
LUTHERAN STUDY GUIDE TO POPE FRANCIS' LETTER ON CLIMATE CHANGE

[Week 4](#)

Sent: Eco-Reformation

What you will need

- Bible, *Laudato Si'*, Lutheran Study Guide
- Optional reading: Desmond Tutu's article, "We need an apartheid-style boycott to save the planet" here: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/apr/10/divest-fossil-fuels-climate-change-keystone-xl>

Opening Prayer

Invite a volunteer to open in prayer

Scripture

"Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

Read Matthew 25: 31-46

Discussion

Focus discussion on Chapters 5 and 6 during this final session.

- In chapter five identify key actions Pope Francis calls for



The Reformation inspired many changes in theology, ecclesiology, and liturgy. One of the more under-emphasized reforms was the institution of community or common chests. Reformation church historians Carter Lindberg and Samuel Torvend are bringing these social/liturgical reforms to light once again.

The common chests held funds for community needs. They supported projects like infrastructure maintenance and building community schools, hospitals, roads and bridges; doctors were hired with the expressed purpose of providing free health care for those who couldn't afford it; no-interest loans were given in times of emergency and to help start new businesses; and orphans, the sick, and the elderly were given basic livelihood support.

Luther and the reformers consciously linked social reforms with liturgical reforms. The community chests, for example, were coherently integrated into new

in order to address the climate crisis. Create a list together. Are there unfamiliar terms? If you have access to the internet do some searches to help clarify terms.

- Where do you see opportunities for these actions to come about? What are the challenges?
- Based on the model of the community chests, what role could the Protestant churches take in these necessary shifts? What role could you see your own congregation taking? What role could you take as a global citizen and person of faith?
- Having trouble coming up with ideas? Check out the ELCA Advocacy website for toolkits and advocacy resources: <http://www.elca.org/Resources/Advocacy> or the Lutheran's Restoring Creation site: <http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org/Home/stories-about-creation-care>
- Take note especially of section 206 where Pope Francis discusses the strategic power of a change in lifestyle. Several ELCA synods have voted to enact boycotts like Francis suggests through divestment campaigns. These synods have voted to remove investments in fossil fuels and reinvest them in companies making positive steps toward sustainability. See also Desmond Tutu's article on the subject (link above).

liturgical practices. Luther interpreted the “collect”—traditionally the prayers of the church—as the general collection of funds to be distributed to the poor. After the funds were collected the celebration of the eucharist flowed directly into service and justice for the neighbor through the distribution of the funds in the community chest as any had need. Luther himself describes the intended flow from the eucharistic table to the concerns of the world:

“When you have partaken of this this sacrament [of the altar], you must in turn share the misfortunes of the fellowship...Here your heart must go out in love and learn that this is a sacrament of love. As love and support are given you, you in turn must render love and support to Christ in his needy ones. You must feel with sorrow all the misery of Christendom, all the unjust suffering of the innocent, with which the world is everywhere filled to overflowing. You must fight, work, pray and ...have heartfelt sympathy...For here the saying of Paul is fulfilled, ‘Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ’ (Gal 6:2).”



These documents demonstrate that for Luther and the reformers social reforms were a key focus for the Reformation vision. They demonstrate a certain flow between worship and the concerns of the world. What went on within church walls flowed out in service to and justice for the neighbor. Reciprocally, the concerns of the world were not checked at church doors, but informed and influenced liturgical practice.

In her video on eco-reformation Barbara Rossing refers to the major shift of the industrial revolution since the Reformation. Since this time, carbon in the atmosphere has increased exponentially. We could also add another significant shift: the interconnection of communities far across the world through a globalized economy. The choices and lifestyles of one community have effects on other communities around the world like never before. The reach of our daily mundane decisions and actions has never before been so nonlocal. The connections between ecological, economic, and social have never been quite so clear.

Look together at the list of ELCA synods that have voted for divestment. Note also that the 2016 church wide assembly has been memorialized to take similar action for the entire ELCA. You can find a list of synod actions as well as templates for resolutions on the Lutherans Restoring Creation website at <http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org/synod-and-church-wide-resolutions>

- If your synod has not yet passed such a resolution have any been attempted? What are some of the challenges and barriers?

Chapter 6

- In the section “Educating for the Covenant Between Humanity and the Environment” Pope Francis mentions several spheres for potential ecological education. Identify these as a group. Which is the closest to your daily experience? What might ecological education look like here? What would it change? What would it affirm that has been done all along?

Pope Francis’ “integral ecology” provides a way to account for these precarious interconnections. He identifies St. Francis as “the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically.” The patron saint of animals is the model of “the inseparable bond between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.” Might this “inseparable bond” also call for significant shifts or reformations in our church, theology, and liturgical practices? For example, might the Lutheran tradition more clearly communicate an integral connection between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and the personal forgiveness of sins?

During this final session, focus on chapters five and six of Pope Francis’ letter: the specific actions needed to address our climate crisis and develop ecological education and spirituality. Let Matthew 25:31-46 frame your conversations. Who (or what!) might “the least of these” be today? How might we be called to be “little Christs” (as Luther writes in *The Freedom of a Christian*) to these neighbors both near and far? Reflect together on how these might inform an eco-reformation for the next 500 years of Lutheran witness.



- In the section “Ecological Conversion” Francis makes suggestions for a Christian eco-spirituality “since the teachings of the Gospel have direct consequences for our way of thinking, feeling and living.” He is particularly interested “in how such a spirituality can motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world.”
 - What are some of Francis’ suggestions? What does he mean by an “ecological conversion”?
 - Reflect on the relationship between action and contemplation or between advocacy and a life of prayer, worship, and study. How do these relate in your experience?
 - Note here how a certain flow is suggested between the contemplative life of the Christian and acts of justice in the world. Compare this to the example of the Reformer’s community chest. How do you see this flow functioning in your congregation, another congregation or the broader church? What untapped resources might Lutheran churches utilize to better express this dynamic between praise/contemplation and service/action?

- In section 233 Francis writes: "The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face. The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things. Saint Bonaventure teaches us that 'contemplation deepens the more we feel the working of God's grace within our hearts, and the better we learn to encounter God in creatures outside ourselves.'"
- Read the following quotes from Luther and reflect together on these questions: What does it change if we profess God's presence in creation? What affect might this acknowledgement of God's all embracing presence have on our daily lives?
 - "[God is] with all creatures, flowing and pouring into them, filling all things," (Luther, WA 10:143).
 - God's "own divine essence can be in all creatures collectively and in each one individually more profoundly, more intimately, more present than the creature is in itself, yet it can be encompassed nowhere and by no one. It encompasses all things and dwells in all, but no one thing encompasses it and dwells in it." (Luther, LW 57:57)

Conclusion

Invite any concluding reflections. Close with the prayer at the end of 'Laudato Si':

All-powerful God,
 you are present in the whole universe
 and in the smallest of your creatures.
 You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.
 Pour out upon us the power of your love,
 that we may protect life and beauty.
 Fill us with peace, that we may live
 as brothers and sisters, harming no one.
 O God of the poor,
 help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth,
 so precious in your eyes.
 Bring healing to our lives,
 that we may protect the world and not prey on it,
 that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.
 Touch the hearts
 of those who look only for gain
 at the expense of the poor and the earth.
 Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,
 to be filled with awe and contemplation,
 to recognize that we are profoundly united
 with every creature
 as we journey towards your infinite light.
 We thank you for being with us each day.
 Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle
 for justice, love and peace.

Amen

