



SPEECH BY REV. EDDIE DEAN

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Kokopo, Rabaul, East New Britain,
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1. PE'E (Chant)

This is a short chant from Mauke, one of our outer islands, which goes like this:

*Kiritia----- kiritia, kiritia----- kiritia
Ka kiritia te papa i Avaiki
Kia tomo mai te marama, ki roto i te poiri
leeee----- kokoooo-----*

Translated into English:

*Open up sky, open up you that covers our ancestral land of Avaiki
Open up so that the heavenly light can come in
So that it can come in to light up the darkness and give you peace now and forever
Hurraayyyyyy*

2. GREETINGS

- The Moderator of the United Church in Papua New Guinea, Rev. Bernard Siai, and your good wife
- The Assembly Secretary of the United Church in Papua New Guinea, Taunao Vai, and your good wife
- Other office holders of the United Church in Papua New Guinea and your wives
- Support staff of this gathering that we're witnessing here today
- Distinguished guests and invitees to this assembly of the United Church in Papua New Guinea and those of your households that you have left behind

- Our brothers and sisters in Christ who have been so kind enough to host us in your home region and in this assembly, the people of this land and region, if I may put it that way
- Everyone else whom I may have missed out

I am humbled and privileged to be standing here in front of this most esteemed gathering of the leaders of God's people both here in Papua New Guinea and from outside of the country, on behalf of the Executive Council of my church, the Cook Islands Christian Church based on mainland Rarotonga. I bring to you the special greetings and best wishes of our President Rev. Tuaine Ngametua, General Secretary Nga Mataio whom yourself Moderator knows well, all members on the council, as well as the special best wishes of our ministers in all of our 65 church branches spread out in the Cook Islands, New Zealand and Australia. Thankyou so much for the invitation to join you in this memorable occasion today, tenkyu tumas in your language, tena kotou in NZ Maori, Giddyay in the language of your close neighbour Aussie, meitaki korereka in my Manihikian mother tongue.

If I can please have a few moments, Mr. Moderator, ladies and gentlemen, to share some thoughts on behalf of my church the CICC.

3. IN REMEMBRANCE OF OUR ANCESTORS

Way back in time – hundreds or even thousands of years ago – Pacific peoples, known for their fearless seafarer status, were travelling from island to island, country to country, around the Pacific and maybe beyond. They were doing that in search of lands, as part of shifting agriculture where they plant certain crops on certain islands at certain times of the year, perhaps as a result of wars and conflicts within and outside of their respective traditional boundaries, who knows perhaps they were also chasing after the big ones that escaped their fishing hooks! For whatever purposes that they were on the high seas during those ancient times, they certainly made their presence known and left behind marks or signs that they did pop in here and there. Modern-day archaeologists have proven many times that those visitations did indeed take place. So without the use of modern-day technology in navigating their way around the vast Pacific Ocean, *Te Moana Nui o Kiva* as we Polynesians call it, it really is simply amazing the skills and capabilities that they possessed and were able to put to good use. As Tina Turner says in her famous song, they're *Simply the Best* in their time, praise the Lord Almighty.

4. IN REMEMBRANCE OF OUR EARLY MISSIONARIES

In the late 1700s, the early missionaries from the northern hemisphere found their way to the south sea islands, perhaps encouraged by the stories of earlier European explorers, people like James Cook, amongst others.

The London Missionary Society, LMS which in later years became known as CWM, first arrived in Tahiti, now French Polynesia, in 1797, and from there found its way to our shores in the Cook Islands in 1821, 24 years later. Last October 2021, Mr. Moderator, ladies and gentlemen, the CICC commemorated its bicentenary on Aitutaki, a once-in-a-lifetime occasion. Unfortunately due to the covid restrictions, not many of us outside of the Cook Islands were able to participate. Nevertheless, 200 years later, God's Word still rules in the lives of our people, whether they still live in the Cook Islands or have moved overseas.

In 1839, the Takamoa Theological College was established, one of the oldest in the Pacific. Since its inception, hundreds of native Cook Islanders were trained as missionaries to take the Living Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to those outside of its boundaries. Some of them went, did their service and time, and came back home. Some unfortunately died in the battle to spread God's word of salvation. Ladies and gentlemen, many of them came here and never made it back home. Our hearts and minds long for their memories, we can only believe that they did the best they can while out here.

