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Melting Glaciers, Climate-Justice, and the Desperate Need for a New Reformation

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The 23rd Annual Luther Lecture, 2019 Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary

The Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary is a graduate school of California Lutheran University, a seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and a member of the Graduate Theological Union. Every year in March, PLTS hosts the annual Luther Lecture which features a nationally or internationally known scholar who presents on their area of Reformation study, with particular reference to the thought, actions, legacy and continuing relevance of Martin Luther. The 2019 Luther Lecture is presented by Icelandic Lutheran theologian Rev. Dr. Arnfríður Guðmundsdóttir, who is Professor of Systematic Theology in the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Iceland. An ordained pastor within the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland, she is author of *Meeting God on the Cross: Christ, the Cross, and the Feminist Critique* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

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After spending years preparing for our celebrations of the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, and a year-long festivities in 2017, it is time we put our focus on burning issues of today and tomorrow. Furthermore, I think it is time to ask what kind of Reformation we need for the 21st century.

The 500th anniversary of the Lutheran reformation in 2017, was indeed an important opportunity for Lutheran theologians to reflect on the main task of Lutheran theology at the beginning of the 21st century. When

Martin Luther came forward with his criticism of current theological ideas and churchly practices, his theological writings were aimed at his own context, and the questions and concerns of his own time. Luther's theology is a clear example of a contextual theology, where the focus is on interpretations of the good news in one's own context, in other words, to talk about God, so people will be able to hear and perceive how God's word is the word for me (i. *pro me*), in the here and now. In 2017 the Lutheran theologian, Christine Helmer, underlined the urgency of this theological undertaking in an article about current Lutheran theology and the "contemporary constructive task" of Lutheran theologians today. Helmer acknowledged the important contributions of Lutheran theology to historical theological studies, but emphasized the need for a constructive theology, which strives to respond to the situations of people living in the 21st century. Helmer wrote:

While theological writing always is informed in some way by the past, theologians also are responsible for paying attention to the present. There are times when looking to the past is not enough, and we are in such a time now. The present commands attention; theologians must respond. In such times, not to respond would betray theology's responsibility to witness to divine truth in the world. It would falsify theological commitments to determining what it means to be truly human in view of the divine work of creating and redeeming humans in this world. In these situations, theologians must focus their scholarly energies on the present. They must discern the signs of the times and God's presence in those times, and be courageous in articulating responses of responsible witness to truth.⁴

I think Helmer is absolutely right about the importance of theology's contemporary constructive task. It is indeed vital for theological discourse today to "pay attention" to the present, including the pending danger of global warming for the future of our planet, which is without doubt

⁴ Christine Helmer, "The Contemporary Constructive Task," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*, 56, no. 3 (Fall 2017): 218-222, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/dial.12331>.

something that should be of great concern to all of us. Belonging to the one “body of God” (to borrow Sallie McFague’s important metaphor), we are called to take into consideration the well-being of the whole creation, particularly those who are suffering the consequences of climate change most seriously, namely the poor, the majority of whom are women.⁵

Not too long ago, very few people around the globe knew about climate change, and the possible consequences those changes would have for life on this planet in the future. It took time, and a lot of effort to raise people’s awareness of what was going on, and for a long time people, including many of us here today, did not pay too much attention. We did not pay too much attention, maybe because we did not believe it would make much difference to us, for our livelihood, and the future of our children and our children’s children. It took a long time, not only for people in general, but also for political authorities, and some of them tried to deny the fact that something unusual was going on, something that was needed to be taken into account, when decisions about the future were made. The road to Paris was a long one, from Rio de Janero, to Kyoto, and on to Copenhagen, and then finally to Paris in 2015. It was too long, and too many opportunities were being lost along the way, opportunities to make important decisions, that would secure the future of our planet, and the future of generations to come.

