

Bonhoeffer's Christology in a Warming World: Ecotheological Conversations with Feminist Theology

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Abstract

The current planetary climate change crisis, characterised by ecological damage, biodiversity loss and climate change, requires humanity to re-examine its relationships to Earth and to each other. The theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's (1906-1945) provides a frame for a fresh approach to understanding these challenges. Bonhoeffer's ongoing questioning of what it means for Christ to be 'Lord of the World' is as relevant today in a globalised world facing climate disruption as it was for the Confessing Church of Germany encountering Nazism. In particular, Bonhoeffer's commitment to the vulnerable other, in real world scenarios, which emerges from his Christology has distinct resonances with Feminist Ecotheology. This paper explores the relationship between Bonhoeffer's theology and feminist eco-theologies and suggest that they are important paradigms for a re-examination of human and other-than-human relationships where the entirety of the biosphere is fundamental to us becoming fully human.

Introduction

The planetary crisis, indeed existential crisis, we face in the twenty-first century could not have been anticipated by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945). Writing his theology amidst National Socialism in Germany, Bonhoeffer's attention was necessarily directed toward the emergencies of his time. His succinct but comprehensive theology is exemplified in the term

“Lord of the World” which encompasses Christological and ecclesiological dimensions, together with a natural and social ethical perspective on God and the world in a united reality. This paper identifies Bonhoeffer’s Christology as being fundamental to an ontological understanding of the relationships between humanity, other-than-humans, and the Creator, and as such provides a way to approach an eco-ethic tasked with addressing the contemporary ecological emergency. The potential for a reading of Bonhoeffer in this arena invites deeper exploration, and its resonance with subsequent feminist ecotheologies is noteworthy. This paper will review elements of contemporary ecofeminist thinking with examples from authors such as Rosemary Radford Ruether (1996, 2000), Heather Eaton (2000, 2005, 2013), Anne Primavesi (1991, 1996), Celia Deane-Drummond (2008, 2009, 2014) and Val Plumwood (1993, 2012), and consider aspects of Bonhoeffer’s Christology which might contribute further to their accompanying notions of ecotheology and eco-ethics. This paper encapsulates early groundwork in my own doctoral project.

Climate crisis and the rift

Science reiterates what one senses primal religions and indigenous peoples have long understood (Johnson 2000; Tucker & Grim 2000), namely, that the Earth System is not simply a backdrop for the human enterprise but rather that humanity is one species among a myriad of species, which, in turn, cohabit with the so-called inanimate elements in the complex biosphere of Earth, within what we call “the Universe”. This cohabiting and interaction between all species and elements is best understood as a network of dynamic relationships, of reciprocity and intricate feedback loops. Contemporary theological speculation, inspired by Alfred North Whitehead for example, explores the concept of life itself as the creative expression of the Universe’s energy, and humanity as the self-conscious, sentient aspect of life which uses symbolic consciousness as a way both to represent and

explore meaning on behalf of the integrated life system of which we are part (see, for example, Hameroff 2003; 2006).

In this geological epoch, the Anthropocene (that is, the period defined by human modification of the environment at unprecedented rates) (Waters et al. 2016, Glikson 2013; Rockström et al. 2009) humanity has become a rival to natural processes which impact on the biosphere to the extent that the Earth System might be approaching significant tipping points. Our geological imprint is such that no ecosystem is now without human impact, and yet no human exists outside of the provisions of ecosystems (Folke et al. 2011). We are, as individuals and societies, integrated parts of the biosphere, historically benefitting from it and now shaping it in ways beyond anything identifiable in the past. Human behaviour, particularly since the Great Acceleration from the 1950s (characterised by exponential growth in population, affluence and technology) has resulted in resource scarcity, degradation of ecosystems and their provisions, a reduction in the ability of the planet to continue absorbing our wastes (Folke et al. 2011; Galaz 2014) and an overall negative impact. Our activity is “leaving a pervasive and persistent impact on Earth” (Waters et al. 2016: 1) which is marked by climate perturbation and signified in the stratigraphic record. Indeed, a new sedimentary layer, distinct from the Holocene (the preceding ~ 12,000 years), has emerged and is characterised by manufactured materials such as aluminium, plastics, and concrete as well as radionuclide fallout and particulates from fossil fuel combustion (Waters et al. 2016).

