



Pacific Conference of Churches

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**“If You Are Not Against Us, Be For Us”: A Call on the International Day for
the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons**

In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus makes a statement that challenges the notion of closed communities and exclusiveness and instead describes inclusive, affirming relationships as the norm.

We often hear and accept the phrase “if you are not with us, you are against us.” This is a statement that challenges neutrality, that challenges dissent of views as disloyalty and alludes to a “my way or the highway” attitude. You are either an ally or an enemy. This phrase was captured in 2001 by United States President George W Bush who, following the September 11th attacks, said, “Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.”

Geopolitically we can see this in the Indo-Pacific (Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean) theatre of engagement with the United States of America, the United Kingdom, France, Australia, Japan and India on one side and China on the other. In our Pacific region this has been playing out largely in the form of development assistance and aid, to counter China’s Belt Road Initiative.

Recently however the announcement of a new security partnership between the United States, United Kingdom and Australia, dubbed "AUKUS", along with the Quad Leaders Summit of the United States, India, Japan and Australia has been labelled by China as a “Cold War” construct and challenged what AUKUS calls an "endeavor" to "sustain peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region," comparing it to a "Pacific NATO" promoting a "cold war mentality to stir up confrontation."

With in all this, Asia has been relegated to India and Japan and the Pacific to Australia. Where do we Pacific Islanders fit in this geopolitical chess game? Are we pawns to be sacrificed? Perhaps we see ourselves as the pawns that may eventually be made a king? It is more likely that we are seen as the chessboard. We are really

part of the seascape in which this game is being playing out. The land and the ocean of which we are a part are the black and white squares.

This Sunday's Gospel reading is from Mark Chapter 9. Earlier in this chapter we have the disciples unable to exorcise a demon from a young boy. Jesus reflects on unbelief, of the disciples but also of the boy's father, before healing the child. Later, found in last week's gospel the disciple jostle for position and power, arguing over who is the greatest among them. Jesus responds by flipping what is understood by greatness, placing servanthood and care for the most vulnerable and marginalised in the community, signified by a child (possibly the same one who has just been released from the grip of his "demons"), the hallmark of "greatness" in the Kingdom of God.

In today's text from Mark (9:38-50), the disciples seek to exclude and chastise someone casting out demons in Jesus' name (ironically, something they were not able to do earlier) because he is not part of the "chosen twelve". It is suggested that he might have originally been one of the followers of John the Baptist or perhaps one of the "Seventy-two" that Jesus had sent out on mission (Luke 10:1-8). The point for the disciples is that he is not part of their group, their alliance. Jesus' response is, "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward." (Mark 9:39-41)

Again Jesus is flipping the commonly accepted perspective. From a Christian perspective, it is not, "if you're not with us, you're against us," rather it is "if you are not against us, then you are for us."

The flip is about intentionality: an intention to exclude versus an intention to include. The geopolitical chess game referred to above has exclusion as it's intention. Here I refer not to China but to the Pacific Islands. We are included only in the game as the chessboard.

The rhetoric of inclusion is well used – family, vuvale, partner, neighbour. But beyond the words, the intention is clear. Even the cup of water given to us, is not because we are part of the community, it is given with a clear expectation that we must only drink from that cup, and the flow of water into the cup and the frequency of when that cup is offered is conditional on our being "with them".

It is not a either or situation – it is not AUKUS / the Quad / Indo-Pacific Alliance or China. As Pacific Islanders have repeatedly said politically and practice culturally, we seek to be "a friend to all and enemy of none" this is part of our spiritual, philosophical, cultural and political worldview.

It is also a question the Pacific Islands' churches, governments and civil society repeatedly turn to ask these chess players, among the worlds biggest carbon emitters and fossil fuel proponents: "If you claim to be with us, how can you be against us in the context of climate change?" "If you say you are with us, how can

you place our islands in jeopardy by your inaction on the actions required to maintain the 1.5 degree target, climate financing commitments etc?"

Today is the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. Most Pacific Islands states have signed and ratified the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which is now in force and are parties to the Treaty of Rarotonga, the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty which has been in force since 1986. Those who have not signed are struggling with political and economic self-determination issues which keep them locked as pawns in the "if you are not with us you are against us" geopolitical chess game.

The Rarotoga Treaty, as it is referred to:

- contributes to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament by preventing the placement of nuclear weapons within the South Pacific by member states (Article 5).
- reinforces, at the regional level, the legally-binding commitments that its States Parties have made under the near universal Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) not to manufacture, possess, acquire or have control of nuclear weapons (Article 3).
- includes an undertaking by States Parties to prevent nuclear testing in their territories (Article 6).
- Emphasizes keeping the region free of environmental pollution by radioactive wastes and other radioactive matter (Article 7).

The recent criticism, by the Pacific community, of AUKUS and Australia's intent to purchase nuclear submarines fuelled by Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU), which is directly usable in nuclear weapons is based on the Rarotonga Treaty. The rejection of increasing militarization which "would embroil Australia in a nuclear war-fighting strategy, increase the danger of armed conflict erupting and escalating to nuclear war in which there could be no winners," is also based on the Rarotonga Treaty.

But it is also based on the Pacific sense of community of which Australia claims it is a part.

To those nations who claim to be for us, if your true intention is to be for us, then be for us. Be with us. Sign the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, commit to the ambitions that must be met for a solution to the climate emergency.

Show us, that you are not against us.

Show us that you are for us.



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