

World Council of Churches
COMMISSION ON FAITH AND ORDER

**Theological Consultation on
Affirming human dignity, rights of peoples and the integrity of creation
Kigali, Rwanda, 4-9 December 2004**

Aide Memoire

I was a man, a woman, a child, a foetus. You know I was killed.

I was killed by the militia because I am a Tutsi.

I was killed by the army because I was Hutu and a member of an opposition party.

I was killed by my neighbours because I would not go with them to kill others.

I was killed because I sought to protect my neighbour's child.

I was killed by my priest because it was the price he had to pay to keep others alive.

I was killed by my wife, my husband, my children, my parents because they had to kill me or be killed.

They killed many like me, women, children, men who happened to be here. I know why, but I don't know why.

I was buried here by my family.

I was buried here in this mass grave and no one knows whether I am dead.

I died here in my grave after they forced me to dig it and put me and others inside it and shot us.

I have never been buried. I am in my house. I am in the woods. I was thrown in a river.

I have been left here as a testament to what happened, for you and for the world to see.

The inhumanity we have known is human.

It is in our human differences that we have found reasons to dehumanise one another.

That is what I want to tell you.

We have died; we have killed because we are like you.

I am like you.

Now, I am dead.

(Rob Shropshire in Hugh McCullum: *The Angels have left us: The Rwanda Tragedy and the Churches*, WCC, Geneva, n.d.)

"And the Lord said, "What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground!" Genesis 4: 10

Rwanda, where the earth still echoes with the blood of the hundreds of thousands of the slain; Rwanda, a nation that is learning to recognise and respect the value and worth of every human being, surrounded by the memories and images of violence that left 800,000 people dead in 1994: this was the site of the present theological reflection. As part of the WCC's work on the Decade to Overcome Violence, this consultation was an attempt to discern what the theme means for churches and the ecumenical movement as they attempt to counter the reality of massive abuse and destruction of life and its legitimisation in the world today. It was also an attempt to do theology informed by the perspectives and experiences of the victims of violence.

The context and the people

This consultation brought together a select group of 25 theologians, human rights activists and social scientists from many parts of the world – from Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Philippines, South Korea, Brazil, Uruguay, Tonga, Finland, Germany, Russia, UK, Canada and USA for a week-long experience of immersion, interaction and reflection.

“Affirming human dignity, rights of peoples and the integrity of creation” is a theological challenge that Faith and Order proposes to the churches and the ecumenical movement through its programme activity on Theological reflection on overcoming violence. This theme has been identified on the following premises: 1) That our views of ourselves and others are factors that shape our attitudes, relationships and actions, including those that motivate and perpetrate violence. 2) That the denial of the dignity of the other is both a motivation as well as the first casualty of any form of violence and to that extent, violence is not merely physical harm but also and essentially the violation of the personhood, rights and space of the other. So much so, most victims of any form of violence are the innocent, the powerless and the dependent, who in most cases are those whose human dignity is denied by religious, social, economic and political structures. 3) That having been motivated by such attitudes, some pursue their rights to opportunities and security even to the extent of violating the rights and basic needs of others. 4) And that the same logic guides the present phenomenon of the increasing commodification of the human person and earth's resources, the ethic of exploitation for economic growth, and the development ideologies that trample over the human rights of the poor and destroy the earth.

The recent and ongoing work of the Faith and Order Commission, particularly in the areas of Ecclesiology and Ethics, Ethnic identity, National identity and the Unity of the Church, Theological Anthropology, and Nature and Mission of the Church, also informed this theological discourse. This reflection initiated by the Faith and Order also provided an opportunity for three other WCC programme activities who participated – the CCIA, the Commission on Justice, Peace and Creation and the Africa desk of the WCC – to recognise the inevitable connections between them and their need of each other in terms of expertise, perspective and constituency for the sake of pursuing their common ecumenical vision.

The consultation was preceded by a one-day exposure visit to Ntarama, where over 5,000 women, men and children were massacred in a small village chapel in 1994, and was facilitated by a constant interaction with local realities, church and community leaders and peace activists in Kigali throughout the week. The images of death as well as of life, reflections on the phenomena of human cruelty, the detrimental notions of the other, stories of the way a whole nation and every individual went through the trauma, the role of the Church during and after the genocide, and the attempts towards healing and reconciliation were the challenges that inspired this process of reflection. What the consultation attempted to do was a theology of peace in a context of pain, loss, memory of violence and massive abuse of life and human rights. In this attempt, the centrality of the vocation of ensuring justice in all structures of relationships, exploring life-enhancing notions of power, prophetic witness, speaking truth to the powers, the ministry of healing, the need to recognise the victimhood of the perpetrator, etc., were some major issues that occupied the discussion.

“Everyone in Rwanda has a story. It is hard to come across anyone who has not suffered any loss. To that extent the Rwandese essentially are a traumatised people, orphans and widows of the genocide, HIV/AIDS infected persons and the poor,” said Pastor Elisée Musemakweli, President of the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda, in his welcome address. He added that Rwanda has seen the maximum extent to which human beings can be cruel towards and debased by one another. “How can we build a society which will respect all human beings and

not reject anyone as worthless and inferior?" he asked, expressing hope that we overcome the tendency to believe that we have done enough through conference statements."

"A man in Kibeho region was seen using human bones as firewood. On asking, he explained: "Indeed they died, but should not be wasted." Tom Ndahiro, a well-known human rights' activist in Rwanda, narrated this incident during a session on 'Rwandese Realities' to portray the extent to which people have lost the sense of value and purpose of human life. "Genocide was a denial of the humanity of a whole community of people and that denial of humanity is like killing someone before the actual murder." Tom Ndahiro spoke at length about the factors that led to the genocide and accused the international community, including the churches, for remaining silent. "The WCC has always advocated for human rights and against the abuse of minority communities, but during the genocide it seemed to have drifted away", he deplored. He ridiculed as "fugitives in prayer" those churches and Christians who only pray and refuse to respond to injustice and violence.

