
Climate Justice as a Spiritual Challenge in an Oil-Rich Country: The Case of Norway

Klimata taisnīgums kā garīgs izaicinājums ar naftu bagātā valstī: Norvēģijas gadījums

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Climate justice and fossil fuel production are addressed in this contextual Bible reading study, as we ask: what challenges does an eco-theology, addressing climate justice, pose in the context of Norway, a country which has built its wealth to a large degree on petroleum production? Based on South-African contextual Bible reading methods, a 3-step process is applied: 1) 'Seeing' involves careful social analysis of a particular context at a particular time; 2) 'Judging' involves reading biblical texts and assessing the context in light of these; 3) 'Acting' means trying to identify and take appropriate action to improve the situation, based on what has been seen and judged in the first two steps.

In the first step, the global context of climate change and climate justice – an approach that combines climate and equity concerns – is presented, followed by a presentation of the case of Norway, a country with great petroleum-based wealth, but also with a self-understanding as an eco-friendly country. Turning to the Bible texts, we focus particularly on two key passages from the Old Testament (Psalm 24: 1-2 and Psalm 82: 2-4) and one from the New Testament (Luke 12: 13-21). These texts are read in light of the context of climate justice and Norway's fossil-fuel based wealth. The reading of these texts in this context inspires actions. Which actions exactly it is left an unanswered question, while several suggestions from Christians in Norway are mentioned. What is certain is that the level of ethical reflection must be raised, priorities must be reexamined, and actions, lifestyles and societal conditions must be changed accordingly. What we can conclude, then, from this contextual Bible reading exercise, is not necessarily *how*, but *that* the climate justice issue *must be tackled*, based on the biblical challenge and the ethical reflections it starts. Climate justice is a spiritual and moral challenge that needs to be contextualized and responded to.

Key words: climate justice, contextual eco-theology, Norway, petroleum

Introduction

From the 1960's onwards, we have seen what could be referred to as a quiet eco-conscious awakening in worldwide Christianity and Christian theology. Within this awakening there are different approaches and emphases, but also considerable overlap. There is a fairly broad consensus among theologians and lay people within all major denominations – Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant – that caring for creation is good and a part of human's responsibility before God, each other and creation in all its fullness (Clifford, 2008). Arguably, eco-theology has increasingly become a part of mainstream theology. But are Christians today willing to apply these noble principles to their personal lifestyles, and perhaps even more important, to the way they build and run the societies in which they live – or are these principles more comfortably maintained as abstract ideas?

Both the term and the field of eco-theology are a modern phenomenon (Schuff, 2011), but arguably the very beginning of theology, literally from creation onwards, has included this perspective considering nature as created by God – “[.] *and God saw that it was good*” (Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). From a cross-cultural perspective we find numerous examples of creation stories which include some sort of divinity or divinities as a core part of religious world-views, traditions and as a foundational element in the diverse communal identities. Looking upon nature or the environment as a “creation”, a planned creative act, emphasizes this original connection and creation's intrinsic value. The Fall of Man disrupted the “natural” order of things, negatively affecting humanity's relationship with God as well as with nature (*cf.* Gen. 3: 17-19). As St. Dorotheos of Gaza writes: “*When he broke the command and ate of the tree that God commanded him not to eat of, he was thrown out of paradise and fell from a state in accordance with his nature (καταφύσιν) to a state contrary to nature (παραφύσιν) [..]*” (St. Dorotheus of Gaza, 6th century). Following this Fall, both humanity and creation itself yearns for redemption (Rom. 8: 20-23). How we define and understand both God's as well as mankind's relationship to the created world or nature becomes a theology of creation. When this is applied to contemporary environmental challenges – as it specifically has been since the 1960's – it becomes eco-theology.

With this in mind, eco-theology can be considered a contextual phenomenon, a result of the Church actively engaging with its context. When translated into practical consequences, eco-theology is necessarily and even more obviously contextual. And the other way around: Eco-theology in context challenges and inspires practice. In this article we will look at *what challenges an eco-theology addressing climate change and climate justice poses in the context of Norway, a country which has built its wealth to a large degree on petroleum production*. When we choose a contextual eco-theological approach, it is because it is our view that eco-theology at its best combines ‘eco-spirituality’ with ‘eco-activism’ – in other words, the spiritual-theological and practical aspects of eco-theology are most fruitful when connected.

Method and structure

This article presents an interdisciplinary case study, combining theology with a social science approach, resulting in a contextual eco-theological analysis of the concept of climate justice and the case of Norway. As theological sources for our analysis we will bring in Biblical texts, patristic writings and more recent eco-theological

writings. These are juxtaposed with official documentation of Norway's fossil fuels wealth and media articles that discuss the paradoxes of trying to combine petroleum production with official eco-friendliness.

The proposed method is inspired by contextual Bible reading, both as expressed in various patristic texts, as well as developed in modern contexts such as in South Africa (West, 2006). West argues that all interpretations of the Bible are contextual since the reader is an active agent in the process of interpretation: "Readers always bring their concerns and questions to their readings of the Bible, even if they are scholarly questions and concerns. Our contexts, therefore, always shape our reading practice" (West, 2006, 131).

