

Bonhoeffer's Christocentric Theology
and Fundamental Debates in Environmental Ethics

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CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter, I will first of all look back and to take stock of the work I have accomplished in correlating Bonhoeffer's theology with environmental ethics. I undertake this task in 7.1, where I set out to answer the central research question. Secondly, in 7.2, I shall overview the results that this dissertation has arrived at, indicating the relevance of this research for ongoing theological reflection on ecology. Thirdly, in 7.3, I will close with a description of the possibilities for future research on the dissertation's topic.

7.1 Taking Stock of the Results Achieved

In Chapter 1, I began by formulating the following research question: "In which way can a number of concepts from the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer be transposed and made relevant for contemporary discussions in the field of environmental ethics?" In response to this question, I examined a great number of concepts from Bonhoeffer's theology, bringing them into dialogue with current discussions in environmental ethics—this is the work that was carried out in chapters 2 through 6.

Chapters 2 and 3 explored concepts from Bonhoeffer's theology that could be situated under the general heading of the relationship between God (or more specifically, Christ) and nature. In Chapter 2, I started off by treating four such concepts that deal with the relationship between Christ and the world in general (that is, not directly in reference to nature as such). The most prominent of these was Bonhoeffer's concept of *Christuswirklichkeit*, which, as we saw, gave shape to his proposal for overcoming certain false distinctions that precluded Christians from engaging with the whole of reality. As I made clear, Bonhoeffer bases his appeal on his assertion that, by entering the world, Christ directed all reality to himself, thereby overcoming the distinction between a 'worldly' and a 'spiritual' realm—in other words, for Bonhoeffer, reality is, in Christ, fundamentally undivided. At the same time, I also showed how Bonhoeffer acknowledges the existence of certain relative distinctions within reality, which guard his ontology from collapsing into a Christological monism. As I argued, Bonhoeffer's assertion that the world as a whole is directed towards Christ bestows an eschatological dimension on his understanding of *Christuswirklichkeit*. In this connection, we discovered a number of parallels between his concept and contemporary research in New Testament theology, which stresses that the eschaton was inaugurated by Christ's advent in the world. I then correlated Bonhoeffer's concept of *Christuswirklichkeit* with the contemporary question of how to motivate Christians to take ecological action, especially in light of certain 'escapist' tendencies at work in evangelical eschatology. In contrast to these tendencies, I presented Bonhoeffer's concept as a compelling alternative to a world-denying eschatology.

The second set of concepts that I explored in Chapter 2 was that of the ultimate and the penultimate, which can be seen as one of the relative distinctions that Bonhoeffer articulates within the one, undivided *Christuswirklichkeit*. In understanding the ultimate in terms of justification by grace, we saw how Bonhoeffer dismissed both radicalism and compromise as false solutions for dealing with the divide between the ultimate and the present, fallen reality of the world. According to him, this tension is resolved, not in the attitude that the church happens to adopt, but in the person of Jesus Christ. In concrete terms, he develops the notion of the penultimate as a sort of third possibility, or alternative, insisting that the latter aims at (or prepares the way for) the ultimate, even while, at the same time,

differing qualitatively from it. Just like with the concept of *Christuswirklichkeit*, I argued that the penultimate is defined in particular by an inherent eschatological dimension: it links up with the distinction in recent New Testament scholarship between the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’ of Christ’s eschatological Kingdom. I then correlated Bonhoeffer’s pair of concepts with the connection between eschatology and ecotheology, drawing particular attention to certain trends in liberal eschatology. In particular, I used his thoughts on the penultimate in order to criticize the optimistic and immanent bearing of liberal conceptions of eschatology, arguing that his understanding of the merely preparatory nature of the penultimate can help relieve Christians of the (apparent) burden of having to realize God’s Kingdom themselves.

Thirdly, I focussed on the further specification that Bonhoeffer gives to the relationship between Christ and the world through his discussion of the three moments of the incarnation, the crucifixion and the resurrection. As I noted, this differentiation results in a particularly nuanced approach to the world. In correlating the concept with environmental ethics, I showed how this threefold definition of the Christ-world relation can provide a grammar that is finely-tuned and articulate enough to speak of nature’s beauty and bounty without going so far as to underestimate (or conveniently ignore) the havoc and destruction that it causes. As such, I argued, the concept can help oppose those approaches to nature that adopt a dangerously myopic, or one-sided, point of view.

