URC Legacies of (transatlantic) Slavery Consultation – the Responses

In autumn 2021 the URC's Legacies of Slavery task group launched a church-wide consultation to consider the Church's response to the continuing legacies of transatlantic slavery today. This work had been requested by Mission Council in autumn 2019 but was delayed due to COVID.

The task group prepared and circulated various resources to assist Synods and local churches in their conversations.

Responses received have been anonymised and reproduced below. They appear in no particular order and with no particular preference.

Responses are from Church Meetings, Elders Meetings, church groups and individuals. One response (not anonymised) comes from Racial Justice Advocates and Activists from the breadth of the URC. Further responses are still arriving.

The Task Group wishes to thank all respondents for taking the time and effort to engage with the materials, and with the issues.

Response 1

The diaconate at Church discussed our response to the consultation at our meeting on 3rd February 2022.

The deacons agreed that we should respond positively to the work carried out by the task group and we thank them for the on-going work in preparation for General Assembly this year.

We agree that it is entirely right for the URC to offer an apology for transatlantic slavery and its continuing legacies and we endorse the draft text for the Apology and Confession.

We support in principle that there should be some form of repairing justice and look forward to more detailed proposals as they are established in the weeks ahead.

There are no specific ideas that we can offer yet, but we will continue to keep this on our agenda and look for opportunities in our local community and with the town centre churches that we work with.

Response 2

UNITED REFORMED CHURCH RACIAL JUSTICE ADVOCATES and ACTIVISTS across the URC, who have individually given their names in support of and in solidarity with the URC in its work and RESOLUTIONS being presented at our 2022 General assembly, on the Legacies of Transatlantic

Slavery and also affirmative action in relation to Recruitment and Representation at all levels of the URC.

1. ENALA BHEBHE	Wessex
2. SANDRA ACKROYD	Thames North
3. PHILIPPA OSEI	Thames North
4. DARNETTE WHITBY- REID	Thames North
5. SHARON HENRIQUEZ	Southern
6. SUSAN BRANCH	Mersey
7. EVERTON TALKER	Thames North
8. LORRAINE DOWNER	Thames North
9. TUNDI BIYI	Eastern
10. PAT POINEN	Northern
11. AFTAB MUGHAL	North Western
12. BEVERLEY HUMPHREYS	Synod of Wales
13. PATRICIA AKOLI	Thames North
14. REVD ZAIDIE ORR	Yorkshire
15. REVD JOHN CAMPBELL	Thames North
16. REVD HENRIETTA WENTINK	South Western
17. REVD FRANCIS ACKROYD	Thames North
18. REVD TESSA HENRY-ROBINSON	Thames North
19. REVD ANDREW MUDHARARA	East Midlands
20. REVD SHAHBAZ JAVED	Thames North
21. REVD SAMUEL SILUNGWE	East Midlands

Response 3

It is undeniable that the slave trade was a great evil. We can and should acknowledge the horrors of slavery and the fact that this country has benefitted from the financial gain of this evil trade.

We can and should condemn the truly awful practice of the transatlantic slave trade and pledge to work towards a fairer and fully inclusive society.

We acknowledge the injustice of racism and slavery in the modern world and we should commit to walk together in the spirit of Christ so that all may be treated as equal, irrespective of colour, creed, religion etc.

However, we have the following concerns about the consultation document:-
Whilst we acknowledge individuals and establishments have benefitted from the slave trade, we are concerned about the judgemental and condemnatory tone of the document, citing people by name and summarily condemning them without any more being known.

We accept that action must be undertaken, this should not just be a “talking shop” but we query whether this document and resolution is the most positive and practical way of addressing what has happened in the past and continues today. Does this address the wider issue of race relations? The important thing is to turn words into actions to ensure equality and inclusivity.

The transatlantic slave trade was an absolutely awful part of our history but there have been many other injustices in UK history over the centuries, e.g. Highland clearances where Scots were shipped to Canada and Australia being just one such injustice. The question of reparation is difficult too. It is difficult to assess how we can quantify and make reparation given all the injustices of the past.

