

# The *Lotu* as Guardian of Ethical Turtle Catching in Fiji

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## Introduction

This paper will deliberate on the church as an institution and as people founded on faith in God, and its role in fostering environmental ethics, and especially in turtle harvesting. Faith is the underlying principle in its role to conserve natural resources, in this case turtle. It will also highlight areas in the church that need to be scrutinized to consolidate its role as guardian of Christian ethical principles in turtle conservation. This paper draws on the existing constitution of the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma, and elements of its doctrine relevant to conservation. The church's creedal 'I believe in God as creator.....' and the Lord's Prayer '*Thy Will be done.....*' needs to be examined. A theological interpretation of creation against domination will be pondered. Likewise, the role of the church as stewards of the Oikos or the Household of Life will be dealt with in ethical analysis.

## Environmental Ethics and Religion

Considering the importance of their settings, the Hebrews formed an interpretation of creation shown in the Genesis parable. The brooding Spirit of God enlivens the earth and earth gives birth. 'The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. And God said, 'Let there be..... (Genesis 1:2-3)' 'Let the earth bring forth living things according to their kinds' (Gen. 1:11, 24). 'Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures' (Gen. 1:20). God, say the Hebrews, reviews this display of life and finds it 'very good', and bids it continue (Rolston, 2008: 911).

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on Terei (2008).

Ancient Hebrews marvelled over the ‘swarms’ (biodiversity) of creatures that Earth brings forth in Genesis 1. These were brought before man to name them. Rolston says that while theologians spoke of ‘plentitude of being’, contemporary biologists concur that Earth speciates with marvellous richness (Rolston, 2008: 912).

Value in nature is recognized when the whole of creation is included within the Hebrew covenant. ‘Behold I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you (Gen. 9:5)’. In modern terms, the covenant was both ecumenical and ecological. It was, therefore, theocentric and less anthropocentric and probably more biocentric than traditional Jews or Christians realized. Noah with his ark, was the first Endangered Species Project; while the science may be out-of-date, the environment policy (‘Keep them alive with you’- Gen. 6:19) is something the US Congress reached only with the Endangered Species Act in 1973 (Rolston, 2008: 912).

There is creation, whether or not there is a Creator, just as there is law, whether or not there is a Lawgiver. Nature has and will remain the environment of culture. Humans need to get themselves naturalized. Nature is the ‘womb’ of culture, but a womb that humans never entirely leave. Almost like God, nature is ‘in, with, and under us’.

## **Church Doctrine**

### *Creed of Fatherhood*

The Apostles’ and the Nicene Creed refer to God as the Father, Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. The Nicene Creed begins ‘I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible’. The beginning of the creed in God the Father depicts a Trinitarian arrangement.

Many other creedal statements were used at the Temple over the centuries, but perhaps the most important was the famous ‘*Shema*’ (‘Hear’) of Deuteronomy 6:4. It says, ‘Hear, O Israel. Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone.’ There may be other possible translations, but this one captures the idea well. It was a statement of faith in the sovereignty of Yahweh (Tuwere, 2007). He alone is the true and living God. The rest of the passage reports how important such a statement of faith is to the people.

Ross states that the attributes or descriptions are divided into two categories: the non-communicated attributes and the communicated ones.

In other words, there are attributes that belong to God that he did not share with humans through creation, and there are those he did (Ross, 1997). The fact still remains that 'There is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him' (1 Corinthians 8:6).

We do not exist for ourselves; we exist for the Father. The world tells us that we derive our existence from it and that we should not live for ourselves. The Word teaches us that all we are and have comes from the Father who formed us for his enjoyment and purposes.

The first meaning of the expression 'Father' is Creator (<http://www.bible.org/author.php>) 9/07/2008). It could mean that when we call God Father, we are saying that He is the sovereign creator of all things; he produces everything, provides for it and protects it. Creation, providence and provision are there with the image of 'Father'. Since God creates and sustains everything by his decree, He is truly 'Almighty'.

The second meaning of the expression 'Father' has to do with Covenant (<http://www.bible.org/author.php>) 9/07/2008. When we call God our Father, it means that we enjoy a covenant relationship with Him. It means that there was some kind of treaty there. In the covenant with Israel, God calls the people his son. Through Jesus, God is not only our sovereign creator, but our redeemer as well, bringing us into covenant with Him. To call God Father in our New Covenant praying is to seek the sanctity of His name and the fulfilment of His sovereign will on earth as in heaven, as well as to seek the daily provisions from the Lord of the covenant (Ross, 1997)..

It is through this covenant that we are bound by His will to discern justice to all living creatures.

Thirdly, when we call God Father, we are also attesting that God is a person; one who we can know and have fellowship with. The term here is human relationship and Community (<http://www.bible.org/author.php>). So that when we call God Father, in fact we are referring to a community of relationship with God.

### *'Father' as Creator*

Turtle conservation is the realization of God's intention for all creation. There is a purpose for all creation and God intends that the purpose is eternal. Our call to him as 'Father' qualifies us to partake in his sustenance of other creations. We cannot call Him Father while at the same time act otherwise. That would be a mockery of our faith.

Adam was called to tend the Garden of Eden. He was called to care

for it. This is God's creation and not ours. We are here as stewards. In the creedal statement, God has given us the immense privilege, which goes with the responsibility of living in this world and passing it on to others.