I am convinced that Christian theology can become an important resource, and a significant voice amongst many different voices addressing the consequences vulnerable groups, particularly women and children, are suffering because of the changes in our climate, both globally and locally. Pope Francis makes an important argument in his encyclical, *Laudato Si*, when he states that religious people need to become active in the fight against climate change, and scientists and politicians should not be left alone to do the job. Furthermore, the pope calls for an “ecological conversion”, which he claims includes a recognition of the earth as God’s gift, and the fact that we, who live on this earth, are all dependent on each

⁵ Mayesha Alam, et al., *Women and Climate Change. Impact and Agency in Human Rights, Security, and Economic Development* (Washington DC: Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2015), 7, <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/sites/giwps/files/Women%20and%20Climate%20Change.pdf>.

other. Therefore, we should not ignore our common responsibility for our “common home” and the entire creation, our family, human as well as non-human.⁶ The call to Christians, as well as other religious communities, to step up and call for a change, was made clear by the representatives of various religious communities at the meeting in Paris in December 2015. There is a strong demand for religious communities to pay special attention to those who are most vulnerable when it comes to changes in the climate, to lift up their voices, in order to empower them so they can become agents in their own lives, and not just victims of unjust situations. What is called for is a *planetary solidarity*, to stand with those who suffer the most from a changing climate, while we recognize our common task to fight for *climate justice*. After all, it is a matter of justice, and needs to be treated as such.

In my lecture I choose to start with my own context, which is Iceland, a small island close to Greenland and the Arctic Circle, and the striking consequences of climate change we are faced with due to the melting of our glaciers. There has been a growing awareness of the impending danger related to drastic changes in the climate in the Arctic, where the annual Arctic Circle Assembly, held in Reykjavik, the capital of Iceland, since 2013, has played a key role. The Arctic Circle Assembly is attended by more than 2000 participants from all over the world; politicians, scientists, entrepreneurs, business leaders, indigenous representatives, environmentalists, students, activists and others from the growing international community of partners and participants interested in the future of the Arctic. The founder and chair of the assembly is the former president of Iceland, Mr. Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson.⁷

Given the importance of the global perspective, and the close relationship between the global and the local, I will in the last part of my lecture talk about how climate change is changing the lives of women and why we need to know about it. The importance of consciousness raising, in regard to climate change, is in many ways similar to what it took to make people aware of the widespread, I want to say epidemic, problem of

⁶ Pope Francis, *The Encyclical Letter. Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home* (New York: Paulist Press, 2015), 85.

⁷ For more information about the Arctic Circle Assembly, see: <http://www.arcticcircle.org>.

domestic, and sexual violence, that women, regardless of class, race, ethnicity, nationality, education etc. are experiencing on a daily basis all over the world. For the past decades feminist critique has been instrumental in making visible women's experience of violence and lack of power in a world that has been, and still is, in so many ways, dominated by men. It has taken a long time, and a lot of effort, to make people aware of the problem, and to do something about it, which does not mean that it doesn't exist anymore. The #metoo movement has, been an important part of that consciousness raising, and there is still a way to go.⁸

There are strong signs that what is urgently needed right now, is awareness raising regarding women and how they are affected by global warming, particularly women in the global south and the arctic regions. Studies show that women are being affected differently from men by a changing climate. At the same time studies of how women's lives are changing have been scarce, while important contributions to the discourse about climate change have been misleading because of an explicit, or more intrinsic, gender bias or gender blindness (f.ex Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si'*). Thus, the strong need to raise the awareness of what is really going on in places where climate change is already making serious impact on women's lives; to make people aware of women's suffering because of a global warming which f.ex. is caused by a lack of water, decreasing harvest, and consequently increasing work load for women who are often left alone to provide for their families, while their husbands go away to look for jobs elsewhere. Before anything can be done in order to improve the lives of those women, it is crucial to raise the common awareness of the dire situation of a growing number of women.

School Strike for the Climate

Before I continue, I would like to introduce you to an outstanding young woman, only 16 years of age, who has already, despite her young age, made a great impact because of her remarkable contribution to the

⁸ For a Lutheran theological response to this issue see f.ex: Arnfríður Guðmundsdóttir, "Let's Be Loud! God in the Context of Sexual Violence and Abuse of Power," *The Alternative Luther. Lutheran Theology from the Subaltern*, ed. by Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen (New York: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2019).

ongoing awareness raising of the importance of greater action because of global warming, world wide.⁹ Greta Thunberg, who lives Stockholm, the capital of Sweden, decided in August 2018 not to go to school, and instead spend the day protesting in front of the Parliamentary house in Stockholm, up to the parliamentary election in Sweden on September 9th 2018. She was calling the Swedish government to live up to its promise, and reduce carbon emission in accordance with the Paris Agreement. After the election she continued to strike, only on Fridays, gaining worldwide attention, and inspiring school students across the globe to take part in student strikes. Thunberg credits the teen activists at Parkland school in Florida, who organized the *March for our lives*, as the inspiration to begin her school climate strike.¹⁰

