



*On behalf of my wife and ministry partner Monica Moss we as a family say thank you for this blessed invitation.*

*We collectively offer our thanks to this World Communion of Reformed Churches.*

*To the President, General Secretary, Officers, servant leaders, member churches, and all who get into “Holy Mischief” and “Good Trouble” on behalf of The Gospel we say thank you.*

## Matthew 5:13-16

**13** “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

**14** “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.

**15** People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. **16** In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Our Subject today is simply **Salt and Light**

*“You are the salt of the earth...”*

*You are the Light of the World.”*

Are we losing our flavor?

Are we dimming our light?

Has the taste of liberation seasoned with grace been replaced with a tasteless pseudo faith masquerading as the Gospel?

Are we losing our flavor?

Are we dimming our light?

Has the bland and bitter non-seasoned flavor of hatred become the new civic recipe for the church and nations across the globe?

Are we losing our flavor?

Are we dimming our light?

Has “empire religion” become our new favorite theological dish?

Are we losing our flavor?



Are we dimming our light?

There is a growing addiction to theologically unhealthy processed spiritual food lacking any nutritional value encased in sugary content that is always devoid of love,  
empty of grace,  
lacking mercy,  
depleted of justice  
and barren of any self reflection.

I can see this recipe being offered as the primary communal meal for civic consumption by unrepentant narcissists.

It is created with the following recipe:

1 teaspoon of hate,

A half cup of resentment,

Add 3 table-spoons of self-righteousness,

56 grams of unchecked power,

4 liters of lies mixed with distrust and deceit; stir it all together with social media and government corruption then place it in the oven of national dialogue and allow it to bake until it is hot to the touch.

Feed this cuisine to any nation or church and watch as people get addicted to this destructive substance and devour this meal believing it tastes good, but in reality it is slowly killing their souls.

Are we losing our flavor?

Are we dimming our light?

The demand of the **Gospel**,  
the press of the **Holy Spirit** and the echo of our **ancestors** demand we the people of God speak with moral clarity and unwavering ethical resolve in this moment. Much of the spiritual food we are consuming in the space called America and across the globe is recycled colonial compost killing us from the inside out. If we **DO NOT** have the courage to change our theological diet, we will become emaciated unethical souls unable to walk due to our self righteous consumption of greed and self absorbed power.

We the people of God are called to be the **salt and the light of this world.**

**The scripture.**



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The scripture speaks with blessed beauty as Jesus offers a sermon upon a “mount” in the region of a colonized space called Palestine. Here in this text we hear the voice of Jesus echo across this arid land affirming this Afro-Asiatic Jewish community that has been marginalized by Roman culture. These words of Jesus share God’s commitment to the most vulnerable in what we call **The Beatitudes**. These words were a balm in Gilead, Galilee, Israel, Samaria and Jericho.

Words such as...

Blessed are the poor...

Blessed are those who mourn?

Blessed are the meek.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst...

Blessed are the merciful...

Blessed are the pure in heart...

Blessed are the peacemakers...

Blessed are those who are persecuted in the name of righteousness?

In this series of teaching we witness **The Gospel of Matthew** shape Jesus as a chief rabbi and an interpreter of scripture making Jesus the living embodiment of the Midrash.

Jesus offers teaching on:

Anger,

Divorce,

Oaths,

Retaliation,

Prayer,

Judging,

And ends out elevating what we call the golden rule; ***“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”***

Chapters 5 through 7 are what scholars call pragmatic teaching offering a clear pedagogy to share with all who hear the beautiful, poetic, blessed, sacred and holy voice of the one we call



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Jesus. But it is versus 13 through 16 we lift up this day for these verses use imagery to ignite our **Moral Imagination** to be faithful followers of Christ.

It states **“You are salt of the Earth... You are the light of the world.”**

The background of the scripture cannot be overlooked for Jesus is speaking these words in the shadow of an empire, in the shadow of land dispossession, in the shadow of bigotry, and in the shadow of colonialism.

He is preaching and teaching in the shadow of political leadership that is insecure, cruel and vengeful; to speak out is dangerous and to offer such empowering words could get you killed, but Jesus who is the Christ is called to speak truth to Power!

