

Eco-Reformation: Always Reforming

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I. The Reformation 500 years ago: :

Five hundred years ago, Luther shifted the focus of faith from human efforts to salvation through Christ. God justifies people through grace, freely given. And the sense of grace and God's love frees people to love of our neighbor, especially the neighbor in need; so that we might serve as Christ asked: to feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, and care for the vulnerable.

When we remember that Nicolaus Copernicus discovered that the earth revolves around the sun (rather than the sun around the earth) only thirty years after Luther posted the 95 theses, we realize that human beings can go through radical new changes in awareness.

Both the Reformation and the Copernican Revolution were major shifts in seeing humans in relationship with nature and with God, major shifts to truth.

II Now we need a new reformation, from salvation of the individual human to restoration of Earth. WE need a reformation to see human beings as caretakers of the Earth, building an economic system that supports such care, and a Reformation in the church so that Christians know that in caring for the Earth and all people, we care for Christ!

Since Luther, the Industrial Revolution that began in the 1700s has vastly changed the planet, as has population growth. Industries that used coal and then oil, industrial scale agriculture, pesticides and herbicides have transformed the ecosystems of the Earth. Population growth has also done so: 1950 2.5 billion; now almost 7 billion. Hockey stick graphs reveal upward turn in aspects of degradation of the earth: (CO2 emissions, soil loss, fisheries collapse, coral reefs dying, and forest decline, while a large

percentage of humans face real poverty). And the hockey sticks take a major up turn about 1950 after WWII and the boom in economic development.

All of these issues combine to make the critical issue of our time for all institutions, none other than the fate of the earth and of humanity. “The overwhelming majority of scientists believe that these conditions are due in large part to the accumulative impact of human activity since the industrial revolution. To stop the destructive activity and to embrace practices that restore Earth, we will need sweeping changes in our society and our world.” (from “Why an Eco-Reformation from LRC) A new geologic term is the Anthropocene: A January 2016 paper in [Science](#) investigating climatic, biological, and geochemical signatures of human activity in sediments and ice cores suggested the era since the mid-20th century should be recognised as a distinct geological epoch from the [Holocene](#).^[8] (period since the last ice age)

In brief:

(1) Climate change exacerbates all the other issues that are destroying the web of life.

World scientists have said that we need to keep CO2 ppm at 350, but we are now at 400.

(2) Oceans are losing oxygen and becoming hostile to life; reefs are dying due to warming waters; “More than 85 percent of the world's fisheries have been pushed to or beyond their biological limits and are in need of strict management plans to restore them. Several important commercial fish populations (such as Atlantic Bluefin tuna) have declined to the point where their survival as a species is threatened.

“<http://www.worldwildlife.org/threats/overfishing>.”

(3) Degradation of topsoil is itself a huge problem, as is the flow of soil into water bodies: added to the silting up of water, which combines with water pollution to make water undrinkable; (**15 million** children under the age of five die each year because of diseases caused by drinking water. In America, **40%** of the rivers and **46%** of the lakes are polluted and are considered unhealthy for swimming, fishing or aquatic life. Water pollution is the **major cause** of various diseases like cholera and typhoid. Water covers 70% of earth but most is salt water (99%) and much is locked up in ice sheets. In developing countries, 70 percent of industrial waste is dumped into water bodies where they pollute and yet 80% of pollution caused by domestic sewage.

(4) Population numbers are rising exponentially but countries differ extremely in carbon footprint and use of world resources: it would take four earths for every country to live as the U.S. and Europe; footprint; India 1/10th of US

(5) Decline in forests, and water pollution has caused an alarming loss of species (6th great extinction spasm). We evolved with other creatures in a web, to lose them is to lose part of our family and diminish who we are and a sense of reverence.

(6) Finally, environmental justice issues are woven throughout these issues: It has been said that the rich harm the world out of greed, the poor out of need. The most disadvantages people suffer the most from environmental degradation: island nations that may be inundated by the ocean, people in sub-Saharan Africa where a dry climate is exacerbated by climate change; so the environment is bound together with care for our brothers and sisters. Justice issues include clean water and clean air and abundant food, for everyone! Conflicts are caused by ecological instability. Syrian refugee crisis caused by a 5-year drought that led to people moving to the cities, which caused displacement, government repression, and migrations unprecedented since WWI.

II. Lutheran basis for response

Humanity and especially Christians need to wake up to the human role of being stewards, prophets, and healers, and our Lutheran tradition can help us do that..

Stewardship: in caring for creation, we care not only for our brothers and sisters but for God. Humans are stewards or sisters and brothers of all other nonhuman creatures (this is true in the biological sense that we all are part of the web of life and share 99% of our DNA with chimpanzees).

Luther said that Christ is in a stone, as well as in the Eucharist. "God is substantially present everywhere, in and through all creatures, in all their parts and places, so that the world is full of God and He fills all, but without His being encompassed and surrounded by it...How can reason tolerate it that the Divine Majesty is so small that it can be substantially present in a grain, on a grain, through a grain, within and without...His 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." (Luther WA: XXIII, 134.34-23: 136.36). This is a sacramental view of creation.

Prophets: Lutherans have been able to call out destructive societal structures, systemic evils, and call for justice. This takes courage. And Martin Luther is a challenging example.

(1518 Heidelberg Disputation, Theological Theses #20, 21):

Luther also said • [he deserves to be called a theologian, ...who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.](#)

- [A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.](#)

Lutheranism helps us to not flinch but to have courage to see clearly and to act even if we don't see the results of our actions in our lifetimes.

