Nature in a 'world come of age'

Peter Scott

I Thinking theologically about nature

What is striking about the reception of the account of worldliness in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's prison writings is how few commentators have drawn attention to the fact that Bonhoeffer concentrates on the status of nature. To be sure, nature is not part of the *definition* of 'the coming of age of mankind'. But the *aim* of such 'coming of age' is 'to be independent of nature'. Bonhoeffer writes: 'Our immediate environment is not nature, as formerly, but organization. But with this protection from nature's menace there arises a new one — through organization itself.' So the claim that 'organization' is now the environment of humanity is to be understood dialectically: the emancipation of humanity from nature leads to new forms of domination.

For Bonhoeffer, the attempt to escape nature thus raises once more the question of humanity. Or, as Bonhoeffer puts it, if the menace of nature is displaced by the menace of social organization, 'What protects us against the menace of organization?'.[1] 'Coming of age' is thus an anthropological development (the theme of worldliness) predicated upon the emerging independence of humanity from nature which, in turn, requires a theological response (the theme of 'secular interpretation'). Such interpretation must address the fact that nature is now mediated to us by social contexts. So the theological interpretation of a 'world come of age' includes judgements about the status and significance of nature for humanity.

The difficulties raised here for Christian theology by the place of nature in a 'world come of age' are acute for we are driven back to the origins of modernity. As Georg Lukács has shown, the relation between an ontology of humanity and an ontology of nature is *the* problem of modernity. In this reading, the Enlightenment, continuing here the thrust of the Renaissance, attempts '...to construct a this-sided and unified ontology to supplant the former transcendent, teleological and theological one. Behind this project is the great idea that the ontology of social being can only be constructed on the basis of an ontology of nature.' The reconfiguration of these ontologies — which was

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attempted, in part at least, for anti-theological reasons — ran into an insoluble antinomy: how could society 'correspond to the eternal and unchanging laws of nature' when, however, no 'ontology of social being could be directly deduced from this conception of nature'.[2] At the heart of modernity is thus the separation of humanity and nature and the subsequent attempt, theoretically and practically, to secure humanity's natural conditions.

That we remain thoroughly confused about the relation between the ontologies of nature and humanity can be seen in the Gaia hypothesis. Central to the hypothesis is the claim that Gaia secures the optimum conditions for life. But does that mean that our current industrial civilization is self-correcting towards such optimum conditions? Or is the harmony between humanity and nature to be secured by technological application? Is this world a self-regulating mechanism or is planning our only hope? Is our industrial society 'natural', the product of Gaia, or is it a departure from Gaia?[3] (If it is thought that our modern economy is a departure from Gaia, then the question arises as to why Gaia permits such an aberration.) At the root of this tension is the issue of the relation between the ontologies of humanity and nature.

Given the confusion created by this antinomy, theological attention must be paid to the modern attempt to construct an ontology which trades upon a separation of nature and humanity. Paulos Mar Gregorios has noted that the modern interpretation of nature as other than humanity emerges as the stress on nature as related to the grace of God recedes.[4] The difference maintained between humanity and nature is thereby anti-theological. If this issue is to addressed fully, the theological interpretation of nature cannot be restricted to the debate between theology and the natural sciences as a theme in the theology of creation. In that debate, the doctrine of creation offers an account, in general terms, of the world as God's creation. It thereby seeks a dialogue with those sciences which treat of nature in the sense of 'all that is'. Central to this dialogue is the attempt by the theologian to show what it means to say that the world is dependent on God.

Yet nature is various: in addition to the doctrine of creation, the interpretation of nature is, as we have seen, a matter also for theological anthropology. (Hence I am not at all persuaded that the claim that the natural sciences now tell a 'new creation story' can carry the weight of anthropological significance which some theologians are currently ascribing to it.[5]) What is required is not a return to the transcendent, teleological account of nature discussed by Lukács, but rather theological ways of drawing together the ontologies of humanity and nature.