### ***You are the salt of the Earth***

We first must understand that salt has two primary purposes, one of which is to preserve or to maintain. It was used in the ancient period to preserve food as there was no refrigeration. Salt was the primary means of preservation.

**You are the salt of the Earth.** You are called as a preserver, but the question is what must you... what must we preserve?

We must preserve a moral demand, a clear ethical frame, an unyielding commitment to love and an unapologetic demand for justice.

We the people of the Black Church tradition in America who come from what is called the prophetic wing are called to preserve. We who come from the tradition of Martin Luther King Jr., Ida B. Wells, James Baldwin and Ella Baker are called to preserve. We have been called to preserve the fullness of everyone's humanity, history, heritage and the sacred beauty of the Gospel.

In America this day, as I speak from this space, the current administration in what we call *“the yet to be United States of America”* is seeking to erase and edit history beginning with people of African descent. Right now as I speak laws are being fashioned in America to outlaw teaching of the civil rights movement, remove chapters on slavery, lynching, segregation in school books and ban books on Asian, Black, Indigenous, Latino or LGBTQ subjects and erase any mention of the term *racism* or *white supremacy*. They state these subjects are *“unpatriotic”* and *“make white children feel bad.”*

Right now in America as I speak federal officers called ICE seek to deport Latino mothers and fathers separating them from their children without due process.

Right now as I speak churches choose to be silent before the pain and cruelty witnessed by the most vulnerable.

Dr. Gary Dorrien in his book *Breaking White Supremacy: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Black Social Gospel* makes the claim that people of African descent in America offer a unique theological frame that has shaped and transformed the American democratic project. Just about every movement to expand civil and human rights in the US can be connected to



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the faith witness of the “*prophetic wing*” of the Black church. Dr. Dorrien is clear stating teaching the complexity of history with its blessings and brutality is essential to creating a flourishing democracy.

### **As the people of God we are called to preserve!**

We are called to preserve Grace, love, justice, peace, patience, mercy, kindness, forgiveness, redemption, reconciliation, and liberation!

Dr. Obery Hendricks , whose latest book *Christians against Christianity: How Right Wing Evangelicals are Destroying our Faith and Nation*, makes the claim that there is a movement a foot in the church a new form of Christianity that is a “Christ less” Christianity. It is the call of people who deeply believe in Christ to offer an alternative to the destructive predatory self interest of “Christ-less” empire religion.

We are called to preserve for salt is a preservative.

### **One purpose of salt is to preserve, the other purpose is to add flavor!**

The beauty of this World Communion of Reformed Churches is the diverse flavors of this gathering. We gather from all parts of the globe bringing diverse flavor to the church.

We bring flavor from  
the Congo to Cameroon,  
From Ethiopia to Egypt,  
From Cuba to Croatia,  
From Indonesia to Italy,  
From The Philippines to Portugal,  
From Angola to American Samoa,  
From Australia to Argentina,  
From Brazil to Bangladesh,  
From Palestine to Pakistan,  
From Korea to Columbia,  
From Hungry to Hong Kong,

The Church was never meant to be homogeneous. We do a disservice unto God when we try to create a church in the image of only one culture, one community or one ethnicity.

Our God is a God of diversity!  
Creation is a landscape of diversity!  
There are 400,000 species of plants.  
... 30,000 species of fish.  
... 20,000 known species of bees  
...13,000 species of ants  
... 6,600 species of mammals  
And there are 2,000 types of fruit!

We must bring our flavor, our songs, our context, our stories, our culture and history to the church.

We all bring flavor to the table!



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This World communion is only a true communion when the global south is present.

This World communion is only a world communion when voices outside of Europe and America are present.

There is no World communion if everyone at the table looks like you.

### **You are the Salt of the Earth!**

But I must say beware my sisters and brothers “Salt” can lose its flavor. Salt can lose its flavor in two ways one is through dilution or the other is through contamination.

A watered down Gospel will lose its flavor! When the poor are no longer a priority, compassion is no longer an ethic, when love is no longer central, “Amazing Grace” ceases to be taught and justice is not on the table this is the Gospel losing its flavor. The Gospel will lose its flavor when the words of Jesus are no longer spoken from the pulpit.