Healers: To realize that God is at work, loving, and encountering humans in all of creation and to live our lives mending what is torn.

(1) Eco-Reformation Changes our Bible interpretation: Reaffirmation that God gave two books (Bible and nature)—a lost awareness that can be traced back to Galileo and other Christian authorities and Luther believed.

We need to read the Bible anew with the understanding that creation is a gift given by God and sanctified by Christ. We read in Colossians that Christ holds all things together: can we see Christ in the trees and soil, in the polar bears and elephants?

Theological focus has been on the salvation of the human for eternal life with God. The Earth is simply a stage for human life and human salvation. But this atonement theology does not capture the full biblical affirmation. The Psalms envision all of creation able to worship God. God cares and has sympathy for all of creation. Job: "Were you there when I created...Do you know when the mountain goats give birth..." (Job 39:1), and Jesus said that God knows every sparrow that falls.

If we harm creation, we are harming Christ. Some Lutheran theologians say that we are crucifying Christ again as we abuse creation, nonhuman and human.

(2) Eco-Reformation changes our Economic thinking—Root word for economics is oecos, which means home. Luther protested the selling of indulgences to make one's way to heaven. Now we also need a

new economic paradigm, because our present paradigm sees buying and selling as identifiers for human well-being. “The night belongs to Michelob?” no, to God. And the Bible asks for a Sabbath for the land and for humanity (Deut. 5:12-15) and to let the land lie fallow every seven years (Lev. 25:1-7). God so loved the “world” (the word means cosmos), John 3:16 that God sent Jesus Christ. If the Earth is sacred, we need to treat it as such.

In our economic paradigm GDP measures only economic flow-through; the Exxon Valdez oil spill made our country appear wealthier than prior to the spill, because of the costs of clean-up, legal fees, etc. Neither the loss of the livelihoods of fisherfolk nor the cost of pollution in the sea life and water counted. WE need to count negative externalities. LWF—“Salvation not for sale, humans not for sale, nature not for sale” ...We need to give up the fantasy of unlimited growth and that all can be fixed by technology.

(3) 500 years after Luther a **transformation of the church** is needed; to be earth friendly in worship, education, and mission so that we seek justice not just for humans but for all the Earth community. Pope Francis’s Encyclical “On Care for Our Common Home” states this; and it is an invitation to live and extend our faith with people of all religious backgrounds and to include creation as part of the congregation.

(4) Theology. To think in new ways **theologically requires** attention to what we affirm we love. It is a reaffirmation of God as creator (first article of the creed) and Christ as holding all things together (Col. 1:18), with the spirit renewing the face of the earth. Trinity. The eco-Reformation also affirms seeing and serving creation from down below, bottom up, which is the theology of the cross, seeing life from the perspective of abused natural systems (e.g., water, soil, oceans) and all the creatures dependent on them, as well as from the point of view of the elderly, women and girls. Eco-Reformation calls Christians not to be Lords over all but to be “least of all and servant of all.” (Mk. 9:25)

(5) Eco-Reformation means being inspired by Science. Coherent with the Biblical view are many aspects of **science**: Christ is in, with, and under (Luther) all things; Christ is bringing creation to fruition, through 16 billion years, and 4 billion to create the Earth. This interweaving of science and theology is new and even troubling for some people, but exciting for others.

Science—is the most extended meditation of creation. Scientific discoveries fill many of us with wonder. New insights and revelations in the last several decades are astounding, about DNA, the expanding universe filled with billions of galaxies, plate tectonics. Further, even nonreligious scientists such as E.O. Wilson are imploring humanity to act, which is the focus of his book *The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth*; Evangelical Christian political leaders were behind support of the Endangered Species Act...

But for people who cannot accept science, creation can be seen as God's precious gift.

6. Eco-Reformation deepens the **Meaning of faith**: be in love with creation, as our sister/brother. To be in love with creation is what many people already feel; the feeling and responsibility fills me and us with terror, wonder, and reverence.

Turns faith from my relationship with God for eternal life (atonement theology) to a larger understanding of eternal life, which includes the flourishing of the web of creation, loving with God's love; having "dominion" in the sense that God has dominion: caring for all and serving the "least of these." Nature should be used carefully, with wisdom and respect; our role is to see that all human and non-human creatures survive and have life abundant.

Justification by grace frees us from the law of all authorities that diminish life, including an economic system in which everything is seen as a commodity to be bought and sold and which diminishes nonhuman and human life.

Here is what Lutheran churches are doing:

of synods....position papers...theologians...planting of trees....working toward the 500th anniversary.

VI Conclusion Eco-Reformation creates a strong and wide faith. And it issues in works: that include fostering healing of toxic waste sites; creating clean and renewal energy, putting strong limitations on pesticides, stopping clearcutting of forests and strip mining of land, protecting of parks, wilderness, wetlands. Eating less meat and more locally. Create sustainable energy sources. Ensuring that clean food and water is available to all children around the world, as well as education, especially for girls. Creating background for peace. The church as a strong moral authority in communities can and should undertake such leadership—2d workshop.

To summarize, Eco-Reformation is a call to be alert to Christ's presence in, with and under all things; and to find where one's heart is yearning and then find ways to act; this is the great work of our age, and it is the most daunting and important challenge that human beings have ever faced. Let us be about Eco-Reformation.