If God made the world, then it is something he cares for. As Christians we are called to love what God loves. That means if we love God, we must love what God has made. It means loving other people and also other creatures (Mograth, 2006).

The environment and its inhabitants is not something we have made. It is not something we own. It is something God has entrusted to us. The non-negotiable teaching of the Bible is that He is the maker of everything. He did this by decree, by His powerful word (Gen.1; Ps.33; Is.44, 45; John 1; Romans1; Colossians1).

The declaration that creation is good is the seed-bed of respect and admiration for all created beings (Tuwere, 2007: 4). In respecting and admiring creation we are in turn respecting and admiring the creator. It is witnessing His ever presence with all creation. Our duty is to cater for that goodness to prevail. Turtle conservation reminds us of the ongoing event in creation. God continues to create, sustain and redeem.

The word dominion does not mean God gave us a license to destroy what He has made (Stott, 2006). We are given a responsible stewardship to care for the creation as God himself does. As Christians, we should be the vanguard for protecting the habitat where turtles live.

### *'Father' as Covenant Relationship*

The very first treaty made by God to man was to have a responsible dominion. Caring for God's creation is also an act of witness. Every time we care for the creation we are proclaiming God's covenant to the world. It is a proclamation of our very existence in God (Jones, 2005). God's covenant with the creation is part of God's one everlasting covenant of grace (Hanko, 1996). God is saying: 'I will establish my covenant with the birds, with the cattle, and with all the beasts of the earth.' That is what I'm referring to as God's 'Covenant with Creation.' And God speaks of that covenant with creation again in the verses that follow, especially in verse 13 (of Genesis ch. 9): 'I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.' And again in verse 15 God shows us plainly that the covenant referred to is not only His covenant with Noah and Noah's descendants. His covenant embraces 'every living creature of all flesh.'

The uniqueness of God's covenant in Genesis chapter nine rests solely through the inclusion of every creature. It is not the revelation of a

different covenant, but it is a new and different revelation of that one everlasting covenant of God (Hanko, 1996) .

The Lord's Prayer says to God 'your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. The prayer reiterates the covenant will. The prayer has to be concerned about creation. That prayer is about the earthing of heaven. It is about bringing heaven down to earth. It is about doing God's will on earth as it is done in heaven (Jones, 2006).

God intended the earth to be like the Garden of Eden. As Christians, we should be as concerned as God is for His creation. After all, this creation came into being through Christ and for Christ. To desecrate God's creation is ultimately not just a crime against humanity, but a blasphemy. Romans chapter 8 verses 19 through 22 also speak of the covenant with creation, but it takes us a step further. These verses do not use the word 'covenant' but the idea is there. The covenant comes into Romans chapter 8 verses 19 to 22 when the Word of God in those verses speaks of the final glory of believers in terms of sonship. In glory we will be 'manifest as the sons of God' and will 'enter into the glorious liberty of the children of God' (Hanko, 1996: 3). The manifestation of the sons of God is the final realization and perfection of God's covenant, the highest glory of that covenant relationship in which God is our God and we are His people.

Nevertheless, even the creature is not without hope (Hanko, 1996). Its hope is, as Paul says in verse 21, that 'the creature also itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.' That will be the final realization of what God was talking about when He spoke to Noah in Genesis chapters 8 and 9. The creature itself also shall be renewed and glorified with God's people. Then God's covenant with creation will be consummated! That covenant, too, is sure and everlasting!

This covenant of God with creation is, therefore, as firmly established in Christ, as those aspects of God's covenant that concern us. When we say Father in creedal statement, it reminds us of our responsibility within His covenant.

### *'Father' as a Communion*

The third meaning of the expression 'Father' denotes a communion: a family, a relationship, a unity, empathy, closeness or coexistence. The creation accounts in Genesis make it clear that man is not created as an isolated individual: 'God created mankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them' (Gen. 1:27). God placed the first human beings in relation to one another, each with a part-

ner of the other sex. The Bible affirms that man exists in relation with other persons, with God, with the world, and with himself. According to this conception, man is not an isolated individual but a person, an essentially relational being. 'Far from demanding a pure actualism that would deny its permanent ontological status, the fundamentally relational character of the *imago Dei* itself constitutes its ontological structure and the basis for its exercise of freedom and responsibility (Rome, 2000-2002).

### **Theology and Ecology**

Noting that the term 'ecology' combines the two Greek words *oikos* (house) and *logos* (word), the physical environment of human existence can be conceived as a kind of 'house' for human life. Given that the inner life of the Blessed Trinity is one of communion, the divine act of creation is the unreasonable production of partners to share in this communion (Rome, 2000-2002). In this sense, one can say that the divine communion now finds itself 'housed' in the created cosmos. For this reason, we can speak of the cosmos as a place of personal communion.

Theology will not be able to provide us with a scientific recipe for the resolution of the ecological crisis. As we have seen, it can help us to see our natural environment as God sees it, as the space of personal communion in which human beings, created in the image of God, must seek communion with other created beings.

