



RISING TO LIFE

Breaking out from Babylon

CWM Theology Statement

Cover page: A representation of Alaa Salah in popular uprisings in Sudan 2019 (see p. 17)



*Did you hear about the rose that grew
from a crack in the concrete,
Proving nature's law is wrong?
It learned to walk without having feet.
Funny it seems, but by keeping its dreams,
It learned to breathe fresh air.
Long live the rose that grew from concrete
When no one else ever cared.*

Tupac Shakur: The Rose that Grew From Concrete

(see <https://allpoetry.com/The-Rose-That-Grew-From-Concrete>)

CONTENTS

Summary:	3
Section 1: Rising to Life – Breaking out from Babylon	4
Section 2: Rising with the Risen Jesus: insurrection and judgement	20
Section 3: Responding in Radical Discipleship – living out the New Heaven and New Earth	26
Section 4: Communities living the urgency of the Risen Life – Embodying Alternatives	29

SUMMARY:

Go out from Babylon, go free! Shout the news gladly; make it known everywhere: "The Lord has saved his servant Israel!" (Isa 48:20)

CWM sets out a theological and missiological vision for its work in 2020–2029, in response to a prophetic reading of the signs of the time and a discernment of God's mission for such a time as this.

Core vision:

We seek as an organisation and as a partnership of churches, a life rooted in affirmation of and responsibility to God's mission focused on:

Rising with the Risen Jesus whose Resurrection is insurrection and proclamation that Babylon is as fallen as the tomb is empty; and

Responding in Radical Discipleship where we live out the New Heaven and New Earth in the midst of a violent, abused and grieving world as signs of transforming love.

Core mission:

Life-flourishing communities living the urgency of the Risen Life on the streets, seas, lands and in the territories of Babylon; witnessing to the uprising of the Spirit as she brings into being the New Heaven and New Earth in our midst; and being at one with the God of Life in arising, shining, planting, praying, singing, dancing and embodying alternatives to empire's death and destruction.

SECTION 1: RISING TO LIFE – BREAKING OUT FROM BABYLON



THE EPIC OF AMERICAN CIVILIZATION: MODERN MIGRATION OF THE SPIRIT
(PANEL 18) José Clemente Orozco, Mexican, 1883–1949

'Be it known to you, O king, ... that we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up' (Daniel 3:18)

A reading of our context

Tell the children the truth

Come on and tell the children the truth

'Cause, 'cause we've been treading on ya winepress much too long

Rebel, rebel!

Babylon System: Bob Marley

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNZcf8WtBiY>

We live in a world dominated by inter-connected powers, which deny the sovereignty of God as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Some of these powers and systems openly announce that they have the power to create, save and build new worlds. They demand that all must bow to the dominance of their logic, power and greed. They claim to bring life, peace and prosperity, but this remains an illusion as the world's resources still remain accessible only to the few. The many are made to live in poverty, war and degradation. In this way, their power and interests directly contest the claims of Christ and his people.

Living amongst these oppressive systems and forces is to live in Babylon. The Old and New Testament both testify that God's people have lived before in Babylon. But they rose in apocalyptic hope to challenge the oppressive death-dealing powers of Babylon; and became heralds of a new life, new Heaven and new Earth, the work of God in our midst.

'Babylon' names empire, oppression and judgement, in both Old and New Testament and in our life today. Babylon proved the place of desolation and despair, the place of weeping (Ps 137) and the place where God's new life breaks out in an uprising of the Spirit (Ezekiel 37:1-14). It was the undoing of Kings (2 Kings 25:7), the unmasking of false prophets like Hananiah (Jeremiah 28:15-17), the despair of prophets (Jer. 20:14-18), the fall of a nation, the loss of covenantal hope and the disintegration of a whole theology (Jer. 7:1-15). For persecuted people in the New Testament and the early church, Babylon became code name for the great oppressor, Rome (Rev 17:9). In naming Rome 'Babylon', empire's horror and its pretension and futility are named all at once in stories which remind God's people that crisis can be transformed into liberation by God.

Beneath the surface of Babylon, alternative hopes, dreams and visions of life broke out, when those trapped in its vice became energised by faith in God's promise of a hope and a future (Jerimiah 29:1-15). Characters like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who were in Babylon but not of Babylon, arose and defied the powers of Babylon (Dan:3). Disciples, who cast down the idolatries of Babylon in favour of unruly revelations of God, emerged to give voice and direction to the people. Occupied by the logic, spirit and

avarice of Babylon, God's people laboured in the midst of evil and misapprehension as they awaited a moment, a movement and a messiah to announce that Babylon is fallen (Isa 14:4,12, 21:9; Jeremiah 50:2; Rev.14:8, 18:2). Thus, across history we have found God revealing the way to liberation through prophets and people like Esther, Rizpah, Jeremiah, Cyrus, John, the Canaanite woman and several others. The most powerful sign of this is a tomb, guarded by empire's finest soldiers, but found to be empty by the women apostles. These women were the first to proclaim the resurrection of the one whom Imperial and Religious power had supposedly killed and silenced. Thus, life breaks out anew from beneath Babylon.

Babylon is not merely a place; it is a system. Peter Tosh, one of the lead voices with Bob Marley of Rastafari, named Babylon, the white colonial, political, economic and religious system, the '*shitstem*'. And so, it is. The system of economic-colonial power which CWM named Empire in 2010, in common with the Accra Confession of 2004, is death dealing, destroying the earth, prospering inequality and preying on those it de-humanises – women, children, people of colour, persons living with visible disability, people with diverse sexuality, indigenous peoples, to name but a few. The full force and horror of Babylon, as well as its alternative, are named and known best by those beneath its weight. Mission in the context of empire is mission siding with God, acknowledging and affirming that God sides with those that Babylon despises and exploits.

Daniel exposed Babylon as an idolatrous '*shitstem*' and, in partnership with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, refused to worship the golden statue (Dan 3:14 etc). CWM's context reading sees similar idolatries occupying central positions in our systems. We live, like Daniel, beneath systems of domination that we dare not worship.

So, we are duty-bound to reflect on the following questions as part of our search for meaning and as part of our commitment to rejecting Babylon and affirming life for all: What is the inter-connecting power(s) today which denies the sovereignty of God as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer? Who are the powers that today claim to create, save and build new worlds? What are the 'systems' that make us bow to their logic, power and greed?

In our context reading we identify the following as ways in which today's Babylon kills, steals and destroys:

Patriarchy, racism and chauvinistic nationalisms

These intersecting systems promote division and drive inequality and violence. Value, rank and position are ascribed in society on the basis of patriarchal attitudes to gender, race, ethnicity, class, caste, sexual identity and ability. Patriarchy is the way Empire operates domestic as well as social control. It favours dominant elites, like whiteness, maleness, heterosexuality, high class/caste and wealth identities; terms them the 'norm'; and privileges them in society. Patriarchy is also one of the clearest collusions between religion and Empire.

The complicity of religion, Christianity especially, with racism can no longer be denied. CWM's reflective project on the legacies of slavery reveals that many Christian missionaries played a role in the propagation of both racism and patriarchy. Patriarchy is also accompanied by violence; and is especially prevalent in Gender based violence, racial violence, ecological violence and homophobic violence, which are on the increase in many contexts.

Chauvinistic nationalism has captured the political will of many nations. It is visible in Europe, in emerging and established far right political populist parties in France, Sweden, Austria and the Netherlands. It is also visible in the decision of the UK to leave the EU, in the anti-immigrant policies of Hungary and in Erdogan's shift to autocracy in Turkey. The aforementioned phenomenon is underpinned by a sense of privilege and entitlement that comes from normative power of Whiteness, which has been central to the corporate identity of Europe, dating back to over a thousand years. This ideology of superiority is also reflected in the leadership style and attitudes of President Putin of Russia and President Assad of Syria. The state of Israel continues to repress Palestinian rights to their land and legitimises its ultra-nationalist settler programmes. Hindu ultra-nationalism holds sway in India under Modi and the BJP; and the Islamic style nationalisms of Pakistan or Malaysia is oppressive and exclusive. The treatment of the Rohingya people by the authorities in Myanmar is ethnic cleansing through and through.

Homophobic and gender violence is a global phenomenon, and in many jurisdictions, it is even sanctioned in law. Minorities are being scapegoated in many contexts and this feeds a feature of human history, best described as a culture war. Civic visions of nationalism have been usurped by exclusivist interests and are accompanied by supremacist and chauvinistic ideologies which threaten minorities and migrants, risk international consensus on key justice issues, from climate change to human rights, and threaten peace at a national, regional and international level. Religious communities, including the Church, are also fostering violence.

In the face of these **idolatries of whiteness, masculinity, heterosexuality, anthropocentric power, privilege and violence** we say, with Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego that *we will not worship the golden statue that you [Babylon] have set up.*

Economic injustice

The global economy is marked by spiralling inequality even though it promises wealth for all. According to Oxfam, 1% of the world's population in 2018 had access to 82% of the world's wealth. The pursuit of profit for this 1%, drives most of our economies and the global corporations central to them.

As Oxfam states:

Our economy is broken. Hundreds of millions of people are living in extreme poverty while huge rewards go to those at the very top. There are more

billionaires than ever before, and their fortunes have grown to record levels. Meanwhile, the world's poorest got even poorer.

Many governments are fuelling this inequality crisis. They are under taxing corporations and wealthy individuals, yet underfunding vital public services, like healthcare and education. These policies hit the poor hardest. The human costs are huge, with women and girls suffering the most.

Inequality is keeping people trapped in poverty ...

(<https://www.oxfam.org/en/even-it/5-shocking-facts-about-extreme-global-inequality-and-how-even-it-davos>)

This economic injustice is a crucial expression of Empire at work, past and present. Global capitalism is a particular legacy of Western colonisation and of slavery. The colonisation of the world by the white Western nations produced and entrenched economic advantage which perpetuates inequality and exploitation. Patriarchy is more than a domestic and social force. It is also an economic force. We saw under economic injustice that wealth models patriarchal interests and histories. Women are paid significantly less than men, and protected and rewarded less in the labour market.

