



JOURNEYING TOWARDS RECONCILIATION

THE LEGACY OF RACISM: LOOKING BACK IN ORDER TO MOVE FORWARD

By Everton Gordon

Everton Gordon has worked in a variety of areas in the field of social service since immigrating to Canada from Jamaica in 1990. These included his work at Across Boundaries, an ethno-racial community-based mental health centre where he developed and delivered anti-racism education and training. He is also the organist and music director for the African-Caribbean Choir at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church in Toronto. He is presently doing doctoral studies in education at OISE/UT in the department of Sociology and Equity Studies, focusing his research in the area of racism and mental health.

The transatlantic slave trade is perhaps the best-known image that comes to mind when one talks about the experiences of people of African descent, whether they are on the continent or in the Diaspora. With this in mind, March 25 in the year 2007 will mark a major milestone as it commemorates the bicentenary—200 years to the day—since the British Parliament passed the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act.

Since Britain was at the very front and centre of the slave trade, taking action to end it had a tremendous influence over the system of slavery as well. Marking the end of the slave trade is to recognize a first crucial step on the long road that led eventually to the abolition of slavery itself within the former British Empire. The Slavery Abolition Act was passed in 1833, although it did not go into effect until 1838 and slavery in the Americas was not abolished until 1888. Sadly, even today, it is estimated that over 20 million people are still in some form of slavery or servitude, on the continent of Africa.

It is well known that the transatlantic slave trade greatly enhanced the wealth of Europe and laid the foundations for modern capitalism.

As the demand for labour increased in many of the colonies, millions of Africans were taken into captivity. Young and old, men, women and children were transported the coasts of Africa to the shores of the Caribbean and to the Americas and sold at auction. Through much of the 17th and 18th centuries, Africans were forced to toil and build the colonies that sustained the economic development of much of Europe. Many of the financial infrastructures required by the slave trade inaugurated new systems of banking and insurance (Rodney, 1981; Williams & Palmer, 1994).

For those who are of African descent, this is a tough time to reminisce, to enter into historic memory, to recall the pain and suffering, to ponder the enormous atrocities that were perpetuated on African Peoples in the name of “development”. For many people who are of European ancestry, memory of the slave trade may invoke feelings of guilt because much of what constitute today’s “progress”—such as the economic wealth and cultural dominance of all that is European in “White” places like London, Paris and New York were derived from the backs of Africans.

Marking the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade in the British Empire is an important time to recall *Sankofa*. *Sankofa* has a powerful meaning in the fabric of Ghanaian social and cultural expressions. It is an Akan word symbolized by a bird whose head turns back, looking to the past. It also works metaphorically as a guidepost—a way of helping us remember that we must go back and understand our past in order to sustain our claim in the present and move forward to the future.

In other words, it is a way of reflecting on the struggles of the past, to assess and appraise what progress we have made; to

contemplate how we are going to deal with the many challenges that we are confronted with requiring healing and recovery; and to ensure a viable future for millions of African people everywhere. This is crucial for Africans in order “to understand who we are and where we stand in the struggle”, to quote the lyrics of one of Bob Marley’s songs.

An important memory of the period of slavery that still lingers and very much affects so many African people in the world today is Anti-Black Racism. As we know, racism erodes our very humanity and no one can be truly liberated while living under such tremendous weight of oppression. This is the central point made by Dr. Joy DeGruy Leary in *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America’s legacy of enduring injury and healing* (Uptone Press, 2005).

Dr. DeGruy traces some of the unique ways that both overt and subtle forms of racism and oppression have damaged the collective African-American psyche. To subject so many African people on the plantations of the Caribbean and in the mines of the Americas to the inhumane and degrading conditions of slavery, to monotonous, insane and severe labour, with little dignity and respect, without religious ritual was to enslave not only their muscles but also their collective spirit.

Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome provides a useful understanding of the psycho-emotional impact on Africans of well over three centuries of slavery. Furthermore, the individual and systemic racism and oppression that has continued has resulted in multigenerational adaptive behaviours that can be linked to the slavery experiences. It is crucial to understand that while the institutional form of slavery no longer exists, the mental impact of slavery continues into the present and that these issues have been passed along through the generations.

Remembering and reflecting are vitally

important because some of these behavioural attributes have been positive and empowering, revealing the resilience of the people, while others have been detrimental, resulting in forms of socially destructive behaviour. DeGruy argues that the manifestations of such harm can be seen through poor mental and physical health, family and relational dysfunction, and self-destructive impulses. By reminding us on the importance of looking to the past, *Sankofa* offers an affirming way of helping us in the healing and recovery process.

Although they were stolen from Africa, the Mother Continent, brought through the Middle Passage to the Americas, and scattered throughout the Diaspora, African men and women have carried with them in their struggles a deep sense of spirituality through the gifts and treasures of sacred songs and chants, moans, groans and other forms of ritualistic cries, all of which were important in sustaining them in separation and captivity.