"The people and the Church are wounded. These are both victims and the perpetrators. People often wonder: where was God when the genocide took place? Why has God created us with so much power to abuse? However, we are also witnesses of miracles around. We are trying to make sense of what has no sense", said Violette Nyirarukundo, a Rwandese woman, member of the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda. She spoke about the way the life-affirming nature of Christian faith was overwhelmed by hatred and violence, and about the part played by churches in the genocide. Describing the presence of sisters and brothers from many parts of the world as a sign and source of healing, Violette Nyirarukundo challenged the consultation with the following questions: "How do we keep the genocide memory alive without keeping people in a permanent mental state of victimhood or of guilt? How do we bring back to earth those Christians who take "refuge in heaven"? How do we reclaim a gospel that transforms the whole person and communities, which doesn't merely mean belonging to one denomination or the other?"

Even as he held the churches guilty for their role in the genocide, André Karamaga, former moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda and programme executive of WCC's Africa desk, gave an account of the way churches and church leaders have worked against it in his presentation on the 'historical overview of the churches' role in and response to the genocide'. He narrated the stories of individual Christians who said "no" to violence, like the minority of the Confessing church in Germany, of the pastors who provided refuge to the people, even at the cost of being killed for doing so. André Karamaga also described the way in which churches have publicly confessed and encouraged people to confess, too. He expressed his strong belief in the Church as a place where reconciliation based on truth and justice is possible. "Forgiveness is possible when people speak to one another in truth. No one has the power of attorney to forgive on behalf of others", he said.

For those who participated in the consultation, it proved to be an extremely challenging experience. Some of their statements are worth mentioning: "I am finding it impossible to get back to 'normality' after what we have seen, experienced and talked about." "This week in Rwanda was a lifetime experience for me. The cross next to the skulls in the Ntarama church (more than the picture of the Pope) is an image that flashes in my mind as I deal with the question where God is in the evil. I wholeheartedly believe that God was there with the victims". "I think that perhaps this whole experience will take me in some directions I wouldn't have anticipated". "My way of thinking and of doing things will not be the same from here on". And, from a Rwandese participant, "Your presence here with us is a source of healing."

Biblical reflections

Janet Parker, a pastor in the Presbyterian Church in USA and a visiting fellow in public theology at Princeton University, in her biblical reflection on Ezekiel 37, compared the heaps of human skulls and bones in the Ntarama church to Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones. While elaborating Ezekiel's calling she asked: "Why did the Spirit of the Lord taunt him with the question, "Mortal, can these bones live?" Can these wasted, sun-baked, dismembered skeletons, these dusty remains of the once great nation of Israel, be brought back to healthy, vigorous life? And what about Rwanda? Can it rise out of the ashes of genocide and become a new nation? Ezekiel's wise reply to God's question was, "Oh Lord God, you know". Janet Parker said: "In the face of evil, the Scriptures compel us to witness, to remember, to lament, to hope and then to act in faith. This was the calling of Ezekiel, it is the calling of the people of Rwanda today and it is the

sacred vocation of the universal, ecumenical Church". "As the Church universal, we remember the faithful presence of God throughout human history, we remember all of the times and places where God brought life out of death, and so we know that there is no human condition that is completely hopeless. We are not left without hope, but we dare to believe in a better future because we know the power of God to effect radical transformation". In closing, she offered two images. "The first is that of the skulls and bones that we saw in the chapel - the horrific detritus of slaughter and death, and the second is that of the children and the people that we saw all along the road, waving, working, playing, socialising, and going about their daily lives." With these two images in mind, Janet Parker reminded the participants that in Ezekiel's vision, through God's power, the dry bones "lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude."

Kasongo wa Kasonga, a Presbyterian pastor from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and an executive secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches, in his reflection on the stories of Tamar (II Sam. 13: 1-20) and the massacre of children (Matt. 2: 14 -18) analysed the factors responsible for the violation of the young woman Tamar and the massacre of children. He inferred that those who decided that Tamar should serve Ammon, those who violated her and even justified that violation were all men. "At no point was Tamar involved in the decisions that concerned her life, her dignity, and her future". Herod's power interests too destroyed the lives of thousands of children. Kasongo then went on to criticise the way certain oppressive cultures get religious legitimacy and warned that as long as we do not deal with and expose the traces of these cultures and structures within and outside the church, we should all expect to be called Ammons and Herods. "We kill our children, we abuse them sexually, we make them soldiers, we rape our women, we infect them with HIV/AIDS, we expose them to deadly diseases, and we make them work very hard and in hazardous conditions." He also listed several instances from his Congolese experience where rape is also used as a weapon to humiliate the pride of the enemy and how the helpless and socially disempowered women are constantly violated. Kasongo also spoke about how male chauvinism and consumerism have similar value orientations in that the fascination lasts as long as the purpose is served. He emphasised that if we are really concerned about the integrity of creation we must rid ourselves of all abusive notions and expressions of power.

Antonios Kireopoulos, a member of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and associate general secretary of the NCCC-USA, in his meditation based on Luke 21: 12-16 and II Timothy 3:6-4:4 spoke about kenosis as the only way the Church can participate in the mission of God in a world that denies justice and life to many. Holding that it is not possible to fully comprehend what happened in Rwanda ten years ago "because our pain can never be the same as theirs", Antonios Kireopoulos elaborated his understanding of kenosis or a kenotic form of discipleship. "We are to be self-emptying, humble, looking out for the interests of others, as Christ was. What, then, does this mean for us today, in this place, and in the presence of these people? ... We must be willing to be broken, hurt, and ultimately changed by the experience of being here. We must be open to the magnitude of hopelessness, fear and devastation that has enveloped these people." It is only then that, "to the misery of death, we can bring compassion; to the reality of betrayal, we can bring assurance; to the feelings of fear, we can bring love; to the instances of complicity, we can bring forgiveness; and to the sin of negligence, we can bring repentance." Talking about human rights, he said, "We have the responsibility to see that these take hold of the minds of men and women everywhere. Indeed, making people realise the inherent worth of every human being is a challenge and an imperative of our faith in God who demands justice".