We also question whether it is productive to look backwards over our shoulders when we have major issues affecting the present and the future, such as ongoing concerns on climate change and the present day humanitarian crises in Syria and Afghanistan. These issues need addressing and we bear a real measure of responsibility for future generations.

We do lament the injustice of slavery, then and now, and we must work towards ensuring this does not happen ever again. However, we do not feel an apology as described in the document is the most appropriate response given the passage of time.

In conclusion, we are not content to endorse this document in it present form.

Response 4

We discussed this at our recent elders meeting, and the consensus was to ask "what does this have to do with us?" We all agreed that the slave trade was a horrific and evil thing, now thankfully abolished (in name at least).

But slavery was abolished before any of us was born, and well before the URC even existed. None of us have ever owned or traded slaves, and I have never knowingly met anyone who has. So any suggestion that we have anything to apologise for or to confess in connection with it is clearly wrong. I'm sure God does not hold us responsible for the sins of others whom we have never even met.

Jesus Himself did not condemn slavery as such, and Paul, in Ephesians, called upon slaves to obey their masters (although to be fair Roman slavery was very different to, and treated slaves much better than, the Atlantic slave trade).

We think that the URC and Christian Church in general has more important and more immediate things to concern itself with, such as the war in Ukraine and other evils of the here and now. We should concentrate our limited resources on areas where we can make a difference, not on pointless virtue signaling. If we wish to address slavery, then it should be something that it is possible to expose and change like modern slavery.

Response 5

We held five formal meetings informed by papers circulated by the URC Task Group on 'Legacies of Slavery'. These papers outlined the original recommendations of the Global and Intercultural Ministry urging churches to discuss and adopt two broad proposals: 1. The giving of a public apology for the URC's historic, institutional involvement in slavery; and 2. The framing of suggestions for possible reparations to individuals and/or communities damaged by the legacy of the slave trade.

Social Justice Group met on 20 January 2022 to discuss the URC's Consultation Document on the 'Legacies of Slavery' coupled with the FAQs sheet, and the draft Apology and Confession document, all of which had been widely circulated among church members. HW began the session with a salutary paper exercise (taken from A Barrett & R Harley, *Being Interrupted: Reimagining the Church's Mission from the Outside, In*), designed to make explicit the unacknowledged levels of privilege most members of mainstream culture enjoy, and to highlight the equally unacknowledged levels of discrimination and marginalization many members of minority cultures are obliged to suffer on a daily basis.

This was followed by a discussion of the Task Group's documents and materials, including detailed reference to the informative video featuring Karen Campbell. The group had also been encouraged by HW to read *A Respectable Trade,* a well- researched fictional account of the Bristol-based slave trade by the historical novelist Philippa Gregory (1995).

Given the detail of the background research provided by the video, the documents distributed by the URC Task Group, along with further information gleaned from, among other sources, the Centre for the Study of Legacies of British Slavery at UCL, the Social Justice Group proposed that Trinity adopt the recommendations of the Task Group.

Church Meeting was held on Sunday 23 January 2022 which, unfortunately, had a crammed agenda covering urgent buildings and finance issues. Following discussion of these, and given time constraints, deliberation of the Task Group's recommendation was restricted to the reading out of two papers written by individual members of the congregation. The first was a carefully framed set of arguments to do with resisting the recommendation, whilst the second was a quickly composed response to some of those arguments. *(Please see accompanying papers).*

One member suggested that perhaps not everyone had had the opportunity to view the video and reflect on Karen Campbell's persuasive presentation, remarking that failing to support the motion contained in the Task Group's papers would perhaps be akin to withdrawing the hand of friendship and solidarity. The majority of members present agreed that they felt insufficiently prepared or informed to vote one way or the other. It was therefore suggested that a special church meeting, devoted solely to the issue, be convened and incorporated into the close of a Church Service on Sunday 13 February 2022. Meanwhile, efforts would be made to provide further opportunities for discussion and exploration of the issues prior to the special church meeting.