As early as 1691, slaves in colonial homes were proficient in the use of many European musical instruments such as the fiddle, French horn, flute, trumpet and guitar. Many of the slaves who were musicians were highly valued not only for the skills they exhibited but also for their spirituality and the spirit-filled atmosphere that their music generated. (Bennett, 1966) The African sense of spirituality was so pervasive that in 1755 a prominent English Minister of Religion, Reverend Samuel Davis wrote: “The [Negro] ... have an ear for Musick, and a kind of ecstatic Delight in Psalmody and there are no books they learn so soon or take so much pleasure in, as those used in that heavenly Part of divine worship”. (Bennett, 1966)

Today this rich historical legacy of their spirituality continues to inform and guide African people wherever they are physically and socially located. Many Black religious leaders play a visible and prominent role in

personal and public life on behalf of Black Community. In particular, leaders from Judea-Christian congregations, whether here in North America or in the many countries of their origin, including Continental Africa and in the Caribbean Region, show how dominant a force religion and spirituality are in the life of African people.

It is well known that Christianity was used by Europeans in facilitating the exploitation of Africans, offering the Bible and taking their lands. Organized religion was also involved in slavery, in some instances to secure conformity and in others to secure liberation. Serving as institutions of teaching, preaching, and of co-operative benevolence, churches are both places of refuge and sources of strength for many Black families. In expressing important rituals, ceremonies and other symbols of African-ness, Black people are preserving and perpetuating our culturally enriched ways of life. Educators and other professionals who are assessing the needs, strengths, weaknesses and coping abilities of Black children, youth and families in the educational system must pay close attention to how religion and spirituality are manifested and integrated in their lives.

Today we need to challenge why it is that the representation of Blackness in the White imagination of the Euro-Canadian society is so problematic. Why is it that the representation of Black people is positively acclaimed only in their role as entertainers, paraded before White audiences as top artists and athletes? At the same time, Blacks are often blamed for their own self-destruction. Blacks in the White imagination of the Euro-Canadian society are manifestations of anti-social behaviours—drug addicts, drug dealers, dangerous criminals, pimps and prostitutes and otherwise engaged in the worst forms of socially deviant behaviours.

Aware of this kind of negative construction

of Blackness, I now return to the bicentenary commemoration and argue that this is an event of epic significance. It is a time not only to reflect but to recognize the hurt and the harm that the Slave Trade and the attendant institution of Slavery have caused African people. Two hundred years later, the damage it has done to us has left us wounded, inflicted with “Spirit Injury”. We now need to come to terms with how to heal and recover. As the late, renowned Reggae superstar Robert “Bob” Marley famously recorded in one of his popular albums: “Two thousands years of history cannot be wiped away so easily”.

As we reflect on the past, we should be mindful that blatant racism based on skin colour, while it has become objectionable in most Western pluralistic democratic societies, still exists. Racism is now fashioned through ethnic and cultural issues in the Canadian Context and is often masked by the politics of cultural diversity. In reclaiming Black pride and dignity we should remember the patterns of an abuser in an abusive relationship. In order to make things “work”, the victim is often expected to love the abuser, forget about the litany of past abuses, and ignore the present predicament that the abuser has placed the abused in.

This, unfortunately, highlights how multiculturalism operates, reflecting some of the traits of the abuser and the abused. We cannot afford to allow multiculturalism to lead us blindly into an appreciation of all cultures while often expecting us, like an abused victim, to ignore our past. People of colour are expected to forget the past abuse of the dominant culture and live as if nothing terrible had happened, and is still happening, at the hand of the dominator. As we mark the significant 200-year milestone, let us challenge the assumptions of equality which are a form of denial by the dominant culture.

Let us renew our faith in bearing witness

Journeying Towards Reconciliation

to the Gospel and remember that seeking justice is the kind of work that involves community development, building peace and promoting reconciliation. It is for us to reflect on the difficulties of the past as well as look to the challenges of the future. We are at a very concerning time in terms of the survival of Africans both on the continent and in the Diaspora. War, poverty and HIV/AIDS are killing millions every day.

European's entry into Africa, the "Heart

of Darkness", left a trail of destruction and marked Africa and African people with a litany of tragedies including some of the worst forms of brutality to have been committed by one human being on another. It is a time to heal and recover from our feelings of loss of hope, guilt, hurt, disenchantment, displacement and disengagement. Let us see 1807 as an important marker in terms of our struggles for a different kind of freedom, one that is defined by racial justice.



credit: Bushra Junaid

UBUNTU: A SPIRITUALITY OF RECONCILIATION FOR ALL PEOPLES

A BOOK REVIEW

By Ivan MacFarlane

Michael Battle. *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu*. Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press. 1997.

Dr. Ivan MacFarlane holds a Ph.D from the University of Toronto and Graduate degrees in Public Administration (Carleton), Environmental Planning (York), and Educational Planning (OISE/Toronto). His volunteer and civic involvement includes the Presidency of Findhelp Information Services, Toronto and the directorship of the Canadian Club of Toronto. Ivan also serves as a Trustee of the University of Trinity College in the University of Toronto.

A 'cradle' Anglican, Ivan worships at St. Mary Magdalene parish in Toronto and is a member of the Doctrine and Worship Committee of the Diocese of Toronto.

Michael Battle is a minister, professor of theology, and academic vice-president of Virginia Theological Seminary. He was an assistant professor of theology at the University of the South, Tennessee, when he wrote *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu*. Throughout his ministry and academic career, he has focussed on Christian non-violence, human spirituality and African church studies.

