

Thinking God and the world in a time of ecological destruction

Two theological responses to the destruction and extinction of life on earth

Reinier van Baaren 1900269 | SEM1 24-25

Thesis supervisor: Prof. dr. H.S. Benjamins | thesis examiner: Prof. dr. P.M. Wisse

Protestantse Theologische Universiteit | Beliefs

24-1-2025

Contents

- 1. Introduction3
 - 1.1 Conundrum and Research Question3
 - 1.2 Justification and objective5
 - 1.3 Methodology7
- 2. Theoretical framework: the climate crisis and theology9
- 3. The relation between God and the world..... 11
 - 3.1 Kathryn Tanner 11
 - Transcendence..... 11
 - Divine agency 12
 - Anthropology 13
 - Creation..... 14
 - Redemption and the role of Christ..... 15
 - 3.2 Catherine Keller 16
 - Transcendence..... 16
 - Divine agency 17
 - Anthropology 19
 - Creation..... 19
 - Redemption and the role of Christ..... 20
 - 3.3 Analysis..... 21
 - Divine agency 21
 - Human agency 22
 - God and the earth 23
- 4. How is ecological destruction a challenge for Tanner and Keller? 24
 - Freedom and justice 24
 - Time and progress 26
 - Loss and Vulnerability..... 27
 - Analysis 30
- 5. Conclusion 32
- 6. Evaluation..... 34
- Bibliography 35
- Data management plan 38
- Declaration Sheet..... 43

1. Introduction

1.1 Conundrum and Research Question

The crisis of global warming is becoming intensifying each year. Temperatures continue to rise and we may have already surpassed the 1,5°C threshold.¹ The WWF tracks the development of wildlife populations and reports a 70% decline in monitored wildlife populations since 1970.² Rising temperatures lead to a decreasing amount of flora and fauna species. Floods, droughts and heatwaves are occurring more and more. Places on earth are heading toward ‘ecological collapse’. This means that, as a result of the climate crisis, ecological systems reach a tipping point where the system is radically disrupted leading to biodiversity loss, a decrease in soil quality and agricultural capacity and deteriorating human living conditions.³ Some scientists speak of a potential sixth mass extinction.⁴ Despite all efforts, the ecological crisis facing the earth seems to intensify.

This thesis explores the relation between ecological destruction and theology. Ecology and theology are connected in multiple ways. Theology may help to address concerns about global warming and other ecological crises. But theology can also be a part of the problem.⁵ An important critique has been that a theology that carries an understanding of God as transcendent, fosters a secular (and devalued, relative to God) understanding of the earth. An overemphasis on God’s transcendence (a distant omnipotent ruler) secularizes the world and undermines human agency which leads to ‘ecologically disastrous consequences’.⁶ Instead, an emphasis on God’s presence in the world makes the world with all its natural processes and different species appear valuable and also renders a way of thinking in which men is ruler over nature illegitimate.

This thesis will evaluate two different theological approaches that provide a response to the aforementioned critique and evaluate these approaches against the backdrop of a world in ecological crisis. These perspectives will not only be assessed with a specific focus on ecological destruction. Instead of looking backwards and seeing a chain of events, or like Benjamin’s ‘Angel of History’ one single catastrophe, this thesis wants to turn around and look into the future.⁷ Eco-theology has thus far primarily focused on environmental issues, often critiquing the conception of God as distant and separate. However, there has been less focus on the relation between *ecological destruction* and God. If God is thought as intimately connected with the world, a move that is often made as a reaction on the earlier mentioned critiques,

¹ The Copernicus Climate Change Service, climate.copernicus.eu 2023 is the hottest year on record, with global temperatures close to the 1.5°C limit, accessed on 15 May 2024

² WWF, livingplanet.panda.org, Living Planet Report 2022, accessed on 15 May 2024

³ Global Challenges Foundations, <https://globalchallenges.org>, Ecological collapse, accessed on 15 May 2024

⁴ Anthony D. Bardovski et al., “Has the Earth’s sixth mass extinction already arrived?,” *Nature* 471 (2011): 51-57. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature09678>

⁵ Ernst M. Conradie, Koster, Hilda P., *T&T Clark Handbook of Christian Theology and Climate Change* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2020), p.2

⁶ Ernst M. Conradie, “The ecological significance of God’s transcendence?,” In Fuller, M., Evers, D., Runehov, A., Sæther, KW., Michollet, B. (eds) *Issues in Science and Theology: Nature – and Beyond. Issues in Science and Religion: Publications of the European Society for the Study of Science and Theology* (2020), vol 5. Springer, Cham.

⁷ Compare Bruno Latour, “An Attempt at a “Compositionist Manifesto”, *New Literary History* 41: 471-490, 2010

ecological destruction could undermine God. Ecological destruction or 'mass extinction' means that complicated life systems are erased or reduced. The question is what this means for thinking the relation between God and creation.

In order to explore these questions, I will evaluate the theological positions of Catherine Keller and Kathryn Tanner. Both Keller and Tanner present theological perspectives that emphasize God's presence in the world. In their approaches the earth is not merely secular but an integral part of God('s continuous work), albeit in a different way. By highlighting God's presence or God continuous work on earth, a new conundrum emerges. If the earth is interwoven with God's ongoing work, ecological collapse becomes a theological issue, as the decline of life on earth might suggest that God's work is failing. Ecological destruction poses a challenge to the idea of God's continuous involvement with the world, especially if this involvement is understood to be progressive. Tanner speaks for example of how God's gift-giving lead to an 'ever increasing unity' with God.⁸

In this thesis the theological conversation will move in two directions. I will explore how the decline of life on earth (ecological destruction) poses questions for Keller and Tanner. This exploration will focus on the implications of ecological destruction and the decline of life on earth for the relationship between God and the world. I will also examine possible theological responses from Keller and Tanner to the issue of ecological destruction. Can their theologies accommodate concepts such as loss, tragedy, or hope? This part will focus on the question of how the relation between God and the world can be thought in a meaningful way for human beings that live in a time of ecological crisis.

The research question central to this thesis is:

What theological response could the theologies of Catherine Keller and Kathryn Tanner give to a situation of ecological destruction, given how these theologies relate God and creation?

The thesis is structured by three sub-questions:

How does God relate to the world according to Keller and Tanner?

In chapter 3 of this thesis will describe how Tanner and Keller write about how God and the world are related. I will try to highlight both some commonalities and some main differences.

How poses ecological destruction a problem for Keller and Tanner?

In chapter 4, I will describe how ecological destruction poses a problem for Tanner and Keller. Based on the God-world relationship researched in chapter three, this chapter will examine how Keller and Tanner can account for ecological destruction and extinction. In other words, in this part I will describe how, in the context of how they think the relation between God and creation, a decline of life on earth is theologically problematic for Keller and Tanner.

What theological response do/could Keller and Tanner give to questions posed by ecological decline?

This question will also be answered in chapter 4. This question aims at the theological response that Keller and Tanner could give to the aforementioned challenges. I will attempt to derive constructive responses from both Tanner and Keller to the challenges they face regarding the

⁸ Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A brief Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), p. 9

decline and extinction of life. I will assess the strengths and weaknesses of their theologies in offering meaningful insights into the relationship between God and the world, for humans who both suffer from and contribute to the ecological crisis.

1.2 Justification and objective

This thesis will try to highlight an inherent tension in theologies that are mindful of our ecological system. The thesis seeks to contribute to an understanding of God that emphasizes God's presence on earth, while acknowledging the deteriorating living conditions of that same earth. In a world where the climate crisis *is* part of our lives, it is important to think God as connected and present to this world and avoid a theology that legitimates the exploitation of the earth. This dynamic, about how theology generates worldviews has received significant attention in the field of ecotheology.⁹

However, ecotheology is not solely about generating worldviews, or about repairing of what is broken. The ecological crisis leads to losses—biodiversity, fertile soil, habitable spaces for humans, and more. We need a theology that can make sense of this ecological destruction—a theology that allows space for the loss of biodiversity, for uninhabitable places on earth, and for an earth nearing a point of no return. This thesis will provide an evaluation of two theologians who think God as connected and present to this earth and reflect what ecological destruction means for their way of thinking about God and the world and vice versa. In doing so, this study aims to contribute to the broader conversation about the contribution of theology in times of ecological crisis.

Both Keller and Tanner address the need for a more 'earthly' theology, albeit in a different way. In her theology, Keller pays a lot of attention to the ecological crisis, and emphasizes the importance of an earth-bound theology, which acknowledges that there is no exception to our entanglement with the earth.¹⁰ The theology of Keller can be described as panentheistic. In panentheism, 'the Creator maintains an intense presence within creation'.¹¹ God is much more closely associated with the created immanent 'order'.

Tanner also connects creation with God, but in her work God radically transcends creation, albeit in a non-competitive way.¹² The non-competitive character of God's transcendence indicates a *radical* transcendence that – for example – also transcends human distinctions between the immanent and the transcendent and, in doing so, prevents 1) a zero-sum game between binary opposites¹³ and 2) a hierarchical orientation towards these binaries. This allows for a more classical theistic approach to the relation between God and Creation while at the same time emphasizing the importance of the earth and the agency of humans. According to Koster, Tanner provides a different response to the critique of White by rethinking the meaning of the concept of 'transcendence'.¹⁴ In comparison to Keller, the position of Tanner represents a

⁹ Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (New York: Oxford Academic, 2008), p. 12

¹⁰ Catherine Keller, *Amorous Entanglements: The Matter of Christian Panentheism* In K. Bray, H. Eaton, & W. Bauman, *Earthly Things: Immanence, new materialisms, and planetary thinking*

¹¹ Catherine Keller, *Amorous Entanglements: The Matter of Christian Panentheism*

¹² Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1988), p. 46

¹³ Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, p. 39

¹⁴ Hilda Koster, "Questioning Eco-theological Panentheisms: The promise of Kathryn Tanner's theology of God's radical transcendence for ecological theology," *Scriptura* 111 (2012), 385-394, p. 386

more classical theism in which the difference between Creator and creation is more pronounced.¹⁵

Both authors are theologically relevant with respect to ecology, albeit in Tanner's case mainly through secondary literature. Both authors reject the idea of life on earth 'as a mere pilgrimage to heaven.'¹⁶ Life on earth does not stand in a hierarchical relation to a beyond. Both Tanner and Keller avoid (moral) relativism towards creation. For them, the system of living organisms on earth is theologically important. This is relevant because in a theological system in which the importance of earth is only relative to God, the destruction of this creation is not insurmountable.¹⁷ Because creation – the immanent – has an important place in the theologies of Tanner and Keller, ecological destruction has theological consequences and requires a theological response. From a theological perspective in which creation, and the interaction between God and creation is important – maybe all there is – the destruction of this creation is problematic; a question that requires a response.

From the standpoint of Tanner, even in the case that global warming will end life on earth, God will remain God because God transcends this earth. In the theology of Tanner, creation is contingent upon God.¹⁸ Still, ecological decline, poses a problem to the theology of Kathryn Tanner. Koster translates Tanner's non-contrastive transcendence to a valuable ecotheological concept. When addressing the relation between God and the world Koster states: "over time, the world is able to receive God's superabundance more fully being drawn closer to God."¹⁹ But how can a world in ecological decline be harmonized with the thesis that the world is able to receive God's superabundance more and more?

Keller associates God closely with the world but God and the world are not the same. Keller speaks of apophatic excess.²⁰ God is present within the world but needs to be actualized by us: 'if we fail, God cannot do it for us'.²¹ In a world that is increasingly uninhabitable for an increasing amount of species: does not even the potential to materialize 'God' vanish? In the theology of Keller, God is not excepted from *our* ecological crisis: if we fail [to fight the crisis] 'we also fail God'.²² The question is what a failing God has to offer if life on earth declines, and faces extinction.

A world in ecological decline may raise some theological questions, as illustrated above. But Keller and Tanner also provide valuable theological responses to address a world in crisis. For example, Keller explores notions like 'staying with the trouble' or 'failing better' and reads these notions theologically. These concepts may be helpful in relating to God, even when the world as we know it falls apart. Tanner proposes a strategy that emphasizes our own agency as humans (for example to take responsibility in relation to climate change) while still conceptualizing God as radically transcendent, keeping a solid distinction between God and the earth in place.²³ In

¹⁵ Joyce Konigsburg, "Speaking of God's Presence as Non-Contrastive Transcendent Distinction," *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* (July 2019)

¹⁶ Catherine Keller, *On the Mystery: discerning divinity in process* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), p. 6

¹⁷ For example: if the earth serves only as a background for God's actions, is destruction compatible with this theology.