Salt can lose its saltiness also through contamination. The Gospel can be contaminated by a prosperity message masquerading as a liberating “word” from God. When the church centers itself on personal prosperity or being a government auxiliary it has gone down the road of contamination.

It has been proven down through history Governments will try to contaminate the Gospel by co-opting the church to be an arm of an empire whose “god” is an idol of power and repression.

Whenever Christ is replaced an idol will be elevated; this is a contaminated Gospel.

We are the salt of the Earth my friends , but do not forget we are also the light of the world!

### **The light of the world**

We must let our light shine, in the words of the African American Spiritual ***“this little light of mine I am going to let it shine.”***

As I close, I bring to your attention, the story of the famed African American activist Fannie Lou Hamer. Mrs. Hamer was a former sharecropper from the state of Mississippi. She only had a 5th grade education due to the oppressive circumstances of the American south. In 1962 in a small church in Sunflower County, Mississippi Mrs. Hamer heard young activists in the civil rights movement speak of the power of voting and changing the destiny of one’s community. This was the moment when she accepted her call to be an organizer and activist. She decided at that moment to join the civil rights movement. Not long after joining the movement, after spending weeks attempting to register people to vote in Mississippi Fannie Lou Hamer was arrested along with several other organizers. They were all taken to jail, but Mrs. Hamer was separated, she was beaten and humiliated by the Sheriff’s department. Mrs. Hamer, as she tells story, states she felt the hand of God pull her out of her body and was able



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to witness what was happening to her physically, but never once felt the pain of the brutality. God placed her spirit back in her body, she became overwhelmed with a feeling that she must sing the song “**this little light of mine I am going to let it shine...**” at that moment she knew God put a light in her to illuminate dark places in this world. Several years later at the Democratic National Convention, Fannie Lou Hamer along with a group of activists from Mississippi stood on the convention floor to declare that segregation was an evil and sinful act. She communicated with authority to the convention and nation that every person in America should have the right to vote. The president at the time was Lyndon B. Johnson he turned on the television that morning and saw the same Black woman on every channel, addressing the nation from the convention floor. President Johnson was shocked and incensed; he told his chief of staff “*do something... get that...( I will not use the language he used)*... *person off of the television screen immediately!*”

The President used his power to call a “*press conference*” to interrupt Fannie Lou Hamer’s speech on the convention floor, but it was too late for Black women around the nation had heard her speech; one woman named Shirley Chislom heard Fannie Lou Hamer that day and decided she must run for congress. She ran and won as a result her campaign inspired other woman of color and to this day ALL women of color in public service in America must thank a Black sharecropper from Mississippi, who was unafraid to allow her little light to shine!

We gather this day to let our light shine! The challenges in the world today may be daunting and we may be tempted to lose our salt quality or cover our light. **The call is clear: let us persevere in our witness.** Our individual light may not look like much, but if we dare take our light and join together we can create a blaze to illuminate the world. Our individual light may not look like much, but if we dare take our light and join together we can create a blaze to illuminate the world.

My light is not enough it is weak alone, but if my light connects with Dr Kassab’s light and Dr. Kassab’s light connects with Dr. Karen Thompson’s light and Dr. Karen Thompson’s light connects with Rev. Ji-Hyun Oh’s light and Rev. Oh’s light connects with Dr. Allen Boesak’s light and Dr. Boesak’s light connects with Rev. Peacock’s light and Rev. Peacock’s light connects with all the moderators’ light and the moderators’ light connects with our members churches light and member churches in African connect with churches in Asia, and churches in Asian connect with Churches in the Caribbean, and churches in the Caribbean connect with Churches in Europe and churches in Europe connect with Churches in Latin America and churches in Latin America connect with Churches in the Middle East and churches in the Middle East connect with churches in North America and North American Churches connect with Churches in the Pacific...

We will no longer have a **little light**, but a blaze to illuminate the Gospel, empower the poor, liberate the oppressed, set the captives free and declare the year of the Lord’s favor and bless our planet!