The fourth and final concept that I treated in Chapter 2 was that of ‘*das Natürliche*’. As I showed, Bonhoeffer took a rather unique position relative to most other Protestant theologians by developing a robust appreciation of the concept of the natural, which was his way of taking the self-preserving process of life into account—that is, nature’s tendency to restore equilibrium. I then correlated this concept with the Gaia theory, which has grown to be so popular in ecological circles. In particular, I argued that Bonhoeffer’s concept of the natural can help provide an added theological weight to the concept: while it accepts the natural as a basic, biological category, it also resists the introduction of a pure and simple naturalism into the realm of Christian ethics.

Whereas the concepts articulated in Chapter 2—especially that of *Christuswirklichkeit*—were foundational to Bonhoeffer’s theology, allowing only for an indirect application to nature, Chapter 3 dealt more directly with nature itself, or more specifically, with a cluster of concepts derived from Bonhoeffer’s theology of nature. I treated five such concepts in all. The first was that of Christ as the hidden center of nature (specifically *after* the Fall). I brought this unique concept to bear in the context of environmental ethics by taking it as a way to overcome the Cartesian divide between subject and object, which separates human beings both from each other and from nature, helped facilitate the radical instrumentalisation of nature, and which is clearly one of the root causes of the current ecological crisis. Secondly, I focussed on Bonhoeffer’s conception of the Fall, showing how he paints post-lapsarian nature in particularly dark colours. While I argued that his description of the world after the Fall is, in fact, somewhat *too* dark, I also made the case that the emphasis he gives to nature’s fallenness can help call into question the comparatively uncritical appraisal of nature made by so often by contemporary ecologists.

Thirdly, I addressed Bonhoeffer’s thoughts on Christ as the Redeemer of nature in connection with his theology of the sacraments—or more specifically, in connection with his assertion that the sacraments give shape to a sort of preview, as it were, of the coming redemption of nature. I correlated this view with the increasing attention granted to the Christian sacraments in environmental ethics, indicating how Bonhoeffer’s (essentially

Lutheran) assertion of Christ's real presence in the sacraments can function as a powerful motive for caring for creation. In addition, I argued that Bonhoeffer's concept fulfills a critical function as well: by limiting the sacraments to baptism and Eucharist, he helps resist the universal sacramentalism which—while popular in ecotheology—tends to affirm the *status quo*, and, as a consequence, makes it rather difficult to call unjust social structures into question. Fourthly and finally, I transposed Bonhoeffer's concept of the *Erhaltungsordnungen* into the domain of environmental ethics. In particular, I showed how he developed this concept as a critical alternative to the concept of the orders of creation espoused by many of German Christians—though Bonhoeffer affirms the existence of order, he also stresses that this order comes from above, that is, from God, instead of from below. In correlating this concept with the debate over the natural order in environmental ethics, I argued that it allows for the recognition of a certain order in the natural world, while also helping to criticize a hasty acceptance or romantization of nature—indeed, I showed how Bonhoeffer insisted quite emphatically that any order perceived in nature should be seen and understood in relation to Christ, and to him alone.

In Chapters 4, 5 and 6, I focused on another general theme of Bonhoeffer's work, namely, on the relationship of human beings amongst themselves, and between human beings and non-human nature. Chapters 4 and 5 correlated four important themes of his theological anthropology with current debates in environmental ethics. In Chapter 4, firstly, I began by addressing the first two of these themes: on the one hand, humanity's fundamental relationship with, or rootedness within, nature, and, on the other hand, its qualitative distinction from nature. Regarding the first theme, I showed how, throughout Bonhoeffer's work, he asserts the fundamental bodiliness of human existence. I indicated in particular how his emphasis on humanity's bond with the earth was influenced by the movement of *Lebensphilosophie*, but at the same time, I also showed how his focus on this bond differs from the latter insofar as it is both explicitly theological and directly grounded in Scripture. From here, I drew attention to how the appreciation of human bodiliness plays an important role in environmental ethics as well: in many different ways, humanity's attachment to other-than-human life is seen as imperative in the effort to overcome the perceived estrangement of human beings from nature. In transposing Bonhoeffer's train of thought into this debate, I argued that the significance of the particular way in which elaborates on mankind's connection to the earth lies in the specifically biblical and theological reasoning behind it. I then closed by arguing that this can further the acceptance of human bodiliness among Christians, and that this, in turn, can serve as an additional motivation for environmental discipleship.