While these views can be considered common in contemporary theological hermeneutics, they can also be exaggerated in such a way that meaning production is understood as taking place almost entirely in the individual reader. Meaning, however, occurs in the *interaction* between text and readers in a certain context. After all, if every reader could construct meaning in a manner independent of the text, then what would be the point of even reading the text? Lewis and Demarest (1996) make similar points in their approach, which they call *integrative theology*, intended to be simultaneously "biblically grounded", "culturally sensitive" and "profoundly related to life" (Lewis & Demarest, 1996, 9). The point of this current contextual Bible reading exercise is, then, precisely to allow the Bible texts a voice, a significant role in meaning production, applied to a specific context – here, the context of climate change, in which we believe that the challenging and transformative potential of the theological texts can contribute to adequate responses. This implies that at least some readers find an inner meaning within the text leading them to, e.g., change their behavior accordingly.

Two aspects that we wish to emphasize in approaching societal issues and contextual interpretation are 1) that there is a communal context (*vs.* a purely individualistic approach) and 2) that this leads to the development of applied communal theologies. This is the general basis for Liberation Theology, reading the Bible from a specific social context and attempting to apply the interpretation to contemporary social issues (González, 1992, 484).

With these reflections in mind, let us return to West (2006) and the specific method of contextual Bible reading he outlines. This method, developed in the context of South Africa¹, can be summarized in the three steps, namely, SEE – JUDGE – ACT:

1. 'Seeing' involves careful social analysis of a particular context at a particular time;
2. 'Judging' involves reading biblical texts and assessing the context in light of these;
3. 'Acting' means trying to identify and take appropriate action to improve the situation, based on what has been seen and judged in the first two steps.

Contextual Bible reading, then, starts with the social reality and experience of those involved, moves into the Bible texts for a slow, careful and close reading – and finally returns to the social reality and resources and action potential of those involved.

This will also be the basic structure of this article. Following this section we will first look at the social context at hand – the global issue of climate change, the advocacy for climate justice as a response to it, and the Norwegian context ('see'). After

that, we will present Biblical texts that we suggest can address the contextual issues at hand ('judge'). And finally, we discuss how the juxtaposition of social context and Biblical texts challenges believers and inspires action ('act').

It is also possible, for our purposes here, to draw on far older traditions of interpretation than that of contextual Bible reading. Many patristic writings acknowledge practical application as a form of interpretation among other forms – “not disregarding literal interpretation, but underlining that this is only one of the forms of interpretation” (Schuff, 2011, 17). In the fourth century, St. John Cassian described four forms of interpretation to develop spiritual knowledge; the four forms being 1) historical, 2) allegorical, 3) anagogical and 4) tropological interpretation. This present article is aimed at the latter of these: “The tropological sense is the moral explanation which has to do with improvement of life and practical teaching” (St. John Cassian, Conferences, 14:8). St. John Cassian proceeds to emphasize that the first step towards spiritual learning is practical, because it is better to start by performing than by discussing and teaching what one learns from the elders: “For from teaching, the dangerous arrogance of vain-glory, but from performing, the fruit of spiritual knowledge will flourish” (St. John Cassian, Conferences, 14:9). This, too, can serve as an argument for the present approach; with its focus on practical applicability as a vital part of the spiritual learning process. The general question posed by applying this approach to eco-theology is then: How can what eco-theology teaches us be applied in practice in a certain context?

In light of this reading of St. John Cassian, the *see-judge-act*-process outlined above could be extended with a fourth step following action; namely *reflect/learn*². One might also argue that *acting* proceeds *seeing* in the process. The interaction between seeing/judging/learning and acting in contextual Bible reading could then more precisely be portrayed as an ongoing spiral rather than a once-off process from step 1 through step 3. For the purposes of this article, however, the three-step structure of *see-judge-act* is kept, as the portion of this process that will be analyzed here.

While borrowing the structure from West, it must be added that our approach differs from his recommendations in at least two significant ways. West is generally reluctant to the use of this method as a research tool, because he and his partners at the Ujamaa Centre consider it a resource to be offered “to the communities of the poor, working-class and marginalized with whom we work” (West, 2006, 148). Therefore, both as scholars and as privileged members of a wealthy society, we are not invited to use this method, at least not without doing it together with oppressed, poor and marginalized non-scholars.

In principle, we strongly agree that an approach that included this proper (according to West) use of contextual Bible reading – and therefore integrated the voices of the poor and marginalized, or in our case, those who suffer under the global injustice of climate change – would be most promising. While we could not arrange study groups of this kind for the purpose of this study³, we will still argue that the contextual Bible reading framework is applicable to a study such as the one we are presenting here. Norway has been chosen as the case for this article because of the subject matter, our experience from the Norwegian context, and since the focus of this NORDPLUS project is the Nordic-Baltic region. And to put it simply: Norway is also a context, and so this context can be assessed in the light of Bible reading. Our goal is not to use the method “to obtain access to the incipient and inchoate historical consciousness of a particular community”, as West (2006, 148) fears, but to assess self-critically the challenges climate change and eco-theology poses to *our own* particular community.

