

Mission Committee, 26-27 September 2019

Healing: Hope in Action September 2019

1. Introduction

1.1 This paper has been produced by the Mission Committee's Legacies of Slavery (LoS) Task Group¹. The group was formed to consider what the URC should do following the Council for World Mission's (CWM) paper looking into the Legacies of Transatlantic Slavery.

1.2 This paper proposes ways in which the United Reformed Church might respond to the three significant aspects of the legacies of slavery identified and presented in a paper to Mission Committee in February 2019:

- 1. Should the URC make an apology for complicity in Transatlantic Slavery?
- 2. What should the URC do about possible reparations for Transatlantic Slavery?
- 3. How might the URC contribute to societal advance on the issue of White Privilege² today?

1.3 The structure of this paper is as follows:

- Context: which gives the background leading to this work;
- Biblical framework: which gives several 'indicative' texts providing the Christian context to our deliberations;
- Objectives: which sets the goals of our work;
- Current situation: which gives a brief understanding of some of the issues already being addressed;
- Suggested actions: which summarises the actions suggested in the appendices; and
- Summary.

1.4 There are seven appendices to this paper:

1. **Apology:** which discusses the value of, and need for, an apology for the evil of enslavement of Black peoples and its legacies, and argues that the URC as a denomination should, as a member of the body of Christ located in Britain (a nation that benefitted from the trade in human bodies), apologise for these atrocities and the concomitant legacies of racism, Black deprivation and White privilege;
2. **Reparation:** which argues that reparation for these atrocities is needed at many levels;
3. **White privilege:** which discusses the origin of and rationale for White privilege, and sets forth an approach to identifying, challenging and dismantling White privilege in our Church today;
4. The CARICOM Reparations Justice Programme ten-point plan;
5. Relevant URC General Assembly resolutions which support this paper;
6. An example of a suitable apology; and
7. A glossary of key terms.

2. Context

2.1 In November 2017 CWM³ launched a series of Hearings to identify the Legacies of Transatlantic Slavery. The report of the core team highlighted racism and deprivation as key elements of the legacies. It also cited the continuing concerns with White privilege. The core team provided a wide-ranging set of

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² Privilege can come from any defining feature of a group, such as colour, class, ethnicity, gender or sexuality. Here we focus on privilege simply based on people's colour.

³ CWM is the successor organisation to the London Missionary Society (1795), the Commonwealth Missionary Society (1836) and the (English) Presbyterian Board of Missions (1847).

recommendations which recognised a process of healing starting with apology and resulting in reparation. On page 11 they state: "Reparation is key to bringing peace, healing and restorative justice. Without reparations the inequalities between White and Black nations and communities are perpetuated." It has become increasingly evident that the dismantling of White privilege is also key to addressing the ongoing legacies and reparations.

2.2 While progress towards equity for Black people has been significant during the latter part of the 20th century and the early part of the 21st century, the rise of ultra-right-wing parties has brought racism back into a sharp focus. 'There is a question as to whether racism has increased or simply become less hidden? In particular, Brexit appears to have made racism more acceptable in some quarters⁴. It has also revealed the underbelly of a fissure in modern British Society, which is the lack of any significant reflections on White privilege and the attendant supremacist underpinnings.

3. Biblical framework

3.1 The Gospels are replete with texts that could serve to locate our motivation as a Christian community. Here are three indicative texts that offer a solid foundation for our deliberations:

- Matthew 22:36-40 provides us with Christ's two commands: to love God and to love our neighbour.
- Luke 10:25-37 provides us with one example of a man from a people hated by the Jews (a Samaritan) who shows unqualified love for a stranger and 'enemy'. In this parable the behaviour of the priest and the Levite seems to resonate with the behaviour of some 'decent' people today.
- Luke 19:2-10 gives another example of an 'unlovable' man (Zacchaeus) who was shown love by Jesus ... and who offered to pay restitution over and above what was called for by Jewish law.

3.2 We are left in no doubt that there are no restrictions to who is our neighbour: it is all humankind. There is no justification for racism, White privilege or privilege of any sort. We are also guided as to the need for restitution.

4. Objectives

4.1 The aims of our reparation considerations are to define how we are to play our part in:

- Seeking healing for the atrocities of the past, which starts with recognition of wrongs, an apology, repentance, and gratitude for Black peoples worldwide;
- Seeking healing for the legacies of those atrocities for both the victims and perpetrators;
- Striving to end racism and discrimination; and
- For LoS countries and communities:
 - Reducing deprivation.
 - Releasing communities from the burden of government debt.
 - Restoring Black people's confidence in their unqualified worth.

5. Current Situation

5.1 Since our involvement in the LoS Hearings some work has been going on to identify the role our denomination played in the enslavement of Black peoples. The URC History Society prepared a summary of our relevant history which is summarised as follows:

5.1.1 Churches of Christ did not arrive in the United Kingdom until 1836, and so they had no [direct] involvement in slavery.

⁴ See article in Institute of Race Relations entitled Post Brexit Racism and dated 7/7/16

5.1.2 It was not until 1844 that the small number of Presbyterians in England were able to organise themselves into the Presbyterian Church in England. Hence, as a denomination the Presbyterians were not [directly] involved in slavery.

5.1.3 The Congregational Union of England and Wales was not formed until 1831, and so as a denominational body had no [direct] involvement in slavery, but many individuals did.

