

Essay from the bold pastor

#96 - Palomares' Despair -

Another Hiroshima Peace Memorial Ceremony was held this year to console the victims of the atomic bombs. As it's widely known, there were three atomic bombs made originally. The first one was dropped in Alamogordo, New Mexico, on July 16, 1945, prior to Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombing. When it comes to dropping of nuclear weapons onto residential areas by the U.S. military, there is another place that fell victim besides Japan. It's the town of Palomares in Spain.

In January, 1966, an American B-52G bomber collided with a refueling tanker over Spain's Mediterranean coast. As a result, one of the four hydrogen bombs B-52G was carrying fell to the open sea and the remaining three fell to the earth. Explosive materials in two of the three bombs that fell to the earth exploded upon impact, contaminating 0.78 square mile of land with uranium and plutonium. The U.S. removed 1750 tons of the contaminated dirt from the most contaminated area and shipped it in barrels to the Savannah River Site in South Carolina for disposal.

Although the residents near the accident site continued farming, the Spanish government bought 5 acres of the contaminated land in 2004. They surveyed 1630 acres of land from 2006 to 2008 and extracted plutonium above the permitted level (as much as 40 times) from 74 acres, reaching as deep as 16 feet underground. In response to the result, they fenced off 100 acres. Despite the effort, it is estimated that 500 grams of plutonium can still be found per 12 acres in some areas as of 2011.

However, the Spanish government insists to this day that "the radiation level in the air is below the international safety standard, and there is no harm to human health" in order to attract tourists. The story sounds way too familiar. Fukushima is struggling with the issue of contaminated groundwater as well as recent revelation of highly radioactive water leaking out of a storage tank at the power plant into the ocean as we speak. These aftermaths reminded me of a Bible verse that was written 3000 years ago.

If a man is lazy, the rafters sag; if his hands are idle, the house leaks.

Ecclesiastes 10:18

In the case of Fukushima, the leak is a deadly one. Nonetheless, the government is all for resuming the operation of the nuclear power plant. I wonder how many more tragedies need to happen before Japanese people will learn from their mistakes. My only hope is the theology of Jesus Christ who was resurrected. He alone can take away the despair of the contaminated land and guarantee the resurrection.

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