In December 2018, Greta Thunberg was invited to participate in the COP 24 Climate Change conference in Katowice, Poland, where she made a remarkable address in private session to UN Secretary General Guterres and UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) Executive Secretary Espinose.¹¹ She used this opportunity to challenge her own nation, and other affluent nations, to live up to the Paris Agreement, and do what they had promised to do in order to cut the carbon emission. She also blamed the media and politicians for not doing their job, and for not talking about climate change and the danger it is causing to the planet. But while world leaders were not doing what they should be doing in order to save the future, Greta Thunberg reminded them that the people, and the youth around the world, were going to take matters into their own

⁹ In March 2019, Greta Thunberg was still widely unknown, internationally. Her reputation spread drastically later in the Spring and summer of 2019. Since then she has encouraged millions of youngsters to take to the streets and do what she has been doing since the Fall of 2018, namely school strike for the climate.

¹⁰ Malena Ernman, Greta Thunberg, Beata Ernman, and Svante Thunberg, *Our House is on Fire: Scenes of a Family and a Planet in Crisis* (New York: Penguin Books, 2020); Greta Thunberg, *No One Is Too Small to Make a Difference* (New York: Penguin Books, 2019).

¹¹ Facing Future, "Greta Thunberg – Our Political Leaders have Failed Us," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUW1OwjWRMw>.

hands, and make the changes that the world leaders should have made long ago.

Iceland: Land of Ice and Fire

And now to my own context, my native country, Iceland, which is often called *the land of ice and fire*, due to its many active volcanoes and large and small glaciers. Within the context of this lecture it is important to know that our legal system, as well as our culture at large, is to a great extent based on a Christian heritage, while the majority of people in Iceland have belonged to the Christian church for the past thousand years. Today, *the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland* has the status of a *National Church*, with constitutional protection. It is fair to say that Christianity, more particularly a Lutheran version of Christianity, provides a foundation for basic values and legal codes, including the constitution. To speak theologically about major societal issues is something that has been practiced in our society for centuries. This does not mean that secularization has not shaped our society in recent decades, which it certainly has. It only means that theological discourse continues to be a part of the public discussion, even if secularization and multiculturalism is gradually changing the way we think and talk.¹²

Iceland is an island just south of the Arctic Circle. In the Arctic, climate change is faster and therefore more severe than in most places, as it is warming at a rate of almost twice the global average. It is due to this increase in temperature that glaciers are melting at an exponential speed. When a glacier melts fully, it exposes the earth below. Glaciers absorb approximately 20% heat from the sun, reflecting back 80%. When the earth gets exposed, this percentage gets reversed. This in turn causes a further increase in temperature. This is a vicious trap which has already begun and it will be almost impossible for us to stop it completely. The melting of the ice in the far North does not only affect the Arctic countries, but has real

¹² For more on this subject see Arnfríður Guðmundsdóttir, "The Fire Alarm is Off: A Feminist Theological Reflection on Sin, Climate Change, Energy, and the Protection of Wilderness in Iceland," in *Planetary Solidarity: Global Women's Voices on Christian Doctrine and Climate Justice*, ed. Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Hilda P. Koster (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 135-154.

and dangerous consequences for the rest of the world as well. This is a serious reminder to all of us that the effects of climate change in one particular part of the world is never an isolated event. Indeed, more than anything else, climate change helps us understand how everything on earth is interconnected.¹³

Melting Glaciers

When reflecting on the current ecological situation, Iceland proves to be a meaningful case in point, due to the very visible impact of climate change, most notably, the melting of its glaciers. Iceland, with its 40,000 square miles, is the second largest island in Europe, after Great Britain. It is the least populated country in Europe, with only 340,000 inhabitants, and close to 80 percent of the island is uninhabited. Eleven percent of the island is covered by glaciers, one of them being Vatnajökull, the largest glacier in Europe. The weather is very mild due to the warm Gulf Stream from the South, while the East Greenland polar current affects the weather in the North and East. However, this may change as scientists predict that the melting of the ice fields of Greenland could hinder the Gulf Stream or stop it altogether and hence lead to a drastic cooling of the North Atlantic, which would have unforeseeable consequences for countries on the both sides of the Atlantic.¹⁴

Iceland is amongst the youngest landmasses on the earth, with some of the world's most active volcanoes. There are between thirty and forty active volcanoes, which means that volcanic eruptions and earthquakes are fairly common. While the weight of the glaciers pushing down on Iceland has lessened as those glaciers melt, rising land could cause increased volcanic activity and earthquakes. Volcano activity is a steady reminder of how dependent we really are on nature and its behavior. An example from

¹³ In Sallie McFague's words: "everything is related to everything else", in *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), 50. See also, Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 85.