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The claim of a 'world come of age' is, in my view, helpful in thinking theologically about nature in this context. As Barry Harvey maintains, Bonhoeffer sought 'an alternative picture of how a Christian is to see herself in relation to herself, to her neighbours, to creation as a whole, and to God'.[6] For Bonhoeffer, the concept of religion names part of our difficulty in construing this alternative picture. In what follows, I argue that Bonhoeffer's discussion of religion enables a critique of some recent developments in the theology of nature. Further, Bonhoeffer's theological commitments permit a constructive argument towards a liberative account of nature in its relation to humanity. The conventional reading of Bonhoeffer as the theologian of secularity whose main interest is the autonomy of humanity is, I think, only partially correct. Instead, Bonhoeffer's writings may form the basis of a critique of contemporary theologies of nature and provide some clues towards a 'secular' theology of nature. In what follows, I thus reinterpret a key theme in Bonhoeffer's prison writings for an ecologically-aware age.

II Religion, partiality and nature

The reflections on 'religionless Christianity' in the letters from prison are the most famous of Bonhoeffer's writings. For our purposes there is no need here to explore the shifts in the conception of religion in Bonhoeffer's thinking. Instead, one or two fundamental points about Bonhoeffer's developed use will set up the discussion.

Central to the meaning of the concept of religion in the prison writings — and earlier — is that religion obscures reality 'as it is'. Reality, as Bonhoeffer makes clear in *Christology* and *Ethics*, has Christ at its centre.[7] How then does religion function to obscure? Religion, in Bonhoeffer's interpretation, has three themes: metaphysics, individualism and partiality.[8] The three are interrelated in that the construal of Christianity in terms of partiality means that Jesus Christ is Lord not of all of life, but only part of it. Hence Jesus Christ is not to do with the world, but only a part of the world. The restriction of Christianity to a part of life connects with Bonhoeffer's assertion that religion is to do with the individual, in his or her inwardness. The address to the individual is validated and stabilised in terms of a metaphysical God who 'appears' at the margins of the world in the form of some supernatural realm.[9]

In addressing the theme of nature in a 'world come of age', the most interesting aspect of religion is that of 'partiality'. In a letter of 18 July 1944, Bonhoeffer writes: 'The "religious act" is always something partial; "faith" is something whole, involving the whole of one's life.' Religion is thereby not universal, but is limited to a particular space

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(perhaps the 'space' of the individual). Religion marks a division between faith and world, thus denying the reign of God in Jesus Christ. For Bonhoeffer, by contrast: 'Jesus claims for himself and the kingdom of God the whole of human life in all its manifestations.' 'The Word of God...reigns.'

The theme of partiality may thus be understood as the attempt to offer an outline of a profound anthropological problem as well as a theological difficulty. The anthropological problem refers to the overcoming of individualism and metaphysics, provincialism and secularism in Christian practice. The theological difficulty is how to interpret the world in terms of its centre, Jesus Christ. Or as Bonhoeffer himself put it: we have here to do with 'the claim of a world that has come of age by Jesus Christ'.[10]

The discussion so far is familiar enough. But what has not been sufficiently highlighted in the discussions of Bonhoeffer's theology to date is, in my judgement, the consequences of partiality for a theological understanding of nature in a 'world come of age'. In 'Outline for a book', Bonhoeffer comments that previously nature had been 'conquered by spiritual means'. Following its (nature's) partial incorporation into social organisation, humanity is thrown back onto itself: problems in the humanity-nature relation are always problems for self-reflexive humanity. Yet, as Bonhoeffer notes, the 'spiritual force' is now lacking. How then are we to understand the salvific power of the Christian God in our current considerations of nature in a world come of age?

We can put the question more sharply, adapting Bonhoeffer: how is Jesus Christ the Lord of the religionless, which must include a non-religious or non-partial reading of nature? We may appreciate the depth of the problem here if we consider briefly what a partial account of nature might be.

If religion privileges and concentrates upon the individual and an absolute God located at the margins of the world, the result is the displacement of nature. Partiality obscures nature.[11] The world is divided up in such a fashion that the significance of nature is misconstrued. In the domain of theological discourse, it is possible to detect two mistakes. We might call these strategies the 'provincialism of nature' and the 'secularism of nature'.

