Reforestation through the planting of crosses

An exploration of the kenotic nature of Jesus' redemptive work as a paradigm for addressing climate change

> The present creation, as God's wounded mask, will not be healed by waving some grand cosmic wand that removes all ills and turns people into friends of the earth. Only by taking up the cross will the suffering turn to redemption, and… the mask [be] restored (Habel 1998, 122).

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Introduction

Much effort has been put into recovering – or uncovering – a theology of creation in recent times. Approaches have drawn from concepts of Sabbath, stewardship and dominion (e.g. Bedford-Strohm 2007; Robinson 2017), the incarnation (e.g. Kirkpatrick 2009), eschatology, the sacredness of creation (Fox 2015) among others (see Gorospe 2013). These have been helpful on many fronts, but theologians need to perhaps move beyond theologies of creation care:

> The most profound challenge now for theologians in thinking about the impact of climate change is not to find a more faithful theology of creation, as much work in this area has been done, but to understand why it is so hard for us to hear prophetic voices and to act in response to them (Durber 2014, 26).

Indeed, there has been much discussion around the difficulty of motivating those who are most responsible for climate change to act, particularly from the behavioural sciences. Various approaches have been considered, including the role of legislation, ethics, and market forces (see Cuomo 2011, 697ff; O'Hara & Abelsohn 2011; Cripps 2013; Peeters et al. 2015; Adger et al. 2006).

However, I would argue that Durber's comment remains unanswered, and that a key contributing factor – at least in Christian circles - has been the sanitising and spiritualising of the concept of sacrifice. In surveying the various secular discussions and approaches mentioned above, there appears to be little mention of the need for a deep reduction in the patterns of consumption and lifestyle for people in industrialised countries like Australia (e.g. Commonwealth of Australia 2017; Yenken & Wilkinson 2000, 326ff). This is not only a secular oversight; much talk about eco-theology speaks of restoration, redemption, healing, rescuing, liberating, saving and loving the earth without ever detailing the *sacrifice* required to bring about the renewal the earth needs (e.g. Edwards 2006; Clifford 2007; Fox 2015; Faricy 2005; Toly & Block 2010).

Indeed, eco-theologies tend to be light on soteriological concepts (Ayre 2010:233). But if the redemption of 'all things' mentioned in Colossians 1 includes the earth and *required* the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus, then the restoration of our earth must be fundamentally Christological and involve participating in the suffering of Christ (Habel 1998:120ff).

I will begin by highlighting the suffering that climate change causes and the sacrifice that it needs before arguing that a biblical response to the fundamental issues of climate change must be grounded in *kenosis*[1] patterned after Jesus. I will demonstrate that evangelicals often and ironically *kenoothee* the power of the cross through metaphoric and spiritualised interpretations, holding us

[1] 'but emptied (*ekenoosen*) himself… to the point of death' (Phil. 2:7-8f)

back from leading the way on climate change mitigation. I will then explore how the self-emptying way of Jesus might shape a Christian response to climate change in the global south and north.

Climate Change and suffering

The suffering it causes

The impact of climate change is already being experienced around the globe, and its consequences are largely destructive.[2] Changing weather patterns that are less predictable and more extreme are having a significant impact on agriculture, particularly among small-scale and subsistence farming communities that have few buffers and helpful information like weather predictions and trends.

I recently returned from visiting communities in rural Indonesia. This past season, the rains came late and so their first crops never made it out of the ground. When the rain did come, they borrowed money and planted again, but the rain was intermittent with heavier than usual falls, stunting their crops.[3] They are now facing a dry season with a debt to repay and a significantly reduced harvest. With little government support, it is highly likely these communities will experience hunger and food shortages this coming dry season.

Rural Indonesian farmers are not alone in their climate change suffering. Bangaleshi communities are experiencing flash flooding and rising sea levels; much of East Africa is experiencing or facing famine; Pakistanis are experiencing deadly heat waves upwards of 45 degrees Celsius. Increasingly floods, typhoons and droughts around the world are setting new records for frequency and severity. The climate change suffering of the poor will likely continue to worsen without serious and immediate action by those who are both responsible for causing climate change, and able to halt it.

The sacrifice it needs

Despite the above, some may be optimistic about the future of climate change given that Australia's national green house gas (GHG) emissions are dropping (Commonwealth of Australia 2016, 5) and Australian attitudes towards addressing climate change are improving (The Climate Institute 2016).