¹⁴ Stefan Rahmstorf et al., "Exceptional twentieth-century slowdown in Atlantic Ocean overturning circulation," *Nature Climate Change* 5 (2015), 475–480. See also: Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, "Atlantic Ocean overturning found to slow down already today," <https://www.pik-potsdam.de/news/press-releases/atlantic-ocean-overturning-found-to-slow-down-already-today>.

our past is when up to one fourth of the population emigrated, due to harsh weather and natural disasters, at the end of the nineteenth century. At the same time, Iceland has been blessed by abundant resources, not the least ample wellsprings of clean water, rich reserve of boiling water underground, and last but not least bountiful fishing grounds. Iceland's natural riches, while plentiful, are by no means unlimited. We also need to keep in mind that nature is not only powerful, and potentially destructive, but also extremely vulnerable, when it comes to human invasion. For that reason, it is important that we remember *who* we are, but also *where* we are, and *what* is expected of us. According to our Christian heritage, we belong to God and are part of God's creation, called to be care-takers of everything God has created, while history tells us that it is easy to forget.

For decades, Iceland has been at the forefront when it comes to the use of renewable energy worldwide. But this is only a part of the picture. While Iceland uses geothermal water to heat about 90 percent of homes and thus produces almost all its electricity from emission free, sustainable natural resources, energy is also being used for other not so ecologically friendly reasons. The big hydropower plants that have been built inland in order to meet the demand for more energy, especially from multinational corporations, threaten Iceland's wilderness in the uninhabited highlands in the center of the island, while the multinational corporations contribute significantly to greenhouse gas emissions.

Iceland: A 'Class-Room' Example of the Effects of Climate Change

In his speech at the COP21 Summit in Paris, in November 2015, the Icelandic Prime Minister made the following remarks regarding the very visible effects of global warming in Iceland:

Climate change is already visible in Iceland. Our glaciers are retreating. We have decided to improve the monitoring of our glaciers and to make the results—and the glaciers themselves—more accessible for visitors and the public. Iceland will become in a way a real-life classroom on the effects of climate change. With no action on emissions, the ice in Iceland could largely disappear in 100 years. Indeed, ice on land and sea is retreating in the Arctic region as a

whole. Rising temperatures and acidification affect the oceans. The marine ecosystem is at risk and the only way to avert this is by cutting carbon dioxide emissions.¹⁵

Icelanders, including its politicians, have slowly been facing the unmistakable signs of climate change. The former minister for the environment, and a member of the Parliament as well as the current government, believes the Paris climate agreement has put climate issues back on the radar screen of Icelanders. She recalls how nobody mentioned concerns related to climate change before the 2013 parliamentary elections.¹⁶ Now people are waking up to the facts, and the possible consequences in the near and far future. An alarming case is the warming of the ocean around Iceland, and its increasing acidity, which is occurring faster and “more dramatic than elsewhere,” according to Jón Ólafsson, oceanographer and professor emeritus at the University of Iceland. Ólafsson explains that the ocean is picking up a lot of carbon dioxide when it is cold, and this increases its acidity, which will result in the extinction of many species, unless carbon emissions are reduced.¹⁷ For a long-time fishing nation like Iceland, this is no light matter, given the economy’s high dependence on fisheries and exports of seafood.

It is the nature of glaciers to increase, or decrease, according to the temperature, precipitation, and other alternating factors of the climate. Glaciers, covering 11 percent of Iceland, store a total of 3600 km³ of ice and are retreating and thinning rapidly at present, as the decrease amounts to approximately 0,3-0,5 percent every year.¹⁸ Meteorologists are predicting that the down wasting of the glaciers will intensify during the coming decades, “leading to their almost complete disappearance in the next 150–

¹⁵ Government of Iceland: Prime Minister’s Office, “COP21 Summit Paris 30 November 2015,” <https://eng.forsaetisraduneyti.is/minister/sdg-speeches/cop21>.