The *provincialism of nature* concentrates on the categories and dynamic of reconciliation in a fashion which tends to restrict to the life of the church the recreation enacted in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Nature is mediated to God anthropologically by humanity and soteriologically by the human nature of Jesus Christ. So here we

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have a theologically conventional schema: Christ, church, nature. Such attention to reconciliation is, of course, an important emphasis for a theology of nature. But, as this account presupposes the separation of the ontology of nature and the ontology of humanity, a detailed theology of nature, as part of a theological anthropology, is missing. In its tendency to pronounce a word of grace to nature, this account already trades upon the (anti-theological) modern separation of humanity and nature.

The strategy of the *secularism of nature* is, by contrast, to broaden the notion of incarnation to refer, in general fashion, to the presence of God. To construe 'the world as God's body' is an excellent example of such an approach.[12] Such accounts may offer a metaphysical reading of reality which includes nature (often in terms indebted to process thought). Such a metaphysical account is an important strength. Yet such a strategy often restricts theological insight by accepting uncritically a philosophy of nature. (A common failing of such an uncritical position is the absence of a determining place for Jesus Christ.) A related difficulty is that particular dimensions of nature are grounded in the incarnational presence of God.

III Provincialism and secularism of nature

Let me be more specific about the character of these two strategies. The 'provincialism of nature' often takes as its point of departure the human nature of Jesus. Such a starting point can be detected in the following quotation by Douglas Davies: 'This process of God entering into humanity in the individual man, Jesus of Nazareth...is...closely associated in Christian belief with what is often called sacramental theology, emphasising how ordinary aspects of life can be endowed with religious significance.' The direction of the argument is clear: from the condescension of God in Jesus Christ to the revaluation of the natural order. As John Habgood puts it: 'The essential point is that material reality is shown to be capable of bearing the image of the divine. It rests on the staggering claim that this is what happened in Jesus and what constitutes the truth in the doctrines of the incarnation and of salvation.'[13]

Given modernity's separation of humanity and nature, one drawback with this strategy is obvious: beginning from the doctrine of reconciliation, it operates without the specification of nature-humanity relations. Because this strategy turns upon the modern signification of the relation between humanity and nature, two difficulties emerge. First, it moves from the ecclesial sphere to the world; the theological structure is 'kerygmatic', pronouncing a word to the world. Second, on account of

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this movement, an ontology of the human is privileged; how the social being of humanity relates to an ontology of nature is not central to this approach.

Jürgen Moltmann's recent Christology, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, is an excellent example of such a strategy. To avoid the difficulties I have just listed, Moltmann offers 'an emphatically *social* Christology' as a way of avoiding the anti-nature tendencies of docetic Christologies. Further, the text seeks to relocate Christological enquiry in the three 'contradictions' of poverty, nuclear deterrence and the ecological crisis which threaten modern civilization. However, the main difficulty Moltmann encounters is how to relate the redemptive cross of Jesus of Nazareth to nature. Although, in a return to patristic forms of Christological thinking, the *embodiment* of Jesus is taken to be central, Moltmann seems unclear as to what precisely is redeemed. Sometimes the suggestion is that only the nature present in nature-humanity relations is redeemed; on other occasions it seems that all of nature is to participate in the glorification brought about by God.

Faithful to his earlier writing, Moltmann understands created nature-history as having its place in a tension in God's own life in which the crucial transaction occurs on the cross between God and 'God dependent'. The primary location of the event of the cross is therefore not the world but some mythical space of the life of the trinitarian God. Quite how such a mythical transaction relates to the three contradictions adumbrated by Moltmann is less clear.

Indeed, the extension of the soteriological efficacy of Christ's passion to include nature rests in a piece of 'theo-logic', not in the particular requirements of an ecological Christology. That is, in order to ground the theological imperative for Christ to redeem all of nature, Moltmann amends a patristic claim thus: if Christ's 'mortal human nature was accepted, raised and transfigured...then Christ's resurrection also raised and gathered up the original good creation which is the ground of human nature, perfecting it in its own new creation'. If Jesus' embodiment is resurrected, and this nature is not explicable without reference to its conditions in non-human nature, then Christ's resurrection is a promise to all of creation.