However, these indicators can be deceptive in light of other evidence. For example, Australian per capita rates of obesity (ABS 2015, 25f), meat consumption (ABARES 2014), personal car travel

[2] Changing weather patterns have also seen improved crops for some areas, but the balance is most certainly in the negative.

[3] This is in a setting where they used to boast that they knew not just the month and the day that the rains would come, but the very hour; such was the historical predictability of the rainy season.

(Renner 2913, 29), waste production[4] (Randell, Pickin & Grant 2014, xi), and the ratio of household debt to income (RBA 2017, 6) all continue to steadily rise. These statistics suggest that while some of the environmental impact of our consumption is dropping, our levels of consumption are *increasing*. This is the ugly offspring of the deeply imbedded neo-liberal economic worldview that continues to heavily influence our collective approach to life (see Taylor 2014), reflected in the freshly printed Australian Federal budget. It aims to elicit 'stronger growth', steady employment, lower living costs and greater national security without ever mentioning climate change mitigation, the increasing disparity between rich and poor, environmental degradation or the need for a new economic and consumptive paradigm that addresses these interwoven issues (see Commonwealth of Australia 2017a).

Despite climate change having "…emerged from powerful and deeply entrenched economic and social norms and practices…" (Cuomo 2011, 692) the primary response in Australia to the issue of climate change has been delivered through the language of *protecting* our economy and lifestyle (Taylor 2014, 87f). Neo-liberal economics continue to be spoken about as though they are value-free and the only way forward for addressing climate change (Goudzwaard et al. 2007, 31f, 85f; Purdy 2012, 79; Taylor 2014, 89), an approach that can only be "risky at best, [and] seriously misguided at worst" (Purdey 2012, 77).

Neo-liberal economics will fail to address climate change. Market forces are causing a slow shift towards low-carbon energy sources, but they will fail to strike the heart of the matter (indeed, the only way they could strike the heart of the matter is through an act of suicide).[5] We have allowed technology and neo-liberal economics to become untouchable dictator gods, but they are lousy saviours (see Postman 1993; Goudzwaard et al. 2007, 17, 23; Boesak 2005, 74, 80).[6] Climate change doesn't need greater technological complexity; we need more *simplicity* and greater *contentedness with less*. Climate change doesn't need more global, open markets; quite the opposite - we need greater *personal restraint* (Chapple 2008, 230f; Derber 2010, 135f; see also see Princen 1997).

How is it that we continue to operate on the same paradigm that gave us climate change, and believe that somehow neo-liberal economics will solve the issue it created and perpetuates? How

[4] While Australia's Municipal Solid Waste disposal has dropped by 15% between 2006/2007 and 2010/2011, recycling and resource recovery rates went up by 20% and 16% respectively (Randell, Pickin & Grant 2014, xi).

[5] Greed is a fundamental contributor to climate change; it is also the very thing on which neo-liberal economics relies for perpetual growth.

[6] I am not saying they need to be done away with *per se*; they can make very good servants (see Goudzwaard et al. 2007, 170). I am suggesting is that we have allowed the servant to not just rule the house, but become untouchable, all-powerful gods.

do we miss the profound stupidity of this approach? Though speaking more broadly than the specific issue of climate change, Brueggemann's question is thoroughly pertinent:

> We need to ask if our consciousness and imagination have been so assaulted and co-opted by the royal consciousness that we have been robbed of the courage or power to think an alternative thought… our culture is competent to implement almost anything and to imagine almost nothing (2001, 39f).

Despite our being 'co-opted by the royal consciousness,' I am convinced that the Christian faith holds an appropriate 'imaginative' key along the lines that Brueggemann calls for. That imaginative key is the cross and the God-man who hung upon it. We need to take a break from having our arms raised and eyes closed as we prance around the cross, and instead draw close enough to 'smell and see' the deathly life of the messianic body nailed to it:

> The leaves emerge – a growing
> garland lying lightly on his head.
> The dance of spring, of resurrection,
> quicks his feet; from all directions
> caper those he'll call his own.
> The sun shines warming down upon
> the dancers 'round their pivot. Only those
> up close can smell or see the thick
> black-red the flowers nurse upon (Noll 1997, 40).

We attempt something of that 'up closeness' now.