The second concept that I treated in Chapter 4 was that of human distinctiveness. As I showed, even while Bonhoeffer stresses the fundamental bond between human beings and the earth, he also strongly asserts certain fundamental differences between human beings and non-human nature (or more specifically, animals). Throughout his work, he identifies a number of these differences. The most important of these can be seen in the strong emphasis that he places on human sociality—human beings, as he contends, are free *for* each other in ways that are purely and simply unavailable to other animals. On a more critical note, I referred to certain avenues of research showing how these distinctions are, in many important respects, theoretically inadequate—in particular, his understanding of human sociality as unique has been disproven, as have most of the other distinctions that he draws between human and non-human species. At the same time, I also argued that this in no way disqualifies the distinctions that Bonhoeffer sets up; if anything, they simply need to be reinterpreted in light of recent and ongoing ethological research. Regarding the theme of

sociality, for example, I drew from research which shows that, while non-human species do indeed engage in certain forms of social relations and modes of behaviour with each other, this sociality is far less developed—in degree—than that found in human beings. I then attempted to bring Bonhoeffer's account of human distinctiveness to bear on environmental ethics. Since anthropocentrism, which is inherent in Bonhoeffer's theology, has come under sustained criticism by environmental ethicists, I first of all defended the plausibility (as well as the viability) of an anthropocentric approach to nature, arguing that any thoroughgoing ecocentric alternative is not only philosophically unviable, but that it fails to motivate meaningful forms of environmental action and engagement. In this light, I made the case that an adjusted (or 'weak') form of anthropocentrism is not only possible, but necessary. This paved the way for me to draw out the particular contribution that Bonhoeffer's theological anthropology is able to make in current debates. As I argued, his stress on sociality as something distinctly human can help to refocus attention on the social dimension of the ecological crisis—that is, on the closely intertwined relation between social and environmental problems.

In Chapter 5, I correlated two other themes from Bonhoeffer's theological anthropology with environmental ethics: the theme of human mastery, on the one hand, and of loyalty to the earth, on the other. Firstly, in my account for Bonhoeffer's assertion that human beings are to *rule* over the non-human world, I argued that the way in which he effectively works this idea out is a far cry from an appeal for the ruthless exploitation of nature. Indeed, as I showed, he views humanity's excessive reliance on technology as a patent *failure* to rule the earth. I also showed how, while his early theology seems to be satisfied with a pure and simple condemnation of technology, in his later thought, he arrives at the more mature view of technology as an intrinsic (and inescapable) part of the world come of age. In this light, he argues that, instead of fighting against the inevitable, the current state of affairs should be accepted—*provided* that an appropriate, anthropocentric ethic come to govern technology's use and continued development. From here, I brought Bonhoeffer's thought into correlation with debates in environmental ethics concerning human mastery and technology. Firstly, I argued that the ancient idea of the *dominium terrae*, in spite of the many contentions surrounding it, doesn't need to be disqualified in light of the ecological crisis; on the contrary, it is a thoroughly adequate concept when viewed in light of nature's ambivalence. In the same view, I argued that Bonhoeffer's specific elaboration of this concept of mastery can help contribute to environmental ethics. Specifically, I made the case that his particular view of human mastery (which, as we recall, should only be exercised in recognition of God and of other human beings) can help to call the dominant Enlightenment paradigm (which effectively transforms the individual into a master of the universe) into question. Secondly, I argued that the maturation of Bonhoeffer's views with respect technology can help redirect environmental ethics away from a fruitless (and insufficiently nuanced) condemnation of technology towards a more constructive engagement with the latter.

The second theme that I treated in Chapter 5 was Bonhoeffer's imperative of remaining loyal to the earth. As I showed, the urge to love the earth was a defining feature of Bonhoeffer's entire theology, an appeal that gradually developed and matured throughout his theological development. We saw in particular how, over the course of time, he gradually shed some of the weight of the Lebensphilosophie that had first informed his love and, in the latter's place, sought out a more robust Scriptural basis for his views. I then correlated his emphasis on human loyalty to the earth with similar appeals arising in contemporary ecology. I made the point that, whereas there is a striking similarity between these appeals, there is

also an important, overriding difference: whereas environmental ethicists often draw from sources such as earth spirituality and the experience of nature in order to make their case, and while these often contain valuable insights, from a Christian perspective, Bonhoeffer would undoubtedly warn against such tendencies seeking to divinise the earth. Indeed, as I argued, his imperative to remain loyal to the earth helps to draw attention to this danger and to formulate a genuinely Christian alternative in its place.