¹⁸ Catherine Keller, *On the Mystery*, p.6

¹⁹ Hilda Koster, "Questioning Eco-theological Panentheisms, 393

²⁰ Catherine Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth: our planetary emergency and the struggle for a new public*, p. 142-143

²¹ Catherine Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 146

²² Catherine Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 146

²³ Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, p. 163-164

this thesis I will explore the way in which the theologies of Keller and Tanner might offer a theological response to a world that fails to address ecological destruction properly.

In this thesis, I will describe both the (potential) problems that ecological destruction poses for Tanner and Keller (how does it relate to ‘God’s gift giving’ and ‘an endless process of becoming’²⁴) and the responses that can be derived from how these authors think the relationship between God and creation. The responses of Tanner and Keller may differ as they have distinct views about the relation between God and the earth.

1.3 Methodology

In this thesis I will compare Catherine Keller and Kathryn Tanner in how they relate God and creation, how ecological decline is problematic for them and how they can be helpful thinking the relation between God and creation. The main sources for this research are works of Catherine Keller and Kathryn Tanner. To explore the perspective of Keller, I will mainly use her book ‘Political Theology of the Earth’, together with some parts of ‘On the Mystery’ and some essays. In order to explore the perspective of Tanner, I will use a variety of works such as ‘God and Creation in Christian Theology’, ‘The Politics of God’ and ‘Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity’.

By close reading the works of Keller and Tanner, I will analyze how they talk about God, creation and other relevant concepts. After discussing these concepts in relation to Tanner and Keller I will analyze commonalities and differences between Keller and Tanner in how they relate God and the world.

In the fourth chapter I will discuss the theology of Tanner and Keller in relation to some other thinkers such as Lisa Doeland, Amitav Gosh and Bruno Latour. I do this to explore the contribution that the theological work of Tanner and Keller can make to the debate on climate destruction and the place of humans on earth.

In her work ‘Political Theology of the Earth’ as well as in many of her other writings, Catherine Keller directly engages an ecological perspective. The books written by Tanner do not deal directly with ecology but in secondary literature the concepts that are developed in this book are applied to investigate the ecological potential of her work.²⁵ Both the book and the secondary literature will be used in this thesis. The perspective of Tanner is thus partly explored by secondary literature because she has not written much on the climate crisis. This will require transparency about the interpretation of Tanner with regard to deriving ecological implications from theological concepts such as ‘non-contrastive transcendence’.

The work of Tanner is analytical, assessing theological discourse about the relation between God’s creative agency, divine transcendence and human agency. The work of Keller is less systematic and more associative. In some cases, I also use her more systematic work ‘On the Mystery’, if ‘The Political Theology of the Earth’ doesn’t provide clarity. As argued, both authors emphasize the value of the earth but at the same time have a different approach to the relation between God and creation. This overlap, in combination with the differences between the authors provide a good basis for comparison.

In this thesis I have used different works of Tanner and Keller but have not paid attention to how they develop their ways of thinking. Especially with regard to Tanner, I have used both her earlier work and later articles. This may be visible in a tension between highlighting God’s radical

²⁴ Catherine Keller, *Face of the deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London/New York: Routledge, 2002) p. xviii

²⁵ See for example: Hilda Koster, “Questioning Eco-theological Panentheisms

transcendence is her earlier work and underscoring God's gift-giving in her later work. It is beyond the focus of this thesis to systematically describe the theological development of Tanner and Keller but more attention to this point could have provided clarity with regard to tensions within their thinking, as presented in this thesis.

This thesis moves from a more general question (the relation between God and the world according to the authors) to a more specific question about an inquiry about how to respond to ecological decline/destruction in theological terms. The fourth chapter of the thesis will provide a more critical perspective about how ecological decline poses a problem. The fourth part will, aided by the perspectives of some other thinkers, also focus on constructive theological ideas and concepts that helps humans to relate to the world and God, in times of ecological crisis.

2. Theoretical framework: the climate crisis and theology

This thesis moves in the field of ecotheology. In general, ecotheology is concerned with thinking the relations between God, the cosmos and humanity.²⁶ It thinks about the relation between concerns for the earth with an understanding of God.²⁷ Ecotheology can move in different directions. On the one hand, ecotheology evaluates ecological destruction from a Christian theological standpoint and on the other hand, ecotheology is about how Christian theology is related, or complicit to ecological destruction.²⁸

In 1967, an article by Lynn White started a debate about ‘The spiritual roots of the environmental crisis’²⁹ arguing that Christian theology is responsible for the exploitation of the earth.³⁰ According to White, thinking God as a distant transcendent agent who is in control, legitimized Christians to model their relation to the world similarly. This attitude legitimized a worldview that places humans “over and against nature as its lord and master”.³¹ In response to White and to the unfolding ecological crisis many theologians have thought the divine and the earth closer together and have emphasized that the earth is our common home while others have emphasized God’s radical transcendence that also allows God’s radical *presence* to the world.³² There have also been critical responses to White’s contribution. For example, the assumption that theologies should foster the intrinsic value of nature has been critically received among some theologians.³³

Central to this debate has been the discussion about the transcendence of God and how God is related to the earth, or: to creation. While White and others have argued that that thinking God as transcendent undermines recognizing the intrinsic value of nature and thus legitimizes anthropocentrism, others have argued the opposite: that a loss of transcendence has made the dominion of the anthropos absolute.³⁴ Critique of transcendence has mainly focused on ‘spatial transcendence’ that suggests the existence of an otherworldly realm. However, temporal transcendence that emphasizes an open future has been embraced.³⁵ A general tendency has been that the earth has become a more important theme within theology. A theology that is more mindful about the ecological crisis, has an increasing interest in the well-being of this earth. Whether this is by thinking God as present within this world or by broadening God’s salvic work (not focused solely on human individuals but aimed at the whole of the earth), the state of the earth becomes connected with who God is or what God does, or is supposed to do. I believe

²⁶ Celia Deane-Drummond, *Eco-theology* (London: Darton, 2008), p.XII

²⁷ Celia Deane-Drummond, *Eco-theology*, p. 12

²⁸ Ernst Conradie, ‘Ecotheology’, www.saet.ac.uk, 2023

²⁹ Lynn White, “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis,” *Science* (1967) p. 1203-1207

³⁰ Lynn White, ‘The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis’

³¹ Hilda Koster, ‘Questioning Eco-theological Panentheisms’, p. 385

³² Hilda Koster, ‘Questioning Eco-theological Panentheisms’, p. 385

³³ Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (New York: Oxford Academic, 2008), p. 12

³⁴ Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*, p. 13

³⁵ Whitney Bauman, “The problem of a Transcendent God for the Well-Being of Continuous Creation,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 46 (2) (2007) p. 120-126

this is also true for theologies who have a strong sense of ‘fallen creation’ and are expecting something from God to restore the earth.³⁶

As a result, ecological destruction and possible human extinction is troubling for almost any theology that is mindful about this earth.³⁷ Caring about this earth and being troubled by its destruction are different sides of the same coin. Ecological destruction not only troubles theological narratives but also asks for a constructive theological approach. Thinkers such as Amitav Gosh suggest that a religious or theological perspective is needed to grasp the scale of the catastrophic future that could be realized.³⁸ However, although anthropocentrism and care for creation have had a lot of attention within theology, this is not the case with extinction³⁹, including human extinction.

A seminal document on ecotheology has been the papal encyclical ‘Laudato Si’. The document reflects upon the roots of the crisis and acknowledges that there is something profoundly wrong with the paradigm of technocratic growth.⁴⁰ *Laudato si* states that after a period of ‘*irrational confidence in progress and human abilities*’⁴¹ it is time to rethink our paradigms and reflect upon the crisis that is currently happening. In his encyclic ‘Laudato Si’ pope Francis also states that Christian thinking has encouraged the exploitation of the earth.⁴² But, the pope also writes that ‘*If we are truly concerned to develop an ecology capable of remedying the damage we have done, no branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom can be left out, and that includes religion and the language particular to it.*’⁴³ This thesis tries to contribute to developing such an ecology by reading Kathryn Tanner and Catherine Keller. These theologians use different theological approaches to think about the relation between God and the world. I will explore the way in which these authors think about the God-world relationship and what this means for a theological answer to the current ecological crisis.

³⁶ See for example: Ernst Conradie, “The salvation of the earth from anthropogenic destruction: In search of appropriate soteriological concepts in an age of ecological destruction,” *Worldviews* (2010), p. 111-140

³⁷ Maybe a theology that is fully committed to a new earth that doesn’t relate to this one is not touched by ecological destruction and possible human extinction. However, it is difficult to image how such a theology could be mindful about the earth. To me, such a theology would be holistically problematic, not only in relation to care for the earth.

³⁸ Amitav Gosh, *Te groot om ons voor te stellen, orig: The Great Derangement: Climate and the unthinkable* (New Delhi: Pinguin Books India, 2015), p. 228 Other thinkers mention also the difficulty to *imagine* the dire state of the earth. See: Lisa Doeland, *Apocalypsofie* (Utrecht: Ten Have, 2023), p. 33

³⁹ Eva van Urk, ‘The Imago Dei in a Time of Mass Extinction: Rediscovering the Spiritual Value of Biodiversity, PhD Thesis Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (2025), p. 3

⁴⁰ *Laudato Si’*: *On care for our common home*, www.vatican.va, 24 May 2015

⁴¹ *Laudato Si’*: *On care for our common home*, www.vatican.va, 24 May 2015

⁴² *Laudato Si’*: *On care for our common home*, www.vatican.va, 24 May 2015

⁴³ *Laudato Si’*: *On care for our common home*, www.vatican.va, 24 May 2015

3. The relation between God and the world

This section discusses how God and the world are related in the writings of Tanner and Keller. The relation between God and the world will be explored by describing how some theological loci function within the theologies of Tanner and Keller.

3.1 Kathryn Tanner

Kathryn Tanner is sometimes characterized as a ‘postliberal’ theologian.⁴⁴ It is true that Tanner (at least her earlier work) shares some characteristics with what is considered typical for theologians in the postliberal strand. In ‘God and Creation in Christian Theology’ Tanner mainly engages the language of Christian theology in talking about transcendence. Tanner generally doesn’t refer to real-world events to support claims.⁴⁵ An important aspect of postliberal theology that Tanner doesn’t share is her understanding of culture is seeing Christian culture as ‘independent of anything outside itself’.⁴⁶ This is connected to the non-contrastive transcendence of God; a concept that Tanner develops and that shall be discussed in the next section.

Transcendence

In order to speak about the relation between God and the world, Tanner develops the concept of *non-contrastive transcendence*. Tanner wants to think God as *radically* transcendent and argues that if God’s transcendence is defined contrastively, the divine involvement with the world is limited. Consequently, ‘God becomes one being among others within a single order’.⁴⁷ If God is defined contrastively; God is brought down to the level of the non-divine, to which it is opposed.⁴⁸ For example, if God is thought contrastively, God could be associated with the spiritual as contrasted to the material. However, if God is contrasted with things we consider immanent, ‘of this earth’ God functions still in the same immanent conceptual framework. If, according to Tanner, one wants to think God radically transcendent, this transcendence must be non-contrastive. In this way, (our understanding of) God is not tied to immanent concepts or things.