The biblical way of redeeming 'all things'

Old Testament: the failure of unfettered greed to bring redemption

There is a profound juxtaposition between the good news neo-liberal economics cleverly markets, and the gospel presented in the biblical narrative. The Old Testament is replete with stories that demonstrate time and time again that society driven by unfettered greed, power and pleasure will disintegrate while the land they dwell upon is simultaneously destroyed. Genesis, Exodus, the books of Judges, Kings, Chronicles, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Prophets repeatedly share stories and sayings that demonstrate that a social and economic system built on greed and unfettered pleasure will only ever end in floods, war, famine, inequality and oppression. Importantly, their message flows through narratives grounded in reality; their warnings are not lofty philosophical propositions or cerebral anthropological theories. Rather, the free market hypothesis has been repeatedly and empirically tested throughout the Old Testament, and the evidence comes back the same everytime:

unfettered greed, power and pleasure will bring death, not life; destruction, not cohesion; disintegration, not *shalom*.

The Old Testament narratives must ring alarm bells as we consider our approach to addressing climate change: our trust and hope in the free market have been tested and tried over numerous centuries more than 2,000 years ago and *always* found wanting.

New Testament: willing self-sacrifice brings redemption

While the Old Testament witness gives numerous stern warnings against a redemptive approach built on selfishness and greed, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus offer an alternative paradigm and give us insight into God's redemptive methodology.

The voluntary, sacrificial nature of Jesus' redemptive suffering is nothing short of profound. He willingly entered the incarnated state despite it meaning a significant loss of power and the eternal altering of his person. He shared the meals and company of tax-collectors and social outcasts though it damaged his reputation beyond repair. He dialogued with Pharisees though he knew they would twist his words and respond with violence and lies. He set his face towards Jerusalem knowing that it heralded his death; he willingly submitted his desire to the Father's in Gathsemane; permitted every lash, every curse, every hit, carried his cross and willingly hung on it until it literally killed him.

This is God's way of redeeming what is broken; *this* is God's way of making the world 'a better place for everyone' (to borrow neo-liberal economic's empty promise). There is a direct correlation between the *kenosis*, suffering and horrific death that Jesus underwent and his Messianic goals (Moltmann 1974, 127); his missiological methodology could not have avoided a painful death on the cross (remember the tears and cries of Gethsemane?). It was through the willing self-sacrifice of the all-powerful Trinitarian God that the process of redeeming 'all things' began. This is an incredible contrast to the self-centred nature of liberal economics, a stark juxtaposition to the false gospel of technology and Adam Smith's promotion of the 'liberating' power of greed!

The true Saviour of the world brings life through a system grounded in otherness and self-emptying *kenosis*, not through selfishness, greed, and the manipulation of nature that technology and free market economics rely upon.

A word of caution on promoting kenosis

Some clarification about *kenosis* as the starting place for our response to climate change is worth mentioning here. Liberation theologians and others have critiqued the likes of Moltmann for supporting suffering as the starting place for redemption because it can foster passivity towards

oppressive regimes (Feske 2000,92ff; Sobrino 1994:52). Emphasising the willingness of Jesus to undergo suffering can lead those experiencing the consequences of climate change injustice to believe that their oppression is permissible – welcome even – because Jesus allowed himself to be whipped, scorned and abused.

However, the *willingness* of Jesus' suffering must not be permitted to whitewash its *subversive* nature (see Horsley 2011, 200f). Jesus was hunted by the likes of Herod and the Pharisees, but Emmanuel[7] eating with tax-collectors and social outcasts was a profound act of solidarity that simultaneously critiqued the religious elites who had 'forgotten the weightier matters of the law'. Jesus' silence before Pilate was certainly reflective of his willingness to die for the redemption of the cosmos; but it was also a deeply disturbing and subversive act (Myers 2011, 75). Jesus' calm silence showed Pilate and the judicial system for the sham that they were, and reversed the power to the point that *Pilate* was the one doing the prostrating, pleading and protesting of innocence (Lk. 23).

A kenotic axiom for a climate change response need not reinforce the suffering of the vulnerable. Indeed, a redemptive paradigm based on Jesus' willing self-sacrifice properly considered will hopefully encourage those suffering the most from the impacts of climate change, and embolden them – where possible – to acting and speaking prophetically to their 'climate change oppressors'. A Christian response to climate change grounded in *kenosis* must be a careful blending of Moltmann's *Crucified God* and Brueggemann's *Prophetic imagination*. This will be explored more fully later in the paper.

Participating in the suffering of Jesus

Biblical basis

While it is important to establish that God's missiological methodology of redemption is grounded in *kenosis* rather than economic and consumptive growth, it is important to note that this self-emptying methodology did not leave the earth with the ascension of Jesus.