Battle lived in residence with Archbishop Desmond Tutu in South Africa and was his adjutant from 1993 to 1994. The book is the result of Battle's studies and friendship with the archbishop. It is said that he calls the book a "meditation" on Tutu's spirituality and theology in their cultural context. That context, of course, is the evil of apartheid that was formalized in South Africa in 1948 and officially dismantled in 1990.

Apartheid had its philosophical underpinnings in the European Enlightenment that provided the ideological grounding for the separation of people into the dominant group—the whites—and the oppressed, primarily the blacks. An Afrikaner word, apartheid refers to "the theological doctrine and practice of separation of complete groups of peoples."

This legal separation of the races ensured, among other things, the complete control over land rights by whites, and maintained and protected the white "race" as a distinctive group. This has some resonance both for political history and institutional relations with the Aboriginal peoples of Canada.

Tutu pointed out, "While the church preached the equality of human beings, people owned fellow human beings and treated them as their property ... [and] saw nothing contrary to their faith in what they were doing." He further noted that apartheid "saw human beings as made for separation, alienation, division and disunity. The Bible and Christianity say human beings are made for fellowship, communion and Koinonia."

Here was a situation in which both Africans and Afrikaners—"practising Christians"—were wedded to competing theological narratives to justify racial violence that would ensure what each side saw as an ideal society. Battle properly points out that theological discourse in South Africa cannot be understood apart from the history of apartheid that the Afrikaners contrived to base on Christian principles of justice.

Desmond Tutu intervened in this situation and appropriated the concept of *ubuntu* to temper the hatreds and also to "draw in, rather than alienate, nascent white resistance." *Ubuntu*, the plural of Bantu, means humanity. Anyone who internalizes *ubuntu* cares about

the deepest needs of others and faithfully observes all social obligations.

Tutu describes *ubuntu* as “hospitality, an open and welcoming attitude that is willing to share, to be generous and sharing.” For him, the solitary Christian “is a contradiction in terms.” The community defines the person. His life and ministry gave a theological interpretation to *ubuntu* in order to counter “the narrative of apartheid.” The first step, as Tutu saw it, was that *ubuntu* “would humanize the oppressor in the eyes of blacks and that a sense of common humanity would form.”

While Tutu’s resistance can be characterized as solidly strategic and political, his approach was theological. He proposed a “plurality of theologies” to accommodate the different understandings that African and Europeans have of God, a plurality that would reinforce “the motif of inter-dependence which is the inalienable characteristic of the body of Christ.” *Ubuntu*, African-black theology, would be inclusive. It could not, by definition, seek retributive justice.

In *Reconciliation*, Battle gives a clear analysis of Archbishop Tutu’s theology of *ubuntu* that crystallized “in the context of apartheid and its clash of European and African cultures.” The African concept, *ubuntu*, that Battle says Tutu appropriated for his own purposes, asserts, “human community is vital for the individual’s acquisition of personhood.” A thorough reading provides an extensive list of *ubuntu*’s many meanings and possibilities:

- ⊙ “each individual’s humanity is ideally expressed in relationship with others;”
- ⊙ “a person depends on other people to be a person;”
- ⊙ building up true interdependent communities defined as Christian;
- ⊙ recognizing people as distinct in their

identity;

- ⊙ combining the best of European and African cultures to produce a new and distinct theology;
- ⊙ being strong enough to address, and even overthrow, apartheid;
- ⊙ being “about the achievement of absolute dependence on God and neighbours in such a way that human identity is discovered therein;”
- ⊙ having little to do with Western humanism: “Although Tutu speaks of *ubuntu* in the South African context, he does not develop it as definitely African.”

Battle reminds us that *ubuntu* is a theological spirituality rather than a political program. One wonders whether Battle embraced this “theological spirituality” and transformed it into a political program as the basis for his latest book, *The Church Enslaved*, that challenges the Christian church in America “to resume leadership in overcoming and redressing America’s legacy of racial segregation” in order to help transform American society itself.

Besides clearly elucidating *ubuntu* theology, *Reconciliation* also provides an important insight into Tutu’s spirituality. The two final chapters make for fascinating reading and contemplation.

This book should be required reading for all who want to destroy a racist Christianity and bring about “the central act of reconciliation which the New Testament declares was achieved by God in [God’s] Son our Lord Jesus Christ.”

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS – THE DEMAND FOR REPARATIONS!

By Hazel Campayne

Dr. Hazel Campayne is a member of the Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network representing the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. She is also Chair of the Justice and Peace Committee at the Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada and worships at Our Lady of Lourdes in Toronto.

Originally from Guyana of African heritage, she is an educator by profession. She attended the World Conference Against Racism in Durban South Africa in 2001 as a delegate of the Canadian churches.

Since the 2001 United Nations World Conference Against Racism held in Durban, South Africa, the international movement demanding Reparations is gaining momentum and strength and has even become strident amongst some Africans on the Continent and African descendants in the Diaspora. REPARATIONS, therefore, in all the complexities of this concept, must become a crucial issue to be addressed by the Churches.

Background

The United Nations World Conference Against Racism offered a forum for profound truth-telling, the acknowledgement of past and present wrongs, challenges to impunity and the call for healing relationships and reconciliation processes.