Human development to this point has occurred in the relatively stable climatic conditions of the Holocene (Rockström et al. 2009) and the possibility of continuation and flourishing of human life outside these conditions is unknown (Rockström et al. 2009). The description of the Earth System parameters as “planetary boundaries” has highlighted that there are parameters nearing points of no return—tipping points and thresholds—and some parameters which are already breached, such as atmospheric carbon (as a measure for climate change),

biodiversity, and ocean acidification. Other thresholds approaching breaches are land use, nitrogen and phosphorus cycles, and chemical and aerosol pollution (Galaz 2014; Rockström et al. 2009). The problem entails humanity's culpability and the worldviews which have permitted human and technological development to outstrip the biosphere's capacity.

Thus far, this account represents a scientific analysis of a current crisis. These are the manifestations of the deeper theological problem that derives from an essential rift between humanity and the rest of creation, one which arguably mirrors the rift in the relationship between the *I* and the *Other*. Wendell Berry describes it thus:

The contempt for the world or the hatred of it, that is exemplified by the wish to exploit it for the sake of cash and by the willingness to despise it for the sake of 'salvation,' has reached a terrifying climax in our own time. The rift between soul and body, the Creator and Creation, has admitted the entrance into the world of the machinery of the world's doom. (cited in Bouma-Prediger 1995: 1)

The anthropologist, Gregory Bateson, described the theological problem in 1972:

If you put God outside and set him [sic] vis-à-vis his creation and if you have the idea that you are created in his image, you will logically and naturally see yourself as outside and against the things around you. . . . The environment will seem to be yours to exploit. . . . If this is your estimate of your relation to Nature and *you have an advanced technology*, your likelihood of survival will be that of a snowball in hell. . . . If I am right, the whole of our thinking about what we are and what other people are has got to be restructured. (1972: 468; original italics.)

Exploring and addressing this rift is fundamental to redressing the symptoms of our assault on the biosphere and recovering a harmonious relationship within it. Referencing St. Paul's letter

to the Romans, Steven Bouma-Prediger states, “almost all informed observers concur that the earth and its various ecosystems are groaning in travail. The plight of the earth is all too real . . . groaning under the weight of our foolishness” (1995: 5-6). The nature of our crisis can be immobilising and fear can render us incapable of making any attempts at either examining the ethical and theological implications of climate change, nor of justifying any personal change or commitment to social and political engagement. Ultimately, they interfere with us being fully human.

Granted the depth and complexity of the ethical issues entailed in the climate crisis, an effective theology to address and redress them seems to be the minimum required of a Christian response. The problem is now an urgent one but the theological probe into humanity’s conceptualisation of its relationship to the balance of creation, and hence an appropriate ethic, supersedes the present situation and is valid only insofar as it represents a maturity of understanding of humanity’s relationship to Christ. A fuller understanding of Christ as “Lord of the World”—Bonhoeffer’s often used deeply layered term (2010: 365)—represents an authenticity in representing the Christian gospel. In de Gruchy’s words, “these issues are perennial to the human condition, and . . . dealing with them is critical for the future of both Christianity and humanity as a whole” (2010: 33). Again, according to Bouma-Prediger, “even if there were *not* ecological degradation of the kind and extent which we face today, there are *still* compelling reasons from within the Christian faith itself for reflection theologically to this issue and ultimately for attending to the earth and caring for its many creatures” (1995: 12; original italics). As “creation groans as in the pains of labour” (Rom. 8:22 New Revised Standard Version) the Christian hope is to restore creation to a harmonious relationship (Hill 2001). In recent decades, feminist theology has helped to explore and redress this issue.

Ecology, feminism and theology

Ecotheology increasingly dialogues with other disciplines and importantly with feminism, seeing the rise of both ‘ecofeminist theologies’ and ‘feminist ecotheologies’, both terms signifying a broad range of approaches and constructs, as well as to some extent prioritising themes in the order of nomenclature. These notions of interdependence and interrelationship are the very nature of ecology. The terms *ecology*, *feminism* and *theology* and their combining and ordering, necessarily assumes a hierarchy of ideas or influences. *Eco-feminist theology* or *feminist eco-theology* are co-informative phrases, with feminist principles and assumptions being applied to ecology and ecological concerns applied to the feminist movement (Schade 2013). Mary Grey describes these phenomena as “a new word for old wisdom” (Eaton 2005: vii). Eva Gebara’s term “lived awareness” describes the heightened awareness of the cultural, natural and cosmic aspects of the human problems related to living “on”, or better, “among” Earth that ecofeminism often questions (Gebara 1999). It attempts to articulate the perceived link between the language and constructs used to describe both women and nature in male dominated society, and the cultural responses to both (Primavesi 1991). Those responses are clearly more than symbolic: they encompass socioeconomic, structural and legal forms (Ruether 1996: 97-99).