5.2 The paper also highlighted a number of prominent Congregationalists involved in slavery:

5.2.1 William Alers Hankey, at one stage the treasurer of the London Missionary Society, was certainly an apologist for the status quo and was a Congregationalist; and so were the Moulton Barretts (Elizabeth Barrett Browning's family). The Countess of Huntingdon inherited an estate from Whitefield in 1770, which was run using slaves. It is, though, a matter of some debate as to the extent to which the Countess could be regarded as a Congregationalist.

5.2.2 William Coward, a young London merchant, acquired a plantation in Jamaica around 1676. Coward's second involvement in the slave trade, indeed his main business on his return to England, was as the owner of several ships trading with Jamaica. His ships took dry goods to Madeira and the Caribbean, and returned with sugar and ginger, the produce of the plantations, including his own. In addition, Coward's biggest ship, the Gold Frigate, was hired on three occasions to those who were involved in carrying slaves. Coward emerged after 1660 as a Dissenter and in due course used his resources to fund lectures in the City to defend his High Calvinist beliefs. He built a house and a chapel and supported ministry in Walthamstow and registered his country house in Sussex for dissenting worship. He also supported men studying for the Dissenting ministry and was a familiar of Doddridge. Coward left £150,000, a considerable sum in the currency of those days, to support students for the Dissenting ministry.

5.3 To this list we wish to add the name of Sir Culling Smith who served as a treasurer of the London Missionary Society after Hankey. He owned a plantation in St Kitts and received the equivalent of £630,000 in 1834 when Slave ownership was made illegal in the UK. Ironically, as an MP, he piloted antislavery legislation in the 1830s. This, in our view, would suggest that there were many influential figures involved in the trade.

5.4 Whilst the URC History Society has used their best endeavours to establish our relevant history, it does not preclude the existence of other, as yet unknown, Dissenters having significant involvement in slave trading or gifts of money/assets whose source is linked to slavery. More intentional research will need to be done in this regard.

6. Suggested actions

6.1 The list of suggested actions is given below in summary. The background to these actions is given in the relevant appendix.

6.2 Apology

- Prepare an apology and proposals for its delivery and communication
- Deliver and publish the apology

6.3 Reparation

- For the URC
 - Strengthening our relationships with our CWM partner churches in the Caribbean, and with the UK Districts of the European Presbyteries of our two Ghanaian partner churches.
 - Develop and deliver an education programme, to include topics such as White privilege, racism, being a multicultural church with an intercultural habit, Black self-image, White fragility and guilt, repentance and forgiveness.

- Define benchmarks and ‘Marks of Equality’ as a significant contributor to the culture change needed.
- Work with The Coward Trust to encourage more equitable use of funds.
- For the UK, through some form of campaigning, encourage the government to:
 - contribute to the implementation of the CARICOM ten-point reparation plan
 - release LoS countries and communities from debt owed to the UK
 - increase aid for LoS countries and communities
 - support positive Black self-image programmes
 - help to reduce the influence of White privilege in the UK by sharing the learnings from our review (outlined in paragraph 6.4)
- For LoS countries and communities, work with our partner denominations to achieve:
 - improved literacy and health care
 - reduction in deprivation
 - positive Black self-image programmes

6.4 White privilege

- A concrete commitment to enabling and resourcing conversations across the whole URC to raise awareness and understanding about White privilege, and to ensure that all voices are truly listened to.
- Design and conduct a White privilege review, with the support of the Equalities Committee, to examine how White privilege influences the policies, processes and behaviours in our denomination, and begin to dismantle it.
- Consider practical ways to help us overcome White fragility (White resistance to honest discussion of White complicity) in the URC.

7. Summary

7.1 The LoS Task Group is unanimous in urging the URC to make an apology for the enslavement of Black peoples and particularly for the legacies that followed. The Task Group is also very clear that this needs to be done together with some programme of reparation and education. Additionally, together with the Equalities Committee, there is a need to take a careful look at how White privilege operates in the URC, and to initiate actions to eliminate it.

APPENDIX 1: APOLOGY

1. Introduction

1.1 That the Transatlantic Slave Trade happened is an accepted fact. That it dehumanised so many is also a very real blot on the history of the world with some peoples becoming stronger whilst many others were weakened as their voices, their livelihoods and their lives were stolen. The whole African continent lost many of those in the prime of their lives, effectively contributing to the region's underdevelopment and depopulation. The resulting inequalities between Black and White peoples have been multiplied many times over in the intervening years leading to the position we face today. That much of the world is a far easier and more fruitful place for White people is bound up with the issue of White privilege which this report attempts to highlight. It is hard enough for us to think again of such times in the human story, perhaps harder still to face the question of what our response before God and God's people should be – and what result our response might hope to bring. But, however difficult, how long can we continue to close our eyes to the need for action to redress these inequalities born from the evil of Transatlantic Slavery?

2. Apology is only the start

2.1 To not apologise for something that we know to be so wrong raises the question of whether we approve or disapprove of the action. Making an apology is making plain that we believe what happened was wrong, and that we are not willing to ignore the legacies of that wrong. But words are only a start; they must be accompanied by actions that prove the value of our words – that we consider the wrongs of the past need to be righted. Apologising does not excuse the acts committed in the past; it does attempt to draw a line under them and enable change to happen.

3. Why should we apologise?

3.1 Because wrong has been done

3.1.1 As individuals we have not played an active part in the Transatlantic Slave Trade. We were not there. Yet as a body, the United Reformed Church, and our antecedents, have been complicit in profiting from the ongoing legacies of the trade and the inequalities it wrought. Whilst some may consider that an apology from us today for the deeds of others long gone is not helpful, can we ignore the voices of our partner churches in the Caribbean, Africa and those of the diaspora in the UK who see such a corporate apology as being a vital step towards reconciling and deepening relationships?