An open invitation meeting was therefore held on Friday 4 February,2022, 11.00 –12.30 chaired by HW. 4 members attended and a wide-ranging discussion of various points of agreement and disagreement ensued. The Task Group's recommendations were strongly supported. It was generally thought that, in relation to the Transatlantic Slave Trade, we all have a shared history, but by no means a shared memory. History is generally written by the winners, not the losers, by the victors, not the victims. The winners are remembered by their place in books, by their statues in town squares, and by their names emblazoned on public buildings. The losers remain silenced, marginalised or forgotten. So, here, with the recommendation of the URC 'Legacies of Slavery' Task Group, was a clear opportunity to side full square with the victims, whose inheritance has largely been one of poverty, discrimination, and discarded identity - denied freedom, justice and dignity. By accepting the recommendation of the Task Group, and by supporting Karen Campbell, the eloquent spokesperson featured in the video, we, as a church community, may help to shape not just a shared history, but also a shared memory. One that would do full justice to the complex cultural history of the URC and its foundational churches, and help to enrich this, our 50th Jubilee Year.

A second, open-invitation meeting was held on February 11 February,2022, 6.00 –7.30,. This would give those who work during the day an opportunity to air their views and arguments. 3 members attended, and a helpful discussion again ensued. It gave HW the opportunity to dispel the understandably widespread notion that reparation or restitution did not involve handing out sums of money to marginalised individuals, but much more to do with exploring ways in which mainstream culture could learn from the experiences of marginalised communities. The complexity of the whole issue was underlined by the fact that even across some communities suffering racial discrimination, there exists no full consensus on the need for apologies to be made nor reparations to be considered.
Meanwhile, the Task Group's video featuring Karen Campbell was played during one of the intervening Sunday Services so that it gained as wide an audience as was possible.

We held its special church meeting on Sunday 13 February,2022, during the latter part of a service held to celebrate Racial Justice Sunday, and using the ecumenical liturgy devised by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI). Although the number in attendance was relatively small, a full and wide-ranging discussion was held on the pros and cons of the Task Group's recommendations *(Please see detailed Church Meeting Minutes).* Much of the discussion reflected the respective views contained in the earlier two papers written by the two members of the congregation. It was finally decided that, although not essential, two formal votes would be taken. One on the question of whether an apology was appropriate, and one on the question of reparation proposals. The votes were as follows:

1. We recommend that the work that is done by the Task Group to be brought to the General Assembly in 2022 and accepted by Assembly. 15 voted for and 4 voted against. The proposal was therefore carried.'
2. We recommend reparations to be made and that the Task Group will continue to work

towards working out how they will be made. 14 voted for and 5 voted against. The proposal was therefore carried.'

Among the many significant contributions to the discussions there was one which stood out. It was made by someone who is not a full member of the congregation and therefore ineligible to vote, but clearly highlighted one of the many radical strengths of the URC, namely, its commitment to democratic openness and equal participation in all aspects of church life. Recognising that although he was not in a position to vote, he strongly commended the way in which highly controversial issues were approached in the church. Contentious topics were discussed in a transparent fashion and debated in an atmosphere of tempered argument and friendship. In the end we are all able to agree and/or to disagree with respect, kindness and compassion.

Response 6

I have long doubted the value of the current fashion for apologising for the 18th century West African slave trade or, indeed, apologising for anything that happened centuries before I was born. Even less have I been convinced of the use of clogging harbours with brass statues. Therefore, before rushing to apologise for something in which I took no part I read the notes and watched the video that you sent to us, ready to be convinced of the error of my ways. I was not, and below I set out a few of the reasons why I cannot support the URC proposition.