Jione Havea, a Biblical scholar from the Pacific, in his reflection entitled "Dignifying Hagar", took the participants through an exercise of re-reading the story of Hagar (Genesis 16:1-16). Holding that his intention was not to side-step texts of terror in order to give pious and hopeful messages, or pacifying readings, he wanted "the story to unfold with its complexities and messiness in order to affirm the dignity of a character that is marginalised in the story". He insisted on the immanent form of dignity shared by all living creatures and not distinguishing humans from the rest of the creation. "Human beings cannot claim a special status based on certain ancient teachings and texts, such as the second biblical creation story. We need to be more aware of our interdependence with other living creatures", he argued. "This immanent or unconditional form of dignity suggests that all creatures share the same worth, and that all humans, irrespective of gender, race, age, rank, class, sexual orientation and so forth, have the same worth. In this regard, the Queen of England and a villager suffering from HIV/AIDS in Rwanda share the same worth, the same dignity; even though they serve different roles/honours/status in their respective countries and communities". Jione Havea wanted to explore how one not only gains the

transcending form of dignity but also how one loses it when one fails to overcome violence. He affirmed the complexity of Hagar's story by suggesting that it is not just us readers who dignify Hagar but the character of Hagar also dignifies us. Hagar's story and stories of others like her give us opportunities to reclaim and maintain our dignity. The title "dignifying Hagar" thus has a subversive sense in that we recognise the character of Hagar as a dignifying subject who obliges us to submit to her "dignifying story".

Presentations on the theme

Valburga Schmiedt-Streck, a Brazilian theologian in her presentation on "*Affirming human dignity*" elaborated on what the theme means in the North and South.

As part of her reflection on the North, she focused on German society, and to describe it she chose the metaphor of *A society of Ichlinger* the title of a book by Heiner Keupp. Keupp, a German Psychology professor, Schmiedt-Streck explained, raises the issue that the new German generation builds its own morals, religion and biography. She summarised Keupp to say that there are no goals anymore but processes that delineate how one can live in this "*bricolage*" morality. One is able to choose what is best and comfortable to oneself even if it is not for others. Life is led by a morality that is shaped by one's own personal choices. Some may feel bad for the world where the importance of common weal is ending while others aspire for a world that is as comfortable as possible. It is, however, not an isolated world but one with free and fluctuant networks of solidarity. Walls are built as well as brought down as per economic interests. Solidarity is increasingly local and temporary. In this gamut of relationships, those who have no assets and skills are pushed out into the margins.

Talking about the South, especially Brazilian society, Valburga Streck used the metaphor of a fatherless society. With Brazil as part of the globalised market economy, skilled labour force is increasingly being sought. This is proving to be disastrous to the unskilled labour or to those whose skills are not sought by the market. The vulnerability of the state to global economic trends is making it difficult for it to uphold the welfare system. On social dynamics, Schmiedt-Streck expressed concern that the fundamentalist movements are becoming stronger, demanding a return to patriarchal ways of human relationships. Traditionally the man as the breadwinner of the family saw himself superior and demanded respect from his wife. But this relationship pattern is not relevant anymore in the present world where women are also engaged in economic activity. Furthermore, with the increase in mono-parentality, traditional notions of family are proving to be inadequate.

She also focused attention on the dehumanisation of the vulnerable young people, children and young women in Brazil. As unemployment increases, violence too is increasing and the young males often find themselves with no other option than to take to robbing the inner cities and thus end up in jail. The death toll is high among young people. Many children take to prostitution very early while some are constantly abused at home. Some women have babies when they are very young and by the time they reach their 30s they tend to have many children from different fathers. Violence against women tends to be very high in the slums and in order to protect themselves they tend to opt for partnership with males even if they do not provide any income.

Recalling an incident that involved one of the mother's of the Plaza de Mayo – also called *Las Locas de la Plaza de Mayo* (The Crazy of Plaza de Mayo) – from Buenos Aires/Argentina challenging the powerful in Davos at the World Economic Forum, Schmidt-Streck asked: "What world is this where so much of injustice is ignored and men seem to find so much pleasure in fighting wars that are shown on television for the whole world"?

Holding that peace is possible only when pursued within a eco-cosmic vision, she quoted Nobel Peace Prize laureate for 2004 Wangari Maathai from Kenya who said that "peace on the planet will depend on a living environment where social, economic and cultural development is secured in an ecological perspective not only in Kenya but also in Africa".

Discussion (highlights):

We need to be careful in using the traditional mother-child category in the light of the changing patterns of life in a globalised world. We do not talk about the need to uphold

women's dignity because she happens to be a mother. We must especially remember the plight of migrant mothers from the south.

Just as much as we focus on the loss of humanity of the victim we must also focus on that of the perpetrator. He needs to tell the story about what happened to him when he violated others, when he allowed his destructive nature to overpower his nurturing nature and his capacity for goodness.

The issue of human dignity is related to identity, gender, justice, relationships, and even to trade and technology. It therefore has to be approached in an interdisciplinary way.

Conditions of social, political and economic vulnerability need to be seen as challenges for human dignity.

Rape is used as a weapon of humiliation in wars and conflicts. The feminine face of poverty and disease also needs to be acknowledged. This makes it necessary to consider human dignity in relation to gender. If we have to affirm human dignity, we have to prioritise and affirm the dignity of women first. To do this, we must begin to highlight the feminine face and attributes of God.

We need to make a distinction between dignity and honour. No one can take a person's dignity away, but honour is conferred by society and can be taken away. Women's bodies become the terrain of the community's honour.

How do we respond to the questions raised by neuroscience and bio-technology which explain many things, even human traits and attitudes, in scientific terms?

Human dignity is an issue that relates to many aspects of life – marriage, family, community, trade, politics, science and technology, etc.

Mary Grey, a well-known British feminist theologian, in her presentation on "*Affirming the Integrity of Creation*", focused on the connections between ecology, women and social justice in an attempt to present the eco-feminist theological paradigm as an important resource for the churches to affirm life and the integrity of the whole creation.

Ecofeminism is a union of two concerns - ecology and justice for women. Ecology explores the interaction and interdependence of all life forms contained in the great web of life, and in Christian theology the web of life is creation, sustained by God's love. Eco-theology, therefore, explores that which promotes healthy interaction within this sacred web and that which disrupts it. It does not stop at the level of physical devastation but asks what cultural and religious symbols, and what psychological means have been responsible for people distancing themselves from the earth and abusing it.

