



CWM ASSEMBLY 2024
DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA, 12-19 JUNE 2024



Council for World Mission

ASSEMBLY REPORT

2024



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Foreword

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

It is with immense joy and gratitude that I present to you the Assembly Report encapsulating the profound messages, insightful articles, and inspiring speeches from the CWM Assembly 2024. Held under the theme “Rise to Life: Together in Transformation,” this Assembly has given all of us a clarion call to action, urging us to rise to life amidst the life-threatening forces nurtured by Empire in the world today.

The Assembly, held in the vibrant city of Durban, South Africa, was a resounding success. It brought together over 250 delegates, ecumenical partners, and visitors from around the world. This gathering was not just a meeting but a celebration of our shared mission and a testament to our collective resilience and commitment to God’s transformative mission. The theme “Rise to Life: Together in Transformation” resonated deeply with all participants.

The Assembly provided a platform for meaningful reflections, robust dialogues, and a collective discernment process on how we, as a global community of churches in mission, can embody the transformative power of the Gospel in our diverse contexts. The contributions contained in this booklet are a testament to the wisdom, diverse missional perspectives, and prophetic vision that our member churches and ecumenical partners brought to the table.

Throughout the week, the Assembly was grounded in daily morning worship services and evening prayers, creating a spiritual rhythm. The three Bible studies led by Rev. Dr Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon, Dr Jin Young Choi, and Rev. Dr Cliff Bird, each paired with one of the sub-themes—Transforming Power, Revisioning Mission, and Building Life-Flourishing Communities—offered a spiritual approach that both challenged and inspired participants, encouraging us to engage deeply with the Scriptures and apply their teachings to our contemporary contexts.

The keynote address by Prof. Puleng Lenka-Bula, set the tone for our discussions, reminding us of our shared mission to reclaim human faith and work for justice and reconciliation. In addition, the sub-theme speakers made significant contributions by addressing critical issues. While Prof. Verene Shepherd highlighted the transformative power of education as a means to liberate post-colonial societies, Rev. Dr Luma Upolu Vaai proposed a “dirtified theology of mission” that emphasised the interconnectedness of all life and the importance of starting mission work from the perspective of dirt communities. Ms Habiba Juma, Ms Muna Nassar, and Ms Priyanka Samy shared personal stories and reflections on the injustices faced by their communities, highlighting the need for addressing trauma, fear, and systemic discrimination, emphasising the importance of community-led initiatives and grassroots activism in building life-flourishing communities.

The workshops provided opportunities for participants to engage in practical discussions on a wide range of topics, from education and gender justice to eco-justice and digital mission. These sessions were not just about sharing knowledge but about equipping each other with the tools and strategies needed to effect transformative change in our communities.

One of the most moving moments of the Assembly was the public worship service held on 16 June, commemorating the Day of the African Child. This service, attended by several hundred people, was a powerful reminder of the sacrifices made by South Africa’s black youth in their struggle against apartheid. The sermon was delivered by Rev. Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson, Moderator of the United Reformed Church (URC).

As you read through the pages of this booklet, I hope you will find rich missiological insights that will inspire and equip you to engage more deeply in God’s mission. May these reflections challenge us to resist life-denying powers, embody alternative ways of

living, and build life-flourishing communities grounded in justice, peace, and love.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to all our member churches for sending their delegates to the Assembly. Your participation and contributions have been invaluable in shaping the conversations and outcomes of this gathering. Together, we have reaffirmed our commitment to radical discipleship and prophetic witness, trusting in the Holy Spirit to guide us as we journey towards our CWM Jubilee in 2027.

The success of this Assembly is a testament to the dedication and hard work of many individuals and committees. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) and the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA) for hosting this Assembly and for their warm hospitality. I also want to thank the CWM staff, stewards, and volunteers who worked tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure the smooth running of the event.

The Assembly’s success is also a reflection of the strength and vitality of our global CWM family. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and other sociopolitical and environmental crises, we have come together with a renewed sense of purpose and commitment. We have heard the call to rise to life and be together in transformation, and we have responded with faith, hope, and love.

As we move forward, let us continue to trust in the Triune God who creates the world by love and calls us to be agents of transformation. Let us continue to bear witness to the God of life, who calls us to rise to life and build life-flourishing communities.

In God’s Mission,

Rev. Dr Jooseop Keum
General Secretary



CWM ASSEMBLY 2024

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Report of The Assembly 2024

1. INTRODUCTION

The Council for World Mission (CWM) Assembly 2024 took place from June 12-19 June 2024, in Durban, South Africa, under the theme, “Rise to Life: Together in Transformation.” This Assembly was particularly significant as it marked the first in-person gathering of the communion of churches in mission since the Assembly in Jeju, South Korea, in 2016. The 2020 Assembly was held online due to the COVID-19 global pandemic.

The Assembly saw the participation of 238 individuals, including 124 delegates from the 31 member churches. Unfortunately, the four delegates from the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (PCM) were unable to attend due to visa challenges. Alongside the delegates, the assembly included ecumenical guests from various organisations, Observers, outgoing Board members and former General Secretaries. Members of various Assembly committees, including the Assembly Planning Group, Nominations Committee, Local Organising Committee, and Stewards, played a critical role in organising the Assembly successfully. In addition, resource persons, including keynote speakers, sub-theme

speakers, and Bible study and workshop facilitators, helped lead the CWM Assembly discernment process. Members of various working groups, including the Spiritual Life Working Group and Communications Working Group, also played pivotal roles in the Assembly.

The Pre-Assembly Youth and Women events played a significant role in the CWM Assembly by ensuring separate spaces for young people and women to share their experiences, discuss challenges, and develop statements that were discussed in the Assembly. They emphasised the importance of youth and women's leadership formation in building life-flourishing, just, and inclusive communities. The events aimed at ensuring their voices were heard, and their perspectives were integrated into the Assembly's outcomes and future directions. The Assembly concluded after five days with a reaffirmation of CWM's commitment to Rising to Life and Confessing Witness to Life-Flourishing Communities. The Assembly elected a new Board of Directors and Trustees to provide governance and lead the global CWM community and Secretariat for the coming four years, until 2028. The Assembly emphasised the importance of prophetic spirituality, faith, evangelism, community, and togetherness in promoting life in its fullness for all as proclaimed by Jesus (John 10:10). The Assembly highlighted the need to address sociopolitical and environmental emergencies, violence, and suffering, and to engage in practices that reflect resurrection life. The Assembly also called for the building of life-flourishing communities and the embodiment of alternative ways of living and being. The final call was to move with the wind of the Spirit towards the CWM Jubilee in 2027, trusting God to renew the vision and mission.

2. THE NATURE OF THE CWM ASSEMBLY (What is the CWM Assembly?)

2.1. CWM Assembly: A Gathering of the Global Community of Churches in Mission

As a community of churches in mission, CWM explicitly demonstrated its commitment to the just and full participation of all through the Assembly. This commitment to inclusion was made visible through the representation of the churches sending young people, women, laity, and ordained to the Assembly. However, CWM's commitment extended beyond representation alone, striving to address deeper, systemic structures that impact participation. There was a genuine attempt to look at the deeper and underlying structures involved. This was amply visible during the Assembly through the diversity of participation representing the various churches and other bodies with which CWM partners.

The diversity of representation that was evident at the Assembly is, in itself, a powerful expression of the identity and purpose of the CWM. Since 1977, it has been engaged in the decolonisation of mission, recognising that mission history is embedded in and entangled with colonialism, slavery, and patriarchy. Disentanglement from these multiple and layered hierarchies has been core to the work of CWM. This anti-colonial positionality is not accidental, cursory, or ephemeral but reflects an intentional and passionate commitment by the CWM at all levels of its structure. It is reflected in its governance, administration, finance, programmes, accompaniment of churches, and public witness. It was visibly evident in the Assembly in Durban.

2.2. CWM Assembly: A Celebratory and Transformative Event

The CWM Assembly in Durban was characterised by its celebratory nature and transformative impact in several ways. The Assembly was a celebration of the work of the CWM, the life and witness of member churches, and the Assembly itself. It integrated worship, Bible studies,

and theme presentations as part of this celebration, making the entire event a joyful and meaningful experience. The celebration extended to recognising the resilience and stories of member churches, ending with the Lord's Supper, symbolising unity and shared joy.

The theme "Rise to Life: Together in Transformation" highlighted the Assembly's commitment to transforming missiology and missiological praxis from below, focusing on justice, inclusivity, and building life-flourishing communities. The assembly addressed sociopolitical and religio-economical contexts, tackling issues like military coups, ecological degradation, and social injustices. The discussions were deeply rooted in theological reflections on justice, people's power, resurrection, and hope, making the CWM Assembly a unique and transformative gathering that aimed to confront oppressive structures and promote liberation.

2.3. CWM Assembly: A Site of Worship and Spirituality

The Assembly also fostered worship and spirituality through a variety of intentional practices designed to deepen participants' faith and sense of community. Daily worship and prayer sessions were central to the Assembly, providing a structured time for communal prayer, singing, and reflection. These sessions helped center participants spiritually, aligning their hearts and minds with the mission and themes of the Assembly. Bible studies played a crucial role in fostering spirituality, with resource persons leading participants through deep engagements with scripture. These studies focused on exploring biblical themes related to the sub-themes, grounding the Assembly's discussions in a strong theological context. This encouraged participants to connect their faith with the pressing issues of the world, fostering a sense of spiritual urgency and commitment.

Workshops and interactive sessions offered practical opportunities for participants to

explore various aspects of mission and spirituality. These sessions provided spaces for creating a collaborative and reflective environment as well as spiritual nourishment. Exposure visits to local communities and mission sites were another key component, allowing participants to witness and engage with the lived experiences of faith in action. These visits provided opportunities for practicing empathy, solidarity, and service, deepening participants' spiritual understanding through real-world interactions.

Celebration and fellowship events, such as the opening worship, Africa night, Sunday public worship gathering, and the closing worship, were moments of joyful communal worship. These gatherings reinforced the spiritual practice of coming together as a community to celebrate shared faith and mission. They provided a space for participants to build relationships, share experiences, and strengthen their collective sense of purpose.

The Assembly also emphasized prophetic spirituality, which combines deep faith and prayer with a commitment to justice and transformation. By promoting a spirituality that is both reflective and active, the Assembly encouraged participants to embody their faith in transformative ways.

3. THE CONTEXT OF THE ASSEMBLY

The Assembly took place in a world marked by significant challenges and crises in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Assembly highlighted a global emergency characterised by sociopolitical catastrophes and environmental crises. This included economic inequalities, climate change, and a malfunctioning global economy, which threatened the sustainability of life for many individuals and communities.

The Assembly acknowledged the world, which has been experiencing widespread violence and conflict, including the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Israeli bombardment

of Gaza, the military coup in Myanmar, tensions in Taiwan, and many more conflicts. These incidents were part of a broader trend of militarisation and the use of advanced technology for destructive purposes. The Assembly acknowledged the persistence of various forms of injustice and oppression, such as gender-based violence, racial violence, caste-based violence, chauvinistic nationalism, and xenophobia. It also recognised the challenges faced by migrants and refugees due to ethnic and military conflicts, poverty, and climate disasters.

The Assembly recognised the ongoing impact of colonialism and neocolonialism, including the exploitation of the global South, the persistence of settler colonialism, and the doctrine of discovery. It called for a decolonising movement with a mission to address these issues. Rapid technological advancements, including AI, posed ethical and moral challenges. While these technologies offered new possibilities, they also brought significant dangers that needed to be addressed.

The Assembly was deeply aware of the global inequality driving the climate crisis, with member churches experiencing the devastating effects of climate change, such as droughts, floods, and landslides. The Assembly noted the emergence of fascist politics dedicated to protecting elite interests, the entrenchment of the neoliberal global financial system, and the prevalence of “necropolitics” that inflicted suffering on the vulnerable.

In addition, as the Assembly took place in Durban, South Africa, the context of Africa also played a significant role in the conversation and discernment process. Africa’s history of struggle for emancipation and dignity provided a poignant backdrop for the Assembly. The continent’s ongoing efforts to overcome colonial legacies and achieve social justice resonated with the Assembly’s themes.

The Assembly paid close attention to the deep-rooted socioeconomic inequalities that the African society has been facing that are further exacerbated by historical exploitation and contemporary global economic systems. The Assembly recognised the need to address these inequalities through transformative actions. The Assembly also emphasised the importance of justice, peace, and human dignity in the context of political instability and authoritarianism prevalent in various African countries, contributing to social unrest and human rights violations.

These challenges called for urgent, faithful, and prophetic responses from the global community of churches. The Assembly participants, who came from different corners of the world, were deeply aware of these global challenges and sought to address them through their discussions and resolutions. These global sociopolitical and environmental challenges, together with Africa’s struggles for emancipation and dignity, resonated deeply with the Assembly’s theme and the sub-themes.

4. THE ASSEMBLY THEME AND SUB-THEMES

The Assembly theme, “Rise to Life: Together in Transformation,” played a central role before and during the Assembly by guiding discussions, reflections, and actions. The theme provided a framework for exploring the current global challenges and the role of the CWM global community in addressing them. It emphasised the need for togetherness and transformation in mission practices and the creation of life-flourishing communities.

The theme, which was further explicated into three sub-themes: Transforming Power, Revisioning Mission, and Building Life-Flourishing Communities, helped structure the Assembly’s sessions, including plenary discussions, workshops, and worship. The theme reinforced the Assembly’s commitment to prophetic discipleship, working in partnership with churches and the ecumenical community to resist life-denying

systems, affirm peace, do justice, and enable life-flourishing communities. It highlighted the importance of inclusivity, calling for the full participation of all, including marginalised and oppressed communities, in mission and church activities.

The theme of “Rise to Life” encouraged participants to look forward with hope and resilience to work collectively towards a transformative mission. The Assembly Statement captured the essence of the theme, emphasising the need for justice, equity, environmental stewardship, and community building. It called for transformative actions and practices that reflect resurrection life, ensuring that the discussions and actions were aligned with the vision of creating life-flourishing communities through transformative mission practices.

In addition, the sub-themes played a crucial role in unpacking the concepts of transforming power, revisioning mission, and building life-flourishing communities. They provided valuable insights and practical frameworks for understanding and implementing the Assembly’s vision. They helped participants to critically engage with the concepts of power, mission, and life-flourishing communities, offering new perspectives and actionable strategies helping participants to discern God’s call to mission in today’s world and to envision practical steps towards creating life-flourishing communities.

5. MISSIOLOGICAL AND THEOLOGICAL OUTCOMES OF THE ASSEMBLY

5.1. Prophetic Spirituality

The Assembly emphasised prophetic spirituality, reflecting a deep integration of faith and action in response to contemporary global challenges. Prophetic spirituality calls for a seamless blend of deep faith and active engagement in the world. It emphasises that spiritual life and social action are not separate but interconnected. This approach encourages churches to engage in justice,

peace, and reconciliation efforts grounded in a life of prayer and faith.

The Assembly highlighted the urgency of addressing sociopolitical and environmental emergencies. With a sense of immediacy and relevance, the Assembly urged member churches and ecumenical organisations to respond to crises as a divine calling and purpose. It includes a critical stance against oppressive power structures, involving speaking truth to power, challenging injustices, and advocating for the marginalised and oppressed. This approach aligns with the biblical tradition of prophets who confronted societal wrongs and called for repentance and transformation.

Churches are called to embody alternative values that contrast with the dominant, life-denying systems of the world. This includes living out values of justice, love, compassion, and care for creation. Prophetic spirituality encourages communities to model these values in their daily lives and interactions. It emphasises standing in solidarity with marginalised and oppressed communities, involving listening to their voices, understanding their struggles, and joining them in their fight for justice and dignity. This solidarity is seen as a crucial aspect of witnessing to God’s love and justice in the world.

Rooted in hope, prophetic spirituality envisions a different future and energises efforts to bring about change. It calls for a transformative vision that seeks to create life-flourishing communities where all people can live in dignity and peace. Churches are encouraged to actively engage in addressing social, political, and environmental issues, involving advocacy, community organising, and direct action to challenge injustices and promote systemic change.

Churches are urged to educate their members about the principles of prophetic spirituality and the importance of social justice, integrating faith and action through theological education and practical training in

advocacy and community engagement. Encouraging collaboration with other faith communities, civil society organisations, and social movements, prophetic spirituality amplifies the impact of churches and contributes to broader efforts for justice and peace. Maintaining a deep spiritual life is essential for sustaining prophetic action, involving regular practices of prayer, meditation, and worship that nurture the inner life and provide strength for the work of justice.

Prophetic spirituality, as emphasised by the CWM Assembly, represents a dynamic and integrated approach to mission. It calls for a deep engagement with the world, rooted in faith and committed to justice, peace, and the flourishing of all creation. This missiological outcome, which emerged from the CWM Assembly, provides a powerful framework for churches to witness to God's transformative love in the contemporary world.

5.2. Justice as a Missional Imperative

The Assembly underscored justice as a pivotal missional mandate for the churches. The Assembly's discussions and reflections highlighted the urgent need to address various forms of injustice that plague our world today. The Assembly emphasised that justice is not merely an optional extra but is central to the mission of God to affirm and protect life in its fullness for all. It is a fundamental aspect of faith, arising from the very nature of the divine and God's desire for the world.

The Assembly's commitment to justice was evident in its call to resist oppressive powers and embody alternative ways of living. This involves actively dismantling coloniality, enslavement, and all forms of hierarchical systems that perpetuate inequality and exploitation. The Assembly recognised that justice must be pursued in every aspect of life, including gender justice, economic justice, and environmental justice. It called for reparations for historic wrongs and the promotion of inclusivity and equality.

Furthermore, the Assembly's focus on justice extended to the need for transformative education and leadership development. It stressed the importance of making education accessible to all, particularly women, young people, and marginalised communities. This is essential for building life-flourishing communities that embody the values of justice, love, compassion, and care for the whole creation.

The CWM Assembly's missiological vision is deeply rooted in the pursuit of justice. It calls for radical discipleship that challenges and transforms unjust structures, promotes human dignity, and works towards the flourishing of all creation. Member churches and ecumenical partners are called to embrace this vision of justice not just as a theoretical concept but as a missional imperative that requires decisive action and a commitment to living out the values of the Kingdom of God in our communities and the world at large.

5.3. Faith and Evangelism as Radical Hospitality

The Assembly placed significant emphasis on faith and evangelism as crucial to the life and mission of the CWM global community. The Assembly recognised that in a world fraught with challenges, faith is essential for looking beyond despair and bearing witness to the transformative power of God through evangelism. This faith is not passive but active, calling for a commitment to justice, peace, and the flourishing of all creation. The Assembly's focus on evangelism was particularly significant. It called for a reimagining of evangelism that moves away from aggressive, divisive, and oppressive practices. Instead, the Assembly advocated for an approach rooted in humility and radical hospitality. This means approaching others with respect, openness, and a willingness to listen and learn rather than imposing beliefs or practices. This form of evangelism is characterised by mutual enrichment, where sharing the good news of Jesus Christ involves both giving and receiving. It is about building relationships, finding common

ground, and engaging in shared action that reflects the inclusive and peace-loving values of the gospel. It involves living out the message of Jesus in ways that promote justice, peace, and the flourishing of all creation.

Moreover, in the world of modern innovative technologies and digital platforms, the Assembly highlighted the importance of equipping future leaders, particularly youth and women, for the task of evangelism. The Assembly acknowledged the acute challenges and emerging opportunities of our time and the need for transformative education and leadership development to build life-flourishing, just, and inclusive communities.

5.4. Transformative Power to Dismantle Imperial Structures

The Assembly underscored the importance of transformative power to dismantle oppressive imperial power structures. It recognised that true mission involves actively resisting and transforming the systems that perpetuate inequality, exploitation, and oppression. This transformative mission is rooted in the power of people, the power of communities, and the power of God.

The Assembly highlighted that individuals, united in purpose and action, possess immense potential to challenge and change unjust imperial systems. This collective power is essential for addressing sociopolitical and economic inequalities that result in vulnerability, deprivation, and suffering for many. By empowering individuals to stand against greed, corruption, and oppression, the Assembly called for a mission that mobilises people to be agents of transformation in their own contexts.

The Assembly also stressed the importance of the power from below. The communities, especially those at the margins, have unique strengths and wisdom that are crucial for transformative mission. The Assembly called for a mission that is deeply rooted in the

lived experiences and struggles of these communities. By fostering solidarity and mutual support, communities can collectively resist the forces that seek to devalue and dehumanise them. The Assembly encouraged the creation of life-flourishing communities that embody justice, peace, and inclusivity, serving as powerful witnesses to the transformative potential of communal action.

Central to this transformative mission is the power of God. The Assembly affirmed that the ultimate source of hope and strength in the struggle against oppressive power structures is the divine power of God. It is through the Holy Spirit that individuals and communities are empowered to rise to life and embody the values of the Kingdom of God. The Assembly called for a prophetic spirituality that is grounded in faith and prayer, enabling believers to discern and respond to the signs of the times with courage and conviction. By relying on the power of God, the Assembly envisioned a mission that not only challenges the status quo but also brings about genuine and lasting transformation.

5.5. Mutuality and Togetherness to Be Resilient Communities

The Assembly emphasised the importance of mutuality and togetherness as foundational elements for building resilient communities amidst ongoing challenges. In the face of socio-political polarisations and pervasive inequalities, the Assembly reflected a deep commitment to fostering unity and solidarity among the member churches and beyond. The Assembly highlighted that togetherness goes beyond physical proximity; it involves cultivating deep, meaningful relationships that reflect the values of justice, love, and compassion. These relationships form the bedrock of resilient communities, providing emotional, spiritual, and practical support to those in need. By fostering a sense of belonging and interconnectedness, communities can stand together and support each other through crises. It was in this sense that the Assembly expressed its grief

for the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (PCM) as they could not travel to the Assembly amidst the ongoing military coup and visa challenges.

“The member churches shared their distress at the situation in Myanmar and the Assembly condemned all forms of violence, systemic discrimination against civilians and communal tensions. CWM laments the lack of medical facilities, the effects of COVID, and the impact of the military coup on the people of Myanmar.

The Assembly affirmed that we are called to be agents of transformation, resisting oppressive powers, and embodying alternative ways of living and being. We are called to engage in practices that reflect resurrection life, building life-flourishing communities.

Recalling the Scripture, “If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Corinthians 12:26), the Assembly calls on member churches to show solidarity with the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar.” Mutuality was underscored as a principle where each community member contributes to and benefits from the collective strength. This reciprocal relationship ensures that all members are empowered and included in the community’s journey towards transformation. The Assembly called for a mission that promotes mutual respect, shared responsibility, and collaborative action, recognising that every individual member has unique gifts and perspectives valuable to the community.

The Assembly recognised that the challenges faced by communities today require collective action. By working together, communities can share their resources, share their wisdom, and support one another in the struggle for justice and peace. This collective power is essential for creating life-flourishing communities that embody the values of justice, love, compassion, and care for all creation. By embracing the power of

togetherness, communities can effectively challenge and transform oppressive power structures, bringing about genuine and lasting change.

6. TOWARDS JUBILEE: A POST-ASSEMBLY JOURNEY OF HOPE AND LIBERATION

The CWM Assembly closed, and it has set forth a compelling vision for the post-Assembly journey, giving the global CWM community a clear mandate to live out a Jubilee ethos. It signifies a transformative path that the CWM community will embark on over the next four years, aiming to foster hope, justice, and liberation in a world fraught with challenges.

The concept of Jubilee, rooted in biblical tradition, calls for a time of liberation, restoration, and renewal. Over the next four years, CWM will focus on embodying this ethos by advocating for social, economic, and ecological justice. This involves addressing systemic inequalities, promoting reparations for historical injustices, and working towards the holistic wellbeing of all communities. The Jubilee ethos is not just a symbolic gesture but a call to action that demands tangible changes in how societies operate and how resources are distributed. The ongoing programmatic structure guided by the Strategy Framework 2020-2029 and The Onesimus Project (TOP) will guide the CWM global community on this journey to hope, justice, and liberation.

This journey towards Jubilee will also be marked by a commitment to prophetic discipleship. This means that CWM will actively engage in challenging oppressive systems and structures, advocating for the marginalised, and promoting radical transformation. Prophetic discipleship involves speaking truth to power, standing in solidarity with the oppressed, and working tirelessly to dismantle systems of injustice. Central to the vision of Jubilee is the creation of life-flourishing communities. CWM will work towards fostering environments where



justice, peace, and inclusivity are paramount. This involves supporting grassroots initiatives, empowering local leaders, and ensuring that all voices, especially those from the margins, are heard and valued.

The post-Assembly journey will emphasise the importance of mutuality and solidarity. CWM will continue to build and strengthen partnerships among member churches and ecumenical bodies. By working together, sharing resources, and supporting one another, the community can collectively address challenges and promote a more just and equitable world. Mutuality and solidarity are foundational to the Jubilee vision, as they reflect the interconnectedness of all humanity with the creation and the need for collective action in the face of shared challenges.

Education will play a crucial role in the journey towards Jubilee. CWM will focus on transformative education that promotes critical thinking, decolonisation, and liberation. This includes developing curricula that reflect diverse perspectives, supporting theological education, and empowering the next generation of leaders to carry forward the mission of hope and liberation. Transformative education is about more than imparting knowledge; it is about shaping individuals who are committed to justice,

equity, and the common good. CWM's ongoing programmes like TEEL, TEL, PhD in Transformative Mission, and various programmes under the TOP Education for Liberation will guide the work of CWM.

Recognizing the urgent need to address the climate crisis, CWM will prioritize climate justice as a key component of its mission. This involves advocating for sustainable practices, supporting communities affected by climate change, and working towards a just transition to a green economy. The Assembly has called for a mission that is deeply connected to the care of creation and the wellbeing of the planet. Climate justice is integral to the Jubilee vision, as it acknowledges the interconnectedness of environmental health and human flourishing. The CWM community is committed to embodying the values of Jubilee by promoting justice, peace, and inclusivity. Through prophetic discipleship, mutuality, transformative education, and climate justice, CWM aims to create life-flourishing communities and bring about radical transformation in a world in need of hope and liberation. This journey is not just a mission but a movement towards a more just, equitable, and sustainable world, reflecting the true spirit of Jubilee.



Assembly Statement

The Council for World Mission (CWM) Assembly met in Durban, South Africa, from 12 to 19 June 2024. With its struggles for emancipation and dignity, Africa provided a youthful and inspiring context for an Assembly focussed on rising to life. With great anticipation, member church delegates, partners and guests gathered for the first Assembly since the Covid-19 pandemic. In the face of socio-political catastrophe and environmental emergency, the Assembly heard the call to rise to life and be together in transformation.

To follow Jesus Christ is a matter of transformation (Romans 12:2). We are transformed as we travel the journey of faith; and as we are drawn into the mission of God we become agents of transformation in our world. The Assembly nurtured prophetic spirituality to enable us to fulfil our missional calling in today's world.

We testify that the Triune God creates the world by love in and for cosmic community (Gen1-2); mission is a living spirituality and embodiment of God's love (1 John 4: 7-21). Led by the voices and actions of young people, we bear witness that through radical discipleship we can overcome life-denying powers.

Transforming Power

It is not true that market forces hold supreme authority in the human community.

This is true: "You cannot serve both God and money" (Matthew 6:24). Rejecting the idolatry of wealth and power, disciples seek justice, compassion, and righteousness.

It is not true that the powerful are entitled to attack, subjugate, colonise or enslave their neighbours.

This is true: We are morally obliged to make reparation for historic wrongs and to actively resist and dismantle all forms of coloniality and enslavement.

It is not true that women must occupy a secondary and subordinate role in church and society.

This is true: God calls women to leadership in mission and calls everyone to practise gender justice and equity to effect transformative change in every aspect of life.

It is not true that migrants and refugees pose a threat and deserve hostility.

This is true: We are called to offer hospitality to strangers (Hebrews 13:2) as we work for justice and dignity with all who are marginalised and vulnerable.

We are called to be agents of transformation, resisting oppressive powers, and embodying alternative ways of living and being.

Revisioning Mission

It is not true that we can be complacent about the climate crisis.

This is true: passion for the flourishing of all creation lies at the heart of the mission of God.

It is not true that world peace can be secured by reliance on military might.

This is true: “blessed are the peacemakers” (Matthew 5:9); mission takes us to places of conflict and brokenness to work for justice and reconciliation.

It is not true that by ourselves we are strong enough to overcome global injustice.

This is true: “Greater is the one who is in you than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4.4); by building collaboration through transformative ecumenism we can defeat the forces of death and destruction.

It is not true that evangelism must be aggressive, divisive and oppressive.

This is true: we can share the good news of Jesus in humility and radical hospitality.

We are called to attend to the signs of the times, discerning the Spirit of life and God’s call to mission today.

Life-Flourishing Communities

It is not true that we must face pain and suffering in isolation and abandonment.

This is true: “If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Corinthians 12:26). African values of Ubuntu teach us about interconnectedness.

It is not true that some people are disposable and can be ignored, excluded or slaughtered.

This is true: every human being is cherished by God, whose loving purpose is for all to live in dignity and to flourish in society (Psalm 139: 13-15).

It is not true that formation for leadership should be available only for a small elite.

This is true: transformative education, spiritual guidance and leadership development should be accessible to all; and formation opportunities for women, young people and children are a missional priority.

It is not true that the time for cross-cultural service in mission is over.

This is true: churches are enriched by sending and receiving partners in mission.

We are called to engage in practises that reflect resurrection life, building life-flourishing communities.

Rise to Life

It is not true that death has the last word for humanity and the earth.

This is true: Christ has risen from the dead and we too can rise to life.

We rise to life in the Holy Spirit.

We are called to a mission which does not belong to us. Rather, it is God's mission, effected through the action of God's Spirit in the life of the world.

The unity we seek is not achieved through our own efforts. Rather, it is the Holy Spirit who unites, inspiring our spiritual commitment.

Facing our torn and troubled world, by ourselves we are unable to be hopeful.

Rather, we "overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).

As we move with the wind of the Spirit towards our CWM jubilee in 2027, we trust God to renew our vision of mission, embodied in life-flourishing communities.

Women's Statement



**We affirm the contribution of all God's people
in church and community.**

**We advocate for the equitable participation of women
in leadership in relation to God and one another.**

Grassroots: Encourage multi-dimensional change,
starting within homes and communities.

Empowerment: Promote biblical literacy from an early
age to reshape leadership.