Animals are the creatures of God. According to the Scriptures, He surrounds them with His providential care (Mt 6:26). Humans should accept them with gratitude and even adopt a eucharistic attitude with regard to every element of creation, to give thanks to God for them. By their very existence the animals bless God and give Him glory: (Jones, 2006). 'Bless the Lord, all you birds of the air. All you beasts, wild and tame, bless the Lord' (Dn 3:80-81). In addition, the harmony which man must establish, or restore, in the whole of creation includes his relationship to the animals. When Christ comes in his glory, He will review the whole of creation in an eschatological and definitive moment of harmony.

In Fiji, this life in communion with the rest of other creatures like the turtle is expressed through our totems, normally a trilogy of *ika* (fish), representing the sea or river; *kau* (tree), representing dry land and *manu-manu* (bird), representing the atmosphere (Tuwere, 2007: 4). These communions were cherished by our ancestors. The totems would communicate different aspects of conditions that will affect humans such as hurricanes, tidal waves, habitat for human consumption etc. Presently, we hardly see those experiences because of the exploitation of other beings.

The world in all its diversity is understood in the creation tradition as created by God is good. That it is a gift and moreover that life is worth preserving. The good to be aimed at is the common good. It encompasses all peoples as situated in an ecological context. In other words it is not simply individualistic. It looks to the good of the individual alongside the wider good of the community as a whole (Drummond, 2006: 899).

Communion with Christ is a result of faith in Him, and Baptism through which one dies to the old man through Christ (Gal 3:26-28) and puts on the new man (Gal 3:27; Rom 13:14). Through this sacrament one finds meaning in communion with creations; a communion justified by being born into a new being in Christ.

An attempt was to give some light to theological interpretation in the first part of our creedal statement. One clear definition of dominion that arises out of this interpretation is responsibility. This dominion is divinely given to us as a witness to the ultimate authority. To participate partially in this exercise of responsible dominion, calls for an awakening.

The church can be a change agent for ecological justice and environmental balance. Our prophetic ministry requires a commitment to non-idolatrous acts, social justice, authentic worship and compassion. This commitment is one expected of the church by the 'Father' to all beings and the care for creation (Mendoza, 2001).

There are some simple declarations in the Bible that clearly teach that God is the creator of everything. As a result He is the one who has control over the world He created. He is called 'Almighty' because He must be almighty to do the things that He has done (Ross, 1997). He notably creates and sustains everything! All power belongs to Him. He is the sovereign Lord of the universe He has made.

To acknowledge God as the creator is to accept Him as the sovereign Lord, all-knowing, all-powerful, and ever present everywhere. To accept Him as the almighty God is to accept that He is the sovereign Creator.

As bearer of faith, the church has every right to boldly proclaim responsibility over creation. This faith that serves for the sovereignty of God is called to deliver the exploited from bondage. They deserve a future as much as we do.

### **The Church as Institution**

The Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma is an institution that covers all those activities and possessions that support a living relationship with God and one another. An analogy would be in the sacrament. It is about personal relationship. It is also called the 'institution of sacrament'.

Why? For this wonderful relationship to survive and grow, it needs to be supported by everyday realities. These include food, dwellings, clothing and the like. For this to happen it requires laws, governance, businesses and others. So sacraments officially have legal and economic status and are therefore an institution.

I believe that all church institutions are meant to humbly support relationships. Marcellino echoes if we are not careful then our institutions can turn into personal bureaucracies that choke out life, resist change and dehumanize people and their actions.

The church will go awry if it disregards its responsibility as a support institution. If relationship amounts to life, the church has a far greater responsibility to continue to persevere for this course. Our relationship with other created beings is equally important as that to our relationship with other people.

### **Turtle Conservation and Church Institution**

There is a need in our eco-theology for the church to support a healthy relationship between people and other creations. As an institution, the church must have a vision of the social structure as a sign of her unity in Christ (<http://www.shc.edu/theolibrary/inst.htm> - 25/07/08). The role of the church, as a steward, and duty of care of its members towards God's creation could best be exemplified in its response to nature and the world. The Church can, and should, play an important role in mainstreaming environmental management and conservation within its ranks.

#### *Methodist Church Statement*

The Methodist Church regards turtle as no different from other species in their importance as creatures. Our Fijian culture has the same appreciation of the animal that it is not something new to conserve within the church framework (Interview with Manasa Lasaro – Former President Methodist Church in Fiji). It has been there; our ancestors have practised conservation sincerely before us. They have their own conservation way of catching turtles. There may have been some instances where over-fishing of turtles was evident. The case was not always the same (Interview with Manasa Lasaro – Former President Methodist Church in Fiji).

While the church does support conservation on natural resources which include turtles, the present constitution does not produce action guidelines for members. I believe what we need is some form of statement: a statement for awareness in the practical exercise of our Eco-

theology.

This paper serves as a request on behalf of one of Earth's creatures that does not have a voice of its own; this gentle giant that has touched many human hearts throughout time and across cultures. I'm writing on behalf of thousands that could be saved by a few simple words from the Conference. If members refrain from eating turtle meat on certain church calendars, probably this may help in the whole conservation process in Fiji and the world. Perhaps a prayer day for all natural resources would bring in a new attitude towards other beings.