3.2 Because wrong needs naming

3.2.1 Appendix 5 to this report shows a list of some of the many previous reports accepted by the United Reformed Church meeting in General Assembly that decry injustice in the world and affirm our theological belief that all are equal in God's sight. This report asks the question whether we, as a body, can hold the view that things are wrong, without going further and issuing an apology, as that body, that they happened.

3.3 Because the Body of Christ is weakened

3.3.1 In 2006 the then Archbishop Rowan Williams urged the Church of England to acknowledge its corporate and ancestral guilt in these words:

"The Body of Christ is not just a body that exists at any one time; it exists across history and we therefore share the shame and the sinfulness of our predecessors, and part of what we can do, with them and for them in the Body of Christ, is prayerful acknowledgment of the failure that is part of us, not just some distant "them""

3.3.2 This report urges the United Reformed Church to take similar stock of our position within the world-wide Church seeking to address the wrongs that have divided us historically, and which still divide today. Before us is a Kairos moment to publicly and formally declare that we not only regret the historic action of others, but also that today we affirm the unity and equality we share before God.

3.4 Because of the power of apology

3.4.1 In 2007 the Baptist Union Council UK⁵ passed an historic resolution apologising for their part in the Transatlantic Slave Trade because they knew that any negative issues raised were worth enduring in order for the positive effect on those hearing the apology.

3.4.2 Another historic example of the power of apology arose in 1970 when the late Willy Brandt, then Chancellor of Germany, visited Auschwitz, fell to his knees and begged for forgiveness and apologised on behalf of his nation. This apology is all the more powerful in that Brandt had himself been imprisoned by the Nazis. He knew that he was not personally liable in any way, and yet he realised that, corporately, he shared in the guilt of his nation. This, and other such acts and statements, have allowed us all to see that Germany no longer stands by the actions of her past.

3.4.3 Will an apology put out the fire of hatred, racism and oppression? Perhaps not, but a formal acknowledgement of significant erroneous actions has a power of its own that will be felt for more years than we can measure.

4. Who should we apologise to?

4.1 To the people of Africa and the Caribbean

4.1.1 When we say that we are truly sorry for the wrongs done to others, and seek to repair the damage done, we begin to right the wrongs of the past. It is important to apologise to the peoples of Africa for the murder and exploitation suffered as a result of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, for the dismantling and displacement of their communities. It is equally important to apologise to the people of the Caribbean, to recognise the direct link and impact as people descended from the enslaved, the descendants of those taken across the middle passage.

4.2 To those descended from these communities

4.2.1 The United Reformed Church today is blessed to have members from so many cultures, including people who are descended from those formerly enslaved. This is why it is vital to understand that we are not apologising as individuals, but corporately, for the acts of those who have gone before. But we also speak a louder welcome and foster a stronger and more authentic unity when we proclaim that there is no place amongst us for racism of any kind, at any period of time.

5. Who should issue the apology?

5.1 We hope that the General Assembly will request their Moderators to issue an apology on behalf of the whole of the United Reformed Church, thus confirming the corporate nature and ownership of the apology. By proclaiming our sorrow for past wrongs, we strengthen our claim to seek justice in the here and now.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Apology and reparation are inextricably linked. Apology without reparation is meaningless. An apology carries the potential to repair harm, mend relationships, offer balm for wounds, and heal broken hearts. But for the potential to be realised it means we must 'be in it for it to happen'. Repair and mending must take some concrete form of restoration/reparation. It is what constitutes justice. Taking responsibility through restitution, or a promise to act, is one way of recognising the evil of what happened and ensuring that such will not be repeated.

6.2 If and when the Mission Committee agrees that an apology is needed, the URC Communications department should be engaged to help develop suitable wording to be presented to Mission Council or General Assembly to vote on. An example of a suitable apology is given in Appendix 6.

⁵ See article in the Baptist Times on 22/10/2017. https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/506587/The_Apology_Ten.aspx

APPENDIX 2: REPARATION

1. Introduction

1.1 Should the URC issue an apology we will need to make some form of reparation. This needs to be done in the context of striving to make a contribution to the overall reparation for these evil acts and their outcomes. It is worth noting that in 1834 slave owners were compensated for their 'loss of property' when slavery was made illegal in Britain. The bill for slave owner compensation, £20m, was about 40% of annual UK government expenditure (at a time when government expenditure was a tiny fraction of what it is today). The government took out a loan to fund these payments. It took until 2015 to repay this loan; over 180 years. This comment cannot pass without reference to the fact that none of the enslaved peoples received any compensation whatsoever.

2. Possible Actions

2.1 Our understanding of reparation for the enslavement of Africans has been guided by the ten-point reparation plan produced by the CARICOM⁶ Reparations Justice Program. A summary of the ten-point plan is given in Appendix 4.

2.2 There are a wide range of actions that the URC could undertake. These actions are considered separately for the URC, for the UK and for the LoS countries and communities.