Mentorship: Foster programs to guide and uplift
emerging women leaders.

Support: Establish networks for mutual encouragement
and advancement.



Youth Statement

Preamble

There is a saying in Chichewa that states ‘*Achinyamata ndi atsogoleri a mmawa*’. This translates to ‘The of tomorrow’. In response to this saying we as youths come to proclaim to the General Assembly ‘We are in fact the leaders of today’. We affirm the words spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 21:16, “From the lips of youths and infants you, Lord, have called forth praise”. Since a significant portion of CWM members worldwide are made up of young people, we are in a unique position to ‘call forth God’s praise’. Regarding the theme of this Assembly, ‘Rising to Life’, Jesus proclaims in John 10:10, “I have come to give life and life abundantly”. The Biblical Greek distinguishes between life as merely existing materially (*βίος*) and life filled to the brim with meaning,

life that flourishes (*ζωήν*). We as youths believe that many of the problems that the world faces stem from the fact that we have aim for a life of *βίος* hile God is calling us to *ζωήν*, life in flourishing community with God.

Through this statement we have come to let our voice as young people be heard, and to proclaim what it means to rise to life. Ours is a voice of faith that bears witness to God’s Spirit who is already at work in our contexts. It is a voice of hope that continues to strive and pray for the renewal of this world. Above all it is a voice of love that stands in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, not just with our fellow humans but with all of creation. It is our calling as future leaders of the church to advocate for those in the margins whose voices all too often remain unheard. We as young people must not let our age be used as a reason to disqualify us from claiming our place at the table. Indeed, as the LORD said to Jeremiah ‘Do not say, “I am too young.”’

You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you” (Jeremiah 1:7). We have come to this Assembly to answer to this call and let our prophetic voice be heard.

1. Discerning the signs of the times as youths

We the youths, in discerning the signs of the times, observe many pressing issues, the biggest three being the decline apathy towards religion in youth, inequality and the Climate Crisis.

Apathy for Religion

Instead of “believing in God” or not “believing in God”, most of our generation choose to not care either way, with apathy towards religion. Losing the meaning given through Jesus, the result is a rising mental health crisis amongst the youths of the world that have to deal with a completely new way of social life through the internet, leading to anxiety, loneliness and depression.

Inequalities

There are also worldwide inequalities that need to be addressed, There is an increase in the disparity between the rich and poor. This inequality manifests differently in each region, but worldwide injustice is seen with the treatment of the homeless, the refugee, the marginalised, the poor, and the oppressed. Also Xenophobia, racism, sexism and other life-denying systems of oppressions have no place in our society or Church, but they are nevertheless prevalent. People abandoned by the church and wider society with no support are dying, yet all of us seem to be preoccupied with caring only for ourselves. Why do these issues remain in the Church when we are taught that Jesus loves and we Christians should love? We are taught to love but not how to love, we are told to stand up for justice but not how to do so. Wider society is apathetic to the needs of others, preferring to please oneself or one’s personal community, consuming for

themselves regardless of the harm it does to others.

Climate Change

This is at its clearest when observing the environmental degradation in the Pacific region and beyond. We are all taught to fight against climate change, most of the world knows that there is a Climate Crisis; however, is there anything significant being done to combat this? Not enough from powerful governments, but also not enough from our Church. At current trajectories we youth will live to experience a refugee crisis as over a billion people will live in wet-bulb zones where it is impossible to live, even in shade, without artificially cooled environments. When we are your age, the world will be completely different to how it is now. With no changes it will be worse but with your guidance we can build a world that can sustain future generations.

2. Confessing and repentance

Although being called to be the salt and light of the world, we, as Christ’s followers, oftentimes fall short of His glory and lose our way on this journey. Confronted by constant loss of believers, due to social and spiritual deterioration in this rapidly changing world, churches are still too concerned with self-preservation and merely aim to “survive”, not to “thrive”. Churches should not focus on paying to keep buildings open instead of giving money to youth work and societal needs. The Church is becoming less relevant to people who are seeking spiritual guidance and asylum, while this generation, the youths, are exactly the very people who are struck by uncertainties and even hopelessness. The Church has thus lost its appeal to the young people, who would now rather seek spiritual support otherwise or simply live a worldly life to “enjoy the moment” to evade from the helplessness they feel. Affected by the gloom and negativity in the global atmosphere, even Christian youths now have less interest

in being part of their own church or actively engaged in God's missions. Unfortunately, the struggles of young Christians do not just originate in worldly matters, but also within the church. Youths are critical and sensitive to current problems, and are not worried about changing for improvements. Church leaders, who have more dominance in decision-making and resource allocation, may not welcome the idea of change as it means challenging the status quo as well as their own authority. Worse still, pride and ego, in the form of racism, class superiority, etc., happens somehow among brothers and sisters. Across cultures and nationalities, there is a common perception that youths should fulfill expectations of their predecessors, which leads to negligence of youth struggles and needs, and eventually burnout. Altogether, this has caused our churches to become rather numb to youth issues, which in turn limits the churches' awareness of the spiritual struggles faced by young believers.

As the word of God stated in both **James 5:16**, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working" and **1 John 1:9**, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." It is therefore important that as the body of Christ, as the Church and youths, we admit our faults and hold firm to God and His words so that we can renew and become His rightful witnesses.

3. Affirmation

We as youths also wish to bear witness to the way in which God's Spirit is already at work within the Church and the world. We recognise the seeds planted by those before us and witness the effects, but we continue to strive to bear fruit. The youth affirm that through the Holy Spirit we can learn to grow, 1 Corinthians 3:6 emphasises "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow."

Though we have said that the Church is not doing enough for this, we also recognise and appreciate that the church is continuing to progress forward by having some support for the youth to develop their skills through various programmes and opportunities. An example highlighted is this very youth assembly gathering which equips and enables young people from different regions and contexts to express their concerns, creating an avenue for youths to collectively address regional struggles and build awareness.

Moreover, these assemblies give rise to churches to unite and stand in solidarity with one another. These events allow us to plant seeds which will bear fruit of transformation, but as we await for growth we continue to nurture these seeds with constant engagement by youths through platforms such as these assemblies where youths are invited to speak on their subjective experiences.

Furthermore, being united as one body in Christ, the churches have an increased collaboration on focusing on missions that share a common goal. For example, providing scholarships and opportunities for students to achieve their goals and offering employment to those in need of support. God's work is evident not only through these events, but highlighted in different forms such as youth camps that guide youths to explore the gospel in a range of forms consisting of movement, drama, music and more. Whilst sharing in fellowship with a diverse demographic of people, we learn the significance of what can be done to progress the mission of Christ. We, as youths, sincerely recognise the seeds that our elders have planted, we are firmly committed to stewarding and watering them and we affirm that in the end, it is the Holy Spirit that makes our endeavors grow.

4. Call to action

We the youths call upon our churches to take actions in making the changes necessary in

the face of the challenges of our time:

We call on our churches to act out of love and hospitality through sending missionaries to other parts of the world, and giving support generously wherever injustice and oppression occurs.

We call on our churches to open up itself to be attentive and accommodating to the needs of our communities, and to encourage an open space and discussion for everyone through enhancing the church's presence and engagement with the youths in person and digitally.

We call on our churches to address the issues of self-interest and financial mismanagement that leads to economic injustice. We call on our churches to address the issues of environmental neglect that leads to unsustainability.

We call on our churches to reject harmful, anthropocentric, and authoritarian forms of theology that only serve to permeate life-denying systems.

We call on our churches to inspire and equip our youths to pursue the biblical calling for justice through sermons, social media, and various events and conferences, and support our youths to transform justice-seeking objectives into practises and actions.

We call on our churches to have more cross-regional gatherings to track the progress and changes that have been made, to solidify the relationships that are built, and to learn and encourage each other.

an effort to strengthen ties across borders and enhance intercultural understanding, the churches across regions should be working together. This entails building connections with people across the globe via partnerships, international gatherings, and digital platforms. The church should promote volunteer work, internships, and cultural exchange programmes as ways to foster stronger ties. By assisting people in comprehending and empathizing with diverse cultures, the programmes are able to promote global citizenship. Additionally, the churches should work together on international projects like social justice campaigns, sustainable development projects, carbon footprint management, and disaster relief. The churches should pool the resources and experiences to address urgent global concerns to this cooperative approach. The churches should also build an online community of support to exchange knowledge, resources, and experiences where people can interact, share knowledge, and encourage one another in their international pursuits on this online platform. To prepare people for participation in groups, churches should offer cross-cultural training and instruction. This involves exchanging best practises, insights, and knowledge to assist people in gaining the abilities and comprehension required for successful international cooperation. The churches should have a more significant impact on the world by utilizing their combined strengths and experiences through resource sharing. Through sharing the experiences and contexts of each church, we believe that the churches can learn from each other, thrive together, and rise together as a life-flourishing global community.

5. "Rising Together"

The Church is fundamentally called to be the body of Christ working together towards the *Missio Dei*. As long as the Church remains divided, we cannot answer this call. Rising to life is in essence a communal enterprise that requires us to rise to life *together*. In



Statement on Myanmar

The CWM Assembly met in Durban, South Africa, from 12 to 19 June 2024 with the theme Rise to Life: Together in Transformation. The Assembly expressed sorrow at the absence of the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (PCM).

The member churches shared their distress at the situation in Myanmar and the Assembly condemned all forms of violence, systemic discrimination against civilians and communal tensions. CWM laments the lack of medical facilities, the effects of COVID, and the impact of the military coup on the people of Myanmar.

The Assembly affirmed that we are called to be agents of transformation, resisting

oppressive powers, and embodying alternative ways of living and being. We are called to engage in practises that reflect resurrection life, building life-flourishing communities.

Recalling the Scripture, “If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Corinthians 12:26), the Assembly calls on member churches to show solidarity with the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar. CWM and its partners are committed to building and expanding the Agape Hospital which has been a ray of hope to the community in providing life-saving medical care for people of Tahan-Kalaymyo and Chin Hills.



A Walk Through the CWM Assembly 2024

More than 250 CWM delegates, ecumenical partners, and visitors gathered at the Radisson Blu Hotel in Durban, South Africa, for the CWM Assembly 2024, which ran from 12-19 June 2024. Hosted by the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) and the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA), the Assembly was the first in-person gathering of its kind in eight years.

Held under the theme “Rise to Life: Together in Transformation,” the Assembly had three sub-themes: Transforming Power, Revisioning Mission, and Building Life-Flourishing Communities.

Three Bible studies, paired with the sub-themes, offered a spiritual approach that both challenged and inspired the participants. Daily morning worship services and evening prayers grounded the Assembly in being led by the Holy Spirit, and ecumenical greetings shared nearly every day reflected the ever-widening circle of the CWM global family.



OPENING DAY

13 JUNE

Procession brought colours, camaraderie

With a procession of colourful flags and a lively band, the CWM family processed down the streets of eThekwin, South Africa, to officially begin the Assembly on 13 June. Their short pilgrimage landed them at Grace Family Church, where they paused on the grounds to bless a special place in the churchyard where a tree would be planted.

Opening worship: hopes, dreams, and prayers

An Opening Worship inside Grace Family Church celebrated the theme “Rise to Life: Together in Transformation.”

CWM General Secretary, Rev. Dr Jooseop Keum, greeted the CWM delegates and

guests in the congregation. “We bring with us our hopes, dreams, and prayers of our communities,” he said.

Rev. Dr Lungile Mpetsheni, General Secretary of the UPSCA, took to the pulpit to welcome the participants to Africa. “I am welcoming you to the land of the brave people, to the land of the warriors who fought over the years against all forms of colonialism,” he said.

Cllr Nompumelelo Ignatia Sithole, PR Councillor for Ethekewini Municipality, shared a message on behalf of the Office of the Mayor. “We are grateful to the organisers for choosing our city as a venue of choice for this beautiful event,” she said.

Outgoing CWM Moderator Rt Rev. Lydia Neshangwe delivered a sermon on how the Holy Spirit is poured out on everyone—children, old people, men, women, and even those who seem unworthy to society.



DAY TWO

14 JUNE

“Hope is based on the promise of God”

On 14 June, after CWM delegates and visitors were formally welcomed to the Assembly, they heard from keynote speaker Prof. Puleng Lenka-Bula. Of Lesotho and South African descent, she is a trained feminist ethicist with a Ph.D. in Social Ethics.

She is the first woman Principal and Vice-Chancellor at the University of South Africa’s existence and the third Black Vice-Chancellor since the advent of democracy in 1994.

“Hope is based on the promise of God to all humanity,” she said.

CWM General Secretary, Rev. Dr Jooseop Keum, then offered a summary of key achievements and journeys that CWM has taken in the past four years. “Mission has an important role in reclaiming human faith,” he said.

The Assembly also received an overview of the host context, with a candid description of Africa’s gifts and challenges.



DAY THREE

15 JUNE

Transforming Power

On 15 June, the Bible study was led by Rev. Dr Monica Melanchthon, Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies, at the Pilgrim Theological College, University of Divinity.

She urged churches to tend to power that is in the invisible.

Prof. Verene Shepherd subsequently took the stage to reflect on the sub-theme “Transforming Power.”

Shepherd is the Professor Emerita of History and Gender Studies at The University of the West Indies, Jamaica. She is also the current Chair of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

“Transforming Power” is vital to pursuing

equality, Shepherd said, “because unfortunately Babylon does not want peace or justice.”

The Assembly received statements from the Youth and Women’s pre-assemblies.

Six workshops offered on 15 June included:

- Education Transforming Power
- Gender: Leadership and Power
- Racism, Power, and Privilege
- Caste: Discrimination and Power
- Dismantling Militarised Empire
- Discovering the Historical Collections of the CWM and their Potential for Future Research

CWM elected Dr Lin Ming-Chu Natalie, from the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, as the incoming moderator. Dr Natalie Lin will serve a four-year term that ends in 2028.

The day concluded with an Africa Cultural Night that shared the spirit of Africa with all.



A SUNDAY TO REMEMBER

16 JUNE

A public worship at the Olive Convention Centre in Durban, South Africa, brought ringing music, remembrance, and renewal to several hundreds of people who gathered alongside the CWM Assembly participants.

The congregation—comprising CWM delegates, commemorated the Day of the African Child, or Youth Day, in South Africa. On 16 June 1976, South Africa's black youth challenged the white apartheid government. The events, during which at least 200 schoolchildren died after thousands were ambushed by the police, marked a turning point in South Africa's political history.

Rev. Dr Tessa Henry Robinson, Moderator of the United Reformed Church, delivered a sermon that focused on celebration in the awe of God's children.

"If heaven belongs to the children, our faith not only asks us but demands us to create space for children where they don't just survive but thrive," she said.

CWM Assembly participants then visited six sites that showcased notable educational, outreach, and support projects and entities that have worked tirelessly and unceasingly for vulnerable people in South Africa.

They visited:

Institute for Healing of Memories

The Institute for Healing of Memories was founded in 1998 by Fr Michael Lapsley, (Society of the Sacred Mission), who lost both hands and an eye in a letter bomb attack in Zimbabwe in 1990.

Inanda Seminary

Founded on 1 March 1869, Inanda Seminary



is the oldest independent boarding school offering secondary education to black female teenagers in South Africa.

iCARE

For more than 22 years, iCare has been a nonprofit Christian organisation, devoted to finding a sustainable solution for street children in the city of Durban and surrounding areas.

Bobbi Bear

Operation Bobbi Bear is a human rights organisation committed to helping sexually abused children in Amanzimtoti, KwaZulu Natal, South Africa.

The ReStory Foundation

The ReStory Foundation, grown from the Bhambayi Project, empowers the marginalised, especially orphans and vulnerable children and youth, to be courageous agents of change.

Groutville Congregational Church and Chief Albert Luthuli Museum

The gravesite of Nobel Prize laureate Chief Albert Luthuli lies at Groutville Congregational Church, where missionary Rev. Aldin Grout arrived from the American Board of Commissioners around 1840. A few miles away from the Groutville Congregational Church lies the Albert Luthuli Museum, full of photos, press clippings, and artwork that commemorate the life of a transformational figure in South African history.



DAY FIVE

17 JUNE

Revisioning Mission

Taking the stage in leading the Bible study session was Rev. Dr Cliff Bird, an ordained Minister of the United Church in Solomon Islands. A signature aspect of Bird's ministry is his love for and keen interest in forging interconnections between theology and issues including human rights, gender justice, climate justice, and eco-justice.

He exhorted the attending delegates to revision mission by placing the meaning of the kingdom or reign (as certain groups would prefer a non-gender specific semantic) of God in context.

As Rev. Dr Luma Upolu Vaai, Principal and Professor of Theology and Ethics at the Pacific Theological College in Suva, Fiji Islands, served as the sub-theme speaker, he reflected on seeing "dirt communities" as critical spaces for revisioning mission—because dirt theology

is grounded in the life of the Trinity.

Five workshops were offered, including:

- Radical Hospitality as Evangelism
- Affirming Life-Flourishing Spiritualities
- Indigenous Vision – Transformed World
- Missional Congregation – Witnessing in Public Space
- Transformative Ecumenism: Mission from the Margins

As "Stories from the Region" unfolded, three regions were highlighted: Europe, South Asia, and Caribbean.

A CWM Cultural Night capped off the day, allowing CWM member churches and friends to share traditions and the spirit of community from their own contexts.



CLOSING DAY

18 JUNE

Building Life-Flourishing Communities

On 18 June, the last in the series of Bible study sessions was led by Dr Jin Young Choi, a Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at the Baptist Missionary Training School. Choi is also the Professorial Chair in Biblical Studies at the Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, USA.

“Life is interconnected and the self cannot flourish if others don’t,” said Choi, “yet the Empire would consistently defy God’s will in human flourishing through economic and neoliberal policies that deny life.”

Three young women—from Nigeria, Palestine, and India—put a human face on what “Building Life-Flourishing Communities” really means.

The Assembly’s final day also brought five

workshops, including:

- Mission in a Digitalised World
- Tax Justice for an Economy of Life
- Building a Movement for Eco-Justice
- Community De(en)velopment Towards Transformation
- Creating Space? Frustrated Youth

As the second half of the “Stories from the Region” began, churches from East Asia and the Pacific took to the stage to highlight their programmes, challenges, and experiences in carrying out God’s mission in their contexts.

The Assembly received with deep gratitude statements from the Youth and Women’s Pre-assemblies.

The CWM Assembly elected a new Treasurer; a slate of Directors for the Council for World Mission Ltd.; Trustees of the Council for World Mission (UK); and a slate of Directors for the Council for World Mission Africa NPC.

CWM also adopted an Assembly Statement that reflects the missiological meaning of the gathering in Durban, South Africa, from 12-19 June, under the theme “Rise to Life: Together in Transformation.”

“In face of socio-political catastrophe and environmental emergency, the Assembly heard the call to rise to life and be together in transformation,” the statement reads.

The CWM Assembly adopted a statement and joined in prayer on the situation in Myanmar, expressing great sadness at the absence of the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar.

A closing service full of music and a dramatic rendition of Romans 12:1-21, allowed CWM delegates and friends to close their gathering in a spirit of prayer.



Moderator's Address

A big welcome to the 2024 CWM Assembly! This Assembly is a special one in that we are meeting face-to-face as an Assembly after eight years following the restrictions that the COVID-19 pandemic previously imposed.

It is significant that this Assembly is meeting on the continent of Africa, described by one musician as “the only continent shaped like a question mark” (Mzwake Mbuli). One of the questions that remains prominent in Africa is that of the legacies of the trans-Atlantic slave trade era, and the role played by people of faith. Notably, the Council for World Mission is facing and dealing with this question through a cutting-edge endeavor: The Onesimus Project.

We come to the Assembly for four reasons.

1. **We come to celebrate** – to celebrate God’s working through both our forebears who began this global missionary movement with courage and calling, and to celebrate the work of those who are currently responding to God’s call through the multi-faceted work being achieved through CWM.
2. **We come to share our stories of mission** – these stories are the backbone of God’s work through the member

churches, and these stories inspire us to keep going.

3. **We come to read the signs of the times** – and we do this collectively as the body of Christ so that we can respond more effectively in keeping with the African proverb which says, “If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together.”
4. **We come to discern** the will of God as we elect and appoint a new Board of Directors. This requires total submission to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

We do all this in the spirit of our Assembly theme “Rise to Life: Together in Transformation.” We are called to rise to life together within our diverse and dynamic contexts, within our modern day sociopolitical, economic, and environmental landscapes. So during this Assembly, “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you” (Isaiah 60:1).

On behalf of the 2020-2024 CWM Board of Directors, I wish you an enriching and life-giving experience. May we together fulfil our CWM vision of co-creating “life-flourishing communities” both here and in the places where God has planted us.

Rt Rev. Lydia Neshangwe
CWM Moderator



General Secretary's Address

Warmest greetings to you all from the Council for World Mission!

I am delighted that you will be joining us in Durban, South Africa, for the quadrennial Assembly after the unfortunate cancellation of the 2020 Assembly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Assembly theme is Rise to Life: Together in Transformation. The sub-themes—Transforming Power, Revisioning Mission, and Building Life-flourishing Communities—are aimed at complementing the Assembly theme, which will guide the CWM family during Assembly 2024 and beyond as we rise to life together from the forces of death and destruction and transform our congregations into life-flourishing communities.

This Assembly will be a time of fellowship, worship, study, networking, and discernment as we seek to understand and respond to the signs of the times. The presence of delegates at this Assembly is crucial in discerning God's mission and addressing the challenges the global communities are facing amidst the rising of Empires and other life-denying forces.

Empire divides and rules, but mission unites and reconciles. Indeed, our world is currently filled with life-threatening forces which are trying to steal and destroy life and peace from the face of the earth. Consequently, we are witnessing numerous forms of destruction, including military conflicts, climate crises, pandemics, and social, political and economic inequalities. Such crises create divisions and destabilise communities to dominate and rule over the poor and oppressed. These are some of the

many problems that challenge our mission of reconciliation through the building of life-flourishing communities in contexts.

Our vision at CWM is to create life-flourishing communities, living out God's promise of a New Heaven and a New Earth. Therefore, we are committed to radical and prophetic discipleship, working in partnership with churches and the ecumenical community to resist life-denying systems, affirm peace, do justice, and enable life-flourishing communities. Through our programmatic areas, we advocate for ecological and economic justice, engage in mission and partnership, promote discipleship, spirituality, and dialogue, provide education, formation, and empowerment, work for mission from the margins, and strive for peacebuilding and community development.

As we gather for the CWM Assembly 2024, we need to respond to the question of how we can witness God's life-affirming mission through our Assembly. To begin with, we must have the courage to witness to the hope found in Christ, even in the face of a hopeless world. Our faith in the Cross of Christ, which defeated the forces of death and destruction through the resurrection of life, is the source of our hope for transformation. We firmly believe that the gospel holds the potential to bring about transformation in various aspects of the world, including one's personality, values, social class, and society as a whole. The gospel of the Kingdom of God challenges the world that nurtures hopelessness. Celebrating life in a hopeless world means bringing eschatological hope to the horizon of history. As a matter of fact, there are numerous stories of hope among our member churches and ecumenical partners. CWM's ethos as a "community of churches in mission" was clearly manifested through our communities by their works of solidarity and resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. As disciples, our mission is to spread the message of hope that "God's Kingdom is coming, and it is already among us." We aim to achieve this by fostering a

high-quality community within CWM, which serves as a foretaste of the Reign of God.

Through the 2024 Assembly, CWM will strive to foster life-flourishing communities where people can find spaces of belonging and new hope in their life together. God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts (2 Corinthians 4:6). Even if the darkness caused by wars, pandemic and other global crises is likely to kill the whole world, the darkness cannot win over even a spark of light in our hearts. Moreover, when tiny sparks of light march together, empowering, encouraging, and enlightening each other, the darkness of the Empire never wins over the light of God's people. The journey of CWM has been the journey to shine the light on Earth. Therefore, we ought to "Rise to Life: Together in Transformation!"

It is, therefore, imperative that as a community of churches in mission, all the six regions of the world should respond to the question: What is God's mission in today's wounded world? And how could we participate in it together as a global partnership of churches in mission? Let us, therefore, "Stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong and do everything in love" (1 Corinthians 16).

I invite you to embrace this Assembly as an opportunity for us to rise to life as a community of churches in mission together towards a transformative mission of God. Let us engage in meaningful discussions, worship together, and build connections that will strengthen our collective efforts in creating life-flourishing communities.

On behalf of the global CWM family, I extend a warm welcome to each and every one of you. May this Assembly be a transformative event in our journey together in God's mission.

Rev. Dr Jooseop Keum
CWM General Secretary



Keynote Address

Prof. Puleng Lenka-Bula

Principal and Vice-Chancellor,
University of South Africa (Unisa)

Greetings!

From the onset, allow me to share with you the good news that, just about two weeks ago, our distinguished Secretary General and chief host of this assembly, the Rev. Dr Jooseop Keum, was awarded an honorary degree by the University of South Africa (Unisa) at a graduation ceremony on our main campus in Pretoria. Unisa conferred on Professor Keum the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theology (*Honouris causa*) in recognition of his immense contributions to global peace and economic and ecological justice; his centring of people in the margins

of society through mission theology; his efforts at empowering youth, young adults, and women in the ecumenical movement; as well as his efforts at promoting justice and human rights through mission work. Conferral of this honorary doctorate is yet another honour and an affirmation of the international stature of this accomplished scholar and global crusader for social justice.

Congratulations are in order to the Rev. Dr Keum for this and many other accomplishments in his stellar career.

God's mission and our own

As we assemble here in the city of eThekweni, we are located a mere 50 kilometres from the town of Tongaat, which is still reeling from the aftermath of a deadly tornado. It ripped through the town and levelled it some two

weeks ago, leaving in its wake displaced families and lost lives. Around the same time, similar storms and flooding wreaked havoc in parts of the Eastern Cape Province of our country, also causing massive damage to homes and leading to loss of life. A total of 21 lives are reported to have been lost in both tragedies. Nothing demonstrates the negative impact of climate crises and their threat to humanity as these two very recent examples.

As these communities embark on a journey of recovery and rebuilding of their lives and restoring their livelihoods, it behoves all of humanity, especially us, as people of faith, to lend both prayer and material assistance to efforts that are underway to help these communities rebuild..

In this present time, I would like to suggest that the church should be oriented toward the mission of God by employing the concepts of missional imagination, *ubuntu*, and *sam-ae*. These three notions, though, need to be translated into praxis in our efforts to address local and global challenges. This means that the mission of God needs to be defined beyond evangelization into tangible actions of solidarity with the poor and the marginalized in our societies. This calls forth missional action as a step of the missional church toward life-flourishing communities.

We also assemble here at a time and moment in history or herstory when internecine wars between members of our one race--the human race--have intensified elsewhere in the world, leading to destruction, increased polarization, and death among the affected nations. Diplomatic efforts appear to be either failing or inadequate to resolve the war between Russia and Ukraine, the military and political conflict between Israel and Palestine, and civil conflicts in such African countries as Sudan, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Somalia, and Ethiopia. These death-dealing situations have, in my view, presented both a challenge and an opportunity for people of faith to step in globally to unite, heal, and reconcile the warring parties.

A critical question this afternoon for our engagement as an assembly would thus be: in our commitment to transformative ecumenism, how can we intervene practically in such violent, death-dealing contexts to agitate for peace instead of war and life instead of death?

A further challenge: the world is emerging from COVID-19, one of the worst pandemics to ever afflict humankind. This pandemic has caused untold damage to the world economy, with countries, organizations, and individuals still reeling from its devastating impact. Its effect has been even more brutal in many, if not all, countries in two-thirds majority contexts, countries which had always been struggling under the fierce choke of poverty, unemployment, famine, and malnourishment. Just over a week ago, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) released a report that highlighted alarming levels of children's food insecurity caused by inequity, conflicts, and climate crises. The report depicts, among others, the difficulty that children under five years of age have in accessing the nutritious and diverse diets necessary for developmental growth. This is caused mainly by the fact that food prices and the cost of living have reached unprecedented high levels as economies struggle to recover from COVID-19. Another factor is the never-ending conflicts on virtually every continent in the world.

It is only through the collective and concerted efforts of humankind—from all spheres of life—that the world will be able to confront and prevail over these challenges.

The body of Christ as agent of transformation

The missional church is expected to come together as the body of Christ in the fulfilment of the mission of God in society. To do so, I would like to suggest that the missional imagination, as a framework for the mission of God in this world, should be juxtaposed with the African philosophy of *ubuntu*. It embraces "community," as opposed to

the individualistic mission paradigms from Western epistemologies and philosophies. As I have argued elsewhere:

Ubuntu recognises the rights and responsibilities of all people, whether individual or collective. It promotes social and individual well-being and wholeness. It is a concept that attempts to describe the relationship of a person as being with others. It sets the limits or recommendations of what being with others entails or requires. It encourages people to open themselves to others and to learn of others as they learn about themselves too. (Lenka-Bula 2008:379)

Thus, *ubuntu* is relevant in the context of the collective responsibility of the body of Christ in bringing transformation of society, as opposed to working in silos as different churches within the Christian tradition. Like the philosophy of *ubuntu*, the Korean philosophy of *sam-ae*, as formulated by Rev. Pai Min-soo, values the empowerment of ordinary members of communities in the fulfilment of the mission of God and the transformation of society (Kgatle & Kaunda 2023).

Sisters and brothers, the work of transformation is thus not only the task of those who are in the high echelons of power, nor the elites, such as clergy persons. Transformation is also the task of those who, though on the margins, can

embrace empowerment to become agents of transformation. We in the faith community have a huge responsibility to join these efforts and, in fact, lead from the front.

Reading Psalm 23 ecologically and in unequal contexts

In our efforts to challenge death-dealing, imperialist, anthropocentric ideologies, even within biblical texts, we are committed to reading the biblical texts *for life*. How might we re-read the text of Psalm 23 in this light? The imagery of greener pastures evokes within us nature at its best. Water in abundance had quenched the thirst of Mother Earth, hence the green, happy, and satisfied landscape portrayed by the psalmist in Psalm 23. The eye-enticing greener pastures would also imply that not only the grass, the plants, and other trees, which serve as food for consumption by other members of the ecosystem, had been sufficiently nurtured. Other members of the ecosystem would also have benefited from the abundance of greener pastures, including the flocks of the psalmist or rather the flocks of his or her (colonial) masters or the elites who represented the Persian Empire in Yehud.

