

Tears That Cannot Be Brushed Aside Between the Gate of No return and the Door of Return Bishop Robert Innes calls for Reparatory Justice



In a moving presentation Bishop Robert Innes, the Bishop of Gibraltar, presented the essence of the Project Spire and elaborated on how the 100 million Pound fund for Healing, Repair and Justice is envisaged to begin the process of ensuring justice to the generations impacted by the gruesomeness of slave trade. Showing images of the gate through which slaves were shipped out (Gate of No Return) and the gate through which the first person in the lineage returned to their home land (Gate of Return) he said that much tears were shed betwixt. Reminding us of the call in Dueteronomy 16:20 the Bishop said that

God demands that we pursue justice and only justice.

Recalling from first hand experience of his recent visit to Ghana the Bishop said the anguish of the memory of what our ancestors did still linger in the air. Human beings were trafficked as slaves by traders and the slave holding sites there stand testimony to the terror, darkness and death that marked those spaces. Women and children went through unimaginable trauma. Between 1501 and 1866 over 12.5 million people of African origin were transported. Slavery was horrific.

It also generated a new legacy of racism which persisted even after slavery was formally abolished. The Church has taken seriously the call to repair the breaches and Project Spire is a prayerful step of repentance and reparation. The Conference warned that one should be aware of power dynamics and saviorism of the powerful and should not add insult to the injuries already created. Its not about money it is about transformation in attitude. Reparation is not about compensating slave owners but about repairing the damage done to generations.

Bishop Rose Hudson Wilkin, who made a significant contribution to the deliberations of the conference said: “for justice to prevail we must set aside our prejudices which spring from our pre-judgements and proactively engage in the struggles of the marginalised.”

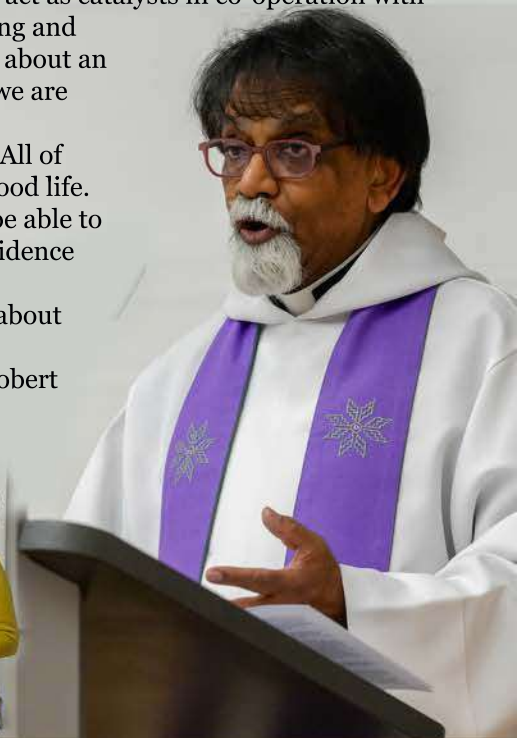


Even in smallest of steps and slightest of signs of hope God's Kingdom is Manifest

Leslie Nathaniel

In his sermon in the Closing service of the Conference Archdeacon Ven. Dr. Leslie Nathaniel reminded everyone that during our conference we have been raising questions as to our public witness. Do we act as catalysts in co-operation with other faith communities to spur and stir us towards being instruments for peacemaking and bridgebuilding? Basing his reflection on Matthew 5:1-12 he said, the beatitudes speak about an attitude, a behaviour, about what space we think we are occupying, that is, the space we are dwelling in with one another, with our family, our faith, our friends and people of neighbouring faith, all those with whom we come in contact with. In short it includes All of Us or None of Us. They are not just a set of rules for existing, for being able to live a good life. They are statements that help us ask searching questions and learn where we are; to be able to discern who we are and so be able to dwell in the world in which we live with the confidence that Christ is with us.

