Being, belonging, and borders: Scandinavian creation theology as political theology

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Abstract
Desire for life and protecting lives has come to the fore during the pandemic. Borders have been closed to stop the spread of Covid-19. The virus does not respect borders, yet physical distance is crucial. Three things have become clear. One is the level of uncertainty about which measures are most efficient. The other is that the neo-liberal philosophy with “just in time” deliveries on a global market has made everyone vulnerable and invited national protectionism rather than collaboration. A third insight is that the lack of borders between wild and tame animals and human beings is connected to the emergence of the virus itself, where rain forests are exploited for short sighted profit. In the midst of this, a cry for Being, for Life, and Human Flourishing, can be heard as an underlying drumbeat. In relation to this I ponder Being in relation to Belonging and to Borders. I first describe a political landscape where neo-nationalist, and neo-atheist, claims for belonging, have emerged all over the world, and hence emphasized strong borders between different people, but not for capital. Secondly, I draw on resources from Scandinavian Creation Theology, especially Grundtvig, Aulén, and Wingren to paint a planetary vision with porous borders, beyond patriarchy, populism, and protectionism. In the long run there is no opting out of the planetary vulnerability. I launch the term eschatological creation theology for a creation theology that allows creation to be inspired by the Kin-dom to come with righteousness and life in abundance.

1 INTRODUCTION—‘BEING’ DURING THE PANDEMIC

Desire for life and protecting lives, especially the most vulnerable, has come to the fore during the pandemic with a realistic fear for death through Covid-19 and hence measures to protect lives. Borders have been closed to stop the spread of the virus. This has sometimes been helpful, at least in the short term. Even if the virus does not respect borders, physical distance is crucial. Many governments and states all over the world have done their utmost to protect their citizens, although some have done everything in their might to downplay the risks. Three things have become very clear during the pandemic crisis. One is the level of uncertainty about which measures are most efficient.

The other is even more obvious, namely that the neo-liberal philosophy with “just in time” deliveries on a global market has made everybody vulnerable and invited national protectionism rather than collaboration among
the countries of the world, including the members of the EU. In the Nordic region some crucial differences between countries can be traced to which degree of neo-liberal globalism they have followed.

Finland, as an example, never discarded their emergency stockpiles as Sweden did, trusting a global market to deliver goods when they were needed, that is, just in time. In an emergency, there was, however, lot of competition and not enough protective equipment in stock. This marketization of the welfare state, which includes heavy privatization of the elderly care and municipalities trying to save money through uneducated staff and precarious employment policies, have, in my view, had tragic effects for the corona strategy in Sweden. In many countries, a politics of “small state,” that is, as little government as possible in favor of big markets, has not been able to provide protection for citizens. Combined with new public management where detailed controlling is crucial, money tends to be spent on administration rather than on the core work done, for instance, by nurses and physicians.

A third insight seems to be growing, namely that the lack of borders between wild and tame animals and human beings is connected to the emergence of the virus itself. It has thus visualized another threat connected to neo-liberal globalism, where rain forests are exploited for short sighted profit, forcing wild animals closer to human livelihood.

In the midst of all this, a cry for Being, for Life, and Human Flourishing can be heard as an underlying drumbeat in the mourning for the victims, especially the poor, who did not have a chance to self-distancing, enforced or recommended, without losing their means of existence. An existential cry for Being, for Life is the horizon for this article, as well as a renewed reminder of life as a daily gift. In relation to this, I ponder Being in relation to Belonging and to Borders.

As these are huge notions, I do so by first describing a political landscape where neo-nationalist claims for belonging have emerged all over the world, and hence emphasized strong borders between different people but not for capital. Second, I draw on the resources from early theologians in what now is called Scandinavian Creation Theology to paint a planetary vision with porous borders, beyond patriarchy, populism, and protectionism.\(^1\)

Based on the notion \textit{creatio continua}, I argue that we are continually called to reflect upon political frames including the structures, or estates, that I elsewhere have called spheres of promise.\(^2\) In a new time, feminist and post-colonial perspectives challenge and expand traditional models of organization. As my third point, I therefore claim that there is no opting out in a time of climate threat and that the present pandemic may have taught us a lesson about shared destiny, where hope is connected to a will to protect life and being together, or with the triad that N.F.S. Grundtvig emphasized faith, hope, and love.\(^3\) Here, I launch the term \textit{eschatological creation theology} for a creation theology that allows the egalitarian insight from creation to be inspired by the Kin-dom to come with righteousness and life in abundance.\(^4\)

### 1.1 Belonging—political landscape with neo-nationalist claims

During recent years, the world has witnessed the emergence of new claims for belonging where a logic of \textit{Blut und Boden}, that is, ethnic claims for belonging and trustworthy citizenship, are reactivated. Many of these neo-nationalist, even fascist claims, are paving the way for xenophobia and autocratic leaderships in many states. Belonging to a community and being regarded as a citizen are increasingly conditioned in relation to ethnicity, faith, sex, and often, sexual preference.