The UN Conference was a turning point for people of African descent with the recognition and acknowledgement of their particular situation and the fact that the legacy of the slave trade, slavery and colonialism can no longer be disregarded. Emerging from this historic conference were a number of significant Articles in the Declaration and Programme of Action:

Article 13: ... slavery and the slave trade..., appalling traditions in the history of hu-

manity... are a crime against humanity and should always have been so, especially the transatlantic slave trade ...

Articles 99 and 100 reiterated “*acknowledgement and profound regret*” for the massive, the untold human suffering and evils, the tragic plight of millions of men, women and children caused by slavery, the slave trade, the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism, apartheid, genocide and past tragedies.

Article 100 noted: “*some States have taken the initiative to apologize and have paid reparation, where appropriate, for grave and massive violations committed.*”

Moreover, Article 104 asserted: “*We strongly reaffirm that as a pressing requirement of justice that victims of human rights violations ... should be assured of having access to justice ... including the right to seek just and adequate reparation or satisfaction for any damage suffered as a result*”

This Document, endorsed by 168 governments and therefore enshrined in the United Nations agenda, has provided a legal foundation in international law for advancing the claim of Africans on the Continent and African descendants in the Diaspora for reparations. It is regarded as the opportunity for making giant strides forward on what has been a pressing issue since the 1800s or perhaps earlier.

Much of the early activity around reparations has been documented, especially in the United States. In 1782, the Massachusetts legislature granted reparations to a slave in the form of a \$15 monthly pension, based on the fact that her labours had enriched her master. This spearheaded movements such as the one led by Callie House and eight Women leaders in the USA in the 1890s, the Garvey Movement,

the Nation of Islam, and a National Coalition for Reparations in America (N'COBRA).

Congressman John Conyers has introduced legislation to Congress calling for the U.S. Government, as a moral obligation, to study the impact of slavery on Africans in the United States. This legislation is currently receiving wide support primarily due to the work of N'COBRA. Several other activist organizations have been established to advance the demand. There are ongoing lawsuits, publications, conferences, forums, lectures, educational sessions, Million "Man" Gatherings, and grassroots organizing.

In 1992, a group of White Supporters for Reparations in the United States set up a foundation and incorporation as Caucasians United for Reparations and Emancipation or CURE. They established a body of written work and have earned a reputation for sincerity, tenacity and passion in their reparations and advocacy efforts. Articles include: "The Unique Responsibility of the Caucasian Christian" (two parts) by Ferrel Winfree and "Reparations: An Issue of Justice and Much More" by Jerry Saltzman.

On the CURE website is found this significant statement:

We express our deep remorse for the ongoing wrongs committed by our people against black men, women and children in the U.S. and throughout the Diaspora who are descendants of enslaved Africans... We support and advocate reparations proposals put forward by black leaders, recognizing that white Americans have no part in deciding what is required to repair and restore the descendants of enslaved Africans individually and collectively.

The first International Conference on Reparations was held in Lagos, Nigeria, in 1990. Two years later, a Group Of Eminent

Persons (GEP) comprising a number of persons of international reputation was established. The GEP included: Madame Grachel Machel, Miriam Makeba, and Dudley Thompson, Rhodes Scholar, international lawyer and former Foreign Minister of Jamaica. It linked with the Commission for Reparations of the then Organization for African Unity (OAU).

The First Pan-African Conference on Reparations held in Abuja, Nigeria, in 1993 produced the Abuja Declaration which:

- i) asserted that the damage sustained by African peoples is "not a thing of the past ... but painfully manifest in damaged lives of contemporary Africans from Harlem to Harare, in damaged economies of the Black World from Guinea to Guyana, Somalia to Surinam" (source - #5 below);
- ii) noted precedents for restitution – Germany to Jews, the USA to Japanese Americans; and
- iii) stated that it is was not intending to evoke guilt but responsibility and called on the international community to recognize the "unique and unprecedented moral debt owed African peoples yet to be paid."

In July 2000, at a Conference in Nairobi, Kenya, launching an International Citizens Campaign and Petition for Compensation for Africans and also at the World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa, in 2001 in a paper entitled: "*A Global Demand for Apology and Reparation*," James Dennis Akumu, Executive Director of Pan-African Research and Consulting Associates noted: "*Even institutions such as Churches where Africans played a leading role in the development of Christianity also joined not just in the slave trade but in making the world believe that our race was cursed by God.*"

Citing a few sources for this opinion, he

called on the Churches

- i) to make a special apology, while he acknowledged what he called “the limited apologies” made by Pope John Paul II and President Bill Clinton;
- ii) to prepare their own world-wide reparations; and
- iii) to rewrite or delete from the Bible those chapters which imply that Africans are inferior or cursed.

Using the population tabulation of a United Nations Demographic Year Book, Akumu described the gravity of the African “Holocaust”, estimating that between 15th and 19th century Africa lost nearly **400 million** of her people many of them the “*most virile and productive sons and daughters*”, the cream of populations [quoting Dr. Walter Rodney in his book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*].

“The slave trade ravaged Black Africa like a brush fire, wiping out images and values in one vast carnage,” opined President Leopold Senghor of Senegal.

Akumu observed that, despite the horrific conditions endured by the slaves, at Emancipation the slave owners (not the slaves or Africa) received compensation from the British, French, Dutch, Danes, and so on.

