

THE BIBLE, CRISIS AND CATASTROPHE

Written by: Rev. Rudolf H. Pasaribu

HKBP Church - Indonesia

1. Preface

Theological reflection on *Bible, Crisis and Catastrophe* is so important now days. Why? Many reasons could be said to this statement; among them I will say several points:

First of all we are living in the modern world; we face the development of all things: science, technology, medical treatment, bio technology, IT, transportation, etc. Almost there is an answer for every problem we face. Most of the people use this tremendous development in their life. It seems that human being does not need spiritual fact in their life; technology has been ready helping them instead. Not only in west (Europe and USA), even in east like in Asia, Latin America, Africa and other under development countries the role of religion in every day life decreasingly more exiguous. The Bible is thought just a theory of morality and spirituality; it does not have anything. It is only appropriate to uneducated people. So, it is my concerned join this discussion about Global Platform, in the theme: *Bible, Crisis and Catastrophe*. I hope that the participants of this consultation held by WCC will rethink again about the existence of the Bible in the life of modern and educated people.

Secondly, there are many crisis happened among us. I do not know what kind of crisis is faced by the developed or modern countries such as Europe, USA, and Japan in Asia. But even though they are so developed in everything they face so many crises too in their countries. In the third world countries, or we always say under developed countries like an Asia, Africa, South America (Latin America), we experience a lot of crisis. Almost in every countries mention above we face so many kind of crisis such as: poverty, corruption every where, political, fighting each other, uncertainty of the low, terrorism, violence, trafficking, climate change, the explosion of population, crises of electricity and energy (for example in Indonesia), etc. To these crisis, what does the gospel (= the Bible) teach us? How far the Bible is still relevant to answer this crisis? This is the second reason, why I am so eagerly to join this consultation. Moreover, that the consultation is being arranged by the very strong alliance like WCC, of course it has enough powerful to influence its member.

Thirdly, the people in Asia, especially we in Indonesia are so close related to the catastrophe at lately five years. We are still remembering to the *tsunami* happened in 2006 (2005?), there were more than 300.000 people dead in Aceh and Nias Island (Indonesia). The saved people in that region, lost their houses and wealth. And after the terrible flood, there were so many another disasters stricken again and again in Indonesia. Up to now, the hot mud caused by Lapindo Brantas in Sidoarjo (Central Java) is still spurt from belly earth. Thousands of people lost their houses

and property. There is no adequate technology which is able to stop the hot mud until now. The earthquakes are always felt in many parts of Indonesia. The flight is so often undergone to an accident inside the country which caused the international association on flight prohibited the flight from Indonesia fly to Europe. Besides, there were many other catastrophe happened in Indonesia, I mention: 'Flu Burung' (avian influenza), heavy flood happened in many region. That facts push me to join this consultation held by WCC. It s needed to think seriously the relation of the Bible (Gospel) to this very bad catastrophe.

All things that I have said above are so importance to reflect from theological point of view. The theme *Bible, Crisis and Catastrophe* for me is so relevant, useful and so close related to our wrestling. To participate in this discussion by email, I will try to formulate my view to this theme. I hope it will be so benefit to other friends wherever they are. Read my opinion as follows!

2. The Bible, Crisis and Catastrophe

2.1. The Bible

What is the Bible for us? The true understanding of the Bible will help us to reflect the theme. I do not know if we have the same understanding of the existence of the Bible. For me, the Bible does not merely a book which contains the word of God, the teaching of Jesus Christ, guidance to morality, the history of the birth, growth and developing of early church, etc. But for me:

2.1.1. It is the personalities of God.

It is the God Himself. It said in the book of John chapter 1:1 "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*". And John chapter 1:14 says: "*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us!*" Jesus Christ is the personality of the Word of God who became flesh. This is the main thing that should be understood from the very beginning of our discussion. If we have received these things, we will so easy to understand the relation between the Bible with all things happened to our life include the crisis and catastrophe.

In order that we get a good understanding of the Bible we have to make the distinction between the **Bible as a common book** and the **Bible as a Magical book and the Bible is the written Word of God**; in other words the Bible is the personality of God Himself.

