

*Invitation: In your presentation, we would be grateful if you could address the current ecological and economic crisis from the perspective of the legacies of slavery and decolonisation. I am enclosing the justice working paper for your perusal.*

There is no doubt that a reading of the times indicates that we live in a world in crisis – the confluence of ecological disaster, economic disparity, unprecedented migration -in part due to the ecological threat which contributes to wild fires, flooding on one hand and drought on the other, food insecurity, gender and religious violence and intolerance, racial injustice and wars – geopolitical uncertainties, genocide and the persistent presence of the colonial project and imagination.

The confluence of economic crisis and the impending ecological disaster, fed by the relentless exploitation of the earth and her resources, and an untethered belief in the unlimited availability of natural resources continues to challenge the church's commitment to offer transformative prophetic leadership in affirming and ensuring the fullness of life for the earth and its inhabitants. How we live faithfully -as a Communion, member church and individual Christian - in what Jesse Zink calls a **Crisis-Shape World** (Jesse A. Zink, Faithful, Creative, Hopeful Fifteen Theses for Christian in a Crisis-Shaped World) with Apocalyptic clarity, that is being attentive to the powers and structures that shape the world, is the question and invitation of the Justice statement before us at this General Council.

The Justice statement has highlights much of the evidence of the crisis we face, paying attention to the structures and powers at work and our faith narratives, and invites us through the process of discerning, confession, witnessing, covenanting and commitment, to reflect on how we are to be faithful to our understanding of the call of God to partner for justice, recognizing that "justice is not merely an ethical requirement but is deeply embedded in the divine nature and God's intentions for the world.

We know that, the economic and ecological crises disproportionately impact people marginalized by the forces of the empire. This impact includes health, economic and physical vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities are further complexified because of historic and systemic inequities, resulting in a lack of capacity to be resilient in dealing with the consequences of the climate challenges.

In this reflection, I would like to offer a perspective on strategy (h) set out in the Justice paper related to "anti-colonial, anti racist and anti-cast initiatives" and in light of the section on Covenanting for Democracy and the Dismantling of Race and Caste. I will do so from the perspective of the legacy of Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Let me begin with a caveat -by focusing the experience and impact of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade I am in no way setting up a hierarchy of oppression. I confirm this statement from – *Abolished but not destroyed: Slavery in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (2007, WCC WARC and CWM)

*We believe that in considering communities that have been marginalized, it is essential to avoid embracing a hierarchy of oppression, but instead to consider ways in which people's forms of oppression are interrelated; we cannot privilege one form of oppression over another. We need to stop reinventing the wheel of imitating the oppressors, or that of oppressive models. We must create alternative models of deconstructing oppression in relation to caste, race, gender, ethnicity, and other identifiers of marginalization. Enslaved peoples need to break into the entire hegemonic [2] power system, and disrupt it. In order to do this, we need a critical critique of the logic and assumptions, spoken and unspoken, that undergird this entire hegemonic power system. Enslaved peoples will no doubt continue to participate in this work.*

Over 15 million Africans were forcibly removed from the African continent as part of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. A trade which commodified human beings, traumatized communities and exploited creation. Over almost 220 years after the slave trade was abolished 'legally,' the legacy of the destruction and disruption continues to impact the lives of Africans and African descendants. In 2014, the United Nations declared a decade for People of African Descent from January 1, 2015 through December 2024. The initiation of this decade was an outcome of the 2010 Durban World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, and recognized that there were over 200 million people of African Descent residing in the Americas, who continued to face the challenges of discrimination, exclusion, economic disparity, access to health care, poverty and marginalization. The decade highlighted the need to unmask the realities of people of African descent. The decade exposed the ways in which anti-black racism is insidious in the ways people of African descent and African in the diaspora are treated, and the relationship to the creation and the ecological crisis. In 2007 the ecumenical gathering of WCC, WARC and CWM as part of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the abolition of slavery affirmed

*Oppression operates not only through physical force and coercion, but also at the discursive level of language where the ways in which knowledge is constructed, and the ways in which we use language to describe reality and human relations show elements of oppression. Since the Transatlantic Trade in Africans and colonialism were such essential components in the emergence of modernity, it, in turn, produced many categories related to notions of being human, the creation, and God that are often taken for granted. There is power in naming - and re-naming - our ourselves, our situations, and our relationships. It is essential, therefore, that we examine and critique the categories we use to define ourselves in relationship to other human beings and God. When we do not examine and critique our human-created categories, we remain enslaved to the old framework, and fail to fully appreciate how the system of oppression functions in its totality.*

So attending to anti-black racism helps to focus the light to the continuing harm to human beings created in the image of God and God's beloved earth.