Churches have become captive to desire for riches and profit. On the one hand, we see Prosperity Gospel captivating many new churches and established churches protecting their institutional financial interests. As a global body of churches, we embody the inequalities of our economy.

In the World Bank listing of 185 countries by GDP for 2018, sixteen of CWM's thirty-two member churches are situated in the bottom 50% – Nauru 98, Namibia 103, Jamaica 109, Guyana 114, India 119, Myanmar 127, Samoa, 131, Bangladesh 136, Zambia 140, Tuvalu 141, Papua New Guinea 148, Zimbabwe 158, Solomon Islands 167, Kiribati 168, Madagascar 176, Mozambique 180 and Malawi 182. Six CWM member churches, situated in seven countries, fall in the bottom 20% of the GDP. Eleven member churches in 7 countries are listed in the top 20% – Singapore 3, Hong Kong 9, Netherlands 12, Taiwan 14, UK 26, South Korea 29 and New Zealand 31. [World Development Indicators database, World Bank.]

In the face of these **idolatries of prosperity, limitless growth and 'fullness of life' for the 1%**, we say, with Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego that *we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up.*

Climate catastrophe

The economic power of Babylon is eco-cidal. We are already in the grip of climate change and its impact is catastrophic. The current global temperature rise, sea level rise, shrinking ice coverage and increasing extreme weather conditions, are leading to species extinction, food insecurity and land loss that threaten all, and the most vulnerable

especially. The year 2016 is now the warmest on record, breaking the record set in 2015 which broke the record set in 2014. Sadly, 16 of the 17 warmest years ever documented were after 2000. There are signs that this will worsen profoundly affecting the climate and the sustainability of life, despite some efforts at environmental controls. Our planet is now in the midst of its sixth mass extinction of plants and animals — the sixth wave of extinctions in the past half-billion years. We are currently experiencing the worst spate of species die-offs since the loss of the dinosaurs 65 million years ago. Although extinction is a natural phenomenon, it occurs at a natural “background” rate of about one to five species per year. However, scientists estimate that we are now losing species at a background rate of 1,000 to 10,000 with literally dozens going extinct every day.

Speaking at the 2018 Climate Summit in Poland, the world-renowned naturalist Sir David Attenborough said:

Right now, we are facing a man-made (human-made) disaster of global scale, our greatest threat in thousands of years. Climate change. If we don't take action, the collapse of our civilisations and the extinction of much of the natural world is on the horizon.

"The world's people have spoken. Their message is clear. Time is running out. They want you, the decision-makers, to act now," The People have spoken. Leaders of the world, you must lead. The continuation of our civilisations and the natural world upon which we depend, is in your hands.

(<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-46398057>)

Climate change is human-caused and follows the recent history of economic expansion from the Industrial Revolution. It is the product of a carbon-centred economy, devoted to limitless growth, that believes that despite living on a planet of finite proportions, growth of profit and production should be limitless. Industrialisation has polluted the earth and the seas. Devotion to a cheap consumerist economy has driven wages low to ensure cheap goods, resulting in the exploitation of finite resources and vulnerable workers. This has suggested that people and planet are entirely at the disposal of the rich and powerful. Economic and Climate justice go together to inform the critique of the death-dealing force of empire. The systemic causes of Climate catastrophe point to the key change which is needed, a change of the system.

In the face of these **idolatries of growth, consumption and human self-centredness** we say, with Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that *we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up*.

Neo-colonialism – Occupation, Militarisation, Religious persecution

Empire's lack of geographical borders belies the violence at the heart of its methods of conquest. In 2015 the World Bank estimated that 1.2 billion people, roughly one fifth of the world's population, were affected by some form of violence or insecurity.

Militarisation is evident in such areas of conflict like Korea, Syria, Iraq and Palestine. But it is also evident in the militarization of police and the brutality of security forces in the United States of America (USA), in several African countries and in the brazen violence by Casteist and State sponsored forces against Dalits and minorities in India. China occupies islands in the South China Sea and the tense relationship between the USA and North Korea could trigger military action. The military establishments continue to command public spending as welfare services suffer from budgetary constraints and adjustments. Singapore, for example, is the world's 5th largest arms importer, despite being half the size of London. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) estimates that almost \$1.7 trillion was spent on militarisation in 2016. It is a scandal to observe that 10 percent of this military budget would be enough to fund the United Nations' (UN) Sustainable Development Goals to end poverty and hunger by 2030. Religious conflict continues to rise at communal, national and international levels. One third of the world's population experience hostility because of their religious affiliation, be they Christians, Muslims, Jews or of other faith traditions.

At a meeting in March 2018 to consider the rise in xenophobia, human rights experts of the UN and regional movements urged State governments, civil society organisations and activists to work to overcome violence and hatred.

Vile discourses of explicit hate and ideologies of racial supremacy have moved from the fringe to the mainstream. Racial, ethnic and religious bigotry fuel human rights violations, including extreme violence against minorities, and against refugees, migrants, stateless persons, and internally displaced, including people of African descent, with a particularly acute effect on women, and sexual and gender diverse populations. This bigotry is unashamed. (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights)

(<http://www.panapress.com/Rise-in-racism,-xenophobia-is-alarming,-warn-UN-rights-experts--12-630543034-34-lang4-index.html>)

We discern the violence and dissension of Babylon at work in all this. It comes as a deliberate effort to undo the work and progress of de-colonising; and civil-human rights movements are confronting and calling the powers-that-be to account for their violent de-humanising actions; and who are posing alternative visions and practices of human community.

In the face of these **idolatries of domineering power and self-righteousness** we say, with Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, *we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up.*

Forced migration and nativism

Up to 68.5 million people are migrants and refugees fleeing conflict, poverty and climate disaster in the world today. These refugees are greeted by a storm of revilement and suspicion from populations and politicians, demanding and claiming that they must

prioritise the interests of native inhabitants against those of immigrants. This is further exacerbated by policies of austerity measures imposed after the 2007/8 financial meltdown.

According to UNHCR, the number of forcibly displaced people, both within countries and across borders as a result of persecution, conflict or generalized violence, has grown by over 50 per cent in the last 10 years. In 2007 there were 42.7 million forcibly displaced people, and by the end of 2017 the figure had grown to 68.5 million (UNHCR, 2018). Today 1 out of every 110 people in the world is displaced (ibid).

Of the 68.5 million forcibly displaced people, 58 per cent or 40.0 million were internally displaced people (IDPs). The remaining 42 per cent comprised 25.4 million refugees and 3.1 million asylum-seekers. Of the 16.2 million newly displaced people in 2017, 11.8 million were IDPs, with only 4.4 million classified as refugees and new asylum-seekers (UNHCR, 2018). Such figures highlight the importance of seeing the whole story, despite the popular view that forcibly displaced persons comprise of only refugees and asylum seekers in other countries. Indeed, the majority of displaced people suffer indignities within the borders of their own countries.

Climate change, already a growing driver of migration, forcing families to flee water scarcity, crop failure and rising sea levels, may cause as many as 143 million people to be displaced by 2050, according to a World Bank report, '**Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration**'. The shift will likely involve the poorest people from the poorest countries moving in large numbers from rural regions to increasingly overburdened urban areas.

Invested economic, political, religious attitudes and levers are being used to stoke racism and xenophobia among populations that perceive minorities and non-nationals as threats. The rise of populist nationalism is a product of widespread loss of faith in establishment politics, that privilege the elites, and in the offensive, xenophobic rhetoric of extremist ideologues.

In the face of these **idolatrics of boundaries and nativism** we say, with Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, *we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up.*

The Fourth Industrial Revolution – Artificial Intelligence (AI)

There are debates as to whether the Fourth Industrial Revolution is a real revolution, (Shoshana, Zuboff). Klaus Schwab, Founder and Executive Chairperson of the World Economic Forum, who tabled the term in 2016, says the 4th IR “builds on the digital revolution and combines multiple technologies that are leading to unprecedented paradigm shifts in the economy, business, society, and individuals. It is not only changing the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of doing things but also ‘who’ we are.” Dazzling claims are made for the 4thIR. This technological revolution will fundamentally alter the way we live,

work, and relate to one another. In scale, scope, and complexity, it will be unlike anything humankind has experienced before.

The First Industrial Revolution used water and steam power to mechanize production. The Second used electric power to create mass production. The Third used electronics and information technology to automate production. The Fourth Industrial Revolution is building on the Third – it is characterized by a fusion of technologies that blur the lines between the physical, digital, and biological spheres.

Compared with previous industrial revolutions, the Fourth is evolving at an exponential rather than a linear pace. Moreover, it is disrupting almost every industry in every country. And the breadth and depth of these changes herald the transformation of entire systems of production, management, and governance. Breakthroughs in health care can lead to healthier lives and longer life spans. Far-reaching changes are on the social horizons. With the development from simple Artificial Intelligence (AI) to Artificial General Intelligence (AGI), and to Artificial Super Intelligence (ASI), in the name of transhumanism (H+ and moreover, H2) by hybridization with machine(cyborg), human beings can evolve to the level of human god (Homo Deus). Such developments may even level up to Human assuming the role of Creator and, ultimately, be enthroned as God the Creator. Ex-Google engineer is founding a church where people worship an Artificial Intelligence god.

The key questions here are: In whose interests will these changes occur, who will benefit or be able to afford them? Can this divided, divisive system deliver for the whole community or the Earth? The objectification of people and planet for the sake of power and progress has done great harm and the values beneath the 4thIR will be no different to the 3rd, which is, for example, deeply complicit with colonisation and enslavement. The central theological question may well be, in the midst of such radical social, economic and cultural changes, what will happen to our humanity and our spirituality? Moreover, will we be able to still embrace the relationality of the Triune God in whom we believe?