We acknowledge, however, the dangers inherent to presenting eco-theological reflections and suggestions from what is globally speaking an extremely privileged position, and have tried to balance this somewhat by using eco-theological sources from countries and continents that suffer under the injustice of climate change, that is, from the South⁴, most notably from Africa. We also believe that biblical texts can challenge a privileged position – and any culture – from within when read carefully and alertly.

A situation from the climate 17th Conference of the Parties (COP17) in Durban in 2011 can illustrate how the climate issue can look very differently when seen from the North and from the South. South African bishop *emeritus* Geoff Davies challenged the delegacy of Norwegian Church leaders during a discussion there. We quote⁵ the Norwegian magazine STREK, that reported:

Geoff Davies said: – As wonderful as you are, dear Norwegians, you have to face the facts: Norway must stop drilling for more oil. The Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations rejected his input. Suggestions like this one, they felt, were *not very constructive*. And right there we could start the debate on what it means to be a state church in a petroleum state (Finnseth, 2012).

1. SEEING the context:

The issue of climate justice and Norway's petroleum wealth

As a starting point, we will base our presentation in the following on the broad consensus among climate scientists that humanly induced climate change is taking place, and that the emissions caused by the use of fossil fuels are the main cause of this anthropogenic and potentially disastrous climate change (*cf.* IPCC 2012). This is, of course, a very short version of the knowledge in a large and complex field, but while the differing views of a small minority of scientists could be discussed, that discussion is not within the scope of this article.

In this last decade we have seen a growing emphasis on *climate justice*⁶ within the environmental movement. There are global campaigns for climate justice, many NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) advocate for climate justice, among them many churches and faith-based organizations, and scholars consider it an 'emerging field' and a promising framework for just solutions to climate change (Burkett, 2008).

So what does climate justice mean? Climate justice is an approach to the climate issue that points to the dramatic injustice inherent in climate change: The world's poor, who have done *least* to cause climate change, will suffer the *most* from it (Clifford, 2008). From an American perspective, Burkett explains:

The emerging field of "climate justice" is concerned with the intersection of race, poverty, and climate change. It takes, as a basic premise, that the disadvantaged in the United States stand to suffer the risks of warming more severely than others, as do their counterparts in the global South. Climate justice also recognizes the direct kinship between social inequality and environmental degradation, which is not isolated to the global South (Burkett, 2008, 193).

The argument emphasizes that the CO₂ emissions that cause climate change mainly come from the North, both historically and currently. The atmosphere and other natural resources are considered common goods that are no more the property of the rich than of the poor of the world. The normative implication of this climate injustice is that the North should therefore be held accountable in terms of reducing emissions, while the South might need to maintain or even increase emissions somewhat more in their still ongoing processes of economic development.

As an example from the African context, an interfaith consultation in 2011 stated that “climate change constitutes a huge inequity for the world and its people, with Africa bearing the brunt of the effects, even though the continent is responsible for only 4 percent of global greenhouse-gas emissions” (AACC, 2011, 4). The faith leaders accordingly, in their communiqué from the consultation, ask world leaders to commit to justice and equity in the much needed and long awaited climate treaty – both inter-generational equity, that is, justice for generations to come, and justice in terms of wealthy countries assuming their historical responsibility for the situation.

Climate change will affect poor countries, cities and groups more severely in many ways. Poverty reduces a country’s and a group’s resilience to natural crises and disasters, that are expected to happen more frequently and intensely due to climate change. Climate adaptation efforts are generally available to the rich, not to the poor. This also applies to the phenomenon of rising sea-levels. Where the Netherlands can afford to strengthen their dikes and enhance their climate adaptation, developing countries such as Suriname are at risk of losing practically all their arable land, and a Pacific island state such as Tuvalu may disappear entirely from the map – without having the financial resources to counter the impact of climate change-induced sea-level rise. Climate change will also hit poor countries harder because these countries lie mostly in the tropics, where higher temperatures will be a lot more devastating to food production and health-related conditions, and because they are more directly dependent on primary production and natural systems for people’s livelihood.

According to the climate justice perspective, our response to the climate crisis must acknowledge this injustice, and place the main responsibility for cutting CO₂ emissions on the rich, industrialized countries⁷. At the same time, the global climate framework should allow for sustainable, preferably ‘green’ growth in poor countries.