2.2.1 For the URC

- **Relationships with CWM Churches.** Strengthening our relationships with our CWM partner churches in the Caribbean, and with the UK Districts of the European Presbyteries of our two Ghanaian partner churches, could enable us to develop further as a multicultural church and to play our part in enhancing Black self-image.
- **Education.** Given that the legacies of slavery are not well understood, especially in terms of our life together today, an education programme will be needed. An education programme for the URC could include topics such as White privilege, racism, being a multicultural church with an intercultural habit, Black self-image, White fragility and guilt, repentance and forgiveness.
- **Define benchmarks and 'Marks of Equality'.** Recent work by Ministries, and Education and Learning Committees, has produced a document called Marks of Ministry. This has shown positive signs of becoming a pervasive definition of ministry that will enable a cohesive and comprehensive understanding of ministry to inform all aspects of our life as a denomination. Working with the Equalities Committee, a similar document defining equity and equality within the URC could have a similar positive and pervasive effect. Eliminating discrimination, particularly that which is unintentional and unintended, will take time and needs collective attention and effort. A document such as Marks of Equality could be a significant contributor to the culture change needed.
- **Work with The Coward Trust for more equitable use of funds.** While recognising that The Coward Trust is not owned or controlled by the URC, most of the trustees are URC members and the majority of the funds are awarded to URC members. It is clear that the original funding of The Coward Trust owes much to the ill-gotten gains from enslavement of Black peoples. It is also clear that the present trustees dutifully observe the conditions of the trust and enable the funds to be used for positive Christian purposes. However, most of the grants are awarded to White people and some Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic URC ministers. We understand that the trustees are looking at broadening the scope of the

⁶ CARICOM is an abbreviation of Caribbean Community, and is an organisation of fifteen Caribbean nations and dependencies having the primary objectives to promote economic integration and cooperation among its members, and to coordinate foreign policy.

charity to include ministers and ordinands from Guyana and Jamaica. We encourage the trustees to use the funds in a manner that reflects a desire for reparation.

- **The Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion.** At this stage we do not know which URC congregations have benefitted from the Connexion, although it is known that some congregations of the Connexion did become Congregational. Because of the expected limited value to come from such an investigation, no action is recommended in the short term.

2.2.2 For the UK

There are several objectives that could be sought, probably through some form of campaigning. We could, for instance, encourage the UK government to:

- contribute to the implementation of the CARICOM ten-point reparation plan. For example, favourable technology transfer, and
- release LoS countries and communities from debt owed to the UK
- increase aid for LoS countries and communities
- support positive Black self-image programmes
- help to reduce the influence of White privilege in the UK by sharing the learnings from our review

2.2.3 For LoS countries and communities

Work with our partner denominations to achieve:

- improved literacy and health care
- reduction in deprivation
- positive Black self-image programmes

3. Conclusion

3.1 Should the URC make a formal apology for the denomination's involvement in Transatlantic Slave Trade and its legacies then it is vital to make some form of reparation. It is only by making reparations that the world will know we are sincere about our apology. The apology will be most effective if some of the reparations can be announced at the same time.

APPENDIX 3: WHITE PRIVILEGE

1. Introduction

1.1 One of the most persistent and pernicious legacies of Transatlantic Slavery has been the invention of 'Whiteness' and the privilege associated with Whiteness. In the time of slavery Whiteness emerged as a crucial identifier of who must not, and who might, be captured, enslaved and trafficked across the Atlantic by European slavers. Then, in the New World, Whiteness (or not) also served as the basis of deciding which babies should be welcomed as free human beings, and which could be taken to be legally-owned property from the very day of their birth. Nearly two centuries after the formal abolition of slavery in British Caribbean Colonies and Mauritius in the 1830s, this crude, arbitrary and utterly illogical measure of a person's worth still has a profound effect on how our society views individuals and communities and still shapes people's whole experience of life in the UK and many other societies. How did that come about? Why has Whiteness persisted as a social force so long after slavery? How does it shape and control the experience of Black people in the UK today? What sustains it and protects it against all rationality in our world now? What can we do to address this legacy of slavery? Let us investigate.

2. The invention of Whiteness in the time of slavery

2.1 If you were a 17th or 18th Century European whose livelihood depended on the enslaved servitude of people captured from Africa and their enslaved offspring, but you wanted to be clear that you yourself could never become a slave ("*Britons never, never, never, shall be slaves!*"), then the noticeable difference in skin pigmentation between most Europeans and most Africans must have seemed an obvious, practical marker trait. So, 'Whiteness', as a crucial category defining who could be enslaved and who couldn't, was invented. And to it were added a whole host of other real or imagined traits that were used to help explain 'White superiority' as if it were an objective fact and argue for the social benefits of enforced servitude for those with darker skins, even whilst enslavement was deemed unthinkable for a 'White' person. Educated White males decided that properly-educated White males were obviously more civilised, more intelligent, more reliable, more gifted in leadership, more morally wise, more positively human than any other people. They developed a careful science, which they said was objective, and which, at least to their own satisfaction, proved their self-serving assertions to be nothing but 'the truth'. And they also set about interpreting their received Scriptures in a way that reassured them that God himself had created and ordained these distinctions, even though there is absolutely no basis for a colour-coded distinction between who might and who might not be enslaved in the Hebrew or Christian Bible⁷.

3. Whiteness after slavery

3.1 When the institution of Black slavery was ended within the British Empire in the 1830s you might have thought that the importance of presumed racial distinctions would swiftly fade away. But that is not how history and the persistence of power work. Once an idea that helps the powerful to maintain their power has become entrenched in the values and norms of a human society, the powerful will endlessly work to keep that idea operating from generation to generation as an idea that is so obvious that no-one, not even the oppressed themselves, would think to challenge it.