In the face of these **idolatries of technology and modernity** we say, with Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, *we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up.*

Religious complicities and complacencies

In the face of these challenges and idolatries, the place of the church and of religion in building peace and seeking justice for the Earth and the communities of the Earth is in question. Climate scientists, the United Nations and Civil movements, are looking to faith communities to provide the values which can transform political, economic and social attitudes in the midst of these urgent crises. There is an urgent need for religious communities, including the Church, to admit our complicity in the face of harmful and oppressive values and systems. Religious communities are exacerbating the crises and harbouring divisive hate-filled rhetoric and practices. This can be seen in our attitudes towards the LGBTQI communities; climate-change denial; connivance with corrupt

political leadership stoking ethnic, racial and religious tensions; privatisation of faith, emphasising prosperity as a sign of God's blessing; among other painful issues.

Christians continue to live with the legacies of slavery and colonisation, and operate mission models which are still colonising in ethos. We continue to believe and to proclaim that our understanding and practice of faith is the only way to God; and, in so doing, we place limits on the mission of Jesus of Nazareth who, endowed with God's Spirit, practiced a communitarian lifestyle and provided space and bread, enough, for all to share. Many religious communities have not advocated for the release and liberation of those still mired and marred by the legacies of racism and poverty today. Many of the movements that God is stirring up to challenge Babylon come from places and peoples ignored or demeaned by religious communities; as a result, there seems to be an irreconcilable, and unnecessary, gulf between people's movements and religion/religious communities on issues of the common struggle for hope and liberation for all.

In the face of these **idolatries of ecclesial and faith identity** we say, with Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, *we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up.*

A theological framing of the context reading

As Christians we acknowledge the histories and practices of oppression and colonisation which mark out our life as churches, mission organisations and people. We see how privilege operates amongst us, dividing us and masking power. CWM must be alert to all these things as it constructs a mission theology and strategy for the coming years, applying a vision of power that mirrors that of Jesus' understanding and practice (Mt. 20:20–28, Mark 10:35–45, John 13:1–17), as we critique empire and all its death-dealing vices. Our complicities and idolatries call for actions in reversal, deeply rooted in our faith in God, our identity as people of God and our calling to be disciples of Jesus Christ. All these are at stake if we remain complicit, for God's creation is groaning and God's promise of a new Heaven and a new Earth invites our participation.

Go out from Babylon, go free! Shout the news gladly; make it known everywhere: "The Lord has saved his servant Israel!" (Isa 48:20)

Weaving the words of Robert Nesta Marley's (Bob Marley) *Babylon System*, "*We refuse to be what you wanted us to be*" into the frame of the theology statement, gives us some key elements around which we may engage with truth and embrace God's commission to 'Rise to Life and break out from Babylon'. This must be the prophetic stance for a Christian Mission organisation in a context where "the writing is clearly on the wall", declaring that *Babylon is fallen*

We live in a world which is not as God wants it to be. There are people powers who benefit from evil systems and they want us to remain quiet and compliant. However, as people

of faith, we cannot be subservient in Babylon. “We (must) refuse to be what they want(ed) us to be”.

People freedom and liberty!

The world that God created and re-creates is marked by life and liberation for all, including and especially the Earth, and God’s rallying call can be heard in the voices of struggling communities and of the Earth.

Yeah, we’ve been treading on the winepress much too long: Rebel, rebel!

God’s people are called to rise up and stop our connivance with the dominant powers which are doing such harm to the Earth and to all who live in it.

Tell the children the truth

Prophetic witness is the proclamation and embodiment of new life as, together with Christ, we dismantle the political, economic, social and spiritual systems which harm, oppress, divide and enslave. This is an urgent call to the people of God.

Prophetic voices and movements

In the midst of life’s disturbances, dislocations and despair, God’s people rise with hope. The biblical witness frequently breaks out from such places and times with the power to surprise and inspire. In the time of Babylonian oppression God’s people turned to the prophets for guidance, inspiration and support as they sought to remain faithful to God and resilient in hope, under the yoke of bondage, even at times when all seemed lost. The biblical narrative invites us to see and embrace prophets like Esther, Ruth, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel who stood by Israel in their night of agony under the grip of Babylon. Equally, the biblical narrative points to prophets like Mary, John, the Samaritan woman, and Phoebe who surrounded and accompanied the Church when there was a crisis of faith in their discipleship journey, as they resisted the claims of Caesar in order to be in allegiance with God. Indeed, the biblical writings are the stories and the experiences of exile and oppression, of exodus and opportunity, and of God in the midst of chaos pointing to life and calling God’s people to rise (see the books of Daniel and Revelation for accounts of rising to life out of Babylon).

Our context reading identifies signs of defiance, hope and uprising in our time.

In the midst of **patriarchy, racism and chauvinistic nationalism** we see many movements rising and offering visions of a new day in which dignity and diversity are affirmed as hallmarks of life-flourishing alternatives, in the presence of God’s Spirit in our midst. The **Black Lives Matter** movement is an example of those who expose and resist the ideology of white supremacy, an expression of Babylon in our midst. Their mission is “to build local power and to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes.”

We affirm the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, undocumented folks, folks with records, women, and all Black lives along the gender spectrum. Our network centres those who have been marginalized within Black liberation movements. We are working for a world where Black lives are no longer systematically targeted for demise. We affirm our humanity, our contributions to this society, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression.

(<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/08/black-lives-matter-movement-explained/>)

Similarly, by the Spirit's stirring and in partnership with *Black Lives Matter*, the **#Metoo** Movement arise to confront the sexism of Babylon as they seek to end sexual violence.

The 'me too' movement was founded in 2006 to help survivors of sexual violence, particularly black women and girls, and other young women of colour from low wealth communities, find pathways to healing. Our vision from the beginning, was to address both the dearth in resources for survivors of sexual violence and to build a community of advocates, driven by survivors, who will be at the forefront of creating solutions to interrupt sexual violence in their communities. Our work continues to focus on helping those who need it to find entry points for individual healing and galvanizing a broad base of survivors to disrupt the systems that allow for the global proliferation of sexual violence. Our goal is also to reframe and expand the global conversation around sexual violence to speak to the needs of a broader spectrum of survivors. Young people, queer, trans, and disabled folks, Black women and girls, and all communities of colour. We want perpetrators to be held accountable and we want strategies implemented to sustain long term, systemic change.

(<https://metoomvmt.org/about/#history>)

Intersected with these are movements that raise up the human rights and dignity of Queer people. We see movements like *Queers without Borders* in South Africa, *JFlag* in Jamaica, *Pink Dot* in Singapore, *Gaya Nusantara* in Indonesia, *Press for Change* in the UK, *The Humsafar Trust* in India, *Curious* in Aotearoa-New Zealand and many more in our regions and contexts, rising up to life from beneath the weight of Babylon, to demand justice for all.

In the midst of **Economic injustice**, we see many movements rising up against the impoverishment that Babylon inflicts on its peoples. South Africa has stirred under the demonstrations and passions of the **#FeesMustFall** movement, a non-partisan, student-led movement, mobilising for the re-imagining and realisation of a socially responsive, fee-free & decolonised education system in South Africa:

Student-led protests gained momentum in 2015/16 and spread across the country. The **#FeesMustFall** movement sparked heated debates on fee increases in universities. Other demands by students included the decolonisation of the

educational system, transformation of universities to address racial and gender inequalities, in terms of staff composition, and the insourcing of general workers. (<https://csvr.org.za/pdf/An-analysis-of-the-FeesMustFall-Movement-at-South-African-universities.pdf>)

France has seen persistent protest against unfair economic policies in the shape of the *Gilet Jaune Movement*, a grassroots citizens' protest movement begun by a black woman with roots in the Caribbean. Protesters have largely come from peripheral towns, cities and rural areas across France and include many women and single mothers. Most of the protesters are low-income workers – secretaries, IT workers, factory workers, delivery workers and care workers – who do not earn enough to meet their monthly expenses. The movement, with numerous grievances and differences of opinion, is predominantly against a tax system perceived as unfair and unjust. Most want to scrap the fuel taxes, hold a review of the tax system, raise minimum wages and roll back President Emmanuel Macron's tax cuts for the wealthy and his pro-business economic programme. Some also want parliament dissolved and Macron to resign.

(<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/03/who-are-the-gilets-jaunes-and-what-do-they-want>)

In the midst of **climate catastrophe**, we see many movements rising up against the irreparable damage and destruction that Babylon inflicts on the creation. The Swedish youth Greta Thunberg has become a spokesperson for a spontaneous youth movement, rising up against inaction by politicians regarding climate change. Her speeches and the youth-led demonstrations and schools strikes show that the complacency of politicians and corporations can be confronted and challenged. In solidarity with this spontaneous youth movement, *Extinction Rebellion*, another grassroots movement, has emerged in the UK and elsewhere. 'Extinction Rebellion is an international movement that uses non-violent civil disobedience to achieve liberating change in order to minimise the risk of human extinction and ecological collapse' (<https://rebellion.earth/the-truth/about-us/>). This movement has staged a series of high-profile acts of civil disobedience in the UK and beyond, which have captured public imagination and pressured politicians to act on climate change.