In Chapter 6, I shifted from Bonhoeffer's theological anthropology and focussed on two other concepts falling under the general theme of the relationship between human beings and nature: responsibility and, closely related with the latter, the divine mandates. Concerning responsibility, I made the decision to focus exclusively on a single concept from Bonhoeffer's broader matrix of responsibility, namely, that of vicarious, representative action. My account of the development of this concept throughout the course of Bonhoeffer's corpus revealed just how fundamental a role it plays in the whole of his theology, being anchored at it is in the vicarious representation of Christ himself. While vicarious representation is primarily a concept concerning the relationships between human beings, Bonhoeffer makes clear that it can apply to things and states of affairs as well—though only in the form of being responsible *for*, and not being responsible *to*. Correlated with environmental ethics, I argued that viewing responsibility in terms of vicarious representation can offer a robust alternative to the popular conception of responsibility for future generations, which is fraught with philosophical difficulties. As I showed, Bonhoeffer's concept avoids these problems by focussing on the idea that suffering people, living here in the present, already furnish us with sufficient motivation for taking responsibility on their behalf. And since a large part of this suffering is caused by ecological degradation, it thereby becomes important to address this dimension of suffering (and responsibility) as well. An additional reason for this is the fact that, from the perspective of Bonhoeffer's conception of vicarious representation, it is possible to assign responsibility *for* nature and the environment *to* human beings.

Secondly, in Chapter 6, I treated Bonhoeffer's concept of the divine mandates (viz., of marriage, work, state, and church), which he originally intended to serve as a blueprint for a new, post-war society. As I showed, this concept can be viewed as a further development of Luther's doctrine of the three Stände. Though Bonhoeffer developed the concept against the backdrop of modernity, we saw how it was still quite traditional in nature, reflecting relatively old-fashioned Prussian ideals. In spite of this apparent drawback, I argued that the concept nevertheless bears a great deal of contemporary relevance for environmental ethics. First of all, I showed how Bonhoeffer's emphasis on the mandates as forms of God's commandments means that they function as a form of revelation—as such, they can help unmask unjust structures in society. While in his own time, Bonhoeffer used the concept as a tool to criticize a state that had become insatiably drunk with power, by shifting focus to the current context, I showed how it can also help to unmask the overwhelming dominance of the mandate of work which, through the doctrines of neoliberalism, has come to threaten and undermine the other three mandates. In this regard, I drew attention to the presence of a certain self-restraint at work within the mandate of work itself. As I argued, the best way forward is to embrace and strengthen the work mandate insofar as Bonhoeffer understood it, instead of simply condemning neoliberalism as a whole. Secondly, I asserted that, in order for Bonhoeffer's concept to remain relevant in today's context, the mandates would first need to be reformulated as *global* activities, or in other words, as a foundation for the establishment of global structures of accountability. This pertains specifically to the mandate of the state insofar as a globalized economy demands a measure of global, democratically mediated control. Thirdly and finally, I argued that Bonhoeffer's mandates can help grant a new

impetus to the church to act as a *community* both in creating and sustaining networks of social interrelatedness, and in caring for nature.

7.2 *The Relevance of this Research Project for Environmental Ethics*

Having reviewed the major results of the project, I would now like to indicate what Bonhoeffer's concepts, when taken together as a whole, can contribute to the field of environmental ethics. This should allow us to organize each of the concepts according to a scale of priority, or of immediate practical significance, at least insofar as current ecological problems and dilemmas are concerned.

As I indicated in Chapter 1, the field of environmental ethics is remarkably wide and diverse. Keeping this in mind, the strategy that I have adopted has not been to develop an overarching perspective on the field as a whole, but rather to correlate certain concepts from Bonhoeffer's theology with a limited number of ecological debates and issues. At the same time, I also expressed the expectation that, rather than merely offering a loose collection of unrelated contributions, a more integrated approach could be developed on the basis of Bonhoeffer's theology. Taking a look back at the ground that we have covered, it is now possible to conclude that this goal has indeed been achieved—the correlations summarized above stand in a clear relationship to each other, and while I am not prepared, on the basis of his theology, to advance a wholesale 'Bonhoefferian' approach to environmental ethics, I would argue that his theology *can* contribute in significant ways to key debates within ecology. In total, this contribution can be formulated along the lines of the following four general tasks: 1) generating motivation for environmental action and engagement, as well as forming a more ecologically sensitive attitude towards nature; 2) formulating an ecologically viable Christian theology of nature; 3) revising Christian theological anthropology in light of the ecological crisis, and; 4) reflecting on the relationship between sociality and ecology.