The still waters depicted in verse 2 equally evoke a calm, relaxed, and refreshing atmosphere in which the flocks could freely quench their thirst. Although this may remain implicit in the psalm, also in line with the holistic worldview of ancient Israel (similar



to the African worldview), the reader may conclude that the apparent bounty displayed in these texts reveals Yahweh's care for all of Yahweh's creation. Elsewhere the psalmist exclaims,

He covers the heavens with clouds,
Prepares rain for the earth,
Makes grass grow on the hills.
He gives to the animals their food,
and to the young ravens when they cry
(Ps 147:8–9).

In contrast to the fulfilling, relaxing, and inspiring scenario presented by the psalmist in verses 1–3, the valley is depicted as a dreadful death-dealing scene. However, the deity is portrayed as bringing protection by making use of elements derived from other members of the nonhuman family in nature: the rod (trees), and the staff (also from trees). Likewise, the oil of gladness (and perhaps royalty/political office?) also from the plant family, is used to anoint the psalmist's head, a sign of divine approval on him or her. By way of revealing his or her gratitude to the Sacred Other, the psalmist, who is depicted as sheep, will return to the house of Yahweh, to be in Yahweh's presence forever (v. 6).

Thus, on the literal level, the psalm centres on the sheep rather than on the shepherd. The one who stands in the service of the other (read: nature) is not the sheep but a human being, the shepherd. The sheep is thus not viewed as first and foremost

an animal to serve humans through what its body can offer to her or him but as the creature within the ecosystem, one that ought to receive provisions from the human being (the shepherd).

At another level, nature imagery as used by the psalmist in this psalm may be interpreted as revealing the spirit of community between the Sacred Other, humans (that is, the psalmist and his or her community) and nature, the environment, the Earth. The smooth connection between the Sacred Other and humans as sheep reveals something of the holistic view of life shared by both the psalmist and his and her people (as well as by people of African descent). In that optimistic religious whole, the sheep (that is, an obedient, righteous Israelite) could be assured of protection and provisions from the Sacred Other (Yahweh as shepherd). Similarly, within the African religious whole, harmony between humans, the Sacred Other (and/or the ancestors), is believed to secure people positive rewards in the form of provisions (including good yields from nature) and protection, among others.

The seamless connection between humans and sheep is worth noting (especially sheep as a humble animal, something that could also be pointing to the low socioeconomic status of the addressees of the psalmist. Mtshiselwa 2015: 710, 712). The daily provisions (for example, food, shelter, and protection) needed by the psalmist are cast

in the analogy of greener pastures and still waters. It would appear that the psalmist, in one way or other, was an inhabitant either of the rural areas in exile under the Persian Empire or, if we posit a late exilic and early post-exilic setting for the psalm, in Yehud. Ndikhokhele Mtshiselwa (2015: 704–723) has convincingly argued that from the tone, contents, and setting of Psalm 23, that the psalmist could have been one of the poor Jews in Yehud. The poor were exploited by the local elites who were also in the service of the Persian colonial masters as they extracted heavy taxes from the people (cf. McNutt 1999: 197).

In the preceding case, Psalm 23 not only reveals the unjust relationships of domination and subjection between the rich (that is, the empire and its allies) and the poor (the colonial subjects). It also highlights the domination of nature by humans, albeit poor human beings. Why so? Whatever aspect of nature has been foregrounded in the preceding paragraphs and however it is cast by the psalmist, the reader would have noticed that it is not nature for its own sake. It is nature in service to human beings. The provision of greener pastures (providing food and shelter, among other needs) and still waters, the provision of protection (cf. the rod and the staff), and the anointing with oil (the possibility of an elevation to a higher political office) are all meant for the benefit of the human being who becomes the object of care by the Sacred Other (that is, Yahweh, the good shepherd). So, although initially the scenario presented by Psalm 23 appears to be foregrounding other members of the ecosystem (the whole household of God), perhaps even more than humans, yet the underlying lesson communicated by the psalm is the care of Yahweh for the poor, the exploited, and the oppressed human being.

This nature-conscious, ecologically oriented reading of Psalm 23 has hopefully revealed the need to expose and resist anthropocentric, imperial, and elitist ideologies embedded in some of the biblical texts. Such an exercise is necessitated by

our commitment to challenging death-dealing ideologies, whether they are embedded in sacred texts, in our hermeneutical strategies, or even our human lives.

In search of a life-affirming ethics

Sisters and brothers, I would like to suggest that we consider the following elements to form the key ingredients of our menu to be prepared to feed our hunger for transformation aimed at life:

- Transforming relationships at local and global levels (for example, the international monetary systems)
- Extricating ourselves from entanglements with mammon (money), which has been made God by capitalist systems. Capitalism makes money sacrosanct, even beyond our critical value systems of care, solidarity, compassion, and collaboration
- Transforming unjust gender relations, the structural systems of prejudices, including but not limited to gender, class, disabilities, health, sexuality, race, etc.
- Mediating gaps and distances in the structural, social, and, material assets of countries and continents which mimic and recreate global divisions (global North/global South). The high consumption patterns of countries of the global North have yielded significant challenges to ecology and ecological degradation. It is important therefore, even as we address climatic challenges, that industrialised countries invest more in the pursuit of solutions. There needs to be a fair distribution of duties and responsibilities. For instance, in the United Nations' COP discussions, the USA and China have not signed the conventions, despite being the largest economies in the world, and with higher demographic levels.
- Addressing the principalities of violence, war, and death and dying expressed

through the “military industrial complex,” wherein guns, weapons, and explosives are traded to sponsor turbulence in countries and among countries. We see this at work in what is currently happening in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gaza, Ukraine, and Russia. And it is definitely a factor in many dangerous wars not so visible to global environments, such as the Sarawiwa people in South Western Sahara colonised by Morocco or the gang and drug wars and warlords in many urban communities.

- Finally, transforming the churches and the ecumenical movements from being “ivory towers” indifferent to the practise and praxes of peace with justice in the lives of the wounded and the marginalised global majorities.

Resurrection, renewal and resolve

As I conclude, my wish is that this quadrennial assembly, guided by the clear theme “Rise to Life: Together in Transformation,” will, after days of intensive deliberation, emerge with a clear programme that will guide us, as people of faith, to collectively confront our challenge: to make a comprehensive contribution, taking leadership in international efforts to make the world a better place, be it in conflict resolution or fighting poverty and inequality or climate justice. The title “Rise to Life: Together in Transformation” demands that we bring to our attention the theme of resurrection, renewal, unity, and collective spiritual growth, all of which are ingrained in biblical teachings.

Now, more than ever, we need to remain steadfast in our commitment to globally share resources in the form of money, skills, and insights. This is how we work toward our mission of (as CWM’s mission statement affirms) “working in partnership with churches and the ecumenical community to resist life-denying systems, affirm peace, do justice and enable life-flourishing communities.”

Collectively, as we emulate the spirit and example of leaders like Rev. Dr Keum, our esteemed Secretary General, we can ensure that the ecumenical community in its entirety takes up the baton and not only advocates for an end to conflict among and between nations, as well as the eradication of poverty, famine, and inequality, but also demonstrates this commitment practically.

To achieve such a bold yet noble objective will require us to emerge from this assembly with tangible, practical resolutions on how we, as people of faith, will seek to ensure that our belief in reconciliation instead of division, justice instead of inequality, and transformation instead of status quo – as Professor Keum so eloquently puts it – becomes contagious and touches every corner of the globe.

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ASSEMBLY REPORT 2024

SUB- THEMES





Transforming Power: Higher Education & Post-Colonial Liberation

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Thanks for your warm welcome. I come to you from the Regional Headquarters of The University of the West Indies, Jamaica, where the Centre I direct is located and where I work as a social justice advocate who tries every day to stand up for someone else's rights – without neglecting my own of course because, believe it or not, not all share the view that women's rights are human rights. That's why we have to insist on Herstory!

I also wish to say how honoured I am to have been invited to participate as a speaker at this Council of World Mission's (CWM) Assembly, as well as to be visiting Durban for the third time. That first visit, at the invitation of former President Thabo Mbeki, was designed to share the history of the Caribbean, in particular the history of Ayiti, with South Africans, in order for them to understand why the deposed - and

what one of the other women on the trip, Lucie Tondreau, called "coupdnapped"- President Bertrand Aristide, and his family, had been given shelter in South Africa.

Now, last year, South Africa honoured the late Jamaican reggae icon Peter Tosh whose song "Equal Rights & Justice" I played to start my talk, not just because he is Jamaican – that would be enough actually.... but because his revolutionary lyrics stir our conscience towards peace and justice. The theme of "Justice" has actually been resonating throughout this Assembly as it does in all post-colonial societies which were disfigured by the colonialists and are now seeking to refashion themselves. Unfortunately, Babylon does not want peace or justice in many of our societies where war is threatening lives and livelihoods, for example in Ayiti. May the spirit of UBUNTU guide our mission and move power towards peace and the former colonial power towards justice –reparatory justice.

It is quite fitting that a Christian Mission that has a concern with democratic principles, human rights, development of the Global South and the elimination of racial discrimination, should be meeting here. As we all know, in 2001, an important United Nations (UN) conference – The World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and

Related Intolerance - was held in Durban. The outcome document, the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA), though still opposed by several countries, is now used, along with the Programme of Activities for the International Decade for People of African Descent, the drafting of which I led; and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) – implemented by the CERD (which I chaired for 2 years), as blueprints for the struggle to rid our world – even parts of which are supposed to be free - of human rights violations and racial discrimination. Of course, as Nelson Mandela taught us, “to be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others”. Transformative power is a necessary tool in that transition.

I use the concept of “transformative power”, as others do, to mean power relationships that reject the domination and exclusion of some persons by others. The ideas associated with transformative power have been used, for example, by women’s rights activists and feminists to describe the different categories of power people use to transform and improve their lives and their societies. But it can be used in its power to and power for meanings to apply to actors in the colonial and post-colonial periods who sought to overthrow the colonial regime and transform their societies from colonial domination, achieve emancipation and/or independence and develop them with decolonial justice firmly in sight. More specifically, my focus will be on education as a means to transform post-colonial societies, bearing in mind the late Tata Madiba’s charge that “education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF EDUCATORS –EDUCATION AS LIBERATION

So, what is transformative education? It is generally defined as an act of imagination for the future of learning and an attempt to find practical ways to develop aspects for this future in the educational practises of the present. According to the Transformative

Education Forum there are 12 principles of transformative education, among them: Human Rights, Sustainability, Value Systems (Morality, Ethics and Spirit); Diversity, Economic and Social Justice, Equity, Peace Education and Conflict Resolution, Holistic education as well as Community-Based Learning and Indigenous Wisdom, ensuring there is no elitism and lack of community input and indigenous knowledge. Transformative power grows from respect for self and equality with others - in all their diversity of identity, experience and ability. Education, then is one of the key principles in transformative power, as it is in the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals, number 4 focusing on quality education. At the micro-level, I will use as my example, a regional tertiary educational institution, The University of the West Indies (The UWI), established in 1948, the same year as the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, just over 75 years ago. It started as one campus but has now expanded to five across the Caribbean.

Why has it been so critical for The UWI to not just engage in teaching and learning and the issuing of degrees, but to also embrace as a mission the decolonization of education, which we see as a liberating tool and as a medium to empower and transform? The simple answer is, because of the history of the region in which it is located and the legacies of that history which has left psychological scars on the people of the wider Caribbean and its Diaspora.

For over 400 years Africans and their descendants were classified in law as non-human, chattel, property, and real estate. They were captured and trafficked to lands far from their homes, to be subjected to a life of chattel enslavement. They were denied recognition as members of the human family by laws derived from the parliaments and palaces of Europe and subjected to the ideology of racism that denigrated all things African. Indeed, many argue that no other group has ever been subjected to attacks as serious to their physical and mental integrity over a comparable time period as the Africans deported to the Americas and their descendants. In his 1952 *Black Skin*,

White Mask, Franz Fanon analysed the impact of colonialism and its deforming effects, and argued that white colonialism imposed an existentially false and degrading existence upon its black victims to the extent, that it demanded their conformity to its distorted values¹.

The physical brutality that was an expression of European racial ideology and which caused so much psychological trauma to Africans and their descendants populates the pages of history texts. This sub-human stamp while eliminating rights, opened the doorway for punishments such as the flogging, rape, hanging, mutilation like splitting of the enslaved victim's nose, severe branding with hot irons, the cutting off of both ears, whipping and or banishment for striking a white person, among other barbaric tactics used to instil fear.

As a result of this history of brutality, today, what Edward Linenthal describes as that "indigestible fishbone of slavery"² still continues to stick in our throats. Indeed, the remnants of this system – called legacies - can be seen across every post-slavery society where emancipation was followed by a century of racial apartheid in which stratification impeded the development of race consciousness and Black nationalism.

Psychological rehabilitation is vital because of the impact of this ma'afa or Maa'angamizi and colonialism on the psyche and consequent behaviour of African people. Evidence that this history has inflicted massive psychological trauma upon African descendant populations in the Caribbean and in the Diaspora is all around us. Joy Degruy Leary frames it within the context of what she labels post-traumatic slave syndrome. According to her this legacy is reflected in our beliefs and behaviour. While her arguments are centred on the African American her argument has diasporic application. She writes:

As a result of centuries of slavery and oppression, most white Americans in their thoughts as well as actions believe themselves superior to blacks. Of greater import, too

many African Americans unconsciously share this belief. That is not surprising...centuries of repetition and justifications have gone into establishing such understanding. It is from the impact of past assaults that we must heal and it is from the threats of continuing assaults that we must learn to defend ourselves, our families and our communities³.

Feelings of cultural loss and social alienation have long been expressed by our literary luminaries and by ordinary writers, especially where they have been writers in exile, forced or voluntary. The effects of racism on Caribbean people living in the Diaspora have been captured in poetry and verse as is evident in the poetry of Jamaican Una Marson, whose idyllic Wordsworthian-type lyrics in Jamaica gave way in England to those more reflective of her experience of racism. We feel Marson's pain in her 'I am Black.'

I am black

And so I must be more clever than white folk
More wise than white folk
More discreet than white folk
More courageous than white folk⁴

Literary luminary, the late George Lamming would write:

When I review these relationships they seem so odd. I have always been here on this side and the other person there on that side, and we have both tried to make the sides appear similar in the needs, desires, and ambitions. But it wasn't true. It was never true.⁵

He wrote of colonialism's "psychic entanglement that is often beyond the understanding of a third-generation British citizen of West Indian ancestry"⁶, tying in with point eight of the Ten Point Reparation Plan of the Caribbean Community [CARICOM]. Yes, colonialism has disfigured us and we need to use all means at our disposal to first, rehabilitate ourselves, and second, to demand reparatory justice from the former and current colonizers. This is where the transformative power of education comes in - to allow us to overcome the deficit left behind when the

colonialists were chased out, manifested in racism, rural and urban poverty, landlessness, lack or limited education, low self-esteem, psychological trauma, hair shaming and the pigmentocracy—and the list goes on. Educators used power for (not over), because power for grows out of a clear and deepening sense of what it is we want to create and change in the world around us); power that is grounded in values of our human rights and fundamental dignity.

Education at The University of the West Indies includes research, teaching (including practical teaching through archaeological excavation of sites occupied by the enslaved on the Mona campus) and commemoration. We embraced our responsibility as University academics in a post-colonial world to write our own content and create our own curricula to ensure that students graduate as self-confident human beings, armed with the knowledge of their past origin and culture; proud of their heroes and heroines and exposed to narratives free of colonialist, racist, sexist and classist ideologies. This has long been a necessary project in my region; because as the late Guyanese Historian and first woman Prof of History at the UWI, Elsa Goveia, warned from the 1950s “in a region [such as ours] where shame about the past too often fills the place that should be held by knowledge, knowledge of the past must play its part in our liberation from the bonds of the past.”⁷

Academics in universities located in countries that were colonized by Europeans, especially those where chattel enslavement was practised, have always had the responsibility of producing knowledge to dethrone the old Eurocentric absolutisms, writing texts and conducting interdisciplinary research to address the roots of racism and nudge us towards social justice. So, yes; academics are in the forefront of those decolonizing university/ higher education curricula ensuring that narratives that do psychological damage are replaced by more liberating narratives of self.

The University of the West Indies, like many other universities has managed to demonstrate

the importance of a social justice agenda in its teaching and learning processes and in the production of students and staff who are scholar activists, even - in the late Historian Walter Rodney's formulation – guerrilla, or some would say, maroon- intellectuals. Prof. Luz Longworth, formerly of the University of the West Indies, captures a critical mandate of the activist University rather well in a speech in which she remarked: “A university must demonstrate its activism, not only in public advocacy, but also in its teaching and learning, its ethical interactions and its global engagement. For The UWI, activism is a strategic imperative and not an activity.”

The UWI, through its History Departments, has made some contribution to the essential project of mental liberation from the shackles of chattel slavery and colonialism. History, of course, possesses one of the greatest possibilities for anchoring people emerging from a colonial past to a more positive beginning, helping them to deal with the epistemic violence of the imperial project, and providing alternative words for the unbridled indecent colonial bad words (and deeds) of early writers.

The production of alternative knowledge was a particularly critical aspect of what Bill Ashcroft et. al refer to as the counter-colonial resistance⁸ ; for the Caribbean has been affected by a historically constructed image that still influences self-knowledge as well as global attitudes towards its citizens. This image, paraded as ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge,’ was the product of the minds and pens of generations of writers from the North Atlantic System, who appropriated the project of producing knowledge on the Caribbean for overseas consumption, introducing the Caribbean and its people to a wider public. The knowledge produced had a discrete political purpose: to support European imperialism and “dislodge and disorient” the Caribbean in the same manner that it did Africa and the Orient, following Dani Nabudere's and Edward Said's formulations⁹. Caribbean scholars were forced to engage in a project of reconstruction, constructing indigenous interpretations of the Caribbean experience, fashioned by explicit

formulations and theoretical constructs and offering the antithesis to the imperialist view of the Caribbean world.

Building on the examples of the pioneers, historians, many trained at The UWI in the post-independence era, sought to carry out Marcus Garvey's and Bob Marley's charge that in liberating ourselves from mental slavery, "none but ourselves can free our minds". Many in the post-colonial era saw the possibility of using history as an emancipatory tool, perhaps believing in Marcus Garvey's concept, that "History is the landmark by which we are directed into the true course of life"¹⁰.

So, how have historians attempted over the past 75 years to ensure that the slavery past is not forgotten? These strategies have included a concerted effort to focus on the self-liberation ethos among Indigenous and enslaved peoples; to question the dominant plantation economy model and show the role of Indigenous Peoples and so-called 'new creoles' in challenging the ideologies and institutional arrangements/economic imperatives of the mercantilist system. Cultural historians like the pioneer Kamau Brathwaite, have stressed the attempts by Africans to preserve their culture even within the constraints of a creolizing trend¹¹. They have shown how the enslaved negotiated terms and conditions of work, even wages, and engaged in collective bargaining despite the system of chattel enslavement; their personal efforts to defeat the monopolistic tendencies of "slave society" and promote economic and socio-cultural diversification. Enslaved men's resistance to plantation owners' efforts to negate their masculinity and the anti-slavery actions which brought down slavery within an economic environment, as Eric Williams tells us, of declining importance of the Caribbean to Britain¹², have been other areas of interest.

Some have tried to reclaim marginalized people's voices through unearthing narratives or at best, sources that ventriloquize the Africans' experience. Historians have challenged the historical dichotomisation of Blacks as powerless and Whites as powerful,

showing how even after the end of White indentured servitude, many Whites remained poor and powerless, particularly in urban centres; while there were some fairly well off freed people¹³. Other works infused with the attention to gender discourses that developed in the 1970s, have destabilized the dialectical representation of the so-called 'loose and promiscuous' Black woman and the 'pure and moral' White woman; the cruel White male enslaver and the benevolent White female enslaver; the passive Black woman and the active Black man; the enslaved man as producer and the enslaved woman as reproducer¹⁴.

African and Indian resistance to exploitative labour regimes and the inequities of the free order so that they could pursue "perfect personal freedom" in Glen Richard's formulation¹⁵, is reflected in my own work¹⁶. Indeed, works of counter-discourse oppose the representations of the newly freed people and the Black working class as 'lazy and shiftless'. Revisionist works on the search for land and the political implications of its acquisition and non-acquisition for the peasantry and the plantation sector, are now standard reference works in the academy¹⁷. The younger generation of scholars have carried on this tradition of research introducing new topics, but all the time keeping the goal of creating a more liberating narrative of self in mind¹⁸.

It is also this history that heritage advocates and actors on the campus have tried to capture through the erection of tangible sites of memory; sites of memory that act as a counter-discourse to the colonizers attempts to stamp their heritage on the landscape. The story of conquest, usurpation, manipulation and illegitimate appropriation of Caribbean resources by colonial powers – all features of colonialism and colonization - is a familiar one. As Jürgen Osterhammel, Marc Ferro, David Trotman, Walter Rodney and others have reminded us, colonization entailed the adjustment on ancestral lands of erected structures of domination and control¹⁹. As an important stage in the global process of westernization, it meant the imposition

of racism, the principal assumption of difference, and the elevation to iconic status of discoverers, monarchs and military men.

Given these features of the colonization project, not surprisingly, in the post-independence period, Caribbean people have sought to eradicate and dismantle political structures of imperialism as well as historical representations of the Caribbean in image, as in text, that mostly reflected the European colonial project in an effort to reclaim and reconstruct the indigenous, African, Creole, and later Asian, experience.

The erection of monuments to the leaders of the anti-slavery struggle and Black liberation movements has been an essential post-colonial activity. Indeed, all over the African diaspora, the descendants of Black freedom fighters have devised creative ways to honour the memory of the African freedom fighters.

As at least two UWI campuses (Mona and Cave Hill) are built on former sugar plantations, they have built monuments to record the presence of our ancestors, with names inscribed, as well as an administrative building- the Stool at Cave Hill- that helps us to remember origins in Ghana by being shaped like the Golden Stool.

These monuments may not be all that visually appealing to all, but they cannot be faulted for their symbolic value and their potential to move the history of slavery from textbook to public space. They facilitate a re-engagement with the past; an opportunity to get a small glimpse into the lives the enslaved ancestors' lived.

Finally, it must also be admitted that University of the West Indies and Historians of Caribbean History, in general, have not all imprisoned themselves within the walls of academia. On the contrary, The UWI, is among those universities that have gone outside of the walls of academia to meet the needs of the societies in which they are located. Indeed, some academics have become "revolutionary intellectuals" because "to be a 'revolutionary intellectual,' according to the late Historian

Walter Rodney in "Groundings", "helps to provide a point of reference to the struggle" especially of black liberation. Many University academics have indeed shunned the path of the classic intellectual, associated traditionally with "ivory tower" and "snobbishness", despite the persistence of this meaning of the intellectual in the popular perception. Many academics now share the views articulated so well by Edward Said that: "the intellectual is an individual in society that confronts orthodoxy and dogma; who cannot be reduced simply to being a faceless professional, a competent member of a class going about his/her business [but] an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public;" that the intellectual must hold to certain universal standards of truth about human misery and oppression despite his/her national background or class affiliation; that sometimes the public intellectual must be prepared to be an exile and marginal²⁰.

The clearest contemporary example of the scholar activism of university academics lies in the numbers from around the world who are active in the reparation movement and the establishment in 2017 of a Centre for Reparation Research at the Regional Headquarters of The UWI. Several members of The UWI community also head national reparation committees or hold office in the CARICOM Reparation Commission, or illustrate some of the activist work that we do, through giving talks to schools, introducing the community to books we publish (like *Introduction to Reparation for Secondary Schools*), interacting with Maroon communities and meeting with other social justice advocates like the Special Rapporteur for Indigenous Rights, the indigenous Guatemalan, Mr Calit Tzay, a former member and Chair of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Why is the University focussing on reparation? Because, as the 2001 DDPA tells us:

"historical injustices have undeniably

contributed to the poverty, underdevelopment, marginalization, social exclusion, economic disparities, instability and insecurity that affect many people in different parts of the world, in particular in developing countries; and because, way back in 1964 at a Conference on colonialism Trinidadian Ellis Clarke announced the responsibilities of a colonial power this way:

An administering power...is not entitled to extract for centuries all that can be got out of a colony and when that has been done to relieve itself of its obligations by the conferment of a formal but meaningless – meaningless because it cannot possibly be supported – political independence. Justice requires that reparation be made to the country that has suffered the ravages of colonialism before that country is expected to face up to the problems and difficulties that will inevitably beset it upon independence.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, I have tried to demonstrate the ways in which the transformative power of History education has been used for the benefit of the people of the Caribbean and its Diaspora. Out of the ruins of Caribbean people's crumbled plantation past is a university that used to have a colonial era Chancellor in the person of Britain's Princess Alice but, since then, for the most part, hired Chancellors that embraced a post-colonial vision and administrators that did the same. We now have a Vice Chancellor whose roots lie in the peasantry and who is providing sound strategic leadership to The UWI. The staff and students also include those descended from enslaved Africans and indentured Indians who understand the power of education for upward social mobility. Our work has not been in vain. The results and shifts that we are seeing have been made possible by the input of University academics working in step with civil society and politicians in some cases.

Despite our collective work and successes, the world now seems topsy-turvy. Indeed, if Jamaican reggae icon and our social conscience, Bob Marley were alive today, he

would be resurrecting his song "war" because there is indeed war in the east, war in the west, war up north, war down south". Based on the push back in some societies against the type of revisionist education I have described, it will take courage for educators to defy the opposers of critical thinking and those who wish to transform people's lives through de-colonial education and affirmative action. But we are in a country that shows what courage can do: you stared down apartheid; you challenged injustice at the Hague. But then, as the Maya Angelou said, "Courage is the most important of all the virtues because without courage, you can't practise any other virtue consistently."

May we all use this occasion to commit to helping to use transformative power to create just societies in honour of those who struggled to get rid of racial discrimination and seek after reparatory justice, if for no one else, for the young people of Soweto who we remember each June 16; and let us do so from Soweto to Sydney; from Bloemfontein to Beijing; from Durban to Dakar; from Pretoria to Paris; from Kwazulu Natal & Kimberly to Kingston; from Cape Town to Canberra; from Joburg to Jakarta and from Randburg to Raleigh and let us sing like Bob Marley who invoked the words spoken by His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie 1st:

Until the philosophy which holds one race superior and another inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned, everywhere is war. And until there are no longer first-class and second-class citizens of any nation, until the colour of a man's skin is of no more significance than the colour of his eyes. And until the basic human rights are equally guaranteed to all without regard to race, there is war. And until that day, the dream of lasting peace, world citizenship, rule of international morality, will remain but a fleeting illusion to be pursued, but never attained... now everywhere is war.

1. New York: Grove, 1967 version
2. Edward T. Linenthal, "Epilogue: Reflections", in James O. Horton & Lois E. Horton, eds., *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* (New York: The New Press, 2006), p. 213
3. Joy Degruy Leary, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*. (Oregon: Uptone Press, 2005).
4. Una Marson (February 6, 1905 – May 6, 1965) was born in Jamaica, where she practised both journalism and poetry at a young age. She emigrated to Great Britain in 1932 and while there continued to write poetry and essays. Her most recent biography, written by Lisa Tomlinson, was published by the UWI Press in 2019.
5. George Lamming, *In the Castle of My Own Skin*. (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1991).
6. Lamming, "Sea of Stories." *The Guardian*, 24 Oct. 2002, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/oct/24/artsfeatures.poetry>
7. Foreword of Hilary Beckles, ed., *Inside Slavery*. (Kingston: Ian Randle Pubs), p. vii; see also Elsa Goveia, 'An Introduction to the Federation Day Exhibition', UWI, Mona, 1959, p. 42
8. Bill Ashcroft, et. al, eds., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 1
9. This was discussed in Dani Nabudere, "Development Theories, Knowledge Production and Emancipatory Practises", 50th Anniversary Conference Reviewing the First Decade of Development and Democracy in South Africa, Durban, October 2004. See also, Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1992)
10. Amy Jacques Garvey, ed., *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey* (New York, 1980), p. 1
11. See Kamau Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971).
12. Eric Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1944)
13. Pedro Welch, *Slave Society in the City: Bridgetown, Barbados 1680-1834* (Kingston: Ian Randle Pubs., 2003), and Beckles, *A History of Barbados*
14. See Beckles, *Natural Rebels: A Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados* (Newark, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1989); Beckles, *Centreing Woman: Gender Discourses in Caribbean Slave Society* (Kingston: Ian Randle Pubs., 1998); Lucille Mathurin Mair, *A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica, 1655-1844* (Kingston: The University of the West Indies Press, 2006) – edited thesis for publication by Hilary Beckles & Verene Shepherd; Linnette Vassell, *Voices of Women in Jamaica, 1898-1939* (Kingston: Department of History, 1993); Brereton, "Text Testimony and Gender" and *Gendered testimony: Autobiographies, Diaries and Letters by Women as Sources For Caribbean History* (Elsa Goveia Memorial Lecture: Department of History nd). Rhodda Reddock, "Indian Women and Indentureship in Trinidad and Tobago, 1845 – 1917," pp. 225-237, Verene Shepherd, "Emancipation through Servitude: Aspects of the Condition of Indian Women in Jamaica 1845-1945," pp. 245-250, and David Trotman, "Women and Crime in Late 19th Century Trinidad," pp. 251-259 in Section 6, "Women & Gender", in Beckles & Shepherd, eds, *Caribbean Freedom*. These articles are more ethnically diverse in their coverage.
15. Quoted in Richards, "The Pursuit of 'Higher Wages' and 'Perfect Personal Freedom': St Kitts-Nevis, 1836-1956."
16. See, for example, Verene Shepherd, *Transients to Settlers: The Experience of Indians in Jamaica, 1845-1950* (Leeds: Peepal Tress Press, 1994)
17. See Swithin Wilmot, "Emancipation in Action: Workers and Wage Conflict in Jamaica, 1838-1840"; Douglas Hall, "The Flight from the Estates Reconsidered, The British West Indies, 1838-1842," in Beckles & Shepherd, eds., *Caribbean Freedom*, Section 2 as well as Satchell's, *From Plot to Plantation: Land Transactions in Jamaica, 1896-1900* (Kingston: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, 1990).
18. See Daive Dunkley, *Agency of the Enslaved: Jamaica and the Culture of Freedom in the Atlantic World* (Maryland, USA: Lexington Books, 2012); Ahmed Reid, "Britain's Long Arc of Injustice", *The Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, June 2018. He has also co-published with Verene Shepherd, articles on women and reparations, "Women, Slavery and the Reparation Movement in the Caribbean," in *Social & Economic Studies* Vol 68: 3&4, Special Issue on Reparations (2019), pp. 31-59, and testimonies of enslaved people sentenced to be punished for revolutionary actions, "Rebel Voices: Testimonies from the 1831/32 Emancipation War in Jamaica," *Jamaica Journal* 27, nos. 2-3 (April 2004)
19. For a theoretical discussion of colonialism, see Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (1997) and Marc Ferro, *Colonization: A Global History* (London & New York: Routledge, 1997). See Also Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1972), and David Trotman, "Symbolic Decolonisation and the City Landscape in Trinidad", *City Life in Caribbean History*, 3rd Text and Testimony Collective Conference, University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, Barbados, December 11-13, 2003
20. Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Vintage Books: 1996), pp. xii-xvi, 11



Revisioning Mission: A Dirtified Theology of Mission from Dirt Communities

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Folamua: Introducing Tulou

E muamua ona ou faatulou i paia ole Atua. Le afuaga. Le malama mai Saua. Le Mataisau. Le Tufuga poto na fofa mea uma. Tulou eleele sa ma lou moana sausau o Aferika. Tulou ulugafa. O tua'a. O tupu'aga. O lenei fanua ma eleele. Tulou le malu taue'e o tagata o fanua eseese ole Aiga Council for World Mission. Tulou le fala le se'e male papa e le gae i sui o Ekalesia e fia ua potopoto mai. Tulou foi le to'aga o lupe ua ifo ile fogatia nei, le mamalu male lasilasi ua potopoto. Tulou!