In countries such as Poland, Hungary, and Russia independent media and democratic institutions are being undermined and dismantled. Other parts of the world see autocratic leaders, such as Xi Jinping, Secretary General of China’s Central Committee, and the presidents Bolsonaro in Brazil, Duerte in The Philippines, Putin in Russia, Erdogan in Turkey, as well as Prime Minister Netanyahh in Israel, and former President Trump in the US, gain support for their heavy criticism against free media, democratic institutions, and international law. The list could be made even longer of leaders who claim to speak for the majority culture and thus point the finger at Jews, Muslims, or indigenous people, portraying them as threats or as enemies of the majority.\(^5\)

Extreme nationalist and racist groups are met with benevolent nods from these men in power, hence endorsing even more hatred between different groups. The others are often the religious other, but beneath a thin surface, skin color is involved, intersecting with sex, gender, and sexual orientation, as feminists and sexual minorities as well are seen as threats and disturbing others. The Incel movement is just one of the more extreme examples.

Male privilege, heterosexuality and whiteness are described as being under siege. Susan Faludi already in 1997 described a backlash against women’s rights.\(^5\) In a recent book sociologist Jonathan M. Metzl describes how men in economically deprived areas in the US vote against their own interests. Even when they would benefit greatly from, for example, gun control and federal medical insurances, they support the National Rifle Association (NRA) and a Republican policy preventing processes towards more universal health care. Metzl’s analysis indicates that desire for white, male superiority for many US men is more important than supporting structures that
would increase their own life and longevity, if that would require seeing oneself on the same level as, for example, a poor Mexican or a Black person.\footnote{7}

1.1.1 Neo-atheism may oddly enough facilitate ethnocentric claims

In some countries in Europe, ethnocentric claims are oddly enough facilitated by neo-atheist movements, which describe religious people, especially Jews and Muslims, as superstitious and often dangerous, barbarian others, without reason and enlightenment.\footnote{8} Rationalistic, anti-religious, neo-atheist movements have therefore been part of paving the way for neo-nationalist claims to see only traditional, conservative Christian people, or atheists, as reliable citizens.

Despite a very different agenda, where neo-atheists defend women and queer rights, they often rally in favor of stronger borders against the others. Jasbir K. Puar has proposed the term homo-nationalism for the favorable association between a nationalist ideology and queer people and their rights, processes with the aim to justify racist, xenophobic positions, especially against Islam, as migrant people are described as homophobic and Western societies as egalitarian.\footnote{9} As a consequence, sexual diversity and queer or gay rights have become arguments against immigration. This is increasingly common among the far right.\footnote{10} It is maybe an irony that Muslims in the US are more likely than Evangelicals to affirm same-sex marriages.\footnote{11}

1.1.2 National-global movements of identity supporting Christianism or Secularism

In Sweden, a party with its roots in Nazism and "Keep Sweden Swedish" now with the name Sweden Democrats, in its early phase went from cheering Nordic paganism to affirming a traditional conservative Lutherdom, “The Church of our Fathers.”\footnote{12} Also the Christian Democratic Party in Sweden, has, maybe inspired by the Tea Party movement, increasingly gone to the right, demanding more police, punishment, and stricter immigration laws. Hence, what in recent years has been labeled “Christianism” has joined forces with neo-nationalist, even neo-fascist movements, or parties.\footnote{13} Also here, anti-Muslim sentiments are often involved.

Many movements of identity are, however, more global than national, be they Christian, Secular, or Nationalist. Nancy Fraser is critical towards what she calls “Progressive Neoliberalism,” which she contends is insensitive to the necessary contract between state and citizens to protect work and living conditions. She accuses the Left of having abandoned demands for economic justice and instead been focusing on identities that easily may be combined with neo-liberal forces, leading to reactionary populism.\footnote{14} It has become increasingly clear that politics of identity ought to be combined with claims for distribution policies. Recognition and economic justice need to be twined together.\footnote{15}

However, according to Jonathan M. Metzl, racism and hatred against the other may not be based on rational, political analyses. What seems clear is that nationalist, fascist, and neo-liberal forces are global movements in our political landscape. It therefore seems more and more urgent to find sources for a shared human identity, an identity that, while respecting and affirming diversity, is open for the human, as well as the non-human, other. Below, I draw on some early theologians from my own region as a background and to inspire certain themes that may be developed further today.

