

## **Waste, Race, and a Matthew 25 Environment**

### **Class 1: The Problem of Waste: Why Recycling is Not the Answer**

The first class will examine the interconnectivity between material and social ordering. We will begin by exploring the life and work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and considering its relevance to discussions of waste management practices. Next, we will highlight recent work by historian Anne Berg that assesses the interconnectivity between the Nazi regime's material and social ordering. In short, we will analyze the designations of "filth" and "purity" as extended to human lives within the Third Reich. Finally, we will evaluate the similarities and differences between the Nazi regime's waste management practices and our present context in order to address some of the problems associated with the contemporary waste crisis.

### **Class 2: The Perception of Waste**

We are encouraged to forget about our waste while producing ever greater quantities of it. This class will analyze the environmental images that orient contemporary perceptions of waste, with special attention to the recycling logo's false narration of a closed loop. Within the dominant waste imaginary, "solutions" to the problem of waste accumulation are organized around efficiency, technological innovation, and individual responsibility, thereby neglecting both the disordered social relations and manufacturing industries that comprise the roots of the waste crisis. In this context we will contemplate what orients our valuation of the stuff we throw away and consider how we, as a church, can live more faithfully in creation by offering the gifts of creation back to God.

### **Class 3: Waste and Race: Addressing Environmental Racism**

Environmental messaging often universalizes harm, making it appear as though all populations bear the same level of risk. This fails to properly address the disproportionate impact of waste and pollution on minority communities that do not have a powerful enough political voice to enact change. For instance, in our local environment much of our trash is shipped to an incineration facility in Chester, worsening "an already alarming health situation...Nearly four in 10 children in the city have asthma, while the rate of ovarian cancer is 64% higher than the rest of Pennsylvania and lung cancer rates are 24% higher."<sup>1</sup> This leads us to consider again the words of Jesus in Matthew 25 in order to determine how we might respond to environmental racism and those disproportionately bearing the burden of our disposable lifestyles.

### **Class 4: Summary and Discussion**

In this class we will summarize the discussions from the previous classes and give participants a chance to ask questions, offer comments, and share any future action steps that will direct our shared life together, especially as this relates to our new status as a Matthew 25 church.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/feb/21/philadelphia-covanta-incinerator-recyclables-china-ban-imports>