3.2 Thus, British colonial attitudes, bolstered by supportive legislation and endless informal reinforcement of societal norms, kept the idea of White superiority as an accepted 'objective fact' alive and active on, into and across much of the twentieth century. Indeed, in the period before the Second World War it was widely accepted in White Western society that it was both inevitable and necessary that all of sub-Saharan Africa should have colonial administrations run by one or other of the European powers – Black people 'needed' White supervision for their own good. When, in the 1950s and 60s 'the winds of change' began to blow and African independence started to happen, British schools would tell of the new

⁷The 'best' Scriptural proof they could muster was the oft-repeated but deeply flawed idea that 'the Curse of Ham' somehow referred to Black Africans. See Goldenberg, David M (2003) *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in early Judaism, Christianity and Islam* Princeton NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press

independence of former colonies, the development of educated ‘native’ elites and the rise of the British Commonwealth, but in a way that never questioned White superiority; Black people were being ‘improved’ by learning to be more like White people. The presumption of White supremacy may have had to accommodate a changing world, but it was not going away.

4. The emergence of ‘post-racial’ Whiteness

4.1 But even when the old certainties seemed, at last, to be crumbling, when the Civil Rights Movement challenged ‘Jim Crow’ discrimination in the Southern States of the USA and resistance within and beyond South Africa made *apartheid* look increasingly unacceptable and thoroughly unjust, inherited ideas of White supremacy simply found better-hidden channels to keep on flowing. Old ways of thinking still worked deep within the minds of people who took themselves to be ‘enlightened’.

4.2 The classic study by Ruth Frankenberg of racial attitudes amongst educated White women in the USA (chiefly California) in the late 20th Century⁸ explores how this works. Most of the women she interviewed would strongly resist the old claims of White superiority. They accepted that people were people, that skin colour was not a real issue. Often, they would claim that they “did not see colour”. On the surface, that sounded much fairer, as if the old racisms necessitated by slave power had at last died out. But Frankenberg identified three problems. Firstly, she observed that, when they found themselves in a corner, these White women would often revert right back to ways of thinking that implicitly relied on the idea of White superiority; notably when they had to confront a personal issue such as one of their own children dating a ‘Black’ person, suddenly they saw colour. Suddenly, family Whiteness had to be defended at all costs, even as ‘racism’ was loudly denied. Secondly, many of her interviewees had a very particular attitude to culture. They accepted their own culture (‘White culture’, though they did not name it as such) as at once completely normal, the neutral ‘norm’ against which **all** other cultures should be judged – yet they found their own culture to be so utterly bland that it was deeply boring. Non-White ‘ethnic’ cultures, by contrast, were felt to be exotic and exciting and ‘other’. Again, buried from sight, they were working with ideas that originated in acceptance of a persisting, right, normal, unquestionable Whiteness. Thirdly, and most importantly, Frankenberg identified the deep danger of a presumed ‘post-racial’ approach that says it ‘does not see colour’ – ‘colour’-blindness is power-blindness. It allows White privilege to keep its privileges by pretending that the remaining power imbalances generated between the declared ‘White’ and the declared ‘Black’ do not exist and so any difficulties faced by Black people in our new post-racial society must be of their own making. This attitude allows White people to tell Black people that when it comes to slavery, its legacies and contemporary racism, they (the Black people) simply need to ‘get over it’. ‘Racial’ inequalities thus persist unchallenged and, in this way, can be blamed on the very victims of those inequalities.

5. White fragility and its effects

5.1 The years since Frankenberg’s study have not significantly altered the way ‘race’ operates for many, possibly most, White people in the USA and in the UK. Indeed, the successful campaigns for a Trump presidency in the United States and for ‘leave’ in the UK Brexit Referendum all too often played, sometimes subtly, sometimes overtly, on White fears of ‘the other’. White privilege and White-norming remain, unnamed and unacknowledged, as foundational presumptions for many ‘White’ people in both nations.

5.2 However, there is often a deep resistance to openly addressing these issues. There’s a rush to denial and a rapidly-deployed sense of offence (“I’m not a racist!”) if anyone attempts to start up honest debate on White complicity in the persistence of racial injustice. In recent years the US scholar Robin Diangelo has made a particular study of how this White resistance to honest discussion of White complicity works. She calls it ‘White fragility’⁹.

5.3 Diangelo argues, from long experience in the USA, that in our new ‘post-racial’ societies in the West the White consensus has come to view and define ‘racism’ in a very narrow and specific way. The implicit

⁸ Frankenberg, Ruth (1993) *White women, race matters - the social construction of whiteness* London: Routledge

⁹ Diangelo, Robin (2018) *White fragility, why it's so hard for white people to talk about racism* Boston: Beacon Press

definition shared by most White people sees racism as conscious and deliberate bad behaviour by an individual – that's what would justify calling you a racist. As a result, any attempt to discuss race issues runs headlong into a personal defensiveness – “but I'm not a racist!” – which prevents all constructive conversation about the lingering effects of White privilege and White ‘norming’ and structural racism and its historical roots in slavery and how, unintentionally, even I might be a part of sustaining this deeply entrenched societal injustice.

5.4 This quickly-offered personal affront that you could possibly want to talk to me about racism she calls ‘White fragility’. She notes how this defensive fragility has a very strong and powerful effect. It shuts down all conversation about White privilege. Indeed, it does this so effectively that she calls it ‘weaponised defensiveness’ or ‘weaponised hurt feelings’¹⁰. And in the way which any sort of relentless personal defensiveness works, Black people have often learned that there is little point in telling White colleagues about the ways they have been hurt or slighted or mindlessly insulted because they will only run straight into this White defensiveness and denial and invite further pain for themselves. So, White fragility is practically powerful in reinforcing the *status quo* of unaddressed racism and allowing White privilege to roll on and on.