The principal difficulty is the various meanings of the term 'nature' which Moltmann seeks to link, sometimes by the employment of theological categories such as 'creation', in this mythic space. The intention is clear: to relate the human nature of Jesus to humanity in its natural conditions. Yet these various domains are not clearly presented. A good example of this lack of clarity is the point at which Moltmann seeks to add to his atonement metaphor of the 'suffering God' a second

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metaphor of the 'cosmic Christ'. The logic of such a development is clear: how does Christ redeem the non-human realm? The connection between the particular identity and the universal significance of Jesus Christ is presented in the form of the relation between cross and cosmos. Yet the 'space' between these two levels — humanity and nature — is lost in the primacy of the mythic space of the cruciform, cosmic drama of redemption.

Moltmann describes his position as a '"physical" doctrine of redemption'. Yet the final impression is not one of physicality. Instead, the presentation is of the world interpreted against itself from the perspective of the mythical life of God in which the reality of the world is displaced. The result of the strategy of provincialism is the denaturing of nature.[14]

I turn now to the second strategy, the secularism of nature. In its stress on the contribution of theology to the humanization of our circumstances, the tendency of this view is towards the displacement of God by nature.[15] To secure such a practical contribution one very influential text, Sallie McFague's *Models of God*, seeks the reconfiguration of the concept of incarnation. Instead of the concept of incarnation being a function of the doctrine of Christ, it is transferred to the doctrine of God and transformed substantially in order to account for God's presence in and to the world.

What is the difficulty with such an approach? The strategy of the secularism of nature here makes the mistake of maintaining that the general frame or structure of the universe might be ascribed to God. Such an approach is unpersuasive today, as Wolfhart Pannenberg makes clear with reference to Logos Christology, in that the modern preference is to discuss the basic frame of the universe in terms of its natural, that is, inherent, regularity and contingency as related in the natural sciences. It is not obvious that such scientific 'laws' are a 'philosophically accessible principle of world order' by which the presence of God to God's body might be secured. (To function as such a principle these laws must be shown to be 'mediators of divinity'.)[16] As McFague's position requires such a principle, a crucial warrant for her argument is missing.

Such a criticism of this notion of incarnation may be put differently: how can a philosophy of nature today provide the framework for articulating the presence of God? To go that way requires that 'the totality of the laws of nature would have to be conceived as an image of God'.[16] Yet no account is offered of the totality; nor is there any discussion as to how the totality may function as a 'public' (that is, philosophically accessible) principle. McFague's argument thus has the

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form of a sustained theological engagement with an ecological age, but the content is lacking.[17]

A second difficulty may also be noted. McFague's reading of the incarnational presence of God in terms of 'the world as God's body' implicitly construes a naturalistic interpretation of nature as the image of God. The ubiquity of God is construed in terms of a philosophical naturalism to which, one supposes, theological insights must eventually conform.

Evidence of such conformity is suggested by the descriptions of 'norm' and 'paradigm' used of Jesus Christ.[18] An immediate loss is the attempt to account for creation in and through Jesus Christ. The attempt to interpret the 'historical figure of Jesus in continuity with God's relation to the world' is supplanted by the attempt to show Jesus as an instance or result of that relation.[19] How Jesus Christ is the mediator of creation is thus put in question. Of equal significance is that alongside the displacement of Jesus Christ by an general account of incarnation is the displacement of an account of creation in favour of a philosophy of nature.

Thus McFague's approach begs two important questions. First, in relation to scientific descriptions of the universe, her account is unpersuasive. Second, her attempt so to relate her view to the structure of the universe has anti-theological implications: 'creation' is displaced by 'nature'. Attempting, in its own terms, to be 'modern', her account fails to convince and allows 'creatureliness' to be usurped by 'naturalness'.