1.2 Beyond borders—Scandinavian creation theology

Early representatives of what today is called Scandinavian Creation Theology lived and worked within national states formed in a post-Westphalian logic of ethnic and religious homogeneity. Danish theologian K.E. Løgstrup (1905–1981) and the Swedish theologians Gustaf Aulén (1879–1977) and Gustaf Wingren (1910–2000), both professors in Lund, were in different ways expressing universal, international, even planetary visions. The notion Scandinavian is therefore used, not in a regional, exclusive way but rather to point to a genealogy, where the founding figures, all with universal claims, lived in Scandinavia and did their work within Lutheran societies.

At the American Academy of Religion meeting in Boston, 2017, these theologians were the theme of a panel together with my constructive work on Luther, body, and sensuality. In the program book of the AAR, it was formulated as follows:

The three founding figures of Scandinavian creation theology (SCT)—K.E. Løgstrup, Regin Prenter, and Gustaf Wingren—combined seminal insights from Martin Luther, mediated through the Danish theologian N.F.S. Grundtvig. The world outside the churches is not God-less. The world is God-given and imbued with a divine presence; therefore, it is religiously valid to approach the world from a secular perspective, and from embodied experiences. Thus, Scandinavian Creation Theology offers a model
for reconfiguring Reformation theology for a post-secular age, holding the view that the doctrine of creation is not just another theological locus to be followed by other loci, such as justification and fulfilment. Rather, creation constitutes the universal horizon for any Christian theologizing, also regarding Christ and church, baptism, and salvation.16

To give a new emphasis to creation is, however, not done in the tradition of the orders of creation, which give divine legitimacy to various hierarchies such as those between different people or between man and woman. An emphasis on creation neither has to do with orders nor with any “quasi-scientific theory of origin,” but is rather a way to affirm “ongoing divine creativity.” Niels Henrik Gregersen contends:

In the first generation of Scandinavian Creation Theology, K.E. Logstrup and Gustaf Wingren claimed that creation theology is not a subtheme of Christian theology but rather the pervasive horizon for understanding all themes of Christian faith. Thereby, they did not want to reduce Christian faith to a first-article Christianity, nor did they want to reduce “creation theology” to a quasi-scientific theory about the origins of our universe. Before anything else, they saw creation theology as an affirmation of an ongoing divine creativity—ubiquitous in a world that is self-organizing and co-creative exactly due to the pervasiveness of the divine source of all reality, also in the chaotic depths of creaturely becoming.17

Hence, Scandinavian Creation Theology is “not connected to information about an historical origin or a theology of orders (Ordnungstheologie).” It is not a kind of “historical knowledge, or a reactionary foundation for the status quo.” According to the founding figures, “creation means change.”18

The so-called German Ordnungstheologie used to be called creation theology as it claimed that certain orders of creation were installed by God. It has thus been used to defend hierarchical differences between people, and to see the family as a God-given entity with the father, husband as the authority, in the family as well as in the state. Hence, it has for very good reasons been met with deep suspicion by people of color and by feminist theologians who have seen the conservative bias in favor of white, heterosexual men.

Against this background, Scandinavian Creation Theology comes with a different approach. “Fresh air!” Marit Trelstad exclaims in her response at the Boston panel, later published as American Perspectives meet Scandinavian Creation Theology.19 She points out that this theology shares with feminist theology “the embodied, shared existence.” Hence, the border between religious and secular is blurred, hardly possible and certainly not important. Instead it “highlights everyday experience as a shared zone between the religious and the public spheres.”20

1.2.1 | Wingren, Aulén, and the world—coram mundo

Aulén and Wingren, two theologians from Lund, both inspired by Luther, emphasized responsibility for the world, coram mundo. Aulén had a high church, Anglican profile, and never endorsed the ordination of women, while Wingren was low church, critical of clerical hierarchies, and resigned his own priesthood as a protest to those who did not allow women to become priests in Church of Sweden. Hence, there are huge differences between the two. Yet they both argued out of a creational ethics, not out of any interpretation of church in contrast to the world where only devoted Christians can do what is right.21

For Gustaf Wingren the embodied shared existence, mentioned above, was part of seeing vocation as something involving all human beings, not only some special groups, permeating ordinary, lived life. He pursued Luther’s “understanding of everyday labor as a calling ordained by God,” yet with God "hidden as if concealed by a mask."22 To breath, live, play, bake bread etc., all was a calling, part of God’s continuous creativity.

