

Telling God what to do – Praying for Copenhagen



There's a prayer been written by Tim Costello and Brian McLaren that's available here:

http://www.melbourne.anglican.com.au/main.php?pg=news&news;_id=22885&s;=1470

I think it's intended to be a prophetic prayer as the world leads into the big climate change summit in Copenhagen. I probably lean slight-towards the climate-change sceptic end of the spectrum. Yet I am pro CO2 and other pollution reduction because whether the sea levels will rise or not I prefer to breathe clean air. So bring on the solar power plants and get rid of the multi-nationals that are destroying the Amazon. That would better for the world whatever the problem is.

But what about this prayer? I'm normally pretty generous with this sort of stuff. OK, they didn't really mention the cross, they may have overprioritised the Creation Mandate ("our sacred duty") over the Great Commission yet again, but it ain't exactly blasphemous and it's well intended... so why am I irked?

I'm trying to come up with the right word – and I think that I find it a little... "arrogant".

I'm not necessarily against prayer that has an imperative (e.g. "God, save me!") – it is grace that allows us to dare to tell God what to do sometimes. I'm not against prayer that explains things to the omniscient almighty (e.g. "My enemies camp about me") – it is grace that allows us to vent and complain to a God who has come close to us.

So why then do bits in this prayer like this make me cringe?

Only recently have we begun to realize the dangerous future into which our current patterns of consumption and waste are driving us, especially in relation to earth's climate. Only recently have we begun to see our need to find a wiser and better way of life in the future, before it is too late and our choices are limited by the consequences of inaction.

I think the arrogance here crosses the line as it gives to human opinion the same value as God's revelation. For instance, if the prayer was "Only recently have we begun to realize the truth of who you are and what you intend for us. Only recently have we understood the need to submit to your purposes" then it would simply be a continuation of the confession and contrition. As it is, however, there is an equating of climate-change-solution with divine-solution. Over-extending perhaps, it is almost "Only recently have we realised that your will is for us to vote for a global carbon reduction scheme." A step too far?

The other part of the arrogance is the conflation on the word "we." Sometimes the word "we" is a representative word of all humanity – "For monetary gain we have reduced verdant forests to barren wastes"). And then sometimes the word "we" refers to "We who join in prayer today" and I assume are ones who agree with the fact of climate change and how to tackle it.

The sense then comes across that the prayer is: "We (everyone) have done wrong and now we (the pray-ers) have realised what is right."

Why can't it be "We have messed up, we don't know what to do, we have differing opinions, competing priorities, work with us we pray." It doesn't elevate the pray-ers but keeps them firmly within the reality of the humanity on behalf of which they are (or should be) praying.

And what's with the meta-praying?

So through this prayer, we of many traditions who follow Christ – joined by friends and neighbors of many faiths – unite our hearts in a cry for change. At first a few of us, and then hundreds, and then many thousands, join together as one to pray to you on behalf of our leaders, in solidarity with the poor, in strong hope for the healing of this beautiful world, your creation and our home.

It sounds like a petition. I don't mean a petitional prayer ("Lord, we pray, do this") but a petition petition – "Lord, look how many signatures we are getting... you have to listen to us now." So much better would be: "Lord, if only a few cry out, yet hear our voice."

And finally this:

This is the moment, God, when a great turning of hearts must begin.

MUST begin! Wow. How far that is from "Lord, your will be done."

And finally, I can't resist, there is some humanistic gospel in there:

Help us reject the lie... that true prosperity, life in all its fullness, can only come from wise stewardship, mutual responsibility, and mutual care...

...AND the grace of God as manifest in his Son I suppose. ☐

I am not against praying for the environment, against climate change, for our political (and ecological leaders). But for goodness sake, let us pray WELL, in humility, with a passion that wells up from resting in grace and not in self-righteousness or presumption that we have the answers and the timetable. Let us have a prayer that reflects the shape and

energy of a gospel centred on Jesus, not just one that uses Christian words.