Since the humanization of our circumstances is the aim, the result is curious: an account of nature grounded in the incarnation of God. The natural is thereby understood in the perspective of and in terms of a religious-metaphysical worldview. Any defence against the ideology of the natural is displaced by what Bonhoeffer, in *Ethics*, calls a 'metaphysical and religious positivism'. A dangerous temptation for Christian theology is evident here: the grounding of what is understood to be natural in 'direct manifestations of the divine will which demands submission to them'.[20] The means employed by Christian theology to avoid such a temptation will be a crucial test of its adequacy as a theology of nature: a discussion reserved for section V.

Ironically, the provincialism and secularism of nature halt at the same terminus. The provincialism of nature fails to articulate how Jesus Christ is the Lord of nature as well as the Lord of human hearts. Theological accounts of secularism privilege a theologically insufficient account of nature and thereby lose contact with the identity of Christianity. The result of each accommodation is the same: the loss of the reality of nature for theological interpretation.

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IV Inappropriate understandings of nature

The argument of the previous section is implicit in Bonhoeffer's writing. Religion compartmentalises the world. The key marks of religious spatialization are provincialism and secularism. If nature falls outside Christological discussion then we have provincialism, in which Christ is Lord only of part of the world. If nature, functioning illegitimately as a universal, secures the accommodation of faith to the world and God to nature, then we have secularism.

In the theology of nature secularism and provincialism are present in the form of the errors of naturalism and the restriction of the efficacy of the kerygma to the human (often ecclesial) sphere respectively. The insights of faith are thus either controlled by the world (secularism) or leave the world as it is (provincialism). For the first, it is as if the world is not justified on account of the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ (with the consequent tendency for nature to become 'god'); for the second, justification, and thus incarnation, are restricted (with the result that, after the fashion of Gnostic dualism, the processes of nature are independent of the operations of grace).

From such a conclusion, the outline of the theology of nature required becomes a little clearer. Such a theology of nature will be 'secular': appeal to the central themes of religion — metaphysics, partiality and individualism — is not appropriate.[21] Theologically, what must be avoided is the location of God at the boundary (which is, in fact, an extension) of the world or the displacement of God by nature. As Bonhoeffer insisted, there must be the attempt to speak of Christ at the centre of human social life and at the centre of nature.[22]

In short, nature in theology is not to be understood *metaphysically*: no account of nature is to be given, either with reference to humanity or to God, in and through which the actions of God are to be deduced. The metaphysical grounding of the action of God, and thereby its marginalization to limit situations and the like, is to be rejected. Nor do we have here a theological account of a positivistic 'nature' which, in its determination of the place of humanity, gives 'rules' for the right ordering of human social life. The strategy of provincialism which validates humanity as other than nature through reference to the human nature of Jesus and the strategy of secularism which grounds naturalistic accounts of nature (including humanity) in a general incarnation of God are both to be rejected.

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V 'Secular' theology of nature

In that nature is not to be interpreted as metaphysical, theological strategies of secularism and provincialism are ruled out. As religious readings of nature, provincialism and secularism fall to grasp or affirm positivistically the concept of nature. Both are to be rejected as theological strategies.

'Secular interpretation', by contrast, brings to theological attention the range of evidence which needs to be considered in the interpretation of nature. Yet this is not simply a question of method. Rather, difficulties in the interpretation of nature raise issues of both theological method and substance; formal consideration alone is necessary but insufficient.

An ontology of the human which offers an account of the natural conditions of social life is the means by which such 'secular interpretation' addresses these issues of method and substance. The rationale for this call for a social ontology is implicit in the critique of the two strategies identified earlier. Provincialism stresses the pronouncement of the message of salvation to society, without careful consideration of the context of the address; secularism has the tendency to naturalise human social life.

Against the first strategy (provincialism), a theological interpretation of social ontology requires the consideration of the actuality of humanity's natural and social life, and its representations, ideological and emancipatory. For theology, the metaphors of stewardship and dominion — and how these relate to the metaphors of domination or mastery of nature — would require careful analysis. Against the second strategy (secularism), a practical, social ontology can function as a guard against the ideology of the natural. Only in this way will it be possible to secure the presence of God and the freedom of humanity in terms which deny the ideological use of the term nature. Of especial importance is that such a practical, social ontology is a crucial corrective to the interpretation of nature in positivistic terms. Such positivism is corrected in the presentation of the historical, practical categories of a social ontology. A dangerous temptation for Christian theology — the grounding in the created order (that is, an order willed and maintained by God) of what is interpreted as 'natural' — is thereby resisted.