From the 1970s, Wingren increasingly stressed international responsibility, especially in relation to the poor. His key to internationalism was concern for the body and healing. The mission given in Acts was to proclaim the gospel and to heal human beings, “as medical doctors in a world with lack of health, i.e. where destruction threatens life given in creation.” He claimed, however, that life is there before the physician. The gospel is preached in a world created by God. Hence, what is good in the world does not only emerge out of the gospel but flows from many wells.23 For Wingren it was evident that God was active also where Christian faith was lacking.24

Gustaf Aulén, an even earlier professor in Lund, seen as one of the founders of what was called Lunda theology, became world famous when his book Christus Victor was published in English 1931 (1923 in Swedish). Given his strong emphasis on lex naturalis, or what he called the
“Law of the Creator,” I see him as part of Scandinavian Creation Theological discourse. Known for his reinterpretation of atonement in line with the classic, patristic ransom theory, rather than Anselm’s satisfaction theory, he saw atonement as a victory over the powers which held humankind in bondage, sin, death, and the devil.

1.2.2 Aulén’s critique of national socialism

In a world with reemerging fascist ideologies, Aulén’s emphasis on a universal law with concern for every human being, also the least prominent, is of special interest and an inspiring example. He became a strong critic of the Nazi regime in Germany. From 1936 he strongly argued against ideologies that projected evil on special groups, such as the Jews, the bourgeoisie, the socialists, or any group that needed to be eliminated in order to fulfill the goal of history. Against what he labeled a false devotion of humans, such as worship of your own class or race, something he discerned in Leninism and Nazism, he honored “Christian Humanism.”

His context was very different from our contemporary struggles formed as identity politics, and he can easily be criticized for lacking insight into the evil of racism, xenophobia, and sexism. Yet, his critique against portraying people with another ideology, or religion, as evil is still important. Further, Aulén was not against the state as such, but argued that its power was conditioned. If the state started to set groups against each other and to circulate around its own interests it became demonic.

The German theologian Paul Althaus had, in the 1930s, launched interpretations of the state that gave support to national socialism. He was critical of both a Christian-theocratic theology claiming that political life ought to take its norms directly from the gospel, and a dialectic theology that he held was too critical to the state and to political life as being too imperfect and human. In that respect, his position follows a common Lutheran grammar. However, when Althaus claimed that it is up to the politician to see what the law of God demands in society and that it can be decided in relation to the historically, given people, without any given criteria, he meets criticism from Aulén, who does not agree. Aulén argues that to focus only on your own people can lead to ethical relativism. To think of two regimes does not mean that states can pursue their own legislation, Eigengesetzlichkeit. While Aulén claims that Jesus and the apostles had a positive sense of their own people, he warns against all tendencies to allow religion to enter the national. Here the gospel is very clear:

No nationalism, nor worldly “kingdom” can grip or replace the Kingdom of God. All absolutist claims are thus radically denounced. Hence, the emergent Christian Church is by essence universal. It transcends all human and national borders, as well as borders between people and races.

The ethical demand to care for your neighbor is for Aulén a “critical principle in relation to all political programs.” This is something that every state must respect. His criticism against making nationalism a religion is of special relevance today.

1.2.3 Same position in creation and continued blessing

K.E. Løgstrup, philosopher and theologian, and Gustaf Wingren both argued in an almost programmatic way that all human beings, independent of faith, have the same position in creation. As they must have been aware of social injustices it has to be seen as a reflection on the ethical demand. They combined Martin Luther’s thoughts on natural law, lex naturalis, with Danish poet, theologian and politician N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783–18723), who, inspired by Irenaeus (130–202), exclaimed “Human comes first, and Christian next.”

They all shared Luther’s emphasis on God’s ongoing creativity. However, stronger than Luther, Grundtvig argued that “human beings never lost the positive traces of being created in the image and likeness of God.” As a consequence, the Christian triad of faith, hope and love can be recognized, appreciated, and even exercised by non-believers. With his principle, Human first, then Christian, Grundtvig argued that a broader understanding and appreciation of ordinary lived human experience is the underlying condition for a Christian way of life. Christian faith has to be lived in a humane way, in accordance with a shared sense of humanity.

In “Becoming Fully Human: Passionate Mutualism for Life and Resistance” I argue that N.S.F. Grundtvig provides a path forward and is a mediator between Luther and contemporary theology. It may be helpful to somewhat soften what has been labeled the “realistic” or even “pessimistic” anthropology, which Lutheran theology is known for. While such realism can be helpful in discerning evil amidst what is labeled good, or religious, it can, namely, also be limiting and pacifying. The fact that Grundtvig stressed the continuity of the blessings of creation, rather
than a radically new situation after the fall, as Luther did, is, therefore, liberating. However, both Luther and Grundtvig stressed the invitation into a passionate relationship with human beings as co-creators.