You are the Salt of the Earth!  
You are Light of the World!

Thank you and God Bless You!



## **REFLECTIONS ON REV. DR. OTIS MOSS' KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

**by Rev. Prof. J. O. Y. Mante, PhD**

### **I. Introduction**

1. I wish to thank Brother Otis Moss for this powerful address at this time in our history as member churches of the WCRC.
2. The biblical images of Salt and Light are things that we can all resonate with.
3. I really like the idea that our God is a God of diversity who intentionally created diverse species and cultures.
4. Our respect for diversity is a great step towards the Imago Dei in which we were created. Perhaps instead of the old adage that “birds of the same feathers flock together”, we should now stress that in our Christian faith, “birds of different feathers flock together” as long as we recognize that we are all birds. See Rev. 7:7-17.
5. Indeed, the beauty of our world consists in “harmonious diversity”, where we create harmony not only from the black keys but from both the black and white keys on God’s keyboard.
6. Isn’t this beauty what God saw when God stood back and said that creation was good? It was good in terms of, among other things, what I call, “harmonious diversity”. See Gen. 1:31.

### **II. The Seeds of the Gospel in Africa — A Penumbra and A Poorly Processed Salt**

1. A penumbra is the partially shaded outer region of the shadow cast by an opaque object. It is not full and bright light; it has opaqueness, shadows and shaded areas.
2. When the Christian gospel first got to our part of Africa, it never came as a complete/pure light nor tasty salt.
3. It came together with slavery, economic greed, individualism (under the guise of freedom), a hegemonic superiority, and physical and mental colonialism.
4. It came with worship services on the top floors and Slave dungeons on the ground floors of the slave castles. In the same building, when people were painfully screaming downstairs, slave masters and slave mistresses were praying and doing Bible Studies upstairs. This phenomenon has not changed much since the so-called abolition of slave trade.
5. Whether in our theological constructions or in our practical worship, too many people are screaming “downstairs” while others, in the same “Communion Boat”, are praying and having Bible Studies “upstairs”. We need prayers and Bible Studies that will not only motivate us but also cause us to stop what is causing “the painful screaming downstairs”.

### **III. An African Faith**

1. We in Africa learned very early to distinguish our Lord Jesus who is the real/true light and salt of the world from the carriers of the gospel most of whom operate in the arena of a Penumbra and poorly processed salt.
2. I live in the midst of other religions and indigenous cultures but I declare that I am very happy and excited that I am a Christian, not just because of what some missionaries preached but also because the living Christ has encountered me through faith, and He is real to me in life, not only intellectually.
3. We are not perfect in our history but when the carriers of the gospel are highly



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tainted with a mindset of conquering other human beings, colonialism, hegemony, economic greed, individualism (under the guise of freedom) and cultural and racial superiority, we must begin a new quest for, and a fresh witness to, the historical and theological Jesus who really is the true salt and the light of the world.

### **IV. Persevering in our Witness**

1. Let us not forget the penumbra that has historically been created in our desire to spread the gospel. Let us also not forget the bunch of poorly processed salt that some Christians have deposited around the world in the name of the gospel.
2. This calls for a deep theological, ethical and missional repentance.
3. It also calls us to persevere in our quest and proclamation of the historical and theological Jesus who is averse to societies that create superiority and inferiority structures that lead to slavery, colonialism, paternalism, individualism (under the guise of freedom), economic greed, hegemony and lust for power and control.
4. Let us persevere in our witness in our quest for a Just Communion that is “Ubuntic” (i.e. truly communal), a proper Koinonia where “loving-righteousness” is our guide and core values.
5. Failure to persevere in our witness makes us complicit in injustice; it is the same as repeating the scenario where slaves are crying on the ground floor and slave masters and mistresses are having Bible Studies and Prayers on the top floor.
6. May our Lord Jesus who is the actual salt and light teach us how to light our little lights from His real light and how to be proper salt (not poorly processed salt).
7. Thank you.

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## **Response to the keynote of Rev. Otis Moss by Heleen Zorgdrager, WCRC Chiang Mai**

Thank you, Rev. Otis Moss, for empowering us in such a refreshing and inclusive way.