In sum, the climate crisis and the poverty crisis are connected – and climate justice is a response to both. A reason why this perspective has been strongly supported by many churches and Christian organizations can be that it bridges Christian environmental efforts and Christian concerns for justice, two strong strands of involvement within the church. *Time for Climate Justice*, a global campaign in which the World Council of Churches and other Christian faith-based organizations (FBOs) has been very actively involved, refers to these two Christian concerns when explaining on its webpage why faith leads them to efforts for climate justice:

God creates human beings and calls humanity to care for the earth (Gen. 2:15), to be stewards of creation. The God of the Bible, at the same time, is a God of justice who cares for the most vulnerable ones: the poor, the orphan, the widow, the stranger (Deut. 10: 18-19) (*Time for Climate Justice*, 2012).

As we now narrow our focus from the global to the Norwegian context, we can note that Norwegian Church Aid, the Church of Norway and the ecumenical Christian Council of Norway have been among these Christian advocates for climate justice.

The case of Norway: fossil fuel-based wealth

Norway is the largest oil producer and oil exporter in Western Europe, and the petroleum industry is the country’s largest industry. The Norwegian ‘oil adventure’ started in the 1960’s, when oil was discovered on the Norwegian continental shelf in the North Sea. Norwegian authorities have managed to secure the country’s petroleum resources as a government-administered asset, so that most of the petroleum-based income ben-

efits the people of Norway: “The Petroleum Act confirms that the property right to the petroleum deposits on the Norwegian continental shelf is vested in the State” (Norwegian Ministry of Petroleum 2012). While Norway was one of the poorest countries in Europe during the first half of the 20th century, the production and export of petroleum has played a vital part in raising Norwegian wealth and welfare levels to the highest in the world.

Currently, the petroleum sector contributes with 26% of the state’s revenues and 21% of Norway’s GDP (Gross Domestic Product). The Norwegian Ministry of Petroleum and Energy sum up the role of petroleum in Norway’s wealth in the following manner: “The petroleum activities have been crucial for Norway’s financial growth and in financing the Norwegian welfare state. Over more than 40 years, petroleum production on the shelf has added more than NOK 9 000 billion to the country’s GDP. In 2010, the petroleum sector represented 21% of the country’s total value creation” (Norwegian Ministry of Petroleum 2012).

The Norwegian state’s income from the petroleum activities is transferred to a separate fund, officially known as the ‘Government Pension Fund – Global’, colloquially (and henceforth in this text) referred to as the ‘oil fund’. This fund was at the end of 2011 valued at NOK 3 312 billion. This corresponds to more than NOK 650 000, or more than 100 000 US dollars, for every Norwegian – and makes it the largest government-administered fund in the world. Some of the revenues of the oil fund are carefully phased into the Norwegian economy (the national budget) each year, while there is a broad political consensus as to saving most of the oil fund for future generations and the economical challenges Norway will face when the petroleum era is over. There are, however, many debates concerning the oil fund, and a set of ethical guidelines has been established to avoid investing in companies that violate human rights or cause serious environmental degradation.

The Ministry of Petroleum and Energy and its minister, Mr. Borten Moe, argue that Norwegian petroleum production is ‘the cleanest in the world’ (*cf.* also Hungnes 2008, from a Christian/environmentalist perspective). But recent figures show that petroleum production in the Middle East is cleaner on average than it is in Norway – that is, emissions are lower there (Finnseth, 2012). The validity of these Middle East figures has been contested. Still, the argument that ‘clean’ Norwegian oil production will benefit the global environment does not seem very solid. To argue that any petroleum production can be environmentally beneficial, when the link between fossil fuel consumption and climate change is so well documented, is a near impossible exercise. There is a broad consensus that the climate crisis calls for a speedy transition to renewable energy sources and drastic reductions in energy use – not for more oil. The reluctance to address this ‘elephant in the room’ creates vague and misleading rhetoric in Norwegian policy documents concerning environmental and development issues, Bjørkdahl (2012) argues.

Today the Norwegian oil industry is ‘still going strong’, energized by several big oil finds in 2011 (Norwegian Ministry of Petroleum 2012).

2. JUDGING in the light of Biblical texts: Reading the Bible in an oil-rich country

Even if the concept of climate justice is not found in the Bible, both creation and justice are key terms of Scripture. There are also many Biblical texts that address wealth and greed, which can be linked to the issue at hand here. From this range of

potential texts, we have chosen two key passages from the Old Testament (Psalm 24: 1-2 and Psalm 82: 2-4) and one key text from the New Testament (Luke 12: 13-21), to read in light of – and to shed light on – the context of climate justice and Norway’s fossil-fuel based wealth.