### *World Church View*

In the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference of 2008, it declares that God calls us to strive for global sense of community to help achieve social, economic and ecological justice for all of creation (<http://gnj08.wordpress.com/2008/05/26/consumer-conservation-from-the-conference-25/07/2008>). The World Council of Churches' emphasis on justice, peace and integrity of creation sends a clear message for global eco-justice (Rolston, 2006: 922). Such a declaration is needed in our church today. As an institution I believe that the Methodist Church in Fiji is capable of using its institutional concept to accomplish God's purpose in turtle conservation.

### *Training*

Davuilevu Theological College and Methodist Lay Training Centre are two examples of institutions where future leaders of our church could be well informed for conservation awareness. The Uniting Church in Australia has designated some of its clergy for special training in eco-theology (<http://nsw.uca.org.au/news/2007/greenstory-1207-denistone.htm-25/07/08>). Can we also take the same course for our ecosystem?

We have so far regarded the church as an institution that has networking capabilities. The Methodist Church with its connectional system has the upper hand in collaborating partnership in turtle conservation. There are 51 divisions, 311 circuits around Fiji (Figures from Head Office – 28/07/2008). Eco-theology is about saving nature and the world, not just humans. The institutional responsibility of the church lies in its ability to cater for all creations equally. This responsibility must have its values grounded on the belief in God and God alone.

## **Church as People Founded on Faith in God**

### *Methodist Teaching About Salvation*

One of the distinctive teachings of the Methodist Church is that 'all can be saved'. Methodists hold an inclusive theology that no one is beyond the reach of God's love (<http://www.methodist.org.uk/index>. - 26/07/08). 'All need to be saved. All may be saved. All may know themselves saved. All may be saved to the uttermost' (<http://www.methodist.org.uk/index>. - 26/07/08). This 'all' signifies the whole salvation of all creation. As human beings we find ourselves part of an unjust, sinful and violent world, which we may feel individually helpless to change. Through faith in God, the impossible becomes possible. This faith in God calls for commitment to His will alone. He is the source of strength that enables our commitment materialized in our role as guardian of Christian ethical principles in turtle hunting. It means to me that catching turtle is not forbidden but it must be done with a commitment to God at heart.

The Methodist teaching emphasizes that salvation is there for everyone who turns to God (<http://www.methodist.org.uk/index>. - 26/07/08). The Good News is the Kingdom of God. Through Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection, we believe that God has broken the power of all that is evil, in the world and in ourselves. We are forgiven and liberated in His blood. Though we sin against God through the exploitation of other beings, His mercy continues to allow for our deliverance from our wrong doings. God's mercy does not only deliver but gives us new direction for better stewards of His creation. As people of faith, we are called to become co-gardeners with God (Tuwere, 2007:6). This partnership in response is not negotiable to those that believe in God. It is something that is expected of us.

### *The Claim to Live*

The 'garden' includes the ecosystem. That entire make up of the ecosystem have their own right to live like any other member of that household. Tuwere stresses that we may have different claims and counter claims. The claim of culture and tradition, the claim of *qoliqoli* owners, the legal claim of government, the claim of the church, and the claim of the sea turtle, the endangered species. Since all are connected to this one delicate web of life, the claim of the weakest member of our common household must take precedence over the others. The claim of

the *vonu* must become paramount (Tuwere, 2007: 6).

We are interdependent for life as created beings. Life is our common standing in God. It is His life in us. This life that we all share is in God. As the garden is the source of life, (Genesis 2:9; 3:3) it must surely be in this Trinitarian God who calls all to enjoy life. He who destroys the garden earns the stern judgment of the Gardener (Ibid, 7).

Perhaps the claim to live in God and for God could shed some light in our quest to act responsibly towards others. Living has to be in God for justice to surface within our role as people of faith. Life is worth living because its source is omnipotent. The immeasurable Creator God who does not only create but dwells among creations. When we exploit other creatures, we are proclaiming that we presume to be people of God in words but in actual fact we may be practicing paganism.

The claim of the sea turtle to the church is to continue to perform as the body of Christ responsibly. The Church as individual or communal is part of the body of Christ (<http://www.allaboutgod.com/body-of-christ.htm> - 26/07/2008). The sea turtle is also part of that body of Christ in sustaining life.

### *The Claim of the Household as Christ Body*

Paul's letter to the Ephesians 1,:22-23 'And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.' This body which is called the church cannot deny the fact that in order to grow, it needs support. As mentioned earlier, any relationship needs everyday realities. This reality is offered by a bigger body, the oikos. The church is part of this bigger body. This is the complete body of Christ; the church and the oikos. The church and turtle and the cosmos represent the complete essence of the Word that creates.

The claim of equal representation and standing as the body of Christ is the claim of the whole cosmos. John 3:16 states: 'For God so loved the "world" that he gave his begotten Son...' Who is the world? In the literal sense of the word, the term world depicts more than man. This love caters for the salvation of every living being including turtles. God enters and works within us for transformation (<http://sharktacos.com/God/2008/07/emerging-relational-theology-5.html> - 26/07/2008). In turn our transformed life must be measured by how responsible we are as stewards of all.

The church as the body of Christ is part of the household of life. In this household of life, other beings have equal standing for life. In deny-

ing other beings their freedom for life, the church relinquishes herself from her responsibility as steward.