Why do I need to spend a few lines to say Tulou? In my culture, saying Tulou is not just a respectful seeking of forgiveness for probable intrusions into a sacred space. This small word

Tulou roots our feet in the soil. It respects mystery and safeguards the sacredness of those past, present, and emerging. It invites us to seek humility in the presence of others. We seek humility because we do not know all there is, and therefore our true meaning cannot be realised until we have the audacity to respect others. This is true especially if we are visitors and strangers to the land.

It is with utmost respect and humility that I take this opportunity to thank the CWM leadership for this rare opportunity. I am humbled and indeed grateful to be invited as one of the paddlers of the voyaging canoe of revisioning the mission of CWM.

'Revisioning Mission' is a mammoth task and no one in a short period of time is able to do justice to such important work. I use the voyaging metaphor to highlight that this revisioning requires many paddlers who can read the currents, the winds, and the tides of time. In this paper, revisioning of mission rests on two propositions. First is the proposition for a 'rise to a life' vision of mission. Second is the proposition for a theology to ground this vision. I want to focus on the second task. Revisioning starts with recognizing that there

is a problem with the current vision of mission. In the context of this storying, the problem lies in its theological framing. My hope is that the Assembly will assist with the first task.

Dirt!

I come from Pasifika¹, the ‘liquid continent,’ a region of up to eleven million people containing one-third of the world’s languages. This brief diversity scan shapes the significant social, political, and behavioural complexities in the region, which also define its complex missional issues.

But I want to acknowledge at the outset my *itulagi* or the ‘side of the horizon’ from which I approach this topic of revisioning mission. I come from a region where we search for life underneath our feet. Everything is defined by our connectedness to the dirt underneath. Growing up on our family land in the island of Savaii, Samoa, I was constantly reminded that I am not just living on a piece of land. Rather, I am living within a house of multiple ecological bodies and meanings. It was as if I did not choose my relations. I was born into these multiple relationships. My identity was an “I with a We.”

Dirt is the glue that bonds us to Land. Dirt, demonized by the Christian mission, is everything to us. We are rooted in the dirt through our umbilical cords, which are buried in the dirt when we are born. We are mothered by the dirt. We are nothing without the dirt. Pasifika people and many indigenous communities are inheritors of a profound philosophy that connects all of life to dirt. Dirt reminds us of our identity and placental rootedness in the land, and of our ancestral connection to a wider eco-relational web of life.

In many indigenous communities, we live, sleep, eat, and play in the dirt. We tell stories

of how the moon mates with the dirt during the yam season (Pauga 2021, 31-46). Our economies are of the dirt. Our reconciliation ceremonies are deeply linked to the dirt. When we are born, we bury the *fanua* or placenta and the umbilical cord in the dirt to remind us of our placental connectedness. Hence the word for placenta is the same word for land. This deep connection to the dirt allows us to constantly acknowledge our limitedness. Our uncertainties. Our earthiness. Our impurity and imperfections. And the fact that we are only a microcosm of everything there is.

In dirt communities, we live ‘within’ dirt time. We come from dirt when we are born, and return to dirt again when we die. Dirt is our world. Dirt is our time. Dirt is at the heart of our being and becoming. In dirt time, we live as dirtified people. This is our placental spirituality. Our wellbeing. We look for God in the dirt (see Vaai 2021a).

But the dirt today is wounded, turned into hell by death-dealing forces. The *Arusha Call to Discipleship* in 2018 reminds us that, “Despite some glimmers of hope, we have to reckon with death-dealing forces that are shaking the world order and inflicting suffering on many” (Arusha Call to Discipleship 2020, 13). Human-made climate disasters are destroying dirt communities. Islands are sinking. Whole communities are forced to relocate. People are leaving their ancestral homes in search of home elsewhere. Our Pasifika region is deeply marked by poverty and inequality, including issues of governance, leadership, health, education, human rights and political self-determination, but also by geopolitical competition and the self-interests of rich nations, such as China, the United States and Australia, with their economic framings such as Asia-Pacific, and just recently Indo-Pacific (Fox and Casimira 2023, 5-27).

1. Instead of the English term Pacific, I opt to use Pasifika to capture the idea of a new awareness. Whether it's a new awareness in mission or in development. It also captures the common struggle of island communities under the threat of climate change and many other ecological crises. This term shifts the focus from the idea of being “peaceful” as connoted in the colonial term Pacific to resilience and self-determination of communities.

In addition, there is the ‘victims narrative’ that frames Pasifika as ill-equipped to handle the climate crisis and therefore in need of a saviour. Many of the dominant climate conversations have sidelined the agency of the spiritualities and communities-based knowledge of Pasifika dirt communities that have been used throughout the centuries to ensure their resilience. As part of this sidelining, the technical expertise associated with climate science and climate finance language requires ‘sending’ outside experts to assist locals with translations.

Then there is the push for a ‘green economy’ as a potential solution to the climate crisis. Of course, a realised vision of a fossil fuel-free world is what we desperately need. However, with all its green framing to facilitate such a ‘solution,’ there is now an urgency to mine the deep-seabed for polymetallic minerals to produce batteries and many things to transition the world into a green economy. Despite of our own Pasifika wisdom that sees the ocean as the VA-SA, the sacred space, some Pasifika countries, whose churches are represented in this very assembly, who have been given the green light from the International Seabed Authority (ISA), have already started the exploration phase of deep-sea mining. These countries say that this is only an exploration phase. But exploration ‘is’ a mining phase. Can’t we see the reality here? It is this kind of ‘solution’ to the problem of the climate crisis that is the problem. We are creating more problems from our claimed solutions. This means that we need to re-examine our underpinning philosophies and theologies.

Pause!

In dirt communities, the most powerful agent of growth and radical solution to the need to ‘rise to life’ is, surprisingly, not production. Rather, it is Pause! Fijians call it *vakatabu*. Pause requires restraint, which includes inaction, passivity, rest. This is something many of us don’t like, especially pastors and ministers. While pause gives off an air of ‘inaction,’ it has an active natural process of renewal and transformation. “These are deliberate

attempts at respecting non-human intervention in the process, thus allowing the land and humanity a liberating space to heal, renew, and activate new development pathways. This is a negotiated space between humans and the natural world” (Institute for Mission and Research 2023).

Pause privileges life. With the word ‘rise’ in the adage ‘rise to life’ connoting expansion and intensification, pause provides the checks and balances for its process. Without pause, the vision of a ‘rise to life’ could easily become a warrant for more production. Pause also privileges the beauty in contradictions. It nurses life through difference and contraction. It embraces the sacredness of everyone and everything. It allows time for relatedness. It keeps space for those who cannot keep up. It is an all-time restorative healer. In dirt communities, rushing violates the relational integrated make-up of communities, and values human development over ecological wellbeing, and money over people.

That is why many dirt communities do not have a system of rewarding children who talk a lot in class. Such a system encourages a culture where everyone is speaking at the same time, where everyone assumes they know everything, where everyone claims to be an expert. We live in an imported system today where every moment of silence has to be jam-packed with noise, with screen time, where every empty peaceful space has to be filled with currency and development. This system excludes the very idea that rising to life can only properly facilitated through pause and silence.

The problem is with our theologies. Today we hardly include ‘pause’ as part of mission theology. This is because we often depict God in the light of categories such as power, transcendence, and expansion. We rarely depict God in terms of contraction, limitedness, decrease, or pause. As a result, we opt for the most powerful categories to help us cope or expand our mission agenda.

Pause points us to the importance of *kenosis* in any mission interaction. It allows us to embody God's love to the world through humility and restraint. Sometimes our mission needs to be not so much about saving others but about saving God from our constant expansion and arrogance, from our greed and destructive paths that led to the Anthropocene. Pause returns us to embrace a faith that is born out of impurity and imperfection, limitedness, humanness, and dirtification.

In biblical language, this wisdom of restraint or Pause is at the heart of the 'Sabbath.' Sabbath is more than just a day of rest. It is a dirtified space of wisdom. It is an ecological principle of restraint put in place by God to control and monitor greed and abuse of land and peoples. And it is also about controlling the noise and long-winded culture of production. It is required for the regeneration and restoration of God's creation. Even God paused and rested.

Is *Missio Dei* Still Relevant?

Now let me return to the theology of mission. In 2011, in a hermeneutics conference held in Fiji sponsored by both the Pacific Theological College and the Pacific Conference of Churches, the late Pastor Fiamia Rakua, the then principal of Talua Theological College of the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu, offered an alternative and surprising reading of mission. The text he used was John 9: 1-41, the story of the healing of the man born blind. His insights about mission caught my attention.

He said that mission should be no longer about 'sending' people; rather, mission should be about the birth of a new reality from within, not from outside. This means that mission has to be about how communities see the world from the perspectives of their dirtified traditions of wisdom, their ethics and practises, and their cultural protocols that God has already gifted them through Spirit. The adage holds true in this hermeneutical perspective that "If an egg is broken by outside force, life ends. If broken by an inside force, life begins" (Institute for Mission and Research 2011).

Fiamia Rakua's reading of mission clearly contests the longstanding mission theology of *Missio Dei* that goes back to the second half of the twentieth century, especially in the work of Karl Barth, David Bosch, and Leslie Newbigin. This was a theology that depicts God as a 'missionary God,' a 'sending God' who sends the Son and Spirit and, as a result, sends the church into the world. This theology assumes that mission should be understood to derive from the very nature of God. Therefore, mission has no life of its own; it is derivative of God.

Perhaps what Fiamia was concerned about is the fact that the idea of 'sending' still has not moved far enough from William Carey's idea of the Great Commission introduced in 1792 in his book *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*, based on Matthew 28:16-20. It was Kenneth Scott Latourette who later extended the idea and framed it in a way in which this 'sending mission' to the heathens becomes a 'divine plan.'

Perhaps Fiamia was cautious of the fact that the idea of 'sending' could be the door for the sending culture to assume control. Which is why Fijians has this proverb: "*Me na tubu yawa mai na kau levu na kau lalai me rawa ni bula*," meaning 'Let the small trees grow far from the shadows of big trees, so they can have life.' This wisdom speaks of self-determination. But to do this, we need to move away from the shadows of the colonial masters. We cannot fully realise our collective potentiality until we shift away from the shadows of big trees. This requires, of course, healing our eyes to see the world differently, believing in what is available in our communities that is affordable and life-affirming to frame a new mission consciousness.

Perhaps Fiamia was concerned with the fact that the Great Commission was not just about the Christianization of the world. It was also the start of what can be called the Great Heathenization of Mission, in which many indigenous communities were heavily heathenized and condemned unless they

satisfied the conversion criteria of the sending mission culture. Like any other colonial project, in order for Christian mission to be successful, an ideology had to be created in which the world was seen as pre-determined by God, fated and doomed. In such a doomed world, God has to be erased from time. As a result, God was engineered so that 'there is a time when God was not,' depriving God of God's overarching presence in all cultures, long before the sending cultures landed on their shores. This not only justified the incursions of a new theological model of mission, distancing the recipients from their ecological rootedness, but also justified the 'outside saviour model,' with salvation as a purely external phenomenon. There are several consequences of the theology of *Missio Dei* that I think should be considered if we are serious about revisioning mission.

First, in the world today, the ideas of 'sending,' 'receiving,' and 'outside saviour' are central to the neoliberal development approach. The neoliberal gods of the market came up with a convincing gospel, and created transnational corporations as their mission society to take their gospel to the ends of the earth. The corporations then had to engineer an ideology in which local people are fated and underdeveloped, and therefore in need of salvation, which only the gods of the market can offer. The corporations then started ordaining and sending out their missionaries, the white consultants and policy advisors, to expand their religion. These consultants and advisors then started building temples, developing local capacity and training local missionaries (governments) to assist with converting locals. The governments, as experts on the local culture, were then tasked with codifying and translating this gospel of capitalist development on behalf of the corporations, through appropriating local cultural concepts. In this framework, it doesn't matter if locals are declared independent as long as they continue to believe that they are fated and in need of salvation.

It is important to note that the very idea of *Missio Dei* was developed at the same time

that the ideology of 'underdevelopment,' led by powerful countries such as the United States and Great Britain, was born. After the world wars, other worlds outside of the US and Great Britain were deemed 'underdeveloped' and therefore in need of being saved from their undignified and fated state. This campaign was the beginning of what Wolfgang Sachs and Gustavo Esteva call "the era of development." It was an era launched after President Truman's 1949 presidential acceptance speech, with its ideological assumption that "other parts of the world are living in conditions approaching misery" and therefore they must be saved, as "their economic life is primitive and stagnant" (Truman 1949).

Like the sending mission of the church, the dirt communities, whose civilization is dependent on deep connections with the dirt, were instantly demonized. "On that day" (Truman's inauguration), according to Sachs and Esteva, "two billion people became underdeveloped. In a very real sense, from that time on, they ceased being what they were, in all their diversity. They were turned into an inverted mirror of someone else's reality; a mirror that belittles them and sends them off to the end of the queue; a mirror that defines their identity in terms of a homogenizing and narrow minority." Since then, development has meant "to escape from the undignified condition called underdevelopment" and "catching up was declared to be the historical task" (Sachs and Esteva 1997).

Second, *Missio Dei* has not gone far enough in dealing with difference. For example, mission at the national level (nationalism) assumes that there is one God for each nation, while mission at the universal level (universalism) contends that there is one God, and therefore one truth, one code for all humanity. Neither of these assertions does justice to the so-called 'other,' the stranger. The former denies freedom to the stranger and turns the idea of a 'chosen people' into a master race or a single truth. The latter grants freedom only if the stranger converts, conforms or assimilates, and turns a single culture into the measure of all humanity. Something that empires continue to do well.

Christian mission has been guilty of both. As history shows, from the Exodus to World War II, the results have been tragic and always an affront to human dignity.

Our sense of mission has been for centuries crippled by an eliminative curse that reinforces an inherent racism, where we favour categories such as heaven over earth, a supreme God over a suffering God, the Christ of faith over the Jesus of history, the centre over the margins, white over black, economy over ecology, European over Pasifika (and other indigenous communities), purity over dirt, light over darkness, male over female, and the list goes on. In other words, our mission theology today is ill-equipped to deal with difference. The reason is that our mission theology has still not moved beyond the Western philosophy of 'competing contradictions' that underpinned the creation of Christian mission. This philosophy focuses on logical deduction and elimination of the other in order to arrive at the so-called 'truth.'

Third, until we re-language or re-story the idea of 'one truth' we will never go far in protesting against empires, challenging the saviour narrative, and what I prefer to call the Onefication system. The concept of 'one truth' was and still is the hallmark of Western cultures that dominantly shape the theology of mission. The Hebrew biblical faith was born out of a reaction to the dominant Mesopotamian and Egyptian story of one truth. The point is that biblical faith was born as a protest against empires, in particular against imperialism (and its Onefication successors: totalitarianism, universalism and fundamentalism), that attempt to impose a single idea onto a plural world, or a single solution onto a multifaceted issue.

Onefication is an ultra-reductionist project that only works through severing links and eliminating the other. It believes that there is only one constituent source of goodness. That is, everything, no matter how diverse, must dissolve into one reality and one truth. Many cultures that are different and are not willing to dance to the onefied music of the

global economic model must be aggressively developed to be 'like them' or else go through the elimination process (Vaai 2021b, 235ff). Many issues of mission today are directly linked to the reduction of cultural difference due to this Onefication system.

Colonization comes from the root word 'colon,' meaning to digest. This contributes to the idea that the best way to own and control, or 'digest' people is to make them look like they need to be saved. The result is the emergence of a universal system that centralizes and controls benefits and resources under one cultural, economic and political centre of power. This is a system where one absolute ideology, one absolute culture, one absolute religion, or one absolute truth digests all.

A Dirtified Theology of Mission

Revisioning mission requires the audacity and the courage to admit that there is a problem with 'our' church mission. Sometimes this self-analysis is difficult if we are part of the system or benefiting from the current mission system. However, it is the only way that we can be able to develop new revisioning questions and foster new and radical conversations. In this re-envisioning, one might ask, why am I starting with dirt? What does mission have to do with dirt? Why is mission in indigenous communities always about the relationships with land, ocean, rivers, and mountains? In particular, what does God have to do with dirt?

A dirtified theology of mission finds its language in the dirtified movements and dynamics of the experiences and struggles of the dirt communities that see dirt as the basis for understanding their struggle, as well as their alternative ways of responding to death-dealing forces. It should be a theology that takes the victimization of ecological bodies and the marginalization of dirt communities as its central theological subject.

When we re-envision mission as a mission 'from' and 'with' the dirt, in other words, if we start with dirt, everything changes. Our minds change. Our theology changes. Our

mission is transformed. This is because we no longer see the world through our own eyes, but now see the world through relations and an interconnected web of struggles. We no longer see mission as saving and redeeming dirt communities, but rather we see dirt communities as spaces of re-envisioning mission.

Looking through these new eyes, we finally recognise that Jesus' mission was all about the dirt. His parables were rooted in the dirt. He feasted in the dirt. His economic models were dirtified models. His discipleship guides were rooted in the dirt. He was killed because he stood up for dirt communities. His mission was not so much about saving the dirt from its dirtified nature, but rather about adopting dirt as part of God's liberative mission.

If the Trinity is meaningful to us as the Triune *Aiga*,² a community of inextricable integrated relationships, and if Jesus Christ is the full representation of this Triune *Aiga*, and his Incarnation is the full dirtification of this *Aiga* as he became a person of the dirt, immersed in the depth of our dirtified cultural and ecological experiences and struggles, then it is possible to claim that in Christ the Triune *Aiga* fully proclaimed itself as a dirtified expression of divine community.

This divine dirtification means that dirt consciousness is first and foremost part of the life of God. Emmanuel is not just about a divine resolve of 'God with us.' Rather, it is God becoming 'dirt with us' in the very heart of our dirt communities, in order to genuinely become 'dirt for us' in the very heart of the divine community. Jesus, on the one hand, through Spirit embodies the Father's deep dirtified love for us and, on the other hand, embodies our woundedness to be part of the Father. There is no other divine expression of liberative dirtified love than that in which God became dirt 'with' and 'for' us through Christ in Spirit.

The mission of God is therefore not so much about sending God's son to save the souls of the fated world, which justifies the church sending missionaries to expand churches (see Koshy 2022), but about divine dirtified immersion, manifested in our own immersion in the dirtified life of the Triune *Aiga*. In such divine immersion, our mission is to embody God's love to the world. At the heart of the dirtified theology of mission is not 'sending' but, rather, 'embodiment.' The uniqueness of a dirtified embodied theology of mission is that it is grounded in the idea of real touch. The idea of practise. Dirt communities are less about theories and abstractive truths than about the interweaving of bodies, meanings, and ecological patterns and systems.

The problem with the world today is that we take mission out of rootedness in practise or praxis and put it into words that claim it as embodied or incarnational. Mission is trapped in words, in theological doctrines and beliefs. Today we cannot feel the Triune embodiment in mission because we normalize the conviction that everything must be, first of all, theory. We put actions into theories to understand them. Then we transfer these theories back into practise and we call this 'applied mission studies.' Theories are then transferred to print. Print-based theory becomes the primary and legitimate source of knowledge. Such knowledge becomes the primary source, archived in history, owned by centres of mission, and policed by a few academics. This archived knowledge then glorifies the authors and not the communities who own the knowledge. We then say that the quality pursuit of knowledge is achieved only when it is verified by this knowledge. And it is only after we study such knowledge in theory that we apply it in the field. We call that field work.

This process has benefitted many of us who have gone through this system. But it was also the birth of a dependency syndrome where we

2. *Aiga* in the narrow sense refers to a social unit comprised of immediate family members and kinship. In the broader sense this is a holistic Pasifika concept that refers to the cosmic extended family inclusive of land, ocean, peoples, ancestors, and spirits/gods that constitute the wholeness of life.

are made to accept that it is alright to carry and drink from someone else's water as long as it is water approved by the centres of money and power. We are so obsessed with converting practise into theory, flesh into word, reality into abstraction, in a search for truth, that we miss the point of embodied mission.

'Growing in' Together

There is a dirtified way to teach us how to deal with difference. That includes mastering the idea of "*mutual contradictions*," expressed in the *both-and* way of thinking. I grew up in a huge extended family of about thirty-plus people, who all ate from one pot. Because of the *both-and* way of thinking, we did not just grow up together. We '*grew in*' together. This is a very deep way of living. Because we grew up being reminded that we live in a multiple integrated multidimensional world, the only way to navigate that complex world was to live with our difference.

By growing 'into' each other, we were trained that in order to maintain and keep our integrated household, we must constantly navigate and negotiate our differences and contradictions. The more we '*grew in*' together, the more we synchronized, the more the world become interconnected to us, and the more we understood our contradictions and appreciated our differences. Negotiating avoids compromising of our differences. Dirt communities and indigenous peoples have for centuries compromised a lot to satisfy the demands of outside saviours.

This is why for many of us who are shaped by an integrated view of life, the idea of 'mission from the margins' is problematic. This is because dirt communities don't have centres and margins. Public and private. They only have a complex integrated household that only flourishes by acknowledging differences. Remember that the materials used for weaving our mats on land are the same materials we use to create sails for our navigating canoes on the ocean. Manulani Meyer from Hawaii reminds us that "difference is what we have

in common ... when you go deeper into difference, we find the depth of what it means to be together" (Meyer 2023, 31).

The problem with mission today is that the conversation around embracing differences and diversity is very shallow, as it is purely based on 'growing together' rather than 'growing in' together. I am reminded here of a Tongan wormwood-borer called *afato*. *Afato* can live together in one piece of wood, but no *afato* dares to cut its hole next to the other borers inside, despite the fact that they belong to the same family.

Afatoism is a kind of mission focus we see today, in which we can live next to each other but we cannot live with each other. We see this clearly in international airport lounges, where people are together but are never together. Many times we are torn apart either by screen time, or by political, social, religious, and economic binaries. We can grow up together as long as the other doesn't mess with my belief system and the truths I hold dear. Here "cultural difference is reduced to choices" (cited by Steward 2021, 43), and intended harmonies are based on a superficial avoidance of contradictions.

This is why the model of 'inner breeding' in theological education is unhealthy. When we are directed by one theological vision, at one theological place, with the same theological mentors, without exposure to different cultures and traditions, we are in danger of producing inward-looking pastors and ministers that only know common opinion at the expense of differences. Improving mission means that we need to relook at transforming theological education to adopt a 'whole of life' vision. The dirtification of mission not only requires decentralization, removing mission from the epicentre of Western Christianity, it is also about questioning the church as the centre of mission. In fact, it questions the necessity of equating the church with Christ or the kingdom of God, thus making it the centre of mission (see Koshy 2022).

If we live in dirt communities, we immediately

notice that people operate on a different philosophical frequency. Because of their multidimensional dirt consciousness, such communities embrace “*mutual contradictions*” without even realizing it. Here boundaries between worlds, such as the material and the spiritual, or living and dying, constantly move and shift to inform one another. There is always fluidity and negotiability, creating a world of continuity. Dirt communities began to terminate this method of negotiating differences when the church came in with its ‘one truth’ narrative promulgated in its doctrines and beliefs. According to Bernard Narokobi from Papua New Guinea,

Our vision, conflicting and harmonious at the same time, was not and still is not an artificially dichotomised and compartmentalised pragmatism of the secular society. Ours is a vision of totality, a vision of cosmic harmony ... that sees the human person in his totality with the spirit world as well as the animal and the plant world.
(Narokobi 1983, 10)

Today our failure to learn this ‘whole of life’ wisdom and to realise the importance of difference and contradictions in the area of mission is the main driver behind our inability to deal with a very polarized world driven by competing political and religious binaries. When it comes to competing binaries or polarities in issues such as gender, politics, and so forth, the church immediately shifts into neutral gear, as it is ill-equipped to deal with binaries. This is a reminder to the church that we cannot address multifaceted issues with a one-dimensional approach.

The prophet Isaiah speaks of this world of “*mutual contradictions*” in Isaiah 11:6-9, where knowledge of God is echoed in the image of the wolf living together with the lamb, the leopard lying down together with the goat, the infant playing near the cobra’s den, and the young child putting its hand into the viper’s nest. They will neither harm nor destroy each other. What is reflected here is not so much harmony without contradictions, but an affirmation that the life that God wills is not about elimination and exclusion, but about negotiating our differences and contradictions for the sake of living together – even if the other turns out to be a wolf, a venomous snake, or just an innocent child.

Folamuli: Concluding Remarks

To conclude, I want to share what the Pasifika churches have been doing to revision mission in their own way. Since 2019, the Pacific Theological College that I lead initiated and has been facilitating a journey in reimagining mission insofar as Pasifika is concerned. This ‘whole of life’ vision is an attempt to capture the holistic way that many Pasifika communities approach life and mission (see Vaai and Casimira 2023).

The vision is a response to the Pasifika church leaders changing the regional ecumenical vision from ‘Unity in the Body of Christ’ to the ‘Pasifika Household of God.’ The change proposes a new direction for the mission of the Pasifika churches not only to critically engage with the political, economic, and ecological issues of the household, but also to ensure that the mission of the churches is an embodiment of God’s love (Pacific Church Leaders 2017).

In 2017, the ‘Reweaving the Ecological Mat’ (REM) project was initiated, which is about understanding the human person as an essential but not the only part of the ecological web of life. It focuses on how to address the development woes of Pasifika today, using this theological foundation.

The ‘Changing the Story’ (CTS) initiative begun in 2018 is about refarming the current

development narrative that is wreaking divisiveness and destruction among the Pasifika people and their communities.

The 'Leadership for Justice' programme begun in 2019 is an initiative aimed at re-educating Pasifika leaders about their 'whole of life' philosophies and about how these can influence their leadership roles and policy making.

The 'Resilience Education' project begun in 2020 is yet another initiative to weave into the learning and praxis curriculum the traditions and wisdom of responsibility and restraint.

The Pasifika 'Whole of Life' philosophies courses and conferences are an attempt to train policy-makers in the region on reframing public and development policies in the light of the life-affirming and living philosophies and theologies of Pasifika communities.

In 2025, the Pasifika churches aim to launch a regional University as the home for its 'whole of life' vision, to strengthen the focus of the churches on the 'whole of life' mission.

All of these initiatives reflect the point raised by Fiamia, namely that mission should be a new reality birthed from within. This goes for hope as well. Hope, as scripture tells us, is when we realise that God does not work through some gigantic dictatorial ways offered by the empires to fix the mess we have created, or others have created for us, but rather through us being able to navigate and negotiate in faith and in trust the multiple options already available before us to use as tools of mission for liberation, including having the faith to hear the 'small voice' of God (1 Kings 19:12) wrapped in small dirtified stories, small dirtified practises of solidarity, a small dirtified cross, a small dirtified tomb, and a small dirt community of Jesus whose only hope is each other.

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Building Life-Flourishing Communities

Ms Habibi Juma

Founder
Soraya

Ms Muna Nassar

Executive Secretary for Mission and Advocacy
World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)

Ms Priyanka Samy

Youth Convenor
National Federation of Dalit Women

A panel of three young women—from Nigeria, Palestine, and India—came together on stage

during the sub-theme session of the CWM Assembly on 18 June and put a human face on what “Building Life-Flourishing Communities” really meant.

The women, each a community leader, shared their stories and reflected on what life is like on the ground in their communities as they came face to face with various forms of injustice.

Addressing trauma and fear

Ms Habiba Juma is the Founder of Soraya, which nurtures young women and mothers, many of whom are growing up in the slums of Nairobi. Some are forced into early marriage; others are forced to start employment at an early age.

“They have a lot of traumas, and fear,” described Juma grimly.

Offering a safe space for the vulnerable women, Soraya offers many services and avenues of social assistance, including mentorship, community awareness, job training, and a safe space.

A beneficiary of Soraya is Valentine Nthenya, a mother to one daughter. “Joining Soraya in 2023 transformed my life from stress and loneliness to hope and opportunity,” said Nthenya who was a Soraya participant in 2023. She has since started a motorbike small parts business to support her daughter.

“Soraya has taught me to let go of the past, love our children, and pursue my goals,” beamed Nthenya.

Cries from Palestine

Ms Muna Nassar, a Palestinian Christian from Bethlehem, has been a long-term advocate for the justice of the Palestinian people through her education, work, and writing.

“Being born in Bethlehem I always felt a sense of pride to be born in the same place Jesus was born,” she said—but she is seriously grappling with the situation on the ground today, where 37,000 have been killed in Gaza.

“They have been made into statistics,” she said. “We want to say: but this was a child, and she was a mother, and he was a great father—not a ‘thing’ bound to die a gruesome death in a devastated city but a child who would have grown up by the sea with a loving family.”

3,000 years of injustice

Ms Priyanka Samy is a Dalit feminist activist based in India.