In addressing the issue of climate justice, let us also venture to question of what it means to be “just” or what “justice” is. In the Biblical texts, whether in Hebrew or Greek, there is almost exclusively one root for what has been translated into English as “righteous”, or alternatively “just”, as an adjective and “justice” or “righteousness” as a noun⁸. Biblically speaking a righteous nation is a just nation with “just weights and just scales [...]” Also the word שָׁלוֹם (“shalom”, translated many times as “peace”) means just this: *balance*. It is used as an adjective in Deuteronomy 25:15 where it says, “You must have accurate and honest weights and measures [...]”. These scriptures concern trade both nationally and internationally, also relevant to the framework of profiteering in the oil industry. The general practice in many modern nations, Norway included, is based primarily upon the principles of profit, which can at times drive people to, if it is profitable, use one weight here and another measure there. There are numerous examples of how Norway’s wealth has also overtly been used as leverage in both political and trade negotiations with other nations. The oil fund increases or decreases within the framework of the world market – which, at the bottom end, leaves about a billion people in extreme poverty. We see here in this brief look at ‘justice’ in the Bible how biblical “justice” also relates to trade and the global economy, phenomena that are often considered entirely apart from the spiritual world in which “righteousness”, i.e., understood often as “holiness” in English, is a common focus. To state it plainly, to be righteous is to be just and to be just is to be righteous, and this must also apply in some way to how we both think and act in our relationship with creation.

With the contextual background that has been established up to this point, we now turn to the selected texts of the Bible, starting with the psalms.

The earth is the Lord’s: Psalm 24: 1-2

¹The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof,
the world and those who dwell therein;

² for he has founded it upon the seas,
and established it upon the rivers.

This text firmly states that the earth belongs to God, its creator, and problematizes the common understanding of Norwegians that the petroleum is ‘ours’. The Norwegian authorities have in their stewardship of the petroleum wealth to a large degree succeeded in contributing to equity within the borders of Norway. But as followers of the God of all the universe, must not global justice be a more pressing concern than an exclusively Norwegian justice?

The proclamation of God’s ownership of the earth also contrasts with the current practice that rich countries use disproportionate amounts of natural resources, and in the specific context of climate justice; our use of larger parts of the atmosphere for CO₂ emissions than poorer countries.

Here, the contemporary relevance of the words of St. John Chrysostom (4th century) on the communal aspect of natural elements is striking:

“For we have all things from Christ. Both existence itself we have through Him, and life, and breath, and light, and air, and earth. And if He were to exclude us

from any one of these, we are lost and undone. [...] the very air, earth, matter, are the Creator's, they are common to you and to your fellow-servants; just as the sun is common, the air, the earth, and all the rest. But if it be made common, both that part and all the rest have it as their own." (St. John Chrysostom, 4th century a)

"God has given all things in abundance, which are much more necessary than money: the air, water, fire, the sun – all of these things. It should not be said that the ray [of sun] is enjoyed more by the rich man, less by the poor man; it should not be said that the rich man has the air in more abundance than the poor man, but all these things are equal and presented in common." (St. John Chrysostom, 4th century b)

The earth is the Lord's – thus we, who are also the Lord's, have it in common – thus, "all of humanity, rich or poor, North or South are equally entitled to enjoyment of God's bounty" (Schuff, 2011, 96).

God judges injustice: Psalm 82: 1-4

¹ God has taken his place in the divine council;
in the midst of the gods he holds judgment:

² How long will you defend the unjust
and show partiality to the wicked?

³ Defend the weak and the fatherless;
uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.

⁴ Rescue the weak and the needy;
deliver them from the hand of the wicked.

In our second text, injustice is an even more a direct concern. God does not only passively dwell in his creation, he also actively takes a stand against injustice, on the side of the weak and fatherless, the poor and the oppressed, the weak and needy. The defense of the poor and the cause of fighting poverty are close to orders or commandments in form, as they are put forth by God in the divine council.

In line with this defense of the poor, Jesus says in Lk. 4: 18-19: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." But these good news to the poor that saturate the Bible – how are the rich supposed to receive them? Both working to fight poverty and acknowledging one's own (non-material) poverty are possibly fruitful responses. We now turn to our selected text from the gospel of Luke, to see if we can find any good news for the rich here:

The parable of the rich fool: Luke 12: 13-21

¹³ Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." ¹⁴ Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" ¹⁵ Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." ¹⁶ And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. ¹⁷ He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' ¹⁸ "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. ¹⁹ And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." ²⁰ "But God

said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’²¹ “This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

When read in a materially wealthy context such as that of Norway, this text challenges our priorities and our focus. The actions of the farmer in this parable are economically sound, from a self-centered point of view. Still, his wealth-saving project fails, because he loses something more important than his material abundance; he loses his life. This parable can, then, be read as an encouragement to be “rich toward God” and to “seek first the kingdom of God [...]” (Mt. 6:33) rather than to plan and live by the dominant profit-maximizing ideology of our time.

With the context of the oil fund in mind, it is not hard to compare Norway to the rich farmer, who saves ‘treasures on earth’ – ‘storing up things for themselves’ and for future Norwegians. One might, in the case of Norway, argue that the oil fund also involves caring for others – for future generations. But then again, what is the most basic need that future generations of Norwegians have – money in the bank, or the basic conditions for living that nature constitutes for humanity? A focus on caring for the future of its own citizens might be a legitimate concern for a nation, and for a government, but is it legitimate for the church – which is, in its essence, global and in its scope, universal – to accept that priority is given to the interests of single nations in this manner, even if that nation is one’s own?

