

The International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade

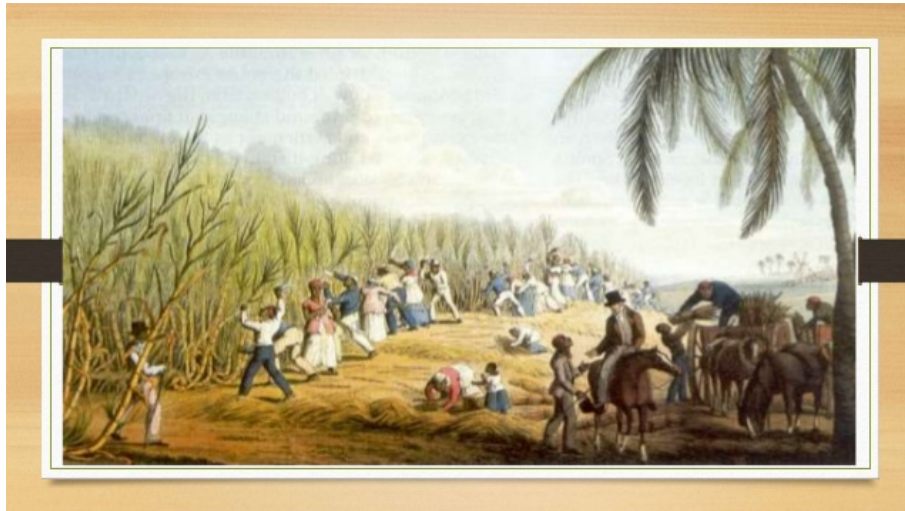
For over a period of 400 years, more than 15 million were victims of the transatlantic slave trade. Fueled by economic ambitions, transatlantic slave trade contributed to what has been described as the largest and extensive forced migration in human history. The sheer scale of the slave trade and its devastation spread across generations and the geographic regions of Africa, South America, the Caribbean as well as the Pacific Islands.

The International Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade is commemorated on March 25th annually. It offers the opportunity to honor and remember those who suffered under the dehumanizing and brutal bondage of slavery. The legacy of slavery continues to have profound social and economic impact. The scars of deeply rooted racial discrimination, chronic poverty, systemic and institutionalized racism continues to affect people of African descent today.

As Christians, we raise our voices in lamentation for all who were forced to submit to the exploitive oppression of the transatlantic slave trade. We cannot turn a blind eye and ignore the many manifestations of modern-day slavery that plague our world today. There is an urgent need to be aware of the various ways we are liable for indirectly fueling the mechanisms of modern-day slavery. There is the need to call to attention the moral imperative to confront racism, xenophobia, inequality and modern manifestations of slavery. There is a need to call for political action to confront modern forms of slavery, such as human trafficking, forced indentured labor and child labor.

LEGACIES AFTER SLAVERY LAMENT

Written for CWM's Legacies After Slavery Project



Slave Plantation in Trelawney Jamaica

The lament follows excerpts of testimony by William Hankey the LMS Treasurer called before the Select Committee on Slavery on July 20, 1832 to give evidence as it considered the manumission of slaves held in the British Empire. Hankey owned 300 slaves in Trelawney, Jamaica.

In the lament which follows, reference is made to Maroon Spirit. The Maroons were a group of runaway slaves in Jamaica who fiercely protected their freedom and life outside of slavery.



Maroon Women

Words of Lament

Let us gather in a spirit of sorrow and lamentation
As we confess the sin, systems and legacies of slavery

(Quiet)

Select committee question

'Has the result of your experience, as treasurer of the Society, led you to the conclusion, from the progress of civilization among the slaves, that when instructed they have become more obedient and tranquil?

Hankey –

'Quite so; I believe their value, even in the market, has risen in proportion as they have been so instructed; we have had instances of that, a slave has been regarded as more valuable in consequence of his being instructed by the missionaries of our own and other societies

Let us confess the part Christians and churches play and have played in supporting unjust rule because we are complicit in its benefits and co-opted to its systems

(Quiet)

Mourn for the sins of the Transatlantic Slave Trade
the profits made in body and blood
the complicities in evil and injustice
Lament
for the chains of enslavement still bind
In persisting racism poverty and violence
And an economic system in which only profit matters
And pray
Slave Jesus: **Lead us**
Rebel God: **Rouse us**
Maroon Spirit: **Fire us**

Select committee question

'...will you state whether ... you are prepared to anticipate the period which you yourself expect, when emancipation might be forced upon the proprietors by taking yourself early steps to give it?