First of all, Bonhoeffer's theology can function as a valuable resource for the development of arguments capable of motivating people to take better care of nature. In Chapter 2, I made clear how Bonhoeffer's concept of *Christuswirklichkeit* can be used to urge Christians to take part more actively in the concerns of the world—instead of shying away from taking responsibility for the earth, it compels them to work towards the 'good' (defined as the reality of God made manifest in Christ) by conforming to Christ's threefold relationship to the world. This concept is undoubtedly the most important contribution that Bonhoeffer's theology can make in the context of ecology, for it links up directly with one of the most central issues in environmental ethics—namely, the problem of motivating people to abandon their environmentally destructive and careless behaviour and to care of the environment. I addressed this issue in Chapter 4 when I referred to Roger Scruton's observation of the need for a widely accessible argument explaining *why* people need to be concerned about the environment. Bonhoeffer's concept delivers such an argument. Though it is specifically addressed to Christians, it also sets Christian men and women free to engage wholeheartedly in the efforts of non-Christians to curb ecological destruction. Moreover, it never places them under the illusion that they themselves are responsible for the realization of God's Kingdom on earth—on the contrary, it clearly reveals that their task is, much more modestly, a mere preparation of the way for God's coming Kingdom.

Secondly, Bonhoeffer's theology contributes towards the development of an ecologically relevant theology of nature. In Chapter 3, I argued that Bonhoeffer offers a surprisingly rich theology of nature, even in spite of its relatively underdeveloped state. One

point that is especially valuable in this regard is his thinking on Christ as the center of nature. This is a centrality that, as we saw, remains hidden, and which only manifests itself in the sacraments, thereby offering a preview of nature's future redemption. This specific proposal for a cosmic Christology contains great promise for the formulation of a Christian theology of nature. In order to put the concept in context, I made the point that Bonhoeffer's emphasis on the cosmic scope of Christ's lordship in no way leads him to minimize—let alone deny—the importance of the historical Jesus; on the contrary, I showed how his Christology remains firmly committed to the Christian creeds. Given this groundedness in the creeds, I then argued that his cosmic Christology offers a viable alternative to, for example, the thoughts of Teilhard de Chardin, which are much more speculative and disengaged from the historical Jesus. Also, in Teilhard's account, 'sin' doesn't have nearly the same degree of prominence as it does for Bonhoeffer. In short, Bonhoeffer's cosmic Christology is considerably more 'thick' in that it is able both to accommodate nature's fallenness and, at the same time, to recognize nature as already redeemed in Christ (even if this redemption still has yet to fully manifest itself). This 'thickness' is also clearly discernable in Bonhoeffer's conception of the *Erhaltungsordnungen*. As I showed, his assertion, that the order perceived in nature should always be seen in relation to Christ, opens up a middle way between an uncritical acceptance of nature 'as it is', on the one hand, and a singular condemnation of every form of natural theology, on the other hand. In this way, Christ, by his threefold relationship to the world, becomes the criterion for deciding whether something is 'natural' or not. In other words, nature is not purely and simply given, with Christ coming on the scene after the fact; no, for Bonhoeffer, nature is only fully revealed as nature in and through Christ alone. In the context of environmental ethics, it should also be noted that Bonhoeffer's theology of nature functions as a necessary complement to his understanding of *Christuswirklichkeit* (as well as related concepts), which I described in Chapter 2, for it further develops an argument for people—specifically Christians—to care for nature.

The third general contribution to environmental ethics lies in Bonhoeffer's theological anthropology. In particular, I applied four elements of his anthropology to discussions bearing on the relationship between human beings and nature. As I showed, Bonhoeffer surprisingly refashioned certain elements from the philosophical and theological anthropologies of other thinkers and traditions. We saw, for example, how he adopts the general philosophical notion of *Leiblichkeit*, only then to ground it in relation to Scripture. We also saw how he redefined the concept of the *imago Dei* in terms of an *analogia relationis*. After drawing attention to these renovated conceptual tools, I argued on behalf of the relevance of Bonhoeffer's theological anthropology with regard to ongoing debates in environmental ethics—for example, the debate concerning the appropriation of technology. At the same time, I also noted how the contributions that Bonhoeffer's thought is actually able to make are considerably weaker, or less significant, than those outlined in chapters 2 and 3. Regarding the theme of human distinctiveness, for example, we saw how *none* of the distinctions that Bonhoeffer drew between human beings and animals has stood the test of contemporary scientific inquiry. While I argued that it is important not to lose sight of human distinctiveness relative to animal life, Bonhoeffer's theology undoubtedly falls short here, for the only distinctions that we were able to keep were quantitative in nature, and not qualitative, as Bonhoeffer had argued. As significant and important as his anthropology is, then, its contribution in the context of environmental ethics is relatively limited.

