

# **KEYNOTE ADDRESS: CHRISTIANS CARING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

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## **OCCASION**

This was a keynote address by Kirine Yandit at the official launching of the book, *Christians Caring for the Environment in Papua New Guinea*. The Evangelical Alliance of Papua New Guinea sponsored the official launching of the book. The official launching took place at the Dame Rose Kekedo Hall of the Papua New Guinea University of Technology in Lae, on September 31, 2005. The audience included the Honourable Sasa Zibe MP Huon Gulf (former Environment Minister); Mr Misty Baloiloi, Vice-Chancellor of Unitech; a number of senior academic staff and students of Unitech; official delegates and observers of the of the Annual General Conference of the Evangelical Alliance of PNG; Sir Brian Barnes, Archbishop of the Catholic church in PNG; and other distinguished guests.

## **PSALM 19**

“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day, they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.

“Their voice goes to all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens He has pitched a tent for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his course.

“It rises at one end of the heavens, and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is hidden from its heat. The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure, and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them, is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from wilful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression. May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer!” (Ps 19).

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Bible teaches that the whole of creation and existence did not appear by chance, or accidentally, as other philosophies propose. Rather, the Bible resolutely witnesses that the whole of creation was brought into existence by the power of the word of the eternal God, the invisible, infinite, self-existent Supreme Being.

Gen 1 depicts God’s creative activity in effecting change, by bringing into existence the material world, out of what once was chaos. In Gen 1, we discover the Great Mind’s purpose and pleasure in bringing the material world into existence, the same world that ancient and modern man claims as “his” nature and environment. In other words, God had a purpose for nature and creation from the beginning.

## **CREATION: GOD’S PURPOSE AND PLEASURE**

God brought creation into existence for His own purpose and pleasure. The crown of creation was the human being that the Bible calls “man”, which included man and woman (Gen 1-2; Adam and Eve). This special creature was purposely created in the very image of God. This image implies that, since man is created like his Creator, and by his Creator, he possesses values, and behaves in the manner, of his Creator, including the virtues of loving care, tenderness, fairness, justice, and the freedom of choice, and all

the virtues wrapped therein. In His eternal goodness, God gave freedom and responsibility to man to take care of the rest of the material creation.

“God blessed them, and said to them, ‘Be fruitful, and increase in number; fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and birds of the air, and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’ Then God said, ‘I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth, and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth, and all the birds of the air, and all creatures that move on the ground – everything that has the breath of life in it – I give every green plant for food.’ And it was so” (Gen 1:28-30).

The text profoundly expresses that man and woman should invest in being good stewards. Hence, as far as God’s purposes for human beings and material creation are concerned, man draws his metaphysical existence from the breath, voice, and word of God, in submission and obedience to his Creator.

On the other hand, as part of physical creation, man’s Creator meant for man to draw his physical existence from creation, by careful and proportionate utilisation of his natural environment. Gen 1:31 depicts that, after all that was conceived in the mind of God came into existence, it brought ecstatic pleasure to God. God was pleased with His creation. No statement can express it better than this, “God saw it all, and it was very good!”

Hence, what was stated in Gen 1, we see being reiterated and actualised in Gen 2, whereby Adam and Eve were to cultivate the beautiful Garden of Eden. As Ps 148 declares, “Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures in all ocean depths; lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do His bidding, you mountains and all hills, fruits trees and cedars, wild animals and cattle, small creatures and flying birds, kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers of the earth, young men and maidens, old men and children. Let them praise the name of the Lord, for His name alone is exalted; His splendour is above the earth and the heavens. He has raised up for His people a horn, the praise of all His saints, of Israel, the people close to His heart. Praise the Lord” (Ps 148:7-14).

## **HUMAN DISOBEDIENCE AFFECTED CREATION AND ENVIRONMENT**

Contrary to what is depicted in the Gen 1 and 2 narratives, in Gen 3, we discover the horror of the reverse narrative. In Gen 3, Adam and Eve, given their freedom of choice, and through the instigation of a snake (symbol of evil), chose to disobey their Creator. This incident, which the Bible describes by many terms, as sin, rebellion, disobedience, violation of God's absolute moral law, and so forth, severed relationships between God and man, man and other men and women, and between man and nature.

The results have been complex. Man has become God's enemy, an enemy within himself, an enemy to his fellow man – ruthless and careless towards creation, his environment, which is the very basis of his survival. Therefore, wherever natural man goes, on the pretext that there is no one above him, he conquers the weak and powerless by force. He plunders the riches of the environment, ruthlessly, without thought or regard for the adverse negative affects that may fall upon his fellow human beings. He forgets the replenishing of the environment for the next person and generation. Therefore, repeatedly throughout the Bible, God calls man to be more responsible to his neighbour, as well as his environment, the very material on which his survival depends. Now, let us turn to some classic examples in the Bible.

### **AFTER THE FLOOD IN NOAH'S DAY**

After the flood in Noah's day, God promises to replenish the earth. Remember that God destroyed the earth by the flood, because of man's sinfulness. Nevertheless, after the flood God made this promise. "Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The LORD smelt the pleasing aroma, and said in His heart: 'Never again, will I curse the ground, because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil, from childhood. And, never again, will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done. "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease'" (Gen 8:20-22). Corresponding to this decree, Hebrews reiterates that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who "sustains the universe by His mighty power" (Heb 1:3).

## **LAWS FROM LEVITICUS**

Another classic example can be observed from the teaching of the Law of Moses in the Pentateuch regarding the Sabbath. Lev 25 talks about the Sabbath, the seventh year, and the year of Jubilee, the 50th year, when the land, environment, and everything were given time to rest, recuperate, and rejuvenate, before further use. “The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine, and you are but aliens and my tenants” (Lev 25:23).