The eco-feminist analysis uncovers the role of religion in legitimising such a separation. Christianity's roots are in both the Hebrew and Graeco-Roman worlds. The problem has been where the God of the Bible has been defined as outside and over against the material world, as its creator and lord. When this fuses with Greek philosophical dualism of spirit and matter it becomes set in stone as 'the primary identity myth of the Western ruling-class male.' God is seen as spirit, transcendent, over against his female counterpart who symbolises body, matter and immanence. Christian eco-feminism neither asserts Divine immanence in a pantheistic way, nor limits God to this physical world. Rather, eco-feminist theology tries to imagine immanence and transcendence differently. Mary Grey then made a connection with the phenomenon of globalisation. This deep cultural pathology of the West expresses itself in many ways - from refusing to recognise human vulnerability and limits, the vulnerability and limits of the earth, to splitting ourselves and our communities from the regenerative cycles of nature which situate us in time and space. A culture that is "split at the root" will neither discover an easy way back to wholeness, nor to the just redistribution of resources.

She then proposed eco-feminism as an alternative worldview. As opposed to a dualist philosophy, polarising a privileged rationality at the expense of the physical and embodied dimensions, eco-feminist philosophy involves seeing and knowing ourselves and the world differently. It involves knowing ourselves as part of the web of life, in communion with and

interdependent with all living things, with a special role and responsibility towards other life-forms. The challenge is to see both men and women as bodily-enspirited organisms, interdependent from plant and animal life - yet with particular responsibilities towards sustaining the earth's well-being.

At the heart of an eco-feminist theology of creation, Mary Grey said, is also the conviction that the world is sacred and held by God. God is not extraneous to the world, but both transcendent and immanent, the power of life, energy, love, sustaining and energising this web of life. Eco-feminist imagery for God, instead of being satisfied with the rather vague language of "sacred being", or "Divine presence in nature", affirms faith in the new naming of God as the passion for justice, as *the power that works for justice and makes it*. Liberation theology too expresses faith in this God who hears the cry and the anguish of the poor, including the stricken earth.

If ethics is given a real theological basis it flows from everything. Mary Grey suggests a two-pronged ethics, an ethics of resistance (against all the eco-cidal practices fuelled by the greed of global capitalism), and a theological, visionary ethics of flourishing, the flourishing of all forms of life within the restored integrity of creation. She ended by saying that where flourishing is enabled for the humblest creatures on earth, the *recovery of joy* becomes a possibility, joy at creation's birth, together with the great vision of the Feast of Life (Isa. 25), and the redeemed city where the leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of nations (Rev. 22), are foundational images creating hope that the necessary restraint and transformation of lifestyles are in the service of a joy that all may share.

Discussion: Highlights

Theologies of smaller churches, such as the Quakers and the Mennonites, need to be explored afresh by others for their liberative and holistic insights on life and the world.

An important challenge for us, even as we ponder the plunder of the earth and possible political actions, is to explore ways of teaching children against consumerism.

Let us not use the term "sacrifice" when it comes to giving up consumerism. It has a history of negative political and religious overtones. On the other hand, 'simplicity' resonates more positively than sacrifice. In Rajasthan, women trek long distances for water to keep their families alive. No one gives them awards, no one write books about them. It is love, not sacrifice.

We need to be conscious of the fact that all of us do hurt nature. We all came by air, use cars and electricity, and consume water more than we require. We recognise a clear hierarchy in our concern for nature. Therefore, the challenge before us is the minimisation of violence against nature. Theology of power is important otherwise incomplete notions of justice are likely to be pursued.

Western Christianity is high on anthropocentrism and on the conquest of the earth. Western Christians need to deconstruct these theological constructs and lay claim to other constructive sources in the Christian tradition such as the Orthodox theologies and the theological expression of Christian communities at the margins of the globalized cultural expansion of the West.

The weight of the North on the earth is outrageous and needs to be challenged.

Jennifer Koinante, a Masai woman activist from Kenya who works with the UN processes on the rights of the indigenous peoples, in her presentation on "Affirming the rights of peoples", gave a vivid description of the life of the Masai and the story of their violation by the dominant social, economic and political powers. "We, the indigenous peoples, have deep attachment to our land, identity and culture. We have never been in conflict with others. Yet, we are constantly violated, our women are abused, our lands are taken away and our labour is exploited. We form the non-dominant sections of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to our future generations our ancestral territories and our identity, as the basis of our continued existence as peoples. Because of our deep attachment to the land and culture, we are also often disadvantaged and exploited" Koinante asserted. She also elaborated on the ways in which her own community - the Masai - are opening up to education and new technologies. She said that

with the help of the NGOs they are also beginning to deal with certain negative cultural practices. Koinante praised the solidarity and support of the United Nations and the World Council of Churches in the Masai struggles to preserve their identity and obtain justice.

Jeannie Nacpil-Manipon, a human rights activist from the Philippines and the co-ordinator of ARENA, a Hong Kong based Asian human rights network, in her presentation on “Affirming human rights” argued for a reconsideration of the UN Charter on Human Rights in the light of the new challenges posed by the globalised world, the war against terror, and the empire. With the help of the religious right, these have begun to effect repressive political processes and remilitarisation. She also drew attention to the increasing presence of non-state actors such as mobs and groups who take law into their own hands as in the case of the massacre of Muslims in Gujarat, India. Journalists and activists are increasingly being targeted and killed. Manipon went on to elaborate four major areas of concern for further reflection and action. These are: 1. The tension between the right to life, land and water and the demands for resource extraction in the light of increasing demands. 2. The organisation of labour at a local level. (e.g. call centres, sweat shops, etc.) 3. The disruption of workers’ solidarity. 4. The right to and struggles for self-determination.

Discussion: Highlights

How do we see the movement against genital mutilation in the light of the need to protect indigenous cultures?

How do we view suicide bombers or the fundamentalism that decapitates even aid workers?