A non-contrastive account of God’s transcendence means that God is involved in all that is. Associating God with a part of being would cause a contrast: a part of being that is close(r) to God and a part that isn’t. Tanner also states that Divine being is ‘the immediate source of being of every sort’. Although God cannot be associated with a specific part of being, God can be associated with ‘being of every sort’. Divine being therefore must not be associated with a part of being, but with the whole of being.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ See for example: Christian Scholar’s Review, Postliberal Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed; Postliberal Theology and the Church Catholic: Conversations with George Lindbeck, David Burrell, and Stanley Hauerwas, www.christianscholars.com, 15 October 2014

⁴⁵ Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*

⁴⁶ Jan H. Pranger, ‘Inculturation as Theology of Culture: Exploring Kathryn Tanner’s Contribution to Intercultural Theology in *The Gift of Theology: The contribution of Kathryn Tanner*, Rosemary P. Carbine (ed.) & Hilda Koster (ed.), p. 184

⁴⁷ Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, p. 45

⁴⁸ Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, p. 46

⁴⁹ Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, p. 46

The radical, non-contrastive transcendence of God also means that God transcends our understanding. God's transcendence means that there is an ontological divide between humans and God. According to Tanner, this invalidates human efforts to understand God or speak about God.⁵⁰ The transcendence of God emphasizes the finite and limited way human understand God instead of affirming absolute claims about God.⁵¹ Tanner states that apophatic accounts of divine transcendence lead to a critical evaluation of all attempts to specify divine standards; all accounts of truth and goodness are susceptible to critique. Tanner states that "Apophasis (...) prevents the position one holds from being immunized against criticism"⁵² Belief in a transcendent God is according to Tanner, inherently self-critical.⁵³ Tanner is wary of an 'authoritarian deployment of transcendence'⁵⁴ and stresses the importance of the ability of a belief to be self-referential. Radicalizing transcendence is for Tanner a way to secure to the critical potential of a belief in God.⁵⁵

Belief in God's transcendence prevents the application of talk about human affairs to the divine. It instigates a gap between the human, worldly realm and the divine transcendent realm.⁵⁶ Tanner talks about God as a 'paradigmatic inassimilable Other'.⁵⁷ This otherness also instigates a 'rejection of the Same'.⁵⁸ God's transcendence is not only positive (God is involved in all that is) but also negative (a rejection of the Same). Belief in God's transcendence fosters a critical attitude toward human affairs (social orders, values, nation-states etc.).⁵⁹ Tanner specifically talks about how a belief in God's radical transcendence undermines the relation between hierarchies in this world. By thinking God radically transcendent, God's relation with the world cannot function as a model for hierarchies within this world.⁶⁰ A hierarchy in this world cannot be derived from the hierarchy between God and the world, or between God and man.

Divine agency

Tanner emphasizes that God transcends this world and is outside of this world. However, God is also involved in this world. God is involved in this world as "creator, providential guide and redeemer".⁶¹ God's involvement with this world finds somehow expression in this world. However, this involvement cannot be associated with specific persons or opinions, nor does God act as an independent actor.⁶² This would bring back a contrastive transcendence. "Because God's work is universal in scope, one cannot rule out divine direction of one's opponent views".⁶³ God's will is all-encompassing. But how particular opinions are related to

⁵⁰ Kathryn Tanner, "The ambiguities of Transcendence: In conversation with the work of William E. Connolly," in *Common good: Economy, Ecology and Political Theology*, ed. Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre et al. (Fordham University Press: 2015), p. 94

⁵¹ Tanner, *The ambiguities of Transcendence*, p. 94-95

⁵² Tanner, *The ambiguities of Transcendence*, p. 96

⁵³ Kathryn Tanner, *The politics of God* (Fortress Press, 1988), p. 80-81

⁵⁴ Tanner, *The ambiguities of Transcendence*, p. 95

⁵⁵ Tanner, *The ambiguities of Transcendence*, p. 95

⁵⁶ Tanner, *The politics of God*, p. 67

⁵⁷ Tanner, "Creation Ex Nihilo as Mixed Metaphor," *Modern Theology* (2013), 138-155, p. 139

⁵⁸ Tanner, *Creation Ex Nihilo as Mixed Metaphor*, p. 139

⁵⁹ Tanner, *The politics of God*, p. 128

⁶⁰ Tanner, *The politics of God*, p. 152

⁶¹ Tanner, *The ambiguities of Transcendence*, p. 96

⁶² Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, p. 102

⁶³ Tanner, *The ambiguities of Transcendence*, p. 97

this will of God is never clear for human beings. God cannot be identified with any of these opinions.⁶⁴

God's will and ultimate intentions are not discernible by human agents. God works through humans but actions by human agents cannot be identified as 'being God's will' or 'not being God's will'. Human actions remain fully human, even if God works through them. Even if God works through humans the distinction between the transcendent God and finite and fragile humans remains intact.⁶⁵

Tanner describes God's creative agency as immediate and completely extensive. She contrasts her approach with an approach that supposes a creature independent from God. Tanner states that 'The creature is nothing without God'.⁶⁶ Tanner argues that an approach that starts with creaturely dependence has to avoid thinking God's power as a tyrannical rule. Although the creature is utterly dependent upon God, God's efficacy does not directly interfere with the creature's own working. Tanner describes divine agency as 'involvement in the form of a productive agency extending to everything that is in an equally direct manner'.⁶⁷

Divine agency works through 'created agents'. God works in and through humans, but as we have discussed, God's will can never be equated with specific humans, plans or institutions. There is a certain tension between God's transcendence that prohibits a direct link between human affairs and God's providence that works through humans. According to Tanner, it is impossible to exactly discern where and how God works in this world but Tanner emphasizes *that* God works in this world, in the present.⁶⁸ For Tanner, the anthropological implication of this is that, being God's agent has a 'fluid and flexible character'.⁶⁹

According to Tanner, the relation between God and the world can be characterized by the concept of giving. God giving can be applied to what the creature is, what it does and what it becomes. This giving of God is universal and direct in scope. Universal because God's working cannot be associated with a particular being (as discussed earlier) and direct because God's giving is not mediated by particular individuals. Creatures are entirely dependent upon God. However, Tanner tries to describe this dependence non-contrastively: the dependence of human creatures on God doesn't restrict their choices. It is more a surplus than a lack.⁷⁰

Anthropology

Tanner describes how theological anthropology often runs into problems by the way it describes humans as made in the image of the divine. According to Tanner, these problems are caused by looking for a fixed definition of what a human being is: a definition that describes humans as made in the divine image and sets humans apart from other animals.⁷¹ These kinds of definitions often function to establish unjust social relations or lead to the exclusion of humans who do not entirely fit the fixed definition. Tanner contrasts this approach with an apophatic anthropology, based on an apophatic theology. Just as Christ is an image of God in an incomprehensible way,

⁶⁴ Tanner, *The ambiguities of Transcendence*, p. 97

⁶⁵ Tanner, *The ambiguities of Transcendence*, p. 97

⁶⁶ Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, p. 102

⁶⁷ Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, p. 46

⁶⁸ Kathryn Tanner, *The politics of God*, p. 106

⁶⁹ Kathryn Tanner, *The politics of God*, p. 107

⁷⁰ Kathryn Tanner, *The politics of God*, p. 155

⁷¹ Kathryn Tanner, "In the image of the invisible," in *Apophatic bodies*, ed. Chris Boesel (Fordham University Press, 2010), 117-118

humans are after God's image in an incomprehensible way. Therefore 'there is something incomprehensible about human nature'.⁷² Just as God who is uncomprehensible because he has no limits, humans are also not limited by a particular nature.⁷³

Tanner continues that human beings develop themselves and strive for the absolute good. Humans are 'attracted to what exceeds their own limited nature'.⁷⁴ The openness and plasticity of humans is important for Tanner because humans can *become* humans in the image of God. The openness of humans is both an aspect of the way humans are made to God's image but also a characteristic that enables them to become 'deified in the way Jesus humanity is'.⁷⁵ Tanner uses the metaphor of nourishment to elaborate on this point. Humans use God as nourishment to become more like God, they are reworked in the image of God. Human life can become many things. Tanner states that humans have self-formative capacities, free will, in order to choose what to become. The purpose of humans is to become more divine-like, but this cannot be equated with a particular kind of life because 'God is the absolute good and not a limited one'.⁷⁶

Human agency stands for Tanner in a kind of hierarchical relation to God's agency. God's gift-giving enables human beings to give to others. Creatures exist for Tanner in constant dependency on God.⁷⁷ However, this doesn't mean a *competing agency*. Because God's transcendence is non-contrastive, as discussed, human agency presupposes God's productive agency. This agency of God, as creator of the universe, is responsible for every moment of our existence. We, and the whole of creation, exists for Tanner as a result of God's continuous gift-giving; God's overflowing goodness. This serves as a kind of blueprint for the life of humans who should share with others. Tanner envisions this giving broadly. For example: I receive education and can teach others. This giving encompasses the material, spiritual, intellectual etc.⁷⁸

Creation

Creation ex nihilo is an important concept for Tanner. With creation ex nihilo she means 'that there is nothing outside the reach of God's beneficent working as a creator, nothing that in its obstructing power might mean the world is fated to remain only as good as it now appears or has been up until now'.⁷⁹ The world as it is now, is not as good as it gets. This means that we cannot equal the world, the status quo, with God. This notion is related to the transcendence of God and the impossibility to equal (parts of) immanent reality to God. The alternative would be to think God and the world completely separate. Such a dualistic account of the relation between God and the world cannot incorporate God's 'intimate involvement with everything'.⁸⁰ Tanner states that the world shouldn't be refused or left. According to Tanner one can 'entertain extravagant hopes'⁸¹ and base these hopes on the power of God, not on the world as it is today.⁸²

⁷² Tanner, "In the image of the invisible", p.121

⁷³ Tanner, "In the image of the invisible", p.121

⁷⁴ Tanner, "In the image of the invisible", p.122

⁷⁵ Tanner, "In the image of the invisible", in *Apophatic bodies*, p.122

⁷⁶ Tanner, "In the image of the invisible", in *Apophatic bodies*, p.125

⁷⁷ Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, p. 91

⁷⁸ Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, p. 92

⁷⁹ Kathryn Tanner, *Creation ex nihilo as a mixed metaphor*, *Modern theology*, p. 148

⁸⁰ Kathryn Tanner, *Creation ex nihilo as a mixed metaphor*, *Modern theology*, p. 147

⁸¹ Kathryn Tanner, *Creation ex nihilo as a mixed metaphor*, *Modern theology*, p. 148-149

⁸² Kathryn Tanner, *Creation ex nihilo as a mixed metaphor*, *Modern theology*, p. 148-149

Tanner discusses two aspects of God in relation to creation: God as natural principle and God as a personal agent.⁸³ Tanner states that creation ex nihilo is a rejection of creation from or through something or as creation as a kind of emanation from God.⁸⁴ Rather, creation is the image of God. Tanner speaks of a kind of duplication of God. God's creation of the world is not necessary. It is not that if God wouldn't have created the world, God would be lacking something.⁸⁵ The emphasis on God's free choice, such as in Aquinas, is the opposite of a certain necessity, implicit in thinking creation as a kind of emanation from God. However, Aquinas modifies the willing of God in such a way that some aspects of emanation from God come back. According to Tanner, Aquinas emphasis on the immediacy with which God creates brings back some language imaginary. Because God doesn't deliberate about creation, or doesn't need additional action to create (God thinks, and it is there) creation feels in a way more necessary and less a free choice.⁸⁶

Tanner paints a contrast: she discover in the history of theology two ways to think the relation between God and creation. On the one hand, there is the tradition that emphasize the necessity of the connection between God and creation. This tradition is found with Plato but also within Christian theology.⁸⁷ For example: Aquinas uses the metaphor of how fire necessarily produces heat. In this way God 'produces' or creates the world. In this tradition, God functions as a kind of natural principle. On the other hand, there is a tradition that emphasizes the freedom of God as creator. This tradition describes God in personalistic language, rather than describing God as a natural principle. Tanner describes how in the history of theology, the two aspects 'freedom' and 'necessity' are combined, this is also what she wants.