To this end, Mr. Moderator, those memories have been kept alive in terms of the many groups from Papua New Guinea who visited us in the Cook Islands over the past 40-odd years. They came in recognition, in remembrance, to give thanks, to acknowledge the great efforts of those early missionaries not only from the Cook Islands but from around the Pacific as well. I'm proud to be a descendant of those forefathers of mine. Praise the Lord for what they have done within our own country as well as beyond our shores. Other countries they also served include Samoa, Vanuatu and New Caledonia.

5. US TODAY

So that was the great effort and achievement of our people yesterday. No doubt similar stories can be told from other Pacific Island countries and churches of their experiences with their own soldiers of the faith.

Where are we today? We continue to serve our people in the 23 branches in the country. We also have ministers posted in the branches that we have established in New Zealand and Australia where our people have re-settled. We have a total of 65 branches as mentioned earlier in my presentation. So in effect the church today has managed to expand on what our forefathers have instigated.

Given the relative ease of movement between international borders today, the CICC has also managed to contribute to, and work as a team, with our colleagues outside of the country. This is where organisations like the PTC, PCC, UCA, UCPNG come into play.

Under our special relations with our close neighbor the Etaretia Porotetani Maohi in Tahiti, a partnership that has been in existence for over 50 years now, we have in place a ministers' exchange programme where ministers are posted in each other's branches for a number of years. Right now there are 3 posted there this year, and we will get one from them posted to us in due course.

There are countless other ways of expanding our scope and coverage but unfortunately for many reasons some of which are rather lousy I must admit, we haven't been able to productively explore them the best we can. Mr. Moderator and your successor, is there any harm in us UCPNG and CICC dreaming about a similar programme that we have in place with the Tahitians, perhaps a theological students exchange programme? Who knows what other possibilities there may be.

6. WHERE TO FROM HERE

My story, Mr. Moderator, ladies and gentleman, has touched on the journey and legacy of those soldiers of the Lord who have passed on. It also made mention of the great efforts of today's generation of leaders who are doing their best to carry on the legacy of our forefathers. Given the many challenges in this day and age, it certainly is great to see that the word *Give-Up* doesn't exist in our dictionary.

Perhaps of more concern, or the greater challenge is the question of; *Where To From Here?* What kind of legacy that we want the future generation to embrace of the efforts that we leaders of today are putting in? We certainly don't want our children, the leaders of tomorrow to say to themselves and their children something like; *What a great effort they did in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, but hopeless those of the 21st century!* No, we will not and should not allow that to happen. Then what are we going to do?

Mr. Moderator, ladies and gentleman, I put it to you that we are obligated and therefore we must strive to continue sowing the seed irrespective of where they will fall. We must untie the horse and take it to the trough irrespective of whether it will drink or not. We must continue the fight to keep God's word alive in the hearts and minds of our people irrespective of where they live. We must use the tools available to us in this day and age – social media for example – to reach out to our people wherever they may be. After all, what we sow today is what we and them tomorrow will reap.

7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion Mr. Moderator, ladies and gentleman, I'm reminded of a song by the Kingston Trio, one of the verses goes like this:

*Where have all the soldiers gone?
Long time passing
Where have all the soldiers gone?
A long long time ago
Where have all the soldiers gone?
Gone to graveyards, every one
When will they ever learn?
When will they ever learn?*

We in God's family know exactly where the soldiers of the Lord will go, and that place is in God's kingdom of eternal salvation where there is not going to be anymore crying and gnashing of teeth. That's where our forefathers and ancestors in the faith have gone and wish for us to be reunited with them eventually. While on this earth, they have learned that the grave-yard is but a mere transit stop for them on their way to a place where peace and tranquility rule forever.

Thankyou once again for this great and memorable opportunity to be here with you all today, my first visit to this part of the Pacific. Praise be to God, for his love is eternal. God is Good, All the Time, and All the Time, God is Good. Kia orana e kia manuia. AMEN.



Rev. Eddie Dean

Map of Papua New Guinea showing the capital Port Moresby, assembly venue Rabaul, and Australia to the south. Google image