Jesus himself affirmed that the *kenotic* approach was also to be the paradigm for his followers when he said:

> "…The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." Then he said to them all, "If any [people] want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those

[7] Lit. 'God with us'

> who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it (Lk. 9:21-24, NRSV)

These words, and Jesus' subsequent yet powerfully 'foolish' crucifixion became *the* central lense through which the early church understood redemption (1 Cor. 1:17, 18; 2:2; 2 Cor. 13:4; Gal. 6:14; Heb. 12:2; 1 Pet. 2:24). The book of Acts is littered with references to the 'power of the cross', seeing the ultimate tool of oppression as the only means of redemptive liberation (e.g. 2:22f; 3:14f; 4:10-12; 5:29f; 7:52; 8:31f; 10:39f; 13:16f). But it was far more than just cerebral and theological repositioning post-crucifixion; the cross shaped the way the community of Jesus followers understood themselves and their interaction with the world at large. 'We have died with Christ, and risen with him' declared Paul, and it shapes our relationship to everything (Rom. 6:1-13; Gal. 2:19f). Jesus is reconciling 'all things by making peace through the blood of his cross', and we - like Paul - are 'servants of this gospel' (Col. 1:20, 23; 2:8-15; 3:1-11). 'Servants of *this* gospel' can only have the same *kenotic* approach that was in Jesus who 'emptied himself' and 'humbled himself' to the point of death on a cross (Phil. 2).

Sanitised, heavenly crosses

However, Jesus' expectation that his followers would 'take up their cross' and participate in his suffering has typically been interpreted in rather spiritualised, unconcrete ways – at least in the evangelical global north. In this context, the most common interpretations relate Jesus' words to religious persecution (e.g. Stults 2015) – a very rare situation in the global north[8] - or the challenges inherent in the process of personal moral sanctification (so Luther – see Myers 2017, 94, 97; Grudem 1994:840; Vaghi 2016). Jesus' description of the 'hard, narrow path' in Matthew 7, and Paul's appeal to 'present your bodies as a living sacrifice' in Romans 12 elicit similar interpretations in most northen evangelical settings, seeing physical crucifixion 'as a drop in the bucket' compared to the struggle with personal morality (Bloom 2010). As Gorman observes:

> The embedded theology of most Christians still revolves around a non-cruciform model of God's holiness, character and power, and a crucial corrective is needed (2009, 128)

The sanitising and spiritualising of our participation in the suffering of Jesus has been encouraged by a number of factors such as the privatisation, internalisation and individualisation of faith (see Goheen 2002, 364) that have been fostered by Enlightenment empirical rationalism and post-modernity's relativism. However, I would also suggest that the more recent emphasis on

[8] It is interesting how often the evangelical church in the north wants to be seen as being persecuted; perhaps because it because Jesus said his followers should expect persecution, but our willing 'co-opting by the royal conciousness' doesn't create much space for it to happen.

resurrection theology has also been a contributor to the sanitising and spiritualising of 'taking up our crosses'. While encouraging Christians to focus on the resurrection has brought a wonderful eschatological hope to many who need to hear that narrative (e.g. Wright 2007:201ff), including myself, an over-emphasis on the resurrection in soteriology can easily overlook the fact that there can be no resurrection without a proverbial death and burial three days earlier (Gorman 2009, 151).[9]

My concern with spiritualised interpretations of Jesus' invitation to 'take up our cross' is that our metonymy risks sanitising the cross of not just its bloodstains, but its very power. When we turn the call to 'take up our cross' into a fuzzy, spiritualised metaphor, it fails to penetrate the grittiness of life in tangible, practical ways. It means that the cross has nothing to say about whether I choose to purchase electricity from renewable or fossil fuel sources; it means that *kenosis* is silent on my daily transportation decisions or my rates of consumption. The question of how the cross might shape my financial decisions or weekly budget is not only a rare question, it is mostly a *forbidden* question, particularly in Australia's highly individualistic dominant culture that misappropriates freedom.[10] I have argued previously that our Australian slavery to individualism has created taboos around a whole host of issues from personal finances to rates of recycling - despite the fact that our choices in these areas deeply impact other people and our shared environment (Bergsma 2017). A spiritual, individual, sanitised cross is similarly locked out of these conversations; the question of 'how does the cross shape your leisure choices?' is rarely a welcome question in the Australian evangelical setting.