Tanner wants to retain the free character of God's creation but doesn't want a picture in which God's free creation contrasts with the freedom of creatures nor does she want a too rigid emanationist framework in which God would have a lack without creation.⁸⁸ Tanner describes creation as an act of overflowing generosity. Described as a natural principle, creation is for Tanner 'the self-communication of the good'.⁸⁹ Personalistic language makes room a description of God's relation to the world as 'willing' and 'loving'. Tanner opts for talking about God as creator 'as both a natural principle and a personal agent' because God is neither *literally*. By sticking with both concepts we are reminded that both don't fully describe the relation between God and creation. Consequently, the radical transcendence of God is maintained.⁹⁰

Redemption and the role of Christ

An essential aspect of the theology of Tanner is thinking God as a gift-giving God: the relation between God and the world is essentially one of gift-giving. The gift-giving of God becomes apparent in creation but becomes most visible in Christ. Tanner states that the Glory of God 'really consists in His self-giving and that this has its center and meaning in God's son Jesus Christ'.⁹¹ The gifts of God lead to an ever-increasing unity between creation and God. The

⁸³ Kathryn Tanner, Creation ex nihilo as a mixed metaphor, *Modern theology*, p. 154

⁸⁴ Kathryn Tanner, Creation ex nihilo as a mixed metaphor, *Modern theology*, p. 149

⁸⁵ Kathryn Tanner, Creation ex nihilo as a mixed metaphor, *Modern theology*, p. 152

⁸⁶ Kathryn Tanner, Creation ex nihilo as a mixed metaphor, p. 152

⁸⁷ Kathryn Tanner, Creation ex nihilo as a mixed metaphor, p. 144-145

⁸⁸ Kathryn Tanner, Creation ex nihilo as a mixed metaphor, p. 152

⁸⁹ Kathryn Tanner, Creation ex nihilo as a mixed metaphor, p. 152

⁹⁰ Kathryn Tanner, Creation ex nihilo as a mixed metaphor, p. 154-155

⁹¹ Kathryn Tanner, Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity, p. 36

incarnation of God in Jesus is the perfect example for this. Tanner states that in the incarnation 'humanity has become God's own'.⁹²

Tanner applies her idea about non-contrastive transcendence to Christology. She contends that the radical transcendence of God, God not being a kind of being, makes the incarnation possible: because God is not contained by categories, is beyond contrasts. This enables God to become human.⁹³ Tanner doesn't like a kenotic approach to incarnation. Tanner argues that in a kenotic approach, the incarnation comes at the cost of God's divinity, which implies a contrastive account of God's transcendence. Instead, she makes a distinction between the substance and the hypostasis of 'the Word'. The divine substance of the hypostasis is not exclusive.⁹⁴ Tanner indicates that God is not restricted by the incarnation. Taking on the human substance does not create a lack for God. Tanner generally doesn't want to focus what the incarnation for God means, the main point of the incarnation is soteriological. Incarnation means something for the relation from humans to God, it means something for this world.⁹⁵

For Tanner, the incarnation is not completed by the birth of Jesus. She connects incarnation to the whole of Jesus' life. The incarnation becomes more complete as the life of Jesus progresses. By suffering, fearing and being crucified, Jesus conquers these phenomena.⁹⁶ From this perspective 'the saving power of the cross is a product of the incarnation', Tanner writes.⁹⁷ In Tanner's understanding, the incarnation is vital to the saving work of God. Jesus conquers sin and death because Jesus undergoes sin and death, 'but is not conquered by them'.⁹⁸

3.2 Catherine Keller

In Catherine Keller's theological work, she builds on the process philosophy of Whitehead. As a result, relationality is very important in her theological work. She engages this relationality from a feminist perspective. In *Political Theology of the Earth*, Keller applies this theological framework to explore both the environmental crisis and the political systems that sustain it. In this thesis I will mainly focus on the relation between God and the world developed within this book.

Transcendence

Catherine Keller is critical about the notion of God as a separate entity from the world. As an alternative, Keller describes God as entangled with all that exists within this immanent order. Keller doesn't want to think God as the exception to creaturely life, as some distant entity.⁹⁹ Keller draws on Whitehead's process philosophy to explore a counterexceptionalist God.¹⁰⁰ The process philosophy of Whitehead views reality as a process; a system in which creatures relate to each other and are dependent on each other.¹⁰¹ Divinity is operative *within* this 'system' or

⁹² Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, p. 9

⁹³ Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, p. 12

⁹⁴ Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, p. 12

⁹⁵ Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, p. 14

⁹⁶ Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, p. 28

⁹⁷ Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, p. 29

⁹⁸ Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, p. 29

⁹⁹ Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, p. 130

¹⁰⁰ Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, p. 136-138

¹⁰¹ Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, p. 138-139

‘process’. Consequently: God is not ‘outside’ as an exception to everything else but ‘inside’; operative within the whole of relations, processes and becomings in this world.¹⁰²

Like Tanner, Keller seeks to move beyond the classic binary between transcendence and immanence. While Tanner radicalizes transcendence, Keller situates transcendence within immanence. For Keller, invoking immanence does not mean we shouldn’t talk about transcendence anymore. She just doesn’t want a transcendence that signifies a God apart from the world – a transcendence that acts as a ‘flight from’ this world.¹⁰³ Transcendence is understood as a struggle in this world, as climbing across ‘one world schema into another possibility’.¹⁰⁴ The term ‘transcendence’ signifies a sort of newness and openness toward the future. However, this newness is not absolute; it does not originate from an absolute outside, but emerges from creation itself.¹⁰⁵

Keller contrasts her approach to God with a concept of God that serves as an exception. This ‘sovereign God’ simply hasn’t showed up, Keller notes.¹⁰⁶ The idea of an omnipotent deity has failed and the exceptional status of this God could be associated with the supremacism of this world. Keller asks whether it might be better to stop concerning ourselves with God altogether, but she answers in the negative.¹⁰⁷ According to Keller, we live in a God-tangled present.¹⁰⁸ There is no escape. Therefore, Keller chooses to ‘stay with the troubles of theology’.¹⁰⁹ This ‘staying with the trouble’ indicates a mode in which one does not have clear answers, yet remains committed to engaging with the world. Keller uses the example of queer arts that, in responding to failed normative sex/gender roles do not ‘transcend’ sexuality, do not fly from the concept altogether but ‘clamber across tricky terrains’.¹¹⁰ Here, Keller emphasizes the importance of navigating complexity, rather than fleeing to quick solutions.

Divine agency

It is clear that Keller does not conceive of God as an omnipotent being, separate from the world; this omnipotent God has failed to show up. But does Keller’s God show up? Not necessarily but if Keller’s God fails to come through, we have failed God.¹¹¹ The absence of God circles back to our responsibility. God ‘appears’ as a possibility for creatures. Creatures can act upon these possibilities. However, God is not able to control humans, beings or even atoms.¹¹² Keller suggests that the ‘divine ecology’ depends on our agency, on creatures who materialize divine activity.¹¹³

If God is weaved through, folded in the world, we are involved in the actualization of God. Keller writes: ‘God folds into any moment, into any creature, now, as “*primordial nature,*” a *lure,* a *nuance of possibility and on the other side of that moment,* as “*consequent nature,*” takes in,

¹⁰² Keller, Political theology of the earth, p. 138

¹⁰³ Keller, Political theology of the earth, p. 115

¹⁰⁴ Keller, Political theology of the earth, p. 115

¹⁰⁵ Keller, Political theology of the earth, p. 115

¹⁰⁶ Keller, Political theology of the earth, p. 108

¹⁰⁷ Keller, Political theology of the earth, p. 108

¹⁰⁸ Keller, Political theology of the earth, p. 110

¹⁰⁹ Keller, Political theology of the earth, p. 110

¹¹⁰ Keller, Political theology of the earth, p. 119

¹¹¹ Keller, Political theology of the earth, p. 125

¹¹² Keller, Political theology of the earth, p. 138

¹¹³ Keller, Political theology of the earth, p. 128

feels, suffers, em-pathos, what the creature has actualized”¹¹⁴ Following this pattern, divine agency doesn’t perform some distinct act (exceptionally) but is involved in all that happens. In the theology of Keller, God doesn’t appear as ‘sovereign Lord’ who is omnipotent or gives certainty.¹¹⁵ God appears ‘primordial ‘; as potential becoming of an entity, a creature.¹¹⁶ This appearing of God relates to the notions of ‘lure’ and ‘possibility’. If God happens, the divine *materializes* in a specific entity, a creature who acts upon its potential.¹¹⁷ Divine agency means in this case that God causes by luring creatures, by being possibility. But the materialization of these possibilities depends on creatures.¹¹⁸

At the same time, God receives or ‘takes in’ who ‘we’ creatures are and what we do. Reality is neither inert nor indifferent. Divinity is moved by us just like we could be moved by the divine.¹¹⁹ In the theology of Keller, divine agency collapses into vulnerability. By giving up God’s omnipotence, space is created for the suffering of God.¹²⁰ Keller engages in reading Karen Barad and Judith Butler to explore this theme. Divine vulnerability is related to a ‘messianic texture’ of the fabric of reality.¹²¹ This messianic texture points to the transience of everything, to a ‘cosmological precarity’.¹²² This scope here is broader than human suffering. The divine takes in, is compassionate with the whole of reality. On the one hand, divine agency suggests that there is no exception to our responsibility as creatures. We shouldn’t expect to be rescued by the omnipotent Lord. Keller writes that divine mystery is redistributed by the indwelling of creation by the divine.¹²³ Similarly, God’s agency is also redistributed to creatures, by giving these creatures possibilities and responsibilities. On the other hand, divine agency is related to divine passion and compassion that has a broad scope, much broader than ‘our’ human affairs. Keller paints an ‘ecogod’ that is involved in all life.¹²⁴ This makes our human efforts relative, puts it in context.¹²⁵

God is in, and works through, the whole of creation. Keller highlights the nonhuman character of God. God is not only involved in the world but in the universe in which ‘*the things are called forth in their distinctiveness*’.¹²⁶ This suggests that God does not only appear as possibility to humans, but that God has something to do with all the different entities and particularities in the universe. These different entities are together, there is no escape. Existing means something like self-realization, but this never happens in isolation. Existing also always means *existing together*. We are always already in relation.¹²⁷ Everything takes part in this web of relations, including God.¹²⁸

¹¹⁴ Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, p. 125

¹¹⁵ Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, p. 127

¹¹⁶ Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, p. 141

¹¹⁷ Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, p. 128

¹¹⁸ Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, p. 128, 138

¹¹⁹ Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, p. 125-126

¹²⁰ Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, p. 130

¹²¹ Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, p. 131

¹²² Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, p. 132

¹²³ Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, p. 130

¹²⁴ Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, p. 172

¹²⁵ Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, p. 132-133, 136

¹²⁶ Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, p. 126

¹²⁷ Catherine Keller, “Amorous entanglements: The Matter of Christian Panentheism,” in *Earthly Things: immanence, new materialisms, and planetary thinking* ed. Karen Bray, Heather Eaton & Whitney Bauman (Fordham University Press, 2023), 103

¹²⁸ Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, p. 138

Anthropology

In speaking about humans, Keller wants to correct an anthropocentrism that sees humans as the exception. Humans are part of the 'planetary oikos'. We relate to each other and to other non-human things on earth. We share the materiality of these other things and species.¹²⁹ Keller opposes a reading of Genesis that legitimizes the exceptional status of humanity as having dominion over all the earth.¹³⁰ Instead, humans take part in the process of creation (just as the oceans and the land) and live 'within animality'.¹³¹ Living within animality means that we humans are also animals. Keller wants to highlight the commonalities between humans and other animals instead of establishing rigid boundaries. Keller, following Derrida, even makes the connection between thinking God as transcendent, separate entity and thinking human beings as transcending nature and bestiality.¹³²

By highlighting the commonalities between humans and non-humans (animals, the non-human world) Keller underlines that 'we' humans are part of a multispecies story. Keller rejects the human dominion embedded in some understandings of Genesis but doesn't want to cross out human agency altogether. Keller wants to promote a 'becoming-with' because human cannot escape their relations with the world.¹³³ Human subjectivity is not autonomous but entangled with the world. Keller speaks about a self of 'entangled difference' in relation to the rest of the world. The relation of humans to the earth isn't therefore a zero-sum game.¹³⁴ Instead, humanity can *become with* other species, create together.¹³⁵

In order to explore what human agency means, Keller uses the concept of 'staying with the trouble'.¹³⁶ Staying with the trouble presents as an alternative to sovereign agency, an unconditioned state in which one can perform 'attentive practices of thought, love, rage and care'.¹³⁷ Keller connects this to the concept of hope. According to Keller, hope is something different than salvic optimism. Instead, hope means embracing future possibilities and acting upon these possibilities.¹³⁸

Creation

With regard to creation, Keller wants to stay away from an understanding of creation as *creatio ex nihilo*. She emphasizes that creation happens from the deep. We already discussed how Keller thinks newness does not signify an absolute outside. By emphasizing the creation *from something*, creation becomes less of a single unique moment but rather a continuous process.¹³⁹ Instead of a single exceptional moment, Keller sees creation more as a creative process between different creatures and God. Instead of the exception, the creation from the deep signifies something like an inception. The *tehom*, the chaos, the uncertainty, brings forth new possibilities. This is a continuous process that is connected to the 'now'.¹⁴⁰ In this way,

¹²⁹ Keller, Political theology of the earth, p. 78

¹³⁰ Keller, Political theology of the earth, p. 75

¹³¹ Keller, Political theology of the earth, p. 76-77

¹³² Keller, Political theology of the earth, p. 78-79

¹³³ Keller, Political theology of the earth, p. 88

¹³⁴ Keller, Political theology of the earth, p. 77-79

¹³⁵ Keller, Political theology of the earth, 88

¹³⁶ Keller borrows this concept from Donna Haraway. Keller, Political theology of the earth, p.88

¹³⁷ Keller, Political theology of the earth, 89

¹³⁸ Keller, Political theology of the earth, 90

¹³⁹ Keller, Political theology of the earth, 42

¹⁴⁰ Keller, On the Mystery, p. 48

Keller wants to connect the continuous process of creation to our agency in the present. We, creatures, are part of this creation and part of new beginnings.¹⁴¹

Keller doesn't want to think God as a single cause, a singular beginning. She wants to associate God with the possibilities creatures have. Keller states that without an absolute beginning, and without a sovereign God, our creaturely planetary entanglement can be embraced.¹⁴² Thinking of God as integrated into this world, rather than as a distant entity in another realm, fosters an affirmation of our interconnectedness and shared existence on this planet.