Many environmental defenders face danger and death. They are real life, contemporary Daniels, Shadrachs, Meshachs and Abednegos. *The Guardian* highlights their stories in a Global Witness campaign in the following words:

Some are indigenous or peasant leaders living in remote mountains or isolated forests, protecting their ancestral lands and traditional livelihoods from business projects such as mining, dams or luxury hotels. Others are park rangers tackling poaching or illegal logging. They could even be lawyers, journalists or NGO staff working to expose environmental abuse and land grabbing.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/jul/13/environmental-defenders-who-are-they-and-how-do-we-decide-if-they-have-died-in-defence-of-their-environment>)

In one year, 2017 alone, 207 such activists were murdered, by business and political interests, in places like Peru, Colombia, Brazil, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Liberia, Mozambique, Zambia, Turkey, Myanmar, India, Pakistan and the Philippines.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/ng-interactive/2017/jul/13/the-defenders-tracker>)

In the midst of **Neo-colonialism – Occupation, Militarisation and Religious persecution** movements break out against the intersected repressive forces of Babylon. Recollections of the image of Alaa Salah in Sudan is a source of perpetual inspiration and encouragement to those in the struggle for peace and justice. Salah stood up in 2019, singing songs of defiance in Khartoum. Her action symbolised the power which brought an end to the 30-year dictatorship of Omar Al Bashir. Alaa Salah was among many Sudanese women who fought against Khartoum's militarism for decades and laid the foundations for Sudan's ongoing revolution. As women took to the streets in Khartoum and other cities in the country's centre, to protest, alongside men, they faced the full brutality of al-Bashir's security apparatus. Women protesters were arrested, tortured and killed by security forces alongside their male counterparts. A significant number of those arrested were sexually assaulted by their jailers. The African Union suspended Sudan in June 2019 for the violent treatment of protestors like Alaa Salah, when 120 protestors were killed by security forces in Khartoum. Women and men stood their ground and Babylon fell.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/alaa-salah-sudanese-mothers-190501175500137.html>)

Peoples movements all over the world are rising up, living their hopes and giving their bodies to secure an alternative way of life to the domineering powers of their land. Among them are: the *Umbrella Movement* in Hong Kong, protesting for democracy in the midst of China's political stronghold; the *Candlelight Revolution*, protesting political corruption in South Korea; *March for our Lives*, the student led protest in the USA, against Gun Violence; the *Taiwan Ecumenical Forum*, pressing for national recognition for Taiwan in the midst of Chinese counterclaims of possession of the island; and pastors and community activists of the *National Council of Churches in the Philippines*, leading movements against President Duterte and facing imprisonment and murder.

In the midst of **Forced migration and nativism** movements of welcome and solidarity with refugees are actively subverting Babylon's de-humanisation of refugees. CWM Mission has produced a compelling video, "Let's bring them here," which tells the story of a group of Dutch citizens moved to act on behalf of Syrian refugees. In the story, some are inspired by their Christian faith and participation in the Protestant Kerk in the

Netherlands; and others were compelled to act on account of the injustice the Syrian refugees experienced and their common sense of humanity together. The group firstly travelled to Greece to see the plight of the Syrian refugees; and later, they challenged the Dutch government to fulfil its legal obligations to receive Syrian refugees. The film is an example of the multifaith community and peoples' movements working together to combat an unjust system which keeps vulnerable and needy people at the border, with the doors to both heart and home shut.

The United Reformed Church in the UK also produced a Mission Stories video entitled *Longing to Belong*, which addressed the experiences of racism met by the 'Windrush' generation, British subjects from the Caribbean who migrated to the UK in the 1950s and 60s. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B6ZO5UOSJN4&t=1s>)

The video also speaks to the 'hostile environment' that the British government created for asylum seekers, people with disabilities and immigrant communities. The following words tell the story poignantly:

'For me, the worst thing about battling the hostile environment was the loss of dignity. It wasn't the lack of certainty, or even the fear that your life, as you knew it, could be taken away by a deportation order. It was that while you were navigating the immigration system and its arbitrary cruelty, you were humiliated. You were made to beg'.

(<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/dec/14/britains-hostile-environment-is-humiliating-you-can-help-people-regain-their-dignity>)

In the midst of the promise of the **4th Industrial revolution** voices are being raised, asking about the ethical cost of such technology and its implications for human identity and equality. These voices are challenging Babylon's claims that it has the technology and know-how to solve all the problems of human life. The 2019 World Economic Forum addressed the 4thIR and espoused the view that AI is seen as having great potential to solve some of the world's most pressing issues (such as climate change). However, the Forum warned that if some organizations and countries implement AI systems and others do not, they will race ahead of others, spreading inequality between and among economies and leading to unforeseen negative consequences for the planet.

In cooperation with the Gyeongang Theological Graduate University located in Andong, South Korea, the *Oikotree movement* has been at the forefront of a Christian and spiritual response to the issues of AI and the 4thIR. They ask what are the implications for ethics and spirituality of 'trans-humanism', of technologies where machines become virtually human, of people interacting with technology rather than human beings, in addition to issues of entrenched economic inequality. These are some of the questions being asked:

What might our life in this era look like? How would it be? What would it mean to be human beings? What would humanity be, and what would be the place and role

of human spirituality? How could we manage a life like this, one which is totally different from what we have understood and lived so far?

(Concept paper GTGU Global Conference on “Humanity and Spirituality in face of the Fourth Industrial Revolution”)

As machines provide more and more labour, grave worries are expressed about the future of labour for the wealthy elite in Babylon, who don't believe in the social contract of economies. There are concerns regarding employment and remuneration for an ever-increasing number of people in economies where their labour has been superseded by unpaid machines. In both GTGU Symposia 2017 and 2018, developing relational epistemology and its connections with spirituality like Ubuntu, an African concept, *Sangsaeng* (mutual living), an Asian concept, and *Sumak Kawsay* (good living), a Latin American concept, have emerged as important ways to address the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

In the midst of **Religious complicities and complacencies** people are re-imagining their faith communities and pioneering new models of religious life and witness which could break the cooperation between religious and state powers. CWM member churches are part of this mission of re-imagining. It can be seen in the Mission Support Programme projects of churches like the UCZ, addressing Gender justice, UCJCI, developing missional congregations, HKCCCC, on developing churches that are more open and compassionate, PCT, on national self-determination for Taiwan, PKN and PCANZ, developing pioneering churches and evangelism, EPM, on Nuclear Testing in the Pacific or CSI's work on Dalit issues. PCT, CSI, FJKM and the URC are developing pioneering work raising up the issues and visions of people with disabilities. CWM's DARE programme brings progressive theologians, church leaders and social activists into a discerning and creative space to interact with faith and life; to offer vital critique to the socio-economic and political issues of the day; and to translate academic work into intellectual activism. The Legacies of Slavery project offers the opportunity for mission agencies, such as CWM, to re-create mission having learned from their colonising racist roots.

This context reading tells us that Babylon is falling. The economic, political, social, religious, sexual, and personal powers and principalities of Babylon declare that they bring life. However, these claims point only to death and destruction. In this regard, Babylon is fallen – its powers are full but its promises are empty. Jesus's resurrection points to life breaking free from death, a life beyond Empire. Our imagination and vision are full of the imageries of a new Heaven and new Earth which is already rising to counter Babylon. Fundamental to this are the 50,000 communities of hope and possibility in which CWM member churches are situated. CWM's mission theology and strategy looks to these places as central to the falling of Babylon and the rising to life of a New Heaven and a new Earth amongst us.

SECTION 2: RISING WITH THE RISEN JESUS: INSURRECTION AND JUDGEMENT



Tess Asplund confronts the Swedish Far Right group: Nordic Resistance Movement in Borlange, Sweden May 2016

To the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood: May grace and peace be yours in abundance. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ... (1 Peter 1:1-3)

Peter writes to the Christians of Asia Minor from 'Babylon' (1 Peter 5:13), addressing a critical time in the lives of these communities. Peter's letter was addressed to predominantly Gentile communities, seeking to inspire and encourage them, setting out guidelines on how to live faithfully and creatively as a minority in a society where hitherto they fit comfortably. The transformation that occurred, on account of their commitment to follow Jesus in faithful discipleship, led them into conflict with the communities, the powers and values that once defined them and their way of life. Their own society, in which they once felt a complete sense of belonging, now views them as unwelcome and subversive. In addressing them, Peter points to Jesus, and his sufferings, as the model to follow. He reminded his audience that they were exiles, refugees or foreigners—temporary residents—in their present society and in this present world (1 Pet. 1:1, 17; 2:11); and he encouraged and assured them that the end of the age was imminent (1 Pet. 4:7). Peter knew that these Gentile Christians were living between times, between the

reality of Jesus' resurrection and his promised return, looking and living towards the new Heaven and new Earth. In these new and fragile communities, there was no doubt that Babylon had fallen, that the powers of the Graeco-Roman world were unmasked by their confession of faith that **Jesus is Lord**. Living out this confession meant a distinctive and visible discipleship rooted in the values of Jesus, a way of life that stood in striking contrast to the eternal Rome; and Peter encouraged them to stay the course (1 Pet. 2:21).

Like Peter's communities, our communities are called to distinctive and visible discipleship rooted in the way of Jesus. God's people, are called to live out a daily ethic of love which brings peace and justice. In our times of wandering and struggle, we can turn to the Scriptures that inspired and empowered Jesus, the scriptures that were shaped by the experiences of the exiles and refugees in Babylon.

But now thus says the Lord,
he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel:
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.
For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour. (Isa 43:1-3)

Rising to life in Babylon is rooted in a Jesus-centred Spirituality:

Walking in the light of God

God sends Jesus into the world as light in darkness (John 1:4-5) and as the embodiment of love that brings transformation (John 3:16). Jesus is the first fruit of the new creation, the inauguration and insurrection in flesh and spirit, in light and love of the coming new Heaven and new Earth. Jesus walked in the light of God throughout the unfolding stages of his life, from infancy to ministry, from ministry to crucifixion, and from crucifixion to resurrection. The Psalms, which are themselves invitations to walk in the light of God (Ps 4:6, 13:3, 18:28, 27:1, 36:9, 43:3, 56:13, 89:15, 90:8, 118:27, 119:105), anticipate Jesus' faith and walk with God. As disciples of Jesus, we are called to walk in the light of God, to enter into companionship with God and each other, sharing in the movement God leads towards creation, bringing fullness of life to the emptiness of death.

Micah gives depth to this image of walking with God by pointing to the committed and compassionate spirituality that is required and the radical transformation that is envisioned, as the suffering communities rise up from beneath Babylon in response to the urgings of the God of life, to choose life over death.