Hankey –

'I am not prepared to anticipate the general measure at this moment ... I should feel it rash as an individual to precipitate a measure of that nature

Let us confess the part Christians and churches play and have played in resisting justice

(Quiet)

Mourn for the sins of the Transatlantic Slave Trade
the profits made in body and blood
the complicities in evil and injustice
Lament
for the chains of enslavement still bind
In persisting racism poverty and violence

And an economic system in which only profit matters
And pray
Slave Jesus: **Lead us**
Rebel God: **Rouse us**
Maroon Spirit: **Fire us**

Select committee question

'With whatever precautions that declarations of immediate freedom is accompanied, still you think that no precautionary measure could countervail the immediate danger of emancipation?

Hankey –

'certainly not; if it were giving the negroes instant emancipation, that is the full extent of personal liberty, I think they are not prepared, so far as I am able to judge, for the reception of so extensive a boon'

Let us confess the part Christians and churches play and have played in denying the rights of others until it is convenient for ourselves to grant

(Quiet)

Mourn for the sins of the Transatlantic Slave Trade
the profits made in body and blood
the complicities in evil and injustice
Lament
for the chains of enslavement still bind
In persisting racism poverty and violence
And an economic system in which only profit matters
And pray
Slave Jesus: **Lead us**
Rebel God: **Rouse us**
Maroon Spirit: **Fire us**

Select committee question

'Do you believe a strong statement of the extent of wrong under which he is suffering promulgated among the slaves is the best means of arriving at a satisfactory arrangement?

Hankey –

'No ... I would no more give a strong statement to the negro of his wrongs that I would tell a patient labouring under a critical disease, the extent of the danger under which he is lying.

Select committee question

'You think ... the truth must be concealed

Hankey –

I think that ought, as it respects the negroes themselves, to be with the utmost caution and delicacy

Let us confess the lies Christians and churches have told, the sins we have concealed and the victims we have silenced

(Quiet)

Mourn for the sins of the Transatlantic Slave Trade
the profits made in body and blood
the complicities in evil and injustice
Lament
for the chains of enslavement still bind
In persisting racism poverty and violence
And an economic system in which only profit matters
And pray
Slave Jesus: **Lead us**
Rebel God: **Rouse us**
Maroon Spirit: **Fire us**

Let justice roll down like waters
And righteousness like a mighty stream
For we are all called
In the face of Babylon
To join the struggle for freedom

Prayer of Lament (with verses from the Psalms, especially 19 & 74)

God of the cross and the lynching tree,
of the jail cell and the street corner,
of the bible study and the police car,
look upon the world you have made.
See how it is full of hatred and how violence inhabits the earth.

Gunshots ring out under the heavens that declare your glory,
singing the destruction of your children.
Do you not hear our songs?
How long, O God, will you keep silence?
How long will we fail to be your voice?

The streets and sidewalks of your dwelling place flow with blood,
pouring out the cries of your beloveds.
Do you not hear our cries?
How long, O God, will you keep silence?
How long will we fail to be your voice?

The breaths snatched from lungs swirl on wind that blew creation to life,
echoing with the last gasps of your dear ones.
Do you not hear our gasps?
How long, O God, will you keep silence?
How long will we fail to be your voice?

The bones that you knit together in a mother's womb are broken,
rattling with the earth-shaking suffering of your people.
Do you not hear our rattling?
How long, O God, will you keep silence?
How long will we fail to be your voice?

The clanging of cell doors resounds amidst the music of the spheres,
tolling the lives stolen by systemic oppression and unspeakable violence.
Do you not hear the tolling?
How long, O God, will you keep silence?
How long will we fail to be your voice?

The crashing of fire-licked windows mingles with the praise and prayers of generations,
shattering the refuge and safety of your sanctuaries.
Do you not hear the shattering?
How long, O God, will you keep silence?
How long will we fail to be your voice?

In these days, as in days past,
our mothers and grandmothers have become mourners.
our fathers and grandfathers have become grievors.
our children have become wanderers in vacant rooms.
our kinfolk have become pallbearers.
our communities have become filled with empty chairs.
Remember the people you have redeemed, Holy One.
Remember the work of salvation brought about by your love.

You made a way out of no way for slaves to cross the sea on dry land.
Arise O God and defend your own cause.

Raise up in us the cries of outrage.

You made water to flow in the dessert for Hagar and Ishmael when they were driven out.
Arise O God and defend your own cause.
Raise up in us commitment to the long struggle for justice.

You cast out demons so that people might be restored to community.
Arise O God and defend your own cause.
Raise up in us the determination to drive out racism.

You witnessed the death of your Beloved Child.
Arise O God and defend your own cause.
Raise up in us the grief that cannot be comforted.

You brought new life from the crucifixion of state violence and the wounds of abandonment.
Arise O God and defend your own cause.
Raise up in us courage to speak truth to power, and hope to hatred.

