

Who is responsible for Samoa's treasured island paradise?

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Introduction

What stands out to you as you commute, or explore our beautiful peaceful Samoan island paradise which to many Europeans in years gone by meant Utopia? No, I am not referring to the hundreds of churches, some mock Baroque, and Gothic inspired, found throughout the isles. Instead, I have seen how tidy our people have become over the last decade or so. In this regard I salute and applaud them, well, especially those villages and urban communities which have embraced our Government's 'Keep Samoa Clean' awareness campaign.

But, the question needs to be asked, 'Are they showing responsibility because they love their environment or are they just doing it because of the obvious material and monetary gains, and the government recognition for their efforts?'

Still, we can see the fruits of the labours and vision shared by the Ministry of Natural Resources & Environment and the Samoa Tourism Authority who are responsible for the National Beautification Programme. The village mayors and village councils have seen the light ... yes there was an incentive...or shall I say a *taui* (reward) - a handsome dividend - a paycheque...together with a beautifully laminated certificate at the end of that tunnel of light. Sadly, some people chose to ignore the light, e.g. motor mechanics; and ignorant people who use their premises, or land not owned by them, including nearby riverbeds, or dried up streams to dump rusty old car wrecks / machinery, and all manner of junk / pollution.

Definition of 'responsible'

According to my Oxford Dictionary, the word responsible is an adjective; I will list the various meanings and definitions: 1) being the cause of something; deserving blame or credit for it; 2) reliable, fulfilling duties conscientiously; and 3) (of a job etc.) involving important duties - responsible for,: having control or care over.

God's creation

God created a wonderful universe, which includes the earth and all that is in it. His Creation gives testimony to His Greatness. God did not need to create the universe, He chose to create it. Why? God is love, and love is best expressed towards something or someone else - so God created the world and people as an expression of His love. We, all Samoans, our fellow human beings, should avoid reducing God's creation to merely scientific terms. God created the universe because He loves us.

What does the holy bible says about man's dominion/rule over creation?

Genesis 1:28 reads '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 the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground'. To 'rule over' something is to have absolute authority and control over it. God has ultimate rule over the earth, and He exercises His authority with loving care. When God delegated some of His authority to the human race, He

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expected us to take responsibility for the environment, our natural resources and the other creatures that share our planet. Therefore, we must not be careless and wasteful as we fulfil this charge. God was careful how He made this earth. We must not be careless about how we take care of it. We must be good stewards of His Creation. Everything God created was good. We and our environment are part of His Wonderful Creation.

Psalms 8:6 reads "You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet." God gave human beings tremendous authority - to be in charge of the whole earth. But with great authority comes great responsibility. For instance, if we own a pet (fagafao) e.g. a pig, a horse, a dog, a cat, we have the legal authority to do with it as we wish, but we also have the responsibility to feed and care for it. The question is, for you and I, "How we treat God's Creation?". So, whether we are Christians, Seventh-Day Adventists, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Bahais, Muslims, Hindhis, atheists or non-religious persons for that matter, regardless of our religious background my fellow Samoans, we must all do our part to take care of our blessed environment and all that lives therein.

We must use our God given resources wisely because our Sovereign Lord holds us all accountable as stewards of His Creation.

The Samoan attitude to the environment

I am only speaking from my own point of view here, and what I have seen in some places I have visited over the last five years I have lived in Samoa. Firstly I would like to raise awareness, or substantiate the fact that there are some people, families or villages in Samoa who are not being responsible in conserving our natural resources like water. There are a lot of selfish and ignorant people here who do not heed the call for the conservation of our water supplies.

To that end, I have provided photographs of water wastage near the *auala galue* in Salani, Falealili. I saw some people filling their buckets, and large empty oil barrels, loaded them on the back of a Dyna truck and left without turning off the tap. I thought that they would turn it off, or the people who were with them whose family property was just down the road. I drove further along and noticed that none had bothered to turn it off, and so I stopped at another family's home and informed them of the dilemma, and asked them to contact the Samoa Water Authority as I had no tools to stop it myself, nor did I know where the water main was located; and that I did not have my cellular phone with me so I could contact the Samoa Water Authority myself.

I believe, this large tap was allowed to gush out water for several weeks because I travelled back there to visit some relatives in Satalo and found that it was still running freely. I contacted the Samoa Water Authority and explained the situation to them. There have been many other instances similar to this, but even though the Samoa Water Authority was aware of them, to the best of my knowledge, they were not acted upon immediately. An example of this is the main water pipe from Saleapaga to Lepa villages which had burst. The villagers, said that this pipe had burst the day before and the Samoa Water Authority had been contacted, but sadly, a whole day later, after possibly thousands of gallons of water had been wasted; as was the case in Satalo; there had been no one from the Samoa Water Authority to stop this horrible wastage of water.

The question remains to be asked; Who is responsible for this? Why did people ignore these situations, whether they were local villagers, or the Samoa Water Authority? Why

Government Departments, or agencies, or organisations like the Samoa Water Authority are unable to train and employ local villagers to fix these problems, and thereby effectively letting them take ownership. This is a possibility, if they, the Samoa Water Authority are not able to send personnel to these villages due to demands on their staff resources. In cases and situations like this, government departments must show initiative and come up with the appropriate solutions, instead of allowing thousands of gallons/ several tonnes of water to be wasted.