¹⁶ Vala Hafstað, “Agreement Breaks Silence on Climate,” *Iceland Review On Line* (December 15, 2015), <http://icelandreview.com/news/2015/12/15/agreement-breaks-silence-climate>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Icelandic Met Office, “Measuring glaciers,” <http://en.vedur.is/hydrology/glaciers/>.

200 years.”¹⁹ While it is often hard to identify how changes in the climate are changing our environment, in Iceland the receding of glaciers is its most visible indication. Nowhere in Europe, and in very few places worldwide, are glaciers as approachable as in Iceland. This is particularly true for Vatnajökull glacier, the largest one in Europe, which is included in the Vatnajökull National Park, a protected wilderness area surrounding the glacier. Hence the idea that the country would be presented as “a real-life classroom”, where people can actually witness the changes caused by climate change, for example, by watching the results from the monitoring system for Icelandic glaciers.²⁰

As the weight of glaciers decreases, the land rises, and the uplift could lead to increasing volcanic activity.²¹ Since 2010, there have been three major eruptions, with serious consequences, not only in the neighborhood, but also cross the Atlantic, by disrupting flight across Europe. While it is known that the melting of the glaciers is having multiple effects on the environment, “the entire chain reaction of melting ice caps, rising earth surface and volcanic activity is still not entirely understood.”²² Scientists are for example paying a close attention to how the rising of land impacts the South-East of Iceland, for example Höfn in Hornafjörður, a small town just South of Vatnajökull glacier. Kristín Hermannsdóttir, meteorologist and head of the Nature Research Center, explains the manifold consequences for the village:

The flow of the glacial rivers changes. The mouth of the river, where ships sail into Hornafjörður, is changing from what it was a few decades ago. Plumbing changes somewhat, sewage and water pipes, as the land rises.”²³

¹⁹ Tómas Jóhannesson et al., “Response of glaciers in Iceland to climate changes,” *Icelandic Meteorological Office*, http://www.vedur.is/media/vedurstofan/utgafa/hlidarefni/Tomas_COP-15.pdf.

²⁰ Ólafur Ingólfsson, “Icelandic glaciers,” Professor of glacial and Quaternary Geology, University of Iceland, https://notendur.hi.is/oi/icelandic_glaciers.htm

²¹ Mari N. Jensen, “Iceland Rises as Its Glaciers Melt from Climate Change,” *UA News*, University of Arizona, <https://uanews.arizona.edu/story/iceland-rises-as-its-glaciers-melt-from-climate-change>

²² Suzanne Goldenberg, “Climate Change is Lifting Iceland—And it Could Mean More Volcanic Eruptions,” *The Guardian*, January 30, 2015, <http://tinyurl.com/n957j3d>.

²³ Vala Hafstað, “Global Warming Causes Rising Concern in Höfn,” *Iceland Review*, 20

Attempting to resist the impending ramification, the district has signed an agreement with the Icelandic Environment Association, “aiming at reducing greenhouse gas emission in the community by three percent a year by using environmentally friendlier cars, by sorting garbage, including organic waste, and by reducing food waste.” Those actions, taken by the people of Höfn in order to counteract the consequences of climate change, are in line with the projects our government has introduced, aiming at “speeding up the decarbonisation of transport, fisheries and agriculture.”²⁴ However, at the same time, the very same government is planning to build more power plants to provide energy for more multinational corporations, and has within the last six years handed out licenses for companies to drill for oil in Drekasvæði, a supposedly oil-rich area north-east of Iceland. Fortunately, all three companies have handed in their licenses. It is hard to imagine how new aluminum smelters, silicon metal plants, and oil-drilling can possibly comply with strategies to reduce carbon emissions, up to 40 percent by 2030, which is the reduction target that the government has committed to take part in together with the European Union and Norway.²⁵

The Situation of Women

According to the *Global Gender Gap Index 2016* Iceland ranks number one in terms of gender equality (the tenth year in a row). Given this reputation, Iceland’s representatives are expected to use every opportunity to address environmental issues from a gender perspective. Not everybody does, but some do. One example is Svandís Svavarsdóttir, who served as a minister for the Environment and Natural Resources, when she attended the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (June 2012). In her speech, Svavarsdóttir passionately reminded her audience that “there is no sustainable development without gender equality and women’s empowerment.” She also criticized “the lack of

March 14, 2016, <http://tinyurl.com/l5le3ey>.

²⁴ Government of Iceland: Prime Minister’s Office, “COP21 Summit Paris 30 November 2015.”

