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Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship

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EMBARGOED AGAINST DELIVERY

The Spiritual Dimension of Embracing the Cross

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“Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” Mk 8:34.

Moderator,

Fellow delegates,

Mothers, Fathers, Sisters and Brothers,

My immense gratitude for the honour and privilege accorded me to make this humble contribution in this august and historic Conference of the Council on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches, JAMBO!

Do we remember what Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, “Pray and Struggle for Justice”¹?

Prayer is one of the most important resources for Christian spirituality. It is said that the missionaries in South Africa said, ‘let us pray, and after prayer our land was gone, and we only had the Bible in our hands!’² With the land still in their hands, now it is prayer itself that is squeezed out of our souls and our crushed consciences. Today in our world, the skies are throttled, mountains are crumbling, streams and the deeps that bowed in prayerful glory to God are left roaring and their waves lifted on high in piercing groans. Creation is groaning! To pray and to pursue justice is heavy and deep.

To embrace the cross is to grasp that *inter alia*, spirituality is a product of ideology and faith — a liberating combination of ideology and faith for the affirmation of the whole of life for me. With ideology we are able to tell our stories and relate to our existence, grasp the contestations that exist among us, the forms of exploitation and our modes of struggle for life. Ideology offers a vision of what is possible, it is aspirational and on its basis we are guided ethically, we are able to choose between right and wrong, good and bad, and ultimately, we are guided by ideology to legitimize power and the ethos of our lived experiences. Admittedly, ideology, can exist independently much as faith can do however, dangerous ideology is a permanent danger to faith and faith without ideology is as toxic.

As an expressive means through which we participate in our own histories and herstories as conscious agents,³ ideology combines with faith in Jesus Christ as the Liberator and produces a spirituality

¹ See, Clodovis Boff, “Feet on the Ground Theology” A Brazilian Journey. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1987), 97.

² A well-known saying in South African Black Theology attributed to Desmond Tutu. ‘When the white man came, he said: let us pray. We closed our eyes and prayed, after prayer, our land was gone, we were left only with the Bible in our hands.’

³ See Robert Fatton Jr. *Black Consciousness in South Africa: The Dialectics of Ideological Resistance to White Supremacy* (New York: University of New York Press, 1986), 41.

epitomized and exemplified in struggles against the bigotry of racism, Nazism, xenophobia, homophobia, patriarchy, triumphalism and fascism, confronting death without fear. This spirituality enables us to learn how to die in order to live. To learn to die is an epitome of supreme sacrifice — sacrifice that epitomizes victory over evil. Undisputedly, spirituality is about the affirmation of life and protest against the architecture of empire and empires that succeed to conceal their original sin of racism. Prayer and struggle for justice is to embrace the cross, the powerless power of God that decolonizes and liberates humanity and the whole of creation against oppression and life killing systems of knowledge. Prayer is a subversive spiritual resource; it is the powerhouse of the liturgy that speaks back to tyrannical forms of power with unwavering faith in the God of life.

From Achimota to Arusha, we embark on a journey of **return!** It is about our future, *Ikamma*, to go back to our future. As Amilcar Cabral avers, “The return to one's origins is therefore not a voluntary gesture, but the only viable answer to the imperious challenge of concrete, historical necessity, determined by the irresolvable contradiction,”⁴ yes, the continuing irresolvable ambivalence enunciated in the dungeons of Elmina and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, a civilization conceived on an irrational ideology that marked black bodies as less than human. Our journey of return thus passes *in, through* and *out* of the hegemonic ethnocentric core of mission and evangelism in marriage with the spirit of conquest. Cabral says: “every indigenous social layer or class is obliged to define its position in terms of this contradiction.”⁵ To engage this irresolvable, cultural and spiritual contradiction that bedevils colonized societies and colonizing powers today, the very sustained ethos of the colonial matrix of power is a continuous challenge to embrace the cross.⁶ To return to our origin, is not voluntary but spiritually necessary. It is to follow Jesus.

Remember we have survived in our continent and the global South, a history of ‘Christianise or I shoot you’, ‘civilize or I shoot you’, ‘develop or I shoot you’, ‘neo-liberalise or I shoot you’, ‘democratize or I shoot you.’⁷ Now we live in a shameless fascist world of ‘do not come next to me’ after the neoliberal ethos made it possible for democracy to kill by law.

The journey of return is dangerous, it entails embracing a spirit that defeats fear which according to Steve Biko,⁸ is reason to stultify the participation of the wretched of this world in the project of their return to the restoration of their dignity. For reasons of fear, the cross has continued to elude us!

“That the analogy between the cross and the lynching tree should have eluded the Christian agents of white supremacy is not surprising,”⁹ Cone argues. How could we be surprised when Vasco da Gama and his crew chanted *Te Deum Laudamus* after invading the palace of Kilwa here in Tanzania? Liturgy and prayer have served to elude us from the violence of the cross. Many indeed continue to be eluded by the analogy between the cross and the black woman's body in the dungeons of the Elmina Castle. The analogy between the civilizing mission and the cross eludes us in our throttled systems of higher learning, we fail to connect the cross with the deification of a form of democracy completely detached from the daily bread needed by millions of people on the margins, yet only one per cent of the total population enjoys ninety nine percent of our global wealth.