In general terms, ecology can mean understanding the connections between living and non-living aspects of the biosphere as interrelated, interdependent and forming “metacontexts” (Primavesi 1991). This clearly lends itself to an immediate resonance with feminism which also rejects notions of separateness and hierarchy, while at the same time being committed to equality and rejection of assumptions that derive from false dualisms. Ecofeminist theology constitutes a family of approaches (Eaton 2005: 87-88) employing ecological and feminist frames and problems to intersect with the spiritual, religious and, in this case, Christian

experience and understanding. Ruether sees this as a profound challenge to traditional Christian theology and indeed all religions “shaped by the worldview of patriarchy” (Ruether 1996: 97), both on the cultural-symbolic level and on the resultant socio-economic level. Furthermore, Johnson (2000) has emphasised the lived experience of women in relation to Earth exploitation and sexist relations and how this, in turn, distorts Christianity. Ruether, along with other Mariologists, sees Mary as the new hope, representing “wholeness of humanity before the fall” (Deane-Drummond 1997: 29).

Feminist theology itself can be conceptually seen as sitting within the Liberation Theology tradition and, in relation to ecological thinking, draws attention to the anthropocentric, and particularly androcentric systems and constructs which alienate or oppress both women and the ecology. It has been particularly useful in drawing attention to systems and paradigms which are so intrinsically normative that they have historically evaded critique.

Ecofeminists generally see “domination as a core phenomenon at the ideological and material roots of the woman/nature nexus”, which in itself is “rooted in a common ideology based on the control of reason over nature” (Eaton 2005: 59). At the core of domination is the construct of dualisms where one is necessarily posed over and against another. Dualisms arising from a mechanistic view of the world where reason is held over and against nature are reflected in notions of rationality over animality, public over private, the universal over the particular (Eaton 2005: 57), or in the words of Plumwood, “the construction of a devalued and sharply demarcated sphere of otherness” (Plumwood 1993: 41). Ecofeminism sees continuity between the mechanistic view of the world and domination of it, as articulated by early figures such as Francis Bacon (Deane-Drummond 1997: 8) and a misogynistic view of the world which further validates that domination (Eaton 2005: 56-57). This can be seen as manifested in the “revolutionary idea of progress and economic growth, solidified into beliefs, social structures and organisational principles, including the most recent form of

economic globalisation” (Eaton 2005: 57). According to Ruether, the orders in place—social, economic, political and religious—reflect and sanction the ideological superstructure of sexism and environmental exploitation, two manifestations of domination (Bouma-Prediger 1995; Eaton 2005: 32; Ruether 1996, 2000).

In response to this status quo, feminist ecotheologies offer a range of approaches for understanding and explaining this domination and for expounding an ethical response. In particular, the sacramental resonates with Gerbara’s “lived awareness” and hearkens back to primal and indigenous conceptions of spirit-infused creation and respect or veneration for processes of reproduction and the nurturing of life. Anne Elvey’s creative theological exploration of Luke using a “gestational paradigm” characterises a facet of meaning particular to the feminine (Elvey 2005). Sallie McFague’s ground-breaking articulation of creation as the body of God (1996) brought feminist ecotheological thinking face to face with the interrogation of creation theology and later, its implications for ethics (McFague 2000).