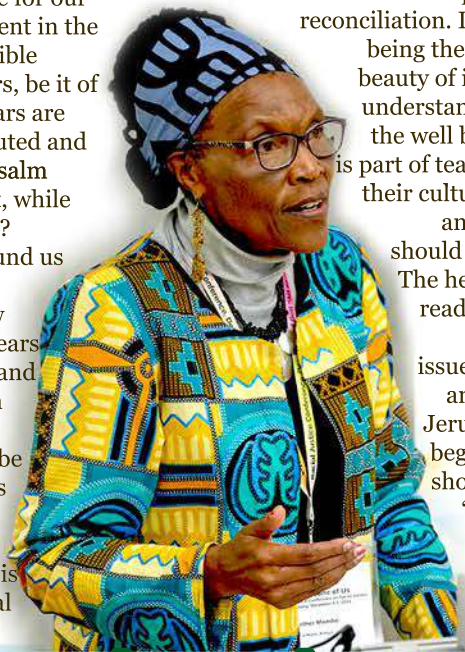
The central issue is not about finding the right kind of religious boxes to tick nor is it about filling in forms. Rather it is about forming us as individuals and as communities, to reimagine our life, and the life of the world; seeing it as God sees it, he said. Bishop Robert Innes celebrated the Eucharist with Rev. Canon Joanna Udal leading the service.



A world without tears demands restorative justice

Envisaging a world without tears must primarily acknowledge the tears around us and repentance for our complicity either in creating tears or in being silent in the face of tears said Esther Mombo in a powerful Bible Study. We must recognize the complexity of tears, be it of exclusion, marginalization or violence. These tears are rooted in the power of inequalities which has muted and silenced many across generations. She quoted Psalm 42:3- My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, where is your God? and said that there are several people living around us today with the same sigh on their lips.

Basing her Bible Study on Rev 21 where the New Jerusalem is envisaged as a safe space without tears Esther said that the ultimate destruction of evil and the triumph of good are inevitable. The question about tears is a catalytic and practical question about affirming human dignity. We should also be able to see the positive power of tears in that it is therapeutic and transformative. The vision- he will wipe away every tear from their eyes- has implications to the past, present and future and is a radical declaration that pain cannot be the final word but a phase in the struggles of humanity.



Esther Mombo

This is thus a call to participate in God's work of justice, healing and reconciliation. It is not only in recognizing the other but also in being the other that we comprehend tears and that is the beauty of incarnation. She quoted Musa Dube saying- we understand ubuntu in our bones- our well being is tied to the well being of our community. Embarrassment which is part of tears when people realize their uprootedness from their cultures through invasions should be acknowledged and addressed. Once we recognize and repent, we should be able to realize divinity in each human being. The hermeneutical tools and methodologies we use to read the Bible should also be liberated for the Word to become liberative. It then begins to address issues around culture, politics, norms and identities and unfolds the possibilities of wiping tears. New Jerusalem is not something "up there far away" but begins here and now. Incarnation and Eschatology should be read together to strive for the renewal of 'all' of God's creation. The Bible Study triggered a stimulative discussion and Esther concluded saying- Every Tear has a Story which is Unique and Wiping Tears is a Gospel Mandate that all of us are called to be partaking in.

Bad Boll Statement affirms a dream, a hope and a commitment

We share a dream: That no person shall be judged by outward features, but that all people shall be seen as children of God, in all their diversity as part of one human family.
We share a hope: That God's love will enable us to see our own shortcomings in making this dream come true, repent of our failures towards those in need of our solidarity and transform our lives from preserving our privileges to sharing our place at the table.
We share a commitment: That we will ceaselessly work to form a communion of faith in which this vision can start to become a tangible reality for everyone, celebrating together the splendour of God's creation and the colourfulness of our community, the Bad Boll statement that was adopted at the end of the Conference affirmed.

The Conference Statement looked at allowing God to be part of the process, providing a safe space for exchange and encounter, letting our established perspectives and perceptions be challenged, taking concrete steps towards being an inclusive church, journeying towards being a 'church for others' and with others and outlining the next steps in our plan for action.

The Conference Statement Team led by Patrick Schnabell drafted the document taking into account inputs from the group discussions that were held each day based on the conference sessions.

(The full text of the statement is separately available)



Give the Young People the Space that is theirs: The Youth Panel Urges

The voices of the younger people that reverberated on the final day of the conference also called for dueful spaces being provided to the young people ensuring racial inclusion. The youth should be part of the decision making and of the leadership. Decisions should not be made for them but instead they must be empowered to decide for themselves said Catalina. The ability of the young people to weave connections across cultures should be tapped to the optimum said Philani. Julius Anzoie pointed out that transgenerational and intergenerational racial trauma need to be understood in perspective. The racism that the young people face also affects the parents. A new table that has space for the young should be the answer to their question- How long should we wait? He also said that we must be aware of how kutizospectrum superiority complex plays out when the lighter skinned people claim superiority over darker skinned peoples. Wu Ja pointed out that one should not miss out the trauma of the yellow people when we discuss the colour spectrum and racism. Lisbeth Kanis called for gender sensitivity when racial justice is called for and Benedikt asked that his generation should be helped to ask if they were racist in any way by nature or by behaviour either of which he said could be unintentional but present. Is there any human being who is not racist, he asked. The Youth plenary was moderated by Grace Fagan Stewart and organised by Hureem Salas.





