Ecological Conversion

Reading: Kenosis, Climate Change & Christianity, Sallie McFague, PhD, p.24

Theme
Climate change compels us to examine our eco-footprint and consumer patterns and calls us to a change of heart for the well-being of all.

ΚΕΝΩΣΙΣ
(kenosis) from Greek “keno” meaning “to empty”

Opening Prayer
(15 minutes)
Setting: Put on the ritual table a cloth and a candle.
Reader
Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus,
Who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God something to be grasped.
Rather, he emptied himself…
coming in human likeness…
he humbled himself…
—Philippians 2:5-8

Leader: As we begin, let’s pause to reflect on what kenosis—self-emptying—needs to take place in me or society so that abundant life for all may be possible.
(pause)
Leader: I invite those who wish to give voice to a personal or societal kenosis—self-emptying—needed for abundant life for all.

Large Group Discussion
(20 minutes)
Leader: Let’s take a few moments of quiet to reflect on our reading, Kenosis, Climate Change & Christianity, and the questions. Then we’ll have a discussion.

“It is the rampant use of energy that creates both our consumer paradise as well as depletes the planet’s resources and contributes to global warming.”

“Thus I am suggesting that the religions of the world have a major role to play in the climate change crisis. Religion should answer the call to return to the deepest roots of restraint, limitation, sharing, and self-emptying so that others might live.”

How was I challenged as I read the article?
What is my perspective on the connection between environmentalism and consumerism?
How can religion be part of the “process of change from belief to action” in addressing our ecological crisis?

Conversion
(25 minutes)

Leader: Let’s take a 5 minutes of quiet to reflect on the statements in A Finite Planet and Call to Conversion and the questions that follow. After the quiet we will have 20 minutes to share with one other person what we wish from our reflections.

A Finite Planet
If everyone in the world lived like the average person in the United States of America, we would need 4.1 Earths.

What happens when an infinite-growth economy runs into a finite planet?

Debt boils over. Historically, cheap resources have helped fuel economic growth, but now increasing costs impose a burden on economic performance that is often reflected in rising debt levels. This is happening at a time when the ability of many countries to service this debt is being called into question.

Energy trumps safety. Petroleum is becoming more difficult and costly to extract. But since our economies remain dependent on fossil fuels, we are taking greater risks to acquire it.

The majority is left out. As prices rise, many countries must spend larger portions of their budgets on essential resources from abroad, often forgoing expenditures on health, education, infrastructure or other productive capacity building. The socio-economic impact of ecological overshoot, including climate change, disproportionately affects the most vulnerable.
**Biodiversity is for sale.** The threats facing plant and animal life on the planet are greater than at any time in recorded history. Human pressure in the form of overharvesting and habitat loss is driving down wildlife populations worldwide. As long as trees, for example, are worth more cut than they are standing, the pressures to liquidate natural resources will be overwhelming.

**Food turns into a luxury.** Soil erosion, rising fertilizer prices and severe weather brought on by climate change have all contributed to the volatility of crop yields and food prices. This is particularly harsh in countries where most people depend on basic foods.

**People rise up.** In 2010 and 2011, people across the Arab world rose up against oppression and deprivation. But many countries continue to face systemic challenges due to food insecurity, demographic trends and water scarcity.

—Adapted from 2010 Annual Report, footprintnetwork.org

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**Call to Conversion**

Grateful for the gift of creation… we invite [people] of good will… to consider with us the moral issues raised by the environmental crisis…. These are matters of powerful urgency and major consequence. They constitute an exceptional call to conversion. As individuals, as institutions, as a people, we need a change of heart to preserve and protect the planet for our children and for generations yet unborn.

—*Renewing the Earth*, USCCB, 1991

In sum, ecological conversion means falling in love with the Earth as an inherently valuable, living community in which we participate, and bending every effort to be creatively faithful to its well-being, in tune with the living God who brought it into being and cherishes it with unconditional love.

—*Ask the Beasts*, Elizabeth Johnson

We humans must now navigate a turning to a viable future. This requires a profound shared awakening to our nature as spiritual beings with a responsibility to contribute as participants in Creation’s continuing epic journey.

—*A New Story for a New Economy*, David Korten

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**Large Group Discussion**

*Which statements in A Finite Planet and Call to Conversion draw me into deeper reflection? Why?*

*In regard to climate change, where am I in the process of conversion—in moving from belief to action?*

**Leader:** I invite you to share with other person what you wish from your reflections.

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**Large Group Discussion**

*(5 minutes)*

**Leader:** We have time for anyone who wishes to share a highlight from your reflections.

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**Break** *(10 minutes)*

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**Eco-Mapping** *(30 minutes)*

**Leader:** Let’s enter into a contemplative time using the map on page 14. We will take about 10 minutes of quiet so that you can write responses to the eco-mapping questions. I suggest you begin in the middle and follow the path of the questions. If you are stuck on one question, just move on to the next one.

*(pause to complete the exercise)*

**Leader:** In groups of three take 20 minutes to share something from your eco-mapping process.

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**Large Group Discussion** *(5 minutes)*

**Leader:** I invite each group to share a highlight from your conversation, if you wish.
Closing Prayer
(15 minutes)

Leader: Let’s take time to read individually about the No Impact Project. What is one area of my life where I would like to explore making a lower impact on the environment?

Story of Hope: No Impact Project

In 2006, Colin Beavan and his family embarked on a year-long project to live in New York City with as little environmental impact as possible. The family’s experiment has resulted in the “No Impact Project,” an international, environmental organization that helps people change their behavior in order to change the world.

Two years after the launch of “No Impact Weeks” over 50,000 people have dedicated a week to exploring how to make a lower impact on the environment. The majority of the respondents to a survey reported that they maintained their lifestyle changes, volunteered and worked for legislative changes and their adaptations have contributed to their overall happiness. To quote participants, the experience:

“Increased my sense of purpose in living consciously for the benefit of others.”

“Has helped open up dialog with a lot of different people in my life about how to go about sustainable change on a practical level. Gives me hope.”

Leader: Let’s take a contemplative moment to hold in our hearts the area of my life where I would like to explore making a lower impact on the environment.

(pause)

Leader: Let’s conclude by saying together:

All: “To embrace a turning point is to see someone or something differently and then to take action on what you have seen…. These moments, where insight and action intersect, are the training ground for living a life of personal courage.”

—Puanani Burgess