Privatising, individualising and internalising a spiritualised cross is a dualistic and Gnostic endeavour – it is certainly not a Christian endeavour. Whatever the reasons for avoiding or reducing the suffering entailed in 'taking up our cross', evangelical Christians - particularly those in industrialised countries like Australia - need to recover the grounded nature of the redemptive cross. While Christ's death was entirely sufficient, he passed his self-emptying paradigm onto his followers so that they might participate in his work of redeeming 'all things'. Jesus' missiological methodology, grounded in *kenotic* love, must be fundamental to our approach of restoring situations impacted by sin. The Christian community's response to climate change must be developed through this same

[9] I want to tread carefully here. I have found N.T. Wright to be very insightful, and *Surprised by hope* was incredibly helpful and encouraging for me as I was raised on the doctrine of 'total depravity' (which tends to forget that there ever was a resurrection). My concern is that when people only focus on the resurrection, they may end up with optimism; I believe that using the resurrection paradigm *within* the balancing narrative of Jesus' incarnation, life and death is more likely to assist people in achieving eschatological *hope* which is driven by a vision of the future but expects the journey to be winding, narrow and sacrificial.

[10] The irony is that freedom claimed in this way is no freedom at all, but an indication of slavery to selfish ambition or fear of reduced pleasure or security (see Purdey 2012, 76). It is fear that shuts the door on these difficult questions; it is freedom that welcomes their possible insights.

paradigm, and I turn to exploring some practical implications of that now, beginning with an exploration of a *kenotic* axiom for Christians in the global south on the issue of climate change.[11]

Vulnerable Christians, climate change and the suffering of Jesus

The solidarity of Jesus

I am keenly aware that I have not experienced any significant suffering in my life, and to date have felt nothing even close to uncomfortableness in terms of the impacts of climate change. It is easy to write about suffering, and easy to suggest ways that suffering people should respond to their condition. In no way is what follows intended to trivialise or spiritualise the suffering of children, mothers and fathers; I have no idea what my theological or practical responses might be if my crops had failed and my children were hungry for food I couldn't provide. I am simply putting forward some suggestions as to how the *kenotic* suffering of Jesus might bring hope in a hopeless setting, recognising that if the suffering of Jesus has been a significant source of encouragement for oppressed Christians, fostering black and liberation theologies (see Heany 2008), then it may well be applicable to Christians suffering from the unjust impacts of climate change.

Indeed, a *kenotic* approach to climate change for people of faith in vulnerable communities will hopefully enable them to not just know God's 'preferential option for the poor', but to experience this truth (see Costas 1989, 50f). Prior to the incarnation, humanity may have been forgiven for thinking that God's concern for the poor was akin to philanthropy from the safety and opulence of a king's quarters. But the willing and self-emptying nature of the incarnation leaves no room for that kind of thinking; it demonstrates not just God's love and concern for marginalised and forgotten people, but his desire and ability to be *with* them in their condition in a very grounded and tangible way (Chung 2006, 13; Dau 2007, 363f; Myers 2011, 72). The incarnation was in the first place an act of solidarity with the suffering of a broken humanity. I love John Stott's reflection:

> I have… stood respectfully before the statue of the Buddha, his legs crossed, arms folded, eyes closed, the ghost of a smile playing round his mouth, a remote look on his face, detached from the agonies of the world. But each time… I have had to turn away and… turn instead to that lonely, twisted, tortured figure on the cross… That is the God for me! He laid aside his immunity to pain. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and death. He suffered for us. Our sufferings become more manageable in the light of his. There is still a question mark against human suffering,

[11] I will be drawing on different aspects of Jesus' *kenosis* for the global south and the global north. While some may suggest that it is inappropriate to divide a theology this way, I would point to the importance of contextualising theology (Segura-Guzman 2010, 125) while noting the often dual nature of Jesus' interactions: his eating with 'tax collectors and sinners' was an act of solidarity for them while simultaneously being a significant critique of the rich, religious elites.

> but over it we boldly stamp another mark, the cross that symbolizes divine suffering (Stott 2006, 326f).