While outlining the demands for Apologies and Reparations in a variety of ways from governments, churches, and commercial institutions, Akumu also suggested actions for people of African descent:

- i) campaign to restore their culture and re-educate themselves and their youth about African values and heritage;
- ii) work to restore Africa’s greatness, reclaim her position in the world as the founders of the first civilization;
- iii) use Africa’s resources judiciously

– not allowing their depletion or expropriation by multinationals; and

iv) memorialize all victims of this (African) “Holocaust” and colonialism.

Since the World Conference Against Racism, there have been many more developments. A few are here cited:

i) UNESCO has developed a project called: *Breaking The Silence: The Slave Route*, targeting especially educational institutions.

ii) Demands for reparations are being made of Britain and the European nations such as those that Aristide of Haiti made of France.

iii) Reparations was the focus of the 10th Annual Churches Lecture in 2003 in Jamaica.

iv) Legislators in the US Virgin Islands are in talks with Denmark, their former colonizer. The African-Caribbean Reparations Resettlement Alliance (ACRRA) hopes to offer a model “*which seeks the repair of the European mentality which allowed for the dehumanization of Africans and the elevation of one race of people above another*”.

v) In 2005, in Barbados, descendants of Slave Owners conducted a symbolic march to apologize for slavery.

vi) A few artifacts have been restored to Ethiopia.

vii) While on a visit to Senega, Brazil’s President apologized for his country’s role in slavery.

viii) The Global African Congress of Africans on the Continent and African Descendants in the Diaspora, established

in 2002, announced in August 2005 the formation of an International Reparations Commission to drive reparations programs and activities. It will, in part, complement and build upon the work of the Group of Eminent Persons cited above.

ix) The United States Senate in 2005 approved a resolution to enact federal anti-lynching legislation passed decades ago.

x) Some victories have been achieved in the US. For example, the City Council in Philadelphia passed legislation in 2006 mandating that companies that wish to do business with the City must disclose their connection with the African Slave Trade. There have been setbacks – a judge, for example, in 2005 dismissed claims to reparations. But attorneys like Deadria Farmer-Paellmann, who has made reparations for U.S. descendants of African slaves her mission, persist. In December 2006 she won a significant victory when an Appeals Court in Chicago ruled that U.S. corporations could be guilty of consumer fraud if they have not disclosed their role in financing slavery.

xi) In preparation for the commemorative Bicentenary of the Act to End the Slave Trade in the British Empire, the Church of England at its general Synod on February 9th 2006, overwhelmingly voted to apologize to the descendants of the victims of the slave trade “recognizing the damage done” to those enslaved.

xii) Mr. Doudou Diène, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Racism in his report on his Mission to Canada in

2003 recommended that “in consultation with communities of African origin or their descendants, the Government of Nova Scotia should re-examine the conditions of their relocation, particularly from Africville, taking particular account of their situation regarding human rights and economic and social conditions with a view to granting reparation.”

Many in the International Reparations Movement consider reparations as the necessary ultimate step in repairing and healing the appalling damage and redressing the injustices done to Africans and African descendants, once these have been acknowledged. They therefore even question the sincerity of apologies if there is no consideration of some form of reparation.

What is this word “reparations” about?

Deriving from the word “repair”, many are the definitions. It has been defined as “*the restitution or repayment by a government and/or institutions of a society for crimes resulting in the systemic destruction of a people.*” In the book, *The Church & Reparations*, Dr. Iva Carruthers defines reparations as a process “*to repair, restore, make amends for wrongs, reconcile. To seek reparations is to seek justice; and the pathway to justice is from confession to reconciliation. Apology and moral, economic, political and educational structural adjustments are stops along the way*” (source - #11 below).

“*Reparations is about the payment of a debt owed; to atone for wrongdoing; to make amends; to make one whole; the payment of damages; to repair a nation; compensation in money, land or materials for damages.*” N’COBRA.

Mme. Zuma of South Africa, President of the World Conference Against Racism, passionately insisted: “*Reparations is not about money ... it is about dignity*”.

Reparations is about respect and esteem, “about recapturing the history and dignity of African peoples.” It is about respect for the dignity of the human person created in God’s image and likeness. And it is about justice and equality. It is about repairing the damage at a deeper level than materially.

Can one measure in monetary terms the damage of this *maafa* – this great suffering –

- ⊙ the price for millions and millions of lives and their labour over centuries?
- ⊙ the trauma, the dehumanization, the shame, the suffering, the loss of culture, the loss of history, of identity, of family and community links, of spirituality, of land?
- ⊙ the economic, political, social and cultural damage to communities?
- ⊙ the persistent, pernicious and indeed dangerous psychological and spiritual damage?
- ⊙ the damage done to the Continent of Africa, the cradle of civilization, where there is evidence of the heights reached by that civilization centuries before Christ’s birth with highly organized kingdoms, institutions, centers of learning, great libraries, architecture, value systems, etc., etc., and the under-development process it has experienced especially since the 15th century.

Some opponents to reparations (in the U.S.) contend:

- ⊙ Slavery happened a long time ago ... why should “I” pay for something that neither I nor my family members participated in?
- ⊙ My family came to the U.S. after slavery. We were not even in the country.

⊙ Reparations are a racial “shakedown” and a “government handout”.

⊙ Reparations are going to “divide the races” even further. Why can’t we just leave the past alone? Can’t we just get along?

⊙ Slavery was evil but it does not justify compensation of the descendants of slaves.