Redemption and the role of Christ

In many theological traditions, Christ is seen as an exceptional figure par excellence. Right at the beginning of the chapter 'Theology', cites Keller Clayton Crockett who asks if the Christ-event has 'run its course'.¹⁴³ Keller seems to recognize the problematic features that some versions of Christ have¹⁴⁴ and also sees 'that each new generation comes less conditioned to the unconditional itself'.¹⁴⁵ Still, Keller wants to 'stay with the troubles of theology' especially since its failing may be connected to the failing of ecology and democracy.¹⁴⁶

Keller discerns a trace in the Gospels in which not Jesus the Christ is of central important, but his ultimate concern: the basileia; the Kingdom of God.¹⁴⁷ This basilea is not an otherworldly phenomenon that awaits us in 'the end' when the world closes. Instead, the basilea is there when we open up the present. Salvation is for Keller not something that comes from above in a singular moment of time. Rather it is a process, which touches our present and is something without a definitive ending.¹⁴⁸ According to Keller, Jesus doesn't shift the attention to another realm, heaven or hell but to this earth. The process of salvation includes the earth and has to be actualized by us.¹⁴⁹ However, it cannot be actualized just by myself, or by a designated collective (the church, Christians, believers). Salvation 'is an open-ended inter-activity and a mystery in process'.¹⁵⁰ Not only human life is in scope here, but the whole earth.¹⁵¹

The basileia, announced and promoted by Jesus is not something that is simply recognizable in the present, nor can it be predicted with calculations. It is not something that is 'out there' waiting for us in the future. Rather it 'flashes up'¹⁵², unpredicted and once thought impossible, in the present. We creatures could actualize this basileia. It appears as a possibility for us. At the same time, we are part of a 'creative process' which is bigger than us and lasts longer than us.¹⁵³ It seems that for Keller, Jesus is also very much a part of this process. Instead of being the exception to this creative process, Jesus points to the basileia as possibility to actualize, just like he did actualize the possibilities he had in his time and place.¹⁵⁴ And 'the Christ-symbol is alive

¹⁴¹ Keller, *On the Mystery*, p. 48

¹⁴² Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, 44

¹⁴³ Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, p. 105

¹⁴⁴ Keller, *On the Mystery*, p. 133-135

¹⁴⁵ Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, p. 106

¹⁴⁶ Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, p. 106

¹⁴⁷ Keller, *On the Mystery*, p. 135-137

¹⁴⁸ Keller, *On the Mystery*, p. 147

¹⁴⁹ Keller, *On the Mystery*, p. 147

¹⁵⁰ Keller, *On the Mystery*, p. 148

¹⁵¹ For example, Keller suggests an understanding of 'the least of us' as the earth. Keller, *On the Mystery*, p. 147

¹⁵² Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, 102

¹⁵³ Keller, *On the Mystery*, p. 176

¹⁵⁴ Keller, *On the Mystery*, p. 153

to the extent that it is living – practicing – the amorous justice of the *basileia*'.¹⁵⁵ Just like the historical Jesus-figure, the Christ-symbol functions like an icon, on which our gaze cannot rest. It should move on to this world, to practice the *basileia*.¹⁵⁶

In 'Political Theology of the Earth' Keller highlights another element of what Jesus could mean. In the crucifixion the attention is drawn to the wounds of Jesus, the vulnerability of the 'Lamb'.¹⁵⁷ The vulnerability of Jesus, apparent in his crucifixion, has more to do with the fate of animals in this world, than with a humane death.¹⁵⁸ For Keller, this vulnerable aspect of Jesus is important as it signifies our vulnerability, more specifically: our animality that exposes us to the earth full of non-human elements. Instead of an exceptional imperial Christ, Keller emphasizes a 'divinanimal Jesus'.¹⁵⁹ Elsewhere Keller describes God as the 'letting be at the heart of the universe'. Keller emphasizes that God is not an omnipotent deity but rather that God should be associated with open-endedness and possibility.¹⁶⁰ This open endedness always risks failure, especially according to the laws of domination. But even this failure could be strong. The cross is the exemplification of this because it is a symbol that still haunts us.¹⁶¹

3.3 Analysis

Divine agency

Both Tanner and Keller think the relationship between God and the world in a non-competitive way. However, they do this differently. Tanner thinks the non-competitive relation between God and the world by radicalizing God's transcendence. First of all, this means that there is a radical ontological divide between the whole of creation (humans, creatures, the earth) and God. This ontological divide doesn't prevent a connection between God and the earth. Tanner affirms that God works in this world, although we cannot exactly pinpoint where and how God works. Instead of pointing to events or things that are specifically related to God, Tanner states that God is connected to all being.

Unlike Tanner, Keller thinks God and being very close together. Where Tanner radicalizes God's transcendence, Keller weakens it. In Keller's panentheism all of being exists 'in' God.¹⁶² However, God cannot be completely identified with the material world. One could say that God in a way 'supervenes' on the material world meaning that God although being dependent on the material world, is not the same as the material world (or cosmos).¹⁶³ God may transcend the present but not as some stable otherworldly realm. Consequently, Keller uses the word 'transcendence' not to signify another world or reality but to point to the possibilities that emerge on the edge of

¹⁵⁵ Keller, *On the Mystery*, p. 154

¹⁵⁶ Keller, *On the Mystery*, p. 154-155

¹⁵⁷ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 168

¹⁵⁸ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 168-169

¹⁵⁹ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 169

¹⁶⁰ Keller, *On the Mystery*, p. 89

¹⁶¹ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 169

¹⁶² Keller, *On the Mystery*, p. 53

¹⁶³ The notion of 'supervenience' was made popular by Donald Davidson, using the idea in the philosophy of mind to explain the relation between mental states and physical states of the brain. See: McLaughlin, Brian and Karen Bennett, "Supervenience", [The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) (Winter 2023 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.)

chaos in this reality.¹⁶⁴ There are always creatures involved in these emerging possibilities: for Keller, transcendence happens among beings in this reality.

Tanner and Keller share several aspects of their understanding of divine agency. They both don't think of God as a separate actor within this world. Central to their respective views is an apophatic element that is operative within their understanding of divine agency, which emphasizes the inherent unknowing or lack of clear comprehension regarding how and where God operates. Tanner states that it is impossible to discern where and how God works in this world.¹⁶⁵ Keller associates the unknowing or absence of a discernible divine presence with an omnipotent God "who fails to come through."¹⁶⁶ God, says Keller, 'communicates in grassy silence'.¹⁶⁷ For Keller, this apophatic character of God is related to the responsibility of individuals and communities. This silence is 'a lure', for 'us' to become a political public; the silence that lures is a kind of call to (political) action.¹⁶⁸ While both authors engage with this apophatic notion, the distinction between them lies in their respective emphases: Tanner's apophatic approach primarily addresses an epistemological challenge, focusing on the uncertainty of divine action. The apophatic, absent character of (a certain) God in the work of Keller concerns also something real: the omnipotent God *isn't out there*.

Human agency

As a result, the indiscernibility, or apophatic element, at the heart of divine agency has different consequences for Tanner and Keller. For Tanner, God's transcendence makes that God('s agency) cannot be connected to specific institutions, agendas or phenomena in an absolute way.¹⁶⁹ Therefore, the understanding of what it means to be human is flexible and fluid. At the same time, God's transcendence does provide norms for humans such as the importance of respect for others.¹⁷⁰ Although the God of Tanner works via our agency, God doesn't seem to *depend* on us. It is more the other way around: we depend on God.¹⁷¹ Tanner uses a non-contrastive approach to creaturely and divine agency.¹⁷² 'Our' creaturely activity is a gift from God: God's agency and human agency thus are not competitive but can easily go together as "God does not give on the same plane of being and activity as creatures."¹⁷³

Keller's emphasis on possibilities and open-endedness also suggests flexibility and fluidity with regard to human or creaturely agency. However, in Keller's work the absence of God makes 'our' agency more pressing as God 'needs our actualizations'.¹⁷⁴ God relies on material agents who act to bring God's presence into the world. In the account of Keller, God depends on 'us'

¹⁶⁴ Keller, *On the Mystery*, p. 54-55

¹⁶⁵ Kathryn Tanner, *The politics of God*, p. 106

¹⁶⁶ Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, 125

¹⁶⁷ Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, p. 171

¹⁶⁸ Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, p. 171

¹⁶⁹ Kathryn Tanner, *The politics of God*, p. 107

¹⁷⁰ See, Tanner, *The politics of God*, p. 165

¹⁷¹ Kathryn Tanner, *The politics of God*, p. 155

¹⁷² Tanner wants to uphold both divine sovereignty and creaturely agency. Her non-contrastive account 'protects' both divine agency and creaturely agency. However, if the absence of some top-down divine agency would increase the need for human agency, this would again introduce a contrastive account. A lack of divine agency should be filled with human agency. This is not compatible with the approach of Tanner, and therefore the negativity (that was mainly epistemological anyway) with regard to God's agency doesn't make human agency more pressing.

¹⁷³ Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, p. 3

¹⁷⁴ Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, p. 173

although ‘us’ is here not necessarily restricted to human beings as God (or “the great Spirit of the universe”¹⁷⁵ as Keller writes) is ‘energetically involved in all that is’.¹⁷⁶

Keller and Tanner emphasize different aspects of what it means to be human in their theological framework. Keller emphasizes the relationality of being and applies this to human existence too. She frames human existence as part of a ‘multispecies story’¹⁷⁷ and is critical of an anthropology that legitimizes human dominion over the rest of creation. From this perspective she wants to confine human agency: we cannot do what we want, regardless of other creatures, plants, ecosystems. As we discussed, from the perspective of God, creaturely agency is emphasized as God needs our actualizations.

God and the earth

In the work of Tanner, Christ has an important place. In Christ, God appears as the gift-giver par excellence. Tanner applies her principle of non-contrastive transcendence to Christ as a gift. This means that the gift of God in the incarnation of Christ does not come at the expense of God’s divinity. Tanner states that this is the case with kenoticism in which ‘God gives up or hinders the operation of God’s own nature’.¹⁷⁸ Tanner wants to maintain God as the divine and wants to maintain a sharp distinction between God and creation by radicalizing God’s transcendence. Therefore, contrasts and comparisons between God and creation are impossible.¹⁷⁹ In this way, Tanner prevents a description of God as sovereign power, that Keller criticizes. Divine agency doesn’t apply to a part of creation, specific kinds of beings but to the whole of creation. God is connected to all being, while maintaining an absolute distinction between God and creation.

Tanner also maintains that the world as it currently is, is not as good as it gets.¹⁸⁰ Creation is a ‘*finite expression* of God’s superabundance’.¹⁸¹ This could provide room for ‘violence, death and decay’.¹⁸² This situation is described as temporary. At least in the interpretation of Koster, God will overcome the forces of death and decay.¹⁸³ Keller would be critical about the implied linear/progressive timeline when talking about a God who will overcome death and decay at a moment in time.¹⁸⁴ Her rejection of an omnipotent God is connected to an approach that makes room for the ambiguousness and open-endedness of reality. Keller seeks to balance lament and hope, for example by highlighting God’s, and our, vulnerability.¹⁸⁵ We have to mobilize another world in order to collectively realize this other world. But Keller is wary of thinking another world ‘otherworldly’.¹⁸⁶ It is connected to our current situatedness in *this* world and therefore always connected to our agency.