The rich and powerful in industrialised nations may currently show scant concern for the climate change induced suffering of the poor; but God is *deeply* concerned about the impact of climate change on the vulnerable. The biggest polluters (such as the average Australian) will likely never experience the same levels of hunger, worry for their crops and children, fear of the approaching storm or drought or unrest brought on by climate change – but Jesus *has* lived and walked a suffering life. He has stood in front of a hungry crowd with only a few loaves and fish; cried out with a loud voice, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!" and died a slow and painful, isolated death (Heb. 5:7). His solidarity with those suffering is complete. The rich will likely remain relatively unscathed by climate change, but the God of the universe bears the marks of it on his hands, his feet, his face, his beloved creation. And he bore those marks willingly, entered that suffering state in an incredible act of solidarity.

Apocalyptic hope

But the willing self-emptying crucifixion of Jesus was more than just an encouraging act of solidarity. It was in the first place an act of solidarity – and we must not move too quickly beyond that – but it was an act of solidarity in order that it might be an act of redemption.

This too has the potential to provide hope to those Christians suffering from the impacts of climate change. Jesus is not only present through the suffering, but has promised to 'restore all things' at a fixed point in the future (Mt. 24:36). The time is coming when suffering will be relieved and the perpetrators brought to justice (Rev. 20-22). It is no ordinary God-man who stands in solidarity with those suffering the impacts of climate change; it is a scarred Jesus that stands with them, but it is also a *resurrected* Jesus (Gorman 2009, 154) who will one day judge the nations. His living body is proof not only of his entering the broken human condition through willing *kenosis*; it is also living proof that death and suffering will not be the final word, even though they might dominate the current experience (1 Cor. 15:20f).

An invitation to subversive redemption

The solidarity of a scarred but resurrected Jesus is also an invitation to those suffering the impacts of climate change to – where ever, if ever possible – attempt creative acts of subversive redemption. While the critique may be levelled that creative acts of subversive redemption are almost impossible for a half-starved farmer in rural Indonesia to implement, the invitation is less than ridiculous. If the silence of Jesus before Pilate rattled the fragile façade of the religious and politically powerful in 30

A.D., so might the silent suffering of a half-starved farmer in rural Indonesia challenge the religious and politically powerful in 2017. If the death of Jesus on the cross was the very thing that brought life to all, then there is no reason why the suffering of the poor cannot likewise be a participation in Jesus' subversive redemption of all things (Sobrino 1994, 53). My repeated experiences of the quiet but deep generosity of the poor in rural Indonesia has been a very subversive act of highlighting the shallow nature of my own generosity to them. It has significantly challenged and reshaped my financial and consumptive habits, and continues to contribute to the redemption of these parts of my brokenness - and by extension heals the very life of the planet.[12] The deep knowledge and connection to the earth that Indigenous people often have has similarly highlighted my relative disconnection with the earth; they have grown a desire in me to relate to creation the way that they do. These messages have rarely been verbal or direct; but their impact has been significant and redemptive.

I wish to repeat that I am not in anyway advocating for the acceptance of oppressive regimes, caste systems or situations of injustice by those who are suffering (Dau 2007, 365). Neither am I suggesting that the suffering of a rural Indonesian farmer is necessary for the redemption of my finances; her suffering is due to oppression, not willing *kenosis*. I am simply attempting to highlight the subversive and redemptive nature of Jesus' suffering in hopes that it might be means of empowering those who are suffering the impacts of climate change to do likewise.

Wealthy Christians, climate change and the suffering of Jesus

Reframes our response

A *kenotic* paradigm grounded in reality can only 'invert' climate change responses by wealthy Christians like myself, shifting our approach from 'victimisation to expiation' (Morrison 2010, 13). While our initial response to climate change might be a concern about potential impacts on our personal lifestyles, 'freedom', security and prosperity, the cross invites us to begin from a different place. A *kenotic* approach starts with a recognition that the redemption of our broken earth begins with a free act of self-emptying that expects cross-like symptoms. It does this because, like Jesus, it is driven by love and a vision of a redeemed future (Heb. 12:2) rather than the pursuit of pleasure.

Thus a *kenotic* approach to the issue of climate change normalises sacrifice and expects rather than avoids self-emptying actions, regardless of whether those actions are the norm or considered to be

[12] My European preference for efficiency and effectiveness dislikes the micro-nature of these improvements, but I am reminded of the mustard seed nature of the kingdom of God.

effective by the dominant culture. It is driven by a love for God, others and creation, and a deep desire to see the redemption of all things. It cares little about market forces, legislation, political leadership, return on investment, financal prowess or whether the rest of the mob is likely to follow (Morrison 2010, 5). Instead, it enjoys a freedom to act deeply and boldly on climate change while those enslaved to the dominant culture point out that those actions will make marginal difference, are financially backwards, and will lead to the death of comforts or financial security (see Gorman 2009, 128). 'Co-opters of the royal consciousness' can only point out things a *kenotic* approach already knows and expects. Indeed, a cross-shaped paradigm *searches out* self-emptying actions that are redemptive, and acts on them quickly while those following Pilate's approach are shuffling their feet, protesting their innocence, appealing to the crowd and sending any idea that suggests pain or sacrifice to the proverbial Herod for review.

