

## Latest Reflection 4<sup>th</sup> June 2023

### *Mission “from” the margins versus mission “to” the margins*

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I want to begin with a quote from Bishop Desmond Tutu “When the missionaries came to Africa they had the Bible and we had the land. They said, ‘Let us pray.’ We closed our eyes. When we opened them we had the Bible and they had the land.

Rev. Dr. Colin Cowan my former boss and former General Secretary of the Council for World Mission says: Mission from the centre to the margins became the norm, whether it be by an individual, a congregation, a denomination or a mission society. Those who were privileged by the Gospel and by “civilisation” began missions to those who were regarded as “the less fortunate and benighted (in a state of pitiful or contemptible intellectual or moral ignorance. “they saw themselves as bringers of culture to poor benighted peoples)” the heathens in places where “thick darkness broodeth yet. In truth, we lost our way.

The disturbing news of this week is Uganda’s signs anti LGBTQ bill into law. Where does this come from? The Biblical texts which the missionaries bought? Matthew 28:19 has been the text that has sent missionaries the world over into new countries, old countries. They believe that this has been their mandate to baptise people in the name of the father, son and holy ghost a mission to the marginalised. However, for me the text from Luke’s gospel Luke 4: which Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah “the spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has

chosen me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people. These verses have become known as the Nazareth Manifesto a mission from the marginalised. It described Jesus' mission and I believe also describes the mission of Jesus followers.

The sad thing about many of the early missions the London Missionary Society which missionized 32 countries worldwide is not exempt from its own involvement and collusion in the slave trade used Matthew 28:19 the baptise the marginalised. The Lukan Nazareth Manifesto undoes this text. It emphasises proclaiming liberty to the captives, setting free the oppressed.

According to Emmanuel Kojo Ennin Antwi slave owners did not initially introduce the slaves to the Bible for fear that they might learn about the liberation stories in them and begin to rebel for their freedom.<sup>22</sup> When the colonised and exploited Africans were exposed to the Bible, they found revolutionary potential in it that they used to authenticate their fight against oppression.<sup>23</sup> They began to find in some characters of the Bible (such as Moses, Joshua and Daniel), a source and sense of liberation.<sup>24</sup> The Bible in this context becomes a tool of slavery and liberation at the same time. Some Anglicans wanted to convert slaves to Christianity, while others saw that as a "slippery slope" that could lead to demands for freedom. There is an exhibition on the church's shameful involvement in the Transatlantic slave trade and it contains a version of the Bible intended for slaves, with all references to freedom from bondage removed. That meant cutting 90% of the Old Testament and half the New Testament This Lukan text is too confronting. Many third world theologians live by the Nazareth Manifesto as it is a mission

from the marginalised to the world as opposed to Matthews great commission a mission to the marginalised from the world.

Rev. Dr. Peter Cruchley-Jones a former colleague of mine from the Council for World Mission carried out research on behalf of the Council for World Mission formerly the London Missionary Society on a Legacies of Slavery project. It investigated the historical roots of racism present in the work of the London Missionary Society (LMS). It offers an analysis of the ways in which a missionary society colluded with Empire in constructing a racist hierarchy that it imposed on White people at home in the United Kingdom as much as it did on African and African descendant peoples. It acknowledges the personal and structural benefits that the LMS and its officers made from enslavement and their efforts to silence calls for emancipation, and offers a class and gender perspective on the forces shaping this distinctively British organization.

We recognise that legacies of slavery are different between and within the CWM membership. CWM is made up of communities and churches whose roots lie in the enslaving and enslaved. CWM's ethos of mutuality means the members need to account to each other for a history and for a present which has treated each other unequally. Systematic racism cannot be treated as a thing of the past. The institution of slavery may have come to an end in the British Empire in 1833 or in 1865 in the US or 1888 in Brazil, or 1962 in Saudi Arabia but racism continues to skew our politics, economics, education, culture and religion at all levels. The legacies of slavery manifested in personal and institutional racism continue to divide, destroy and despoil human lives, communities, nations and economies, from the

continent of Africa to the communities of African descent peoples globally. The silence of London Missionary Society at the time of enslavement and emancipation means CWM must end the continuing silence over these issues now.