The responsibility rests squarely on their shoulders, as well as that of the local village or community concerned. No one likes to see a precious, natural resource like water being wasted. How can we waste water, a gift from God to Samoa, when there are tens of millions of sick, starving, malnourished, under-nourished, thirsty, fellow human beings suffering and dying around the world in places like Africa, South America, India ?

Where is our love? Have we forgotten how blessed we are to have all these wonderful God bestowed blessings like coconuts, breadfruits falling from trees, mangoes, vi, banana, taro and cocoa plantations providing us with an abundance of food. We are a country blessed with a beautiful environment which includes our using the once abundant fish stocks in lagoons, and the ocean. Are fishermen using the correct fishing methods when fishing? Are they following the appropriate laws as set by central and local government? Are they catching too many undersized fish or are they using illegal methods which could harm our marine life.

Like most nations, we have over-exploited our fish supplies, polluted the rivers, streams and seas. Some ignorant people have thoughtlessly thrown metal scraps, car wrecks in near by river beds, e.g. Samusu near a church youth mechanics shop. So, who is responsible? Is it the youth leader? Does it rest with the local pastor, the village mayor or the village council?

No, we are all to blame, even the Ministry of Natural Resources & Environment! Where were their Environmental Officers? Do they make regular visits throughout the villages on a weekly/fortnightly/monthly basis to inspect and speak with village mayors on a district level to make their job easier? Are these Environmental Officers accessible to the public? We must become more accountable for our actions. Again I posit, 'Have we been good stewards of God's Creation?'

Are our people being educated to care for, respect and revere God's creation? It is my stated opinion that we Samoans are not showing our love, respect (fa'aaloalo/migao) to God if we continue to victimize the environment. We human beings and Samoans must listen to the environment crying out for help; to stop the injustice! We are a country founded on God, yet we continue to be ignorant and disrespectful of the environment. This in effect means we do not truly love God, who gave us human beings, us Samoans, a nation which is predominantly Christian, a beautiful island paradise to live and raise our children in relative peace and harmony. We should be very grateful we live in such wonderful surroundings away from all the wars, diseases and famines.

Furthermore, it seems to me that there are some villages selling their souls, their God given inheritance for a few thousand tāla when agreeing to cut and sell whole or part of their forests to the local timber companies. Are they being fairly and adequately compensated for this? Are their future generations winners or have they been short changed? Is it all worth it in the long run? Obviously, that is none of my business, that is their prerogative, but I only ask these questions as food for thought. Only time will tell if they have made the right choices.

Rubbish disposal trucks

The introduction of rubbish disposal trucks has been a great idea, though sometimes they may be a day or two late, and there is a large amount of rubbish piling up in families' rubbish bins. I was driving through Luatuanuu recently and was saddened at the horrendous sight of rubbish bags and rubbish boxes lying all over the road and dumped on the wooden shelves. Some rubbish, including pampers and were left strewn across the beach. Who is responsible? Nobody likes to clean up such a mess, but if it is in your front or back yard, its common sense just to clean it.

This was just opposite the newly built Church; several villagers saw me taking photographs of this too. They must have thought I was from the Ministry of Natural Resources & Environment, Samoa Tourism Authority or from the Samoana, or Samoa Observer, though I was trying my best to look like a tourist/ visitor from New Zealand. They must have panicked because on my return trip back to Apia, I noticed that the rubbish had been cleaned up and carefully stacked on the wooden shelves rather neatly. It does pay to have a person going around taking photographs of such unhealthy and ignorant practices, thereby expose such lapses or inappropriate attitudes of some Samoan families. Secondly, I would rather see our rubbish put in bins which have been introduced in some villages like Fasitoo-uta, in the Apia township and urban residential areas like Toomatagi.

Conclusion

If all Samoans work together to achieve what the Ministry of Natural Resources & Environment is striving to meet in their annual programmes, then we would have made further progress in fulfilling our God given responsibilities to become more loving and caring citizens of planet Earth, when we look after our own environment right here in our Pacific island paradise which is our home, our heritage, our Samoa.

It all starts with doing the little things right and having a caring attitude towards our environment. The Ministry of Natural Resources & Environment is doing their role by educating the public, starting from our children right through to our adult population. We must adjust our sails so we can sail with the wind. To go against the wind would be detrimental to our well being and health. We must re-learn, re-educate ourselves to become skilful navigators as our ancestors and forefathers once were in centuries gone by. We must sail with the Ministry of Natural Resources & Environment.

Nobody can direct the wind, only God has complete control of such forces of nature. Therefore we, the people of Samoa, the Ministry of Natural Resources & Environment and the various other government departments and agencies, with our friends from foreign diplomatic communities and their aid agencies must sail and journey together with God as we traverse the high seas and torrid ocean currents which will endanger our very existence. Providence will ensure our safe journey.

'Cool runnings', a Jamaican saying, means Peace be the Journey. Let us work together in God's peace and love to ensure our environment is well protected and cared for. That is what I expect any decent and well-meaning human being and Samoan to do.