When one considers the somewhat romantic notion of primal cultures co-existing with nature, one is reminded that there is no evidence of any culture *not* entering a path of environmental degradation given population growth, increasing technology and affluence. Plumwood’s work (1993) develops these ideas well and she is known for her repositioning of humans within the natural food chain, and rejection of “ontological veganism” as reinforcing dualistic separation from the natural (2012). Both of these positions derive from locating humanity within the biosphere and rejecting notions of separateness or otherness. Feminist ecotheologies have also drawn attention to notions of interconnectedness with Earth and other creatures. Vicki Balabanski’s (forthcoming) metaphor of the human body as a community of beings: 23 trillion bacteria coexisting *with* and *as* host human, exemplifies how species, elements and systems can collectively comprise the living organism. It represents the collective of life and the geophysical which comprises Gaia (Lovelock 2000) and how

humans might represent the sentient aspect of that organism. According to Deane-Drummond:

the recognition of sociality within the human community is part of a wider recognition of the sociality of all things. In this way mutual relationships are not narrowly defined, but both ecological and cosmological. (Deane-Drummond 1996: 55)

Ecofeminism has also connected and collected together the weaker elements of the dualisms: it describes the links between nature and femininity, imagination and fertility, intuition and creativity, in rejection of domination paradigms of reason and mechanistic constructs. It is at this point that ecofeminist theology extends beyond that of a reactive, liberation theology and asserts its positive frame with important ethical implications.

Within this broad church of feminist ecotheological explorations lies ecofeminist Christology, exemplified by authors such as Schade (2013), Solberg (1997) and Deane-Drummond (2008, 2009; Deane-Drummond & Bedford-Strohm 2011). The latter in particular has traced Christological treatment of ecology in theologies of Teilhard, Balthasar and Moltmann, and examined them all against an evolutionary cosmology. Her work represents an important development in methodology moving toward, and potentially beyond, the planetary crisis. Ecofeminist Christology might be characterised by a foundational worldview that existing social structures reflect patriarchal, dualistic thinking, but it nonetheless drills down deeply to Christological and Trinitarian understanding in order to articulate ontological meanings and hence ethical frames.

With its investigation of the ontological significance of Christ in creation, and hence the significance of that for relationships, ecofeminist Christology is reminiscent of the insights of Martin Luther and in turn, Bonhoeffer. This is where ecofeminist theology and Bonhoeffer's

Christology can be seen to intersect. Bonhoeffer's theology draws attention to Christology as being central to all Christian theological concerns. The significance of the incarnation rests in three key areas: validation of the physical, the ontology of sociality, and the chief characteristic of relationships as being defined by suffering for the sake of the other.

Bonhoeffer

Larry Rasmussen, a highly respected Bonhoeffer theologian since the 1960s, captures much of Bonhoeffer's method in a recent paper (2014) that fortifies Bonhoeffer's credentials as a contributor to ecotheological thought. Building on his own earlier works (1996) that utilised a historico-social lens through which to examine Bonhoeffer's peace ethic, Rasmussen examines his ecological credentials. In doing so, Rasmussen cautions against the misuse of Bonhoeffer in engaging with a subject he did not specifically name—a field which was yet to become critical to human survival “a couple of decades before ecological concern was even seen as necessary” (Burkholder, 2013: 338). In defending Bonhoeffer's apparent lack of explicit analysis of ecotheological concerns, Burkholder (2013: 350) reminds us that:

In light of the fact that Bonhoeffer's immediate concern was confronting the tenacious power of the Third Reich, he can hardly be faulted for concentrating his energies on the pressing issues of his time.

Heinrich Ott, an early commentator on Bonhoeffer, lyrically describes a suitable hermeneutical process as “a discussion with Bonhoeffer” wherein:

...consequences are drawn. If we wish to do justice to Bonhoeffer we have to engage ourselves with the thoughts that his thought raises in us . . . Perhaps now then the matter could be carried a little further and it is time for us to join Bonhoeffer in

thought and advance with him again and again to the frontier of still open questions.
(1971: 315)

Bonhoeffer's potential contribution to ecotheology

So how can Bonhoeffer's theology contribute to ecotheological and eco-ethical thinking? I suggest the case rests firmly in Bonhoeffer's overarching framework of his theological project, namely, his Christology. A key text in this discussion is Bonhoeffer's exegesis of Genesis 1-3 collected as *Creation and Fall* (1997). Bonhoeffer's reading of the Hebrew Scriptures is informed by his understanding of it in light of the New Testament, namely, that of God's 'self-disclosure in Christ' (1997: 9) and Christ's fulfilment of the scriptures necessitates a reading outside of time, as it were. In this reading, he criticises the "irresponsible, unsound apologetics" which theology had offered in the face of advances in quantum physics, biology and evolution—which he characterised as "rear-guard actions" (Rüter & Tödt 1997: 161). In contrast, Bonhoeffer was not remotely interested in rejecting the science (coming, as he did, from a family of notable scientists). Rather:

The reconstruction of the empirical world by the exact sciences and the reality that this scientific construct represents, in which heavenly bodies and atoms as well as living creatures are to be found, he saw embraced by the one who is most real of all.
(Rüter & Tödt 1997: 164)

Creation and Fall is the only extant material from Bonhoeffer's Berlin period (1932-3) in his own words, and reflects his conviction that theological exegesis implies capturing "the message of the God who acts in the present" (Bonhoeffer 2009: 484). To fully understand creation and humanity's place within the biosphere, Bonhoeffer takes us to Christ, reflecting his position that creation and resurrection should be viewed together (2009: 154). His Christology lectures from the same period provide clues. In them, Bonhoeffer distils the

Christ who permeates the corpus of theology (Lenehan 2012), which he reaffirms in his

Ethics:

In Jesus Christ we believe in the God who became human, was crucified, and is risen. In the becoming human we recognize God's love toward God's creation, in the crucifixion God's judgment on all flesh, and in the resurrection God's purpose for a new world. Nothing could be more perverse than to tear these three apart, because the whole is contained in each of them. (2005: 157)

Bonhoeffer's premise that Christ is the centre of reality—of time, history and nature—reframes both the ontology and relationships of humans (an assertion more fully articulated in *Ethics* 2005). His writing into the political crisis of his time provides us with clues about our ecological crisis. Bonhoeffer demonstrates that a disjointed reality—one divided into false dualisms—is not supported by Luther, the fullness of church tradition, or Scripture, if examined through a Christological lens. In fact, placing Christ at the very centre of reality both negates the possibility of dualisms and removes the problem of 'the god of the gaps'. In the modern scientific age, where the 'gaps' are seemingly ever smaller, the potential for moving God to the margins, and ultimately removing the potential for transcendence altogether, has been enhanced (see Bonhoeffer 2010: 410). Bonhoeffer nonetheless returns to a thoroughly Christocentric view of reality and, in doing so, allows us to revisit and validate our understanding of creation and our place within it. It is no wonder, then, that Dorothee Soelle described Bonhoeffer as "the one German theologian who will lead us into the third millennium" (cited in Bonhoeffer 1997 covernote).

Bonhoeffer's Christology

Christ is at the centre of Bonhoeffer's theological schema; it is this same Christology which forms the basis of his ontological understanding whereby humanity is seen to be in

relationship with both God and the rest of creation (*The Christology Lectures*, Bonhoeffer 2009: 300; de Gruchy 2010: 17-19). That ontological construct places Christ both in the world and in the community of believers, to the extent that the community is the Body of Christ, and the Christocentric theology underpins Bonhoeffer's social intention for Christianity. Bonhoeffer's creation theology, so essential to our understanding of Bonhoefferian theology's approach to the environmental crisis, must be seen first in the context of his Christology (Green 1998: 1).

Bonhoeffer's understanding of Christ as the "image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15), whereby "all things have been created through him and for him . . . and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:16-17) and for which Bonhoeffer uses the motif "Lord of the World", is the basis for all his work on life in faith. The words of this most ancient hymn, appearing in the books of Colossians and Philippians, and drawing on earlier tropes from Proverbs, Wisdom and Sirach, express Christ's mediation of, and centrality to, both creation and reconciliation (Murphy-O'Connor 2001: 1193-1194).

At the core of Bonhoeffer's kenotic theology is the Suffering Christ who exists in order to serve others. In response to what Bonhoeffer considered modern theology's emphasis on the individual, he confronts "the world come of age" (for example, Bonhoeffer 2010: 450) directly by subverting the overarching sin narrative of the modern world, namely, the misuse of power (Bonhoeffer 2012: 246-257). For Bonhoeffer, the misuse of power is manifest in technology as power over Earth, and by the individual and the State in relation to other people. In building this case, the "powerful" weakness of God provides the basis for an ethic whereby the human lives only in order to serve the other, and in doing so mirrors Christ. Furthermore, freedom for others must extend from the human community to the whole of Earth's community to reflect the embodied nature of humanity as *imago dei*. The antithesis of service rests on the attempt to overpower Earth, and disengage from it, through means of

technology (over nature) and organisation (over people). So *imago dei* is to be understood in terms of *analogia relationis*: when relationship is breached (between humans, humans and God, or humans and Earth), *imago dei* is obscured (Burkholder 2013: 196). Bonhoeffer's statement "I am not free from it"—Earth—is not a protestation, but an affirmation that, ontologically, humanity is free *to serve* Earth:

On the contrary this freedom to rule includes being bound to the creatures who are ruled. The ground and the animals over which I am lord constitute the world in which I live, without which I cease to be. It is my world, my earth, over which I rule. I am not free from it in any sense of my essential being, my spirit, having no need of nature, as though nature were something alien to the spirit. On the contrary, in my whole being, in my creatureliness, I belong wholly to this world; it bears me, nurtures me, holds me. But my freedom from it consists in the fact that this world, to which I am bound like a master to his servant, like the peasant to his bit of ground [Boden], has been made subject to me, that over the earth which is and remains my earth I am to *rule*, and the more I master it, the more it is *my* earth. What so peculiarly binds human beings to, and sets them over against, the other creatures is the authority conferred on humankind by nothing else than God's word. (1997: 66)

In this concluding paragraph from his chapter on *The image of God on Earth*, Bonhoeffer lays the groundwork for linking humanity's ontology, relationship to God, Earth and each other, and the roles of sociality, service and responsibility.

The way we live as people in community, and the choices we make in light of our relationships with others, including God and Earth, highlights our actions as manifestations of our agency. In his 1932 devotional essay, *Thy Kingdom Come*, Bonhoeffer links our relationship to Earth with our relationship to God:

We are hostile to the Earth, because we want to be better than it, or we are hostile to God, because God robs us of the Earth, our mother. We flee the power of the Earth, or we hold hard and fast to it. Either way we are not the wanderers who love the Earth that bears them . . . Only wanderers of this kind, who love the Earth and God as one, can believe in God's kingdom. (2009: 286-287)

Incidentally, in this same essay, Bonhoeffer calls to mind Prometheus' love for his "Mother Earth", and elsewhere draws on Antaeus' ability to restore and heal when in physical contact with Gaia (Bonhoeffer 2000: 68-69; 2008: 344-345). Bonhoeffer speaks of nature throughout much of his work and it is increasingly important to him personally when he is divorced from nature in prison (for example, Bonhoeffer 2010: 459). The discussion of Mother Earth, nature, and our relationship to it is important to Bonhoeffer's eschatology because it is only in our understanding of Bonhoeffer's interpretation of the New Kingdom can we fully appreciate humanity's relationship to God and Earth. Bonhoeffer's framing of the notion of "the now and the not yet" as "penultimate and ultimate" (Bonhoeffer 2005: 137; 2010: 365) contextualises the reality in which we live: that is, Christ's redemptive work is both manifest and being manifested. In Bonhoeffer's theology, we see a temporal focus on this present reality in its actual, experienced form, and this speaks to humanity's role in responding to climate change. It negates the idea of a hope in a new world which simply supersedes this present one in the event of its destruction, but rather calls people to consider this Earthly problem and its reality, in some senses regardless of eschatological hope. "We have to live in the world—'etsi deus non daretur'" [as if God did not exist] (Bonhoeffer 2010: 478). Bonhoeffer asks that we consider the value and delight that this present reality deigns and, to that end, we should focus on its restoration and reconciliation, or in other words, its flourishing. The emphasis on the penultimate is closely linked with the notion of Christ's

embodiment in this one reality and, in turn, reinforces the necessity of working towards reconciliation of Earth.

Reconciliation speaks to Bonhoeffer's notion of orders of preservation (a notion he addresses many times and developed further as "mandates" in *Ethics*), a term used in contrast to the Lutheran "orders of creation" to differentiate pre-fall and post-fall states. Bonhoeffer's doctrine of preservation allows for God to intervene and sustain creation "even in the face of creaturely sin" (Ballor 2006: 6). Preservation connotes that God continues to uphold and preserve the creation that he loves, despite its fallen condition. These are now the only viable orders, since the orders of creation are no longer operative, post-fall. As Ballor (2006) points out, this is in contrast to Bonhoeffer's contemporaries' understanding of orders of creation and permits Bonhoeffer's creative dialogue with earlier, medieval notions of natural theology.ⁱ