God of the ones with hands up and the ones who can't breathe,
of those who #sayhername and those who #shutitdown,
of "we who believe in freedom" and we who "have nothing to lose but our chains,"
look upon the world you have made.
Do not forget your afflicted people forever
so that we might praise your holy name with joyful lips. Amen.

***By Rev. Dr. Sharon R. Fennema, Assistant Professor of Christian Worship and
Director of Worship Life, Pacific School of Religion.***

Unity of All

Hanto Yo*

God of surprises,
you call us
from the narrowness of our traditions
to new ways of being church,
from the captivities of our culture to
creative witness for justice,
from the smallness of our horizons
to the bigness of your vision.

Clear the way in us, your people,
that we might call others to freedom
and renewed faith.

Jesus, wounded healer,
you call us
from preoccupation with our own histories and hurts
to daily tasks of peacemaking,
from privilege and protocol
to partnership and pilgrimage,
from isolation and insularity
to inclusive community.

Clear the way in us, your people,
That we might call others to
wholeness and integrity.

Holy, transforming Spirit,
you call us
from fear to faithfulness,
from clutter to clarity,
from a desire to control to deeper trust,
from the refusal to love to a readiness to risk.

Clear the way in us, your people,
that we might all know the beauty and power
and danger of the gospel.

(*Hanto Yo means “clear the way” in the Lakota language of the North American Plains.)

*By Gwyn Cashmore and Joan Puls, From One Race the Human Race: Racial Justice
Sunday 2003, published by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland: Churches Commission
for Racial Justice, London.*

COUNCIL FOR WORLD MISSION LEGACIES AFTER SLAVERY HEARINGS

ONE PAGE SUMMARY

CONCEPT

Council for World Mission (CWM) has developed a project to explore the legacies after the Transatlantic slave trade. There has been a call for some years now from Black communities of the Caribbean, United Kingdom and the United States for the legacies of the Transatlantic slave trade to be addressed. It has been recognized by the United Nations. CWM's own origins as the London Missionary Society lie in this vital period of colonization and slavery as we were founded before slavery was abolished. CWM came into being in the 1970s as a way to decolonize the mission relationships of the member churches, and its vision of partnership emerged as a way to dismantle some of the consequences of colonialism. This project is a further part of our being a post-colonial organization. We are looking to take historical contemporary perspectives, examining the practice of slavery in those settings and how this has continued to shape the realities of the people of that place. In this way, the hearings will enable people to voice hurt and anger, and for CWM to discover afresh what post-colonial mission movements need to address.

PROCESS

The project will include four hearings in the United Kingdom, Ghana, Jamaica, and the United States. The first two will take place in late 2017, and the remaining two during the first half of 2018.

Stages:

- Hearing the story of the legacies after slavery of the place and people
- Performing acts of lament and repentance
- Sharing in historical and social analysis
- Advocating for political presence in each space
- Raising voices and developing practical actions which can be shared more widely

PARTICIPANTS

There will be a core group of participants who will attend each hearing and act as witnesses to share with the wider CWM family the findings of the project. Each hearing will include people from the locality, including where possible CWM members, but especially community voices, practitioners, and analysts to help us understand the persisting realities of slavery, its avatars and legacies, and how we can engage together in dismantling these injustices.

OUTCOMES

CWM is looking to assess its own story and complicity with the systems of slavery, but also to understand better the urgency of racial justice and the issues which intersect with it and, with its member churches, find ways to advocate reparation and an anti-Imperial model of Christianity in today's world.

A BIBLE STUDY: THE (UN)FORGIVING KING

Bible Passage: Matthew 18:21-35

by Michael N. Jagessar Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education

Aim: To re-read these verses through the eyes of an imaginary Slave

I cannot recall ever hearing a sermon or reading a commentary on the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant or Slave where the "wicked slave" has been given a chance to tell his or her story, even though almost all preachers tend to locate this parable in the context of forgiveness. Through Jesus, Matthew writes off the slave as wicked and unforgiving and deserving only to be handed over to be tortured until he could pay off his debt. Matthew then goes on to have Jesus saying to his disciples and to us: "So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart." There must be countless of these "torture sites" with long queues of defaulted debtors! The King, on the other hand, is most forgiving.

Let us allow Black Martha - a house slave and a convert to the Christian faith, property of the Massa Christopher, owner of the Paradise Plantation - to share her 'insights' on this narrative.

"Black Martha is not my real name. I do not know my real name. This is the name my master and mistress and owner gave me as I was darker than most of the other house slaves who tended to be of a lighter hue. My friends told me that my real parents were killed when caught trying to escape to the mountains with me as a little baby. I was brought up by another slave mother - named Industry - who is now deceased. From age eight I have been working in the great house of Massa Christopher and family. 'Work', not 'lazy' is my other name. We work long, long hours - from sunup to sundown."