I am convinced that wealthy Christians who allow the suffering cross to shape their response to climate change will be far more open to making deep changes to their lifestyle than their counterparts, and willingly explore (rather than avoid) new and creative ways of reducing their carbon and environmental footprints. They will be less concerned about trying to balance pleasure, comfort and financial security with a low-carbon lifestyle, and be more concerned about the impacts of climate change on the vulnerable than their own levels of comfort. They will be willing to wait at bus stops, change their diet, sweat or shiver, pay the extra for green power, consume less, live more simply and share more.[13] Their motivation isn't greed or guilt, efficiency or fear. Their willingness to make such sacrifices is an outworking of love – and we turn to that now.

Fosters solidarity with the poor and the planet

A *kenotic* approach by wealthy Christians to the issue of climate change is fundamentally driven by a deep love for global neighbours and the environment we share. Self-emptying to the point of costly sacrifice can only be sustained by love; any other foundation will collapse under its own weight. It is this love that sent Jesus eathward (Jn 3:16), and is the identity marker of his followers (Jn. 13:35; 17).

Thus a cross-shaped approach to addressing climate change will not only be marked by a willingness to make significant redemptive sacrifices; it will also naturally foster solidarity with the suffering people and a 'groaning' creation (Morrison 2010, 13f). By its very nature, a cross-shaped approach binds the Christian to those who are suffering the impacts of climate change. This is a profound juxtaposition with the selfishness that neo-liberal economics fosters:

[13] I am aware that there is a risk here in equating 'waiting for a bus' with Jesus' horrific death on the cross in a similar fashion to the spiritualising of the cross mentioned earlier. Given the grounded, physical nature of the examples provided, I hope that the risk is minimised.

> …People engaged in a self-interested life will perceive the effect of climate change as more an end to *my* personal pleasure-seeking in the world… The face for the other, competing with *my* face and *my* opportunities, will be more despised rather than respected (Morrison 2010, 9)

Kenotic Christians don't see the impact of climate change on poor communities as just another creative appeal for charity. They see the suffering of their global brothers and sisters, lament with them, feel deep sorrow for the way they have contributed to the suffering, and experience a quiet thankfulness at being able to contribute – however mustard seedly – to the relieving of that suffering. Likewise, *kenotic* Christians hear the groaning of creation - see photos of degraded land, retreating glaciers and bleached coral – and they instinctively know that this was never God's intended design, and feel a strong desire to be a part of restoring it, whatever the cost.

This love enables them – as love only can – to attempt things others consider ridiculous or 'over-the-top'. Their love *is* radical, because it is only a radical love that can provide the strength to willingly climb onto a cross. It is here, where the sacrificing is driven by love, that solidarity blossoms. While I want to be very careful about trivialising the suffering of the poor, I feel something of the rural farmer's sapped energy when I fast and refuse to turn on the airconditioning; I am reminded of a poor mother's despair at another failed crop when my veggie patch gets hammered by the weather; I echo creation's groan when the rubbish I picked up on the way home leaks through my bag. Repetitious simple, vegetarian meals; selling the fuel-guzzling car; 'wasting' time at bus stops; taking public transport in the rain; seeing savings fade because of organic food purchases and carbon offsets bring up a mix of emotions. But mostly – if any thing – it's helped me remember the poor in the day-to-day, and in these varying and small sacrifices I receive little hints, echoes and pictures of what it must be like for those suffering from the impacts of climate change.