“Our bodies, our dignity, our rights, continue to be unabashedly betrayed in life and death,” she said. “The caste system is 3,000 years old. Yes, you heard that right—3,000 years old!”

She estimated there are 270 million Dalits worldwide.

“The practise of caste, it is very important to note, is widely pervasive not only in South Asia, but across the globe to the South Asian diaspora,” she said. “I want you to hear this: Most often, people from the upper castes—the privileged classes—occupy influential positions in our churches across South Asia. Our churches are patriarchal and casteist institutions.”

Samy also tied together the three presentations by demanding not just local but global justice. “We live in times where struggles for social justice and equity converge, revealing inherent similarities between issues,” she said.

“Churches have an urgent call to move from tokenistic solidarities to transformational solidarities.”



ASSEMBLY REPORT 2024

BIBLE STUDIES







Sub-Theme 1: Transforming Power

Text: 2 Samuel 21:1-14

Rev. Dr Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon

Pilgrim Theological College, University of Divinity
Melbourne, Australia

Introduction: Entering the Text

I am a recent migrant to and settler in Australia and this presentation came to birth in Naam, now called Melbourne, the land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation, custodians since time immemorial. I recognise and acknowledge the human sufferings and injustices that Aboriginal people have experienced and continue to experience as a result of colonization, discrimination, and marginalization. I offer my respects to elders, past, and present, their continued connection to the land and waters of that land, their continuing culture and acknowledge that they never ceded sovereignty.

Born and raised in India with its rigid hierarchies that were particularly unfavorable to women and girls, I had parents who impressed upon my sisters and myself that education and literacy is essential to counter exploitation and victimization; that we need to conduct our lives informed by a larger sense of humanity; to be suspicious of that which is merely theoretical; to validate the experiential, the lived and the ambiguous; to be hospitable; and to use knowledge, power and skill for the benefit of the church and the community. These values have made significant contributions to the shaping of my personality and my Christian faith. I am very aware that issues of power, powerlessness, and privilege are fundamental to virtually every aspect and avenue of the cultural and social worlds we occupy, often operating in dialectic tension. This awareness undergirds my commitment, as a theological educator and biblical interpreter, to producing reflections and texts that resist and oppose cultures and languages of dominance that exclude the experiences and voices of the oppressed.

environment on a planetary scale is limited but growing. Our understanding of the impacts of our planned and unplanned disruptions is also limited and growing far slower than needed. Human beings also use Science to modify the genetic structure of species, to explore space and foster new modes of communication. Our power lies in our capacity to understand, respect, and work in harmony with nature's intricate systems.

Discuss:
Who are the powerful
in your locale?

Who are the powerless?

'Power over' understood mostly as political authority, coercion, force, or domination.¹ This is the type of power we are most familiar with. It may rule with weapons that are physical or by controlling the resources we need to live: money, food, medical care or by controlling more subtle resources: information, approval, love. We are so accustomed to power over, so steeped in its language and its implicit threats, that we often become aware of its functioning only when we see its extreme manifestations.²

The other forms of power recognise that power is not owned by individuals but is active and dynamic, present in every relationship.³ It is contextual and relational.

As suggested by Starhawk,

Power is never static, for power is not a thing that we can hold or store, it is a movement, a relationship, a balance, fluid and changing. The power one person can wield over another is dependent on a myriad of external factors and subtle agreements.⁴

Following are three types:

'Power with,' refers to shared power, mutual empowerment, where authority and capacity decisions are made through collective processes, persuasion, collaboration rather than domination. Rather than domination and control, power with leads to collective action and the ability to act together.⁵

Multiple Definitions of Power

But what is power? If we go around the room and ask how power is understood in different cultures, some may offer meanings derived from experiencing it politically (Ask a Gazan or Palestinian, a resident in North Korea), others more socially (Dalit, Tua, the Minjung, women), and another may allude to church/religious leadership (women and those othered and excluded). For still others, it could be a combination of all three realms. In any case, without a broader understanding of power any process of analyzing power could be limited and potentially disempowering. We experience power in its varied forms:

1. L. VeneKlasen, & V. Miller, *A New Weave of Power, People & Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation*. (Warwickshire: Practical Action Publishing, 2007). Chapter 3 on Power and Empowerment is available from <https://justassociates.org/en/resources/new-weave-power-people-politics-action-guide-advocacy-and-citizen-participation>
2. Starhawk, *Truth or dare: Encounters with power, authority, and mystery*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1990) 9.
3. J. Meyerding, "Reclaiming Nonviolence: Some Thoughts for Feminist womyn who used to be Nonviolent, and Vice Versa". In Pam McAllister (Ed.), *Reweaving the Web of Life: Feminism and Nonviolence*. (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1982).
4. Starhawk. 268.
5. Raji Hunjan, & Soumontha. Keophilavon, *Power and making change happen*. (Carnegie UK Trust, 2010), 15. Available from <https://carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/power-and-making-change-happen/>

Some Initial thoughts on Power

“Transforming Power” is the theme for this Bible Study. What do we hear when we see these words? Is it about changing our conceptions of power, so we transform power itself, or is it how we might use power for the sake of transforming lives and communities? As Christians we are often suspicious and guarded about power and structures/systems of power, with rather strong negative or sometimes fearful attitudes to power, seeing it as evil and oppressive. Power is too often perceived as a negative concept, relating to the abuse of power, rather than as something that can be used to transform the lives of many.

The Bible witnesses quite clearly to a God who empowers individuals and communities to struggle and resist against unjust and abusive structures and uses of power. When tyrannical and overbearing powers - individual, communal, structural, and systemic (heteronormative patriarchy, racialized colonialism, and capitalism), need to be queried, and confronted for the sake of justice, then we as church will need to go beyond individualistic evangelism and piety and find ways to effectively name, challenge and confront them.

When thinking of power and its distortions, we also need to attend to power embedded in the invisible, in the symbol system (e.g., ideas, values, dogmatic theology), that which influences and forms the world views, value systems and imaginations of peoples, including religious imagination, doctrine and theology. The Bible, our scriptural tradition, and Christian theology has been wielded to justify the exercise of harmful types of power, especially against women, slaves, the earth, the poor, and much more. But the very same Bible also contains within it a rich, diverse collection of imaginative resources and an essential structure of resistance and self-critique, which should inform our theology and praxis as we reflect on how we might use the power inherent in each of us, as individuals and churches, to address issues of power.

Power and Powerlessness in our Context

Each of us can attest to the daily exercise of power. We experience and witness powerlessness as well on a regular basis. We live in times of unprecedented human power – over people, and the environment. The power to control people and nations – e.g. the situation of 200 million Muslims in India who are facing increasing discrimination, prejudice, and violence, despite constitutional protections. Anti-Muslim sentiments have heightened under the current government in India, and all attempts are being made to disenfranchise the Muslim population. The Myanmar military/junta began a sweeping campaign of massacres, rape, and arson in northern Rakhine State on August 25, 2017. Five years on, this community, displaced and confined to life in a refugee camp away from their traditional homes, is still awaiting justice and protection of their rights. The Gaza–Israel conflict and genocide is a localized part of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict beginning in 1948, when 200,000 Palestinians fled, or were expelled, from their homes, settling in the Gaza Strip as refugees. These are just a few examples of the exercise of abusive power to discriminate, persecute, restrict freedom, and limit movement. We may find other or name similar struggles in our own locations/regions.

The human species has long believed in its ability to control, shape, alter and manipulate the natural environment to suit human need and greed. The impact of the same on local environment requires little explanation. From harnessing energy to altering landscapes, our technological advancements have fueled the notion that we hold dominion over nature. However, a deeper examination reveals the limits of our control and the need to reassess our relationship with the natural world. These efforts have impacted environments, both locally and farther away, due to the interconnectivity of Earth’s systems. Some of the impacts of our technology are large-scale, physical, and well understood, such as climate change. Our ability to disrupt the

‘Power to’ refers to the “productive or generative potential of power and the new possibilities or actions that can be created without using relationships of domination.”⁶ It centres on the capacity of an individual, an agent or situation or event to enable change or things to happen.

“Power Within” is related to a person’s “sense of self-worth and self-knowledge; it includes an ability to recognise individual differences while respecting others.”⁷ Power within implies people having a sense of their own capacity and self-worth.⁸ Power within allows people to recognise their “power to” and “power with,” and believe they can make a difference.⁹

Power is therefore the ability to respond to, influence, and shape reality. It is the ability to act on and effectively shape the world around us, particularly through collective action and institutional policy.”¹⁰ Individuals, communities or collectives, ideas, and beliefs have power to shape reality that can be exercised through both domination and collaboration. The interaction between power, powerlessness and our religious beliefs is best seen and experienced in human societies/social existence.

It is against this very brief and basic understanding of power that we now look at the text as found in 2 Samuel 21:1-14 and unpack what it teaches us about power and powerlessness and the capacity of an individual to use her power in a transforming manner for the wellbeing of herself and her community.

2 Samuel 21:1-14

Rizpah and her story are not very well known it seems. Not many people find time to reflect upon this woman; books tend to ignore her. But she is, I think, the subject and the heart of one of the most inspiring stories in the Bible. When I became familiar with the story, I celebrated the success and achievement of this narrative, for Rizpah’s vigil and unspoken resilience give the story its power. But like many others, I saw it only as her story until I heard of a woman in the Indian state of Orissa who guarded the body of her husband killed by Hindu fascists in the 2007 pogrom. For days she was determined to keep it safe from dogs and other animals. She refused to bury it until the local police and legal machinery could collect evidence.

So, here’s the story of Rizpah¹¹.

1 Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year, and David inquired of the Lord. The Lord said, “There is bloodguilt on Saul and on his house because he put the Gibeonites to death.” 2 So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them. (Now the Gibeonites were not of the people of Israel but of the remnant of the Amorites; although the people of Israel had sworn to spare them, Saul had tried to wipe them out in his zeal for the people of Israel and Judah.) 3 David said to the Gibeonites, “What shall I do for you? How shall I make expiation, that you may bless the heritage of the Lord?” 4 The Gibeonites said to him, “It is not a matter of silver or gold between us and Saul or his house; neither is it for us to put anyone to death in Israel.” He said, “What do you say that I should do for you?” 5 They said to the king, “The man who consumed us and planned to destroy us so that we should have no place in all the territory of Israel, 6 let seven of his sons be handed over to us, and we will impale them

6. A. Mathie, J. Cameron, & K. Gibson, K. “Asset-based and citizen-led development: Using a diffracted power lens to analyse the possibilities and challenges,” in *Progress in Development Studies*, 17/1, (2017): 54-66, here page 54. doi: 10.1177/1464993416674302 Available from <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1464993416674302>

7. L. VeneKlasen, & V. Miller, *A New Weave of Power, People & Politics*, 45.

8. A. Mathie, J. Cameron, & K. Gibson, K. “Asset-based and citizen-led development.”

9. L. VeneKlasen, & V. Miller, *A New Weave of Power, People & Politics*. 45.

10. Beverly Harrison, *Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 290, n.5.

11. See Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon, “Reading Rizpah across Borders, Cultures, Belongings ... to India and Back,” in Jione Havea, et.al., (eds.), *Bible, Borders, Belongings: Engaging Readings from Oceania* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 171-90.

before the Lord at Gibeon on the mountain of the Lord.” The king said, “I will hand them over.”

7 But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Saul’s son Jonathan, because of the oath of the Lord that was between them, between David and Jonathan son of Saul. 8 The king took the two sons of Rizpah daughter of Aiah, whom she bore to Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; and the five sons of Merab daughter of Saul, whom she bore to Adriel son of Barzillai the Meholahtite; 9 he gave them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they impaled them on the mountain before the Lord. The seven of them perished together. They were put to death in the first days of harvest, at the beginning of barley harvest.

10 Then Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it on a rock for herself, from the beginning of harvest until rain fell on them from the heavens; she did not allow the birds of the air to come on the bodies by day or the wild animals by night. 11 When David was told what Rizpah daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done, 12 David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan from the people of Jabesh-gilead, who had stolen them from the public square of Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hung them up, on the day the Philistines killed Saul on Gilboa. 13 He brought up from there the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan, and they gathered the bones of those who had been impaled. 14 They buried the bones of Saul and of his son Jonathan in the land of Benjamin in Zela, in the tomb of his father Kish; they did all that the king commanded. After that, God heeded supplications for the land. (NRSVUE)

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David’s Ruse to Slaughter the Boys:

Rizpah, the name meaning ‘daughter of a falcon’ or ‘glowing coal,’ is introduced as the secondary wife of King Saul and the mother of his two sons. After his death, Rizpah was bandied about by Ishbosheth/Ishbaal and Abner as we read in 2 Samuel 3:6-11. But we do not hear her voice. In 2 Samuel 21, we learn that Israel had suffered from a famine for three years. David asked God why this had happened and learned that King Saul had broken an agreement with the foreign Gibeonites and killed them instead of protecting them (vv 1-2). The famine was thought to be God’s punishment¹². This attempt by Saul to break the treaty/covenant (Joshua 9), is not attested elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. David asked the Gibeonites how he could atone for the sins of Saul and “restore the cosmic order”.¹³ They respond that they do not seek monetary restitution, but they have no power to demand blood. David perhaps could have still offered money,¹⁴ but instead he prods them further, “What do you say that I should do for you” (v 4)? The Gibeonites respond, “The man who consumed us and planned to destroy us, so that we should have no place in all the territory of Israel—let seven of his sons be handed over to us, and we will ‘impale’¹⁵ them ‘before Yahweh in Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of the Lord’ on the mountain of Yahweh” (2 Sam 21:5–6). Without any sign of hesitation or remorse, David agreed to hand them over (v 6). Mephibosheth, the remaining son of Saul who is allowed to live (v 7), will continue the line of Saul but he would never be able to be king since he was disabled. David did this because he benefitted from their deaths. Since fewer descendants of Saul meant fewer heirs with a competing claim to the throne.

12. Violation and breach of treaty oaths is a serious offense, and the violator is cursed, but “the curse could not negate the treaty; it could only make the obligations heavier” (see, Charles F. Fensham, “The Treaty between Israel and the Gibeonites,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 3 (1964): 96–100, here 99). Natural calamities and disasters such as famine and plague were often perceived as direct consequences of such a breach. See A. Malamat “Doctrines of Causality in Hittite and Biblical Historiography: A Parallel.” *Vetus Testamentum* 5:1–12.1955):1–12.

13. Julianna M Claassens, *Claiming Her Dignity: Female Resistance in the Old Testament* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016), 5.

14. Gerald West, “1 and 2 Samuel,” in *The Global Bible Commentary*. Edited by Daniel Patte. Nashville: Abingdon, 2004): 92–104, here 101.

15. There are several meanings to this verb: being impaled, being cast off a cliff, being exposed, being crucified, and the like. See P Kyle McCarter, *II Samuel*. Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 442, suggests that it should perhaps be understood as “crucifixion and subsequent exposure.” Numbers 25:5 uses the same verb, and the context there suggests it is “impalement”; the Septuagint, the Greek translation renders it as “exposure to the sun.”

The killing of these boys was meant to be a deterrent to all or any who might seek to rebel against David and his kingship.

Some might read this as a sacrifice of the boys to appease God, so the famine ends. There are many cultures where the shedding of blood is connected with famine. But this is actually slaughter!! It is so when the boys are forcibly killed, when they did not volunteer their lives to be sacrificed. They were given no choice. It was unwelcome death!



Discuss whether this was slaughter or sacrifice.

David stood to benefit from the death of these boys.

What other reasons might you think of that contributed to their slaughter?



beginning of barley harvest” (v 9). But it does not bring rain to end the famine as expected. The family was not allowed to bury the bodies of these young men. This was a particularly vile and insulting punishment.



Most translators hesitate to use the word ‘crucifixion’ to describe the manner of their deaths. Why do you think so?

Would it be appropriate to use the term in this context? If not, why not?



The Seizure of the Boys

The text does not provide any details on how Rizpah or the community reacted when her children were being taken away. Some scholars suggest that she was stoic and accepted the fate that was to befall her sons and nephews. In my mind she was never stoic.

The Impalement/Crucifixion

David did not attempt to find another way to resolve the issue. He had little interest in the lives of these boys who had done nothing to deserve a brutal death. He showed no worry for their mothers’ grief. David gave the Gibeonites, Armoni and Mephibosheth, the two sons of Rizpah, along with the five sons of Saul’s daughter Merab/Michal¹⁶. The seven young men (perhaps only in their teens) were brutally killed, and their bodies were left exposed. The text says that they were impaled upon the mountain of Yahweh and “they were put to death in the first days of harvest, at the

16. 2 Samuel 21:8. There is some ambiguity regarding who the mother of the five boys was. Variant readings name Merab as the mother, while popular translations and the Masoretic text name Michal as the mother. Merab was the wife of Adriel, son of Barzillai the Meholathite (v 8). 2 Samuel 6: 23 notes that Michal had no children.

Use your imagination to fill in the missing details.

How might the boys, Rizpah, and other members in the household, and the neighbors reacted when David's men came to take the boys away to be handed over to the Gibeonites?

What time of the day did they come to take them?

Was there a crowd watching all this?
How did they react?
Did they plead with David's men?
What might they have said?
Did they follow the boys and watch their impalement?

In my imagination she must have cried, beaten her chest, clung to her children, pleaded with David's men, called out to/begged the crowd to do something when her children were being dragged away. The sound of their cries and the memory of their fear filled, and teary faces would linger in her mind and heart for the rest of her life.

Rizpah's Vigil Begins

After the death and impalement of her children Rizpah "took sackcloth and spread it out for herself on a rock. From the beginning of the harvest till the rain poured down from the heavens on the bodies, she did not let the birds touch them by day or the wild animals by night" (v 10). A complete hush descended on the scene. Death often forces us to be quiet/silent and invites us to sit with it. Some think that peace, a calmness descends at that moment

- a sense of acceptance, resignation, and a calmness, akin to the sense we experience after someone has died after a prolonged illness, or something similar. I do not think it is peace as we would normally understand it. Rather, it is a suppression of the chaos, a subduing of the turmoil of the moment. But in that moment, Rizpah resolves to act. There was nothing she could do to bring the children back to life, but she had to do something that will memorialize them, so they and their undeserving and untimely death is not forgotten. She refused to allow the bodies to be desecrated. She was not permitted to remove the bodies or to bury them, but she could try to do her best to protect them. She moved herself to the site of their execution and holds a silent vigil to memorialize their death through her silence.

Rizpah prays to the Ancestors and to Yahweh the Rock!

She spreads a sackcloth "out for herself on a rock." There has been much speculation on what this actually means. Some maintain that Rizpah made a tent to shield herself from the sun, or that she just sat on a piece of sackcloth (a sign of mourning) beside the impaled bodies of the boys to keep the birds and dogs and other wildlife away from further desecrating their bodies. Compare translations of verse 10 and discuss what you think is happening here.

How is this verse translated in the Bible in your language?

17. See 2 Samuel 22:2, 3, 32, 47 where Yahweh is referred to as the Rock. Compare translations of this verse and discuss what you think is happening here.

Stanley D Walters look at Isa 30:29 and Isa 51:1–3a suggests that Rizpah was praying “to the Rock”, a symbol often used of God.¹⁷ It has also been suggested that she might have taken her household gods with her and directed her prayers to them. What is perhaps more interesting is that ‘the Rock’ could, according to Walters also be a reference to “founding parents of Israel, ... a metaphor expressing pristine source and origin.”¹⁸ I would like to believe that Rizpah prayed to God but also pleaded with her ancestors to receive her boys and care for them and intervene and secure justice for them. She needs them to be buried and she could not do this without clearance from David. Rizpah prays contradicting all efforts of religious institutions that require women to be silent!!¹⁹

What do you think?
Picture this scene.

Was she alone for the entire time?
How did she fend for herself?

Did someone bring her food and
water? Did anyone sit with her?

What did the bodies look like,
or smell like after days, weeks and
months in the hot sun?

Rizpah Supported by Family and Community

The text also does not tell us how she fended for herself over these long days and months of vigil.

In the imaginations of several interpreters of this passage, Rizpah was not alone. She may have begun the vigil on her own but was soon joined by others. According to Ortega, “It was mostly a women’s vigil that challenged the logic of men that was more concerned with “maintaining national security and keeping an alliance of death.”²⁰ She is assisted by her family and eventually by others, mostly women but perhaps also men, those that brought her food, helped her shew away the birds and dogs, who prayed along with her to God and to the ancestors, pleading for intervention.

Rizpah’s Vigil was a Public Act!

Rizpah could have chosen to withdraw in the midst of this anguish. She had lost her sons and nephews, her source of financial support, and her security for the future. She could have decided that there was nothing she could do about the desecration of their bodies. She could have withdrawn into solitude within her home to mourn the loss of her children. But No! She went to the place where the bodies were exposed, spread a cloth on the rock, and lived there for months. Picture her yelling and waving her arms and shooing away birds, dogs, vultures, and other night predators from tearing the bodies apart or eating at their flesh. She would have been in danger herself. But she kept vigil for months, we are told. By positioning herself at the site of their slaughter, she called attention to the bodies of the boys (although it is hard to imagine how anyone could have ignored them), to herself and to the injustice done to them all. She wanted to shame the king and draw awareness to this heinous crime committed against her children and she could not think of a better way to do this than by placing herself strategically in this public space.

18. Stanley D Walters, “To the Rock: 2 Samuel 21:10,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 70 (2008):453–64.

19. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon, 1983), 74...

20. Ofelia Ortega, “The Gospel of Solidarity,” *Ecumenical Review* (1994): 46:135–41, here 137...

Discuss the advantages of public protest. Would you endorse public protests on the part of the church or by church membership? If not, why not?

Dead Bodies Speak!

Rizpah was determined to bury the bodies of her children. She was not swayed by, nor did she fear sitting beside the dead bodies. She does come across as someone who did not recoil from the sight or the smell of death or the rotting flesh. She was repulsed. In that public space, the bodies became active agents, they called attention to themselves and their mother who had located herself beside them, Rizpah gave these lifeless bodies a voice reminding us that bodies are more than just an object, an “it.” They are silent witnesses speaking to us of their experience and the injustice done to them and are therefore alive as agents in their own transformation.

Do dead bodies speak?
If so, how?

Think of areas of conflict
and the piles of dead bodies.

What are they saying to us? How do
you respond to such a sight?

How should we respond?

Rizpah’s Vigil was a Political Act!

The vigil of Rizpah created a civic space and public debate. Her act was a political one and one of deep spirituality, a spirituality of resistance.²¹ As the days went by, more and more people came to know what had happened and sympathies for her increased. The deaths and the subsequent vigil of Rizpah gave rise to a public space and a civil discourse. Her vigil brought her into the presence of a community that was created and forged around the bodies of her dead children and her grief and her efforts to seek justice for them. There was perhaps discussion, argument, conversation and a spread of ideas. David was forced to act and act soon before it generated widespread rebellion. Rizpah’s and the community’s powerlessness was transformed. They were now filled with an active resolve. They were driven by their shared sense of pain, grief and anger, the need to protest and the obsession to right the wrong that was done, and continued to be done, by David, who was denying Rizpah the right to bury her children and the yearning for justice.

Rizpah’s Loud Silence!

The vigil was marked with silence, but the protest and resistance were loud. Her silence was overt and pregnant with meaning, with protest, with resilience. It is a silence that can be heard and not easily forgotten or ignored. It enhances memory. She did not want to forget and would not allow others to forget either. Through her silent act, she memorializes her dead children. The silence affords her and those gathered with her the opportunity to introspect, to reflect, to analyse, to critique, and evaluate. The silence provoked and churned intense emotions and a communal rising to and for the sake of life. Her silence is not only intentional but also ritualistic and internalized so she can discipline herself in the act of memory.

21. Sharon D. Welch, *Communities of Resistance: A Feminist Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985), 39.

Rizpah grieves in silence and in public. She sees not a political spectacle but a human tragedy. The death of these men is not a display of indignity and shame; it is an assault upon the dignity and worthiness of God.²² No individual could walk away from the scene unaffected. She therefore draws our attention away from the centres of power to the margins of suffering and righteousness.²³ And words were unnecessary. Her posture of resistance, her silence, her positioning by the bodies, her public expression of grief, pain and anguish, and her resolve and commitment to justice moved the powers that be - the King and even God to respond. Rizpah's action of resistance is a case of the marginalized who cannot be confined to silence or speech but also action as well.

When was the last time you were moved to join a public protest? Explain.

David and God respond!

David has the bones of Saul and Jonathan taken from the citizens of Jabesh Gilead (v 12) and together with the bones of the exposed dead boys and buries them in the tomb of Saul's father Kish, at Zela in Benjamin. Finally, they receive the honour given to the dead. I imagine that the land and the sky had also joined Rizpah in protest and the famine continued until justice has been served. Only after they were buried, then, does the text report, that God listened, the rains came, and the famine ended.

Where is God in this story?
If God is present, how else could God have acted?

In Conclusion...

Rizpah had little power of her own. She had no status or wealth that we know of. She was the secondary wife of a dead leader, and the mother of two boys. A widow, and now no children, she had nothing more to lose other than her own life which had lost all meaning. Rizpah had no recourse to any higher authority to appeal to other than God, but she did what she could within the limits of her capacity to bring justice for her dead boys and healing to her family and community. Her strength came from her faith, her resolve, and her courage to take risks against the singular most powerful man of her time – David, and she succeeded.

She would not experience peace without at least trying to seek justice. Driven by the thirst for justice, anger, and grief, she was resilient and used whatever power she had to do what she did and was successful in having her children buried, albeit after three months. It sounds ironic, but her power and resoluteness came from her vulnerability and her powerlessness. She exercised this power over herself and those watching her saw that power and she gained their respect and admiration. With that came the power and the conviction to affect change and transformation. Such power is not easy to come by. It has been said that it requires recognition of one's own sense of powerlessness, and with that comes a sense of freedom, releasing power. She uses the "power within" - her capacity and knowledge of self-worth to affect change. Her understanding of God was that God was a God of justice and a

22. Allan Boesak, "The Dignity of Resistance in Solidarity: The Story of Rizpah," *Kairos Southern Africa (blog)*, May 8, 2010.

23. Allan Boesak, "The Dignity of Resistance in Solidarity."



Welcoming Tears by The Grief Deck

God of life and this differed from that of David. Her power was also 'power with' and 'power to' that empowered a community to boldly stand with her which in turn empowered her to press home the fact of injustice that required righting.

How is the recognition of one's own powerlessness, freeing or liberative?

She had no voice or power or wealth, but she had courage. She channeled her anger and her grief into defiant action. Any sense of victimhood which is a weapon in the hands of the oppressor/victimizer is overcome. Rizpah puts up a powerful fight against men who use women and children as pawns in their power struggles. She refuses to see herself as a victim but as the wronged who insists on being heard. She resists David's understanding of God as one who sides with the powerful and is vengeful. Instead, she harnesses her own belief that God empowers the powerless to resist and act against injustice. She does not retreat into a private space to mourn and grieve her losses but chooses instead the public space of the execution to give expression to her grief and pain. She goes public with her cries for justice and transforms, empowers and emboldens her community.

She is a powerful example of grace and redemption lived out in an ugly tale of revenge. She encounters evil and responds with love, care and nonviolent resistance. She powerfully gives expression to how much she valued these children. She brought David and perhaps us as well to our theological senses, demonstrating that it is not violence and sacrifices that God wants, but mercy and human compassion.

Transformation is a characteristic feature of Christian tradition, fundamental to the Christian view of things, and is at the heart of our conviction that something fundamentally new and different can be brought about by God's will and work through us.²⁴ Rizpah and those who joined her were powerless, marginalized, victims of state abuse and yet they become champions of justice. They are similar to people, movements, and agencies who today resist with their voices, with their tears, with their prayers – silent and spoken, with their bodies, with their energy and their love, with dignity, and courage, protecting, preserving, uplifting, redeeming. They question all existing and dominant notions of survival and national security, that are secured by injustice and oppression through power that is transforming. Rizpah and the community that joined her in her struggle for justice were transformed and their story continues to challenge, inspire, and sustain the faith and struggles of people who are familiar with her story, and I hope it speaks to you too.

24. Philip Hefner, "The Church as Well of Possibility," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 25, no. 4 (1998): 249.



Questions for Discussion

- *We may or may not have heard of Rizpah's story, yet she provides a powerful example of courage, compassion, agency and transforming power. Is there someone you know whose life bears witness to these qualities?*
- *Are you able to name Rizpah's type of power? What were the sources of her power? What sources of personal, professional, and spiritual do you draw on, as a church leader, organiser, facilitator, or activist to address controversial issues in your community or church?*
- *Pair up with another participant and discuss the sources of power they feel they have, and both the similarities and differences in their experiences.*





Sub-Theme 2: Revisioning Mission (By Situating the Reign of God in Context)

Text: Matthew 13:31-33, 44-48
[See whole of Matthew 13]

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Introduction: On Entering the Text

I was born and grew up in a very rural village in the Solomon Islands. My daily livelihood was woven and interwoven with the environment – land and sea and skies. From the very young age of four, I started to go out fishing with my dad. He was such a repository of traditional knowledge and wisdom in all things fishing and in the maritime environments, how the maritime environments are interwoven with both the skies-heavens and terrestrial

environments. I learnt how to read the rhythms and signs of times of nature, movements of currents and tides, spawning seasons of fish species, and so on. My mother was also a storehouse of knowledge with her roots firmly planted in the ground, and she was a woman with “green fingers”. From her, I learnt much about traditional-indigenous ways of knowing and farming and the right times for planting different types of crops. She was also quite knowledgeable in the medicinal makeup and benefits of various plant species and she would treat me with the most appropriate one or two whenever I was ill! God in Creation and God of Creation was my initial affirmation. I was in God before I heard the stories about Jesus of Nazareth! Faith in Christ began here! For me, that is! This kind of interconnected life was neither “apart from” nor peripheral to the life of faith in Jesus Christ that we live in church. My Christian prayer life and my life in Christ were not seen or treated as completely separate from my daily life that was interwoven with the environments. As such, I was nurtured in a spirituality that was holistic and embracing. It is

this holistic spirituality that has shaped my own faith journey and affirmation, and established my position as to where God and the talk and stories about God (theology), including God through Jesus Christ and the Spirit, are located and what these have to do with life now and as life continues to become.