Fourthly and finally, I made the case that Bonhoeffer's theology can also contribute towards the development of a specifically Christian framework for taking responsibility, both in relation to nature and to society. As I showed, his concept of *Stellvertretung* is valuable in

the way that it stresses the qualitative uniqueness of Christ's vicarious representation, through which human beings are reconciled to God, while at the same time using it as a paradigm for authentic Christian living. This undoubtedly issues a radical call for taking responsibility both for society and for an endangered planet. In particular, it is able to provide a much needed alternative, or median path, between liberalism's dual-focus on the (moral) example of Jesus and social justice, and orthodoxy's focus on Christ's uniqueness and on individual salvation (though, to be fair, this presentation of either position is admittedly somewhat of a caricature). In addition, we saw how Bonhoeffer's conception of the divine mandates can be viewed as a concretisation of the way Christians can live out their lives responsibly. In this connection, I indicated certain ways in which this concept can contribute towards environmental ethics—for example, by emphasising that the mandates come from 'above' (as commandments of God), they help reveal unjust structures of power. Although Bonhoeffer's theology of responsibility can certainly make important contributions to contemporary environmental ethics, they too are relatively modest in nature. One specific limitation can be found in the fact that Bonhoeffer does not deliberately include nature in the realm of human responsibility, even though he provides the conceptual possibility of doing so. In addition, his concept of the divine mandates presents a number of problems, as I pointed out. Very much like his theological anthropology, then, the value of Bonhoeffer's theology of responsibility for current environmental ethics is relatively limited.

In sum, this dissertation features two different categories of contributions. The first category consists of concepts (concerning the relationship between Christ and the (natural) world) that have the capacity to make the most significant contribution to environmental ethics. In contrast, the second category is composed of concepts (concerning Bonhoeffer's theological anthropology and his theology of responsibility) that would appear to have much less to offer. Setting this relative distinction to the side, however, one could still easily argue that Bonhoeffer's theology has a great deal to bring to bear on key debates within the field.

7.3 Possibilities for Future Research

This dissertation helps open up a number of perspectives for future research, three of which I would briefly like to consider here, in closing.

First of all, I drew attention to the eschatological dimension of Bonhoeffer's theology. While I pointed out (primarily in Chapter 2) that scholars have gradually come to acknowledge the presence of this dimension in his work, a thorough description of it has yet to be carried out. The partial exploration that I undertook in that chapter drew particular attention to the promise of Bonhoeffer's eschatology insofar as it provides an alternative to both escapist and immanent alternatives. While, in the context of the dissertation, I focussed specifically on the potential significance of his eschatology for the field of ecology, it can readily be observed that it bears great promise for other contexts as well. Bonhoeffer's own examples of feeding the hungry and healing the sick, as activities belonging to the realm of the penultimate, could clearly be brought to bear in the field of social ethics, political ethics, and the ethics of care, for example. For this reason, it is crucial that more in-depth study be carried out on this aspect of Bonhoeffer's theology.

Secondly, this dissertation has barely even scratched the surface of the potential contribution that Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology could make towards a renewed formulation of the church's mission, particularly in the context of the ecological crisis. Although I briefly touched on the subject in Chapter 6, I only approached it in a very limited, *formal* way, that

is, in relation to the divine mandates; as such, I have significantly restricted the present study from considering the full contribution that Bonhoeffer could make in this regard. A more thoroughgoing examination of Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology would very likely result in a much richer understanding of his potential contribution to environmental ethics, as well as to other contexts.

Thirdly, an important issue for further research concerns the relation between the theology of nature and the doctrine of Christ. This challenge was addressed in Chapter 3, where I argued that Bonhoeffer's way of understanding Christ as the hidden center of nature helps to answer the question of how to overcome the subject/object divide within nature. However, there are many other possible contributions that could be drawn out from a more sustained reformulation of the theology of nature within the context of Christology, and not simply for the field of environmental ethics. To do so would necessitate going beyond Bonhoeffer, however, for his work only addresses the issue in a tentative fashion. One point that would be particularly important to address would be the question of how we ought to appropriate—Christologically—the understanding of nature made available through the natural sciences.