The impoverished and the disempowered articulate their victimhood in different ways. It is an extremely difficult task to analyse these responses.

We cannot endorse any form of violence. We need to reject suicide bombings. How can we ever endorse the massacre of children in Beslam recently? Their notions of martyrdom are highly dubious. How can you take lives along with your own?

The suicide of the Korean farmer in Cancun was termed as self-sacrifice. The US called it suicide. Whatever may be the case, we need to deplore the instrumentality of violence both the perpetrators and the victims.

How to respect and improve the living conditions of indigenous peoples without tampering with their patterns of life?

How do we affirm the rights of some without violating the rights of others? The right to safety and security of the powerful destroys the lives of many others. The violence of the powerful should not be ignored as we talk about all forms of violence or of the powerless.

Collective Reflection

The group then synthesised the biblical reflections, insights, comments, etc and identified the following areas as concerns for working groups:

1. Created in the image and likeness of God – responding to the issue of detrimental and nurturing notions of the other.
2. Re-weaving the web of life – responding to the challenges posed by economic globalisation, environmental degradation, militarisation, the spirit and logic of violence and the state and non-state actors in the dynamics of violence.
3. Re-member-ing the victims of violence – responding to the challenges of healing and reconciliation.
4. Meaning of being Church – responding to the challenges of the vulnerability and culpability of churches in situations of violence, and of the need to reclaim the centrality of the vocation of peace and reconciliation in the life of the churches.

Implications of Affirming human dignity, rights of peoples and the integrity of creation

(The following is the summary of the reports of the working groups):

1. Created in the Image and Likeness of God

The bases for Christian affirmation of human dignity stem from the following faith convictions:

- That all human beings - male and female - are created in the image of God;
- That human life is intricately interrelated with the rest of God's creation;
- That human relationship with God is experienced and lived out in mutually interdependent relationships;
- That human beings are called to uphold the integrity of God's creation; and
- That life is a gift of God and hence should not be abused.

Violation of Human Dignity

Human dignity is violated: 1) when one deprives another individual or community of both the means and capacities necessary to live with dignity and freedom; 2) when an individual or a group exercise their power to constitute and sustain their own society / community / family by removing obstructions to their visions and interests (e.g., wars, genocides, violent religious conflicts, etc.); 3) and when some persons or groups seek to satisfy or empower themselves by trampling over or manipulating other. (e.g., rape, torture, slavery, bondage, weapons).

The essential relationality of life and human interconnectedness makes the violation of any person's human dignity a violation of the one who violates. It is not only the dignity of the violated but also that of the violator which is lost in the act of aggression. It implies breaking the interconnections and interfering with God's purposes for the creation. Creation, after all, is a self-expression of God – of God's power of love and wisdom. The God of the Bible is a God of life. God interferes whenever life is abused. In fact this history of God's intrusions into human history begins when the earth complains of Abel's blood shed by his brother Cain. (cf. Gen 4). Privilege and aspirations of power along with pride, arrogance, contempt and envy spill the blood of many and thus poison the earth. The earth cries when blood is spilt and its cry becomes a reason for God's intervention. Sin, therefore, is any act that denies God's gift of life. As we thus affirm, we turn to Jesus who came to show us how this could be possible and available in abundance for all (cf. John 10:10). God's salvation in Christ then needs to be seen as a way and a process of overcoming all forces, powers, attitudes, and values that deny, abuse and assault life.

Even as we acknowledge the innumerable bonds of solidarity that exist in human relationships, we also recognise a dominant human trait of detrimental constructions of the "other" as the "enemy". This trait has been the origin of many violent structures, cultures and values, such as racial bigotry, ethnic hatred, slavery, gender discrimination and many other forms of hatred and exclusion. This has also given way to the emergence of certain oppressive symbols and assertion of power, such as religious, ethnic, racial, linguistic identities, that are used by the vested interests to consolidate and multiply their hegemony over opportunities, privileges and power. Consequently, solidarity degenerates into selfish obligation to care for one's own group and into denial of responsibility towards others. In situations of scarcity and intense polarisation of interests, there arises the desire of the dominant group to monopolise the space and resources, and to "cleanse" or "purify" their society of the unwanted. Therefore, the shameful legacies of ethnic cleansing and genocide.

Affirming human dignity

In this polarised and fragmented world, all people of good will have the moral responsibility to pursue justice and uphold the power of love. We believe that this can be done by: 1) resisting the misuse and abuse of power; 2) transforming asymmetrical power relationships; 3) breaking the exclusionary logic and practice of relating with others as enemies and the expendables and by replacing it with the inclusive spirit of love; and 4) honouring those who risk their own lives in defence of the dignity of the excluded and the disempowered. When Jesus reminds his disciples that neighbourly love must include love of the enemy, he implies that the denial of the humanness of the other is in fact a denial of one's own humanness.

The Church's role of healing in such a context implies being prophetic - to denounce injustice, to tell the truth and to provide a space where people can speak the truth and share their stories of humiliation, exclusion, torture, rape, murders and massacres. Truth-telling is pivotal for a lasting peace. Our Lord said: "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:32) Exercising this form of discipleship in every single context is difficult for the Church. Yet, it is the faith and hope in the risen Lord – the Lord of Life that has brought the Church into being and is hence inevitable for the Church's own credibility.

We need to work seriously on those conditions which prevent the Church from being perceived as or offering itself as a "safe space" for the vulnerable and the innocent in times of wars, violence, and abuse. During the Rwandan genocide the Church was no longer seen as a sanctuary even by those who worshipped in the churches all their lives. On the other hand, we also acknowledge the stories of individual acts of love and courage undertaken by many Rwandans who rescued and offered sanctuary to many vulnerable people at the risk of their own lives. We recognise these as the sites of ecclesial expression. This power of love and the will to affirm life in the face of death is the source of hope and the basis for the credibility of the Church, the people of God.

These considerations help us to identify those elements in our cultures and communities that strengthen mutual recognition, accountability, solidarity and care for life. We learned how much our own theological approach resonates with the spirit of "*ubuntu*", the African understanding of being persons in community. At the same time, we recognise the need to identify, critique and propose alternatives to those values and practices that deny and destroy life.

