

A Statement by MATS on the Integrity of Creation

The Bible teaches that God created the world, and saw that it was good. Our wonder and delight, in the world in which we live, prompts us to assent to the biblical revelation, and to respond, with praise and thanksgiving. Further, the Bible teaches, and our consciences acknowledge, that we are responsible to God as stewards of His wonderful creation. We, the people of Papua New Guinea, in our culture, are aware of the goodness of the natural world, that comes as a gift from beyond ourselves, to be in a reciprocal relationship of exchange within the whole community of creation.

Yet, in Papua New Guinea, we are already seeing symptoms of an ever-increasing misuse by humanity of the responsible dominion entrusted to us by God. This dominion is exercised through the structures of politics, and economics, within society, and by the tools of technology. As a result of the misuse of the means of stewardship, the relationships between humanity and God, human being and human being, humanity and creation, are seen to be breaking down. In Papua New Guinea, the misuse of technology for economic reasons is leading to deforestation, over-mining, over-fishing, and over-intensive agriculture. Its effects and symptoms are seen in the exhaustion and poisoning of the land, and the disappearance of valuable species of plants and animals.

Although deforestation is in its early stages in Papua New Guinea, in other tropical countries, it is far advanced, so that loss of trees is contributing, in turn, to the build-up of greenhouse gases, climate change, and eventually to the raising of sea levels, and the submerging of coastal areas. These changes amount to unprecedented, and critical, interference in, and alteration of, the ecological balance of nature. As such, they are a violation of the natural order, which God has provided, to sustain the universe. Such a violation is not just an accident, or a casual mistake, it amounts to a consistent attitude of disobedience to the moral order that undergirds the natural order. Human beings are misusing the tools of technology for short-term economic gain. Unthinking desire for gain is not merely greed, but idolatry, for it makes desire for money into an absolute goal for human life, a “god”, and erects a “technological imperative”, that states that technology should be pushed to its limit to maximise economic gain.

As long as they allow themselves to be carried along by their greed and idolatry, human beings will be in the grip of the very technological tools and

economic forces that they seek to exploit, and will have no means to stop the acceleration of their efforts from continuing to the point of terminal breakdown. In that case, they will see environmental destruction as inevitable, if they refuse to face the thought of dealing with its basic cause, which is the human urge for power, uncontrolled by the will of God.

This urge for power is hidden behind an ideology of development, which sees “growth” in terms of an increase of material wealth, and measures success, solely in terms of monetary profit. It disregards the effects of the private accumulation of wealth and power upon the human and natural community, and upon future generations, who will have to cope with the waste and desolation, caused by temporary “progress”. The result is not only the destruction of the integrity of creation, but also the disruption of justice and peace, leading to the loss of human wholeness. We are like passengers on a runaway, driverless PMV, or an oarless canoe, because we have abdicated responsibility for the control of the natural processes, of which we are stewards.

Confronted by the seeming possibility of a man-made end of the world, Christians do not give in to despair, complacency, or escapism. Instead, they turn to Christ. In Christ, the Father is renewing the whole of creation, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and is calling humanity into a new covenant relationship with Himself. By the incarnation of Jesus Christ, God dwelt among us, and by His Holy Spirit, He is in touch, not only with every human being, but with the whole of creation. The presence of God, through Jesus Christ, is offered to us by word and sacrament, by the Bible, and by the bread and wine, fruits of the earth, which Jesus Christ took to be His body and blood. The incarnation of Jesus Christ includes His cross and resurrection. By His cross, Jesus won the victory over all forces that are used by human beings to gain absolute power for themselves. He exposed all such forces as powerless, and condemned the greed and idolatry of those who use them.

So, the cross shows us our real powerlessness, if we idolise technology and economic power. Yet, if we accept our powerlessness, we are then open to the love of God, displayed on the cross, and to the resurrection life that flows from it. We are open to the love that builds community, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and so restores the integrity of creation, and restores justice and peace to humanity. So, the covenant relationship, into which God, in Trinity, calls us, is renewed and we are made stewards of creation once more. The reciprocal relationship with creation, in which we Papua New Guineans take

part, may be taken up into, and fulfilled by, this new covenant. So, by confessing our sin against the God of creation, we are brought to repentance, and are then renewed, and sent out, to act, by word and example, as prophets to our fellow human beings, to awaken them, both to the reality of their situation, and to the remedy.

When our understanding of our role as stewards is renewed by Christ, we will no longer allow the tools of technology, and the political, and economic structures of life, to enslave us, but will control them, by love, and use them to cooperate with God in the work of renewing His creation. Guided by love, we will respect each creature as a valued member of the web of creation. We will use all our skills of intelligence and imagination to work for the good of each creature, and use the tools of technology, and the structures of society, in a way that is appropriate to them. We, ourselves, will adopt a simpler, sustainable lifestyle, where necessary, by which we can live in harmony with the community of creation, and help restore its ecological balance.

If we are to use the tools of technology, and the structures of society constructively, we must use the advice of the technological, ecological, and social sciences, and incorporate them into the curricula of our seminaries, and into the life of our nation. Our audience for this appeal is the whole of humanity, for all human beings share in the call to be stewards of creation.