In the gospel according to Matthew, the mission of Jesus began with the words, “Change your hearts and lives [Repent], because the kingdom of heaven¹ is near [at hand],” (4:17, EXB). Some important points are worthy of note here. Firstly and quite significantly, Matthew locates this inaugural declaration of the kingdom of heaven around the countryside and lakeside village of Capernaum (approx. 1000 people) – a kind of fishing village along critically important land and sea trade routes. It was in Capernaum that Jesus dwelt (4:13) and from where he engaged in mission. Fishing and fish trading was the mainstay of life and livelihood in Capernaum. There were also other daily livelihood activities in which people engaged. It was in this context that the first disciples were called by Jesus! Secondly, immediately following this declaration, the “kingdom of heaven” that “is near” or “at hand”, began to unfold and continued to unfold throughout the gospel, through Jesus’ miraculous deeds and through his teachings and lived life. Thirdly, news of Jesus’ mission spread quickly and crowds came from everywhere both rural and urban all came to seek his help. Most of these people were from the lower and lowest rungs of society (4:23-24) at the time. This movement of crowd from many places to reach Jesus is noteworthy indeed: “Great crowds from Galilee, the Ten Towns [Decapolis; the area east of Lake Galilee that once had ten main towns], Jerusalem, Judea, and the land across [beyond] the Jordan River followed him,” (4:25, EXB). Lastly but not least, this “kingdom of heaven” is given more clarity and meaning in chapter 13. Chapter 13 is considered a turning point in the book of Matthew, a kind of hinge in the literary structure

of the book. The chapter marks the beginning of Jesus’ teachings on parables about the kingdom of heaven. There are seven such parables about the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 13. This bible study will focus only on five of these parables.

“

Reflect:
How does context affect or shape or influence our ideas, experiences and views about Christian faith and living?

”

Preference of Use of Terms

Before going any further, I wish to pick a position on the use of the phrase “kingdom of heaven”. According to scholarly discussions of the New Testament, the kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God refer to the same idea. At the same time, the use of the word “kingdom” has also come under scholarly scrutiny, not least because of the obvious masculine connotations of the term. As a consequence, other terms have been put forward and have come to use, including “kin-dom” and “reign”. In this study I have chosen to use the “reign of God” except where direct quotations of texts are used.

Context as the Interpretative Lens

This study is set from the context of the “Liquid Continent” of Oceania, or as our well-known academic the Late Epeli Hau’ofa aptly describes as “Our Sea of Islands”². This “Sea of Islands” comprises approximately 822,800 square kilometers of land and millions of square kilometers of ocean or water within the greater Pacific Ocean.³ Diversity is a fact of life:

1. Note that in the gospel according to Matthew (3:2), the use of the phrase “kingdom of heaven” is attributed first to John the Baptist, and then to Jesus (4:17).
2. See *A new Oceania: Rediscovering our sea of islands*, eds. Eric Waddell and Vijay Naidu and Epeli Hau’ofa, USP: 1993.
3. Covering more than 30 percent of the Earth’s surface, the Pacific Ocean is the largest water mass on the planet. With a surface area of more than 155 million square kilometers (60 million square miles), this ocean basin is larger than the landmass of all the continents combined. See *How big is the Pacific Ocean?: Ocean Exploration Facts*: NOAA Office of Ocean Exploration and Research

people of different ethnicities speaking about 900 languages from diverse cultures, and big and high mountainous islands to small atoll islands, to mention just a few. However, there are also commonalities: the majority of people are rural-based, from 70-80 percent, and as such, the majority of the islands' population still lives in subsistence lifestyles, in ongoing daily interaction with the land, seas and sky – but with rising pressure from and increasing orientation towards the formal economy. A prickly and uncomfortable component of this formal economy is the place and force of extractive industries operating in the islands – especially mining, logging, and commercial fishing. As such the dual economy (of traditional/informal sector and the cash/formal sector) has become the commonest way in which people live, move and have their being.

The Christian component of each of the island countries is at least 90 percent (with the exception of Fiji Islands). Of this, at least 50 percent are children and youths. Placing the rural population and the Christian component side by side, two factors are obvious: firstly, the majority of the Christian population is rurally-based; secondly, the majority of this Christian population comprises children and youths. They live off the land and sea, together with the influences of the skies-heavens! This is where faith and daily life interact in the first instance. With mainline churches, and increasing numbers of new churches, perhaps a more apt description is in the plural: Christianities in the islands as presented and represented by the various denominations.

In view of this contextual background, a very common interpretative engagement is to ask how the selected text(s) speak into the context. However, at the same time the context must be able to trouble and interrogate the text. My own story and the context as described above,

serve as both entry point to and interpretative lens for the text(s). Particular ways of looking into texts is one that bible scholars such as Jione Havea⁴ and Walter Wink⁵ employ, and which I adapt in this bible study. In introducing the book, Havea says, “the book offers a powerful and potent contribution which refuses to pretend scripture can be read separately from the every day realities of a climate emergency.” This approach to treating the scriptures that does holds together people's every day living realities and the biblical texts is one that is taken in this study. Although Havea's book is focused on Ruth, my own story and the context described above fall generally within the way of reading and interpreting scripture as embodied in the book. A helpful insight from Wink that is adapted in this study is on reading and understanding and, therefore, interpreting the images (metaphors) used by Jesus in the parables of the kingdom of heaven. This is especially useful in view of the commonalities of some of the images in the parables with images in the sea-land-skies of the context described above. Putting these insights together, this study advances that revisioning mission is about the declaration, and especially the practise of and the recognition, of the kingdom of heaven in the everyday lived experiences of God's people.

Looking Into the Text –

Matthew 13:31-33 [34-43] 44-48

31 Then Jesus told [presented to them] another story [parable]: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a man planted [sowed] in his field.

32 That seed is the smallest of all seeds [the mustard seed was the smallest seed known to Jesus' hearers], but when it grows, it is one of the largest garden plants. It becomes big

4. Jione Havea. *Losing Ground: Reading Ruth in the Pacific*. SCM Press, 2021.

5. Walter Wink. *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*. Fortress Press, 1992.

enough [a tree] for the wild birds [birds of the sky] to come and build nests in its branches."

33 Then Jesus told another story [parable]: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast [leaven] that a woman took and hid [mixed] in a large tub [Greek: three sata; about fifty pounds] of flour until it made all the dough rise [the whole was leavened; Luke 13:20–21]."

34 Jesus used stories [parables] to tell all these things to the people; he always used stories to teach them [did not speak to them without parables; Mark 4:33–34].

35 This is as [fulfills what] the prophet said: "I will speak using [open my mouth in] stories [parables]; I will tell [announce; utter] things that have been secret [hidden] since the world was made [creation/foundation of the world. Ps. 78:2]."

36 Then Jesus left the crowd and went into the house. His followers [disciples] came to him and said, "Explain to us the meaning of the story [parable] about the weeds [tares] in the field."

37 Jesus answered, "The man who planted [sowed] the good seed in the field is the Son of Man.

38 The field is the world, and the good seed are all of God's children who belong to the kingdom [the children/sons of the kingdom]. The weeds [tares] are those people who belong to the Evil One [the children/sons of the Evil One].

39 And the enemy who planted [sowed] the bad seed is the devil. The harvest time is the end of the age, and the workers who gather [harvesters; reapers] are God's angels.

40 "Just as the weeds [tares] are pulled up [gathered] and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age.

41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will gather [remove; weed] out of his kingdom all who [or all things that] cause sin [are stumbling blocks] and all who do evil [break God's law].

42 The angels will throw them into the blazing furnace [Dan. 3:6], where the people will cry and grind their teeth with pain [there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth; indicating agony and remorse].

43 Then the good people [righteous] will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father [Dan. 12:3]. Let those with ears use them and listen [The one who has ears to hear, let him hear].

44 "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. One day a man found the treasure, and then he hid it in the field again. He was so happy [joyful; excited] that he went and sold everything he owned to buy that field.

45 "Also, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. 46 When he found a very valuable pearl, he went and sold everything he had and bought it.

47 "Also, the kingdom of heaven is like a net [dragnet; a net dragged between two boats, or between a boat and the shore] that was put into the lake [sea] and caught many different kinds of fish.

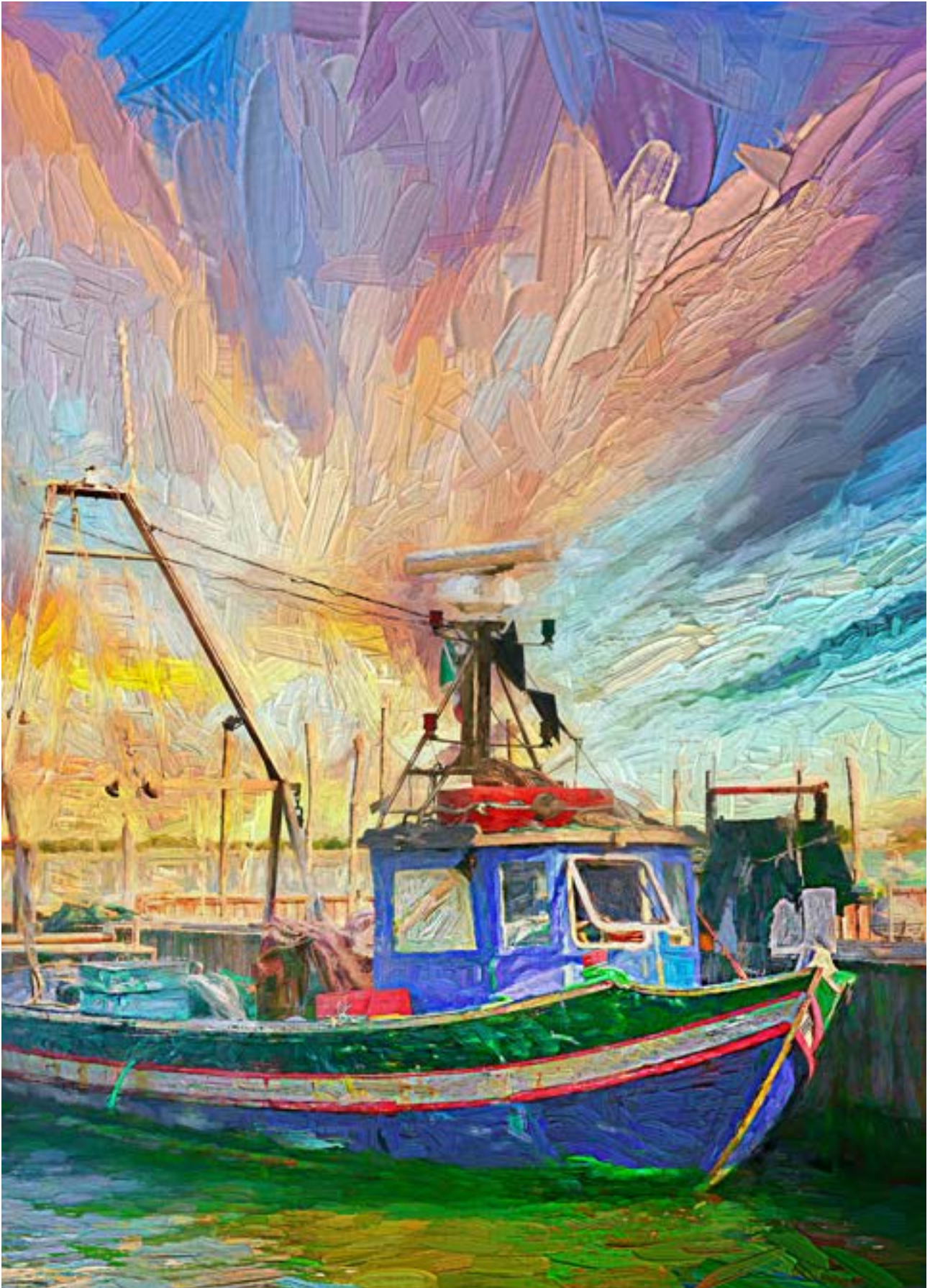
48 When it was full, the fishermen pulled the net to the shore. They sat down and put all the good fish in baskets and threw away the bad [worthless] fish. [Amplified Bible]

The parables in focus are:

- Mustard seed (13:31-32)
- Leaven (13:33)
- Treasure hidden in a field (13:44)
- Merchant looking for fine pearls (13:45)
- Net (13:47-48)

Some Common Interpretations

There is general consensus amongst New Testament scholars that the mission of Jesus centres on the reign of God. The way in which Matthew structures the gospel appears to suggest this as well: chapter 13, which is roughly in the middle of the book, consists of the parables to show the centrality of the reign



Fishing Boat: Shutterstock 1630863958

of God in the mission of Jesus. The parables interconnect and are also connected to Jesus' use of some of these images in other parts of the book.

In the parable of the mustard seed, emphasising the size of the seed may refer to the modest beginning of the reign of God being realised on earth. The point that is usually highlighted is the remarkable growth arising from seemingly insignificant and small beginnings, and that what is seemingly invisible can have an overwhelming impact. A common interpretation of the parable of the leaven is that the kingdom of heaven is transformative, and again such transformation arises from small "hidden" beginnings. Growth from small beginning is a theme that connects these two parables. Then the reign of God is like hidden treasure that has been found and it brings joy – a joy that is worth all that one has. Along quite similar lines, the reign of God is valuable – a value that, like the hidden treasure, is worth all that one has. Discovery of something of great value, and the willingness to part with all possession to acquire it is the theme that connects these two parables. The parable of the net takes another tangent. A point usually highlighted in this parable is the diversity and inclusiveness of the reign of God. However, as in the parable of the weeds, there is a separation between the evil and the righteous – prospects which according to the text are carried out by angels.

Analysing the Parables through Images

The words of Jesus that precede each of the parables, "the kingdom of heaven is like ...", are quite telling and instructive, especially for the crowd which consisted mainly of people from the lower and lowest rungs of society. As such a bit more serious attention must be given to the images that are used in the parables. This is crucially important because these images would have been, and actually were, quite well-known to the "large crowds gathered around him" (13:1) by Lake Galilee. They would have understood what Jesus meant when he used these very familiar images.

This kind of analysis of the texts requires group participation. The table below accounts each of the parables in terms of the images used by Jesus. You are asked to look through the table very carefully and critically re-look and re-think the parables by discussing the questions that follow:

Reading the Scriptures	Eucharist
Baptism	Re-member-ing
Prayer	Giving Generously
Meditation	Charity
Journalling	Being Creative
Listening	Praise
Prophetic Voice	Singing
Advocacy	Struggle
Acts of Protest	Acts of Solidarity
Confronting Injustice	Sharing
Pilgrimage	Healing
Walking the Labyrinth	Anointing
Communing with Creation	Learning / Storying
Fasting	Visiting
Feasting	Loving the unlovely
Holy Communion	Kindness

Questions to analyse the parables (before proceeding any further):

1. What other images mentioned in the texts are missing from the above list?

2. What do you notice about each and/or all of the images? Or what is so obvious or what stands out?

3. Where are these images located or found?

4. What are the colours of these images?

5. What might have been the immediate reaction(s) of the large crowd when Jesus used such images?

These images were common during the time of Jesus and it was to these that he likened the reign of God. Walter Wink draws from these images insightful reflections of the reign of God:

- Its images are drawn from farming, fishing, shell collecting, and work done by women and men.
- It is not described as coming from on high down to earth; rather it rises quietly and imperceptibly out of the land and sea.
- It is established not by armies and military might, but by the common people.
- Its colours are not gold and scarlet and purple, but earth tones: brown, yellow, green and blue.

- Its symbolism is not masculine (kings, swords, chargers, shields, spears) but feminine (water, soil, dough, women, a home).

The prevailing diverse socio-economic situation during Jesus' time that is represented in the parables is quite interesting and informative to the readers, to say the least: a sower of seed, a woman baking bread, a fortune seeker, a merchant, a fisher. These reflect types that were easily recognised in the world of the Gospel, with each individual going about their usual work. The ordinariness of the tasks invites us to see signs of the reign of God in our day-to-day lives; to recognise that it is emerging in our very midst.

Interphase of Context and Text

There are three areas of the interweaving of context and text that I would like to highlight in this study, amongst others!

Firstly, revisioning mission becomes an invitation to us to cultivate the practise of seeing God and signs of the kingdom of heaven in Creation. Jesus' usage of images found on the land, in the sea and skies all point to this invitation towards a God-in-Creation and Creation-in-God Spirituality. Yet, for the island countries of the Pacific, this is increasingly becoming a challenge. Revisioning mission, which in the context of the Pacific calls for revisioning the heart of Jesus' message on the reign of God, demands a mission paradigm that speaks to/in the context of coastlines being reoriented, shorelines being washed away, king-tides washing over residential and farming areas, and people's homes threatened and endangered, and/or even being relocated. What do we expect to see as signs of the reign of God in these situations? This is the foremost emerging challenge for revisioning mission, through the mantle of the reign of God, in the context of the island countries of the Pacific.

Secondly, revisioning mission means recognising and affirming the intrinsic value and integrity of the land-sea-sky web of life. There is much that is couched within the



Leaven Bread

religio-cultural worldviews and experiences of the island countries of the Pacific which speaks to and embodies this! For the Pacific, the locations of the images used by Jesus for the reign of God (land-sea-skies) underpin this seemingly perennial truth, that the land-sea-skies have integrity and value beyond the desire and drive for human utility and the so-called economic growth and progress! That these are important enough in/for the reign of God for Jesus to make significant references to them! As such, revisioning mission has at least two critical functional and focus areas: one is a mission focus that seeks to recapture, revive and nurture these respectful relationalities between human communities and other biotic communities in the land-sea-skies web of life; two is a mission focus that calls for a critical rethinking of the prevailing economic paradigm that desacralises and objectifies the land and sea and skies, a paradigm that sees and treats the land-sea-sky web of life as mere raw material to be pummeled into commodities for the neoliberal and consumption-consumer-driven market, regardless of the environmental, social, cultural-human and economic costs! The Reweaving the Ecological Mat⁶, which is a joint effort and vision of the Pacific Conference of Churches and Pacific Theological College and the University of the South Pacific Oceania Centre, is both a project and mission undertaking that seeks to en flesh this missional imperative in the churches, Christian communities and broader society in the island countries of the Pacific.

Thirdly, revisioning mission is an invitation to engaging the various socio-economic and cultural locations in which people find themselves and/or to which they are forced in one way or other. In the parables these are a sower of seed, a woman baking bread, a fortune seeker, a merchant, a fisher. In the time of Jesus there were various other socio-economic and cultural locations! So, when Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God with reference to their existential locations in

society, they understood what he meant: that, what seemed to be the ordinariness of their daily livelihood was in fact important to/in, and perhaps even revelatory of the reign of God! Revisioning mission in the Pacific context calls for a fresh way of seeing and affirming the reign of God in the works of the people striving towards livelihood and sustenance and forging better futures. This means that mission is no longer a kind of sterile activity that only aims to get people into a future heaven, but “dirties” itself in the ordinariness of existential realities and gets people to see and experience God and God’s reign in their earthy social locations! Central to revisioning mission in this way demands critical analyses of some rather uncomfortable issues, which in the context of the Pacific include, but not limited to, the following:

- The generally low social-cultural locations of women, girls and children in society;
- The reality of the growing numbers of people, especially young girls and women, engaged in the “sex workers” industry – many of whom are forced by economic-financial pressures;
- The rising incidences of homeless people, from young children to elderly people;
- The high levels of unemployment in the island countries, consisting most of young people;
- The growing popularity of the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme (PALMS) and the increasing number of Pacific Islanders engaged in this scheme;

Obviously, there are justice and ethical questions with the foregoing issues, and revisioning mission includes dealing with the justice and ethical aspects of such issues.



Finding Hidden Treasure in a Field by Bentram Poole



Questions for Group Engagement

1. What are some opportunities and obstacles in seeing God in Creation in the context of the part of the world in which you live?
2. Given the rapacious and destructive nature of extractive industries operating in the Two-Thirds World, what might revisioning mission look like in addressing environmental and economic justice issues in your part of the world?
3. How might the social-economic-cultural locations of your people be the foci of revisioning mission, and what are the challenges inherent in such revisioning?
4. What are your thoughts and responses to re-reading Jesus' parables on the reign of God as these pertain to revisioning mission as presented in this study?





Sub-Theme 3: Building Life- Flourishing Communities

Texts: *Mark 6:14-29, 30-44; 7:24-30¹*

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Introduction: My Social Location

As a citizen of a previously developing country, South Korea, currently residing in the U.S., I realise several social factors and experiences have profoundly influenced my personal life and thoughts. I grew up in a rural town near the DMZ two decades after the Korean War. The Korean War was a product of the Cold War and produced the wall that has torn the country and families apart. My father became a refugee at age fourteen and had to take care of his family starting then. While memories of the War

were passed down to my body, my education was imbued with anti-communist ideology. My incredibly hard-working parents wanted their children to receive a better education for a better future, so I moved near Seoul with my grandmother and siblings. I converted to Christianity in my early teenage years. Around that time, South Korea became a developed country through industrialization, and after 1987, it adopted neoliberalism, which brought the success of conglomerates (chaebols). Despite the 1997 Asian financial crisis, South Korea became one of the largest developed economies in the world. Coincident with economic development, Christianity grew fast, but not without compromise with political and economic powers and thus corruption. I was greatly disappointed by the fundamental and prosperity theology and lack of concern about social justice when the poor, workers, students, and civilians suffered under dictatorships in the Full Gospel (Pentecostal) Church I first attended. Leaving that church, I found and was involved in alternative faith communities, such as the para-church movement and the minjung church.

1. New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) is used for this study. The Updated Edition (NRSVUV) is also available.



Herod's Birthday Fest by Edward Armitage (1868)

My upbringing and encounter with Christianity lead me to ponder the relationship between Korea's exponential growth alongside capitalism and the church's roles within this rapidly changing globalized society. As I moved as an immigrant to the U.S. later, I became an Other in terms of race, ethnicity, and language and found myself in the midst of global cultural flows. I came to see more clearly the systemic racism, white supremacy, and exceptionalism of the U.S. from my perspective of an outsider within. Neoliberal global capitalism, in which the U.S. plays a critical role, has heightened disparities between the Global South and North and aggravated the climate crisis. Living in an in-between but privileged metropolitan space, I hope to provide a prophetic witness and to imagine flourishing together through my reading of Scripture.

Our Topic

In the post-Cold War era, imperialism no longer depends on geopolitical control of nation-states but wields biopower by disciplining bodies, managing lives, and containing populations.

This mode of governance is called biopolitics. Today, this biopolitical order administers everyday life across geographical borders. As life has become the object of technologies of imperial power to regulate individuals and society, building life-flourishing communities is a decolonial project of the global church. It is also a missional project, which claims life—human and other-than-human—as God's creation, albeit under threats.

Biopower seeks to promote productivity and even the well-being of bodies, but only in service to neoliberalism's values of individualism, competition, and consumerism. Building life-flourishing communities is a communal project that resists neoliberal capitalist ideology and governance. This project is a common struggle for the replenishment and flourishing of lives that are not deemed valuable. One way to resist the biopolitical power deployed to regulate life through various mechanisms and strategies is to consider a commons that is essential and accessible to every life—food.

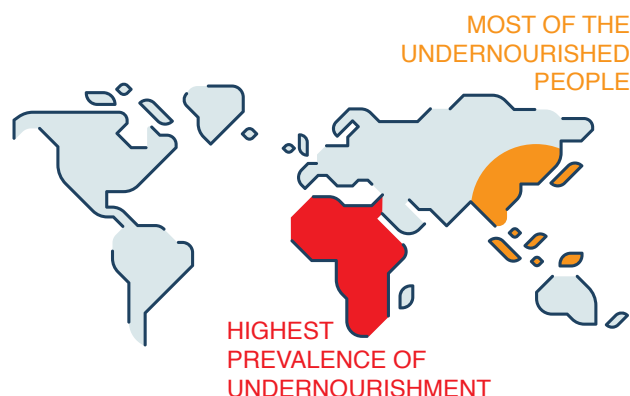
The Gospel of Mark is replete with food stories in which Jesus addresses food as a basic necessity of life. A brief sketch of global food systems will inform our reading of the biblical text.

Global Context

The 2023 Global Hunger Index (GHI) reports that hunger remains serious or alarming in 43 out of 125 countries, with the highest hunger levels in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.²

Despite the considerable reduction in global hunger between 2000 and 2015, progress has halted since 2015 due to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, armed conflicts, economic shocks, and climate change. According to the 2015 FAO Report,

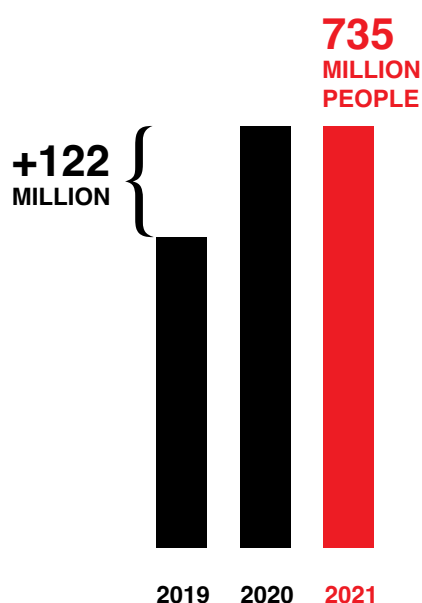
PREVALENCE OF UNDERNOURISHMENT



While most of the undernourished people live in Asia, Africa has the highest prevalence of undernourishment.

• Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the UN, *World Food and Agriculture—Statistical Yearbook 2023*.

RISE IN HUNGER



Global hunger, measured by the prevalence of undernourishment, remained relatively unchanged from 2021 to 2022, affecting around 9.2% of the population in 2022, or about 735 million people. This is 122 million more people than in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic.

780 million people in developing regions were hungry, while nearly one-third of the food produced for human consumption was lost or wasted.³ In 2022, 735 million people were still undernourished, and 1 billion were obese.⁴

The statistics indicate that the current food systems are unfair and unsustainable.

Neoliberalism has accelerated the conversion of public goods to private goods in the name of economic growth since the 1970s. Food has turned into a commodity as transnational agribusiness corporations have dominated the global food system—from farms to supermarkets. For example, Cargill, an American global food corporation, employs over 160,000 people in 70 countries and is invested in meat, grains, poultry, fuels, fertilizer, trading markets, agricultural services, and more. Its revenue in 2023 was \$177 billion,⁵ and the descendants of the founder own over

2. *Global Hunger Index 2023: The Power of Youth in Shaping Food Systems*. Concern Worldwide, Welthungerhilfe 2023. <https://www.globalhungerindex.org>
3. <https://www.fao.org/3/i4646e/i4646e.pdf>
4. <https://www.who.int/news/item/04-03-2022-world-obesity-day-2022-accelerating-action-to-stop-obesity>.
5. <https://www.cargill.com/about/doc/1432242761261/2023-cargill-annual-report.pdf>

90% of the business. Corporate concentration resulted in overproduction, biodiversity loss, decline of family farms, increased food costs, food waste, migration, violence, etc.⁶ Industrial modernization, which guarantees the maximization of agricultural productivity through market-driven competence, has led to the widespread prevalence of such broken systems.

International organizations and agreements, such as WTO and NAFTA, have reinforced corporate concentration in US and foreign markets. Unable to repay their loans due to the 1980s debt crisis and rising interest rates, so-called developing countries received aid from the IMF and World Bank and, in turn, had to cut social programmes and deregulate their economies. They produce crops for export because they need foreign exchange to pay their debts. At the same time, they import food to meet domestic needs, which further threatens food security. In addition to increasing food import bills and demanding debt service pressures, poorer countries are most vulnerable to intensifying climate impacts.⁷

How can we transform unjust and inequitable food systems that maintain the vicious cycle of debt and hunger? Can we think about food differently? While the fundamental value of food is in use rather than in exchange, in reality it is commodified. Some scholars, activists, and communities advocate food as a commons, not a commodity. The concept of food commons is “an emancipatory alternative, a system carrying a moral purpose to combat oppression and create conditions for human flourishing.”⁸ If commons means natural resources such as air, water, land, forest, and the ecosystem, accessible to all members of society, food is a commons essential for human survival and rights. It is hard to separate out poverty and hunger, and between finance capitalism and food politics.

Although the economy of Roman-occupied Palestine in Jesus’ time was agrarian, he might have been aware of the connection between food security and debt relief when he taught the disciples to pray, “Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts.” (Matt 6:11-12a)? Our Bible study focuses on food for life and, therefore, as a commons in the Gospel of Mark to seek ways of building life-flourishing communities together.

Reading Scripture

Mark 6:14–29; 30–44; 7:24–30]

14 King Herod heard of it, for Jesus’s name had become known. Some were saying, “John the baptizer has been raised from the dead, and for this reason these powers are at work in him.” 15 But others said, “It is Elijah.” And others said, “It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.” 16 But when Herod heard of it, he said, “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.”

17 For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, because Herod had married her. 18 For John had been telling Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.” 19 And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to kill him. But she could not, 20 for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he liked to listen to him. 21 But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. 22 When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests, and the king said to the girl, “Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it.” 23 And he swore to her, “Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom.” 24 She went out and said to her mother, “What should I ask for?” She replied, “The head of John the baptizer.” 25 Immediately

6. https://www.iatp.org/sites/default/files/451_2_107275.pdf

7. <https://www.ipes-food.org/pages/debtfoodcrisis>

8. Jose Luis Vivero Pol, “Food as a New Old Commons: A Paradigm Shift for Human Flourishing,” *World Nutrition* 10.1 (2019): 119–37.



Feeding the 5000 by Laura James (c.1999)

she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." 26 The king was deeply grieved, yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. 27 Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's[g] head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, 28 brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. 29 When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

30 The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. 31 He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. 32 And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. 33 Now many saw them going and recognised them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. 34 As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he began to teach them many

things. 35 When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; 36 send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat." 37 But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?" 38 And he said to them, "How many loaves have you? Go and see." When they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." 39 Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. 41 Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and blessed and broke the loaves and gave them to his disciples to set before the people, and he divided the two fish among them all. 42 And all ate and were filled, 43 and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. 44 Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men. [NRSV]

Mark 6 depicts two banquets in stark contrast. The first banquet is the one Herod Antipas

hosts to celebrate his birthday. The invited “guests” are his court nobles, army officers, and the elites of Galilee (v. 21). These high-profile guests “recline” at Herod’s table, which is how people ate then (vv. 22, 26).⁹ They are served a sumptuous meal with entertainment. We don’t know what food they ate, but the story provides a striking imagery of food. John the Baptist was beheaded due to his critique of Herod, who had taken his brother’s wife, Herodias, in marriage. And his head is displayed as food on the platter at the king’s feast—a feast of hunger for power and injustice.