²⁵ “Iceland Joins 40% Emission Target,” *Iceland Monitor*, modified April 14, 2016, <http://tinyurl.com/kb5bv6r>.

language on gender and climate,” arguing that “women and girls are the most effected, and that their access to decision making, not least on financial matters, has to be ensured.”²⁶

On the global scale, there are various reasons why climate change is believed to be harder on women than men. It is important to remember that this does not mean that all women are the same, or their living conditions similar. As is the case with other adversities, climate change is hitting poor women in vulnerable situations the hardest. First of all, the following things are generally holding women back, and are made worse with climate change:

- Limited education
- Poverty
- Discrimination
- Violence²⁷

And, while climate change opens doors to the following, all of these factors fuel discrimination and sexual violence:

- Scarcity of resources
- Loss of income
- Dislocation
- Unrest
- Lack of safety²⁸

When it comes to means to counteract global warming, it is interesting to note the list of solutions published in 2017, where the education of girls, and family planning are number six and seven on the list,

²⁶ Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources, “Statement at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, 22 June 2012, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil,” (June 22, 2012), <http://tinyurl.com/kysg9pc>.

²⁷ See for example the following resources provided by UN Women: “Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2019,” <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2019/progress-on-the-sdgs-the-gender-snapshot-2019-two-page-spreads-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5814> and “The Facts about Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=RDCMUCXDenzwzeXM1TNIuWj8C4A&v=K-oc4GOoW0I&feature=emb_rel_end.

²⁸ See for example Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Hilda P. Koster, eds., *Planetary Solidarity: Global Women's Voices on Christian Doctrine and Climate Justice* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), and Mary Robinson, *Climate Justice: Hope, Resilience and the Fight for a Sustainable Future* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018).

after refrigerant management, wind turbines, reduced food waste, plant rich diet, and tropical forests, and before solar farms.²⁹ However accurate this list is, it does challenge the assumption that the most important solutions are technically complicated, highly scientific, and financially demanding. This is the reason why it is so crucial to pay attention to the gender aspect, and what can be done in order to improve the situation of women who have been, and still are hardly hit by the results of climate change.³⁰

The Gendered Aspect of *Laudato Si'*

In terms of significant religious responses to the threat of global warming, Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'* from 2015, is without doubt one of the most important ones. While Pope Francis' voice has really made a great impact, not only within the Roman Catholic Church, but in other religious as well as secular contexts, the criticism against its gender bias, or gender blindness, has proved to be significant. Ivone Gebara, is a Roman Catholic theologian from Brazil, who has been an important voice within eco-theological discourse for decades, not only in South America, but internationally as well. In her chapter in the collection of articles, titled *Planetary Solidarity. Global Women's Voices on Christian Doctrine and Climate Justice*, Gebare writes on "Women's Suffering, Climate Justice, God, and Pope Francis's Theology". While Gebare recognizes the value of Pope Francis's positive attempt to reflect on the great challenges of today's world and especially the issue of global warming and its related problems, she criticizes the lack of contextualization within the Vatican policy, and its sexism.³¹ Gebare, for example, criticizes the silencing of women, and the fact that Pope Francis doesn't allow women to speak for themselves. Gebare writes:

²⁹ Paul Hawken, ed., *Drawdown: The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming* (New York: Penguin Books, 2017), 221.

³⁰ For more information see for example this video, made by the Natural Resources Defense Council, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=paepDI4znA> and also "Weathering Change – Stories About Climate and Family from Around the World," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hPv3pLBZvuE>.

³¹ Kim and Koster, *Planetary Solidarity*, 75.

In *Laudato Si'*, women do not speak in their own voice about their life situations, their suffering, and their demands. The pope speaks for them, following a romantic tradition that praises women by elevating them to level of unreal qualities and, thus, preventing any further reflection...³²

Furthermore, Gebare, reprimands the Pope, for ignoring the feminist critique, that has been lunched against “male hegemony and idealized models of femininity.” And she continues:

There is no recognition of and willingness to pay attention and listen to real women regarding their lives and what they have to say. There is no distinction between powers or representations; there is no effective change in theologies or symbolisms.³³

Instead of the gender biased approached in Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'*, Ivone Gebare wants to address the climate injustice we are witnessing from the perspective of suffering women, which means “to highlight a different aspect of the specificity of women’s suffering.” And Gebare continues:

It demonstrates how certain human groups, in particular women, live in precarious political and other vulnerable situations in different parts of the world. This politics of precariousness and vulnerability is the public reflection of the lesser value of one group vis-a-vis another. In this sense, the social value of female bodies, the care for their needs, and the public expression of the power is less than that of male bodies...³⁴

Climate Justice

³² Ibid., 76.