### ***Lotu as Ethical Agent in Turtle Conservation***

#### *The Underlying Principle*

Jesus Christ of Nazareth is the supreme ethical authority. When we come to receive from Him our final awards, He will not ask, ‘What was your theory of atoms? What did you think about evolution? What was your doctrine of atonement? What was your mode of baptism?’ But He will ask, ‘What did you do with Me? Did you accept Me as your personal standard of character? Were you a practical everyday Christian?’ Christian Ethics will be the judgment test (<http://repository.upenn.edu/boardman/about.html-27/07/2008>). The purpose of Christian ethics is to show the practical application of the precepts and behaviors of Jesus Christ to everyday life.

The church as the Body of Christ will continue to seek what we ought to do in turtle conservation (Rolston, 2008: 908). Using Jesus’ life and teaching as a model is a norm for the church. If Jesus is the model we have chosen to imitate, what does that imply about attitudes? What does it mean to our values and style of life of the self-identified Christian? (<http://christianhumanist.net/credo91.aspx-27/07/2008>).

When we refer to *Christian ethics* we mean the core values that have been extrapolated from the life and teachings of Jesus that form the foundation of the moral life of the Christian and that provide guidelines for his behavior and decision-making and a basis for self-examination and judgment. The claim to be a Christian implies an invitation to others to evaluate the behavior, the value commitments and the personal conduct of those who define themselves as Christians.

#### *Attending to the Church Patient in Turtle Conservation*

We need a prophetic vision of a world into which God might transform ours through transforming us (<http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=2215&C=2005-27/07/2008>). This means that one particularly important response to our situation is openness to the transformation of our imagination. We live largely in and through our images. Where no adequate images exist, we cannot lead full and appropriate lives. In recent centuries church people have not been in the forefront of image making. We have increasingly lived in and from images fashioned by others.

Our traditional Christian images have been crowded into special corners of our lives. Recognizing our poverty, we need to find Christ at work in other communities in the new creation of images by which we can be enlivened. We can hope also that as we confess our nakedness and gain a fresh appreciation for the creative imagination, the sickness of the church in this respect may be healed and our Christian faith can be released to share in the fashioning of the images so urgently needed in conservation.

Perhaps for affluent Christians the deepest level of response to the awareness of limits is the recognition that we cannot free ourselves from guilt (Ibid, 2008). The Methodist Church in Fiji is caught in a destructive system, and we find that even our will to refuse to identify with that system is mixed with the desire to enjoy its fruits. None of us is innocent, either in intention or behavior. At most we ask that we may be helped to open ourselves to re-creation by God, but we also depend on grace in another sense. It is only because we know ourselves accepted in our sinfulness that we can laugh at our own pretences, live with a measure of joy in the midst of our half-heartedness, and risk transformation into a new creation.

The term 'Christian salvation' expresses a desire to set ethical reflection in the context of reconsideration of the nature of God's purposes for creation. Privatistic and other worldly forms of religion have great appeal in a time when solving human problems at the human level is so bewildering and frustrating (<http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=2215&C=2006-27/07/2008>). The legitimate claim for attention of such views of salvation should be recognized, while we look again at what God offers us in Jesus Christ. The new sense of limits can be an occasion for deepened recognition of our dependence on God. Indeed, if it does not lead to renewed openness to divine power and direction, we are not likely to be effective.

We have not as yet adjusted our theology, our piety, and our ethics to what we have come to see as the real situation of the planet. For the first time, the World Council of Churches at Nairobi, affirmed a just and participatory society, and actually called for a just, participatory, and sustainable society. (<http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=2215&C=2009-27/07/2008>). Turtle conservation calls for a just, participatory and sustainable reference of the church.

There is sickness within the church that needs to be healed. Although the Biblical view of God expresses a transformation of the way God is seen as related to nature, there is also a lively sense of God's relation to and presence in nature that was overlooked in this stress on the God of

History 'against' nature (<http://www.sedos.org/english/radford.htm-28/07/2008>). A re-examination on the part of the church has been pending. I'm referring to our daily attitudes towards other species.

Although God is seen as 'creating' nature, rather than being an expression of it, nevertheless the nature God creates is alive and enters into lively relation to God. God delights in the creatures God creates, and the creatures return this rejoicing in joy and praise.

### *The Kingdom of God as the Telos<sup>2</sup>*

I have chosen to use the best synopsis of Wesley's Theology of the Kingdom. In order that the name of God may be hallowed, we pray that His kingdom, the kingdom of Christ, may come. This kingdom then comes to a particular person, when he 'repents and believes the gospel'; when he is taught of God, not only to know himself, but to know Jesus Christ and Him crucified. As 'this is the life eternal, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent'; so it is the kingdom of God begun below, set up in the believer's heart; "the Lord God Omnipotent then 'reigneth,' " when He is known through Christ Jesus. He taketh unto Himself His mighty power, that He may subdue all things unto Himself. He goeth on in the soul conquering and to conquer, till He hath put all things under His feet, till 'every thought is brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ' ([http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan\\_theology/theojrnl/21-25/23-03.htm](http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan_theology/theojrnl/21-25/23-03.htm) - 28/07/2008.)'