The current globalisation trend, and Papua New Guinea’s Land Mobilisation Bill, disregard God’s command to humankind to care for the environment. Globalisation and the Land Mobilisation Bill, in my view, give opportunity for total alienation of land from those having customary land ownership: the clans, transferring it to new tenants, the state, and multinational corporations. This, I fear, will have an aggravating effect on the customary land rights of the people.

## **LAWS FROM DEUTERONOMY**

Deuteronomy also speaks of caring for the land. “If you come across a bird’s nest beside the road, either in a tree or on the ground, and the mother is sitting on the young, or on the eggs, do not take the mother with the young. You may take the young but be sure to let the mother go, so that it may go well with you, and you may have a long life. . . . Do not plant two kinds of seed in your vineyard; if you do, not only the crops you plant, but also the fruit of the vineyard, will be defiled. Do not plough with an ox and a donkey yoked together” (Deut 22:6-7, 9-10). “If you enter your neighbour’s vineyard, you may eat all the grapes you want, but do not put any in your basket. If you enter your neighbour’s grain field, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to his standing grain” (Deut 23:24-25). “Do not take a pair of millstones – not even the upper one – as security for a debt, because that would be taking a man’s livelihood as security” (Deut 24:6).

These are but just a few examples that remind us that God has laws and commands that His people need to obey. If man does not follow God’s laws, then there will be severe consequences. Notice that the laws include moral laws and universal laws. Moral laws relate to how we must treat one another

as human beings, and universal or natural laws relate to ecological and environmental systems.

### **GUIDANCE FROM PROVERBS**

We have seen that scripture teaches us how we should deal with our environment, economics, business, commerce, agriculture, science, culture, and education. Proverbs further emphasises this truth, “A poor man’s field may produce abundant food, but injustice sweeps it away” (Prov 13:23). The truth of this verse is happening in this country. What the environmental sciences and medical sciences are telling us today is not new. These are the very reasons why God wrote his Word as instructions to His people long ago. And we need to take heed of it.

### **HOPE IN THE RECREATION OF NATURE AND ENVIRONMENT**

The New Testament portrays Jesus Christ as King and Lord of all creation, and, through Jesus, the whole earth will be renewed and recreated. John 3:16 states, “For God so loved the world.” The world, in my belief, includes the material world around us. God loves and cares for the material world, as well as fallen, sinful man. It is also not surprising to have included preaching the gospel of salvation to all creation, in the great commission passage of Mark, “He said to them, “Go into all the world, and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15).

Ironically, the apostle Paul, in Rom 8, vividly describes how the whole creation groans for the day, on which the Lord will release it, and set it free from the effects and bondage of sin. “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one, who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay, and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. . . . We know that the whole creation has been groaning, as in the pains of childbirth, right up to the present time. Not only so, but we, ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly, as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons/daughters, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:19-23). In his vision of the future, in the book of Revelation, John states, “Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come.

Worship Him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water” (Rev 14:7).

### **SUMMARY**

This brief overview of the Bible tells us one thing: that God is concerned for the welfare of the whole universe – man and nature. God knows too well that man is dependent on the physical environment. Thus, when man becomes careless in the use of his natural resources, he faces all kinds of consequences. Therefore, Christians need to understand this basic mandate, and be faithful stewards of God’s creation, because that is His purpose and will for our well-being.

With the increase of scientific knowledge and technological advancement, in the last two centuries, human beings have conquered the globe, with greater success than preceding generations. Yet, the impacts of these great successes are compounded with indiscriminate social upheavals, and increasing catastrophic environmental disasters, to such an extent that there is no reversal of the damage that has been done to man and the environment.

Only in the recent past has man begun to think seriously about the effects of environmental disasters that affect all of nature. Therefore, man has a great moral obligation and responsibility to God his Creator, to himself and his fellow men, and to his environment. The present seven billion human beings are entirely dependent upon the present ailing environment for survival.

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

“Four things on earth are small, yet they are extremely wise: Ants are creatures of little strength, yet they store up their food in the summer; coneys are creatures of little power, yet they make their homes in the crags; locusts have no king, yet they advance together in ranks; a lizard can be caught with the hand, yet it is found in king’s palaces” (Prov 30:31).

Ladies and gentlemen, what have we learnt from this? Firstly, God’s word is very clear. This is His world, His property, and He is very much concerned about its welfare. Global warming, and associated environmental disasters, are the result of man’s problem of not taking heed of the natural or universal

laws, which God has put in place. What each of us needs to do is to take God's Word seriously, as scientists are confirming, and advising us. In terms of development, our governments need to be more serious about environmental control and rehabilitation in the face of increasing development proposals.

One of the things that Christians, as a corporate body, need to do is to educate our people to be more environmentally conscious. That is the reason for our gathering here today. I invite you all to have a copy of this book. This book contains both the Bible's and science's message for us! Thank you very much.

### **NOTE ABOUT THE BOOK**

The title of the book is *Christians Caring for the Environment in Papua New Guinea*. It is a handbook of principles and practices, and contains relevant biblical teaching and scientific facts relating to environmental and ecological concerns. It is a good educational resource. The Evangelical Alliance of Papua New Guinea (EAPNG), led by David Kima, General Secretary of EAPNG, compiled the book. The book attracted a forward from the pen of Sir Paulias Matane, Governor-General of Papua New Guinea, and carries other recommendations from notable Christian leaders, like Revd Dr Joshua Daimoi, Principal of the Christian Leaders' Training College of Papua New Guinea; Archbishop Sir Brian Barnes, OFM, KBE, DD; Colonel Andrew Kalai, Territorial Commander, The Salvation Army, Papua New Guinea. The book can be obtained from the Evangelical Alliance office in Goroka, phone 732 1707, or purchased in Christian Books Melanesia outlets in Papua New Guinea.