"The slave in the parable reminds me of my life and those of my friends and family - a hard, harsh and dehumanising life so far. I read the same Bible as my master and his family and cannot understand how they treat us as lesser specimens of the human race to be forcibly managed. Whether house or field slaves, the fact is, we are property of Massa Christopher and bound to plantation Paradise. Our life is a real and present terror on Paradise. I can still recall that pregnant mother that Master Christopher whipped because she was unable to go to the fields. He had the other slaves dig out a hole to accommodate her belly when she was placed face down on the ground and whipped like hell. I have seen Tuba flogged and put to the stocks because she spent too much time breast-feeding her infant while she worked in the fields. I also recall that night when they caught Quashie, the runaway slave. We were all brought outside to witness how he was strung up-sided down and beaten with the cat-o-nine tails. I lost count after one hundred. I remember that after the beating salt was rubbed into his wound and he was left hanging until he died."

"The master or king in this parable may appear to be some kind and benevolent Father - willing to lend sums of money to his slaves to invest. I am yet to meet such a master. I may be wrong. If he is so kind why did the Master want to sell off this slave, his family and the little they had to pay off the slave's debt? Why did he hand the slave over to be tortured until he got back his money? If the slave could not pay up then the torture can only mean his eventual death and his family being sold to pay back the king. The fact is - whether we are house-slaves or managerial slaves - we are slaves. We are somebody's property. It is the master/king who has the power. His decision is calculated for his own benefit. It does not improve our condition. He would always get back his money. The slave pays either way: with money and/or life."

“This story reminds me of the naked force that is always dished out to literally whip us into submission. The reality is: we are at the mercy of the master/king. Our bodies are like punching bags - an object of abuse. So, I wonder if this is one reason why that slave brother, in desperation and fear, turned to force to get his money back from one of his own. He was terrified of the king and internalised the very thing that eclipsed his own life. I do not know what I would have done.”

“I guess as a Christian, I am expected to forgive. And what can be more fitting than this image of debt to point how costly is forgiveness. When someone is indebted to you - you have power over that person and to forgive is to give up that power. The problem here is whether the master or king had really given up power. Was his forgiveness genuine - from the heart? I am no expert - just a humble convert. But if true forgiveness is as Jesus said: ‘not seven times but seventy-seven times’ then that king failed to forgive repeatedly and took back the forgiveness already offered when the slave failed to forgive just once.”

“In the end, by removing the slave the master/king re-established that he is ‘massa’: powerful and ruthless. If you ask me this is not gospel and the Jesus way. This is not speaking rightly of God. Perhaps Jesus is doing a trick with the text to confound a wicked system and such wickedness with its own chains. By mimicry and mockery Jesus reveals the inconsistency in the world around him and subverts it. That is why he comes as a slave or servant. I still think that Jesus, whose body was brutalised and left hanging on the cross, knows our pains and loves us. Nothing can conquer such power of love. And Jesus loves plenty - that is the resurrection truth that is hope for me and my freedom”.

Postscript: To Ponder (Readers)

1. What connections can we make between the acts of the king to the indebted slave and rich countries and their relationship to the poor countries indebted to them?
2. How is God represented in this narrative? Is it a just representation? Can you connect with such a view?

Additional Resources:

Antony G. Reddie, Editor. “[Black Theology, Slavery and Contemporary Christianity: 200 Years and No Apology](#)” published by Routledge Publishing (2016).

Bernadette J. Brooten, Editor. “[Beyond Slavery: Overcoming Its Religious and Sexual Legacies](#)” published by Palgrave-Macmillan Publishing (2010).

Emmanuel Yartekwei Amugi Lartey, “[Postcolonial African Practical Theology: Rituals of Remembrance, Cleansing, Healing and Re-Connection](#)”, published in the Journal of Pastoral Theology, Vol. 21, Issue 2, 2011.

James M. McPherson, “[The Abolitionist Legacy: From Reconstruction to the NAACP](#)” published by Princeton University Press, 1976

J. F. Ade Ajayim, “[Unfinished Business Confronting the Legacies of Slavery and Colonialism in Africa](#)” published by the South-South Exchange Programme for Research on the History of Development (SEPHIS) and the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, 2002.

Laurent Dubois, “[Confronting the Legacies of Slavery](#)” published in New York Times (Oct. 28, 2013).

Maria Suzette Fernandes Dias, Editor. “[Legacies of Slavery: Comparative Perspectives](#)” published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing (2007).

Yolanda Pierce, “[When Our Truths Are Ignored: Proslavery Theology’s Legacy](#)”, published in Religion and Politics, August 10, 2015.

Articles and Publications from the United Nations ([Click here for link](#))

Legacies of British Slave-Ownership from the University College of London ([Click here for link](#))