To become human, again, which is part of the Irenaeian sense of restoration and salvation, is therefore to realize that also the other is a human being, bearer of human rights, that is, with a right to protection and right to self-expression. As a politician, Grundtvig defended religious freedom for persecuted Baptists and religious minorities and in 1839, was active in a committee to put an end to slavery in Denmark. In an age of neo-nationalism, this is an important inspiration for resistance against dehumanization of the other, be they religious Jews, Muslims, Buddhists or Secular, Atheists, or Agnostics. For (Scandinavian) Creation Theology, all human beings are created equal as part of the givenness in life. As the sun rises on good and evil, just and unjust, the gifts of God are for all, which is part of the “egalitarian contribution of creation itself.”

Grundtvig was also expressing a widened imago deo for the earth. Catherine Keller exclaims that this is extremely rare in her response to Scandinavian Creation Theology:

The radicality of Scandinavian Creation Theology bursts through with particular force in these words of Grundtvig, offered in the form of a prayer: “We thank you, great master of the vineyard, who existed before the mountains were and before you created the earth in your image after your likeness....”

She comments on seeing the earth as imago dei:

I can only underscore how almost unspeakably rare is the content of this theological gesture.

Such a perspective is opening new horizons, where borders between human beings as well as between humans and the earth need to be rethought anew. Marit Trelstad and Catherine Keller have therefore both been challenging Scandinavian Creation Theology to include more ecological and planetary perspectives today. Let me, however, first refer to these themes as they were introduced by our predecessors.

1.3 | Becoming—Shared destiny beyond and within borders

K.E. Løgstrup may be best known for his emphasis on interdependence and how every human being is carrying the life of the other in her/his hands as an ethical demand. Interdependence is for Løgstrup “prior to the possibility of setting ourselves apart from the social nexuses of which we are part,” Niels Henrik Gregersen points out. In relation to power and values, however, human beings have very different positions. Gregersen thus continues:

Løgstrup was, however, also inspired by Grundtvig in relation to more planetary visions where non-human beings were included. Gregersen elaborates on how Løgstrup speaks emphatically about God “as the power to be ‘in everything that exists,’ and about the ‘self-regulating autonomy of specimens and individuals.’”

In Løgstrup’s descriptive metaphysics, he applies these thoughts on self-regulation also to biological and social areas.

We have self-regulation everywhere in view, in nature as in the universe, most clearly, biologically and socially. We have it vividly before our eyes in each plant, in each ecosystem, in our own body as well as in society and each of its institutions.

Løgstrup’s four-volume Metaphysical Considerations from 1976 to 1984 (partly translated into English as Metaphysics 1–2), may be a resource to return to. It seems inspiring that this can be done in a dialogue with new voices and perspectives of our time, with an ambition to search for healing from the anxieties that may be part of shaping the political landscape described above.

1.4 | Being in an intersectional world

In my work I want to create a dialogue between the early representatives of creation theology and feminist theologians expressing a shared emphasis on “the embodied, shared existence.” Elizabeth O’Donell Gandolfo weaves a web of interdependence with vulnerability at the center. Drawing on the experiences of mothers she extrapolates from “maternity and natality in order to describe
the inevitability and universality of human vulnerability” claiming that vulnerability is “an inherent and unavoidable feature of the human condition.”

I have elsewhere described this as contingency, that is, that humans are finite and fragile. Gandolfo, contends that vulnerability, as a dimension of human existence, causes anxiety and thus attempts to eliminate your own vulnerability at the cost of others. She therefore explores the link between vulnerability and violence and its relation to privilege, seen as “socially mismanaged vulnerability” first as “a social response to vulnerability” but also “as a major factor in the exacerbation and social production of vulnerability.”

She lists five individual and communal assets identified by Peadar Kirby: physical assets and human assets, such as health and education, capabilities to make the most of a given situation. Social assets may be “families, communal associations, unions, identity groupings” that can give strength and support. All are included in the World Bank’s analyses. Kirby also mentions environmental and existential assets.

I would suggest that behind neo-nationalism and neo-atheism there may be a lot of anxiety involved. For the nationalists, a fear of becoming a minority and loosing economic privilege: in the US related to whiteness, in many European countries related to the welfare state; for the atheists an anxiety to live under religious regimes with little respect for pluralism or for lived life. Until the midst of last century, people in my part of the world had to belong to the Lutheran Church. For many this is still a basis for suspicion and hatred.