The affirmation of human dignity is the theological basis for the Christian commitment to human rights. While human rights as such are a secular construct, they are based on, infused with, and rooted in faithfulness to the God of life. Human rights and those who advocate for human rights at various levels certainly need to be supported and accompanied. However, there is an urgent need to review the language and discourse of human rights in the light of the challenges that the 21st century world poses which include the rapid destruction of nature. The human rights of the privileged often impinge upon the basic human rights of the disprivileged. Therefore, commitment to justice is pivotal to our pursuance of human rights.

2. Reweaving the Web of Life

"During the genocide in Rwanda, people were killed and thrown into the rivers and lakes. As a result, many people would not use the water of the Kagera river and other bodies of water, because they had been contaminated by all the corpses"

Nagaju Mukagahima, a participant from Rwanda

The web of life has been torn and is unravelling. Creation's integrity is under severe threat. Within this broken web our rich Christian traditions and scriptures provide a vision of the integrity of creation we seek to recover. The understanding of integrity which we offer to the ecumenical community has two key dimensions. The first is integrity as wholeness, interconnectedness, and interdependence. The second is accountability and moral responsibility. When we hold these two dimensions of integrity together, we realise that the integrity of creation is the framework within which we understand human dignity. The connection between human dignity and the integrity of creation is inseparable; the violation of one involves the violation of the other.

Integrity as Wholeness, Interconnectedness and Interdependence

The creation story in Genesis 2 is a rich resource for theological reflection on the integrity of creation. God creates "*adam*" from "*adamah*," which means the earth, or more precisely, the soil. Often overlooked is the fact that God then creates the other animals and birds from the same soil. Humans, animals, birds and soil are all kin, related in their very substance. Furthermore, all life is interdependent. Adam's life depends on sustenance from the garden in which he has been placed. Yet the earth also needs Adam's care and service. God commands Adam to till and keep the garden (another translation from the Hebrew is "to serve and conserve"). It teaches us that human beings belong to the earth and depend upon it for their lives and livelihoods *and* that the earth needs human care and attention to continue to provide a suitable habitat for humanity. This insight challenges us to rethink common notions of sustainability that focus on the human role in sustaining the earth and neglect the deeper truth that, first and foremost, it is the natural

environment that sustains humanity. Creation is a living community of beings who sustain one another and are blessed by God. *Amahoro* - a Rwandese term - expresses beautifully this condition of human beings dwelling peacefully with one another and with nature. As an African equivalent of the biblical concept of *shalom*, *amahoro* encapsulates a sense of harmony, peace, welfare, good environment, calmness and humility.

Integrity as accountability and moral responsibility

Also inherent in the concept of integrity is the accountability of the human person to God for one's relationships with others. When one violates one's responsibilities to God, to human beings, and to the rest of creation, God demands accountability. Often, a failure to act responsibly involves an abuse of power; sometimes it means the abuse or neglect of oneself.

Rents in the Web of Life

Among the most violent expressions of "power over" in the human community is the use of military power. Not only human life but all forms of life can be devastated by war and the preparations for war. Our world today affords us too many examples - from oil fires in Iraq, to the landmines that continue to wound people and make places uninhabitable, to the aftermath of nuclear bomb testing.

The dominant economic model of continuous growth threatens ecological balance. The fullness of God's creation, though regenerative, is not limitless. Recovering the biblical imperative of the Sabbath can recall Christians to practices that honour the need for rest of the earth and of all its creatures. The commodification and commercialisation of many of God's gifts of creation are exacerbating overuse by some and increased scarcity for others. The privatisation of resources such as land, water, seeds and genetic materials by a few deny these necessities of life to many. These appropriations impose a new set of artificial boundaries, further tearing the web of life (dis-integrating creation). Powerful technologies permit more intrusive interventions and reordering of nature with more widespread and radical effects. How are we hearing God's call to accountability for the consequences of our actions on those who are away?

Unequal power permits the deliberate transfer of the negative impacts of the misuse of natural resources. For example, some of the toxic wastes from industrial processes in the North are dumped in Africa. In many regions and cities in the North, poor people of colour are further impoverished by being relegated to live in polluted areas - an expression of environmental racism. This also has a dangerous impact on women's lives and the health of the children. High rates of birth defects in such areas and the dangerous concentration of toxins in mothers' breast milk in some Northern aboriginal communities demonstrate the differential impact of environmental degradation on women. Thus, ecological injustices exacerbate other forms of injustice, shredding the integrity of creation and human community simultaneously.

Place and Displacement

The web of creation has been rent through a modern disregard for the integrity of place. Colonisation and subsequent globalisation have resulted in massive displacement of peoples and other life forms. Peoples have been involuntarily torn from their homelands through enslavement, war, forced migration, government appropriation of land, and privatisation of communal lands. When people are removed from their traditional territories against their will, their culture and well-being suffer and sometimes disintegrate. When indigenous peoples are removed from their territories, the land itself suffers. Artificial boundaries created through European colonisation continue to separate people and sometimes cause violent conflicts across borders. National boundaries also fail to respect the contours of ecosystems, watersheds and climate patterns, making environmental management difficult as pollution generated in one country may greatly affect the welfare of another. How can the ecumenical movement support the rights of peoples and the integrity of creation through the development of a theology of place?

Church as the repairer

The broken web of life calls for renewed theological reflection and action from the churches. As we recognise the interconnections between human dignity and environmental wholeness, we begin to see the ways in which the human moral condition is reflected in the condition of the earth. Dismissed as superstition by modern minds, the correspondence between the moral state of the human community and the health of the earth is becoming clear again in the age of

human-induced climate change, massive extinction of species, and droughts and famines brought on by human activities. The widening chasm between the global rich and the global poor is impoverishing people and the earth together. Human justice and eco-justice are indivisible.

Human accountability to the proper use of power calls forth a new ethic of service. This leads us to explore the possibilities for a theology of service. Dominating power is usually associated with maleness and service with femaleness, but the radical example of Jesus is of a community of mutual service and shared power. In contrast to more traditional understandings of service, we stress the mutuality and reciprocity of Jesus' call to serve one another (cf. John 13:1-15, Mark 10:35-45). Dominating power is dehumanising both for the oppressors and the oppressed, as it destroys human relationships and offends God. As we acknowledge our interdependence and strive for mutuality in our relationships, we actually find our humanity restored.