With what shall I come before the Lord,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings,
with calves a year old?
Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with tens of thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:6–8)

Invoking the Life flourishing Spirit

Jesus walks in the light of God, through the power of the Spirit. The Spirit of God was revealed at his birth and at his baptism to signify that through the life and mission of Jesus, the new creation comes into being. Luke tells that the conception of Jesus is the work of the Spirit (Luke 1:35) and thus, like John, he points to a new Genesis moment. The baptism stories all reveal the presence of the brooding Spirit, announcing God's affirmation and anointing of him, with joy: 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased' (Matt 3:17, Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22). This is the new *euangelion* countering and subverting the old *euangelion* of Rome, declaring that it is not Caesar, full of imperial power and splendour, who is born the Son of God; rather, it is Jesus of Nazareth, born in a borrowed room, in an occupied land, and who became a refugee from the violence of a tyrant. To proclaim Jesus is Lord is to announce the Good News, to the Emperor himself, that Babylon is as fallen as the tomb is empty.

The Spirit's power in Jesus was manifest in the miracles of Jesus through which love acts and life flourishes anew in the face of sickness, agony, pollution and rejection. Jesus embodies the power of the Spirit, which came to him in the wilderness after his baptism, in the healing of lepers (Mark 1:40–45), possessed beggars (Mark 5:1–21), blind folk (John 9:1–12), bleeding women (Luke 8:43–48), dead children (Matt 9:18–26) and the Centurion's servants (Luke 7:1–10; Matt 4:1). It is the Spirit who commissioned him in the Nazareth synagogue as he cites the words of Isaiah (cf. Luke 4:16–21). Thus, we turn to the Spirit to commission and to empower us to the same life-flourishing mission of Jesus.

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.
They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations. (Isa 61:1–4)

Meeting Jesus coming from the tombs of Babylon

Peter's letter tells us that we live between Jesus' resurrection and his return. The despair of the crucifixion is visible in all areas of our world, from the slow inexorable death inflicted on the Earth to the unseen murders of Filipino activists. The charge of the Spirit is to still have hope. Today, we find ourselves amongst the disciples, suddenly and unexpectedly experiencing Jesus, risen and alive. The road we walk with God, in the power of the Spirit, is the road to Emmaus, where Jesus' word burns within us as in those he encountered on the Emmaus road (Luke 24:13–35). Knowing that we are not alone; and learning to recognise God's Spirit amongst us; enable us to live expectantly of his presence and mindful that those occupied by the spirits and the powers of Babylon can neither discern nor experience the presence and movement of God's Spirit in our midst.

We search for a spirituality that is open to welcoming those in whom Jesus comes to us daily. Those who are crucified and de-humanised by Babylon are the community to which Jesus belongs, the community he seeks out, the church transformed and reawakened to the realities of a world, broken and in search of meaning *beyond the Church*. We are his followers, yet Jesus satirised follower's inability to recognise him when he comes (Matt 25:31–46) and John tells it plainly, 'He came to his own country and his own people did not recognise him' (John 1:11). The emptiness of the tomb does not minimise the power and threat of Babylon; but it is an opening through which we can see the counter communities of Jesus embodying his struggle and promise. To see them we need to be reminded of a text Jesus himself may have been mindful of:

Who has believed what we have heard?
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?
For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

He was despised and rejected by others;
a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity;
and as one from whom others hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him of no account.

Surely, he has borne our infirmities
and carried our diseases;
yet we accounted him stricken,
struck down by God, and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions,
crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,
and by his bruises we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have all turned to our own way,
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so, he did not open his mouth.
By a perversion of justice he was taken away.
Who could have imagined his future?
For he was cut off from the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people.
They made his grave with the wicked
and his tomb with the rich,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth. (Isa 53)

Demonstrating with the cloud of witnesses, ‘ancestor insurrectionists’ and communion of creation, the new world which has come and is coming

We are not alone! God is with us; and so are the many communities and partners through whom God’s Spirit demonstrates the first fruits of the new World – where the Earth is blessed and the people are free. We meet them in the presence of protesting peoples and Queer folks who embody the alternatives to Babylon’s oppression and death. They become clear in the healing powers of the earth to reclaim and renew all that we harm and pollute. They watch over us in the cloud of witnesses, our ancestors who have struggled and celebrated the risen life in the midst of Babylon, our sisters and brothers who have kept faith with the new world they now indwell.

As for us, we have this large crowd of witnesses around us. So then, let us rid ourselves of everything that gets in the way, and of the sin which holds on to us so tightly, and let us run with determination the race that lies before us. Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end. He did not give up because of the cross! On the contrary, because of the joy that was waiting for him, he thought nothing of the disgrace of dying on the cross, and he is now seated at the right side of God's throne. Think of what he went through; how he put up with so much hatred from sinners! So do not let yourselves become discouraged and give up. (Hebrews 12:1-3)

Mission: Faith's Call to Action – Action's Call to Faith

The scale and urgency of the issues around us require that we respond in faith and action. Our lives and the life of the whole creation are at stake. We cannot accept the place that the '*shitstem*' has given us. Instead, we will rise up and make space for the new creation, the counter creation which will break in as we participate in its unfolding. Christ's love stirs us and inspires us to participate in creating a world, a church and systems where love bears fruit and brings healing for all (Rev 22: 1-2).

At the heart of the mission theology that CWM articulates, is a call for justice to renew the earth, the economy and all life. This is not an optional extra; rather, it is a matter of faith that calls us to action, stirring us to interpret the signs of the times through the lens of faith and our call to discipleship. CWM calls on its member churches and all Christians to confess our complicity with empire; to expose and oppose the sin of the '*shitstem*', the idolatries of Babylon; and to live a faith which acts responsibly within the Earth.

Critical confession of faith and radical discipleship come together in this vision and theology. CWM offers its reading and discernment of the signs of the times as more than an agenda for work over the next 10 years, but also as provocation and inspiration for churches to rise up in faith and declare the new creation, an embodiment of faith and an essential dimension of life and witness. This theology statement is our covenant with God for life, the life of the groaning Creation for which Christ lived and died. If we participate with Christ in restoring Creation, then all will see, believe and taste that the Lord is good.

SECTION 3: RESPONDING IN RADICAL DISCIPLESHIP – LIVING OUT THE NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH



School climate strike ...

Radical Discipleship is costly, and it is to be understood eschatologically. As the communities of faith witness to the new world which is coming, we are mindful that we are in the shadows of Babylon. We understand radical discipleship to mean following Christ's demands to engage in a continuing struggle for justice and righteousness, remembering the costly nature of redemption that has been won for us through the cross. Our call to discipleship is a call to participate in the coming of the new Heaven and new Earth. We participate in this struggle for a new Heaven and a New Earth because of our faith and conviction that God will have the final word on human existence and of the breaking in and bringing forth of the new world. Our eschatological vision, a vision of God's *Kairos*, when God's reign or rule will be fully expressed throughout creation, inspires us to continue in the struggle for transformation and liberation. The resurrection narrative is a reminder that evil, suffering and death are means to an end, the inbreaking of God's *Shalom* where injustice, inequality, corruption and amorality hitherto dominate.

Eschatology has been understood as an esoteric, abstract theological concept. But we see it instead as the power that gives hope to communities excluded and demeaned under Babylon. In this regard, eschatology is hope in action, the struggle for change and the demand for a new world, flourishing with love and justice. Eschatology is the language

of the disadvantaged and the deprived, those who cannot entertain the luxury of silence nor the convenience of compromise. To embrace eschatology is to know the costly nature of radical discipleship, the awareness of Babylon's stronghold and the corresponding defiance of its courtship or coercion irrespective of the risk of violent repression. In every corner of the world we witness the presence of those who, in the face of systemic oppression and violence, remain determinedly true to the liberation struggle in pursuit of life in fullness for all; because of the conviction that "someday a bright new world will break upon the shore." In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., "Riot is the language of the unheard." Among the unheard, of this moment in time, and to whom attention must be given, are:

Kairotic black liberation Dalit disciples: The witness and struggle of communities in this new Heaven and new Earth will be expressed in the lived realities and faith of those who are presently consigned to the margins of existence. Their struggle for liberation is infinitely complex as they move against forces which dehumanize them from the outside; and as they work against those oppressive values which they have been forced to imitate and embody. As God's time breaks into ours, we believe that new communities formed from the lives of those presently being broken by the evils of Babylon, inside and out, will emerge and provide renewed examples of transformed faith across the world. Whether through the witness of millions of so-called Untouchables or Dalits, or through the radical expression of the Black Lives Matter Movement, and wider Black liberation struggles, we will see an arising of new expressions of faithful struggle for the new Heaven and new Earth. As a mission agency recognising its legacies of slavery, these movements are especially vital partners.

Eco-feminist, womanist discipleship will be an important ingredient to the recipe for justice and liberation that underpins the arising of life to confront Babylon. We recognise the critical contribution of women, who comprise the majority of congregations in churches across the world and play invaluable roles in sustaining communities, often against Babylon. Noting the witness of the women who were first to witness the risen Christ, we are mindful that transformation cannot take place without the participation and leadership of women. They can lead the way to new visions and experiences of justice for the Earth and the peoples of the Earth.

Queer communities – The struggle for a New Heaven and new Earth is one that has been undertaken in the knowledge that our present ways of being and living do not affirm all God's creation. Those whose identities do not synchronize with social and sexual normativity are often perceived and treated as transgressive, pitiful or unacceptable. CWM has spoken out against homophobia and sought to uphold the God-given dignity of LGBTQI+ people. However, LGBTQI+ communities are calling attention to themselves as persons and voices to be recognised, affirmed and listened to. One's freedom cannot be given, less the freed is made beholden; one's freedom must be taken, even fought for.

Persons living with disabilities – are among the disciples who may teach the church and communities how to honour and celebrate diversity and how to embrace the variety

of gifts and ways of sharing in the life of communities. CWM rejects the notion that accommodating persons living with disabilities is adequate. Instead we invite our Members and the wider community to affirm and advocate with and for persons living with disabilities as the path to integration and inclusion. Language that patronises and stereotypes is rejected by persons living with disabilities and they demand to be called as they wish and to be treated without robbing them of their intrinsic worth. This is part of the subversive alertness that is required to usher in the new day and the new world.