But as said earlier the damage sustained by African peoples is not “a thing of the past”.

On the other side of the debate it should be noted that reparations:

- ⊙ are not about development aid; they are not about charity;
- ⊙ involve law and justice under International Law – where one people subjects another to systematized inhumanity, negating their humanity, a crime against humanity has been committed; there is no statute of limitation;
- ⊙ are not simply a Black issue but an issue for all Humankind; an issue of rights and of justice;
- ⊙ are about restoring Africa to its rightful place in World Civilization and a cessation of the manipulation of African countries, the exploitation (indeed theft) of their resources and respect for their independence; and
- ⊙ are about honestly facing the question of Debt – Who really owes whom?

Reparations are therefore about what, in Swahili, is called *amani*:

Healing and Repairing

Restoring and Reconciling

Justice, Human Rights, Equity, Peace

Transformation of Relationships

Reparations are the path that leads towards reconciliation and transforming our relationships on this Planet. The basic steps ought to include: acknowledgement of the truth, confession/repentance/apology, restitution/reparation (and some of the various ways cited above) reconciliation.

The United Nations Declaration has provided the legal foundation and the issue is being addressed through legal, legislative, research and conceptual terms. *For Such A Time As This* the moral foundation for advancing the claim for Reparations is urgently needed. Should that not be the challenge for persons of faith individually and collectively? Churches have a vital role to play since, as an essentially spiritual people, Africans have experienced damage at the very core of their being and identity, at a deep spiritual level. The Churches cannot deny their “complicity, omission and commission”.

The Statement of the Eumenical Caucus at the World Conference Against Racism expressed commitment and called upon churches to, “*address the issue of reparations as a way of addressing the wrongs done, and to be clear that the trans-Saharan and the transoceanic-Atlantic, Pacific and Indian slave trade and all forms of slavery constitute crimes against humanity.*”

The World Council of Churches:

Attentive to the impetus provided by the UN’s World Conference Against Racism and the “raging debate” engendered around the Issues raised, the conversation of the Central Committee of World Council of Churches about its programme *On Being Church – Overcoming Racism Today* resulted in the concept and process of transformative justice. A bold call to churches has been issued not only to “*continue their advocacy and solidarity*” work but also “*for more commitment from Churches to face their own*

racism, not only racism elsewhere ... to face their own past –in the present – in relation to their own people – Indigenous Peoples, African-descendants ... others.”

The process towards Reparation and Reconciliation is guided by the Gospel imperative: c/f Luke 19: 8; Matthew 5:23-24; and Matthew 22: 34-40. Is this not the call and challenge to the Churches and Church-related organizations? The World Council of Churches recognizes: “*Reparation and restitution as moral obligations are part of the transformative justice process which does not allow for easy solutions.*”

The call and challenge to Churches is to engage in truth-telling as they face their own past and the damage and injustices done to Africans and African descendants. A Statement of the Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches in 1999 sees the challenge facing the Ecumenical Movement with regards to Africa in the early decades of the twenty-first century as:

The search for what it takes to right the wrongs of the previous century, and millennium. In this respect several characteristics are relevant: repentance, forgiveness, reparations, reconciliation and healing.

This is crucial for Africa. Violation of dignity of the African people must be addressed and redressed. This should be the case for Africans both on the Continent and in the Diaspora. In both situations, the African people continue to live with wounded and compromised dignity.

It is at the same time a problem of impunity. Reparations do not only have only to assume material dimensions. Violation of dignity is not only a justice question, it is a deeply theological one. That makes it imperative for the ecu-

menical movement to accompany the African people in their attempt to deal with the legacy of domination and all its derivatives.

In this respect racism in the twenty-first century should be considered in a new light ... (Journey of Hope, p. 151)

Action Now is the call and challenge, to repair, to heal, to restore God's original intention for Creation, for humanity. But this must and ought only to be done in dialogue with Africans and African descendants.

Sources

1. Paper - The World Council of Churches on Transformative Justice, 2004.
2. UN World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance - Declaration and Programme of Action, 2002.
3. The Abuja Declaration. A Declaration of the First Pan-African Conference on Reparations, April 27 -29 ,1993. Abuja, Nigeria.
4. FACTS on Reparations to Africans and Africans in the Diaspora prepared by the Group of Eminent Persons on Reparations.
5. "Africans - A Race in Quest for its Redemption and Restoration of its Dignity and Respect. A Global Demand for Apology and Reparation." Paper presented at a Conference launching the International Citizens Campaign and petition for Compensation for Africa. YMCA July, 15, 2000. Nairobi, Kenya.
6. Lectures by Professor Raymond Winbush and Lawyer David Comissiong (2004 and 2005) and various related e-mails from other individuals.
7. *Transformative Justice: Being Church and Overcoming Racism*. Resource Guide. World Council of Churches, 2004.
8. Letter by Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia, General Secretary, World Council of Churches. Geneva, August 2004.
9. Statement of the Ecumenical Caucus at the World Conference Against Racism, 2001.
10. *Journey of Hope: Towards a New Ecumenical Africa* By Nicholas Otieno with Hugh McCullum. WCC 2005.
11. *Commission on Human Rights: Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and all forms of Discrimination*. Report by Mr. Doudou Diène, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Mission to Canada: <http://www.ohchr.org/english/issues/racism/rapporteur/visits.htm>. Scroll down to Canada (2003).