It seems difficult to read these texts and simultaneously argue that maximizing profits should be more of a priority than caring for creation and caring for neighbors in poor countries and in future generations. So are there any good news for the rich here? Not if one is interested in maintaining the status quo and one’s wealth and avoid being reminded of unpleasant truths. But for those who want to live in freedom from greed and self-centredness, in a more sustainable and sharing manner, reading and acting upon these texts can be very good news indeed.

3. ACTING on a Biblical basis in the context of Norway

Now, to the most difficult, but also the most important question we face in this contextual Bible reading process: How do we apply these biblical insights to our context in practice? The starting point must be to raise the level of ethical reflection to a point where people are willing to change their behavior and their society away from greed, overconsumption and profit-focus towards more sustainability and sharing.

In the introduction, we asked whether Christians are willing to apply these eco-theological principles and priorities to their personal lifestyles, and perhaps even more important, to the way they build and run the societies in which they live. Empirical studies show that active church-goers in Norway are in fact on average more ‘eco-friendly’ than non-church goers – in terms of being willing to make personal sacrifices and make environmentally friendly lifestyle choices, and in terms of supporting increased political measures towards sustainability (Botvar, 1998, 2012). The eco-involvement of churchgoers is steady over time, while it has decreased between 1993 and 2011 in the population in general. This implies that there is indeed a potential for the growth or re-growth of a Christian a Christian counterculture for the environment and for climate justice in Norway.

Bjørkdahl (2012) points out how the Norwegian government avoids drawing the obvious link between petroleum production and climate efforts. This creates vague political statements, such as that on development and environment, which leaves the petroleum production almost unmentioned, an obvious "elephant in the room" (Bjørkdahl, 2012) The question here is, can Christians see the petroleum elephant?

The challenge of thoroughly addressing climate justice and responding to the climate crisis, especially by relating these issues to Norway's petroleum production, were recently raised in the ecumenical Christian in-depth magazine *STREK* (see *STREK* 1/2012). The title on the first page was "A state church in a petro-state. The eco-friendly with the two lords", accompanied by the photo of a priest's face covered in dark brown oil. This edition raises questions such as: Can Norway be an eco-friendly country while profiting on fossil fuels while the emissions from those fuels have caused the climate crisis? Will the church dare to be true to its 'green heart', and speak up against more oil production? Is the church held back by its economic ties to the state, whose income is to a large degree from petroleum¹⁰? Don't we have to choose between serving God or Mammon?

The biggest Christian daily in Norway, *Vårt Land* (see *Vårt Land*, April 2012), also raised similar questions in the spring of 2012, and reminded the Church of Norway about its climate ambitions a few years before – the 'climate revival' that may seem to have come and gone.

If it is accepted, then, that Biblical texts do raise a radical challenge in the context of the current ecological crisis, climate justice perspectives and Norway's petroleum wealth – then this does not point directly to a recipe for solving the issues at hand. One possible response would be to work for the slowing down of oil production and increased efforts for renewable energy, which has been proposed by several bishops in the Church of Norway, most recently by bishop Erling Pettersen in Stavanger, Norway's 'oil capital' (Lewis & Demarest, 2012). Another response would be to invest more of the oil fund in green development, that is, giving nature and others higher priority than profits only. This path of action has been suggested by the Christian ecumenical movement *Korsvei* ('Crossroads'). Norwegian Church Aid, on their part, are asking for 1% of the oil fund investments to be placed in Africa; again, looking for ways to exercise good stewardship.

These suggestions have not been fully adopted by the government or society at large as of yet, but can be seen as glimpses of the Church exercising its prophetic voice. Churches and Christian movements are teaming up with other environmental organizations. This May, representatives from the Church spoke against Statoil's involvement in tar sand production in Canada; a production that both severely damages the environment and takes the livelihood from natives, a marginalized group in Canada. The Church's own fund owns a small share of the stocks in Statoil, but have now decided to sell their share, since at the latest general assembly of Statoil the suggestion to end the tar sand project was rejected (Eikeland, 2012).

When Church leaders and Christian movements make statements concerning the environment in this manner, especially specific statements about the pace of petroleum production, they are often criticized for becoming "too political" and told they should rather just attend to "spiritual" matters. While this reflects the modern world's compartmentalization of life, which can be questioned on its own merit, it is not only a Norwegian phenomenon. Based in Constantinople, His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has addressed environmental issues in a frequent and faithful manner over the years, and is often met with suspicion and criticism by Orthodox laypeople

and clergy, saying that he should address more “spiritual” issues (Schuff, 2011, 98). The Patriarch comments: “Unfortunately, it has been a consolidate opinion, even among the Orthodox, that the Church should deal with other issues supposed to be more ‘spiritual’; as though the protection of God’s creation from destruction, which is resulted by human greed, is not a spiritual issue!”¹¹ His reminders of how greed and destruction of creation must be considered sin, and how asceticism and self-sacrifice following the example of Jesus Christ can contribute significantly to sustainability, are important themes that we unfortunately cannot explore in depth within the scope of this present study. For now, let us just underline that we share his emphasis on our response to the ecological crises in the world as a matter that is spiritual at its core.