The life-giving texts and spiritualities through which God is speaking – The breaking in and through of the spirit of life, pointing to God in relationship, is not restricted to fixed patterns of worship or solely to existing expressions of church. We recognise, therefore, that we must be open to life-giving texts and wisdom from the prophetic communities beyond the church, through which God is present and speaking. They are offering us new insights for the continued task of discerning how we might live together and affirm one another in a world wounded by racism, sexism, economic exploitation, climate injustice and the many other ills that weigh heavily upon us in the name of Babylon and its colluders.

CWM believes that God exist outside of space and time, yet integrally intertwined and involved in all of life; and that God is renewing and bringing all things together, challenging us to care for and be in solidarity with all living people and things. We remain committed to participating in God's mission to renew all creation; and we affirm that we are witnesses to the gracious love and creative inspiration that God has offered to all that God has created in God's image. In this regard, we embrace the universality and catholicity of faith and faithfulness as expressions of our connectedness to one another and to all that exists, both within the Earth that we call home and in all the billions of stars and universes beyond our sight and comprehension. We believe that the new creation that breaks out by the Spirit in the midst of Babylon is one that will affirm and recognise the gifts and contributions of diverse communities. We also believe that the experiences emerging from these contexts will offer fresh insight of the liberating God who is 'making all things new'.

The logic and practice of all this will be realised in the solidarity we express with all who are under Babylon's grip, be they from within the wider Christian family, among all people of faith and ideologies that promote liberation and affirm life, or our fellow creatures living in the climate that we have changed. Such radical discipleship challenges us to set aside desires to dominate; and, instead calls us to come in peace into Earth's 'community of communities'.

SECTION 4: COMMUNITIES LIVING THE URGENCY OF THE RISEN LIFE – EMBODYING ALTERNATIVES



Nuns hold placards during a protest demanding justice after an alleged sexual assault of a nun by Jalandhar Bishop Franco Mulakkal, in Kochi, in the southern state of Kerala, India (Sept. 13, 2018). The placards read in Malayalam "Why is the government silent?" "Police, do justice" and "Our lives are threatened."

Disciples living out the new Heaven and new Earth in the midst of the old.

¹⁴ I gave them your message, and the world hated them, because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁵ I do not ask you to take them out of the world, but I do ask you to keep them safe from the Evil One. ¹⁶ Just as I do not belong to the world, they do not belong to the world. ¹⁷ Dedicate them to yourself by means of the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ I sent them into the world, just as you sent me into the world. (John 17: 14–18)

The spirituality and discipleship invoked by this theology builds on John 17, which is intended to call attention to the understanding that, as disciples of Jesus, we are *in* but not *of* empire, *beneath* but *beyond* Babylon. John uses the term 'world' to define systems, not to reference creation. In this regard he sets up a polemic between the world of the Roman Empire and the community that Jesus called into being as an alternative to such systemic arrangements. Therefore, as disciples of Jesus, we are called to live the alternative, to inhabit with Christ, the risen life; and to live out the New Heaven and New Earth amid the struggle, system and circumstance of the current heaven and earth.

The old order makes the exclusive claim to bring prosperity for life. It asserts that every nation, government, corporation, community and individual needs to be devoted to the profit-making processes of the Empire. But CWM, in common with the Christian faith, rejects this assertion, affirms the Johannine theology of locating Jesus outside of empire and sees in Christ a new order, shaped by fullness of life for all.

The old order's devotion to money and desire for profit is defined by John's Jesus as the thief coming to "steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:10, NIV). Jesus' vision of fullness, in contrast, is as a blessing, especially of the Earth which will be made new (Rev 21) and of the poorest people upon it who will be lifted up (Luke 1:52-53). The healing miracles of Jesus offer us signs of the fullness Jesus brings without cost or exploitation. This stands in sharp contradistinction to the marketized and monetarized practices of medicine in many parts of the world, where health is seen as a commodity and not a human right. Indeed, attempts to profit through God's healing power are condemned, as with Simon the Magician (Acts 8) and with Elisha's servant Gehazi (2 Kings 5). The early church builds on this, seeking a community of solidarity where property is held in common and its profits equitably shared as the community seeks to be faithful to the mission of God (see Acts of the Apostles).

The old order favours power, prestige and strength. Its monuments are fetishes devoted to the great and the glamorous. The power politics are about preferment and status; and ego and testosterone reveal its Patriarchal core. It functions by co-opting and coercing others to its desires and schemes. Discrimination on grounds of gender, race, ethnicity, ability and orientation are all integral to its hierarchy and shows itself in many forms of slavery, violence and repression. Empire favours elites and communities of self-interest who buy into the privileges that empire affords or dangles before them. In Jesus we see the inversion and subversion of hierarchical binaries, a figure whose being transforms and bursts our constructions of identity and nature. This 'trans-Jesus' is fullness of life, and from his side we see the fullness flows from and for those denied life by the old order. Jesus's mission from the margins and his commissioning of the marginalized, offers a vision of life that contrasts strongly with Patriarchy and Empire. This action drew particular criticism from religious power then and still does now. Yet, this is Jesus' decisive practice of fullness of life, amongst and with those people whom Power despises and dispossesses. It is a daring and transformative re-ordering of life in terms of equality, mutuality and solidarity, informed and inspired by love.

This is the shift Paul recognizes that Christ's love and life brings about a shift in the ordering of human relationships that transcends social categorization and demands justice for all.

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:28)

This claim does not deny human distinctiveness and cultural diversity, nor does it support slavery or other forms of dehumanizing relationship. Instead, it points to

counter-Imperial communities that reflect God's counter-reality: no longer subject to Empire (Phil. 3:20), open to all, including Gentiles, "foreigners and strangers" (Eph 2:19); and informed by the values of Jesus, the chief cornerstone (v. 20). This is a daring confrontation of Empire with a life-giving and liberative alternative.

Christ's love stirs within us an inbreaking of God's Spirit, offering the seeds of new creation, the outworking of justice in history, and the experience of the Creator's promise of salvation for all. It calls us to transformative praxis in our involvement with God's mission and in our relationships in communities and with the whole inhabited Earth. It positions us to hear God's urgent cry for an uprising to life in resistance to the death-dealing principalities and powers of our times, crossing boundaries of spiritualities and species and witnessing to life-flourishing communities where God's life-giving streams flow to transform the Earth.

Rising up in a Fallen Babylon: Communities *in* but not *of* Empire

CWM and its member churches come together as disciples of Jesus living and loving the vision of a New Heaven and a New Earth, in the face of idolatries of power and privilege; and expressing ourselves as 50,000 life-flourishing communities, arising, shining, planting, praying and embodying alternatives to empire's death and destruction.

We will reject and divest ourselves from the legacies, liturgies and longings of colonization which dominate histories and occupy our hearts. We will explore and discover methodologies to disarm toxic texts and pretexts, interpretations and collusions which domineer and do violence.

We will learn from the disappointment in church, in the language of transformation and the claims we have made for ourselves and God, yet affirming the new world discerned by those that Empire has despised and despoiled.

We take up daily ways to live authentically and embody the counter claim Jesus has on us, sharing in movements committed to justice for the earth and for the excluded, acting in repentance for our past sins of colonisation, racism and violence.

We seek at the fringes – sanctuaries and signs of the uprising of the Spirit, of the world which is coming, of the church beyond church, of Jesus repenting, rising and calling: follow me.

This leads us into some modes of the Rising Life which we characterize as 'arising', 'shining', 'planting', 'praying', 'singing', 'dancing' and 'embodying'. These speak to the key characteristics of missional congregations in Babylon.

They come from the apocalyptic hope and wisdom of the prophets in Babylon, especially Jeremiah 29:5–7:

Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶ Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and

do not decrease.⁷ But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

Arising ...

Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

² For darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the Lord will arise upon you,
and his glory will appear over you.

³ Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

⁴ Lift up your eyes and look around;
they all gather together, they come to you;
your sons shall come from far away,
and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.

⁵ Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,
because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you. (Isa 60)

As Christians, we believe in the power of resurrection and, accordingly, that we are called to arise and proclaim the reality of God's vision for the world even when we are still caught up and entangled in the morass of Babylon. We believe that throwing off Babylon requires commitment and courage to denounce and disassociate from all forces, behaviour and lifestyles that deny life; and, instead, to embrace all that breathes life, nourishes and sustains all living things and beings. We are not offering a 'council of despair', where doom-laden prophets of desolation and hopelessness argue and cajole, casting themselves as the enemies of joy; and we are not seeking to scare people into changing their ways and attitudes. Rather, we believe that we are called to participate in the creation of communities that are filled with the joy of the gospel, inspiring people into new ways and patterns of living and relating to one another on the basis of justice and peace. These are communities that will stand up and stand out, who find in our faith and vision of justice the courage to arise despite the weight of oppression, unjust systems and corrupt social order.

These new ways of being community are envisioned as ones that renounce the evils of patriarchy and male-centred forms of power; and where space is given for all to live in peace and with dignity and each regarded with respect. Jesus reminds us of the folly of pouring new wine into old wineskins (Matthew 9:14–17, Mark 2:21–22, and Luke 5:33–39), suggesting that new, vibrant, spirit-filled communities of hope, representative of the

new wine, ought not to be poured into the old wineskins that represent patriarchal models of faith communities that besmirch the inclusive and all-embracing *imago dei*.