The kingdom of glory in heaven is the continuation and perfection of the kingdom of grace on earth. The final renovation of all things, by God's putting an end to misery and sin, to infirmity and death, taking all things into His own hands, and setting up the kingdom which endureth through all ages. This final renovation is for all creations including sea turtles.

The kingdom means the sovereign, righteous rule of God. It is a rule in which power and goodness, judgment and mercy are combined. This sovereign rule of God must be accepted by us in faithful, grateful obedience. There is no real kingdom without subjects. The kingdom is not destroyed by men's disobedience, for God still rules in judgment. Yet the summons to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness certainly entails human obedience.

A redeemed society is one in which salvation is sought and found,

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<sup>2</sup> Telos = *an ultimate end* (Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary).

not as one individual alone, but in an over-expanding community of individuals. This is basic to the relation of the kingdom to the church, but the goal extends far beyond the boundaries of the visible church.

The kingdom meets opposition at every point, and this opposition is latent even in our most meritorious actions. In short, no consideration of the kingdom should minimize the power of evil. The opposition may be thought of as coming from the devil, or from the demonic powers of history, or from mankind's ever-present sin, ignorance, apathy, and error. The 'principalities and powers' confront God's power. God is never conquered by these forces, but what we believe to be his purposes are delayed or frustrated by them (<http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=577&C=739-28/07/2008>).

To sum up, the kingdom of God is our ultimate challenge and our ultimate hope. Thus, it is not surprising that Jesus found in it his central message. It remains for us to discover, to declare, and to live by all that is good and true in what the term implies.

Turtles do have a place in God's Kingdom. If this were not so, why then did God create them in the first place. He must have *telos* for all creations.

### *Reconciliation of the Lotu with Natural Resources (turtle)*

God created the world for two reasons. The first is to provide the idea of His greatness. The other is to depict invisible things in the visible. Seeing an image of His grace in all that He has produced in plants and animals, He insists on the contrary, on providing a reason for everything.

Unity in Christ is broken by sin. Understanding God's reconciliation requires understanding God's view of sin, sorrow, penitence, confession, repentance, justice and restoration (<http://www.peacemakers.net/peace/resolving.htm-28/07/2008>). Why do we need reconciliation of the church and the rest of the household of life? Perhaps no one will deny the fact that it is humans that exploit. Basically, the outcome of every practical decision will be determined by its impact on other beings.

The Macuata saga rings important questions. How many is enough to cater for an occasion as such? How do we justify the number of turtles as a claim that it was enough? Who says that the figure is enough? Can we also consider voices that say the figure is far more than enough? Did we make an attempt to hear those voices? While happiness filled the atmosphere of such occasion, did we make an attempt to feel breezes of sorrow among some?

Along those lines of questions lies our shortcoming as stewards of

the land. We fall in God's sight. The action entails some elements of heresy in my opinion. Our measure in practical Christian living is God alone.

All reconciliation, of course, as indeed all the sacraments, leads to the celebration of the great sacrament, the Eucharist, in which Christ is 'the Victim whose death has reconciled us' to the Father (<http://www.spiritualitytoday.org/spir2day/823414dimock.html-29/07/2008>). Death of such number of turtles in Macuata calls for reconciliation with the Father. In turn, it reconciles us with the turtle by accepting our sin to God.

### *Lotu a vehicle to Pacifism within the Household of Life*

'Pacifism' is the in-principle unwillingness to engage in lethal violence, including most obviously the unwillingness to participate in warfare. The word 'pacifism' has the virtue of being a positive term, connoting the affirmation of peace more than simply the opposition to violence (<http://peacetheology.net/pacifism-with-justice/1-introduction-defining-pacifism/-28/07/2008>).

As a vehicle for non-violence in all degree and variations, the church has an obligation to the household of life. Christian pacifism has its basis in Jesus, the non-violent one whose power is perfect in weakness (<http://faith-theology.blogspot.com/2007/08/ten-stations-on-my-way-to-christian.html> - 28/07/2008). Jesus is the human hermeneutic of God. The act of exploitation is violent.

Many of us have been appalled by the Biblical granting of dominion to human beings in light of how Christians have exercised this. But the truth is that we do exercise dominion. The survival of millions of other species depends on what policies we now adopt. At such a time, to deny that we have dominion is foolish and likely to lead to irresponsibility.

The household of life needs our attention to the growing exercise of exploitation based on the anthropocentric attitude. The church as the body of Christ is called to be an agent of pacifism on the weaker member of the household of life.

### **A Way Forward**

The aim of this paper is to construct and offer a solution that may benefit not only the *Vonu* but all natural resources in Fiji. The need for the church to participate actively in conservation has to be seen as one of its Biblical roles. The basic principle of every faith adhering community is the Bible.

Stewardship is the duty of the church. It is not a choice. To execute

this duty is witnessing to God and His Son Jesus Christ. As believers, we are the 'shepherd of beings', one who leads all beings to God, inviting them to sing an 'alleluia' of praise. The Psalmist brings us into a sort of cosmic church (Psalm 148:1-5); this church whose apse is the heavens and whose aisles are the regions of the world, the world in which the choir of God's creatures sings His praise.

What this paper attempts to offer is a vivid outlook of the wider perspective the church has or needs to engage in. Turtle conservation is about engaging the church in practical stewardship. The Methodist Church has already received its mission to govern creation in order to make all its potential shine. It is a delegation granted at the very origins of creation.