Naturally, the principles for action suggested here do not only concern large macro-level structures and political decisions; it also concerns personal and interpersonal choice. How to handle the fossil fuel-based wealth in the case of Norway is only one of many possible concretizations of a more general principle, which is touched upon every time we choose a less eco-friendly alternative because of money concerns – to save or earn more money – when we can afford the eco-alternative. On the personal level, then, appropriate actions might be using public transportation rather than driving a fossil-fuel-run car, eating less meat and more local foods, isolating homes and other buildings to save energy, and reducing consumption and energy use in general.

The global scope of the climate crisis, however, also requires a response at a whole different scale than just ‘starting with oneself’ – so a proper response to the climate justice challenge must therefore not ‘end with oneself’ as well, with merely individual actions (Hungnes, 2008). It is so limited what an individual can do that it might end up with a feeling of hopelessness. Again, we want to emphasize the importance of a communal approach. When people come together in communities, at smaller and larger scales, and change behaviors and pressure politicians, a much more viable dynamic is set into motion. And when such communities open their lives to the guidance *and* the transformative power of the Triune God, then change is possible; climate justice is possible; and ultimately, another world is possible.

Summary and concluding remarks

We have in this contribution argued that a contextual and alert reading of Bible texts can seriously challenge Christians in an oil-rich country such as Norway. Following a contextual Bible reading approach, also inspired by patristic explanations of the tropological way of reading, and the methods of integrative theology, the goal was to link context, biblically based theological considerations and possible real-life applications.

Looking at the context, we took as a starting point that humanly induced climate change is taking place, and that fossil fuel emissions are the main contributor to these processes that threaten the future life of the planet. The concept of climate justice, which unites concerns the protection of creation with the fight against poverty and injustice, has emerged within the climate field over the last decade, and many Church leaders and Christian movements are among its advocates. In the case of Norway, climate-conscious policies have been formulated to make Norway ‘green’, yet they have not addressed the fairly obvious paradox between these good intentions and the continued large-scale production and export of fossil fuels. Since Norway is among the leading oil- and gas-producing countries in the world, basing approximately one fourth of its national budget on revenues from the petroleum sector, the link between fossil fuels and climate change is Norway’s own ‘inconvenient truth’ (Bjørkdahl, 2012).

Turning to the Bible texts, Psalm 24: 1-2, Psalm 82: 2-4, and Lk. 12: 13-21, we let them judge our context and ourselves to see the situation more clearly according to faith. The texts clearly state that the earth's is the Lord's, that God fights with the poor for justice, and that those who save up treasures on earth as opposed to in heaven should reexamine her or his priorities. In the context of climate justice and Norway's fossil-fuel based wealth, these texts stimulate reflection concerning all the key elements; creation and threats of its destruction and deterioration, common goods and rethinking property rights and how we use natural resources, profits and greed versus concern for the poor and oppressed.

Looking at possible responses to these challenges from the Bible in context, both political and personal responses were mentioned. We will not here finalize a new petroleum policy for Norway or give any recipe to how the climate justice challenge should be tackled on personal, communal and societal levels. At the same time, we underline that these challenges call for a response – on all of the levels mentioned above.

The climate change and justice issue is an economical and technological challenge – because we need to base our economy, welfare state and energy use on renewable energy rather than fossil fuels. It is a cultural challenge – because we need to change our lifestyle from consumption to sustainability. And as a context for reading these Bible texts, climate justice also adds up to a *spiritual and moral challenge*: To have God as our Lord, not Mammon – and live by the priorities of Christ. Loving God, others and nature, also by saying no to possible profits and rejecting greed as a motivational force; to not gather riches for one self, but to be rich toward God (Lk. 12:21).

This shows that a holistic theological approach to today's global climate and justice challenges can be developed from biblical and patristic sources, and that this can serve as a basis for ethically grounded reflections and discussions on what actions should be undertaken. Those who believe that the Bible and the theology of the Church community have something to say to us today, will therefore do well in exposing themselves to its challenges also concerning climate justice. Climate justice is a spiritual and moral challenge that needs to be contextualized and responded to. And no matter what actions and changes are to be made, they should be actions that properly answer to the question of what our lives and societies would look like if maximizing sustainability, caring and sharing is more important to us than maximizing profits and guarding our wealth.

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- 2 This also seems to be the common dynamics of the process at the Ujaama Centre at the University of Kwazulu-Natal, a centre of which Gerald West is the director. The Ujaama Centre offers both practical and academic resources on contextual Bible reading, resources that go together, as they explain on their webpage (<http://ujamaa.ukzn.ac.za/resources.aspx>): “for reflection on practice are part of a single process”.
- 3 While ‘poor and oppressed non-scholars’ have not been directly consulted in this current project, the authors have both been impacted by meeting such people in the past, e.g., youth and church leaders from African, Pacific and South American countries

already affected by climate change whom we have met at different climate-related conferences and gatherings. We feel that future studies would be strengthened by a more systematic voicing of such concerns 'from beneath', not to 'access their consciousness' (cf. West), but to present theological/academic work that seeks to be equitable (in North-South-terms) also in method.