Another way to reweave the web of life could be through the development of an ethic of "enoughness," a considerable challenge to the over-consumption of the global rich, and a hopeful promise to the impoverished of the earth. Is it possible to conceptualise a theology of enoughness without reverting to notions of scarcity which can fuel fear, greed and conflict? How can the churches help their members discern morally appropriate lifestyles that honour the well-being of people they do not know but are morally bound to protect? How can our global economy be restructured so that everyone has enough? A theology of enoughness is good news for the poor, who unceasingly suffer from a lack of resources. The obstacles we face must not dissuade us from taking prophetic action; the Church is called to be faithful whether or not success appears on the horizon.

3. Re-member-ing the victims of violence

Genocides are crimes against humanity. These are products of prolonged processes of political, social and moral degeneration resulting in language and attitudes that categorise some as worthless, detrimental and expendable and thus deny their humanity. Ironically, the ideology of the free market as well as some dominant cultures of discrimination and exclusion are also led by the same logic, i.e., some are less important than others.

Both victims and perpetrators of violence have different memories. Reconciliation is possible only if stories are told and the truth is acknowledged in all its entirety and rawness. It is important for the victims, the perpetrators and for the community as a whole, that this remembering process does take place. Otherwise denial constitutes a pathway to continued violence and the perpetuation of the crime. Structurally imposed silences by power interests, fear and pain often block this process. The following are among some of those in our world today:

- The determined efforts of the most powerful countries through media and diplomacy and their strategies and regulations, such as the structural adjustment programmes and mono-cultures.
- The legitimisation and glorification of state violence, and the war against terror.
- The rise of the religious right and the cultures of domination and discrimination such as patriarchy and caste. Patriarchy by promoting unjust power relations between men, women and children forbids the victims to talk about the aggression even if it is sexual abuse and makes the victims internalise shame and oppression.
- Intense pain and trauma (such as in the cases of the Jewish experience of the Holocaust), fear of re-victimisation and fear of being accused of participation in the crime as well as fear of standing for the truth.
- Structural amnesia where the context for remembering is deliberately made impossible. For example, the massacre happening during the Korean war was silenced by anti-communist propaganda and the national security law.
- Persons with disabilities or sexual minorities who are often silenced or rendered invisible. (In the case of sexual minorities we note that there are important issues of theology and different understandings of sin that determine the attitudes of churches).
- Racist and colonial interests. In situations in which injustice and impunity prevail and remain unaddressed, repetitive violence can occur.
- Accompanying this and following from many of these forms, there is an unholy silence over the exploitation of the earth.

Cultures of silence

Within our various Christian traditions, remembering has always been an essential activity of the people of God. In remembering, we affirm the historicity of our faith in God; lament and voice our sufferings; acknowledge our mutual responsibility towards each other and to the earth; and link past, present and future. Within their history, Christians hold on to this “dangerous memory” by voicing the saving act of God in Jesus Christ.

The Israelites knew what it meant to be suffering and to be silenced at the same time. Psalm 137 is the story of the people unable to sing because of the experience of captivity. II Sam 13:20 tells us the story where the abuser told Tamar not to tell anybody about her rape and the concubine in Judges 19 experiencing a traumatic silence after being abused all night. In the New Testament, in contrast with Pilate’s silence expressed through his washing of hands and refusing to accept responsibility for justice, in the silence of Jesus, the silence of the innocent one, we recognise the counter-cultural silence that evokes the very truth that Pilate tried to run away from.

From victim to survivor – theological resources for building a new society

As part of the search for theological resources for re-remembering the victims (including the perpetrators) of violence, the following were reflected upon:

First, the Korean Minjung theology and its rich concept of *han*. The *Minjung* are the economically poor, politically weak, socially deprived people, but who are at the same time culturally and historically rich and powerful. *Han* is an underlying feeling of the Korean Minjung people. On the one hand, it is a dominant feeling of defeat, resignation, and nothingness; on the other, it is a feeling accompanied by a tenacity of will for life which comes to weaker beings. The latter aspect could erupt as the energy for a revolution or rebellion. The *han* of the Minjung people is a resource for healing. The trauma of the victims is overcome through a realisation of their inherent potential for a new life. The victims need to *dan*, to cut the desire for revenge or the danger of fatalism. Through many forms of ritual, worship and prayer, particularly in the Eucharist, liberating strands and a horizon of open future are offered. In the dangerous memory of suffering and humiliation, new life is made possible.

Second is *Gacaca*, a traditional process in Rwanda used to resolve conflicts within the communities and between neighbouring communities. It is a process in which responsibilities for various crimes are identified in a dialogue which involves both the perpetrators and the victims. Traditionally *Gacaca* might result in imposing sanctions on the guilty side or in achieving reconciliation. This is especially complex in Rwanda where the whole community has been involved in violence - although it is clearly recognised that the systemic killing was planned by minority of politicians, yet different levels of denial still exist. After the genocide, the process of *Gacaca* was reintroduced to assist the judiciary system. Villagers are fully involved in the judiciary process including testimonies, questioning and some times ending in confessions and some times repentance and remorse. Within the churches, this process is also extended to promote healing and reconciliation where churches have failed to stand for the truth.

There are also several other examples where churches have become models of healing in contexts of extreme violence (e.g., South Africa). In situations where they have failed to be such models, we call on the churches’ long tradition of repentance, from the prophets of Israel to the proclamation of the Kingdom by Jesus (cf. Mark 1:15) which challenge us to rediscover our role to stand for the truth and to facilitate reconciliation. Confession and repentance constitute the beginning of the Church (Acts 2.37-41). Churches then need to strengthen the dimension of confession and repentance in worship, and affirm the need of *lament* in order to remember the victims of violence.