The church is the living image who participates by its dignity in the perfection of the divine archetype. Our lordship is not absolute but ministerial. It is a real reflection of the unique and infinite lordship of God. Hence the church must exercise it with wisdom and love, sharing in the boundless wisdom and love of God.

Today there is an urgent need for 'ecological conversion' to protect not only the natural environment but also the human quality of life.

## **Awareness Initiative**

### *Education and Outreach*

Education and outreach are perhaps the most appropriate tools to sensitize people within the church and prepare future generations to the need of conservation and habitat protection. Awareness for Conservation, therefore, can be designed as the Campaign arm of the Methodist Church to create awareness for specific issues creating spaces in the minds of its members for favorable reactions to chosen subjects.

Church Divisions can be used to run conservation campaigns all over Fiji. This existing church network has the capacity to carry out efficient conservation programs. This is to ensure that there are plenty of turtles available for our future generations.

### *Workshops*

Training workshops is fundamental in this exercise. Themes such as 'Protecting Sea Turtles and their Habitat – Stewardship Role' or 'Stewardship is Conservation' for instance, are two examples that awareness could focus on.

The training workshop will provide confirmed members with the skills needed to organizing extra-curriculum activities based on the above

themes. The documents presented should outline information and knowledge that can help raise the awareness of Methodist Youth Fellowship about sea turtle conservation and could be developed especially for extra-curricular classes. It can be accompanied by an informative packet, entitled 'Biological Information about Sea Turtles and Their Habitat' or 'Ecological Life Cycle'.

The church is so close to our local people and as such is in a better position in communicating conservation awareness initiatives. This can be done at Divisional level, Circuit and village church level. The implementation process will depend on how our leaders are trained and equipped for such exercise. It may not be too late to begin and for the church to be a portal between heaven and earth in conservation.

### *Outreach through Media*

The media has a very effective role in communicating almost every issue in Fiji. The Methodist Church often uses various media (newspaper, radio, television etc.) available in communicating its stand on various issues. It may not be something new for the church in this regard. Perhaps what would be new is sending awareness messages through these media with regard to its role as stewards of creation.

Our existing program *Raici Jisu Matua* is one example. This particular program could also serve our members with updates on current data on environment issues. Relating the Gospel message in conservation is something that will provide an opportunity for our people to be enlightened with related issues.

Interviews on television and conservation column in the dailies will see our active role in outreach enhanced. Outreach is not only for the people but for the whole of creation. We need to fully utilize the critical role that the media plays in communicating the importance of protecting our environment and exploring ways to secure a sustainable future for both people and nature.

### *Engaging the Congregation for a Sustainable Environment*

In the next fifty years, the population in Fiji is likely to exceed 1 million. Greater population means greater demand. Unless we make significant changes now, meeting that demand will become a burden for everybody, including the church. It is just ethical that we as stewards of the land act now for the future. God has instilled in us the knowledge to make clear judgments with regards to everything in our dominion.

The Church needs to catalyze change in people so that they can make a difference that matters. Maybe what we can do as the church is to send our people to exceptional places of biodiversity and cultural heritage. There they can work with scientists to find and implement solutions.

Working closely with community members, partners, local stakeholders, and non-governmental organizations, the church can help identify and prioritize important environmental problems and cultural issues that need attention. I believe it is a unique opportunity for the church to engage with others who share the same passion and responsibility towards nature as the Household of Life.

*Lectionary and Sermon Text on Conservation for Lay Preachers, Catechist and Pastors.*

My experience in the ministry has prompted me to share this fact. Not once in my years in the ministry of the Methodist Church have I experienced sermons on environmental issues. It has been taken as part of a sermon but not the whole sermon. Conservation calls for a good exegetical overview of creation and stewardship. I wonder why can't we have a Sunday Sermon when the preacher spells his/her topic like, our sermon today is based on the theme 'Conservation is Gods Holy Calling' or 'Conservation is Witnessing Jesus' Love'.

Neglecting environmental issues in our church worship, is neglecting the very nature of God that we are serving. How can we praise God with our prayers and hymns when at the same time engage ourselves in the exploitation of our natural resources? What kind of worship does that signify? Is it genuine in God's presence? Or is it a mockery of the faith that we hold so dear yet so far in its real meaning?

Interestingly, the text John 3:16 reads 'for God so loved the world that He gave His begotten Son...' The environmentalist Christian will ask the meaning of the word *world* in the text. Who or what the word *world* means sound exciting. Does it refer only to human beings or does it refer to every living being and their right to access that Love from God? Is it because humans have the knowledge to understand? Are we saying that other beings do not have their own wavelength with the creator God? Is that what we normally refer to as the Mystery of God? Can we measure the immeasurable? Or does our interpretation distort the meaning of the word *world* in God's intention for His love?

*Handbook for Lay Preachers*

A handbook on lectionaries and sermon texts will enlighten lay preachers on texts with reference to nature. Enhancing promotion to environmental awareness from the pulpit must be seen as a way of contextualizing the Bible. We are so eager in preaching about the Kingdom. The Kingdom is about love. The more we love the better our world becomes. Love heals, transforms, rejuvenates, unites, and makes what seems impossible possible...it is the most positive force alive! The world, meaning every bit and pieces of it, has equal right to access God's love.