¹⁷⁵ Keller, Political theology of the earth, p. 172

¹⁷⁶ Keller, Political theology of the earth, p. 172

¹⁷⁷ Keller, Political theology of the earth, 88

¹⁷⁸ Kathryn Tanner, Creation ex nihilo as a mixed metaphor, p. 10

¹⁷⁹ See also: Konigsburg, ‘Speaking of God’s Presence as Non-Contrastive Transcendent Distinction’

¹⁸⁰ Kathryn Tanner, Creation ex nihilo as a mixed metaphor, *Modern theology*, p. 147

¹⁸¹ Koster, “Questioning Eco-theological Panentheisms, p. 393

¹⁸² Koster, “Questioning Eco-theological Panentheisms, p. 393

¹⁸³ Koster, “Questioning Eco-theological Panentheisms, p. 393

¹⁸⁴ Keller, On the Mystery, p. 173

¹⁸⁵ See also: Keller, Political theology of the earth, p. 158

¹⁸⁶ Keller, Political theology of the earth, p. 158

4. How is ecological destruction a challenge for Tanner and Keller?

We have established the contours of how Tanner and Keller think about the relation between God and the world. This chapter will explore how ecological destruction poses problems for Tanner and Keller, given how they relate God and creation. The chapter also seeks to derive constructive theological responses to ecological destruction. In order to give more substance to the concept of ecological destruction I will bring Tanner and Keller in conversation with authors who have written about what ecological destruction/catastrophe means. This will help clarify the potential contributions of the Tanner and Keller.

Freedom and justice

In an essay, Amitav Gosh writes that climate change poses a challenge to one of the most important political concepts in modern times: freedom.¹⁸⁷ This concept was important for struggles against oppression in various ways, but climate change is, according to Gosh, not about a struggle to become free. To him, the opposite is true: climate change confronts us with the non-human constraints in our existence.¹⁸⁸ Gosh states that modernity is not able to think these constraints properly. While (post)modernity has had a lot of attention for different forms of oppression and inequality, Gosh argues that climate change has received little attention in literature, arts, the humanities and in politics.¹⁸⁹

The issue of thinking the human as embedded into a broader relationality with non-humans is recognized by Keller and a vital aspect of her theology. This enables Keller to attend to the constraints of human agency, visible in her critique of an anthropology that legitimizes human dominion. However, she renders a different account of postmodernism, compared to Gosh. Gosh seems critical of identity politics that focus solely on (what he considers) identity issues like religion, gender or ethnicity.¹⁹⁰ The conceptual pair of exception and inception that Keller employs leads to a different discernment of these 'identity issues'. For Keller, these issues are not opposed to imagining climate change. Keller promotes the inception; that happens within creation. The inception happens within our possibilities, but climbs across the borders, norms, limits of this world. Keller suggests that 'protests against structural injustices of race, sex, and class' may fail but can, in their failure, generate creative forms of inhabiting this world'.¹⁹¹ This connects for Keller to how ecological destruction also asks for different forms of inhabiting this world, especially in the midst of failure and 'ruins'.¹⁹² Consequently, for Keller, the planetary crisis is connected to other injustices and attention for these issues is not a zero-sum game.

The connection between the issues of (what Gosh calls) 'identity politics' and the planetary crisis is that in both cases we need to find new ways of inhabiting our world, while we are at the same time still connected to the phenomena that are problematic. Keller gives an example of

¹⁸⁷ Gosh, *Te groot om ons voor te stellen*, p. 181

¹⁸⁸ Gosh, *Te groot om ons voor te stellen*, p. 181

¹⁸⁹ Gosh, *Te groot om ons voor te stellen*, p. 188

¹⁹⁰ Gosh, *Te groot om ons voor te stellen*, p. 191: Gosh doesn't seem to be against the 'identity struggles' against oppression per se, but sees these movements as products of modernity, as an element of a broader struggle for freedom. Gosh argues that in this paradigm constraints from a non-human origin cannot have a proper place.

¹⁹¹ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 119

¹⁹² Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 55-56, 123, 168

how the 'queer arts' as a result of problematic cultural ideas about sexuality not completely neglect sexuality but creatively seeks new possibilities. Such a movement captures for Keller what she means by inception. The inception seeks new possibilities that are 'active potentialities'.¹⁹³ That being said, Keller does signify the problem that Gosh brings up. She suggests forming coalitions 'across critical difference'.¹⁹⁴ She acknowledges that there is simply no time 'to achieve purity'.¹⁹⁵ One of Keller's main points is about how creation happens from chaos.¹⁹⁶ From the chaos of different movements, she envisions the creation of a coalition that fights for new and better ways of inhabiting this world.

Keller *does* thematize relationality and the vulnerable dimension of relations. In doing so, she has a nuanced account of human agency (see 'Loss and Vulnerability' for more on this topic) and is attentive to the constraints of our existence. The question is, when reading Keller through the eyes of Gosh, whether these constraints are thought radical enough. What is striking is Keller's emphasis on possibilities. For example, when Keller talks about the *basileia*, she focusses on possibilities that emerge. Another example is creation, which Keller describes as a creative process between creatures and God, in which new possibilities emerge from chaos. Keller repeatedly emphasizes the possibilities and in doing so, themes like impossibilities and constraints are less developed.

Tanner's account of God's non-contrastive transcendence and her emphasis on God's gift giving that is essential for the continued existence of this earth¹⁹⁷ can inform a worldview that emphasize and embraces the non-human.¹⁹⁸ Tanner wants to model our relation to the non-human after the relation that God has with us.¹⁹⁹ This is the model of the gift: God as one who bestows his blessing on the earth can guide our behavior towards the non-human (and fellow-humans).²⁰⁰ At the same time, Tanner recognizes that the non-human is also a gift from God and has therefore inherent value.²⁰¹

Gosh connects the failure to imagine and think climate change and climate catastrophe to the fact that climate issues are in many countries not on the top of the political agenda, even if countries are severely impacted by climate change.²⁰² The failure to image climate catastrophe is connected to the conception of literature as 'an individual moral adventure'.²⁰³ This understanding of what fiction should be about, leaves little room for 'the collective' and focusses on individual morality rather than on public policy.²⁰⁴ This focus on personal morality is according to Gosh connected to Protestantism and although the concept of morality has been secularized, the structure of the imperative remains the same. What is important in

¹⁹³ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 59

¹⁹⁴ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 61

¹⁹⁵ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 61

¹⁹⁶ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 61

¹⁹⁷ Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, p. 3

¹⁹⁸ Hilda Koster, "Questioning Eco-theological Panentheisms, p. 393

¹⁹⁹ Kathryn Tanner, "Creation, Environmental Crisis, and Ecological Justice." In *Reconstructing Christian Theology*, edited by Rebecca S Chopp and Mark Lewis Taylor, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994:99-123, p. 105

²⁰⁰ Tanner, 'Creation, Environmental Crisis, and Ecological Justice', p. 104-105

²⁰¹ Tanner, 'Creation, Environmental Crisis, and Ecological Justice', p. 118

²⁰² Gosh, *Te groot om ons voor te stellen*, p. 190

²⁰³ Gosh, *Te groot om ons voor te stellen*, p. 191

²⁰⁴ Gosh, *Te groot om ons voor te stellen*, p. 191

literature/fiction is the unveiling of the inner soul.²⁰⁵ This focus on authentic experience blocks the imagination of other possible futures of this earth.²⁰⁶

On the one hand, Tanner could be susceptible to such a critique. Tanner does connect God's gift-giving with our gift-giving. Much of her work is focused on how beliefs about God interact with belief about the world and with action. However, Tanner generally doesn't address isolated individuals and doesn't suggest a kind of moral purity that Gosh criticizes. Instead, she engages with political, economic and cultural issues.²⁰⁷ And because God's gift-giving is all-encompassing, the whole world is in scope when speaking about morality. For Tanner, there is no contrast between moral concerns for social justice and environmental well-being.²⁰⁸ I will come back to this point later (3.1 Time and progress/Loss and vulnerability).

Time and progress

For Gosh, another reason why modernity has failed to imagine climate catastrophe is because it understands history as a progressive movement that moves from revolution to revolution.²⁰⁹ Gosh, refers to Latour, who sees in modernity a double movement: one that contrasts the present (emancipated, free) with an ancient and stable past and a distinction that distinguishes the human domain from 'nature' in which the human domain dominates (wins) and the domain of nature loses.²¹⁰ As a result, modernity has equipped us with a system in which the earth and its ecosystems of which we are a part, remain hidden. Especially our embeddedness in these ecosystems becomes invisible. Latour also argues that postmodernism doesn't solve this problems because it doesn't value empirics and cannot image a future.²¹¹ Keller and Tanner are both constructive thinkers who want to connect Christian symbols and language to cultural, social and political issues.²¹² Both are also interdisciplinary theologians who take up the work of others. Especially Keller engages other disciplines, including physics when discussing Karen Barad.²¹³

What about modernity? Both Tanner and Keller don't fit the description that Latour gives of modernity. Both resist the winning-losing axis of modernity in the way Latour describes it. Tanner does this by applying God's gift-giving to the whole of creation. This includes both the human and the non-human.²¹⁴ In applying God's gift giving to the whole of creation, Tanner avoids associating parts of creation more with God than others (see 3.1). As we have said: Tanner's non-contrastive account of God's transcendence means that God is involved in all that is. Describing God by contrasts (infinite vs. finite, de-animate vs. animate, human vs. nature) is ultimately not possible for Tanner. Consequently, the theology of Tanner does not fully align with the modernist framework described by Latour.

²⁰⁵ Gosh, *Te groot om ons voor te stellen*, p. 192-193

²⁰⁶ Gosh, *Te groot om ons voor te stellen*, p. 193

²⁰⁷ See for example: Tanner, *The Politics of God & Tanner, Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*

²⁰⁸ Tanner, 'Creation, Environmental Crisis, and Ecological Justice', p. 122

²⁰⁹ Gosh, *Te groot om ons voor te stellen*, p. 188

²¹⁰ Bruno Latour, *Wij zijn nooit modern geweest* (Boom uitgevers, 2016), p. 26

²¹¹ Bruno Latour, *Wij zijn nooit modern geweest*, p. 82. Latour refers here to Lyotard and Baudrillard as representatives of what postmodernism contains.

²¹² Compare: Rosemary P. Carbine & Hilda Koster, *The Gift of Theology: The contribution of Kathryn Tanner* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), p. 18-19

²¹³ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 104-16

²¹⁴ Koster, "Questioning Eco-theological Panentheisms", p. 393

However, Tanner does not fully escape this framework either. Although Tanner is not explicitly committed to a linear conception of time in which humanity gradually progresses towards salvation, Tanner speaks about creation as dependent on God's continuous gift-giving.²¹⁵ The reading of Tanner by Koster highlights the aspect of some progressive element in God's gift giving in relation to the world.²¹⁶ On top of that Tanner speaks about salvation through the incarnation of Christ. Tanner states that 'Christian life reproduces in their own distinct way, then, the incarnation of Christ'.²¹⁷ This includes the conflicts and difficulties that are part of (Jesus') life but also Jesus 'post-resurrection perfection'.²¹⁸ The question is however, what God's gifts and our 'perfection' means in times of ecological destruction. In a way, Tanner's description of salvation through God and our human perfection echoes the progressive aspect of the modernist narrative. Apart from that, the question is how the gap between an unfolding ecological crisis and Tanner's description of God's salvation can be explained.