A suggested workplan:

1. It is imperative that this communion explicitly name anti-black racism and not just a general commitment to anti-racism. It needs to recognize that those of us who inhabit

black bodies continue to bear the scars and wounds of the colonial project and its antecedent “white supremacy.” To name the reality of anti-black racism is to have a realistic reading of the times. Anti-Black racism is manifested in the legacy of the current social, economic, and political marginalization of people of African Descent in society such as the lack of opportunities, lower socio-economic status, higher unemployment, significant poverty rates and overrepresentation in the criminal justice system. Naming Anti-Black racism allows people impacted by the economic and ecological crisis to be at the table, bring their wisdom and gifts to the struggle.

2. Secondly, in the spirit of partnership, it would be important for the Communion to affirm its commitment to the Second Decade for people of African Descent with its focus on reparation, and work within the United Nations (UN) structure to support issues of reparations and the dignity of people of Africa and African Descent. Drawing on the 2007 Statement *Abolished but not destroyed*:

*We believe that reparations are essential for the healing of peoples who were once enslaved. Reparations go far beyond a financial figure; rather, reparations are about recognizing the wrong that has been done. It is a process that compels confession, contrition, restoration and reconciliation; it also involves a process or truth-telling that sets rights, makes amends and restores breached relationships. Reparations from both the church and society are needed, and these reparations are both praxis and prophetic - naming the wrongs that have been done is praxis or an action-reflection model; righting the wrongs, is a prophetic action.*

*The process of reparations requires the restoration of relationships that affirm the dignity and humanity of all parties in order to repair what has been broken. Reparations also challenge the perpetrator to confession and repentance and ministers restoration and healing to those who have been exploited.*

In the final report of Accra +20:

*We reaffirm that God is a God of justice and the Accra Confession emphasizes economic and ecological justice and therefore reparatory justice, including, in response to the trading of peoples as commodities and the question of the land where indigenous peoples are being removed from their land for the economic gain of few. This emerges as a biblical imperative for our present context. From Leviticus 25:8–55 we have the concept of Jubilee, that is designed through the process of repatriation and rest to promote the flourishing of land and people. As a model to address the injustices of our times it needs exploring more.*

3. I would call upon the Communion to convene representatives of its member churches from the African Continent and the Diaspora to build relationship, to develop strategies and build partnerships to address the economic challenges and the environmental crisis. Knowing that the continent faces massive humanitarian and economic burdens, with countries losing significant GDP and millions of people being exposed to drought and

floods that destroy livelihoods and food security, and continues to trigger risky migration; and that people in the diaspora continue to be victimized economically, to continue together to explore opportunities for alternative economic imagination – the Zac Tax as an example and well as to build a platform to advocate for, and advance mechanism for reparations to be realized.

4. Decolonization-. Our work is premised on the realities that structures and systems of colonization are in-place being upheld and maintained by the current government of formerly colonized countries. The structures and system of continuing colonization sticks and replicates itself. Moreover, most of our theologies, especially, if it does not have a critique of the colonialism, tends to legitimized these colonial systems and structures. Let us affirm decolonizing theologies and promote it among our churches. It is important that the framing of the crisis and the solutions must come from those experiencing the heavy brunt of colonization. Social movements that spring from the ministries of our churches in the formerly colonized countries may point us to models of decolonizing practices. In our striving for justice, we allow ourselves to be molded and shaped by those who are historically experiencing injustice. The commodification of human person seen in the way colonizers traded the enslaved is ones again showing itself in ways migrant workers are seen by modern nation states. Decolonizing in economically affluent societies has to attend to the situations of migrants, calling out nation states for its commodification of human person.
  
5. It is important to take an intersectional approach, that issues of race, gender, sexual identity, (dis)ability and economic status are all intertwined. I would suggest, we adopt an *Abolitionist ecology*. In their essay *On Abolition Ecologies making "Freedom as a place,"* In *Antipode*, A radical Journal of Geography, Nik Heynen and Megan Ybarra introduces the concept of *Abolitionist ecology* which is a critical approach that links environmental justice and liberation struggles to theories of abolition, emphasizing how racial capitalism, white supremacy, and settler colonialism create ecological harms and inequalities. It argues that environmental racism and ecological destruction are intertwined with carceral systems, focusing on creating "freedom as a place" by dismantling oppressive systems and reimagining land and property relations to foster liberated life-ways for all beings. ~~This builds on the work of W.E.B. Du Bois.~~
  
6. We are reminded of the assertion of the Bangkok World Mission Conference (1972-73): *"We as Christians declare that colonial domination is anti-christian because it denies to each person the inalienable right to personhood. No church can support such a system*

*without betraying its own vocation and mission in the world* “ An anti-black focus, we must be attentive to our theologies and to ensure that our theological frameworks do not support or contribute to a continuing commodification of human persons and creation. Our theologies must offer critique of the views that human beings and creation can be commodified. We continue to encourage resources that help member churches to engage in critical reflection on theologies and theological framework.