Gandolfo does not reject personal responsibility, but she repudiates the traditional Christian interpretation among others by Augustine to see natural vulnerability and suffering as a “punitive response of divine justice to human sin.” She is also critical of the self-righteousness of so many privileged to see their assets as something they have earned themselves, thereby forgetting the “reality of their own dependency.” While pointing out the violence of privilege, anxiety, and egocentrism she, however, argues that vulnerability also is the basis for human openness to the redemptive work of divine love. Existential resources and empowering practices may help human beings to cope with vulnerability in more courageous, peaceful, and compassionate ways.

Given the challenges from various politics of identity, which have made us see how power and dependence are unevenly distributed, we need to rethink political structures anew, beyond traditional borders as well as within them. For me this is deeply connected to the notion creatio continua, that is, an emphasis on God’s ongoing creativity where human beings are taking part. The pandemic has shown that we have only one planet, one humanity. Yet, the national responses have been quite varied and not always helpful or done in any international solidarity. The differences in position and access to quarantine, life-saving measures and protection, including vaccines, are like a wound for the world, visible both between nations and within. Can this be healed? Yes and no. There are some good reasons behind a Lutheran realism that we will never completely reach the Kin-dom of God here and now. And yet the Kin-dom is something that breaks into our present time and space, challenging and encouraging us.

1.5 Becoming: New ways of being and belonging from below as eschatological challenge

In this consciousness raising period we are witnessing new insights to be discovered and acted upon.

One is that there is “no opting out.” We do live on a shared planet. The differences between the Global South and the Global North, and between races, classes, and ethnicities are huge. In relation to pandemics, and to the climate crisis, they may be decisive, and yet no one is able to opt out completely. In the long run we all share vulnerability. “In vulnerability is an impossibility, even for the most privileged among us.”

It is easy to agree with Gandolfo and others’ analyses that “the independent individual is always a fictive creation of those men sufficiently privileged to shift the concern for dependence onto others.” Gandolfo contends that vulnerability, as a dimension of human existence, causes anxiety and thus attempts to eliminate your own vulnerability at the cost of others. This is obvious among those who deny climate change and in the reactions to the pandemic, yet in the long run we are all vulnerable.

Hence, a sense of being and belonging from below may be growing as an open window of transformation. In a time of reemerging patriarchy, populism, and protectionism, new voices are being heard. Responses to the pandemic have shown that there is money to save life and livelihood when politicians want to. Neo-liberal “Just in time” philosophies have proven themselves to be very unreliable, something that does not mean that global interaction and exchange need to be replaced by protectionism, but to be balanced in new ways were states take responsibilities for their citizens and for the world. This is necessary in a time of climate change.

If the “spheres of promise” for Luther was familia, including the economy, politia and ecclesia, we today need to see all these spheres in interaction. While states and governing bodies, politia, must defend justice and welfare in the interest of all human beings, economia needs to be challenged based on the ethical principle “care for
the neighbor.” The crisis may help us develop new spheres of promise with care at the center, sensitivity to human beings independent of race, class, sex, or social position, and with care for the planet and all its inhabitants.

This is a huge vision, I know, but I hold that the vision that I elsewhere have called eschatological creation theology is breaking into our present time and space. I see this in line with the Hebrew tradition to choose life over death (Deut. 30:19), the important life over death-perspective of Grundtvig.54

In Gandolfo’s words:

Theologically speaking, all that exists participates in the goodness of Being, and the life that human beings have been given in creation is good; the God of the Christian tradition is a God of Life, who desires that human beings choose being over nonbeing, life over death, and who became incarnate so that human might have life in abundance.

From various places in the world people are affirming a new Belonging from Below, respecting necessary Borders between human and non-human animals, and between each other for mutual protection, yet affirming our planetary interdependency and relationality. This may be a Becoming of new ways of Being, of Life with porous Borders in relation to neighbors near and far away.