These new ways of being in community also calls us to stand up to the power and toxicity of racism and sexism that has bedevilled the Body of Christ and other communities of faith for over a millennium. At a time when nationalism is on the rise and the restricted and bounded ways in which notions of community are being constructed, we remember the vision of Paul (Galatians 3:28) – that the Body of Christ is not based on hierarchies of power and preference. In Christ, notions of privilege and ideologies of supremacy, which invariably lead to various forms of xenophobia and racism, are replaced by a radical form of equality to which Paul calls attention in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 12:12–27). The logic of this form of interconnection between and among all peoples, irrespective of our differences, is that we learn to treat each other as equals, endowed with inestimable value, which will naturally lead to the eradication of economic poverty and inequality. Embracing our oneness and committing ourselves to an ethic of solidarity with each other, across our tangled lines of sexual, ethnic, cultural, national, denominational and religious differences, will inspire a greater impetus to ensure that no one part of the body suffers in isolation. The ethic of radical solidarity in which all members of the body care for and support one another remains the basis for the new hope-filled communities of transformation that we envisage arising within the midst of Babylon.

Shining ...

The God who said, “Out of darkness the light shall shine!” is the same God who made his (God’s) light shine in our hearts, to bring us the knowledge of God’s glory shining in the face of Christ. ⁷ Yet we who have this spiritual treasure are like common clay pots, in order to show that the supreme power belongs to God, not to us. ⁸ We are often troubled, but not crushed; sometimes in doubt, but never in despair; ⁹ there are many enemies, but we are never without a friend; and though badly hurt at times, we are not destroyed. ¹⁰ At all times we carry in our mortal bodies the death of Jesus, so that his life also may be seen in our bodies. (2 Cor 4:6–10)

To shine is to witness in word and deed to the good news of Jesus’ coming amongst us. His life gives us hope and joy in believing so that others can see a light in us revealing the deeper truths of the Gospel at work in our world. These truths point to a God who lifts up the light of God’s shining countenance upon the earth to give peace.

‘Shining’ communities are communities of love, where compassionate grace is extended and experienced; where disappointment can be confidently expressed and caringly addressed; and where “love and faithfulness meet together and righteousness and peace kiss each other” (Psalm 85:10). Jesus calls disciples to be and to enable shining communities, devoid of mean-spirited, self-serving attitudes; and filled with the passion of Jesus to love and serve.

In the midst of the oppressive forces of these times, shining communities rise up to show that alternative worlds are possible. Communities shining with Jesus' risen life, inspire hope and confidence in all who "walk through the valley of the shadow of death" (Ps. 23:4); and make space for those on the margins to take their place within the community,, to absorb the light of God, and to shine for others to "come and see" (Jn. 1:46, 4:29). This is the particular power of Pride as shown by the LGBTQ and Black liberation movements and churches might see in this a new and powerful metaphor for evangelism and witness.

By embracing this theology, CWM commits itself to deconstruct the notion of evangelism as doing violence to the bodies, souls and cultures of others; and reclaim evangelism as Jesus practiced it, proclaiming the Gospel of hope and hospitality and inviting others to become part of the alternative, life-transforming communities and counter-creating cultures. We will resist the temptation falling prey to the colonizing ways of mission and evangelism in our history; and commit ourselves to the movement of Jesus on the streets, seas and territories of Babylon, confronting power and proclaiming peace.

Planting ...

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.

¹⁸ But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating;
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,
and its people as a delight.

¹⁹ I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,
or the cry of distress.

²⁰ No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days,
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.

²¹ They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

²² They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

²³ They shall not labour in vain, or bear children for calamity;
for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—
and their descendants as well.

²⁴ Before they call, I will answer,
while they are yet speaking, I will hear.

²⁵ The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!

They shall not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain,
says the Lord. (Isa 65:17–25)

Urgent action is needed to bring about the change we claim to be both possible and necessary. To stem the pressing ecological catastrophe, we must end the old damaging and destructive ways of living, trading and consuming; and, instead, work together to nurture the Earth. Positive changes are needed in communities, creating and lifting up alternatives to the systems of Babylon that govern the economy and impoverish the ecology. *Planting* communities persist in creating, nurturing and inviting, change in the attitudes of peoples and in the cultures of neighbourhoods and societies. As in all gardening and farming, planting is a sign of hope in a life-flourishing future, which has already begun, beckoning us to believe and live the change we declare is possible.

This theology commits CWM and its member churches to models of mission rooted in ecological justice at every level. We will divest ourselves from the interests and financial systems which profit from despoiling the Earth and seek ways, in our own work and life, to restore a creation choked by human sin. We will continue to imagine and build life-flourishing alternative financial and economic systems to counter the prevailing one, which is driving the economic and ecological catastrophe around us.

This theology also commits CWM and its member churches to nurturing ways of mission which demonstrate rejection of our colonial history, repentance for our past and present complicity, and a return to the radical discipleship to which Jesus invites us. This means that work is needed to enable CWM and its member churches to understand how the legacies of the Imperial mode of mission continue to shape our work, and to equip each other to participate in creating life-flourishing communities that are free from racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination. The love we claim to be at the heart of mission compels us to ways of engagement that neither hurt nor harm. Instead, it challenges us to live and serve with justice and integrity; to set aside the paternalism that characterizes so much of what the Church does in the name of love; and to submit ourselves to be nurtured in risen life so that, in turn, we may become instruments of God's nurturing Spirit.

Praying ...

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to teach them that they should always pray and never become discouraged. ² "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected people. ³ And there was a widow in that same town who kept coming to him and pleading for her rights, saying, 'Help me against my opponent!' ⁴ For a long time the judge refused to act, but at last he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or respect people, ⁵ yet because of all the trouble this widow is giving me, I will see to it that she gets her rights. If I don't, she will keep on coming and finally wear me out!'" ⁶ And the Lord continued, "Listen to what

that corrupt judge said. ⁷ Now, will God not judge in favour of his own people who cry to him day and night for help? Will he be slow to help them? ⁸ I tell you; he will judge in their favour and do it quickly. But will the Son of Man find faith on earth when he comes?" (Luke 18:1-8)

Jesus' direct command was that we should 'Worship the Lord our God and serve God only' (Luke 4:8). In this invitation and obligation to worship God, is the fundamental characteristic that defines the church. The church may do many worthy and important things, but its fundamental calling is to worship God. The centrality of worship within the Christian community is not simply an obligation to observe a certain ritual. Rather, this obligation to worship, is the means by which Christian communities honour God and, by so doing, subvert Babylon. Worship is an act of surrender to God, and God alone. Through this act of surrender the community is enabled and emboldened to arise and proclaim a new reality from within the tentacles of Babylon. In Paul's admonition we are reminded that "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12). Since this is the context in which we carry out God's mission, then connecting with and surrendering to God, through worship, makes available to us the spiritual resources to resist Babylon and the seductive and inducing power of empire.

The significance of prayer and worship cannot be overstated. Throughout the ages Christian communities have sought the power and inspiration of the Spirit in order to deepen our experience of being human and to increase our capacity to see the world as God's creation of beauty and grandeur, and not through the distorted lenses of Babylon's design. Arising to new life in Christ is much more than human intellectual processes and action. This is not to abandon the importance of human commitment to action and resistance, but it is to remind us that Paul's charge, that we are not simply fighting flesh and blood, should ignite a spirituality of reliance upon God's Spirit as the Source and energy behind our action and commitment to transformation and liberation.

In this regard, worship is an offering of our intellect, allegiance and action to God and a reliance on, and discernment of God's Spirit for enablement for and engagement with God's life-giving mission. The Sacrament of Holy Communion is not just a memorial of the crucifixion of Jesus and its salvific meaning, but also an anticipation of the gracious generosity of God who is calling all people to embody God's life-flourishing communities in which there is abundance and fullness of life for all. Worship and prayer, therefore, represent the embodying of emotions, actions, symbols, gestures, movements and commitment to God in Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Worship is total surrender to God, hoping and expecting our hearts and minds to be renewed by the Spirit; and that our collective and corporate expression of 'being in Christ' will remain the basis on which new communities will rise in the midst of Babylon and proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Singing ...

O sing to the LORD a new song,
 for he has done marvellous things.
 His right hand and his holy arm
 have gained him victory.
² The LORD has made known his victory;
 he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations.
³ He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness
 to the house of Israel.
 All the ends of the earth have seen
 the victory of our God.
⁴ Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth;
 break forth into joyous song and sing praises.
⁵ Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre,
 with the lyre and the sound of melody.
⁶ With trumpets and the sound of the horn
 make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD.
⁷ Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
 the world and those who live in it.
⁸ Let the floods clap their hands;
 let the hills sing together for joy
⁹ at the presence of the LORD, for he is coming
 to judge the earth.
 He will judge the world with righteousness,
 and the peoples with equity. (Ps. 98)

A key aspect in the process of rising to life is the power of singing and the collective strength of the human voice articulating struggle, defying the odds and expressing hope. Evolutionary biologists have long pondered the significance of singing and why it is an important facet of meaning to be human. All human communities sing. Even in times of severe pain and suffering, human communities sing, sometimes in groans of anguish and protest; and most often, with a determination to rise. Psalm 137 presents the captured and demoralized community, once a singing community, unable to sing. This inability, rather unwillingness, to sing, was not simply due to the pain of their circumstances. They were, instead, expressing their refusal to be used by their captors who demanded that they sang. Pain and suffering are not so controlling as to prevent the human spirit from rising in singing as seen in Psalm 34, where the Psalmist proclaims that they will praise God irrespective of their circumstances; and Psalm 91 begins with the affirmation and invitation to sing a new song to the Lord.

Songs of protest have long been a central part of many activist moments of resistance to injustice. It is often said that if you cannot sing your message then you don't have a message worth proclaiming. One only has to consider the power of collective singing of enslaved people – in the Civil Rights Movement in the US in the 1950s and 60s, and in the

Anti-Apartheid Movement in the 1970s and 80s in South Africa. These are among the many scenarios in which we witness the emotive power of singing. In many cultures, often amongst the poorest and suffering communities in the world, we hear songs of defiance and hope in the most desperate of circumstances; songs of a fierce resistance to all that dehumanizes; and songs of celebration for victories won, however small, and at signs that “freedom is coming”.