- ☞ If the Bible just we deem as a common book, so the Bible does not have any spiritual power for human being. It is totally same with other books written by scholars. It is just the guidance to a good moral, the teaching about heavens or the low for good and bad practice. If it likes that, so the Bible is only needed by the pastors and church workers.
- ☞ If the Bible we believe as a book which contains supernatural power we will make it as a book of **occultism**. In our country there are many people who believe that the Bible has its power, and put it at the head side when they are sleeping. They believe that the Bible will frighten the

evil away and they will be saved. They believe that the Bible has a complete power from itself, and can be use to drive Satan out from their room or house.

- ☞ The Bible is the written Word of God. The Bible as the personality of God. It is impossible to describe what God looks a like; it is not theological to think God as a King who is sitting in His throne and watches His creation from heaven. The Bibles tells us that He is in His Word, and His Word was He (John 1:1). It means that God is not separated from His Word. We know Him from His Word and His Word tells us His existence and His creation all over the world.

2.1.2 It is the Power of God

As the Word of God, the **Bible is** the power of God. Notice, in that sentence, I do not write: the **Bible has** the power of God, but *the Bible is the power of God*. If we believed that the Word of God is God Himself it means that the Bible If I say that the Bible has the power it means the Bible is separated from the power belongs to it. If I say the Bible is the power of God Himself it means the Bible **is united** with the power of God. **There is power of God in it and it is the power God**. In the book of Genesis chapter 1 God created the whole things with His Word. In this chapter we find the sentence says: “And God **said**.....!”. Every thing was created with His Word. So the Word of God once again does not merely a voice or sentences came from God’s mouth but it is God Himself.

So amazing! The Word of God does not merely a voice or sentence of God but it is God Himself. As an existence of God Himself the Word of God written in the Bible is also the amazing **power of God**. More clearly we find in the New Testament at the book written to the Hebrew chapter 1:2. It is said: “..... *and upholding all things by the word of his power....!*”. The context of this verses 1-3 is that the power of the Word of God which had revealed to the world by the prophet and at last by the His Son, in Jesus Christ. His Word did not merely create the universe by His Word, but *upholding all things include the universe by the word of his power*. This idea is so important to reflect when we talk then to the third part, catastrophe. Whoever believes to the power of His Word and receive that Word of God in their life they will not be disappointed in every thing happened to him. This understanding of the power of God will help the believers to face all kind of crisis and even the catastrophe.

2.2. The Role of the Bible in Crisis and Catastrophe

2.2.1. The Bible Gives Us the Real Salvation.

What has been written by Paul in the book of Roman Chapter 1:16 so important to us: “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek*” (King James Version). It is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believe (Today’s English Version: “.... it is **God’s power** to save all who believe...”). For me the word “to save all who believe” is so important. It means that the Words of God written in the Bible is a dreadful power to save the believers. The ‘*salvation*’ which performed by

the Bible is not only the spiritually salvation after dead but the salvation regard of daily life, here and now ('hic et nuc'). If we know the true existence of the Bible we will use the Bible in a good understanding.

In Email I read from Simon Oxley at 13 March 2008 was written as follows: "However, the main motivation was the recognition that in diverse issues such as Christian Zionism, climate change and HIV/AIDS, the Bible has been used by some Christians to deepen or deny problems. At the same time, Christians who are working for peace and justice in the Middle East and for changes in individual and collective attitudes and behaviour in response to climate change and HIV/AIDS may also be selective and partial in the use of the Bible". It is repeated again in his Email on 17 April 2008 that there are many people use the Bible to work against peace in Middle East, deny climate change or regard HIV /AIDS as a punishment for sin.

To respond what is said by Simon Oxley, I do not agree to use Bible partially in the sense that only a part of the Bible can be used as a Word of God and the other is the word of men. The whole contents of the Bible are totally the Word of God, and have the power to touch the human wrestling. The consequence of this opinion is that the Bible as the Word of God can be used either to struggle for peace in Middle East or in another countries; it may be used also to response the climate change and give the spiritual guidance to the victim of HIV/AIDS. In a short sentence I say: **We should use the Bible faithfully, creatively and responsibly in relation to all issues.**

In a short sentence I could say that there is no doubted to believe the Word of God written in the Bible. It brings us the totally salvation either to spiritual scope or to all crisis of life. If we understand and use Biblical text in the true ways we do not care about the danger. **In the guidance of the Holy Spirit as the 'Author' of the Bible there is no danger using the Bible in the whole life. But if we use Bible just to promote and reinforce our theological point of view, we will face with many spiritual problems**

2.2.2. The Role of the Bible in Crisis and Catastrophe

I have tried to describe the crisis and catastrophe we experience in our life. To reaffirming the idea we should say that there is no human being which does not face with the crisis. Whoever and wherever they live the people are always shaded by the crisis. The crisis is our close 'friends' in our life.