Personal Perspectives on Reparations

Perspective #1

In 2006 Omega Bula, Executive Minister, Justice Global and Ecumenical Relations of the United Church of Canada, presented this paper at the Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Porto Algré, Brazil, at a workshop with Dr. Hazel Campayne entitled: "Repairing the Damage, Redressing the Injustice! What does the Lord Require of Us?" *Micah 6:8*

In the Introduction, Omega shared her personal experiences of colonization. These included remarks on reparations. Reparations to former colonized peoples in Africa and African descendants in the Diaspora is not all about money. (Reparations refers to the act of repairing, making amends, offering expiation, or giving satisfaction for wrong doing or injury.) Making reparation is about restoring dignity and God-given ubuntu (personhood). It is about truth-telling and acknowledgement of the injustice and violation of human rights done to the victims/survivors. It is about working to end impunity, power and privilege enjoyed by the perpetrators of the injustice. It is about working toward healing and reconciliation.

I was born in Northern Rhodesia, which is one of the countries that formed the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. The two Rhodesias were named after Cecil Rhodes who apparently discovered us and bought the land from the chiefs of the time. We were part of the British Empire and the British Commonwealth.

I was 16 years old when we gained our political independence. We became Zambia; Southern Rhodesia became Zimbabwe; and Nyasaland became Malawi. So I was born and raised in a colonial context. I know about growing up learning that I am an inferior human being, who needed to be modernized. I know about segregation when black kids and white kids could not live, play or go to school

together. I know about an Uncle who worked in the copper mines, living in a one-room house where he was not allowed to bring his family. I know about the church's role in racism and segregation, because I went to a residential school run by the church where I suffered racism and racial discrimination. We were never to speak about the truth of these realities, we were to remain silent and be truly grateful that we were getting an education – a Bantu education [identity, self esteem, devaluing of culture and knowledge etc.]

Northern Rhodesia, like any other colony, was important to the British only for its land and the minerals underneath it. Rural areas were depopulated to work in the mines.

The lands left behind were taken over by white farmers and the colonial government.

The current extreme economic problems and social imbalances faced by Zambians has its roots in the colonization history of that country. Today, we only look at the current/recent events and resist addressing the wrongs and harm caused to the people and the country as a result of colonization.

Why is reparation a question for the church to address?

The question of reparation is not only a moral issue but a justice question. We are called as church to seek justice and resist evil. The church can offer a vision of reconciliation which calls for truth-telling. By truth-telling, the church will discover its own complicity in the sin of colonization and slavery.

The church needs to struggle with the question of racism as a sin ... challenge the ideology of racism and acknowledge the churches' role in the taking into slavery and colonization of African peoples that manifested this racism. Racism is a sin. It violates God's desire for humanity.

Theological reflection: resourcing the journey

A key element the church can offer is one that will enable us to discern the direction toward which God's justice is pointing, through a submission of our experiences as individuals and communities called to be the church, to ongoing theological reflection; theological reflection which engages in a post-colonial analysis of domination, exploitation, cultural hegemony, and the use of unequal access to economic power and resources in the maintenance of imperialism; theological reflection that affirms human beings as created in the image of God and challenges patterns of thought, beliefs, concepts, and racist language in our hymns and prayers, which continuously negate people of colour.

Solidarity and Accountability

Advocating for reparations is not merely objecting to what is wrong, but working for what is right. We shall know what is right by seeking to understand the situation from the perspective of those who have suffered injustice. The church is challenged to be in solidarity with – which means being accountable to – those who have suffered the oppression caused by colonization and slavery ... to watch out for the unintended re-victimization and marginalization of the already excluded and oppressed. This requires a church committed to working for institutional change from within, through leadership training at every level of the church, equipping and empowering the faithful to participate in systemic change and transformation.

Healing and Reconciliation

Reconciliation is for me the great message of the gospel (Romans: 5-11) Through the cross he reconciled us to himself. He justifies us by grace, frees us from sin, transforms us and restores us to his friendship through forgiveness. In

feminist theology, the word healing is found in the overcoming of duality and dichotomy, the most basic being the “them” and “us”. This played out in terms of gender, race, social class, domination, sexual orientation, etc. [Russell and Clarkson, 1996, pp. 137). Healing is defined in terms of exclusivity and recognition of, and respect for, pluralism, diversity, difference and understanding. These aspects are not only personal, they are interpersonal and global. The church can play a critical role.

Jourdan Anderson: An ex-slave writes in 1865 to his former master

Perspective #2

The demand for reparations in all the complexity of what that word means and what it brings are here reflected in this letter, published in “The Freedmen’s Book”, a collection of African-American writings compiled by the abolitionist Lydia Maria Child in 1865. The letter is a response to a slave owner who has written to his former slave at the war’s end, asking him to return to work in Tennessee.

To my old Master, Colonel P.H. Anderson, Big Spring, Tennessee.

Sir, I got your letter, and was glad to find that you had not forgotten Jourdan, and that you wanted me to come back and live with you again, promising to do better for me than anybody else.