'Secular interpretation' stems from a commitment not to turn evidence into 'religious' evidence: metaphysical, spatialized, simplified. 'Secular interpretation' knows nothing of attempts to map the world in the zones of an abstract humanity opposed to, or in domination of, an abstract nature. In that the character of God's blessing of natural, social

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life and the lordship of Christ over all of life is here misunderstood, 'secular interpretation' of nature deconstructs such oppositions. Especially, nature is not to be understood as subsumed under social ontology. 'World come of age' does not suggest the disappearance of nature; it is not true that nature is subsumed under sociality. Such a claim hints at the basic 'otherness' of nature: provincial interpretations fail to break through to this otherness; secularist interpretations fail to grasp the significance of the otherness. Such metaphysical interpretations construe nature at the margins, as substrate, or as all-determining context, denying in the one case the natural basis of all culture and in the other the freedom-in-sociality of humanity.

In such fashion, 'secular interpretation' in theology is godless, but full of promise.[23] It is godless in the sense that it rejects the false consolations of naturalistic interpretations of nature which suggest nature as the balm for humanity's ills or the false optimism of the application of ever more sophisticated technological 'fixes'. Instead, 'secular interpretation' refuses false optimism and pessimism in the face of nature: it prejudges neither humanity's preeminence over nature, nor nature's governance of humanity. If the charge against Christianity is that it simplifies evidence, the challenge here must be to hold to a polyphonic interpretation of nature in a 'world come of age'. In such fashion, it may be possible to address the central dilemma of modernity: the relation between an ontology of nature and an ontology of humanity.[24]

The intention here, in the discussion of evidence, is of course to seek ways of reconfiguring God's transcendence and presence to humanity and nature. Neither the strategies of secularism nor provincialism are adequate here. Nature in a 'world come of age' does not mean, of course, that humanity lives in relation to nature out of its own resources; this is not anthropodicy by which humanity renews nature (or the reverse: 'naturodicy'?). Nor does it leave in place the metaphors of mastery or domination (nor stewardship nor dominion) for interpreting the relation between humanity and nature. Instead, it calls for a wider range of evidence to be collated, analysed and evaluated in the testing of such metaphors, and such testing will be theological: carried through in the light of God's transcendence of the created order in the form of human sociality and nature in their interaction. This testing is a crucial preparation for the interpretation of the commitment that the world is claimed by Jesus Christ. 'Secular interpretation' ends in Christology.[25]

1 Dietrich Bonhoeffer *Letters and Papers from Prison* (London: SCM Press, 1971), p. 380. Andrew Shanks and Barry A Harvey discuss these sentences from Bonhoeffer

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but not from the perspective of the theology of nature. For the references, see Andrew Shanks, *Civil Society, Civil Religion* (Oxford: Blackwells, 1995), p. 85; Barry A Harvey, 'A PostCritical Approach to a "Religionless Christianity"' in Wayne W. Floyd and Charles Marsh (eds.), *Theology and the Practice of Responsibility. Essays on Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1994), p. 40.

2 Georg Lukács *The Ontology of Social Being* (London: Merlin Press, 1978), pp. 5–7.

3 For this interpretation of Gaia, see Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy. A History of Ecological Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd. edn. 1994), pp. 381–87.

4 Paulos Mar Gregorios *The Human Presence: Ecological Spirituality and the Age of the Spirit* (New York: Amity House, 1987), p. 20.

5 For this use of the 'story of creation' see, *inter alia*, Sallie McFague *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1993), pp. 38–47; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist theology of Earth Healing* (London: SCM Press, 1993), pp. 32–58.