Bonhoeffer was adamant that the ethical behaviour demanded of Christians requires the use of reason to consider the ramifications and consequences of our behaviours. Choices are often difficult, sometimes with many options, with none of them 'good' (Bonhoeffer 2001, 2005). Bonhoeffer's own struggle with such a choice in Nazi Germany is witness to this line of reasoning. Again, his eschatology becomes important here insofar as "penultimate" and "ultimate" realms interplay, meaning that immediate and future ramifications are crucial to Christian decision-making. In the context of climate change, both present and future consequences operating as a critique to human behaviour would indicate that sustainability is the logical conclusion. Climate change is the contemporary setting in which to deliberate responsible action (for example, Bonhoeffer 2005: 259).

Towards a Bonhoefferian eco-ethic

This key tenet of Bonhoeffer's Christology—the weakness of the Suffering God—in conversation with humanity's response described by Bonhoeffer in terms such as sociality and responsibility—is important because it provides several pointers to the theological task of addressing ecological concerns and developing an eco-ethic, and the tools for interfaith relations around both. We see in Bonhoeffer's theology an interrelatedness of concepts within the starting point of his Christology and centred within the frame of a single, unified reality (“one reality” is a key assumption underpinning *Ethics* and introduced explicitly in “*Christ, Reality and Good*” [Bonhoeffer 2005: 47-75]). Bonhoeffer's approach, of which “one reality” thinking is just a part, has been considered by at least one respected commentator to represent a total paradigm shift of the order of Augustine, Aquinas or Luther. Green (2012) describes this paradigm as *Christus in Mundo, Christus pro Mundo*, which captures the interrelatedness of Christ and creation, both in and for the world, and the specific place of humanity as a unique part of creation but only insofar as we recognise Christ in and through creation and in the face of the other.

Basic to Bonhoeffer's Christology is the concept of Christ's physicality and embeddedness in this one, single reality (developed in Bonhoeffer 2005). The embodiment of Christ validates materiality and establishes the body trope that the Apostle Paul uses (and as we have seen, McFague) and co-opted by Bonhoeffer in *Sanctorum Communio* (1998). Christ's body is manifest now as the church and is necessarily based in sociality. This compels us to reassess the contemporary emphasis of the salvation of the individual human being to the salvation (or health) of the whole of creation.

Bonhoeffer sees church as being representative of both guilt and redemption and therefore open to a different, redemptive, way of operating (Ballor 2006; Law 2011). That different

way is servanthood (McBride 2014; Nullens 2013) toward the other, and in this context the other signifies not simply other *people* but all of creation. Put differently, perhaps we are of “the same stuff” whether animate or inanimate, human or “more-than-human” (Abram 1997: 67), since all of creation is permeated by Christ. Christ’s incarnation serves as an historical marker of Christ’s immanent transcendence, a theological notion that can be found at the heart of some of the oldest Christological debates in the church as well as in contemporary philosophical theology (Haynes 2012).

The very nature of Christ is seen through his incarnation in order to manifest servanthood. Bonhoeffer explores this notion in his writings on *The Sermon on the Mount* and invites us to examine the problem of the climate crisis through the focus of the Suffering God (Bonhoeffer 2007: 401; Kelly & Nelson 2003). He presents us with a God who “gains ground and power in the world by being powerless” (Bonhoeffer 2010: 480), which, appearing paradoxical, provides a key to operating within the interrelationship model. Seeing the Suffering Christ embodied in all of creation allows us to subvert the existing model of domination over others and by extension, over creation. So Christ’s embodiment validates both our physicality and our embodied relationships and gives us a starting point to explore Bonhoeffer’s “Lord of the World”.

Bonhoeffer’s Christology as the starting point undermines, as we have seen, notions of false dualisms and posits rather one unified reality, completely expressed in and validating this Earthly experience. The incarnation can mean nothing less. The concept of domination—whether over a particular gender, a race, or Earth—is shown by Bonhoeffer to represent the antithesis of the Suffering God and hence the ontology and role of humanity. His explication of the roles of both church and state and dismantling of faulty Two Kingdom thinking (as it had come to be understood) undermines the justification for domination. Ecofeminist theology has done well to highlight the problems of domination of both women and nature,

