

Theological Perspective on FONO and Moana Water for Life

The FONO and Moana Water for Life conference centres on Indigenous theologies that reflect a deep commitment to contextualizing Anglican theological education within the unique cultural, historical, and spiritual frameworks of Indigenous and Pacific peoples. The conference emphasizes several key theological themes:

1. Indigenous Worldviews and Contextual Theology:

- The FONO prioritizes Indigenous worldviews and Pacific ways of learning, moving away from purely Western educational models. This approach is seen as essential for developing a theology that resonates with the lived experiences and cultural practices of Pacific communities. Theological education is framed not just as an academic pursuit but as a means of engaging with and empowering Indigenous knowledge systems and spiritualities.

2. Restorative and Decolonial Education:

- The emphasis on addressing colonialism through theological education highlights a commitment to restorative justice. Theological education is seen as a tool for healing relationships—between God, people, and the environment—by acknowledging and responding to the intergenerational trauma caused by colonial histories. This aligns with the broader Christian mission of reconciliation and justice.

3. Empowerment and Voice:

- The conference underscores the importance of empowering Indigenous voices within theological discourse. There is a call to ensure that theological education fosters critical engagement rather than conformity or silence, encouraging students and educators to speak out for justice and human rights. This is in line with the Christian principle of upholding the dignity and worth of every person.

4. Cultural Translation and Theological Expression:

- The conference discusses the challenges of translating theology across different cultural and linguistic contexts. The use of Pacific methods like "usu'usu" (a form of talanoa) is highlighted as a way to engage communities in theological reflection that is both culturally relevant and theologically rich. This reflects a theology that is deeply rooted in local cultures while being open to the global Christian tradition.

5. Climate Resilience and Practical Theology:

- The integration of climate resilience into theological training is presented as a practical and necessary response to the realities faced by Pacific communities. This aspect of theological education is seen as vital for equipping clergy and lay leaders to address pressing issues like climate change, which has a profound impact on their communities. This practical theology aligns with the Christian call to care for creation and respond to human suffering.

6. Reimagining Theological Education:

- The FONO participants discuss the possibility of creating a Centre of Excellence for Theological Education in the Pacific, rooted in Indigenous and Pacific-centered approaches. This reflects a desire to reimagine what theological education can be, moving beyond traditional Western models to something that fully integrates and honours Indigenous spiritualities and ways of knowing.

The theological perspective of “FONO and Water for Life” as described is one that seeks to decolonize, contextualize, and empower, with a focus on justice, reconciliation, and the holistic well-being of Indigenous and Pacific communities within the Anglican tradition.

My focus of what I picked on from Tuesday and Sunday’s event

The FONO and Moana Water of Life conference was a vivid expression of how indigenous traditions and Christian worship come together, showing the deep connection between cultural identity and faith. Theologically, this can be understood as an example of how the Gospel becomes part of a culture, respecting and uplifting its traditions.

1. Cultural Integration in the Traditional Welcome Ceremony:

- The traditional welcome ceremony on Tuesday evening set the stage for the conference by showcasing the cultural richness of the participants. Students from Saint John the Baptist College, dressed in traditional attire, welcomed delegates from different regions, including the Solomon Islands, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Italy, and Panama. This ceremony highlighted the importance of cultural identity within the context of the conference, emphasizing that God’s love is inclusive and embraces every culture.

2. The Embrace of God through Worship:

- On Sunday, during the church service to farewell the delegates, the chorus "The Embrace of God" was sung, suggesting that God's love crosses cultural boundaries and welcomes all people. The participants and students, dressed in their traditional attire according to their ethnicity, further emphasized that God’s love includes everyone, just as they are, in their cultural uniqueness. This reflects the message in Revelation 7:9, where people from every nation, tribe, and language stand before God's throne, highlighting the worldwide reach of the Gospel.

3. Decolonization of the Mind through Worship:

- By integrating traditional customs into the worship service, such as the “Fijian Drua” and traditional attire, the ceremony acted as a strong form of decolonization. It challenged the historical push of Western forms of Christianity that often overlooked or ignored indigenous practices. Instead, this service celebrated and valued indigenous identities, allowing the participants to express their faith in a way that is true to their cultural heritage. This approach aligns with the idea of contextual theology, where the Gospel message is understood and practiced in ways that are meaningful within the specific cultural context of the people.

4. The Eucharist as a Unified Cultural Expression:

- The participation of Solomon Islanders in the Eucharist, along with the singing and dancing in traditional attire, symbolized a strong unity in diversity. The Eucharist, which is the central act of Christian worship, became a moment where different cultures came together, each bringing their own unique way of expressing faith. This not only honored the cultural richness of the participants but also reflected the biblical vision of the Church as one body with many parts (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). It showed that unity in Christ does not remove cultural differences but rather brings them into harmony.

To conclude, the integration of indigenous customs into Christian worship affirmed that the Gospel can take root and grow within every culture, enriching the global Church with a variety of expressions of faith. This approach not only honored the dignity of each culture but also deepened the communal experience of worship, reflecting the inclusive and all-embracing love of God.