6 Barry A. Harvey 'A Post-Critical Approach to a "Religionless Christianity"', p. 48.

7 See Dietrich Bonhoeffer *Christology* (London: SCM Press, 1978), pp. 59-65; Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (London: SCM Press, 1955), pp. 161–84.

8 Eberhard Bethge adds *deus ex machina*, privilege, tutelage and dispensability as aspects of religion — see Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Theologian. Christian. Contemporary*. (London: Collins Fount, 1977), pp. 779-82. As Ernst Feil argues, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), pp. 173–4, privilege and dispensability can be ascribed to partiality; *deus ex machina* to metaphysics. Feil makes no reference to tutelage, but this may be ascribed to partiality of course.

9 The list of letters which gives credence to this summary is long, but see especially those collected in *Letters and Papers from Prison*, dated 30 April 1944, 5 May 1944, 29 May 1944, 8 June 1944, 30 June 1944, 16 July 1944 and the important sketch 'Outline for a book'.

10 Bonhoeffer *Letters and Papers from Prison*, p. 362; p. 346; p. 342.

11 Feil *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, p. 103.

12 See Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological. Nuclear Age* (London: SCM Press, 1987).

13 Douglas Davies, in J. Holm with J. Bowker (eds.), *Attitudes to Nature*, (London: Pinter, 1994), p. 40; John Habgood, 'A sacramental approach to environmental issues', in Charles Birch et. al. (eds.), *Liberating Life, Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1990), p. 48.

14 Jürgen Moltmann *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions* (London: SCM Press, 1990), p. 71; pp. 172–181; pp. 258–259.

15 See Gordon D. Kaufman *Theology for a nuclear age* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 28: 'A supreme test...of the Christian symbols...is their capacity to provide insight and guidance in our situation today'; cf. McFague, *Models of God*, p. 21.

16 Wolfhart Pannenberg 'A liberal logos Christology' in David Ray Griffin and Thomas J J Altizer (eds.), John Cobb's *Theology in process* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), p. 133; *Jesus — God and Man* (London: SCM Press, 1968), p. 166.

17 McFague's subsequent book, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* discusses postmodern science but only in terms of providing a context for theological reflection. Materially, her position is unchanged from that of *Models of God*.

18 See McFague, *Models of God*. p. 45f.

19 Pannenberg 'A liberal logos Christology', p. 133.

20 Bonhoeffer *Ethics*. p. 243.

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21 Cf. *Letters and Papers from Prison*, p. 280: 'How do we speak...in a "secular" way about God?'.

22 Bonhoeffer *Christology*, pp. 61–65. 23 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 83.

24 From the perspective of 'secular' interpretation, it seems likely that even Bonhoeffer mistakes his own approach. Bonhoeffer's suggestion for the 'starting point of our secular interpretation' is God's weakness; that is, 'secular' interpretation begins from the cross (see Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, p. 361). But such a claim suggests a programme which we have seen repeatedly in this paper fails to grasp the many dimensions of nature. (Even Bonhoeffer resists appealing to the cross in the discussion of nature in *Christology*, see pp. 64–65.) The cross in the economy of reconclliation is not the place to start a 'secular' interpretation of nature.

25 I am grateful to Alistair McFadyen, Stanley Rudman and Haddon Willmer for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

Sölle, Girard and the Religion of Substitution

James Girdwood

In recent years and in separate spheres Dorothee Sölle and René Girard have developed work relating to a theological account of the Cross of Christ which amounts to a strong refutation of substitutionary atonement. Both these thinkers come from distinct backgrounds. Sölle, a political theologian, was a student of Bultmann and has often referred to his importance for her theological development.[1] Girard is not a theologian as such, but rather, a literary critic with strong sociological influences and considers his work to be influenced by Emil Durkheim.[2] Nevertheless there are strong implications in his work for theology and especially christology. These two thinkers are compared here because their work has consequences for theological praxis which carries us beyond the more 'privatised' accounts of the Cross of Jesus Christ in many contemporary religious settings .[3]

The work of both thinkers shall be interpreted here and then a discussion on the relevance of that work will follow. This is especially important when it comes to the issue of violence and religion. Violence

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