Provides a taste of resurrection life

However, a *kenotic* approach by wealthy Christians also gives glimpses and flavours of resurrection life. Indeed, if the cross is where God's heart is revealed, then we can expect to meet and see God more clearly in that place. This is the counter-intuitive nature of the cross; it looks like death, but it is paradoxically the very source of life – this is the only place where we have the possibility of thriving (Myers 2017, 90f; Horsley 2011, 194; see also Greenway, Barret & Furrow 2016). It is in the very act of self-emptying that we find our purpose and humanity, as Jesus said:

> If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. *For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.* (Mt. 16:24-25, emphasis mine)

Anyone who has attempted a truly sacrificial action knows the very grounded truth of this statement. Self-emptying sacrifice brings integrity and life to our humanity; we were designed to sacrificially love and serve God, each another and the environment, and when our lifestyle and choices align with that, we experience a sense of balance, peace and joy. There is a solid 'rightness' to be enjoyed in a purchase that is good for people and the planet; great celebration and joy in the sharing of home-grown veggies; taking the bus gets me outdoors, and creates opportunities to meet new people, gives me time to think and reflect. Reducing consumption and living more simply turns things like wine and coffee back into luxuries that we take the time to savour rather than thoughtlessly consume as part of a social ritual (Foster 1981, 77ff). These cross-shaped actions redeem our patterns of consumption and have the ability to transform them from thoughtless pursuits of pleasure to enjoyable acts of reflective worship.

Thus Morrison rightly speaks of the 'excitement of the quest' (2010, 7ff). A love-driven, self-emptying approach to climate change by wealthy Christians entails risk and creativity, hope and hard work, a mix of new and painful experiences - the hallmarks of an adventure. But ultimately it will lead to life. Thus the kenotic wealthy Christian is propelled from behind by the historical love, grace and example of Christ, while being dragged forward by a vision of eschatological hope.

The challenges of preparing people for their own funeral

Despite my argument for *kenosis* as the theological starting place for addressing climate change, Durber's question still stands: *why it is so hard for [Christians] to hear prophetic voices and to act in response to them on the issue of climate change?* (Durber 2014, 26). I wish to offer a brief reply by borrowing heavily from Walter Brueggemann's *Prophetic imagination:*

> …the proper idiom for… cutting through the royal numbness and denial is *the language of grief*, the rhetoric that engages the community in mourning for a funeral they do not want to admit. It is indeed their own funeral (2001, 46 emphasis mine).

Brueggemann draws from the example of the prophet Jeremiah, and argues that what is needed is not so much repentance, but that the 'numbness of history' be penetrated by the 'ache of God' (2001, 55). It involves uncovering the lies and ideologies of a technocratic, individualised, free-market worldview, showing the falseness and shallowness of its promises, highlighting the environmental and social destruction it has caused, and helping people to lament and weep over its

impending collapse.[14] It involves fostering empathy with those who suffer by disturbing the layers of insulation that keep us from feeling the groans of the vulnerable and the earth. This must be simultaneously done with 'prophetic energising' (Brueggemann 2001, 59f) that holistically describes and demonstrates the alternative paradigm of Jesus, fostering hope – not optimism – in the resurrection that follows crucifixion. It is this push-pull of prophetic 'dismantling' and 'energising', the tension between the cross and the empty tomb that creates a proverbial three days of silence for people to explore a cross-shaped approach to climate change. This is particularly difficult when the one attempting the 'dismantling' and 'energising' is as affluent and bourgeois and the rest (as I am), but the task can and must still be attempted.

Conclusion

I have argued that a more cruciform approach is needed if we are to address the fundamental issues that have caused climate change. The biblical narrative demonstrates that the way to the redemption of the environment is not through neo-liberal economics, the free market or legislation. Rather, a Christological approach that reflects the *kenotic* nature of Jesus' redemption of 'all things' is needed. A climate change response centred on the cross offers a freedom that no other paradigm can provide. It need not wait for legislation; it is not propelled by a guilty verdict but is driven by love. It fosters solidarity with those who are suffering the impacts of climate change, while reminding the vulnerable of God's intimate company and his conclusive plan to deal with the injustice they are experiencing.

This is no easy task, and it is easier to write about a kenotic approach than to attempt it. But if self-emptying is the way of Jesus, and if the death of self is the only way to experience a resurrected life, then we must not flinch or avoid attempting it. Mistakes will be made, motivations will almost always be mixed, opposition and excuses readily available internally and externally; Jesus promised that it will be a difficult and narrow, winding road to walk.

But it is only the posture of *kenosis* that can paradoxically provide the energy required to carry this environmentally redemptive cross. May our theological reflection on the planting of the Golgothian timbers spawn a global plantation of climate change crosses.

[14] Some might find the idea of an 'impending collapse' ridiculous. However, the similarities between the current global social climate now and that which preceeded the French Revolution are striking (see Goudzwaard et al. 2007, 152).

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