and some important creative extension work has been done realigning Christian thought with primal notions of connectivity to Earth and positioning injustices toward women as mirroring irresponsibility toward Earth (Deane-Drummond 1996: 55). In Bonhoeffer's mind, however, the problem is not one first of patriarchy *per se* but of not placing Christ at the centre of the question. Patriarchy, the Jewish Question, environmental destruction, for example, all become symptoms of the overarching disjunction, rather than the starting point. In his essay, *The Right to Self Assertion*, Bonhoeffer articulates the problem of humanity's domination of nature—its “mastery”—as one in which humanity instead is ‘mastered’ through the medium of technology—including, according to Abram, the technology of language. Language itself can insult the relationship between humanity and creation by constraining and altering perception of the biosphere (Abram 1997: 254). The ultimate extension of technology's mastery over humanity, particularly in the history of the West, is war. The predicted results of climate change, such as water wars and conflicts over diminishing habitable land and scarce food sources, simply represent tragic outcomes of attempted mastery over nature and people.

Bonhoeffer's notion of sociality is central to understanding all relationships, in light of characteristics of the Trinity, and particularly when considering humanity's ontological standing before the rest of creation and God. For this reason, it becomes an important component of exploring his potential ecotheological approach to creation. Importantly, feminist ecotheologies have largely straddled the sacramental/apologist division could be considered to be a false duality in itself. Bonhoeffer's corpus weaves together notions of Christology, ontology and ethics in creative and often beautiful ways, while continuously inviting us to participate in the ongoing creation of a redeemed world. That participation is, in effect, the expression of Christ as “Lord of the World”.

Conclusion

Ecofeminist theology in the latter part of the twentieth century until now has articulated the effect of patriarchal symbolism and its social manifestation in the forms of domination of women and nature. The false separation of men from women and the devaluing of things seen as feminine has led to a devaluing and exploitation of both nature and women, according to this view. Ecofeminist theology has effectively described the value of the poorer cousins of false dualisms and how their interrelatedness more appropriately reflects a scientifically supported conception of the biosphere. Its contribution comes at a time when humanity faces a rupture in planetary viability. Ecofeminist Christologies especially draw attention to the notions of servanthood and sociality within this paradigm and offer a way forward in justice eco-ethics. Ecofeminist theology has effectively drawn attention to the primal and indigenous notions, as well as updated philosophical theological ones (Haynes 2012), pointing to the idea of immanent transcendence, wherein the Otherness of God may be at once immanent in all of creation. What ecofeminist theology risks is a “slide into biocentrism” which diminishes human responsibility and potentially detaches it from “practical Christian ethics” (Deane-Drummond 1997: 39). Sacralising Earth as a reaction to androcentric forms, or feminising God, both fail to acknowledge the disjunct of both men and women (as well as trans- and indeterminate-gendered people) from more-than-human nature, and also the shared awe and love for creation found amongst people of all genders. In a related way it risks inadvertently perpetuating the very dualisms it critiques.

Bonhoeffer’s Christology, forged whilst confronting the existential crisis of twentieth century totalitarianism, similarly provides tools for better understanding humanity’s place among other-than-human creation. His ongoing question of “who is Christ actually for us today?” (Bonhoeffer 2010: 365) demands a re-examination of both the Incarnation and the ethic

which it manifests. As Bonhoeffer sees it, this one, unified reality *is* the Kingdom of God and he invites us to participate in that reality with Christ at “the centre of the village” and not at the periphery. In real terms, relationships to ‘other’ (human and other-than-human) are the very essence of that Christ-reality and as such are based on servanthood and seeing the Suffering Christ in the face of the other. Following Luther’s use of the term “the mask of God” to describe the natural world provides a clue as to how we might perceive the face of Christ in the suffering biosphere of which we are part. The “mask” is paradoxical: it both hides and reveals the Creator to its creatures, mirroring the tension, but not the exclusivity, of immanence and transcendence at once.

It is these notions that Bonhoeffer brings to his own *Ethics* and which we must now bring to an eco-ethic which is adequate to the task of both meeting the needs of human and other-than-human creation in this time of crisis, and doing as much as we can to mitigate it. How successful we are may be less crucial than how humanly we learn to live.

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Endnotes

ⁱ Bonhoeffer was influenced by Thomas Aquinas, directly referencing him over one hundred times and utilising his thinking more generally, and by implication, some of the Islamic influences in turn, on Aquinas. Key here is the overarching notion that revelation has occurred and is occurring in the material world.