CWM must confess that the evangelical piety which the founders of the LMS left injustice unchallenged as they sought not to 'disclaim all political views and party designs; abhorring all attempts to disturb order and government in this or any other country', (George Burder, London Missionary Society founder) There are three dimensions to the legacies made clear from African perspectives on this era. Firstly, slavery depopulated the African continent, stealing its young and productive members for nearly 500 years. This had profound implications for the political history and economic development of its people. Secondly, this system of enslavement consolidated the dominant-dominated' relations between White and Black, making racism the primary justification for colonial exploitation. This racism continues to the present in different guises, in Africa and beyond. Thirdly, White people and their descendants reaped more than economic benefits from slavery. Fed better, the population of Europe increased, with new wealth and industry, Europe developed better technology with which to further conquer and exploit others. All of which points to Empire's simultaneous occupation of Land and Being in Africa. The occupation of Being is something mission and missionaries particularly enabled, as the humanity of African and African descendent people was denied theologically. The Transatlantic Slave Trade therefore intensified the mix of different motives—greed for material, geographical and spiritual possession and consumption, combined with racism and self-aggrandizement. This has a history

which began with the Crusades and a present which continues in global Capitalism.

The Hearings and preliminary work in the LMS archives reveal LMS/CWM has benefitted from direct investments in enslavement through constituent parts of LMS/CWM. William Hankey the LMS Treasurer was called before the Select Committee on Slavery on July 20 1832 to give evidence as it considered the mission of enslaved people held in the British Empire. Hankey owned 300 slaves in Trelawney, Jamaica. He was questioned closely and his evidence was recorded.

Select committee question to Hankey 'Has the result of your experience, as treasurer of the Society, led you to the conclusion, from the progress of civilisation among the slaves, that when instructed they have become more obedient and tranquil?

Hankey – 'Quite so; I believe their value, even in the market, has risen in proportion as they have been so instructed; we have had instances of that, a slave has been regarded as more valuable in consequence of his being instructed by the missionaries of our own and other societies

Hankey, LMS Treasurer received £5777 in 1834 as 'compensation' for the liberation of his slaves. That is the equivalent of £630,000 in 2018 terms, Hankey owned the Arcadia Plantation in Trelawney, Jamaica. It was held in his family until it was given in trust to the Commonwealth Missionary Society. Arcadia was sold in 1954 to the Kaiser Bauxite Co for £13,240, this is the equivalent of £350,000 in 2018 terms. The Commonwealth Missionary j

was one of the constitutive mission bodies with LMS when CWM was formed in 1966. This indicates capital complicit in profit from enslavement of Africans.

Indirect Assets while LMS did not own a slave plantation as an institution, in the way the Anglican mission societies did, the people behind the LMS were often deeply invested in the slave trade. The accounts to the Directors show that LMS was funded by the subscription of individuals and Non-Conformist chapels. The LMS was funded by those whose businesses, savings, and earnings were directly and indirectly resourced by the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the Industrial Revolution, but because these organisations wished not to disturb order or government, no connection was made with this history. CWM's accounting for complicity in enslavement should recognise this significant indirect investment.

Good news should always be anti-imperial, it resists the notions of Empire. Therefore evangelism is, as the Nazareth Manifesto suggests, good news to the poor. What would good news to the poor look like? It would mean that all of life's necessities would be freely available, it would mean the cancelling of debt, it would mean the redistribution of wealth and resources, it would mean justice! Surely then this is bad news to the rich, it means that they would have to give up wealth, power and control. Not only has mission moved from the centre it is now happening in and from the margins. There is a reverse of mission now going from the margins to the centre from whence mission originated.

Like those on the margins, what is our mission then? To live out the Nazareth Manifesto to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives

and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when God will save God's people. Amen.