ENDNOTES

1 “Scandinavian” in this context is not used as a regional notion to denote a particular rather than a universalist approach, but to refer to the origin of this theology among a few inspiring theologians of Scandinavian origin, who all had universalist ambitions.
2 See e.g. Gerle, E. (2017). “Human rights: Revisiting the political program of Scandinavian creation theology.” In N. H. Gregersen, B. Kristensson Uggl, T. Wyl (Eds.), Reformation theology for a post-secular age: Logstrup, Prenter, Wingren, and the future of scandinavian creation theology (Research in Contemporary Religion); Gerle, E. (2014). “Eros, ethics and politics: Nuptial imagery in Luther Read as a challenge to traditional power structures.” In Carl-Henric Grenholm & Göran Gunner (Eds.), Lutheran identity and political theology (p. 224). Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications.
3 Gregersen, N. H. (2018). “Church and culture in living interaction – Grundtvig the Theologian.” In Edward Boadbridge (Ed.), Human comes first. The christian theology of N.F.S. Grundtvig (p. 33). Aarhus: Aarhus University Press. Grundtvig sees faith as given in baptism, hope as nurtured through the preaching of the word, and love as its fulfillment in the Lord’s supper.
4 I have used the notion Kin-dom as a more gender neutral notion in Gerle, E. (2019). “Eschata, the Kin-dom of God, in a time of presentism, patriarchy, and neo-nationalism: Writing back to Luther through Hannah Arendt and Judith Butler.” In Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen (Ed.), The alternative Luther. Lutheran theology from the Subaltern. Lanham Boulder New York, London: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic (p. 57).
5 Chin, R. (2017) claims in The Crisis of Multiculturalism. A History, Princeton: Princeton University Press, that the notion culture, including religion, increasingly is replacing the notion racism. Yet it is often combined with traditional racism.
6 Faludi, S. (1992). Backlash. The undeclared war against women. London: Vintage.
7 Metzl, J. M. (2020). Dying of whiteness. How the politics of racial resentment is killing America’s heartland. New York: Basic Books.
8 Gerle, E. (2015). “Between sun and shadow – Navigating between the extremes and beyond.” Feminist Theology, 24(1), 35–48.
9 Puar, Jasbir K. (2007). Terrorist assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times (p. 83). Durham, London: Duke University Press.
10 d’Adesky, Anne-christine. (2017). “The men that would be Queen. France, Le Pen & LGBT Vote”, Pride Life 7, June 2017. https://pride.life.com/pride-life-issue-exclusive-the-men-who-would-be-queen-france-le-pen-the-lgbt-vote/ Accessed May 26, 2020.
11 Shackford, S. (2016). “In America, muslims are more likely to support gay marriage than Evangelical Christians.” In Reason, https://reason.com/2016/06/13/in-america-muslims-are-more-likely-to-su/ Accessed May 26, 2020.
12 Gerle, E. (2010). Farlig Förenkling. Om religion och politik utifrån Humanisterna och Sverigedemokraterna, (Dangerous Simplifications) Nora: Nya Doxa. In this book analyzed the motions from the Sweden Democrats to the Parliament of Church of Sweden as well as the main journal published by the Neo-Atheists. The motions from the Swedish Democrats all had a patriarchal, nationalistic agenda emphasizing traditional values. The neo-atheist journal on the other hand emphasized liberal values such as women’s and queer rights but portrayed these values as being in opposition to religion, especially Islam.
13 Christianism is, according to the Urban dictionary, a political ideology derived from the conservative religious views of Christian fundamentalism. It holds Christianity to be not only a religion, but also a political system that governs the legal, economic and social imperatives of the state. https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Christianism, Accessed May 18, 2020. Trump as a leader, who does not show much respect for liberal institutions, may in such an ideology be seen as Cyrus the Great 500 years B.C, the Persian king who through his politics helped the Hebrew people to return to Jerusalem. Support for Israel and anti-abortion is at the centre, not respect for democracy. See also Strommen, H. & Schmiedel, U. (2020). The claim to Christianity. Responding to the far right. Norwich: SCM Press.
14 Fraser, N. (2016). “Progressive neoliberalism versus reactionary populism: A choice that feminists should refuse.” NORA, Nordic Journal of Feminism and Gender Research, 4, 281–s284.
15 I have developed this more in Gerle, E. (2019). “Eschata, the Kin-dom of God, in a time of presentism, patriarchy, and neo-nationalism: writing back to Luther through Hannah Arendt and Judith Butler.” In Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen (Ed.), The alternative Luther. Lutheran Theology from the Subaltern (p. 58). Lanham Boulder New York, London: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic; See also Fraser, Nancy & Axel, Honneth. (2003). Redistribution or recognition. A political-philosophical exchange. London, New York: Verso.
Quoted in Gerle, E., Wyller, T., Schelde, M. (2019). American perspectives meet Scandinavian creation theology (pp. 7–8). Aarhus: Church of Sweden Research Department, The Grundtvig Study Center, Aarhus University. The three books introduced in the panel were Gregersen, N. H., Kristensson, Uggla B., Wyller, T. T. (Eds.). (2017). Reformation theology for a post-secular age: Logstrup, Prenter, Wingren, and the future of Scandinavian creation theology (research in contemporary religion). Kristensson Uggla, B. (2016). Becoming human again. The theological life of Gustaf Wingren. Eugene: Cascade Books, and Gerle E. (2017). Passionate Embrace. Luther on love, body and sensual presence. Eugene: Cascade.