6. Black Experience in the UK Today

6.1 Lest we imagine that persisting ideas of White privilege hidden deep within the minds of the UK White population is but a trivial issue, let us take a moment to consider how British society operates for Black people today.

6.2 The statistical litany of Black disadvantage in our society is laid out in meticulous detail on a special UK government Ethnicity website¹¹. It details the statistical trace of discrimination in just about every imaginable area of life: crime, justice and the law, culture and community, education, skills and training, health, housing, work, pay and benefits, workforce and business. Here are but two quick examples from this mountain of data:

- **Stop and search:** “Black people were 9 and a half times as likely to be stopped and searched [by the police] as White people in 2017/18”¹²
- **Household income:** “the Black ethnic group had the largest percentage of households in the lowest 2 income quintiles (at 55%), while the White British and Other White ethnic groups had the smallest percentages (at 38%)”

6.3 And what sustains this pervasive inequality in a society that claims to seek fairness for all its citizens? It can only be the outworking of that shared bias operated relentlessly by the White majority, even though it remains largely hidden from everyone's self-inspection. This is the active legacy of ‘Whiteness’.

6.4 Inevitably, such pervasive and persistent injustice shapes the life-experience and the self-understanding of Black people trying to survive and seeking to flourish in UK society. No wonder that Black children can often recall being told by parents, aunts and uncles that if they want to get anywhere in this society they have to be twice as good in order to be equal. The playing field is not level. So, again, it is little wonder that some Black youngsters are rebelling against a system which requires them to input more than their White counterparts in order to receive less; a system which highlights their involvement in antisocial activities such as criminality and knife crime, without seeking to address the underlying causes - poverty and inequality, which leave many Black young people feeling dispossessed and lacking hope. Even within the life of the United Reformed Church, an organisation committed to being a multicultural church with an intercultural habit, Whiteness affects Black experience in a thousand and one ways. For example, when a Black colleague contributes at a committee it can sometimes feel as if the meeting is just hearing them out

¹⁰ view Robin Diangelo talking about these issues: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kzLT54QjclA> (accessed 7/6/19)

¹¹ UK Gov Ethnicity facts and figures website: <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/> (accessed 11/6/19)

¹² And all the indications are that this disparity will have got significantly worse in 2019 with the much-extended use of stop and search across London as a police tactic deployed in response to growing concerns about knife crime

before continuing with its real business; when a Black ministry student visits a new church they can be met with strange assumptions that seem to imply that all Black people must be from the same place; when a Black theological college lecturer stands up before a class they seem to have to justify why they are there and teaching, in a way that is not true of White colleagues.

7. What do we do now?

7.1 So, what do we do to help eradicate the lingering, debilitating legacies of slavery within our society? The four key sets of possible actions for the URC are as follows:

7.1.1 Engagement and education. Surely, we have to find a way to talk. We have to start a conversation where each of us and all of us learn to openly acknowledge how history and power are working in our society and working against the Kingdom of God. We need to look closely at the issues unearthed by Frankenberg and the silencing identified by Diangelo. We need to make sure that Black voices are truly listened to by White people and their insights afforded full and honest attention. Note that there are many resources already available to help this process.¹³

7.1.2 White privilege review. The concept of Whiteness and White privilege appears to be not well understood. It exists both at a conscious and at a sub-conscious level. At a superficial level, there appears little evidence that White privilege is exercised overtly in the URC. However, the level of Black participation in leadership roles in the URC would indicate that White privilege could be operating. Therefore, it would make sense to conduct a White privilege review, with the support of the Equalities Committee, to examine how White privilege influences the policies, processes and behaviours in our denomination. This will necessitate some intentional and honest conversations. A key outcome expected is not just to identify White privilege but also to develop a strategy to eliminate it.¹⁴

7.1.3 Overcoming White fragility. We need to work out how we might overcome White fragility in church and in society.

7.1.4 Dismantling White privilege. Some actions and policies to address White privilege already exist (although not named as such). The Equalities and Nominations Committees are already tasked with ensuring all in the URC are treated fairly. A White privilege review should highlight where existing policies, processes and culture need changing. While policies and procedures can be quick to change, culture won't be: we may need considerable stamina to make some changes.

8. Conclusion

8.1 If, as we have argued, this debilitating legacy of slavery, this Whiteness thing, needs dismantling and it can only be done by enabling a much-resisted conversation, this must be an issue that affects UK society as-a-whole. So, where does the URC fit into this? We are but a tiny fragment of UK society. Yet, in practice, the society-wide conversation will only happen through lots and lots of much smaller conversations within more and more of the diverse segments of our society. And some smaller groupings are going to have to take a lead. Might it be part of our commitment to Kingdom values and our sense of the prophetic calling of the people of God that we in the URC should seek ways to start honest conversations about the persisting effects of White privilege and White norming both within our churches and in interaction with the communities in which we are set? Like the people in Paul's infant church in Corinth we truly love to proclaim our one-ness in Christ, but, like them, we still have so much work to do to make that one-ness an honest, practical, sustaining reality. Addressing this lingering and deeply corrosive legacy of slavery and starting real conversations about White privilege now is surely a vital part of trying to follow Jesus in the 21st Century. Together, can we figure out how we might reconstruct our mindset so that, going forward, the only

¹³ See the range of materials available from the UCC. <http://privilege.uccpages.org/>

¹⁴ Further work is needed to define the scope of a White privilege review and precisely how we would conduct it.

persisting legacies of slavery will be those which enable justice, reinforce freedom and build co-operation and hope for all – a remembering that empowers us all for life. When can we start that conversation?