⁴ Amilcar Cabral & Michel Vale, “The Role of Culture in the Struggle for Independence,” *International Journal of Politics*, 7, no.4 (1977):27.

⁵ Amilcar Cabral & Michel Vale, “The Role of Culture,”27.

⁶ See examples and affirming lessons from the ecumenical movement which must be mentioned in passing: The Programme to Combat Racism, the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women, AGAPE, and what the Accra Confession designates as Empire.

⁷ See Sabelo, J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Empire, Global Coloniality and African Subjectivity* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn,2013), 22 of 104, Kindle edition. Ndlovu Gatsheni cites Ramon Grosfoguel and this is paraphrased.

⁸ Steve Biko, *I Write what I Like*, (2004),165.

⁹ James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. (Maryknoll, Orbis, 2011), 31-32.

It is **the heart to feel** the burden of the cross that distinguishes elusion from the spiritual embrace of the cross Jesus.¹⁰ “Pray and Struggle for Justice.” To pray and struggle for justice is to fully grasp that “prayer holds the word of faith the way the earth holds the seed until it sprouts.”¹¹

We surely must hold onto the seed that was planted by CWME in Melbourne.¹² Melbourne saw the disorder of humanity as a starting point of mission and evangelism as we today hold on to move *Together Towards Life*. We hold on against a heartless, hardening husk of the world, one without a heart to feel, whose disorder according to Percy More is marked by:

[The] persistence of invidious racism, student protests such as #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall, demands for a decolonised curriculum, and the continual presence of neo-colonialism, neoliberalism and a detotalised black identity.¹³

We hold on against this heartless world, revived by student protests showing that “Colonization and decolonization as well as coloniality and decoloniality are increasingly becoming key terms for movements that challenge the predominant racial, sexist, homo- and trans-phobic conservative, liberal, and neoliberal politics of today.”¹⁴

To embrace the cross is the capacity by the conquering, destructive spirit to accept defeat. This is what those who have experienced defeat in their histories and herstories offer to the world. To accept defeat is to have a heart that can feel. Bonhoeffer had the heart to feel and demonstrated “an existential interest in blacks.”¹⁵ He preached in Harlem! He felt the ghetto! Solidarity is not a matter of pigmentocracy, but a conscious response to the demands of the cross, whose embrace is impossible without a trans-valuation of values. The cross is the absolute opposite of human value systems,¹⁶ the Bonhoefferian “paradoxical agility” we inherit in Christ, the only viable answer to the irresolvable contradiction that plunges the colonized to opposites with the colonial matrix of power. Existential commitment to the wretched is the recognition that those nailed on the cross are a community with a subversive historical memory. It is to remember that, “The fundamental elements that form the basis of the survival of the victims as a self-conscious and self-creating people are never destroyed.”¹⁷ Defeat means the defeat of a heart that cannot feel the pain of the poor, the pain of the Palestinian, that of women who continue to do more unpaid care work than richer ones, the current global attitudes that devalue the status and abilities of poor women in the global South.¹⁸

In conclusion, we can nourish the seed of our prayer if we learn that spirituality is not an **idea** but a **verb**. We can embrace the cross when we hold that there is no spirituality without life and spirituality is impatient life against the disorder of humanity. When the verbs of the faith of the victims move away from the promises of the powerful, and when the oppressed return to their origin and their historical memory, then prayer becomes a subversive **verb that inflicts convulsion and the collapse of the fortresses of Empire**. When the students march and sing during the #FeesMustFall, chanting and singing, *Siyabasaba na? Asibasabi!* (Are we afraid of them? We are not!), hope ceases to be an idea, but a verb of dislocation from a life killing order. The Cross of Jesus for struggling masses is a paradox fraught with “ironic tenacity.”¹⁹

¹⁰ Cf. James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. (Maryknoll, Orbis, 2011), 37-41. Cone specifically analyzes Reinhold Niebhuur’s understanding of the cross and argues that Niebhuur had eyes to see blacks suffering, but lacked the heart to feel it as his own. It is the analogy of the lynching tree that we are at the moment focusing on.

¹¹ Clodovis Boff, *Feet on the Ground*, 97.

¹² See David Bosch’s “In search of Mission: Reflections on “Melbourne,” *Missionalia*, vol.9 (1981):3-18.

¹³ Mabogo, Percy, More, *Biko, Philosophy, Identity and Liberation* (Cape Town: HSRC Press,2017), xi.

¹⁴ Nelson Maldonado-Toress, “Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality,” http://frantzfanonfoundation-fondationfrantzfanon.com/IMG/pdf/maldonado-torres_outline_of_ten_theses-10.23.16_.pdf, (Accessed February 22, 2018).

¹⁵ James Cone, *The Cross*, 41-42.

¹⁶ James Cone, *The Cross*, 35.

¹⁷ Takatso Mofokeng, “The Crucified and Permanent Cross-bearing” *Journal of Black Theology* 7, no.1 (1993): 23.

¹⁸ See OXFAM, “Reward Work, Not Wealth,” (Report, January, 2018),25.

¹⁹ James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis,2011),

Kubi, Kubi, siyaya , Noba Kubi Siyaya, Noba Besibulala Siyaya, (No matter how bad, we are going, no matter if they are killing, we are going). We follow Jesus who was crucified and killed for justice: “whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

ASANTE.