³³ Ibid., 76.

³⁴ Ibid., 69.

Because climate change is a justice issue, what we hear in the discourse today is a growing emphasis on *climate justice*. In their introduction to *Planetary Solidarity. Global Women's Voices on Christian Doctrine and Climate Justice*, the editors, Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Hilda P. Koster give the following definition of climate justice:

...Climate justice is the understanding that global warming is not just an environmental matter but also a moral, political, sociological, and religious concern. Climate Justice is often seen as a human rights issue. It stems from the observation that climate change will have the most adverse effects on the livelihood and health of people with the least political and economic power...³⁵

An emphasis on climate justice is also present in Pope Francis' encyclical, where he writes:

...a true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*...³⁶

A loud cry for climate justice is for example put forward in a recent book, called *Climate Justice. Hope, Resilience and the Fight for a Sustainable Future*, by Mary Robinson, former president of Ireland, and UN Special Envoy on Climate Change. What is significant about this book is that it gives voice to the voiceless, mostly women, who tackle climate change in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. It tells stories of farmers and activists, who are examples of positive change that Robinson thinks can help turn things around. Robinson talks about the need for awareness-raising, where she writes:

Raising awareness about climate justice requires us to marry the standards of human rights with issues of sustainable development and responsibility for climate change. We need

³⁵ Ibid., 2.

³⁶ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 32.

to create a “people first” platform for those on the margins suffering the worst effects of climate change, and to amplify their voices to ensure them a seat at the table in any future climate change negotiations.³⁷

She quotes Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s words, in an interview regarding the publishing of her book, where she states that she has

learned from Archbishop Desmond Tutu to be a ‘prisoner of hope’, a great expression that he uses. That means the glass may not be half full, but there’s something in the glass that you work on. Hope brings energy.³⁸

What women like Ivan Gebara and Mary Robinson are stressing in their powerful mission against hopelessness, and cynicism, is the importance of listening to women, and to have their voices being heard where decisions about the future are made. They are helping us see how climate change is making life harder for women across the world. But they want us, not only to recognize women’s hardship, not only to see women as victims of injustice, but as agents of change, to listen to their voices, and pay attention to their “hope, resilience and the fight for a sustainable future”. If we keep ignoring the changes in the climate, then we are making it harder for women who are suffering because of global warming across the world. That is why we need the consciousness raising, but we also need to experience the “ecological conversion”, Pope Francis is calling for in his encyclical. What Pope Francis is calling for is a transformation, a radical change in the way we think and act. But it also has to be a call to hear the lost voices. The driving force behind such a change is hope. In the context of our Christian faith, it means hope in justice; that climate justice will in the end prevail.

In her book, Mary Robinson admits that she is a relative latecomer to the issue climate change, and what really helped her realize that climate

³⁷ Robinson, *Climate Justice*, 9.

³⁸ Rory Carroll, “Mary Robinson on Climate Change: ‘Feeling “This is too big for me” is no use to anybody,’ *The Guardian*, Oct. 12, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2018/oct/12/mary-robinson-climate-change-former-president-ireland-ipcc-report>.

change was not “a scientific abstraction but a man-made phenomenon that impacted people—primarily the most vulnerable—all over the world”, was the birth of her first grandchild.³⁹ What grandmother Robinson, the sixteen years old Greta Thunberg, Pope Francis, together with many, many more, are calling for is nothing less than a *reformation* – a new mind-set, new values, new criteria, a new way of being in the world. What we need to do is to become aware of and admit that things are not as they should be. According to our Christian faith, it means that God calls us to repent, to turn around, and to become agents of change, agents of a new beginning. Global warming, melting glaciers, and rising sea-level, are clear signs of where we are heading if we continue to ignore what is happening to our planet, to God’s good creation. It is our responsibility to do whatever we can to make it possible for our children and grandchildren to have a future on this earth. Mary Robinson reminds us that we are all in this together. And our Christian faith helps us understand that this is what the Bible calls good stewardship – when we stop being totally bent in on ourselves and we start owning up to the responsibility to be God’s partners; when we start living our lives on behalf, and not against, God’s good creation.

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³⁹ Robinson, *Climate Justice*, 3.

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