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Pacific Christianity and People Solidarity

Greetings from the Pacific. I understand that this consultation is the first of its kind in the United States about the African Churches. I consider myself fortunate to participate with you in this consultation. It seems that we represent both extremes — Africa the big continent, and the Pacific the big ocean. You have a large population and wealth in Africa, but we of the Church in Tonga have more square miles of water than most of the people who live in the Pacific area. The contrasts are varied and innumerable, and from the analogical point of view we share many similarities and differences, and I hope that you will put the Pacific on your map, and we will do the same for you.

We both are in the Third World category. We both are among the “receiving” churches, and although Christianity has been for many years in our areas, we both are still called the “Younger Churches.” We both belong to the oppressed and the voiceless. When the foreign powers established the Colonial Offices in London and Paris, the European was the colonist and we became the colonized.

The Unhappy Past

For more than two centuries most Pacific peoples suffered the oppression of colonialism. When there were wars between the great power countries, our islands and the Pacific Ocean were their battle fields. Our peaceful Pacific now has become the atomic testing and the nuclear dumping areas

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of the oppressors, the brutal and aggressive nations of the world.

After World War I, the Peace Treaty was signed in Europe. World War II ended in Asia. And if there is a World War III, the big nations will wield their hammers on the Pacific because it is an anvil to ignite holocaust upon all the inhabited world. Some nations have told us that there is no harm in the testing of missiles and warheads, so they come and do it in the Pacific! Suppose it is safe, why then don't test them in New York, or Paris, or in their own backyards? Why not have them stored under their beds? Many islands have been contaminated by the atomic fall-out, and the people have been forced to leave their fertile lands. Today they are packed in small islands where there are more suffering people than there are square feet. There is no open space; not enough burial places; and in the morning people are ferried to work and in evening returned to their adopted habitat. Their only entertainment is in a crowded room with television programs from beautiful America or Europe. They have lost their cultures. The sea is too dangerous for fishing, and there is no land to cultivate. They exist on imported foodstuffs and canned soda for drink.

The Difficulties of the Present

The problems of the Pacific and Africa are manifold, and to solve them locally or regionally would be an impossible task, because most of them are not homemade! They exist because other nations created them. We need united frontiers in order to discover ways and means for a favorable solution. We need first of all freedom and justice to liberate ourselves from outside powers. We want to be free; we want human rights. No prisoner can liberate another prisoner.

We have a saying in the Pacific about the poisonous sting ray, when it strikes the sting poisons the stricken sufferer (*Hola e fai kae tuku e foto*). He suffers the consequences of the sting, and becomes a powerless, voiceless sufferer. The only solution is to remove the sting, otherwise it becomes fatal. There are so many "sting rays" in the world today, and

their stings are fatal to humanity. This fish, the sting ray is a beautiful fish, but its stings are deadly and harmful. We are so small and we are not like what Dr. Shumaker referred to in *Small and Beautiful*. When the Small look up to the Big, we only see the Ugly, Grotesque and Unjust.

When the navigator Vasco de Gama looked from the top of a tree in South America to the vast ocean before him, his were the first European eyes to see that calm blue ocean. He named it the Pacific Ocean because of its calmness and beauty. Poets and writers like Robert Louis Stevenson and James Michener told their stories of the Pacific, full of beauty and romance. They told of King Solomon's mines and many seafaring explorers who swept through the islands, and many traders who settled in them. Large plantations grew and slave traders exploited the people. Many of our peoples were taken to South America and to other parts of the Americas. The Pacific was no longer pacific, but became "apathetic." Crime, diseases, epidemics took their tolls and people became suspicious of white skin.

Pacific Christianity

At the end of the eighteenth century many Christians in London came together and formed the London Missionary Society. In 1797 a boat was brought and many missionaries set out for Hawaii and Tahiti to take the gospel. Ten men arrived in Tonga two years later. All of them were lay artisans who thought that people should be civilized first and then evangelized later. They should be taught how to grow their food and build their houses before being told of the Good News. This resulted in people wanting their tools for weapons and the end result was not civilization but European "Evilization." During the 1820s more missionaries were sent out to the Pacific. Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Catholics found their way to different areas. There are long and existing records of these pioneers. Most of them carried their national flags and

contributed to paganism being uprooted and colonialism taking over. They were missionaries, but unfortunately they were not friendly to each other. In an island where the Presbyterians established themselves, for example, any other mission to come there discovered that they were not welcome. Then there were also religious civil wars between tribes; and instead of bringing the Bible and the Good News, these foreigners brought swords and axes to help them settle their disputes.