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Aulén, G. (1936). Kristendomen och kulturkrisen. Stockholm: Diakonistyrelsen; See also Svenungsson, J. (2020). “Teologi – en tragisk vetenskap.” In Henrik Rahm et al. (Ed.), American, (p. 59).

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Lind (1975, pp. 168–169).

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Aulén (1939, p. 23) (My trans.)

Aulén (1940) Kan något kristet krav ställas på statslivet (p. 68) Stockholm: Svenska kyrkans diakonistyrelsens bokförlag (My trans.)

Grundtvig, N. F. S. (2015). Living wellsprings (p. 249), (Ed. & trans.) Edward Brodbridge. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press.

Gregersen et al. Reformation, (p. 28).

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See Gerle. (2017). Passionate Embrace, p XI, 173, 197, 290.

Gregersen, N. H. (2018). ”Church and culture in living interaction – Grundtvig the Theologian.” In Edward Brodbridge (Ed.), Human comes first. The ChristianTheology of N.F.S. Grundtvig (pp. 23–26). Aarhus: Aarhus University Press.

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Gerle, E. (2017). “Human rights: Revisiting the political program of Scandinavian creation theology.” In N. H. Gregersen, B Kristensson Uggla, T. Wyller (Eds.), Reformation theology for a post-secular age (p. 181).

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Knud E. Logstrup. (2019). Metaphysics I, 156; cf Gregersen (p. 65).

Trelstad, M. (2019) p xxx. See also Gerle E. (2017). Passionate embrace.

Gandolfo, E. (2015). The power and vulnerability of love: A theological anthropology (p. 24). Minneapolis: Fortress.

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Gandolfo (pp. 138–8).

Gandolfo (pp. 138–139), See also Kirby P. (2006) Vulnerability and violence: The impact of globalisation (p. 44 ff). London, Anna Arbor, MI: Pluto.

Gandolfo, p. 4; cf. Book XII of Augustine, City of god, (Henry Bettenson, trans.), London, New York: Penguin.

Gandolfo, p. 143.

This perspective inspired by Vítor Westhelle is something I develop further in Gerle, E. (2019). “Eschata, the Kin-dom of God, in a time of presentism, patriarchy, and neo-nationalism: Writing back to Luther through Hannah Arendt and Judith Butler.” In Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen (Ed.), The alternative Luther. Lutheran theology from the Subaltern. Lanham Boulder, New York, London: Lexington Books/ Fortress Academic.

The Global South can be a bloc away from the Global North and human beings with the same ethnicity, culture or skin color may have different access to power and influence, due to gender, class, and religion as well.

Gandolfo, p. 142.

Gandolfo, p. 144; cf Fedder Kittay, E. (1999). Love’s neighbor; essays on women, equality, and dependency (p. 17). New York: Routledge.

... Grundtvig not only takes the historical fact, but also stresses Christ’s victory over death by resurrection. The problem of the combat between life and death is the central theme in Grundtvig’s thinking, already in an existential manner two decades earlier than Søren Kierkegaard…. Grundtvig’s understanding of resurrection as a victory over death is not merely confined to the individual, but is seen as a cosmic victory including the whole creation.” See Wen Ge “Grundtvig’s eschatology and its realistic significance: Reflections from the Chinese context” (2007) in, Ed. Jens Holger Schjorning, S.A. J. Bradley, FL. Lundgreen-Nielsen og Kim Arne Pedersen. Grundtvig Studier, København: Grundtvig-Selskabet, (pp. 198–214); Gregersen writes in “Church” (2018) Grundtvig holds “that human beings are also to be understood from their embeddedness in the created cosmos, as an imago mundi. We are microcosms of the wider macrocosm, both as sensory and as spiritual beings.” (p. 19).

Gandolfo, p. 123.
Elisabeth Gerle is professor at Lund University, and affiliated with Stockholm School of Theology. She earned her PhD by a dissertation on Global Ethics, analyzing the WCC project Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation in comparison with a global network of international lawyers and political scientists, WOMP. Since then, she has published a wide range of books, articles and book chapters on human rights, education policies, multiculturalism, nationalism, atheism, AI, and theology. She lives in Lund and has spent several periods as Visiting Scholar at Princeton University and at Stellenbosch Institute of Advanced Study, STIAS. Her most recent book is Passionate Embrace. Love, Body and Sensual Presence (Cascade 2017). Her research is carried out at the intersection of theology, ethics, political science, and human rights.

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