The exploitive nature of Herod Antipas’ banquet is considered within the larger political economy of the Roman Empire, as he, like his father Herod the Great, was a client ruler of the Roman Empire. Rome’s wealth was primarily the product of military conquest, and the empire had to secure food supplies for the army to maintain its power. Additionally, the empire was obliged to meet the urban population’s demands. A concentrated population in Rome and the large cities was involved in manufacturing, marketing, trading, and other activities to supply luxuries to elites. Increasing military and urban demand in the empire required large volumes of agricultural products.

As the basis of the Roman economy, agriculture employed the vast majority of the empire’s population. The land was a resource providing economic security for the elite classes. The peasants and laborers worked the land and provided goods but didn’t own the means of production. The wealth generated from agriculture was not redistributed to peasant farmers. On the contrary, peasant producers had to pay rents and tributes in goods or sell produce to obtain cash to pay taxes.

Jesus knows this profoundly unjust reality when he tells a series of parables that spring

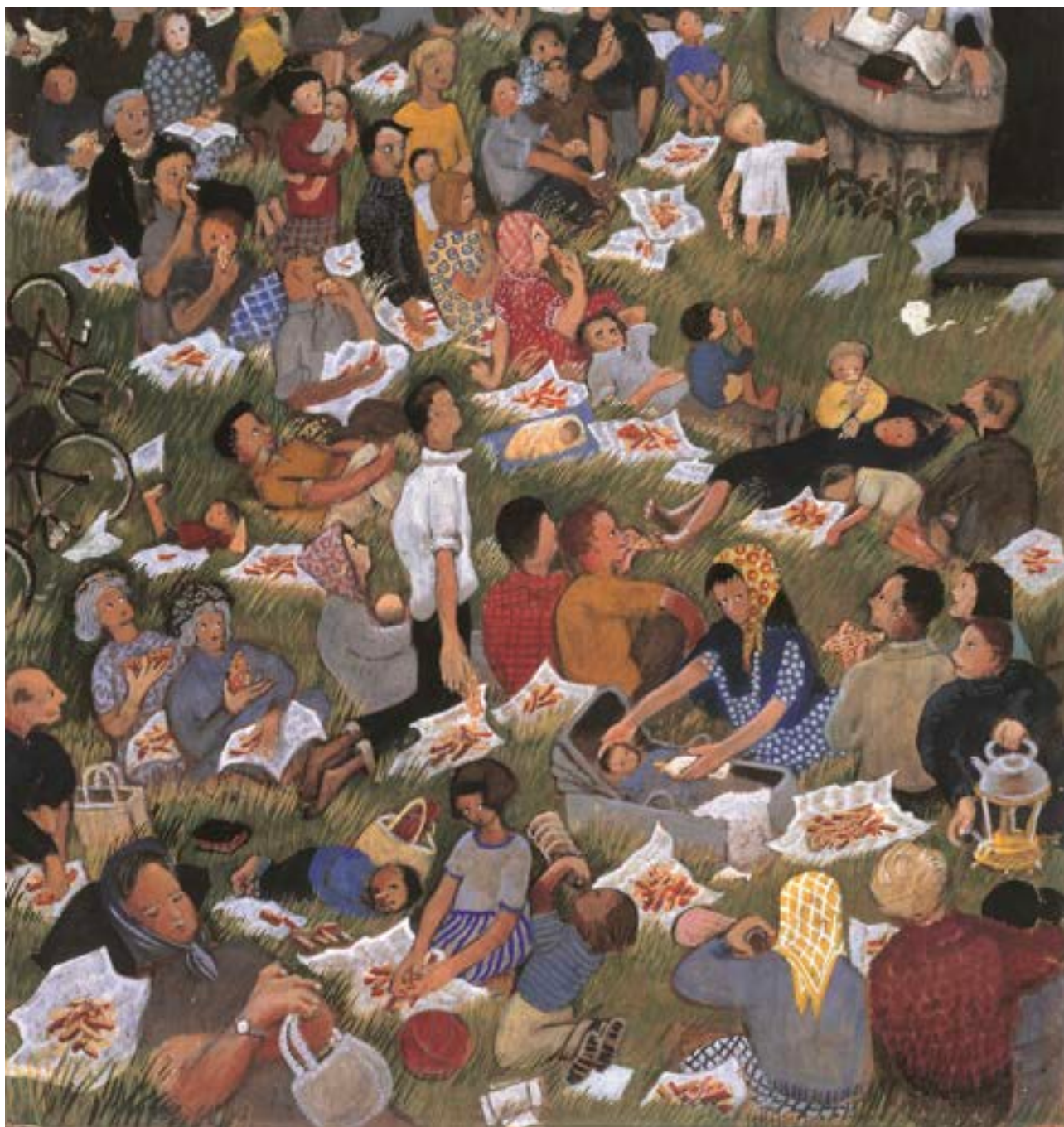
from agriculture. The large crowd (ochlos) beside the sea “on the land (gē)” are listening to Jesus’ parables of soil (gē), seeds, and produce (4:1). In speaking of the parable of the mustard seed, Jesus asks, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it?” (4:30) Jesus has shared his joint knowledge with the people connected with the earth. Knowing their fragile existence, he was in solidarity with peasants and the poor. The empire and landlord elites exploited labor and extracted produce, which endangered people’s survival and health.

Jesus’ tables

Then, Jesus appears to provide health care and food for the sick and the poor. Tax collectors and sinners were socially alienated and stigmatized. They “recline” (eat) with Jesus at the table because “[T]hose who are well have no need (chreia) of a physician but those who are sick” (2:15, 17). The religious authorities regarded Jesus’ practise of eating with such unclean people as a violation of the purity law. For Jesus, however, what is more important than the laws is to meet human needs: “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need (chreia) of food...?” (2:25). Food is for survival. Jesus cares about human needs and wellness.

It is not coincidental that Mark contrasts Herod’s banquet and Jesus’ table set in the wilderness (6:30–44). Jesus sees a great crowd (ochlos). He has compassion for them because “they were like sheep without a shepherd” (v. 34). It seems like Jesus knows what has just happened at Herod’s table. But these people are hungry in a desert place. While Jesus’ disciples suggest sending them away to “buy” bread for themselves (6:36), Jesus urges, “You give them (something) to eat.” It would cost “two hundred denarii” to buy bread to feed the hungry ochlos (v. 37).

9. The Greek word (*synanakeimai*), indicating the posture of eating, is rendered “his guests” or “those who sat with him” in most English translations.



The Five Thousand by Eularia Clarke (1962) (from the Methodist Modern Art Collection, UK) ©Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes.

We often hear that one denarius was the daily wage paid to a worker in the first century (cf. Matt. 20:2), but it is not an absolute truth. While the subsistence cost was 200 denarii a year in Rome, in Palestine the minimum subsistence cost was estimated at 30 denarii per year. On the other hand, Roman magistrate Pliny the Younger, alive when the Gospel was written, had an estimated yearly income was 300,000 denarii.

In this situation of extreme disparity, what is most important for Jesus is to meet basic human needs. For Jesus, food is not a commodity but a commons. Even the Roman Empire provided public subsistence support by distributing wheat and cash donations, but only for its citizens in Rome and Italy. At Jesus' table in the wilderness, however, "all ate and were filled (fed; chortazō)" (6:42). Not only this, but

there is also a surplus of food. Only the number of men who ate the bread was counted, and they were five thousand. Most probably, this first feeding occurred in the Jewish territory. Mark depicts such an extraordinary feeding once again in the wilderness, this time in Gentile territory (8:1–10). Again, he is moved with compassion toward the ochlos who are an ethnic other to him. Jesus' compassion crosses geographical and ethnic borders and is toward the ochlos who have had nothing to eat while being with him for three days. Jesus is concerned that if he sends "them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way" (vv. 2–3). Along with the importance of a series of Jesus' actions—taking the loaves, blessing or giving thanks, breaking, and giving in these two feedings (6:40, 8:10), what is highlighted is the role of the disciples in distributing food. As a result, four thousand people in the Gentile region eat and are fed (*chortazō*), again with a food surplus (8:8–9).

The children's crumbs under the table

Between these feedings, Jesus debates with the Pharisees and some of the scribes from Jerusalem regarding eating with defiled hands (7:1–15). When the Pharisees challenge Jesus for his disciples' eating grain heads on the Sabbath as a violation of the law (2:23–28), we can assume that following Jesus meant living in poverty. Again, these local elites criticized the disciples for offending the purity law. Yet, for Jesus, the purity codes are less important than filling his disciples' hunger. In contrast, what defiles a person is from the human heart—the elites' evil intentions to pursue their greed and exploit others (7:20–23). After this dispute, Jesus goes to the region of Tyre and encounters the Syrophoenician woman whose daughter is possessed by an unclean spirit (vv. 24–30). While much ink has been spilled over Jesus' harsh remark to this Gentile woman, we want to focus on the word, "feed" (*chortazō*), used once again. Jesus says, "Let the children be fed first," as if he forgets the ochlos have been fed in the wilderness (6:30–44).

24 From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre.[f] He entered a house and did

not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, 25 but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. 26 Now the woman was a gentile, of Syrophoenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 27 He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." 28 But she answered him, "Sir,[g] even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." 29 Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." 30 And when she went home, she found the child lying on the bed and the demon gone.

An account of the remarkable event of Jesus' free distribution of food for the Jewish multitude might have been circulated, leading the Syrophoenician woman to cry out to Jesus: If free food amounting to 200 denarii was distributed to five thousand adult men who are Jesus' children or guests at his table, "Why not my girl child?" When Jesus moves further in the Gentile region after this incident, he feeds, or shares the children's crumbs with, other children. The concept of food as a commons overcomes the mentality and practise of "feeding only my children."

Reading the Gospel of Mark through the lens of biopolitics today, we observe how the lives of people, particularly the poor women and children, were threatened by the empire, the temple economy, and the elites. There is another unnamed woman in Mark's story. Jesus sits down against the temple treasury and watches the ochlos putting money into it (12:41–44). While many rich people put in large sums, a poor widow puts in the two copper coins out of her poverty, which is all she has—literally, "all her living" (*bios* in Greek). Whereas Herod's banquet reveals the unjust political economy as Rome's client state, in this and preceding stories, Jesus denounces both the Temple by depicting the poor widow's life (*bios*) thrown into its treasury and the local elites (i.e., the scribes) for "devour[ing] widow's houses" (12:38–40). The woman with bleeding for twelve years had been exploited by many

physicians and “spent” all she had (5:25–26: cf. bios, Luke 8:43). When basic necessities for human life like food and health care are commodities that one can “buy,” the lives of the poor are most vulnerable.

“What does it mean to “rise to life” in these situations—both in Jesus’ time and our time?”

in nutrients from food, produce energy, and carry out functions required to sustain life. During interphase, the cell performs its daily operations without replicating or reproducing. Life that thrives requires this phase in the cell cycle.

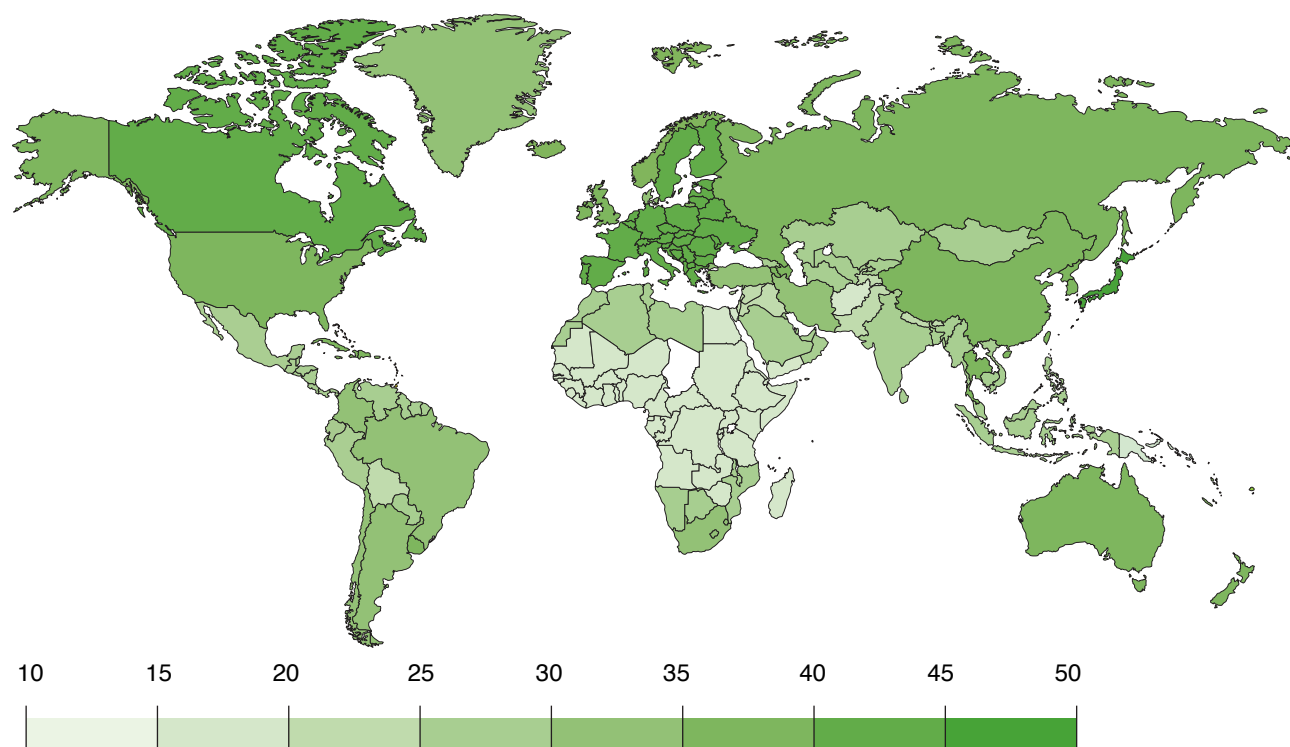
The Gospel illustrates a similar imagery of life. While the seed sown in good soil bears fruit and multiply produces, it also takes time until it sprouts and grows: the sower scatters seed on the ground (gē) and sleeps and rises night and day (4:20, 26–27). Those who work the land patiently know the mystery of nature. While doing the work of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we perceive the mystery of life, including human and non-human.

Interphase: To Rise to Life

Interestingly, “interphase” is a biological term denoting the resting time for a cell to prepare itself to duplicate. The human body is composed of trillions of cells, which take

In our reading today, Jesus invites us to see the mystery of life in and beyond the biblical text. In the previous Bible study, a way of revisioning the mission was to practise “seeing God and signs of the kingdom of heaven in

WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE LIVE: MEDIAN AGE BY COUNTRY, 2021



Source: Ritchie and Roser (2022), based on data from UN DESA, Population Division (2022).



Questions for Discussion

1. Even the Roman Empire was responsible for supplying its own citizens and soldiers—and only its own citizen and soldiers, with food. In contrast, Jesus invited everyone to the table, particularly those hungry and in need.

Imagine what the people sitting at Jesus' table looked like (cf. 2:16; 3:7–10) and discuss who should be invited to Jesus' feast today.

They may include farm families and workers who feed most of the world but remain hungry, just like peasants in Jesus' time.

2. Local farming and indigenous communities lack food sovereignty—the right to healthy and culturally appropriate food. The industrial food system has also threatened indigenous knowledges and practises of agriculture. Jesus asks, “What parable will we use (to see God's reign now)?”

What do we learn from Jesus' teaching using shared knowledge and wisdom?

3. Young people, approximately 1.2 billion, are most vulnerable to the current broken food systems; the majority of the youth population live in poorer countries in South Asia, East Asia, and Africa.¹¹

How can we empower young people to transform their inherited, broken food systems or distributive systems and participate in public decision-making that will affect their future?



Creation.” Jesus' words in Mark 4:11 deepen its meaning: “[T]o you the mystery [mystērion] of the kingdom of God has been given.”

This mystery is the broken body of Jesus.¹⁰

Recognizing that poverty, hunger, and illness would be pandemic in exploitive political economies, Jesus finally decided to feed people with his broken body: “Take, this is my body” (14:22).

At the moment of the interphase of our communal life, where do you see the mystery of life in the world where the bios of the vulnerable—individually and collectively—are continuously threatened and thrown into the dominant political economy? Who are today's beheaded John, the hemorrhaging woman, the Syrophenician woman and her daughter, the poor widow, prostitutes, the sick, the possessed, or the hungry, migrating ochlos? Buying bread for the poor or pain medicine for the sick is insufficient. We are invited to perceive the mystery in broken bodies. To rise to life, to build life-flourishing communities, we discern those bodies have the agency to be alive and the power to resist the peremptory power that controls bodies and lives.



4. Contemporary Christians tend to think Jesus' feeding of the multitude is a “miracle” story, and “daily bread for all” sounds utopian.

What are the challenges to imagining and building life-affirming communities where basic human needs (e.g., water, air, shelter, clothing, education, etc.) are met?

How can CWM and local churches organise ways of living and managing resources sustainably to build flourishing communities?



10. See Jin Young Choi, *Postcolonial Discipleship of Embodiment: An Asian and Asian American Feminist Reading of the Gospel of Mark*. *Postcolonialism and Religions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

11. <https://www.globalhungerindex.org/issues-in-focus/2023.html>



ASSEMBLY REPORT 2024

WORKSHOPS





Education Transforming Power

Rev. Dr Seforosa Carroll

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The “Education Transforming Power” workshop focused on understanding and reshaping power dynamics within community relationships, emphasising the importance of discernment in addressing how power is held, shared, or misused. The workshop challenged participants to contemplate education’s role in transforming these dynamics to align with divine purposes, presenting a choice between perpetuating existing power structures or utilizing education for reform

and transformation. The workshop advocated for shifts in pedagogy, curriculum, and educational objectives to promote liberative practices that moved beyond Eurocentric perspectives. It invited participants to engage with intersectionality, valuing the insights of marginalized voices, and to co-create a new educational agenda that fosters flourishing lives for all.

To effectively harness the transformative power of education in changing power dynamics, participants examined the importance for educators and institutions to understand the historical and contemporary contexts that influence current educational practices. They critically examined traditional teaching methods, as these can sometimes perpetuate existing inequities and power imbalances. The real challenge extends beyond simply sharing knowledge; it involves creating environments

where diverse voices, especially those from marginalized groups, are actively included in shaping discussions and perspectives.

Adopting the lens of intersectionality is one of many meaningful approaches in transforming educational power structures. This perspective helps educators analyze how various social identities intersect to create unique experiences of privilege and oppression. By incorporating these insights into educational frameworks, they can gain a clearer understanding of the complexities of power relations. This approach also encourages conversations about unequal power dynamics and deepens awareness of community dynamics and relationships. Moreover, rethinking education in this way promotes a curriculum that reflects diverse histories and cultures, validating students' unique identities and experiences.

To envision education as a true catalyst for change, it is essential for educational leaders to develop an agenda focused on social justice, equity, and community involvement. This involves designing curricula that honor local contexts and Indigenous knowledge, advancing teaching methods that foster collaboration and critical thinking, and making institutional commitments to inclusivity.

Additionally, educational organizations should prioritize ongoing reflection and accountability to ensure alignment with broader humanitarian goals. Churches and faith-based groups can play a significant role in this transformative process by advocating for educational practices rooted in spiritual and moral values that emphasize justice and community. Together, these efforts can create educational spaces that empower communities and foster personal growth, turning them into environments that embody the shared values they aspire to achieve.



Gender: Leadership and Power

Rev. Dr Minwoo Oh

PIM Mission Partner

World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)

The workshop on gender, leadership, and power delved into the complex interplay of these elements, highlighting the various injustices that pervade both economic structures and social hierarchies. Participants engaged in meaningful discussions that illuminated how gender roles, shaped by cultural and societal influences, often perpetuate inequities within both the church and the wider community. By reflecting on their personal experiences, attendees uncovered the procedural and experiential dimensions of gender injustice, particularly how hierarchical leadership models marginalized certain groups while legitimizing the dominance of others. This exploration underscored the urgency of transforming these paradigms for a more

equitable future.

Central to the conversations was the idea of gender justice as a collective mission that transcended individual concerns, fostering relationships grounded in respect and mutual accountability. Participants envisioned a church and society where leadership embodies a “power-with” approach rather than a “power-over” dynamic. Through shared reflections, the workshop aimed to equip attendees with the tools to navigate challenges in their leadership roles, empowering them to advocate for gender-sensitive practices that promote flourishing for all individuals. As participants embraced the call to dismantle systems of gender injustice, they recognized their integral role in fostering holistic spiritual engagement and advancing the mission of reconciliation within their communities.

The workshop examined the intricate relationship between gender, leadership, and power, emphasising the profound influence of inclusive leadership in creating environments

that prioritize justice and equity. By embracing a collaborative approach, we can enhance decision-making processes while steadfastly committing to dismantling the patriarchal systems that have historically marginalized women and other underrepresented groups within both the church and society at large. This paradigm shift not only amplifies diverse voices but also fosters spaces where equity can flourish.

Achieving gender justice necessitates a critical reassessment of existing leadership practices and the frameworks that underpin them. In discussions, workshop participants challenged traditional notions of authority that often exclude marginalized voices. They also recognized the connection between gender justice and broader social and economic issues. The underrepresentation

of women in leadership roles is often linked to economic disparities and social injustices, such as gender-based violence and wage gaps. To tackle these challenges effectively, we must explore strategies that ensure equitable access to leadership opportunities across all sectors. By implementing practical frameworks like gender audits and developing gender-sensitive policies, we can cultivate inclusive environments within churches and communities. This workshop served not only as a theoretical discourse but also as a call to action, encouraging participants to become advocates for change in their own contexts and contribute to a transformative legacy.



Racism, Power and Privilege

Rev. Philip Vinod Peacock

Executive Secretary for Justice and Witness
World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)

The workshop “Racism, Power and Privilege” addressed the ways in which racism constructed social hierarchies that granted power to some individuals while disenfranchising others. Participants reflected on how recent incidents, such as police brutality against black individuals in the United States and beyond, had brought renewed attention to the ongoing problem of racism and spurred the development of new anti-racism initiatives. The workshop encouraged attendees to consider how these

recent events were part of a larger historical context rooted in colonial legacies and racial supremacy. During the session, the role of the church in perpetuating racism was critically examined, highlighting that both its practices and theology contributed to racial discrimination. The workshop reminded participants of the historical complicity of religious institutions in systems like apartheid, which were justified through reformed theology. The event emphasized how Christian unity and communion continued to be challenged by racial issues. To deepen understanding, the workshop provided an interactive space through a participatory, performative reading of the Hagar narratives from Genesis 16 and 21, encouraging attendees to explore the complexities of racism, power, and privilege in a contemporary context.

During the sessions, participants discussed racism as a construct embedded deeply in our societal frameworks, perpetuating a hierarchy that privileges certain groups while marginalizing others. The horrific instances of police brutality against minorities have illuminated this inequality, causing widespread outrage and prompting a reevaluation of systemic structures. Recent events have catalyzed not only public discourse on racism but also concrete anti-racism initiatives that seek to dismantle these ingrained systems of power. Understanding racism today requires recognizing its multifaceted nature—operating both overtly, as seen in acts of violence, and subtly, through structural inequities that privilege one group over another.

The theological implications of racism within the church are particularly significant, as the faith community has historically served as both a purveyor and challenger of racial hierarchies. The troubling truth is that many religious doctrines have, at times, been manipulated to support racial oppression, evident in systems like apartheid, which were justified by misinterpretations of scripture. This complicity not only challenges the integrity of the church's mission but also undermines its claim to unity in Christ. As the church reflects on its role in perpetuating or addressing racism, it must confront the uncomfortable truth of its historical and contemporary complicity.

The Hagar narratives from Genesis 16 and 21 offer a poignant lens through which to explore these themes of power and privilege.

In these texts, the figures of Hagar and Sarah embody the complexity of marginalization and privilege, with Hagar representing those who are oppressed. The performative reading of these narratives provided an interactive and transformative space to engage with the lived experiences of marginalized communities, allowing participants to reflect on the intersections of race, gender, and power. Through this engagement, they gained a deeper understanding of the realities faced by those at the margins and the ways their voices can be amplified.

Ultimately, understanding racism today involves not just intellectual engagement but also a commitment to action. The dialogue initiated through awareness conversation can lead to constructive steps toward dismantling systemic racism and redistributing power. As participants reflected on the Hagar narratives and engaged with their implications, they were invited not only to witness the pain of others but to become advocates for justice and equality in faith communities. This is a call for transformation that seeks to honor the dignity of all life, encouraging a move toward a more equitable future grounded in genuine respect and communal support.



Caste: Discrimination and Power

Rev. Samuel Mall

Assistant Professor in the Department of Christian Theology, Bishop's College, India

Caste is an integral part of Indian culture and its social relations. It divides society hierarchically, thereby creating and sustaining inequality. It normalises oppression of those who are at the bottom of social structure. However, the rigidness of caste identities and the nature of caste discrimination have undergone a considerable change. Therefore, it is obligatory to understand the modern complexities of caste oppression because it operates at dangerous levels affecting political, social, economic, and religious life of the downtrodden.

A couple of developments that have altered caste relations in India are the rise of religious nationalism and neoliberalism. Hindu religious

nationalism, defined as “Hindutva” has become a dominant political ideology that is defining the social, cultural, economic, and political process in India, while neoliberalism aims at enhancing capitalist interest and also reduction/elimination of state social programmes that benefit the working class. While neoliberalism blurs caste boundaries, Hindutva strengthens religious boundaries. As a result, Dalits are absorbed into the caste structure and it becomes easy for the dominant communities to reinforce caste ideology by promoting communal projects that encourage religious animosity and separation. The context of new economic order resembles such an ideology as it has resulted in strengthening oppressive hierarchies that produce inequalities, oppression, and discrimination. Therefore, religious nationalism and neoliberalism become perfect allies.

Both neoliberalism and Hindutva are similar ideologies and entail in themselves an aspect of fascism. Both neoliberalism and religious nationalism have been challenged in India.

However, there is an inherent weakness on how both these ideologies have been confronted. They both are considered diverse ideologies and thereby neoliberalism invites only economic critique while Hindutva invites religious critique. Considering both, Hindutva and neoliberalism as separate ideologies divides resistance into two different and unrelated approaches and thus both remain unchallenged. Such is the power of discrimination.

In such a context, “Rise to Life” means that we seek alternative strategies of liberation that seek justice in a complex world where diverse discriminative powers intersect each other to produce an overall hegemony on the downtrodden. Therefore, this workshop sought to explore potential avenues that not only help analyse systems and structures from below but also helps develop effective transformative social action.

The workshop addressed the complexities of caste discrimination in India, emphasising its historical implications in shaping social interactions and contributing to systemic inequality, particularly for marginalized communities. While caste identities have been traditionally rigid, recent societal transformations necessitate a reevaluation of caste oppression as it now permeates various aspects of life in political, social, economic, and religious spheres. This contemporary understanding reflects the ongoing necessity to address the nuanced ways caste affects those at the lower end of the hierarchy.

Participants discussed the concept of “Rise to Life” as an alternative strategy for liberation, emphasising the need for justice in the face of intersecting discriminatory powers. The workshop aimed to explore avenues for analyzing oppressive systems from the perspective of the marginalized and to develop effective transformative actions. The ultimate objective was to foster a deeper understanding of caste dynamics and encourage proactive efforts to dismantle the intricate web of caste oppression, striving for a more just and equitable society.



Dismantling Militarised Empire

Prof. Jude Lal Fernando

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Trinity College Dublin

The workshop “Dismantling Militarised Empire” examined the pervasive impact of the imperialist war paradigm, which prioritised military solutions over peaceful negotiations in resolving global conflicts. It highlighted how millions had suffered due to this approach, becoming victims of violence, displacement, and exploitation. Attendees reflected on the harsh realities faced by those pushed from their homelands, now turned into zones for geo-strategic gain, marked by increased surveillance and military presence. The discussion underscored how regions were transformed into fortified war fronts, with tightened borders and seas dominated by naval forces, while aerial and space technologies expanded the reach of imperial control.

Participants of the workshop critically assessed the notion of “security” touted by the empire and its allied states, questioning whose security was truly being protected. They explored the devastating intergenerational impact of militarisation and challenged the concept of the empire’s global dominance as akin to the Golden Calf, symbolic of false promises of peace. The session aimed to empower attendees to advocate for life-affirming alternatives, encouraging reflection on how to counteract the false narratives of military dominance and war, and promote genuine peace through creative, community-based approaches. Emphasis was placed on discerning spiritual movements and fostering negotiations that uplift all life, striving against the cycle of war and destruction. In the pursuit of dismantling a militarised empire, participants discussed the importance of confronting an imperialist security framework that prioritizes a war paradigm over a true peace paradigm. This mindset has inflicted severe trauma on countless lives, perpetuating cycles of violence and dehumanisation that has resulted in maimed bodies and widespread

sexual violence. An overwhelming numbers of widows and orphans have been left stripped of their dignity and rights. Millions who were uprooted from their homes and ancestral territories found themselves thrust into precarious situations reminiscent of historical colonial struggles, reframed to fit modern geopolitical tensions.

The transformation of once-fertile lands into militarised zones and extractive landscapes underscored a global distortion driven by imperial ambitions. In this altered reality, a security apparatus fortified with advanced surveillance technologies, barriers, and military installations created a world where violence is normalized and human life subordinated to imperial priorities. Refugees fleeing devastation faced the harsh realities of border militarisation, trapped in desolate regions under constant threats of aerial attacks or enduring perilous journeys across treacherous seas in search of safety.

This complex dynamic reveals an elaborate web of geopolitical reconfigurations, where military support and security assurances served not as liberation but as mechanisms for enforcing imperial mandates. Oceans turned into contested battlegrounds, and skies became arenas for extending warfare beyond physical borders, aiming to silence dissent. This ongoing militarisation presented itself as a quest for absolute power and echoed ancient idolatries while masquerading as a promise of security. The challenge ahead was to advocate for a narrative centered on life and justice, emphasising collective efforts toward peace through dialogue and empathy. The ultimate goal is to build a society where justice and coexistence triumph over dominance and despair.