8.2 As Paul wrote to those Corinthian Christians:

*Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.
It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice
in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth.*

1 Corinthians 13.4-6 NRSV

APPENDIX 4: CARICOM REPARATIONS PLAN

1. CARICOM Reparations Justice Program Ten Point Action Plan

1.1 FULL FORMAL APOLOGY: The healing process requires the offer of a sincere formal apology by the governments of Europe.

1.2 REPATRIATION: A program to resettle those persons who wish to return. A resettlement program should address such matters as citizenship and community re-integration.

1.3 INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM: A Development Plan is required to rehabilitate the indigenous community who remain traumatized, landless, and are the most marginalized social group within the region.

1.4 CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS: The establishment of institutions, such as museums and research centres, similar to those in Europe that prepare their citizens for an understanding of these Crimes against Humanity (CAH); giving Caribbean schoolteachers and researchers the same opportunity.

1.5 PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS: One tragic human legacy of slavery and colonisation is that the Caribbean has the highest incidence in the world of chronic diseases in the forms of hypertension and type two diabetes. The governments of Europe need to take responsibility for this.

1.6 ILLITERACY ERADICATION: Some 70 percent of Black people in British colonies were functionally illiterate in the 1960s. Caribbean governments allocate more than 70 percent of public expenditure to health and education in an effort to uproot the legacies of slavery and colonization. European governments have a responsibility to participate in this effort.

1.7 AFRICAN KNOWLEDGE PROGRAM: The forced separation of Africans from their homeland has resulted in cultural and social alienation from identity and existential belonging. Projects (such as school exchanges and culture tours, community artistic and performance programs, entrepreneurial and religious engagements, as well as political interaction) are needed to build knowledge networks that are necessary for community rehabilitation.

1.8 PSYCHOLOGICAL REHABILITATION: The history of enslavement has inflicted massive psychological trauma upon African descendant populations. Only a reparatory justice approach to truth and educational exposure can begin the process of healing and repair.

1.9 TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER: The Caribbean was denied participation in Europe's industrialization process and was confined to the role of producer and exporter of raw materials. This meant that the Caribbean entered its nation building phase technologically and scientifically ill-equipped. Technology transfer and science sharing is essential for development

1.10 DEBT CANCELLATION: Caribbean governments that emerged from slavery and colonialism have inherited the massive crisis of community poverty and institutional unpreparedness for development. This has resulted in states accumulating unsustainable levels of public debt that now constitute their fiscal entrapment. Support for the payment of domestic debt and cancellation of international debt are necessary reparatory actions.

APPENDIX 5: RELEVANT GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTIONS

1978

Resolution 4 (Church and Society Department)

The Assembly endorses the **Affirmation in the British Council of Churches Statement on Racism** and urges all members to make a public stand against racism in all its forms and in support of the reconciliation which is so integral a part of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

1980

Resolution 1 (Church and Society Department)

The Assembly urges all churches to study the question of racism, both locally and nationally, using the publications of the British Council of Churches' Community and Race Relations Unit, and commends to all Churches the CRRU Project Fund as a practical way of contributing to the creation of a truly multi-racial society in Britain.

1987

Resolution 4 (Church and Society Department)

The Assembly adopts the **Declaration on Racism** and commends it for study and action and as a future point of reference throughout the Church.

The Declaration on Racism:

<i>Creed</i>	The United Reformed Church believes that all people are created in God's image, free and equal in his sight.
<i>Definition</i>	Racism results where prejudiced attitudes of superiority over others are combined with the power to shape society.
<i>History</i>	Western civilisation is, and has long been, seriously flawed by racism.
<i>Acknowledgment</i>	British society nurtures racism through assumptions, stereotypes and organisational barriers which deny black people a just share of power and decision-making.
<i>Confession</i>	The Church displays racism by failing to adapt so that Black people can share fully in its life, its outreach and its decision-making.
<i>Affirmation</i>	There is cause for celebration in church and society when Black and White people learn to cooperate, share power and make decisions together and where new forms of community life are thus discovered.
<i>Commitment</i>	The United Reformed Church commits itself to challenge and equip all its people to resist racism within themselves, within the church and within society as a whole and to train people and devote resources to this task.
<i>Pledge</i>	The United Reformed Church pledges itself, as it shares in action against racism, to monitor and review at regular intervals what progress is being made in church and society.

1990

Resolution 7 (Ministries Department)

The Assembly adopts the statement **A Declaration of Equal Opportunities** policy (in relation to ministers).

Par. 4: The Church is aware of possible barriers for example to women and to Black people within the structures of the Church in ministry and other posts; this has to do with expectations, position, role and status.

Par. 5: The Church will therefore establish appropriate methods of monitoring the appointment, call and position of women and Black people in the ministry and of considering appropriate action where necessary.

2004

Mission Council Resolution on the British National Party (BNP)

Mission Council at its January 2004 meeting declared that:

'membership or any form of support for organizations such as the BNP is incompatible with Christian discipleship...'