This act of re-remembering the victims of violence is an act in hope that God breathes new life into the bones (cf. Ezekiel 37). It is an affirmation of the spirit of Pentecost that effected a new community in which all find a common ground and understanding in spite of the differences. In other words, in a process of healing and reconciliation, the victims (including the perpetrators) respond to God’s purposes by re-constructing themselves, re-remembering the society and re-affirming the integrity of creation (“divine weakness is stronger than human strength”: 1 Cor. 1.25). Finally, it is a fulfilment of the hope that the victims of violence are received into the new heaven

and the new earth where all tears are wiped away and where there will be no more death and no more grief (Rev 21:4).

4. Meaning of being Church

Rwanda

Meeting in this Advent season in Rwanda, we have been privileged to come to know more intimately something of the tragedy and the marvels that have occurred in this place.

We visited a church building still filled today with bones of the many men, women, and children who were killed there while seeking refuge. There we beseeched Heaven, using the ancient words of the Christian people *Kyrie Eleison*, for the many ways in which the community of Christians, being human, has failed in wisdom and in virtue. Both Rwandan communities and those from far away have appropriated narrow identities, distorted by their own self-interest and the misappropriated self-interest of others, betraying their faith in the universality and unity of the Church and the Gospel itself. The credibility of the churches has been damaged not only to others but also to themselves.

We have learned as well from faithful witness. In the midst of the genocide crisis, some responded with extraordinary creativity, resourcefulness and courage. Since those events, churches and individual Christians, trusting in the Lord, empowered by faith, embodying forgiveness, have achieved extraordinary renewal within their communities and the larger society. We have been honoured to be witnesses to their witness. Faced with the sorrows of this place we cry “never again”. As we face our weaknesses and our strengths, as we face ourselves, we humbly confess that it is not we ourselves, but “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit” that “enable the one Church to live as sign of the reign of God and servant of the reconciliation with God, promised and provided for the whole creation.” (Canberra Statement, Faith and Order Commission, adopted by the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Canberra, Australia, 1991, 1.1)

Therefore we assert that the Church has to rediscover itself afresh in all situations to uphold the vivacity and relevance of the Gospel, more so in situations of brokenness and destruction. The Church is a fellowship, a *koinonia* in the blood of the Lord (cf. I John 1:7). “This *koinonia* which we share is nothing less than the reconciling presence of the love of God” (Message from the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, Santiago de Compostela, Spain, 1993). The Church exists to carry out God’s mission in the world which is “to gather all creation under the Lordship of Christ” (cf. Eph 1:10), and to bring humanity and all creation into communion. Entering into the Christian community, the Church’s members have been ‘[incorporated] into Christ, who is the crucified and risen Lord’ (Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, Faith and Order Paper No. 111, World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1982, B1). In the Eucharist, the Church sees the vision of the in-breaking reign of God and receives a foretaste of it. (cf. *Ibid.*, E22). Participating in the redeeming mission of God in the world, the Church both proclaims and manifests the Good News. Filled with the Holy Comforter, the Church offers healing to the violated and wounded. Being salt of the earth and light of the world (cf. Matt. 5:13 and 14), the Church reaches out to all who suffer, effecting healing and reconciliation within herself and among all those whom she has the capacity to touch.

Engaging for Life

However, we acknowledge that the Church, in many ways, fails to be what it is called to be. We all “have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”. (Rom 3:23) We can only seek forgiveness. Such forgiveness may not be mixed up with “cheap grace”. Forgiveness for our human failure to be what we are, the body of Christ, is the most powerful force of change and new beginning. Growing into being an authentic community which is moved by Christ as its centre opens up new possibilities of engaging for life.

The Church can heal the wounds that the experience of grave violence leaves in the souls of those who have been victims. It can be a safe place to tell their stories, to be comforted by others, to deeply understand that no violation of dignity which has been experienced can destroy the infinite worth of every human being created in the image of God. The Church can be an agent of healing of the wounds that the experience of grave violence leaves in the souls of those who

have been perpetrators. The Church can be a force of reconciliation. It can bring perpetrators and victims together and open up new ways of living together in community. The Church can help in rebuilding through worship, preaching and acts of love. In rebuilding a country destroyed by genocide, the Church can also help in manifold material ways. It can show that, as a common body of Christ, it is an international community in which all members suffer, when the weakest members suffer. The Church can live its universality by engaging in ecumenical dialogue across cultures, between nations and also within nations. It is a Spirit-born agent for transformation in crossing boundaries that are erected by forces of hatred, exclusion and deprivation. The Church can be challenging to those who hold political and economic power, when new injustices become visible. The Church is called to resist when governments and economic powers engage in grave and systematic injustices and when all calls to responsibility have been in vain. In such situations it is not enough to dress the wounds of the victims but to take vigorous action to change the contexts and ideologies that create these wounds.

We recognise and affirm the role of the ecumenical community in impressing upon the international community the need to ensure justice and human rights at all levels. In the same spirit, we deplore the many ways in which the United Nations, as an institution for peace and stability in the world, has been repeatedly misused to serve the interests of the dominant powers. We are deeply troubled by the experience of the Rwandan people who saw the United Nations leave the country when they needed them most. We affirm the obligation of the international community to come to the aid of the vulnerable in cases of genocide. This requires systems of reliable information gathering, and also the help of civil society agents such as the Church, a capacity for clear decision-making and rapid reaction, and nuanced and cautious critical assessment. The appropriate role of military force and the use of guns in such interventions must be discussed by the churches during the Decade to Overcome Violence. We must deepen our discussion on how an ethic of conscience and an ethic of responsibility are meaningfully related to each other. Therefore, in situations of massive violence such as in Sudan at present, we advocate 1) Monitoring of the media; 2) Supporting peace movements; 3) Sending in a "council of the wise"; and 4) Economic sanctions only if it is clear that these do not affect the weakest members of society.

The Church is called by Jesus to be "the salt of the earth" and "light of the world" (Matthew 5:13-14), to be "in the world but not of the world" (John 17:15-18). In listening to this call the Church can generate a dynamic from hostility to hospitality in the whole of society. Such movement from hostility to hospitality may be the most powerful witness of engaging for life and of bringing back life where death has appeared to reign, and thus of the hope that, one day, all violence will be overcome.