Keller begins her book 'Political theology of the earth' with developing an alternative to the friend versus foe-politics of Carl Schmidt.²¹⁹ Her theology of inception focusses on concrete materializations that are contingent and finite but point to different possible futures and worlds. This approach leaves no room for an 'almighty fix' but seeks for 'some lure, glimmering darkly'.²²⁰ The approach of Keller also want to trouble sharp human-nature distinctions, she speaks about God as 'involved in everything that has been born'.²²¹ This is not a God of winning and domination, but a God of 'the dark space of possibility'.²²²

While Keller seems to leave more room for the radical contingency of history, and the vulnerable character of salvation, there is still a progressive element operating in her theology. As noted, Keller argues for example that we, humans, are part of a 'creative process' which is bigger than us and lasts longer than us.²²³ Interestingly, Keller seems to look beyond humanity here but still emphasizes 'a creative process' rather than loss or tragedy. The scope of this process is cosmological. Keller cites Whitehead who states that 'The universe is thus a creative advance into novelty'.²²⁴

Loss and Vulnerability

In her book 'Apocalypsofie' Lisa Doeland pays attention to the question how we, humans, can go extinct in a proper way. Instead of moving straight to an answer, Doeland wants to dwell on the questions about how we can go extinct in a dignified way or how to live on an earth that has transformed into a wasteland. Similar to Keller, she draws on Haraway's concept of 'Staying with the trouble,' suggesting that these questions do not have clear, definitive answers but instead require sustained engagement.²²⁵ Doeland describes how humans have been, and are still, producing endless streams of waste that is (almost) not biodigestable. But how to relate to this phenomenon? In this context, Doeland refers to the ragpicker, a figure in the work of Walter

²¹⁵ Kathryn Tanner, *The politics of God*, p. 155

²¹⁶ Hilda Koster, "Questioning Eco-theological Panentheisms", p. 393

²¹⁷ Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, p. 56

²¹⁸ Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, p. 56

²¹⁹ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 22-24

²²⁰ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 171

²²¹ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 178

²²² Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 179

²²³ Keller, *On the Mystery*, p. 176

²²⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 222. Quoted in Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 141

²²⁵ Lisa Doeland, *Apocalypsofie*, p. 162-163

Benjamin. The ragpicker lives off waste, seeing new uses for it. Doeland describes how this figure lives on the edges of the capitalist system.²²⁶

The figure of the ragpicker could be associated with the edge of chaos about which Keller speaks. If we recall Keller's literal use of 'transcendere' as 'climbing across', the ragpicker *transcends* the modernist-capitalist system.²²⁷ He is not completely separate from it, or pure. He uses the streams of waste produced by the system. But the ragpicker relates differently to the phenomenon. Generally, people hide their waste, put it where they can't see it and live as if waste production doesn't really matter. The ragpicker faces the waste of this earth, seeing new uses for it. Browsing through the waste, the perspective of the ragpicker shifts: this figure sees the history of the future. In seeing this possible history, that the world will transform into a landfill, another now and another future become possible. Doeland writes.²²⁸

If we infuse the theology of Keller, which describes the divine as possibilities on the edge of chaos, with Doeland's 'apocalypsofie', landfills are the place to find God par excellence. Especially turning waste into something useful (like the ragpicker does) could be described as 'possibility on the edge of chaos'. At the same time, the waste of this world disturbs us, interrupts our anthropocentric attitude.²²⁹ With Gosh in mind, we can wonder whether waste is not mainly marked by impossibility, by constraints. But this is not Keller's take. When Keller talks about a God who is 'all-in', she talks about a God who doesn't 'except itself from the All.'²³⁰ That God is not excepted from the all, means 'not a completion but an opening'.²³¹ For Keller, this signifies 'novel possibility'.²³² This novel possibility does not come supernaturally from the outside, but is described by Keller as 'immense intake'.²³³ This intake, which she associates with redemption is "one great recycling of the world, known and unknown, of all its temporary realizations, its endless failures and waste".²³⁴

Both Doeland and Keller refer to Anna Tsing's book 'The Mushroom at the End of the World'.²³⁵ Doeland extracts from the work of Tsing a kind of human agency that is not focused on a beyond, spatial or temporal but an agency that is specialized in 'the art of noticing'.²³⁶ Tanner, who proposes an apophatic anthropology, could absorb this kind of agency Doeland describes.²³⁷ Although Tanner would maybe add something to the here-and-now agency of Tsing and of the ragpicker. The human is in Tanner's anthropology open-ended, just like the ragpicker who is defined by what he finds. This figure hasn't a specific telos in advance. Tanner also talks about how Humans are 'nourished by God' and are reworked in the image of God. Although Tanner is not entirely clear how this happens, she associates the reflective capacities of humans with humans being the image of God. The self-formation of humans is not restricted to its cognitive capacities: it also involves the body.²³⁸

²²⁶ Lisa Doeland, *Apocalypsofie*, p. 157-158

²²⁷ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 143

²²⁸ Lisa Doeland, *Apocalypsofie*, p. 159-160.

²²⁹ Compare: Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 143

²³⁰ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 149

²³¹ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 148

²³² Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 148

²³³ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 148

²³⁴ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 149

²³⁵ Lisa Doeland, *Apocalypsofie*, p.149-155 & Keller *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 168

²³⁶ Lisa Doeland, *Apocalypsofie*, p. 155

²³⁷ Tanner, "In the image of the invisible", p.121

²³⁸ Tanner, "In the image of the invisible", p.123

However, Tanner also highlights the incarnation in which God/the Word becomes human. This indicates a special relationship between God and humans. In the work of Tanner God's gifts are all-encompassing but are also a kind of one-way movement. We humans receive God's gifts and pass these gifts through to our fellow (non-)humans.²³⁹ Tanner describes God's giving as unconditional and universal. God gives regardless of our return.²⁴⁰ In a sense, this gift of God is *pure*.²⁴¹ Derrida has remarked that there is something impossible about the gift. As soon as a gift is given, there exists a kind of reciprocity, even if the gift is accepted as gift (in which case, the acceptance of the gift counts as counter-gift).²⁴² If the gift is theoretically thought as pure, the gift would also be completely foreign. But the gift *isn't completely foreign*. The gift is, according to Derrida, connected to the present.²⁴³ This being present however introduces exchange and circularity, obscuring the purity of the gift.²⁴⁴

Manolopoulos observes that Derrida has a preference for purity. As soon as the gift isn't pure anymore, he considers it 'fallen'.²⁴⁵ Derrida, along with Jean-Luc Marion thinks God and the gift as 'outside the [exchange] economy' which Manolopoulos considers 'a flight to transcendence'.²⁴⁶ In this way God/the gift is isolated from participation in an ecology or an economy of relations and exchanges.²⁴⁷ Manolopoulos argues that it is important to have attention for the 'double sidedness of the Earth-gift' instead of thinking it 'pure'.²⁴⁸ This perspective makes room for different attitudes towards creation. Manolopoulos mentions letting be, playing with, utilization and reciprocity.²⁴⁹

Manolopoulos explains that these different modes stand in tension with one another. We can utilize the earth on the basis of the gratuity of the earth-gift. However, this stands in tension with 'letting be' that is also important, on the basis of the circularity of earth processes. Human intervention is destructive to many ecological systems.²⁵⁰ The relation between the human and the earth is here one of interactivity. Tanner's understanding of Creation as God's gift giving can thematize our attitude towards 'the environment' by addressing the need to receive God's gifts and pass them through to our (non-)human neighbors. However, the interactions we have with the earth and the reciprocal character of these interactions remain easily out of sight, especially the harmful interactions in which 'we' should have resorted to a mode of 'letting be'.

In other words, Tanner focusses on the character of Christ as gift giver, and applies this model of gift-giving to Christian life. By doing this, Christ's dependence on others does not come into focus. As a result, our dependence on other (non)humans does not come into focus either. Tanner thinks God/Christ as essentially independent and creation as dependent on God. In this

²³⁹ See 3.1 under 'Anthropology'

²⁴⁰ Filip Rasmussen, "The gift in theology: Unilateralism and reciprocity in Kathryn Tanner's and John Milbank's theology of the gift," *Studia Theologica – Nordic Journal of Theology* 76, no. 2 (2022): 114-129

²⁴¹ Rasmussen, 'The gift in theology', p. 125-126

²⁴² Rasmussen, 'The gift in theology', p. 116

²⁴³ Mark Manolopoulos, "Derrida's Gift to Eco/Theo/Log: A Critical Tribute," *CrossCurrents* 54 (2005), 57-58

²⁴⁴ Manolopoulos, "Derrida's Gift to Eco/Theo/Log: A Critical Tribute", p. 58

²⁴⁵ Manolopoulos, "Derrida's Gift to Eco/Theo/Log: A Critical Tribute", p. 61

²⁴⁶ Manolopoulos, "Derrida's Gift to Eco/Theo/Log: A Critical Tribute", p. 61

²⁴⁷ Manolopoulos, "Derrida's Gift to Eco/Theo/Log: A Critical Tribute", p. 61

²⁴⁸ Manolopoulos, "Derrida's Gift to Eco/Theo/Log: A Critical Tribute", p. 65

²⁴⁹ Manolopoulos, "Derrida's Gift to Eco/Theo/Log: A Critical Tribute", p. 65

²⁵⁰ Manolopoulos, "Derrida's Gift to Eco/Theo/Log: A Critical Tribute", p. 66

picture, the interdependent character of creation, such as the vulnerable ecosystems of which ‘we humans’ are a part, is kept out of sight.²⁵¹

This is different in the picture that Keller paints. Keller provides more room for ‘letting be’ in her theology. By emphasizing the vulnerability of God, Tanner renders a nuanced picture of human agency. On the one hand, God’s vulnerability means that God is not sovereign or omnipotent, meaning that God cannot do it for us. God’s agency cannot solve our planetary problems, which emphasizes the importance *our* agency and responsibility. At the same time, vulnerability also signifies the destructive potential of human agency. Therefore, we can, for example, not trust on techno-optimist solutions. Additionally, the importance of adopting a mode of ‘letting be’ becomes more apparent as it is our very agency that can be problematic.

Analysis

I want to return once again to Keller’s notion of continuous creation that is a creative process.²⁵² I contain that this notion of creation is fundamentally at odds with biodiversity loss, which could be described as ecological destruction. Philosopher David Wood states that the extinction of a species ‘diminishes the web of life to which we belong.’²⁵³ There is not much creative about that. Even for Keller’s theology that is attentive to our entanglement, to the vulnerability of the earth, and the open-endedness of the future, extinction of species, possibly the human species, is something difficult to accommodate to. In this light, it is striking that Keller focusses on possibilities rather than constraints. It is compelling to see that possibilities emerge from waste, but the question remains whether Keller downplays the disturbing, destructive potential of waste and our other failures too much.

A notion that Keller takes up and that could provide a constructive approach to ecological destruction is the concept of ‘staying with the trouble.’ With this concept Keller indicates that not everything is always understandable. Things can be unnamable, unspeakable or unknowable. Keller describes ‘staying with’ as a mode to relate to trauma: an experience that is unassimilable.²⁵⁴ Keller also uses the word ‘ecotrauma’. Ecotrauma could be applied to ecological destruction and loss. She relates the experience of trauma to the figure of the dark cloud. This dark cloud evokes ‘the apophatic encounter with the unknowable.’²⁵⁵ This encounter brings not only possibility but also, potentially, trauma.²⁵⁶

Keller is attentive to the darkness of this moment of ecological crisis, of the destruction of the earth. She wants us to focus on the ‘now’, the possibilities that we now, in this moment, have.²⁵⁷ In this context ‘names of God go dark.’²⁵⁸ The divine is ultimately unnamable and is not really discernable ‘except in ‘an cloud of impossibility’.²⁵⁹ It is in this notion of God that grieve, loss and

²⁵¹ A nuance to this is that if we would view Tanner’s position from her emphasis on God’s gift giving as equally applicable to the whole of creation and her emphasis on God’s radical transcendence, the earth and ‘our’ interactivity with it would appear more as a tabula rasa. The interdependence of life on earth is from this perspective neither obscured nor highlighted.

²⁵² Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, 42

²⁵³ David Wood, “Specters of Derrida: On the Way to Econstruction” in *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth*, ed. Laurel Kiarns and Catherine Keller (Fordham University Press, 2007), p. 277

²⁵⁴ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 92

²⁵⁵ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 92

²⁵⁶ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 92

²⁵⁷ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 104

²⁵⁸ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 120

²⁵⁹ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 120

failure have a place, within Keller's writings. Keller states that this notion of God might help us living in the 'ruins of political and religious certainty'.²⁶⁰ It might help us also in the more literal ruins that are caused by climate catastrophe.

Tanner's notion of a God who gives gift's, and we who pass these gifts through to our fellow beings, can correspond to a responsible way of inhabiting this planet. On top of that Tanner thinks God as encompassing the whole of being and in doing so, she renders the non-human valuable. Koster points out that Tanner's concept of radical transcendence produces a non-anthropocentric and non-hierarchical understanding of the world.²⁶¹ However, Tanner does not have specific attention for loss or tragedy which may be connected to a subtle progressive conception of time as we have discussed.

²⁶⁰ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 120

²⁶¹ Hilda Koster, "Questioning Eco-theological Panentheisms", p. 393

5. Conclusion

This thesis has started with the question *what theological response the theologies of Catherine Keller and Kathryn Tanner could give to a situation of ecological destruction, given how these theologies relate God and creation.*

We have observed that both Tanner and Keller emphasize the importance of creation, specifically the earth. Tanner counters much of Keller's critique of a sovereign and omnipotent conception of God by radicalizing God's transcendence. In this way, Tanner can think God as transcendent, while maintaining both the importance of creaturely agency and the inherent value of the whole of creation as God's gift. This combination—of a more traditional understanding of God's transcendence alongside a commitment to the agency of creatures and the worth of creation—is a strength of Tanner's theological position.