GRACE IS GIVEN, COMMUNION CREATED, FUTURE HOPED FOR

The Conference Revisits the Nicene Creed

The Conference acknowledged that celebrating the 1700th anniversary of the world's first Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 2025, is a key moment in the history of the Christian faith and asked in the light of this event what fresh theological perspectives will help us in our task of dedesigning our landscapes towards a racially just, inclusive and healing community?

Making his presentation on the theme Dr. Jayakiran Sebastian pointed out that language can in itself become an artifact and building on the consensus of Nicaea is beyond working on the challenges the usage of language raises. The second key question is the naming of Mary in the incarnation narrative. How can we magnify the purity of human beings in every aspect of life. Thirdly one must note how Nicaea named Pontius Pilate. How do we deal with the evil confronting the world and envision transforming evil structures. The fourth is recognising the visible and invisible realms of God's creation. In the understanding of the macro and the micro the theology of humility and the understanding of death, the anthropy of human centered triumphalism is questioned. The final element that Kiran pointed out is recognising that God's reign does not have an end (telos). These realities invite us to revisit, reenergise and revitalise the Nicene creed.

Dr. Manoj Kurian making his case in the plenary said- the issue is instead of living the creed we tried to use the same as a tool to fight heresies and read it as though 'defending' the essence of faith was what its task was.

Dr. Monica Melancton said that the practice of our lives emulate our understanding of God. For many the creed is abstract, istoeric and offers a kaleidoscope of interpretations. She pointed out that the creed that was formulated by men should be re-read with woman's eyes. The creed is the vigilante of grace. It is not the mystery of the overwhelming but the mystery of fragility of life. Dr Klaus Schaefer in his inputs provided the participants with the historical and contemporary context, as well as some of the political and theological concerns. He noted that the Nicene Creed was formulated at a time of a decisive turn in the history of the church. It is understood that the Nicene Creed is a Doxology and not a dogmatic statement. He then took the participants on a journey of recognizing the gift of the Nicene Creed with five key perspectives.

Dr. Tomi Karttunen said that the Nicene Creed strengthens our vision for a cosmic Christology. Creation and Redemption belong together. Therefore, also eco-justice and racial justice belong together. That is obvious in the global world where we understand the interconnectedness of all better than before.

Bishop Rose Hudson Wilkin also presented her perspectives on the creed and its implications for the future in reshaping our ecumenical landscapes.

Fr. Michael Lapsley pointed out that his concern with the creed is that it misses out on the life and work of Jesus- its jumps to the passion immediately after the incarnation.

All are Equal before the Lord - Kaleidoscope at Worship





Responses from the delegates

It was indeed a great pleasure to participate in the conference and the enriching discussions and perspectives shared by the distinguished panelists towards a more just, more equal and prosperous future for all of us. I arrived back in Ankara safely. I thank Leslie, Vinod, Molly and your team on behalf of St. Nicolas, Ankara, Turkey for all the hospitality extended to me during the conference.

Felix Shihundu, Ankara, Turkey

I sincerely appreciate the way the Conference was organized and acknowledge the great blessings I received at the Conference- Thank you so much for your wonderful hosting of the Conference. It was such a rich time of learning and inspiration. Please do keep me updated on your continued work for racial justice across the diocese-

Amos Osoramkpe, Padova, Italy

Ella Sibley, Regional Manager, Europe, USPG, London

I would like to place on record my appreciation for the excellent effort by all of you to make the conference impactful and our participation, travel and logistics comfortable. A big thanks to the organizing team for your quick and immediate responses which was an added support in acquiring the visa and facilitating my coming-

Joycia Thorat, New Delhi, India

The conference was truly a world-class event, and it opened my eyes to the critical and complex subject of racism and ministry within the church. The presentations delivered by distinguished scholars, coupled with the moving testimonies of individuals who have personally experienced the journey, were deeply insightful and transformative.

Ishanesu Sextus Gusha, Palma de Mallorca, Spain

It was a true delight to share in such an inspirational and well-organised conference. And I want to say just how much I appreciate Giji's design work – she is highly gifted! (and surely Norma too)-

Bishop Robert Innes

