

**World Council of Churches and Council for World Mission**  
**Communique on evangelism and the legacies of colonization and enslavement**  
**Toronto, Ontario, Canada, June 22-28, 2019**

**Part I: Introduction**

Continuing the 'Explorations in Evangelism' series, representatives of WCC and CWM gathered in Toronto for a consultation on evangelism and the legacies of colonization and enslavement. The consultation focused on the Toronto context to explore the practice of colonization and enslavement in the evangelism of the colonial churches, as well as the patterns of resistance revealed in the evangelism of Black and First Nation's churches. Representatives came from Aotearoa/New Zealand, the Cayman Islands, Greece, India, Jamaica, Korea, South Africa, the UK and the province of Nova Scotia in Canada and from Toronto itself. They included clergy, community leaders, theologians and religious studies scholars. The consultation was coordinated and facilitated by Rev. Dr. Peter Cruchley of the Council for World Mission and Ms Kyriaki Avtzi of the World Council of Churches in collaboration with local Toronto host, the United Church of Canada, represented by Rev. Michael Blair, Executive Minister. In addition to presentations from international and local representatives, the consultation included on-site visits to three local congregations and two visits to community-based outreach ministries.

**Part II: Key Themes**

The consultation featured opportunities for shared stories across divergent national, regional and denominational contexts. Here is a summary of three common threads which emerged from the stories and histories:

**First, the complicity between evangelism and colonization is a persistent historical and current phenomena.** It reveals itself in many geographies and ecclesiologies and is rooted in patterns of historic empire as well as the manifestations of global empire today. These complicities make themselves known in the persistence of racism, oppression, marginalization, degradation and brutality, including the physical and spiritual death of Indigenous peoples throughout the world. Each narrative bore witness to the ongoing determination of global racist power and discrimination found in the fabric of societal structures, including churches of today.

**Second, we, descendants of enslaved and colonized peoples survived with authentic notions of self.** The descendants of colonized and enslaved peoples were able to preserve, often in secret and through complex symbolic interaction with Christianity and other religious traditions that they encountered, their spiritual and cultural traditions, languages and worldviews. These include, but are not limited to, linguistic, culinary, visual and oral traditions. These remain rich reservoirs of self-identity and community building that are important for contemporary and future generations and must be central to authentic evangelism and discipleship.

**Third, we must take the lessons forward in evangelism.** The sharing of our stories allowed us to make global connections between issues of common pain and suffering of people. We acknowledge the hurts and do not want to repeat the past. Out of this realization, a central question emerged: What does it mean to be a contemporary Christian amid the types of pain that many people are living through in their daily existence? It is clear to us that racism can have no place in the discipleship of Christ.

### **Part III: Reflections from our meeting: 'Prophetic moments for evangelism today'**

The first is provided by the ***ongoing movements of decolonization within Church constituencies globally and locally***. Christians are claiming space to tell their own stories of evangelism and witness which confront complicity with nation and empire building and assert their dignity and discipleship despite it being denied by centuries of colonising Christianity. How might we imagine new ways of doing evangelism that account for the stories arising from these spaces? And how might these spaces be opened wider

The second is provided by ***the need for the colonising churches to account and repent of the genocidal hatred and hurt caused and become allies in the justice struggles of First Nations and African descendent people***. This was a powerful dynamic coming from the Canadian location which is so marked by the entwined oppression of First Nations people and people of African descent. How might we break through this ***sanctioned silence*** and respond prophetically to doing evangelism in Canadian contexts? In what ways are similar analyses relevant in other postcolonial and post-slavery contexts?

The third is provided by the ***cost of the witness of many human rights movements today who invite us to consider how resistance needs to be a part of Christian witness and discipleship***. Resistance and self assertion became key elements in our reflection. We met while the people of Hong Kong were taking to the streets, it was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Stonewall Riots. We reflected on the history of a mission organisation which, during the time of slavery in Guyana, advised slaves to stay at home and be quiet rather than rise up for their human dignity. Many of the contexts we visited in Toronto were asking how to affirm life and dignity in communities marked by ongoing violence stirred up by the racist operation of the economy, the state, the police?

Evangelism cannot be practised in ways that deny or spiritualize the pains and sufferings sustained from ideologies of supremacy and practices of exclusion. It must expose these ideologies and at the same time, be *transformative and take forms which are relevant to the local settings*.

#### **Recommendations:**

We invite CWM and WCC to continue to move forward with this area of reflection and engage new partners and members in this discussion.

WCC continue in particular through CWME and its Working Group on Transforming Discipleship to explore this area, integrating it as well in the work towards the 2021 WCC General Assembly.

CWM push forward its work on the Legacies of Slavery and how this can connect into other locations in the Colonial story of CWM.

Consider how both organisations can participate in the UN International Decade for People of African Descent