That being said, I consider ecological destruction as problematic for Tanner's theology. Tanner speaks for example about Jesus who conquers death.²⁶² Koster, interpreting Tanner speaks of the world being drawn closer to God.²⁶³ These notions are difficult to reconcile with a looming mass-extinction-event and with a decreasing biodiversity on this earth. On top of that, the tension between such a victory statement and the dire state of the earth is not made productive either, at least with regard to ecological concerns. There is a progressive element operating in the theology of Tanner which makes it harder to grasp the scale of the crisis, or to imagine its possible consequences. To a certain degree, the critique of Gosh and Latour is applicable to Tanner's theology.

If humans were to go extinct, or life on earth would vanish, the existence of God is not really at stake in Tanner's theology. While Keller talks about a God who is dependent on our actualizations²⁶⁴ the God of Tanner does not depend on us.²⁶⁵ However, this situation, that our existence is related to God's agency, makes it again, very hard to imagine that life on earth, or our earthly existence would be lost.²⁶⁶ We should note here that the way in which God's agency works, is ultimately not discernible or understandable by us. The impossibility of understanding divine agency could enable us to maintain the proposition of God's active agency while affirming this earth as God's creation. It should also be noted that Tanner does not offer easy escapes from problems on earth as in her theology, God is committed to this earth. Her largely implicit progressive conception of time does not culminate in an opportunistic leap into an otherworldly realm.

Keller cultivates the apophatic character of God more than Tanner while at the same time emphasizing God's presence within the world. God is present within the relations, processes of this world. This means that God is very much at stake within the ecological crisis. In this crisis God appears as, "*primordial nature,*" *a lure, a nuance of possibility and on the other side of that moment, as "consequent nature," takes in, feels, suffers, em-pathos, what the creature has actualized.*"²⁶⁷ This means that God is in a way vulnerable because God 'takes in' what we actualize and in this way God depend on us.

²⁶² Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, p. 29

²⁶³ Hilda Koster, "Questioning Eco-theological Panentheisms"

²⁶⁴ Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth*, p. 146

²⁶⁵ Tanner, *The ambiguities of Transcendence: In conversation with the work of William E. Connolly*, p. 97

²⁶⁶ Tanner, *The ambiguities of Transcendence: In conversation with the work of William E. Connolly*, p. 97

²⁶⁷ Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, p. 125

As a result, Keller is able to speak very nuanced about human agency. On the one hand, she highlights importance of our agency to which there is no escape. God needs to be actualized by us. On the other hand, Keller highlights the vulnerability of the earth that suffers as a result of human dominion. The attentiveness to the fact that we exist within a web of relations, is a valuable insight in a time where these relations, especially our relations with the non-human, become more apparent as a result of the ecological crisis. Gosh argues that these relations become more apparent by being a constraint to humans. We have questioned whether Keller's theology can fully absorb this concept of the earth as a constraint to human agency. Keller emphasizes mainly the possibilities that emerge out of chaos but is in that way less attentive to the impossibilities that come with the ecological crisis. This is especially the case when Keller talks about creation as a continuous creative process.

However, Keller does make room for loss, and grievance in relation to ecological destruction. She does this by taking up the concept of 'Staying with the trouble'.²⁶⁸ This concept allows for a commitment to the earth, while acknowledging pain, suffering and our lack of answers. It is in this context that Keller introduces the concept of hope. With hope Keller means embracing future possibilities.²⁶⁹ Keller is committed to an understanding of the future as open-ended. Within this open-endedness there are possibilities. The lure of all these possibilities, along with our collective materialization of these possibilities is what Keller calls God.

For both theological positions it is hard to adapt to a possible extinction. That being said, I argue that Keller's theology provides more room for loss and tragedy by describing God as vulnerable and by taking up the concept of 'staying with the trouble'. Tanner strength is combining a traditional conception of God with a theology that is ecologically attentive and that highlights human agency. In her theology our 'extravagant hopes'²⁷⁰ are based on the power of God whose specific agency we cannot discern. Following Keller, we, the emphasis lies on us, humans, who have to act to materialize the possibilities that lure.

²⁶⁸ Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, p. 88

²⁶⁹ Keller, *Political theology of the earth*, 42

²⁷⁰ Kathryn Tanner, *Creation ex nihilo as a mixed metaphor*, p. 148-149

6. Evaluation

It is not easy to make sense of ecological destruction and possible human extinction. We could hope for an intervention from an otherworldly realm but this merely avoids the question. In this thesis I have tried to find a constructive theological contribution to this question. Tanner and Keller of both a nuanced and intelligent understanding of the relation between God and the world. As discussed, the both have their strengths but for both is difficult to make sense of ecological destruction and extinction. I argue that this is especially the case for Tanner, as loss and tragedy are relatively underdeveloped in her theology.

In first instance my intention was to restrict myself to the books 'Political theology of the earth' and 'God and creation in Christian Theology' written by Keller and Tanner respectively. During the research I felt the need to explore both authors more broadly, especially in the case of Tanner as 'God and Creation in Christian Theology' has quite a specific focus. The principles of this book are applied by Tanner in 'The politics of God' which proved helpful in drawing out her theological position in chapter 3.1. With regard to the analysis of both authors, I felt the need to stage a conversation between Tanner and Keller and authors who focus on questions related to climate change and extinction. In my opinion this has helped to ask more specific questions to Keller and Tanner and has provided a more thorough analysis. It could be argued that with the choice of different authors in chapter four, a different conclusion would have been possible. I do not deny this. It is probable that other perspectives benefit the conversation about making sense of ecological destruction.

As mentioned, I do not evaluate the development of the ideas of Tanner and Keller throughout their academic careers. This limits the degree to which this thesis gives a refined rendition of how Keller and Tanner thinks. This thesis represent their ideas in the light of my research question, but does not take into account possible developments in their way of thinking throughout time.

Bibliography

- Bardovski, A. D. (2011). Has the Earth's sixth mass extinction already arrived? *Nature*, 51-57.
- Bauman, W. (2007). The problem of a Transcendent God for the Well-Being of Continuous Creation. *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*, 46(2), 120-126.
- Carbine, R. P., & Koster, H. (2015). *The Gift of Theology: The contribution of Kathryn Tanner*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Christian Scholar's Review. (2014, October 15). *Postliberal Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed: Postliberal Theology and the Church Catholic: Conversations with George Lindbeck, David Burrell, and Stanley Hauerwas*. Retrieved from christianscholars.com: <https://christianscholars.com/postliberal-theology-a-guide-for-the-perplexed-postliberal-theology-and-the-church-catholic-conversations-with-george-lindbeck-david-burrell-and-stanley-hauerwas/>
- Conradie, E. M., & Koster, H. P. (2020). *T&T Clark Handbook of Christian Theology and Climate Change*. London/New York: T&T Clark.
- Conradie, E. (2010). The salvation of the earth from anthropogenic destruction: In search of appropriate soteriological concepts in an age of ecological destruction. *Worldviews*, 111-140.
- Conradie, E. (2023, January 12). *Ecotheology*. Retrieved from St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology: <https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/Ecotheology>
- Conradie, E. M. (2020). The Ecological Significance of God's Transcendence? In M. Fuller (ed.), D. Evers (ed.), A. Runehov (ed.), K.-W. Saether (ed.), & B. Micholett (ed.), *Issues in Science and Theology: Nature – and Beyond: Transcendence and Immanence in Science and Theology* (pp. 87-88). Springer Cham.
- Copernicus Climate Change Service. (2024, may 15). *2023 is the hottest year on record*. Retrieved from climate.copernicus.eu: <https://climate.copernicus.eu/copernicus-2023-hottest-year-record>
- Culp, J. (2023). *Panentheism*. Retrieved from Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/panentheism/#Ter>
- Dahl, D. E. (2002). Criticizing "Secular Criticism": Reading religion in Edward Said and Kathryn Tanner. *Studies in Religion*, 359-371.
- Deane-Drummond, C. (2008). *Eco-theology*. London: Darton.
- Doeland, L. (2023). *Apocalypsofie*. Utrecht: Ten Have.
- Ghosh, A. (2022). *Te groot om ons voor te stellen: de klimaatcrisis en onze verbeelding*. (J. Heyvaert, Trans.) Berchem: Uitgeverij Epo.
- Global Challenges Foundations. (2024). *Ecological collapse*. Retrieved from globalchallenges.org: <https://globalchallenges.org/global-risks/ecological-collapse/>
- Jenkins, W. (2008). *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology*. New York: Oxford Academic.

- Keller, C. (2002). *Face of the deep: A Theology of Becoming*. London/New York: Routledge .
- Keller, C. (2008). *On the Mystery: discerning divinity in process*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Keller, C. (2018). *Political Theology of the Earth*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Keller, C. (2023). Amorous Entanglements: The Matter of Christian Panentheism. In K. Bray, H. Eaton , & W. Bauman, *Earthly Things: Immanence, new materialisms, and planetary thinking* (pp. 99-110). Fordham University Press.
- Konigsburg, J. (2019). Speaking of God's Presence as Non-Contrastive Transcendent Distinction. *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*.
- Koster, H. (2012). Questioning Eco-Theological Pantheisms: The promise of Kathryn Tanner's Theology of God's Radical Transcendence for Ecological Theology. *Scriptura*, 385-394.
- Latour, B. (2010). An Attempt at a "Compositionist Manifesto". *New Literary History*, 471-490.
- Latour, B. (2016 (orig. 1991)). *Wij zijn nooit modern geweest*. (G. De Vries, & J. Van Dijk, Trans.) Amsterdam: Boom.
- Latour, B. (2017 (orig. 2015)). *Facing Gaia: eight lectures on the climate regime*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Laudato Si': On care for our common home*. (2015, May 24). Retrieved from [www.vatican.va: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html)
- Manolopoulos, M. (2005). Derrida's Gift to Eco/Theo/Log: A Critical Tribute. *CrossCurrents*, 55-68.
- McLaughlin, B., & Bennett, K. (2023). *Supervenience*. Retrieved December 27, 2024, from The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.
- Pranger, J. H. (2015). Inculturation as Theology of Culture: Exploring Kathryn Tanner's Contribution to Intercultural Theology. In R. P. Carbine, & H. (. Koster, *The Gift of Theology: The contribution of Kathryn Tanner* (pp. 183-207). Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Rasmussen, F. (2022). The gift in theology: Unilateralism and reciprocity in Kathryn Tanner's and John Milbank's theology of the gift. *Studia Theologica - Nordic Journal of Theology*, 114-129.
- Tanner, K. (1988). *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press.
- Tanner, K. (1992). *The Politics of God: Christian Theologies and Social Justice*. Augsburg: Fortress.
- Tanner, K. (1994). Creation, Environmental Crisis, and Ecological Justice. In R. S. Chopp, & M. (. Lewis Taylor, *Reconstructing Christian Theology* (pp. 99-123). Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Tanner, K. (2001). *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

- Tanner, K. (2010). In the Image of the Invisible. In C. Boesel (ed.), *Apophatic Bodies* (pp. 117-134). Fordham University Press.
- Tanner, K. (2013). Creation Ex Nihilo as Mixed Metaphor. *Modern Theology*, 138-155.
- Tanner, K. (2015). The ambiguities of Transcendence: In conversation with the work of William E. Connolly. In M. (. Johnson-Debaufre, *Common good: Economy, Ecology and Political Theology* (pp. 91-102). Fordham University Press.
- van Urk, E. (2025, February 5). *PhD Thesis: The Imago Dei in a Time of Mass Extinction: Rediscovering the Spiritual Value of Biodiversity*. Retrieved from research.vu.nl: <https://research.vu.nl/en/publications/the-imago-dei-in-a-time-of-mass-extinction-rediscovering-the-spir>
- White, L. (1967). The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis. *Science*, 1203-1207.
- Wood, D. (2007). Specters of Derrida: On the Way to Econstruction. In E. L. Keller, *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth* (pp. 264-289). New York: Fordham University Press.
- WWF. (2022). *Living Planet Report 2022*. Retrieved from livingplanet.panda.org: <https://livingplanet.panda.org/en-US/>