Another important aspect of God's Kingdom is in the Lord's Prayer. 'Let your will take place, as in heaven, also upon earth'. This eschatological statement is valid also for the here and now. The Kingdom comes when one repents and believes the gospel. The person does not only end with repentance and belief as the way of the Kingdom. In the process of sanctification, he needs to be taught about God; not only to know himself, but to know Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

We pray for the coming of His everlasting kingdom, the kingdom of glory in heaven, which is the continuation and perfection of the kingdom of grace on earth ([http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan\\_theology/theojrnl/21-25/23-03.htm](http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan_theology/theojrnl/21-25/23-03.htm)). The Kingdom of righteousness is for all creation.

To subdue nature and dominate it, or to till the garden and to maintain it (Genesis 2:15) is not easy. One needs verification from the manual. The Bible offers adequate insight on how to attend nature and maintain it. While it is necessary to use the resources of earth for human purpose, at the same time we are assigned to take good care of the garden. I would suggest that both sides of this equation are equally important.

In the handbook we could probably add some important elements such as intrinsic values for all creation. This could include their richness, complexity and intensity of feeling enjoyed by organisms. Jesus said that sparrows and sheep are valuable but that human beings are worth much more (Matt. 10:31, 12:12). Reverence for all life, yes.

Nature, history, technology, and everyday life are ambiguous, a mixture of good and evil. The Apostle Paul sees all of nature as estranged from its original purpose. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now (Romans 8:22 RSV).

In the same passage in which Paul speaks of the groaning of the creation, he also writes that 'the creation waits with eager longing ... because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God' (Romans 8:19, 21 RSV). This destiny is the consummation of the creation and the realization of the di-

vine purpose for the world. The church as portal to this consummation of creation must come out boldly and proclaim earnestly. Unless our people are literally equipped, they will continue to be misinformed on this very important calling for the church.

The fact is, however, that in one way or another all has gone astray and have sought to build empires of greed in which power is used to oppress other people and to exploit nature for selfish purposes. Hence, history is the story of divine judgment but not of judgment alone but also of grace, reconciliation, and renewal.

The last word is hope. This divine promise is the basis for hope. The biblical imperative is this: Respond to God's creative and redemptive action with appropriate human action that contributes to the achievement of God's own purposes in the world (<http://www.frontiernet.net/~kenc/ecology.htm>). Probably this is where the Methodist Church in Fiji could contribute effectively. The mandate is to cooperate with God in a covenant of faithfulness in establishing peace, justice, and prosperity.

### *Church Schools' Curriculum*

Conservation awareness could also be introduced in Circuit schools and the Theological College. This will boost student knowledge in conservation and the Bible. For the church to address conservation properly, we have to train our leaders at every level of the church. Training of the mind helps in the transition of attitudes.

The school curriculum must adapt to the reality and the need for a much broader knowledge of conservation. The curriculum is to be such that our catechist and ministers are efficiently developed for knowledge about ground realities and the Biblical approach to conservation. Understanding of ecological issues is equally important if conservation is to become a reality.

Having collaborative studies with institutions holding varied expertise on this field such as USP or FIT will only favor the need that is at hand. I can only recall having field trips in our BD class to enhance our first hand experience of the reality. The subject of conservation connects theory to practical everyday activities. The creation story could only be learned clearly outdoor.

Visiting sites and *tabu* areas is a delight and an enlightening experience. It is like walking into God's sacred ground. The feeling that life is everywhere depicts the omnipresence of the Creator in all His creations. A sense of interconnected surfaces and a will to surrender the aspect of

exploiting comes to life. At that particular moment exploitation is defeated and the will of God is paramount.

I'm talking about first hand learning experiences in the field of conservation. These experiences are hardly attained in any classroom learning process. The advantage of the course is probably because much of the materials are readily available in the field.

What the church needs to focus on is a curriculum beginning from Bible Schools to the Theological College. A curriculum that assures a flow of learning exercise at the same time enhances broadening the knowledge to Degree level.

In my opinion, what we want is not just 'riches' but a 'rich life'. Appropriate respect for the biodiversity on earth enriches human life. This appropriation is attainable through proper training and equipping the mental capability.

## **Conclusion**

In the midst of its struggle, life has ever been 'conserved' as biologists find. Life has been continually 'redeemed' as theologians find. To adapt a Biblical metaphor, the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1:5).

The church is to recognize that the basis of our 'ecological' theology lies in the doctrine of creation, and the doctrine of redemption. Discerning a Trinitarian relationship between God, the land and humankind we acknowledge that when the Land cries, humankind cries, and that when humankind cries the land cries and that when either the land or humankind cry, God cries.

A statement from the consultation held at PTC echoes the reality of the need at hand. We call for a simplifying of ecological theology to enable the complex eco-theological concepts to be understood at the grassroots level, and for the creation of an electronic forum through the SPATS website for discussion of issues related to conservation. "We commit to developing a curriculum on conservation and theology for the member institutions of SPATS and commit to developing a handbook on conservation for the churches of the Pacific" (<http://babasiga.blogspot.com/2007/10/green-theology-way-to-go.html>).

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