My response is in two parts:

- Who owns the salt of this earth?
- What prevents us from being the salt of the earth?

[PROJECT IMAGE: Pieter Claesz, Still life with peacock (1627)]

*Who owns the salt of the earth*

My country, the Netherlands, have a troubled history with salt. I need to share that with you.

Please have a look at this painting of Pieter Claesz, *Still life with a Peacock Pie* (1627). Our modern eyes might overlook it, but very close to the magnificent pie decorated with the bird's own feathers we find, cradled in a gold-plated pedestal, a small, white, granular heap of salt. In many of such painted table scenes you will find the same.

The salt on the rich men's table is a silent witness to the role salt played in the colonial enterprise. The Dutch needed the salt for their booming economy, for the production of butter, cheese, and herring. It was inadmissible for preserving the food on the long voyages to colonize territories, to trade spices and other goods, and to transport enslaved women, men and children from Africa across the Atlantic. Battles were fought over access to salt. Having access to salt meant that one could secure economic and political power. As the Dutch poet Jacob Cats stated "One can do better on earth without gold than without salt."

After having exploited the salt islands in Cape Verde the Dutch conquered the island Bonaire in the Caribbean, rich of salt. Enslaved men worked on the salt pans called the white hell. Many became blind because of the reflection of sunlight off the white salt crystals and the extreme dryness of the air.

That is the true story behind the salt crystals on the rich man's table. He was most likely a Calvinist, a God-fearing Christian, daily reading in his Bible, familiar with the Heidelberger. He and his family knew the words of the gospel "You are the salt of the earth", "You are the light in the world". They must have nodded in agreement. Yes, that's us, we are called by Christ himself to spread our ideals, our protestant civilization all over the world and set the example of the true, right, - and white -, Christian.

Boasting of the treasure of salt on his table, the man ignored the salt workers. Obsessed by the spirit of owning and exploiting, he had become blind for his fellow human beings.

[PROJECT IMAGE Doritha Hoffman, Levensstroom, 2000]

*What prevents us from being the salt of the earth?*



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As heirs of the rich man, we Europeans need a deep theological, ethical and missional repentance. From history we learn how the gospel is sinfully watered down by spiritualizing its truth. When the gospel ends being existential, materialized, enfleshed good news in the lives we live, the salt is diluted. Taking up Rev Moss's words: when justice is not on the table, the gospel's flavor is gone.

In our time, the spirit of owning and exploiting is alive more than ever. New powers took stage in the east and in the west. They're getting the vote in European countries too. They coopt Christian religion in new guises. They invent new Christianisms (Christian faith in diluted and contaminated forms) by sacralizing the belonging to this nation, this glorious past, this superior culture, and this golden destination. They play on feelings of loss, on desires of belonging of people. They stir up fear and insecurity, and place people in opposition to 'others': the elite, migrants, people of color, gendered and sexual minorities, militant women, global conspiracies.

Owning and exploiting is the hallmark of these populist powers.

They own the minds and souls of the people by pretending the leader knows their needs.

They own a godlike sovereignty to set laws aside and punish whom they want.

They own the world and its natural resources. *Drill baby drill.*

They own the definition of the most precious human relations, by issuing decrees on what a family is, which genders are recognized, how true masculinity affirms itself in fighting and dominance.

They own the truth.

They own 'Christian identity' and that is perhaps the greatest sin of all.

Churches should be very suspicious when Christian identity is flagged. Moreover, they cannot remain silent when Christianity is claimed and appropriated for the sake of self-interest. The most remarkable thing namely about salt and light is that they are *dispossessive* entities: their working depends on their wonderful self-giving nature. There is nothing to 'have' or to 'own' and a lot to be. Such is Christian life, marked by a dispossessive posture.

Heidelberg Catechism,

Sunday 1: What is your only comfort in life and death?

*That I am not my own,  
but belong with body and soul,  
both in life and in death,  
to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ.*

No other ownership is given; no ideology can claim our minds, souls and bodies but only a fellow human being, our nearest sibling Jesus Christ.



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Inspired by this kinship we may find the courage to resist, protest,  
witness faithfully today.