The power of collective singing was once heard in inner city churches and in the townships of South Africa, where songs such as *Siyahamb' ekukhanyen' kwenkhos'*, (‘We Are Marching in the Light of God’) were sung against a backdrop merciless violence and oppression from the White minority Apartheid regime of the National Party in South Africa. Singing ‘We Are Marching in the Light of God’, in the midst of legalised torture and murder, may make no sense when heard in purely human terms. Indeed, it is difficult to fathom one speaking of the ‘Light of God’ amidst the travails of suffering and oppression, meted out to ordinary, poor black people, wallowing in darkness; and in a context where it appears that Babylon has blotted out their light. And yet this song echoed across the townships, and eventually across the world, as churches and communities joined in the singing in a show of solidarity with their suffering brothers and sisters in apartheid South Africa.

The process of arising in the face of Babylon calls for singing that evoke anger as well as aspiration and pride, lifting the human spirit and offering emotional and psychological catharsis in the midst of all that dehumanizes. Celebration is often empty without the collective power of singing; and suffering and pain are easier borne with those who share the struggle and know the power of singing.

In more recent times, we have witnessed the power of singing accompanying the Black Lives Matter Movement in the US, as contemporary artists, like BeBe Winans, compose and record songs that speak to specific moments in the life of that nation. Further back in history, folk artists, like Woody Guthrie and Robert Nesta Marley (Bob Marley), composed and popularised such anthems as “This Land is Your Land” and hymns such as ‘Concrete Jungle’ and ‘No Woman No Cry’, calling for just living and declaring resistance and defiance to the realities of poverty and marginalisation.

In the UK context the contemporary hymnody of John Bell and Graham Maule, of the Iona community, have provided theologically grounded resources for expressing the liberationist dimensions of the gospel through songs such as ‘Jesus Christ is Raging’ and ‘Heaven Shall Not Wait’. In these and other songs, we are witnessing the contemporary exploration of the ways in which songs and singing can bring people together to express truths in a language that resonates with people across cultures and ethnic backgrounds; and, particularly people from the margins, who know pain and suffering and the accompanying languages, such as singing and tears. So, this theology statement affirms that God’s people will arise and claim the power of singing as language and resource of the new life-flourishing communities of love, where solidarity in resisting Babylon and celebration of rising to life constitute the content of the songs we sing.

Our singing signifies that we are communities of solidarity and celebration. The Gospel challenges and calls us to a life of justice and peace as it fills us with joy and inspiration. In a deeply broken world, there are wounds to heal and wonders to celebrate. God's Spirit acknowledges our faithfulness and affirms our joy. The Spirit meets us in our singing as we rise from hostility to hospitality and from brokenness to koinonia. In this movement of arising, accompanied by the Spirit, we will sing of the mercies of the Lord and commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of living, loving, marching and singing in the "light of God". In the words of the Christian mystic, Hildegard of Bingen, "There is the music of Heaven in all things." So, with her and with Bob Marley we sing and "chant down Babylon" with hope and joy.

Dancing ...

²⁰ Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. ²¹ And Miriam sang to them: 'Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.' (Exodus 15)

Miriam's dance was a spontaneous outburst of gratitude and joy at the realization that Israel had been cut loose from the bondage of Pharaoh's oppressive regime. In calling the women to join her in the dance, Miriam declared that Pharaoh had lost his grip on their bodies and minds and that they were free to arise and dance to the rhythm of their new found life of freedom. In the language of this theology statement, Miriam declared that Babylon is as fallen as the tomb is empty and there was no better way of saying this than with dance, an expression of defiance and delight combined.

Like singing, dancing is a movement of the whole being, giving expression to what it means to be human in the midst of a system that dehumanizes and destroys body, mind and spirit. The Christian faith has not always been a sympathetic proponent of the body. Paul himself seems to have been somewhat dismissive of body, offering a parallel between the decaying body and the immortality of the spirit that resides within (2 Corinthians 4:16). However, this theological articulation, which makes such marked distinction between the body and the spirit, often leads to unhelpful disregard for the body; and, in so doing, diminishes the totality or wholeness of the human being. Miriam's dancing affirms the "beingness" of our humanity and portrays the body as the outward expression of a living energetic and Spirit-filled life, buoyant with hope and possibility.

According to Eve Ensler (One Billion Rising), dancing "insists we take up space. It has no set direction but we go there together. It's dangerous, joyous, sexual, holy, disruptive. It breaks the rules." Similar sentiments are echoed by radical black theologians like Anthony Pinn and Dwight Hopkins. Dancing engages the whole body and expresses emotions in ways that words fall short. We dance in the face of any encumbrances of the body and the spirit because in dancing we join the Lord of the dance to tell stories about life, feelings, dreams and aspirations. Ronan Hardiman's rendition of Lord of the dance presents God as a dancer who incarnated God's self in Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus danced the

dance of God even when the “sky turned black”. He faced rejection and death in the process of dancing; but not even death could stop the dance.

They cut me down and I leapt up high;
I am the life that will never, never die
I'll live in you if you'll live in me
I am the Lord of the dance, said he.

Dance is an embodiment of our purpose and our passion. It encapsulates the entirety of our being and it invites community involvement. Indeed, “it insists that we take up space”.

Dancing must be an important component in the process of arising to the new life in Christ that we envision in the midst of Babylon. Despite the desperation and despair that Babylon leaves in its wake; and despite the terror and trauma experienced by the victims of Babylon, the people of faith will arise and declare that Babylon is fallen. This proclamation is a dance. In this dance, we articulate our struggle and protest our discontent with the politics of Babylon; navigate our way through the maze of corruption and abuse of power; occupy space within the domain of Babylon, without becoming tainted by its inducements and incentives; and celebrate our victory over the claims and schemes of Babylon (see Ex. 1:15–20; Dan. 1–3; Jer. 29:1–14). We believe that the fullness of life that Jesus promises (John 10:10) must be received and celebrated as an expression of gratitude and joy; and that dancing is an appropriate way to celebrate this gift.

Dance involves movement, movement of bodies, minds and spirits; and it requires partnership, the coming together of dancers from different social locations, with common aspirations and vision for transformed and life-flouring communities. God's promise of a New Heaven and a New Earth (Isaiah 65:17–25) is for all of creation. Deeply etched into our consciousness is the anticipation of this dream coming into being and the faithful, from every people and tongue, dancing to welcome this subversive and energizing reversal. This subversive dream is nourished by Jesus' transformative action in Mark's account of the Feeding of the 5,000 (Mark 6:30–44), in which Jesus's community dance is in striking juxtaposition to that of Herod's (Mark 6:14–29). In Herod's community, the feast is for the few “high officials, military commanders and leading men of Galilee” (6:21, NIV). In Jesus's community the feast is for the many who live on the margins of Herod's social order (6:33–34, NIV). In Herod's community, Herod, the leader, tramples upon the weak and the vulnerable (vv. 22–27a). In Jesus's community, Jesus, the leader, shows compassion for the weak and the vulnerable (v. 34). In Herod's community, the dance leads to death (vv. 27b–28); in Jesus's community the dance brings life (v. 42). Jesus invites his disciples to participate in a dance where little becomes much and where there is more than enough for everyone (vv. 35–44).

In John's account of the feeding miracle, the dance of more than enough, Jesus' disciples are willing participants (Jn. 6:1–14). Philip's hesitation (v. 7) is quickly rebutted with Andrew's positive movement – “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small

fish...” (vv. 8–9). And here is where the subversive dance begins – an abundance of resources for all people is suddenly made available, which all started with the offering of a seemingly insignificant boy. He joined Jesus in the dance of abundance and the miracle happened (vv. 9–13). Matthew’s account shows the disciples struggling to enter this dance (Mt. 14:13–21). Jesus’ “You give them something to eat” (v. 16) is rebuffed by the disciples’ “We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish” (v. 17). Jesus, however, continues to court them into the dance; and, in the end, they witness the miracle of resocialization and the birth of a new way of seeing and being in community (vv. 18–21) – the dance of more than enough.

Babylon establishes clear demarcation in the way it dances, often playing off one group against another. In Jesus’ alternative dance we see everyone eating and dancing together. In Eve Ensler’s picture of the dance, “we all go there together”. The New Heaven and New Earth, which God promises is one of abundance for all; and the community we envision is one where hope arise, as Babylon’s death-dealing schemes perish and fall. CWM is committed to join the Lord of the dance as we bear witness to the New Heaven and the New Earth, founded on God’s love, justice and peace.

Embodying alternatives to empire’s death and destruction: Communities of the risen life

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying:

‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; ⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.’

⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’ Also, he said, ‘Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.’ ⁶ Then he said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. (Rev 21:1–6)

The eschatological tension of the now and the not yet meets in the heart of faith communities who confess that Jesus is Lord, who believe that this is not how God calls our world to be, and who are committed to the coming new Heaven and new Earth. Such hope is the active demonstration of confronting and challenging all powers that defy the God of life; of rejecting the system of death and destruction that divides in an attempt to conquer; and of working towards righting the wrong of history and making way for the new to emerge. The violence perpetrated and perpetuated by Babylon and its co-conspirators, such as the Church, will not prevail; and the false prophets who offer a vision of peace without justice will crumble with the fallen Babylon.

CWM embraces the vision of a different world, a world liberated from the curse of injustice, inequality and indifference, a world transformed by the power of the Spirit to become life-flourishing, justice-supporting and peace-affirming. For the new world, where all lives are flourishing, justice is exercised and peace affirmed, CWM and its member churches, together with Christians around the world, commit ourselves to remaining on the journey of 'Confessing Witness' (*Missio Confessionis*) as an expression of our faith in action and our approach to engagement with God's mission. We believe that God is present in the 50,000 communities where we are located, and that God is calling us to join with others to be God's agents of transformation. As we experience the fresh wind of the Spirit brooding over us, we accept God's call, steeled not to despair, determined to love, witnessing to the risen Jesus, whose resurrection is insurrection and proclamation is clear: Babylon is as fallen as the tomb is empty.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. (Revelation 22:1–5)