I want to know particularly what the good chance is you propose to give me. I am doing tolerably well here. I get twenty-five dollars a month, with victuals and clothing; have a comfortable home for Mandy - the folks call her Mrs. Anderson - and the children - Milly, Jane, and Grundy - go to school and are learning well ... We are kindly treated. Sometimes we overhear others saying, “Them colored people were slaves” down in Tennessee. The children feel hurt when they hear such remarks; but I

tell them it was no disgrace in Tennessee to belong to Colonel Anderson. Many darkeys would have been proud, as I used to be, to call you master. Now if you will write and say what wages you will give me, I will be better able to decide whether it would be to my advantage to move back again.

As to my freedom, which you say I can have, there is nothing to be gained on that score, as I got my free papers in 1864 from the Provost-Marshal-General of the Department of Nashville. Mandy says she would be afraid to go back without some proof that you were disposed to treat us justly and kindly; and we have concluded to test your sincerity by asking you to send our wages for the time we served you ... I served you faithfully for thirty-two years, and Mandy twenty years. At twenty-five dollars a month for me, and two dollars a week for Mandy, our earnings would amount to eleven thousand six hundred and eighty dollars. Add to this the interest for the time our wages have been kept back, and deduct what you paid for our clothing, and three doctor’s visits to me, and pulling a tooth for Mandy, and the balance will show what we are in justice entitled to.

Please send the money to Adams’s Express, in care of V. Winters, Esq., Dayton, Ohio. If you fail to pay for faithful labours in the past, we can have little faith in your promises in the future. We trust the good Maker has opened your eyes.

To the wrongs which you and your fathers have done to me and my fathers, in making us toil for you for generations without recompense ... Surely there will be a day of reckoning for those who defraud the labourer of his hire. In answering this letter, please state if there would be any safety for my Milly and Jane, who are now grown up, and both good looking girls ... I would rather stay here and starve - and die, if it come to that - than have my girls brought

Journeying Towards Reconciliation

to shame by the violence and wickedness of the young masters. You will also please state if there has been any schools opened for coloured children in your neighbourhood. The great desire of my life now is to give my children an education, and have them form virtuous habits.

Say howdy to George Carter, and thank him from taking the pistol from you when you

were shooting at me.

From your old servant,
Jourdan Anderson.

From a lecture: "Reparations: Not What is Given, but What is Owed" by Raymond A. Winbush, Fisk University.

Pope John Paul II addresses issues of slavery

In Cameroon (1985)

Having reminded his listeners that Christianity defends freedom and the inalienable rights of persons, John Paul II said, "In the course of history, men belonging to Christian nations unfortunately have not always acted in this way and we ask forgiveness from our African brothers who have suffered so much; for example, because of the slave trade. Nevertheless, the Gospel continues to make its unequivocal appeal."

To the people on the island of Gorée, Senegal (1992)

"From this African shrine of Black sorrow, we implore heaven's forgiveness. We pray that in the future Christ's disciples will be totally faithful to the observance of the commandment of fraternal love which the Master left us. ... We pray that the scourge of slavery and its effects may disappear forever. ... We must equally oppose new, often insidious forms of slavery, such as organized prostitution, which shamefully takes advantage of the poverty of the people of the Third World."

References

Accotoli, Luigi (translated by Jordan Aumann, OP). When a Pope Asks Forgiveness: the mea culpa's of John Paul II. Boston: Pauline Books & Media. 1998

Vatican web site: http://www.vatican.va/phome_en.htm

MODERN SLAVERY

Millions of men, women and children around the world are still forced to lead lives as slaves. Although this exploitation is often not called slavery, the conditions are the same. People are sold like objects, forced to work for little or no pay and are at the mercy of their employers.

Slavery exists today despite the fact that it is banned in most of the countries where it is practiced. It is also prohibited by the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the 1956 *UN Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery*.

Characteristics of slavery

Common characteristics distinguish slavery from other human rights violations and are established in international law. A slave is:

- forced to work—through mental or physical threat;
- owned or controlled by an ‘employer’, usually through mental or physical abuse or threatened abuse;
- dehumanized, treated as a commodity or bought and sold as ‘property’;
- physically constrained or has restrictions placed on her/his freedom of movement.

Bonded labour affects millions of people around the world. People become bonded labourers by taking or being tricked into taking a loan for as little as the cost of medicine for a sick child. To repay the debt, many are forced to work long hours, seven days a week, up to 365 days a year. They receive basic food and shelter as ‘payment’ for their work, but may never pay off the loan, which can be passed down for generations.

Trafficking involves the transport and/or trade of people—women, children and men—

from one area to another for the purpose of forcing them into slavery conditions. Traffickers use violence, coercion and deception to take people away from their homes and families and force them to work against their will. People are trafficked both between countries and within their own country.

The trafficking of people is a rapidly growing global problem that affects countries and families on every continent. Those trafficked may be forced to work as domestics, in prostitution, as labourers and in many other industries.

Because of its hidden nature, it is impossible to measure accurately the numbers of people trafficked. The International Labour Organization estimates that over 2.4 million people have been trafficked.

Child labour affects an estimated 179 million children around the world in work that is harmful to their health and welfare. At the most extreme end of the spectrum, 8.4 million children are estimated to be victims of slavery, trafficking, debt bondage and other forms of forced labour, forced recruitment for armed conflict, prostitution, pornography and other illicit activities.

Excerpted from *Set All Free: Act to End Slavery*, a project of Churches Together in England. www.setallfree.net/modern_slavery.html