Resolution 35 Anniversary of the abolition of the British Slave Trade

In commemorating the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade in British territories General Assembly adopts the following statement of regret and commitment and calls upon all members of the United Reformed Church to do the same:

- We recognise the inhuman treatment of Africans transported across the Atlantic as slaves and forced to work in degrading conditions.
- We are sorry for the legacies of that oppression which still distorts our relations with one another.
- We rejoice in the courage of those, Black and White, who challenged the values of their day that allowed the slave trade to happen, and we pledge ourselves to recognise the dignity of all God's people and to build our society on that principle.
- We commit ourselves to the continuing struggle for justice for all the oppressed, including the many who are held in bondage today.

Resolution 31:

General Assembly:

- a) reaffirms its longstanding commitment to engage with global and intercultural themes (including justice, peace, partnerships, mutuality in giving and receiving, solidarity and discipleship) and its desire to make this engagement integral to the whole life of the United Reformed Church;
- b) encourages Synods in their mission and ministry to recommit to give appropriate time for, and attention and intention to, the sharing and development of these themes;
- c) directs Mission Council to reflect and report to Assembly 2020 on how the Church lives out this global and intercultural commitment.

APPENDIX 6: AN EXAMPLE OF A SUITABLE APOLOGY.

Commitment Statement from the United Reformed Church

We, the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church, are mindful of our own current history, that of our antecedent bodies, the scriptural and theological groundings of our Basis of Union, and of our many declarations and resolutions over the years related to justice and the embracing of the humanity of all our sisters and brothers.

As a (Conciliar) Church, we have listened to one another as we received the report of Mission Committee on the ongoing Legacies of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. We have heard the pain of sisters and brothers who have been hurt and are still being hurt today. We have heard God in Christ speaking to us in what we believe to be a Kairos moment. We acknowledge our weakness, the ambiguities we embody, and yet, in a spirit of humility and vulnerability, we are urged on by a movement of God's Spirit, calling us to a journey of words and actions born out of what we have felt and heard, a commitment to a future built on equity, justice and love.

To this end, the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church, gathered here in Birmingham in the year 2020

- *humbly acknowledge our share in and benefit from our nation's participation, and that of our own antecedent bodies, in the Transatlantic Slave Trade.*
- *acknowledge that we speak as those who have shared in and suffered from the legacies of slavery and its appalling consequences for God's world.*
- *offer our apology to God and to our sisters and brothers in Africa, the Caribbean, and their descendants, for all that has created and still perpetuates such hurt which originated from the horror of slavery.*
- *repent of the hurt we have caused, the divisions we have created, our reluctance to face up to the sin of the past, our unwillingness to listen to the pain of our African and Caribbean sisters and brothers, and our silence in the face of racism and injustice today.*
- *commit ourselves, in a true spirit of repentance*
 - *to take what we have heard/learned at this Assembly and share widely across the whole of the URC and beyond,*
 - *to find constructive ways by which we can turn the words and feelings we have expressed today into concrete actions and contribute to the prophetic work of God's coming kingdom, as we continue to walk the way of Jesus.*
 - *to continue to develop ways of promoting racial justice and justice for all*

As we ask for forgiveness, we invite all of the United Reformed Church to recommit ourselves to walking together in the Spirit of Christ so that all peoples may be blessed, and God's creation healed.

July 2019

APPENDIX 7: GLOSSARY

CARICOM	is an abbreviation of Caribbean Community and is an organisation of fifteen Caribbean nations and dependencies having the primary objectives to promote economic integration and cooperation among its members, and to coordinate foreign policy.
Coward Trust	William Coward died in 1738, at the age of 90. Coward's Will reflected his support for three Dissenting academies, for churches and ministers' dependents fallen on hard times, and for the extension of the Christian Gospel. A trust was set up to continue the work he so generously funded in his own day. William was a wealthy 18th Century merchant who owned ships and built up a plantation in Jamaica using enslaved peoples.
CWM	The Council for World Mission is a worldwide partnership of Christian churches. The 32 members are committed to sharing their resources of money, people, skills and insights globally to carry out God's mission locally. CWM was created in 1977 and incorporates the London Missionary Society (1795), the Commonwealth Missionary Society (1836) and the (English) Presbyterian Board of Missions (1847).
Jim Crow	Jim Crow laws were state and local laws that enforced racial segregation in the Southern United States. All were enacted in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by White Democratic-dominated state legislatures after the Reconstruction period. The laws were enforced until 1965. In practice, Jim Crow laws mandated racial segregation in all public facilities in the states of the former Confederate States of America and other states, starting in the 1870s and 1880s, and were upheld in 1896, by the U.S. Supreme Court's 'separate but equal' legal doctrine for facilities for African Americans.
LMS	The London Missionary Society (LMS) was a protestant missionary society formed in England in 1795 'to spread the knowledge of Christ among heathen and other unenlightened nations'. Although broadly interdenominational in scope, the Society was largely Congregationalist in outlook and membership.
LoS	The Legacies of [Transatlantic] Slavery is a project initiated by CWM to:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assess its own story and complicity with the systems of enslavement and empire• Understand better the urgency of achieving racial justice and the issues which intersect with it• Find ways to advocate reparation with its member churches• Discover anti-Imperial models of Christian mission in today's world.
URCHS	The United Reformed Church History society is open to anyone interested in the history of the denominations which came together in 1972, 1981 and in 2000.
White Privilege	Privilege can come from any defining feature of a group, such as colour, class, ethnicity, gender or sexuality. Here we focus on privilege simply based on people's colour.