The same thing we could say about the catastrophe. It happened to the whole world. It does not recognize the *first world* or the *third world countries*. The altitude development of technology could not prevent the coming of catastrophe in the world. The technology could help the human being to overcome the consequence of the disaster, but does not prohibit it happen to the world. In the book of Jeremy chapter 49:32 God says: "...and I will bring *disaster* on them from every side". And in the book of Ezekiel chapter 5:16-17 it said: "I will cut off your supply of food and let you starve. You will feel the pains of hunger like sharp arrows sent to destroy you. I will send hunger and wild animals to kill your children, and will send sickness, violence, and war to kill you. I, the LORD, have spoken." So, it is not so difficult to understand the catastrophe happened to the world. It comes from the authority of God. That's why we can say, whatever the technology we

have, it can not prevent the hand of God works to do every thing in the world. From the tsunami happened in Asia, especially in Aceh, Nias (Indonesia), Malaysia, Thailand, etc several years ago we learn what is written in the book of Jeremy Chapter 26:32-33 “³² *The LORD Almighty says that disaster is coming on one nation after another, and a great storm is gathering at the far ends of the earth.* ³³ *On that day the bodies of those whom the LORD has killed will lie scattered from one end of the earth to the other. No one will mourn for them, and they will not be taken away and buried. They will lie on the ground like piles of manure*”.

So the Bible gives a complete answer to every crisis and catastrophe happened to the world, so that all believers could learn from the Bible. It will give us the power and strengthen to face every crisis and catastrophe.

2.2.3. The Word of God Gives Us the Salvation in Crisis and Catastrophe

The salvation which is undertaken by the Word of God is regarding to all thing of life such as: economical crisis, physically problems, destitution, poverty, etc. The salvation brought by Jesus Christ in the Gospel as the Word of God deal with money, housing, food, healthiness, education, social and political crisis, disasters and catastrophe, etc. The process of the Gospel as the Word of God is begun from our attitude to the Gospel itself. We should believe to the Gospel as the Word of God and then He will do something to save us from many problems we face. It does not meant that we just praying God and waiting so patiently and then in the time decided by God something will fall down from heaven; no need to work anymore and our life will be blessed by God with every thing we need in the life. This is the wrong attitude of course!

If I say that I believe to the Gospel written in the Bible as the Word of God, it means that the power of God in the Gospel will motivate me to do my best. I will work hard according to the job or occupation I got. God will push me to do my job every time diligently. I will of course be faced with some problems and difficulties in every day life (we call it ‘crises’ or ‘disasters’ in this writing). It does not matter to me, I will not be desperate, because I know that the difficulties and crisis will guide me more maturity in faith. I should use the challenges as a starting point to the next progress. I have to learn from one case happen to me, analysis it and define what is my wrong in the past, what should I changed from my lacking to be a better one?. That is the result of salvation I got from the Gospel.

3. The Conclusion

What are the conclusions to all argumentation I declare above? To the Global Platform for theological reflection and analysis I could say several things as follows:

- 3.1** Every believer could be able to say that the power of the Word of God written in the book called the Bible gives him the stimulation and the ability to manage the life. It does not a static or magical power. It is the power of the Bible in His Word to

exchange all his/her life: mentality, spirituality, morally, and even the outward appearance of physically.

- 3.2. By the power of God which I believe written in the Bible I become my own self and have a positive thinking for every thing, include to the negative things happened to my life. Since I have believed to Jesus and His Word written in the Bible, I become a real human being. Now, an amazing thing will happen to my life: **I am a winner for everything**. Why does it happen? Because of the Word of God written in the Bible becomes a dreadful power to the believer.
- 3.3. If God, let the crisis and catastrophe happen to our life we should say that it is the precious thing to improve the faithfulness and our loyalty to God. This experience will guide us to learn from the experience of Paul in Roman 1:16. In another text he wrote also: “...*for my strength is made perfect in weakness*” (2 Corinthis 12:9). That is the theology of salvation we should develop today.

Note: These Papers will be presented to the Consultation WCC 2008 Global Platform on Theological Reflection and Analysis on the theme: **THE BIBLE, CRISIS AND CATASTROPHE**, 29 September - 1 October 2008