On the other hand, there were some remarkable developments from the movement of the Holy Spirit. A great missionary like David Livingstone went to Africa. There were similar great missionaries who came to the Pacific. Dr. John G. Paton went to the New Hebrides. With him were men like Reverend A. W. Milne who went to the island of Nguna. He lived with the people for more than thirty years without any furlough. Milne was murdered there because of some cultural misunderstanding, but the people had accepted the Lordship of Jesus Christ. On his grave there is a tablet, put up by the natives, with this tribute: "Here lies the remains of A.W. Milne, a beloved missionary; when he came there was no light, but when he died, there was no darkness."

John G. Paton taught the people that there was more water to come up from wells than waters that fall from the rain. The natives did not think that it was possible to get water from under the ground.

In Fiji in the old days they used to kill the victims of war on a killing stone. Then Christianity came, and the killing stone was converted into a baptismal font.

Today, the Church has grown and instead of being a mission field there are autonomous churches that are self-supporting, and decision-making is done at the local level. Twenty years ago the heads of missions were white missionaries and the decision-making was directed from the mission-sending Church. Today we are free to make our own decisions.

One of the great developments today is ecumenism. In 1961 the International Missionary Council sponsored a conference for churches and mis-

sions held in the Pacific. Out of this conference the agreement was reached that there was a need for the Churches to come together. In the 1960s, after consultations and discussions, the Pacific Conference of Churches was inaugurated, and now all the Pacific Churches are working together. We now have a headquarters in Fiji where the secretariat is located.

From these developments a central theological institution was established where leaders of the Churches are being trained — the Pacific Theological College in Suva, Fiji. The Roman Catholic Church had a Pacific regional seminary built side by side with the P.T.C. and they exchange leaders. Nearly all the heads of our Churches are graduates of these two institutions, and there are friendly relations between the Churches.

Pacific Theology

There is now a need to move towards a Pacific Theology. There was a challenge to look at a Pacific Christ with brown eyes and with Pacific features. For many years theology was transplanted from the West. The theologies of Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and Bonhoeffer automatically became the theology of the churches in the Pacific. But we wanted a theology that grows out of our own Pacific soil. A theology that is indigenous and relevant to the Pacific context. One of our Pacific leaders complained that when missionaries came they brought Christianity as a pot-plant and tried to nurture it under European conditions. We had to learn English or French in order to become an ordained minister. He suggested that the flower of Christianity must be removed and planted in the local soil. Today, we are trying to look at theology in the Pacific context and we are enjoying a new understanding. Instead of the faith being philosophical, we view it as more practical and relevant. The fish of the sea and the trees of our islands have a great deal to teach us. Our cultures and history, together with the Bible, are the measuring rods. We see the kairos in the coconut. No one delays its falling, nor can bring it to fall

any earlier. Only when it is ready to fall it falls. That is what we call Coconut time.

The Coconut is a Tree of Life. It has many uses. The fruit is round and when it falls it rolls down to the lowest level. When it rolls down, it rolls down with food and drink; money and industry for the use and employment of the people. When there is life in the coconut it floats, but when there is no life in it, the nut sinks to the bottom of the sea. When in the sea the coconut floats against the current, and grows when landed on another island. *That is evangelism!* Did you know that the coconut has eyes and a mouth? When you open the mouth you drink the juice by kissing it. The coconut also reproduces itself without pollination, and that is the theology of the virgin birth. I am quite sure that if Jesus had grown up in the Pacific, he would have used the coconut instead of bread and wine for the elements of the Eucharist. Inside the coconut there is both food and water. Bread and wine are foreign to us and very expensive to buy. Bread is made from wheat and wine from grapes. The coconut is more relevant when we remember that the blood and flesh of Christ come from the *one* body. The coconut, its juice and meat are in the one same nut. Further, when we think of the crucifixion, we see it in the coconut that one breaks in order to get at the content. When one puts it into the ground to grow, one thinks of the Resurrection. So in the Pacific, Coconut Theology is a theology that is easier to understand.

Finally, I hope this paper will draw Africa and the Pacific together more closely. We have more in common than our differences. Like you, we have many languages and yet we are one in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Master.

May God continue to help us to be liberated from foreign powers and allow us to enjoy justice and peace through Him who bought us with His own blood.