Discovering the Historical Collections of the Council for World Mission and Their Potential for Future Research

Mrs Jo Ichimura

Archivist

SOAS Library, London, United Kingdom

Housed at SOAS Library, University of London, since 1973, the CWM archives are a unique resource for the study of the global spread of the Christian faith over the last 200 years, used by academic researchers, family historians, churches, and communities from around the world. Spanning the whole history of the

organisation from the foundation of the London Missionary Society in 1795, to the creation of the Council for World Mission in 1977 and its early decades, the archive comprises over 3,000 boxes of letters, diaries, reports, minutes, photographs, and maps, in addition to a library of printed books, pamphlets, periodicals, vernacular texts, and translations. This workshop was led by CWM Archivist Jo Ichimura, who provided an overview of these historical collections, including case studies on research and use of the materials.

There was also an opportunity for participants to learn how to use catalogues and explore online digitised materials. The workshop ended with a question-and-answer session on the collections and the management of archives more broadly, which also provided an opportunity for participants to consider and share ideas around the potential of the collections for future research.

The workshop aimed to familiarize participants with the collections' significance and practical applications. Among the key highlights:

Research opportunities: The archives are not merely historical documents; they play a crucial role in understanding the spread of Christianity globally and provide valuable insights into important social issues such as the legacies of slavery.

Digital access: Thanks to ongoing digitalization efforts, many materials will be accessible online, making them easier for academic researchers and community historians to explore.

Hands-on learning: Participants were trained on how to navigate the online catalogues and search for specific materials, enhancing their research capabilities.

Community engagement: Attendees discussed how the archives can benefit their congregations, especially for churches with limited historical records. The CWM resources can help them explore their church histories more thoroughly and honor the legacies of missionaries who have participated in their communities.

Future contributions: There's a call for member churches to contribute their own historical records to the archive, ensuring that local histories are preserved and accessible. The suggestion of creating a project to compile historical records from different churches to build a central repository underscored the collaborative potential of this initiative.

Overall, this workshop not only showcased the historical depth of the CWM archives but also envisioned a future where these resources can facilitate deeper research and understanding within various communities around the world.



Radical Hospitality as Evangelism

Rev. Dr Kenneth R. Ross

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Dean of Postgraduate Studies
Zomba Theological University, Malawi

The workshop programme centered on the concept of radical hospitality and its significance within the context of Christian faith and evangelism. Emphasizing the biblical call to care for the foreigner and stranger, the workshop challenged the prevailing trend of protection and exclusion in the world by advocating for a radical openness to the other. Participants were encouraged to resist the injustice often imposed on those in need of hospitality and to embrace a new form of evangelism that is characterized by humility, generosity, and mutuality.

The workshop proposed that radical hospitality represents a rediscovery of authentic evangelism, offering a transformative approach

to engagement. By prioritizing the mutuality of giving and receiving, the programme aimed to redefine evangelism as a collaborative and reciprocal process rather than one characterized by arrogance or unequal power dynamics. It advocated for a shift towards a form of evangelism that is marked by vulnerability, humility, and a genuine openness to learning from others, signaling a departure from the traditional perceptions of evangelism and emphasising the shared experience of encountering and learning from one another. Overall, the workshop sought to instill the values of radical hospitality and genuine openness as the hallmarks of true evangelism in today's world.

The concept of "Radical Hospitality as Evangelism" focused on the current societal tendencies toward exclusion and protectionism by advocating for a biblical vision rooted in hospitality. This philosophy stands in stark contrast to the contemporary view, where privilege often results in barriers and a sense of threat posed by the "other." In the biblical

narrative, followers of God are frequently commanded to care for strangers, highlighting a profound commitment to welcome and generosity.

In the Letter to the Hebrews, believers are reminded of the importance of hospitality, which can reveal divine encounters. This idea that hospitality is foundational to faith illustrates that welcoming others is not just about kindness but also serves a divine purpose. As modern believers engage in this practice, they also protest against the injustices faced by those in need.

The workshop posited that redefining evangelism through the lens of radical hospitality could revitalize its meaning in today's context, moving beyond the negative connotations often associated with it—such as arrogance and coercion. By embracing hospitality, believers can foster an environment of mutual learning, recognition, and openness, where the exchange of gifts and knowledge becomes central.

Thus, the call to vulnerability, humility, generosity, and a spirit of hospitality may redefine true evangelism, emphasising that in the act of welcoming others, we, too, are welcomed into deeper understandings of God's love and salvation. This shift in perspective can transform evangelism into a shared journey of faith, where every encounter enriches both the giver and the receiver.



Affirming Life-Flourishing Spiritualities

Rev. Dr Amelia Koh-Butler

Mission Secretary - Education, Formation and Empowerment,
Council for World Mission

As followers of the Tri-une God, we hold that life flourishes when it is centred on God and not ourselves. Recognising that life arises from relationship with God, we learn from the Bible, and see modelled across historic traditions, the importance of spiritual practices. With the Pentecostal/charismatic movements of the 20th century, reformed/evangelical churches have worked to define which faith habits are core for us. Research from the last 25 years has prompted many churches to highlight how their particular habits grow individuals and communities in Christ-like-ness. These spiritual practices serve to nurture and nourish disciples and form them for participation in God's mission. This workshop looked at different spiritual practices and how attention to these inspires and strengthens churches and missions. Participants looked at the core

list for churches today (prayer, reading of scripture, sacraments, giving, and service), scriptural examples (fasting, singing, sacrifice of praise, group discussion, healing, anointing) and expanded into extensions (pilgrimage, creativity, meditation, labyrinth, and many more...)

The workshop emphasized the crucial relationship between spiritual practices and the flourishing of life centered on God. Recognizing that life arises from this relationship, participants explored how these practices, shaped by biblical teachings and historical traditions, nourished discipleship and enhanced community engagement in God's mission.

Key themes recognized from the workshop:

Core practices:

Prayer. Both individual and communal prayer helps to foster a deeper connection with God. **Reading Scripture.** Engaging with the Bible guides believers in their spiritual journeys. **Sacraments:** Observing sacraments is always vital for reinforcing faith and community ties. **Giving and service.** Acts of generosity were discussed and seen as integral to living out faith in action.

Scriptural foundations:

Practices like fasting, singing, healing, and anointing provide scriptural benchmarks for spiritual growth and community life. Emphasizing traditional practices that align with biblical teachings aids in the formation of Christ-like characteristics within individuals and communities.

Expanded practices:

Additional practices such as pilgrimage, meditation, and creative expressions were encouraged to deepen spiritual experiences and community engagement.

Inspiration and strengthening. The workshop highlighted how attention to spiritual disciplines fortified church life and mission work.

Community growth. Attendees were encouraged to identify and cultivate practices that fostered both personal and communal growth in spiritual maturity.

Overall, the workshop aimed to equip participants with practical tools for nurturing their faith and engaging in meaningful action within their communities, framing spiritual disciplines as pathways to deeper communion with God and active stewardship of creation.



Indigenous Vision - Transformed World

Rev. Dr Seforosa Carroll

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Mission and its ties to colonialism and capitalism through the doctrine of discovery continue to impact Indigenous peoples globally in different ways. As such our missiological and theological understandings and practices need always to be open to ongoing critique, decolonisation, and reconstruction as a journey of reconciliation, truth telling, justice, healing, and peace that is wholistically integrated. A critical and key aspect of this process is the active engagement and involvement of Indigenous peoples, their experiences, insights, and wisdom. This workshop explored the Indigenous vision for a transformed world

through the perspective of wholistic liberation and shared global ecumenical Indigenous concepts. Wholistic liberation is in essence reimagining an alternative theological narrative and worldview that values Indigenous epistemologies as sources that can guide and shape our theologies and mission.

This workshop invited an openness and willingness to listen, engage, and consequently act in ways that bring about transformative change.

In the context of the ongoing journey toward healing and justice, the workshop emphasized the crucial relationship between Indigenous mission and the historical impacts of colonialism and capitalism.

The workshop was not merely an academic exercise, but a deeply rooted commitment to weave together three essential threads:

Indigenous wisdom and creation. We are invited to recognize that liberation is intrinsically linked to the healing of the Earth. This perspective draws upon Indigenous understandings of kinship between humanity and creation, highlighting the ecological dimensions that are often sidelined in traditional theological discourses.

Interconnection and rights. The interdependence between securing a sustainable future for all and the affirmation of Indigenous rights was highlighted. By advocating for the restoration of these rights, the workshop connected justice for Indigenous communities with broader ecological and societal sustainability, affirming that true progress benefits all.

Power of agency. Empowering Indigenous peoples as active agents in their liberation is paramount. This principle counters historical narratives that portray Indigenous communities as passive victims. Instead, agency encourages recognition of the resilience and leadership within Indigenous communities, asserting that their knowledge is critical for enacting meaningful change.

This journey toward a transformed world is not only about voicing Indigenous concerns but also about laying the groundwork for collaborative initiatives that foster transformative change in both local and global contexts. In doing so, it cultivates a richer, more inclusive theological framework that reflects the values and experiences of Indigenous communities, ultimately contributing to a transformed world.



Missional Congregation – Witnessing in Public Space

Rev. Jasmijn Dijkman

The workshop explored the profound questions of what it means for Christians to bear witness to the God of justice in places of deep inequality, to assert the presence and priority of the Prince of Peace where war is prepared, and to hear the word of the Lord in the temples of mammon. It was argued that the climate crisis represents the culminating crisis of the depredations of the socio-economic system known as Babylon, the devastating

consequence of the ruthless exploitation of the planet and its inhabitants for the benefit of a privileged few. This crisis had prompted the emergence of protest and resistance movements across the globe.

Participants discussed the liturgical protest that emerged in the Christian wing of the climate justice movement in The Netherlands. Liturgical worship was recognized as providing a space to lament present and impending loss, to confess sins, and to unapologetically assert the Gospel message of God's ultimate victory over the powers of darkness. Moreover, it was understood that such liturgical worship profoundly shapes Christian communities. The workshop aimed to explore these practices of protest and public worship, and to share stories of how they foster mutual accompaniment and solidarity.

The workshop focused on both the theological and practical dimensions of bearing witness to God's justice amid societal inequities and environmental crises. Participants delved into the meaning of witnessing to a just God in regions characterized by stark injustice while also emphasising the significance of the peace in conflict zones. The workshop aimed to empower participants to engage meaningfully in public witness, allowing them to connect faith with action in a contemporary context.

A key discussion point involved reflecting on the implications of responding to the divine call within a consumer-driven world, often described as "the temple of mammon." This reflection was especially pertinent in light of the climate crisis, which was seen as the result of exploitative socio-economic practices likened to Babylon. The environmental degradation stemming from the relentless exploitation of both the earth and its inhabitants catalyzed widespread protests and movements of resistance globally, challenging participants to understand their role in this struggle.

The workshop emphasized the practice of liturgical protest that emerged within the Christian climate justice movement, particularly in the Netherlands. This approach blended worship with activism, creating sacred spaces for lament, confession, and the proclamation of the Gospel.

By highlighting the historical link between "protest" and "Protestant," participants were encouraged to explore various forms of public worship, share experiences, and foster solidarity within their communities. The aim was to inspire attendees to enact their faith through concrete actions, supported by meaningful theological reflections, ultimately addressing urgent social and environmental issues with prophetic urgency.



Transformative Ecumenism: Mission from the Margins

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Council for World Mission

Rev. Dr Jaeshik Shin

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“What does the Lord require of you?” (Micah 6:8). Transformative Ecumenism attempts to reimagine ecumenism in response to the unsustainability of the current global dynamics and in eagerness to nurture new opportunities for transformative Christian presence. The increasing diversity, complexity, and global nature of contemporary Christian presence indicates the need for new strategies to inspire faith-based transformative responses that resonate with people’s yearnings for justice and life. While building on the contributions of the past, this step forward is toward a troubling of the waters and a listening to the wind by those daring to ask uncomfortable questions in faithfulness to God’s call and in anticipation of a new ecumenical future.



Transformative Ecumenism represents a vital shift in the landscape of Christian engagement, marked by a collective movement towards justice and life emanating from the margins of society. This paradigm, grounded in the prophetic question posed in Micah 6:8, urges believers to reflect deeply on their responsibilities in the face of contemporary challenges. The foundations of this initiative call for a theological education that prioritizes the transformation of the world over traditional ecclesiastical structures, emphasising the necessity of aligning curricula with the core values of justice and sustainability.

Participants in this movement recognize the rich tapestry of diverse faith traditions and the urgent need for collaboration across these faith and society. CWM, through its commitment to Transformative Ecumenism, endeavors to create inclusive spaces where the voices of marginalized communities can be elevated. By valuing the insights and experiences from the edges of society, this initiative seeks to establish a confluence of movements that celebrate shared struggles against systemic injustices, such as poverty, discrimination, and environmental degradation.

Moreover, Transformative Ecumenism challenges the limitations of traditional ecumenical dialogues that often overlook the pressing realities faced by those at society's margins. It acknowledges that justice cannot be achieved without inclusivity, and unity must embrace diversity to authentically reflect the multifaceted web of life created by God. By fostering partnerships between various faith communities, civil society organizations, and grassroots movements, Transformative Ecumenism strives to inspire collective action that aligns with the divine call for justice and wholeness in creation.

In the workshop, as participants engaged in transformative practices, they prioritised mentorship, intergenerational collaboration, and the active participation of women and youth within church leadership. The focus was on dismantling hierarchies and fostering participatory approaches to ministry that reflect Christ's model of servitude and solidarity with the marginalized. This shift not only revolutionizes ecclesial structures but also emphasizes the importance of a collective spiritual journey that transcends institutional divisions.

In summary, Transformative Ecumenism calls for a radical re-imagination of ecumenical identity, seeking to empower all voices in a shared quest for justice and life. It is a vibrant, decentralized movement rooted in the understanding that God's Spirit is alive in the struggles and aspirations of people everywhere. By actively engaging with the complexities of modern society, this movement aspires to forge new pathways towards a future defined by justice, respect, and flourishing for all of creation.



Mission in Digitalised World: An Ethics of Artificial Intelligence from a CWM Perspective

Rev. Dr Young-cheol Cheon

Mission Secretary - Communications,
Council for World Mission

Introduction

Digital media, now deeply intertwined with artificial intelligence (AI), is rapidly transforming our world, presenting both opportunities and challenges. This transformation is leading to unprecedented paradigm shifts in politics, economics, society, and culture. Digital media fosters cyberspace, a virtual world intricately linked to our physical space. In the digitalised world, people are carrying out their social

activities online. People live, meet, and communicate with other people in cyberspace.

However, the digitalised world also brings persistent challenges such as digital divides, widening inequalities, educational disparities, gender injustices, and increasing privacy and security concerns. In addition, the potential for AI to be controlled and manipulated by political entities and a handful of transnational corporations raises profound concerns. This workshop aimed to critically examine the ethical issues emerging in our digitalised world. It sought to propose and discuss alternative ethical frameworks from a CWM perspective to address and overcome these challenges.

The concept of mission in a digitalized world necessitates a thorough exploration of the ethical implications arising from the pervasive influence of digital media and AI. As digital platforms become the primary space for social interaction and economic activity, the challenges they introduce are equally

significant. Digital divides, which separate those who have access to technology from those who do not, exacerbate existing inequalities in society.

Underrepresented groups often find themselves disproportionately affected, facing barriers in education, economic advancement, and even participation in civic duties.

To address these pressing issues, a robust framework of tax justice emerges as a vital component of economic discourse in the digital age. Tax justice advocates for equitable distribution of resources, ensuring that all individuals and communities contribute to and benefit from the economic opportunities created by digital technologies. The manipulation of wealth by large corporations, especially in the realm of AI and digital services, raises urgent questions about fairness and accountability in taxation. Undoubtedly, the profits generated in the digital economy must be fairly taxed to close the gaps in funding essential services, especially in education and health sectors. This calls for transformative policy adjustments to increase transparency and foster financial responsibility among multinational corporations. Furthermore, as AI technologies evolve, the ethical imperative to safeguard privacy and security grows more pressing. Participants were encouraged to develop alternative frameworks that prioritize human rights, ensuring that advancements in technology contribute positively to societal wellbeing.

The interplay between technology and community cannot be understated; Life-Flourishing Communication, as articulated in the CWM Communications Strategy, advocates for dialogue that enhances mutual understanding and nurtures relationships within digital contexts. This approach strives to build life-flourishing communities that resist the threats posed by exclusionary technology and the social isolation often perpetuated by its misuse.

In conclusion, addressing the challenges of the digitalized world through a lens of ethical responsibility not only requires critical analysis but also proactive solutions that empower marginalized communities. By advocating for tax justice and embracing ethical frameworks rooted in communal wellbeing, this mission can pave the way for a more equitable and thriving future amid the digital revolution. The workshop ultimately invited all to collaborate in envisioning a digital landscape where technology serves humanity, fostering justice, dignity, and sustainability.



Tax Justice for an Economy of Life

Rev. Philip Vinod Peacock

Executive Secretary for Justice and Witness
World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)

In the context of a global capital economy, taxation is a means for the redistribution of wealth. Only if the state takes an income can it provide and organize the needed goods and services to enable a healthy society that protects the life and livelihood of its citizens. Today, taxes provide much-needed public goods and services such as health and education and ensure that the most vulnerable in our society are taken care of. Taxation also allows the regulation of the overall economy by taxing the public “bads” – for instance, the taxing of greenhouse emissions. Particularly in the context of the climate crisis, just taxation can be used to find crucial funding to mitigate

the crisis by taxing those who pollute and using these funds to ameliorate the conditions of those suffering the most because of the climate crisis.

Since the 1970s, in the wake of economic liberalization and globalization, governments are increasing privatization and reducing social spending on health and education in an economic system that is increasingly driven by profit. This has been coupled with tax reductions for wealthy individuals and corporations. Most super-wealthy individuals and corporations pay little or no tax or a tax that is grossly disproportionate to income. Many dodge paying tax altogether by tax avoidance, tax evasion, and tax havens; this has caused a shortage of tax revenue and plunged public finances around the world into deficits.

The workshop aimed at investigating the complexities of tax justice within the context of a global capitalist framework. It positioned

taxation as a vital mechanism for wealth redistribution, highlighting the essential role of the state in generating revenue to deliver crucial goods and services. These services were foundational in safeguarding the health and wellbeing of all citizens, especially the most vulnerable populations.

In contemporary society, taxation plays an irreplaceable role in financing public goods, such as healthcare and education, which were central to collective wellbeing. Moreover, tax policy is critical for regulating the economy by levying charges on negative externalities—commonly defined as “public bads.” For example, instituting taxes on greenhouse gas emissions not only acts as a deterrent to pollution but also create vital funding to combat climate change. This mechanism ensures that those who harm the environment are held accountable for their actions, while simultaneously aiding those most impacted by environmental crises.

The workshop also incorporated a historical perspective, examining the evolution of tax policies since the 1970s, a period marked by economic liberalization and globalization. This era saw a shift towards increased privatization and cuts in social spending, prioritizing profit over public welfare. Dramatic tax reductions for the wealthy and corporations led to disproportionately low tax contributions relative to their income levels. Additionally, tax avoidance and the exploitation of tax havens significantly eroded public finances, resulting in widespread fiscal deficits that challenged the provision of social services.

Participants in the workshop explored the foundational principles of tax justice as crucial for fostering an economy that prioritizes life and ecological sustainability. One of the primary goals was to engage religious organizations and congregations in advocacy efforts that seek to promote economic and ecological justice. By deepening their understanding of tax justice, faith communities can play a pivotal role in calling for fair taxation policies that support those most in need.

A significant element of the workshop involved a fresh interpretation of the biblical story of Zacchaeus from the Gospel of Luke. Zacchaeus’ transformative relationship with Jesus, which led him to correct his past misdeeds by repaying those he had wronged, served as a poignant metaphor for redistributive justice. The ZacTAX campaign draws from this narrative, framing taxation as a radical act of justice aimed at restoring to the marginalized what had been unjustly taken. This initiative not only addresses economic inequality but also tackles climate injustice and reparations for the historical injustices of slavery.

Ultimately, the “Tax Justice for an Economy of Life” workshop called faith-based communities to engage in transformative advocacy. By confronting the systemic issues of economic and environmental injustice, we contribute meaningfully to the creation of a more equitable and sustainable world. Through collaborative efforts rooted in theological insights and economic principles, the workshop aimed to galvanize a collective commitment to justice that honors both human dignity and ecological integrity.



Building A Movement for Eco-Justice

Rev. Daimon Mkandawire

Mission Secretary - Ecology and Economy
Council for World Mission

The escalating environmental crisis, characterized by climate change, loss of biodiversity, pollution, and unsustainable exploitation of natural resources, presents an unprecedented challenge to the wellbeing of our planet and all its inhabitants. This crisis is not only a physical and economic issue but deeply rooted in moral and ethical dimensions, reflecting a profound disconnection from the principles of justice, stewardship, and care for creation. In response to this urgent situation, there is a growing need to mobilize communities around the world to advocate for eco-justice—a holistic approach that seeks to address environmental issues within the framework of social justice, ensuring a flourishing creation for all.

This workshop aimed to galvanize CWM communities into action for eco-justice by:

Educating on eco-justice. Enhancing understanding of eco-justice principles, including the interconnectedness of all life, the importance of biodiversity, and the need for sustainable practices that honor the Earth and its resources.

Inspiring action for environmental stewardship. Sharing successful case studies and strategies for community engagement in environmental conservation, climate action, and sustainable living.

Empowering churches for grassroots movements. Equipping participants with the tools and knowledge to mobilize their communities towards effective advocacy and action for eco-justice.

Fostering collaboration. Creating a network of activists, community leaders, and organizations committed to building a global movement for

eco-justice, facilitating the exchange of ideas, resources, and best practices.

In the face of the escalating environmental crisis, the call for eco-justice became more pressing than ever. Communities worldwide were urged to recognize that the challenges posed by climate change, loss of biodiversity, pollution, and the over-exploitation of natural resources were intertwined with deep-seated social inequities. The movement for eco-justice was framed not merely as an environmental issue but as a moral imperative that reflected a collective responsibility to foster both social and ecological wellbeing.

Educating on eco-justice was essential to effectively mobilizing communities and enhancing their understanding of eco-justice principles. This included emphasising the interconnectedness of all life, highlighting how the degradation of one part of the ecosystem reverberated through the entire web of life. Recognizing the importance of biodiversity proved crucial, as it underpinned the health of ecosystems and, by extension, human survival. The workshop provided comprehensive education on sustainable practices that not only honored the Earth but also empowered communities to make informed decisions

that protected their environment for future generations.

Sharing successful case studies served as a powerful tool for inspiration. Demonstrating tangible results from community engagement initiatives reinforced the idea that collective action could lead to meaningful change. Innovative strategies for environmental conservation, ranging from urban gardening to local renewable energy projects, offered blueprints for action.

By highlighting these exemplars, organizers galvanized participants and encouraged them to envision what was possible within their own communities.

The role of churches proved pivotal in this movement. By equipping congregations with the tools and knowledge to advocate for eco-justice, they became formidable grassroots movements. Resources were provided to help church leaders understand their ethical obligation to act as stewards of the Earth. The workshop included training on lobbying for eco-friendly policies, organizing community cleanup events, and integrating eco-justice teachings into sermons and outreach programs. Ultimately, building a movement for eco-justice becomes a holistic endeavor that thrived on education, inspiration, empowerment, and collaboration.



Community De(en)velopment Towards Transformation

Rev. Dr Lesmore Gibson Ezekiel

Director of Programmes (DOP)

All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC)

Today's world is entrenched in a development culture that perpetuates various forms of violence, injustices, and blatant disregard for the dignity of creation, especially evident in the brutality that characterizes human relations. There is a pressing need for a recalibration and reengineering of this culture to establish a framework that upholds the dignity of all creation through authentic justice for all. This imperative is driven by the acknowledgment of forces that pose existential threats to life, including but not limited to economic exploitation fueled by capitalism, political exclusion, climate change denial, gender-based violence, authoritarian regimes, and myriad other oppressive ideologies. The convergence of these forces renders the

world fragile, toxic, wounded, and seemingly fragmented, underscoring the urgency for fresh ecumenical perspectives to envision a new culture of development that champions dignified coexistence and rejects ideologies that obstruct flourishing relations within the ecosystem.

In light of these challenges, the workshop aimed to ignite a renewed imagination concerning the nature and strategies of community development that embody genuine transformation rather than distortion, rooted in the transformative concept of communitarianism that transcends the barriers created by greed and individualism. Participants were invited to reassess their roles as agents of change within society, with the goal of devising initiatives that would contribute, both in small and significant ways, to improving lives and dismantling systems and structures that perpetuate harm. The workshop employed a methodological approach that included a presentation on the essence and methodologies of community development, showcasing concrete examples of transformation in people's lives and communities while maintaining the integrity

of the ecosystem. Through group discussions and plenary sessions, participants were encouraged to share insights, harvest ideas, and formulate actionable proposals for driving positive change.

The workshop was strategically designed to initiate a vital shift in the ongoing development dialogue. Acknowledging the myriad challenges that threaten both the dignity of creation and the interconnectedness of human relationships, this workshop sought to foster an environment conducive to innovative, ecumenical thought. Participants were invited to embark on a journey to reimagine development strategies that prioritize not just economic growth but also social equity and environmental sustainability.

Central to the workshop was the belief that authentic development should enhance human dignity. It emphasized the need to cultivate an inclusive culture that challenged existing paradigms rooted in individualism and consumerism. By adopting a communitarian approach, participants investigated how shared responsibility could empower communities to contest and reshape prevailing dynamics. Engaging with various methods of community de(en)velopment, attendees critically analyzed successful transformation initiatives through concrete case studies that highlighted effective practices.

The workshop was guided by facilitative methodologies such as the “see-judge-act” framework and participatory learning and action. These approaches provided participants with the tools necessary for a thorough examination of community challenges. By encouraging collective reflections on lived experiences, the workshop sought to identify actionable pathways that allowed for meaningful community engagement and a deeper understanding of the many social injustices.

As discussions progressed, both group conversations and plenary sessions played a crucial role in sharing insights and collaboratively developing actionable proposals that participants could implement in their own communities. The ultimate goal was to focus on initiatives that were rooted in the realities faced by people, ensuring relevance and sustainability within the ecosystems that supported them. By unifying diverse voices in this effort, the workshop aspired to inspire collective action against forces that hindered flourishing relationships, paving the way for innovative development models and fostering environments where dignity and justice prevail.



Creating Space? Frustrated Youth

Dr Sudipta Singh
Deputy General Secretary
Council for World Mission

The workshop addressed the often-overlooked perspectives and energies of young people within the church, ecumenical space, and mission. It specifically focused on identifying and understanding the frustrations experienced by young individuals in the mission field, such as feeling undervalued, unheard, or excluded from decision-making processes. The workshop aimed to explore and create a more inclusive and participatory environment, empowering the voices of young people to actively shape the future of the mission.

Throughout the session, participants engaged in meaningful dialogue and collaborative efforts to address the sources of frustration among youth in mission activities. The workshop also explored innovative strategies to effectively integrate the perspectives of young individuals into mission planning and execution, ultimately working towards a mission that is more reflective of and responsive to the needs and aspirations of its younger members.

The workshop within the mission contexts was essential for fostering conversations about what young people feel and what can be done to address their challenges, emphasising that their experiences are not isolated but resonate globally.

It is noted that many youths feel a significant disconnect between their contemporary realities and the traditional teachings

upheld by the church. This disconnect often manifests in feelings of isolation and disillusionment, especially as important issues such as mental health, social justice, and sexuality remain inadequately addressed. Additionally, generational gaps exacerbate these challenges; younger congregants frequently struggle to relate to the values and perspectives of older church leaders, creating barriers in communication and understanding.

A critical aspect of the workshop was its focus on the lack of meaningful involvement in decision-making processes. Many young participants express frustration at being sidelined and feel that their potential contributions are not valued. By actively integrating youth into leadership roles, the church can stimulate engagement and indicate that their insights are crucial for its evolution.

Moreover, the conversation extends to the church's adaptability in the face of cultural shifts. Younger generations crave a faith community that champions contemporary social issues and actively reflects their values. When this does not occur, feelings of discontent surge, further alienating youth.

The themes of authenticity and community are also paramount. Young people today place a high value on sincerity; they are quick to identify hypocrisy within the church, which diminishes their trust and engagement. Additionally, they seek genuine connections and a supportive network—something that, if lacking, exacerbates feelings of loneliness within their faith journeys.

Finally, the workshop embraces innovative approaches to leverage technology and modern communication tools that resonate with youth. As digital natives navigate their lives through social media and online platforms, churches have a unique opportunity to engage them where they are, fostering a sense of belonging and relevance.

Overall, the workshop created a transformative space where youth could identify and position themselves within the framework of cultivating change. They examined how previous generations are able to navigate difficult spaces and form social movements that foster a sense of belonging. It was concluded that the youth are the change they need to see in the world—a change that they themselves must seek to create.



Access 2024 Assembly Photos and Videos



CWM ASSEMBLY 2024
DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA, 12-19 JUNE 2024
<https://2024.cwmassembly.org>

2024 CWM Assembly



CWM Photo Shelter



CWM YouTube



Android App



Apple App

To access the photos and videos from the 2024 Assembly, simply scan the QR code using your smartphone's camera or any QR code scanning app. This will direct you to the official photo gallery, where you can view and download images from the event.

Appendix

Board of Directors & Trustees

The following is a list of Board of Directors & Trustees elected at the CWM Assembly 2024.

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Mr James Ronnie Kaboke (Treasurer)
Ms Afika Babazile Rwayi (Director)
Rev. Chipasha Musaba (Director)
Rev. Anthony Chung (Director)
Mr Trevor Liewellyn Benn (Director)
Elder Lim Kar Hor (Director)
Ms Gwen Aeron Down (Director)
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Ms Mina Tupu Saifoloi (Director)
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Ms Zodinpuui (Director)
Mrs Sarah Phua (Director)
Rev. Dr Wonbin Park (Independent Trustee)
Rev. François, Opura Pihaatae (Independent Trustee)
Rev. Kudzani Ndebele (Independent Director)

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Mrs Andry ep Andriambahiny Nirina Veloso
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Bako Henintsoa
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Churches of Christ in Malawi

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Rev. Lonjezo Sam Makuwira
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United Church of Zambia

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United Congregational Church of Southern Africa

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Rev. Hua Peng Chua
Ps. Jia Yii Yep

Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China

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Dr Sum Yee Jasmine Yung
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Presbyterian Church in Taiwan

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Rev. Hsin-Lien Huang
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Presbyterian Church in Singapore

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