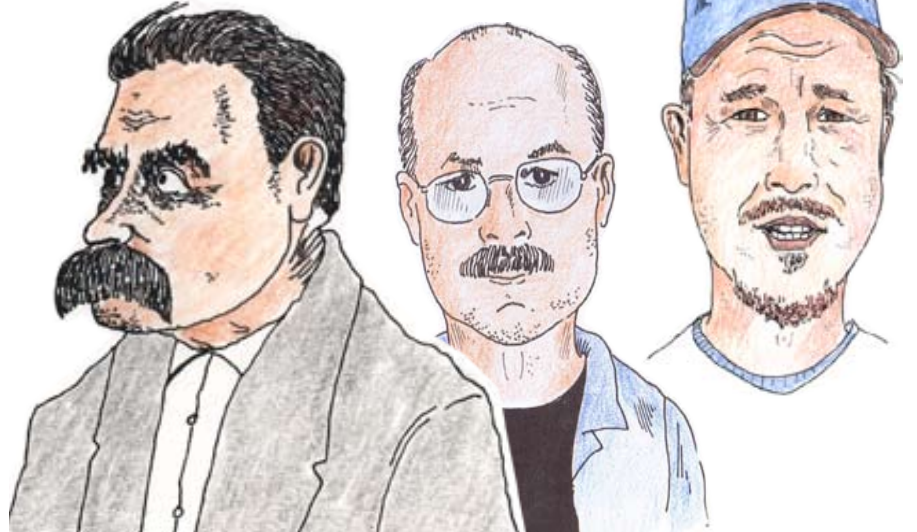
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