

Abstract

Against Recycling as Such: Cheap Grace in the Christian Response to Climate Collapse

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Much institutional discourse (ecclesial and academic) around the current Anthropocene extinction event still focuses on the hopeful themes of Old Testament stewardship and ecotheological theories of potentially harmonious creaturely relationality. With yearly United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports stating with great certainty that the earth had entered a mass extinction event driven by humanity's abuse of resources, ecosystems, and fellow creatures, where is the prophetic ethical response from theological schools and clerical communities? How is it that discourse around the sixth mass extinction continues to be hedged in ambivalence, hope, and a tenacious attachment to the individual freedoms of capitalism? This paper examines the ways that Christian faith communities and academic ecotheological discourses continue to skirt around an adequate prophetic response to the anthropogenic factors at work in climate collapse (and the subsequent suffering of all species on the planet). It asks what new prophetic directions are theologically possible in making way for thinking about God, creation, and creatures, inside of and on the other side of the Anthropocene extinction. How are theologies to be imagined or how is God to be imagined

in a world without Homo sapiens? How has humanity's super-predatory speciesism been fed by Christian scripture and Christian doctrine? What does the Cross tell us about humanity's capacity for destruction and creaturely suffering? This paper attempts to re-frame ecotheology away from its liberal concerns with nature's beauty, creation's sanctity, and the cheap grace of church recycling programs toward an understanding of the collective sacrifice demanded (especially of western "first world" peoples) to stave off the complete (or currently projected 95%) destruction of life on earth over the next century. An ecotheology that lacks prophetic vigor is an ecotheology of cheap grace. How can theologians and clergy use their "authority" to re-frame the discussion of the Anthropocene extinction? What in our scriptural tradition hinders us from doing so (from Old Testament "dominion" to Jesus's curse of the fig tree)? How can we read the term "Environmental Justice" through the lens of two prophetic texts: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship* and James Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power*? What are the messages that the academy (and church) have yet to integrate into discourses and action around the Anthropocene extinction (and what can we learn from dire United Nations IPCC reports, from Cone's critique of the white environmental movement, from Kathryn Yusoff's *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* and from the grassroots civil disobedience actions of groups like Extinction Rebellion? Drawing from the thinking of Bonhoeffer, Cone, Yusoff, Walter Brueggemann, Catherine Keller, Judith Butler, and Jea Sophia Oh, this paper examines what is lurking in the tepid Western institutional response to climate collapse.