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RESCUING VICTIMS IN THEIR HOME ISLANDS

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Introductory Remarks

I praise God and thank the WCC staff for the privilege to share a Narrative Study Case from the Republic of Kiribati in pertinence to the South Pacific in general.

The presentation focuses on how these people understand and struggle with the impacts of climate change, especially “sea rise”, on the pacific understanding of the creation understanding, and what the reconciling and healing mission of God to these people and to the world at large is.

Creation Perspective

The purpose of creation is for the praise of God. Creation was and is not done out of indispensability but owing to his grace and preference, so the creation work elucidate glimpses of God’s love, wisdom and power.

This creation work of God is exceedingly superior, as witnessed by God himself, that after his creating work, he rested and saw it to be good. The “resting” of God on the seventh day does not refer to his withdrawal from creation, but referring to his contentment of the goodness of his work.

The creation story narrated in Genesis seems to describe an ‘ideal partnership’ pattern with God. This ideal partnership envisages and authenticates the unavoidable interdependency known these days as ecosystem.

Jesus is the visible underlying cause of creation, and when the world was corrupted by sin, Jesus himself, with the love of God, was sent to rescue the ‘world’ from perish. The world here is inclusive of the material world and not just humankind.

People's Responsibilities to God and Creation

The created world was entrusted to human beings to care for with love and enjoy its benefits, but also as a sign of the relationship with the Creator.

As caretakers, humans are liable and answerable to God the Creator and his affinity to creation. Humanity is not to exploit God's blessings selfishly, but wisely, globally, in a sustainable and responsible manner. In doing this, humanity is not to bring about an incessant destructive exhaustion of natural resources, because this world is fragile and limited in resources. Humanity should give nature a chance to re-strengthen its reproductive potential, and only then will we be able to harvest plentifully when the time comes. For the Israelites, the land is given a one-year rest after every seven years of use.

This world is our global home, it is our life, we exist as an interdependent whole. Humanity therefore is to work hard towards the reconciliation and healing of our damaged world for the full glorification of God by his own creation, as he expected from the very beginning.

If we accede to our duties, God will use nature as a blessing to us, but if we do not conform to our duties as caretakers, nature will become a curse to us.

The Pacific Islands

The smallest, most fragile and most vulnerable islands are in the Pacific. The temperature varies between 27-34 degrees centigrade. The islands are low coral atolls of no more than 5 metres above sea level. Although small and insignificant, these small islands are not of secondary importance in God's creation; they are equally precious to and loved by God like the big countries.

Understanding and Doing a Reconciling Mission Together

The reality of climate change can be seen and experienced in the Pacific. Scientifically, a research done by Solomon from the University of Hawaii in 1972 -1974 confirmed the rise of sea level to be between 3-4 mm annually. The United Nations Framework Convention and its Kyoto Protocol 1999, also confirmed the already increasing sea level from the past and claimed that it will rise drastically in 2100 by 50 centimetres. The two latest studies by our local social experts also reinforce a common understanding of the pragmatic consequences of climate change as experienced in the Pacific. In particular:

1. The increase of heat ruins the lives of trees and people.
2. The rise of sea level incites brackish and salty water, which will sooner or latter cover the islands.
3. Erosion vanishes historical areas, disfigures and shrinks parts of the land, forcing people to move from coastal areas to the inland.
4. Extreme changes of tides, currents, weather, temperature and seasons cause a lot of confusion, more frequent and unpredictable storms, droughts, floods, diseases, diminishing of marine and land resources, and more and more often drifting of fishermen.

The Pacific governments and churches are striving for survival, and sending an S.O.S out to the world for rescue. The Kyoto Protocol is one of the most effective and applicable global solutions to the calamitous impacts of climate change. The super-powers that we trust for their global concerns, such as restraining “terrorism”, are more concerned with terrorist attacks than the rise of sea level, which will not only extinguish a few, but an entire human race and the islands themselves.

The problem is the human person, the sinner, who failed to be a responsible caretaker in upholding the affluence of creation, selfishly and destructively exploiting for his/her own luxury, thus becoming the enemy of creation by inducing suffering to it and to God who is in and beyond nature. It is to say that the world has been wounded and is now groaning and crying for healing.

The person commits the sin of irresponsibility to God, to the creation and to fellow human beings. Therefore we should confess to God the Creator, change genuinely by dying as our old selves and being re-born in a new life in Christ, who rescued the world. We are to reaffirm the loving stewardship commitments, in words and in our doing healing and reconciling mission together globally, and will certainly be forgiven and reconciled with God, with His creation and with one another, and consequently receive the blessings of God and his creation abundantly.

In line with the above, the Pacific Church leaders cry out for global commitment as follows:

1. We affirm our commitment to care for the earth as our response to God’s love for creation.
2. We declare as forcefully as we can the urgency of the threat of human-induced climate change to the lives, livelihoods, societies, cultures and eco-systems of the Pacific Islands.
3. We dedicate ourselves to engaging our churches in education and action on climate change.
4. We commit ourselves to ecumenical collaboration among our churches and with others religious and secular bodies in the Pacific that will increase the effectiveness of our national and regional efforts.
5. We Call our sisters and brothers in Christ throughout the world to act in solidarity with us to reduce the causes of human-induced climate change. We issue this call particularly to churches in the industrialized nations, whose societies are historically responsible for the majority of polluting emissions.
6. We express our appreciation to the World Council of Churches for its support to the Pacific Churches on the issue of climate change and request that the voices of the Pacific become increasingly reflected in the WCC Climate Change Programme and in the next WCC Assembly in 2006.
7. We pressure all countries to ratify and implement the Kyoto Protocol, especially industrialized nations such as the United States of America and Australia which to date have not ratified the Protocol.
8. We encourage companies that are major producers or consumers of fossil fuels to support a transition toward less carbon-intensive economies, reduced energy usage and the development of cleaner, renewable energy sources.

The Dignity of Humankind

People are more important than money, for they were created in the image of God, not created for money. Humankind was borne into a particular world which became a home so dear. The trees, birds, animals and other living and non-living things around us became part of the individual person's life.

The fear of the rise of sea levels forces some to reluctantly migrate to the big countries. These people lost their dear home islands, their identity, freedom, and political independence, as they migrated or were obliged to go to another foreign country, culture, and government; this is another form of re-colonization.

Invitation

This is an S.O.S cry and an invitation to all people to listen objectively and lovingly. May this S.O.S cry be the "chorus" of your heart, your mind, your prayers, your words and your doings. It will be much better if you come to see, experience and rescue the dying victims in their home islands, heal the groaning, wounded and crying creation, and be reconciled with the suffering and crying God in the Pacific.

These people are your brothers and sisters, created by the same God and living in the same planet. But they are dying victims in and with their home-islands. They are crying for justice and the dignity that they have been deprived of. A complete disappearance of this race and the islands is at hand, come before it's too late. Come with compassion, sympathy and consolation, may we see your love and commitment rapidly emitted, strongly covering the earth and sea below and rising up even through the ozone layer as high as possible, so that the groaning creation be healed and the suffering Creator be pleased.

The time is running out, and people of the islands of hope firmly put their trust in "you", the members of the global family, and in God our Father, our Almighty Creator and Sustainer of the Universe.