- 4 The terms 'the South' and 'the North' are here not used in strictly geographical terms, but about the so-called global South – the poorer and less industrialized majority of the countries of the world, as opposed to the global North – the wealthier and industrially/post-industrially developed countries. This is necessarily an oversimplification of the rapidly changing positions of several countries, but can nevertheless be useful for the purposes of this paper.
- 5 This and other quotes from originally Norwegian sources are translated into English by the authors.
- 6 Related terms are eco-justice and environmental justice, which are broader in scope, but share the same essence in combining a concern for environmental protection with a concern for social justice.
- 7 A heated debate here concerns what the role of newly industrialized/rapidly developing countries such as China, India and Brazil should be – since they do not quite 'fit' in the North/South or rich/poor categories, as they have less of historical responsibility, but a significant current share of emissions.
- 8 In Greek: adj. δίκαιος; n. δικαιοσύνη, ἡ. In Hebrew: צדק.
- 9 Lev. 19:36.
- 10 In this current year, 2012, the Church of Norway will cease to be a state church and Christianity will cease to be the official state religion. The economic ties between church and state, however, will continue in a similar way as today (STREK 2012).
- 11 Quote from a speech given at the Academy of Athens on February 3rd, 2010. Published in Greek in the Journal Ekklesia (Church of Greece), April 2010. This translation into English is from Schuff (2011, 98).

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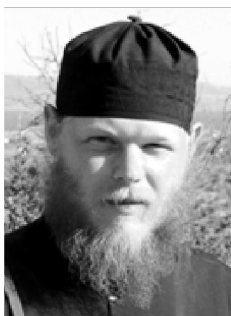
Klimata taisnīgums kā garīgs izaicinājums ar naftu bagātā valstī: Norvēģijas gadījums

Kopsavilkums

Rakstā, kas veidots kā kontekstuāls Bībeles lasījums, ir aplūkots klimata taisnīgums un fosilā kurināmā ražošana, uzdodot jautājumu: kādi ir ekoteoloģijas izaicinājumi attiecībā uz klimata taisnīgumu Norvēģijas kontekstā, valstī, kas ir uzkrājusi savu bagātību lielākoties no naftas ražošanas? Balstoties Dienvidāfrikas Bībeles kontekstuālās lasīšanas metodēs, rakstā tiek pielietots trīs soļu analīzes metode: 1) *'Ieraudzīšana'* ietver rūpīgu sociālo analīzi izvēlētajam kontekstam konkrētā laikā posmā; 2) *'Spriešana'* ietver Bībeles tekstu lasīšanu un konteksta izvērtēšanu Bībeles tekstu perspektīvā; 3) *'Rīcība'* nozīmē centienus identificēt un uzsākt atbilstošu rīcību, lai uzlabotu situāciju, balstoties uz pirmajos divos soļos *ieraudzīto* un *nospriesto*.

Pirmajā solī tiek parādīts klimata izmaiņu un klimata taisnīguma globālais konteksts, apvienojot sevī klimata un taisnīguma (objektivitātes) jautājumus. Tam seko Norvēģijas pieredzes apskats. Šajā valstī, pateicoties naftas ieguvei un pārstrādei, ir uzkrāta ievērojama bagātība, tajā pašā laikā šī valsts ievēro videi draudzīgu politiku. Runājot par Bībeli, uzmanība pievērsta diviem būtiski nozīmīgiem tekstiem no Vecās Derības (Ps. 24: 1-2 un Ps. 82: 2-4), kā arī vienai vietai Jaunajā Derībā (Lk. 12: 13-21). Šie teksti klimata taisnīguma un Norvēģijas naftas bagātības kontekstā mudina uz rīcību – lai gan pagaidām nav skaidrs, uz kādu. Tomēr Norvēģijas kristiešu vidē izskan vairāki priekšlikumi. Skaidrs ir, ka jāpaceļ jautājums par ētisko refleksiju, ir jāparāda prioritātes un līdz ar to atbilstoši ir jāpārskata rīcība, dzīves stils un sabiedrības morālētiskie nosacījumi. Veicot Bībeles kontekstuālās lasīšanas uzdevumus, var teikt, ka ne vienmēr vispirms ir jāatbilst uz jautājumu *kā*, bet gan, *ka* klimata taisnīgums *vispār ir jārisina*, balstoties Bībeles imperatīvos un ētiskajā refleksijā. Klimata taisnīgums ir garīgs un morāls izaicinājums, ko nepieciešams kontekstualizēt un uz ko nepieciešams sniegt atbildi.

Atslēgas vārdi: klimata taisnīgums, kontekstuālā ekoteoloģija, Norvēģija, nafta



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