
LUTHERAN STUDY GUIDE TO POPE FRANCIS' LETTER ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Week 3

Gathered into an Integral Ecology

What you will need

- Bible
- Copy of Pope Francis' Letter, *Laudato Si'*
- Lutheran Study Guide
- Joseph Sittler's "Called to Unity" speech: <http://www.augie.edu/pub/values/sittler.pdf>
- Optional video on ecology and salvation, Norman Wirzba lecture: <http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/55257942> (start at 7:35 and watch as much as is helpful)

Opening Prayer

God of our weary years, God of our silent tears, you have brought us this far along the way. In times of bitterness you did not abandon us, but guided us into the path of love and light. In every age you sent prophets to make known your loving will for all humanity. The cry of the poor has become your own cry; our hunger and thirst for justice is your own desire. In the fullness of time,



Gathered through Christ in Cosmic Communion

“Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all thing in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the good of his cross,” (Colossians 1:15-20, NRSV).

you sent your chosen servant to preach good news to the afflicted, to break bread with the outcast and despised, and to ransom those in bondage to prejudice and sin. Give us faith to trust in your love and courage to hear and respond to your prophets and the cries of those affected by climate change. (Adapted from ELW Eucharistic Prayer VIII, p. 67)

Discussion

After reading Colossians 1:15-20, Sittler's speech, and Laudato Si' Chapter One, section II on St. Francis and integral ecology, Chapter Two, section 5, and Chapter Four, subsections 1, 4, and 5, discuss the following questions:

- What surprises you about Christ's role as described in Colossians?
- Have you ever thought of Christ suffering in nature or with nature?
- Have you ever thought about what the reconciliation of the cross means for all things—including non-human creation?
- How do you understand what is meant by "ecology"? Does Pope Francis' understanding of "integral ecology" sound different or unique?

We might say Sittler inaugurated an eco-reformation movement in 1961 when he chose to vastly expand the subject on which he was invited to address the World Council of Churches: church unity. Speaking to the assembly gathered in New Delhi, Sittler expanded ecumenism to cosmic proportions, suggesting this unity is only rightly understood in the scope of God's cosmic redemptive work of ecological unity in Christ.



He also had a specific message for the other Protestants at the gathering. Recognizing the important emphasis the tradition has placed on redemption and salvation he argued that, "A doctrine of redemption is meaningful only when it swings within the larger orbit of a doctrine of creation." In short: any theology of salvation worth its weight in salt must be creation loving rather than creation evading.

Pope Francis' letter urges a perspective he calls "integral ecology"—the integration or interconnection of all things. More than just environmental interconnections though, Francis is urging an expansion of the scope of even ecological interconnections. The concern for social justice can commonly be left out of environmental concerns. However, climate change tragically demonstrates the interconnection of social and ecological justice. "We are not faced with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social," Francis writes, "but rather one complex crisis which is both social and environmental." Since ecology and economy are interconnected, "strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature," (139).

The letter highlights the ways in which our most pressing issues of human injustice (racism, colonialism, income disparity, etc.) are also issues of ecological injustice. Lutheran ethicist Cynthia Moe-Lobeda has similarly highlighted the interconnectedness of social and eco-justice. In *Resisting Structural Evil* the scholar demonstrates the injustice of the fact that those who contributed the least to

- How do you generally think of salvation? What are some of the implicit views or values of the created world in most modern Christians' understanding of salvation? Do they affirm the goodness of creation? If not, what would need to change in that understanding of salvation?
- Think back to some of the introductory media you watched or listened to. What issues of social justice do you recall coming up with regard to climate change? How do you think a relatively economically privileged, caucasian person in the US might see climate change differently than a native person in Shishmaref or an African American survivor of Hurricane Katrina from the Ninth Ward?
- Reflect on Patriarch Bartholomew's connection between the sacrament of communion and the ecological communion of the world. Do you think about or experience a connection between a cosmic and ecological communion when you share the wine and bread in communion? Whether you do or not, what do you attribute this to?

global warming are likely to suffer the first and most profoundly from it. This injustice is compounded by the fact that the populations most likely to feel the effects of climate change first and with most disruption or devastation to their livelihoods are most likely to be not white, impoverished, and politically underrepresented.

Where eco-justice and social justice are intimately linked human salvation and redemption cannot be purchased at the expense of either. Early on in the encyclical Pope Francis quotes Patriarch Bartholomew, leader of the Eastern Orthodox church, who links the Christian ritualization of communion with the ecological communion of the world. Patriarch Bartholomew urges us to

“accept the world as a sacrament of communion, as a way of sharing with God and our neighbors on a global scale. It is our humble conviction that the divine and the human meet in the slightest detail in the seamless garment of God’s creation, in the last speck of dust of our planet,” (8).

If Colossians 1 is to be trusted, this must surely be the case since all things have been created through Christ and for Christ; in Christ all things hold together and through Christ all things have been reconciled to God.



Conclusion

Invite any concluding reflections and then ask a volunteer to close in prayer.

Preparation for Week 4

- Return next session with Bible, Study Guide, and Encyclical
- Optional: Read chapters 5 and 6 of *Laudato Si'*