1. For centuries slavery was endemic throughout Africa as it was in many parts of the world. Historians from Boston University have estimated that of the Africans captured and then sold as slaves in the Atlantic slave trade, some 90% were captured by fellow Africans who sold them to European traders. This dreadful trade was therefore exploited by both Europeans and Africans alike to the advantage of both. In fairness, therefore, any apology from the URC in Plymouth should be matched by an apology from the Christian Churches of West African countries, but I doubt that this will happen.
2. It is often claimed that the present-day wealth of the United Kingdom derives from the Atlantic slave trade.
3. However, whilst this may be true to a limited extent, it takes no account of the fact that there is a very strong work ethic common to most European countries; on the whole Europeans of all races and colours work hard and for long hours. Sadly, many workers, including children, in England and Wales worked in conditions little better than slavery during the industrial revolution. Moreover, we are an inventive and innovative people who have delivered almost countless advances in science, technology and medicine to the whole world. Is it not ingenuous to claim that our current wealth stems significantly from the 18th century shipping of Africans rather than from our own efforts and ingenuity? And is it not equally likely that there are families and institutions in West Africa whose wealth derives from that same evil trade?
4. It is frequently implied that historic slavery has been mainly a white-on-black activity. This is not so. Slavery has been endemic throughout most of the world's history and practiced by

people of all colours, by no means least in Africa. Most European countries provided white slaves for the Roman market. The little village of Dyflin on the east coast of the present-day Republic of Ireland grew to become the thriving capital city of Dublin as the centre of the Viking slave trade. Most of these slaves were white Anglo Saxons and Irish; many were shipped east to the non-white Muslim world. And then, of course, during the 16th to 18th centuries the coasts of the south west of England, Ireland, Scotland and Iceland were raided by the Barbary pirates of North Africa, their purpose being the capture of slaves for the Arab slave markets in Africa. I could go on. But in many ways worse, much worse, because it's happening today right under our noses, is modern-day slavery.

5. It is estimated that 40 million people—that is a number equivalent to nearly two-thirds of the population of the UK, or two and a half times the population of The Netherlands—are trapped in modern slavery worldwide. One in four of them are children and almost three-quarters are women and girls. This dreadful trade includes human trafficking to exploit victims for forced labour, prostitution, organ removal and forced marriage, sometimes of children. Surely URC members would be better occupied in actively opposing modern day slavery in all its horrible forms rather than agonising over just one historic trade? Or will future generations of URC members be asked to apologise for our indolence today?
6. In many ways the British have made some amends for their part in the Atlantic slave trade. Let us not forget that it was the tireless efforts of British abolitionists that eventually led to its end. Following our outlawing of this trade, the Royal Navy's West African Squadron was formed. It captured about 1,600 slave ships and fought several naval battles off the West African coast, successfully freeing 150,000 slaves, most of whom chose to settle in Sierra Leone for fear of being recaptured and re- enslaved by their fellow Africans. Some 2,000 British sailors died of injuries and disease, mainly malaria, during this period. Later it was the UK that imposed economic sanctions upon South Africa in opposition to apartheid and the continued detention of Nelson Mandela.

I do recognise that the URC's endeavour to right the wrongs of the past is both sincere and heart-felt. I also acknowledge that since I live in Cornwall, which is probably the whitest county in England, I do not experience or fully appreciate the racial tensions and problems suffered by non-white citizens unfortunate to be living in more northern parts of our country. However, I truly believe that equality of treatment, equality of opportunity and equality of respect will come only from a big effort from whites and non-whites alike, and that by far the biggest part of this effort must come from the white members of our society. Thus far, our record has not been good.
However, I do not believe that great harmony will be achieved by one group trying to rub the noses of the other in the dirt of history.

Response 7

1. Institutions, such as the British Monarchy and the URC, representing a mainstream white, wealthy and powerful culture, which has benefitted from slavery, ought perhaps to make a

public apology which helps to symbolise contrition and humility, and goes some way to repairing fractured relations between black and white. If the Monarchy, through Prince Charles, can make a sincere apology, then it would be churlish if the URC decided not to.
Much of what said is broadly accurate; Africans were complicit in the slave trade.
However, the British, through the ports of Liverpool, Bristol and London were primarily responsible for the enslavement and exploitation of over 800,000 African men, women and children. That fact alone is a continued stain on British cultural history.

2. Bristol's Edward Colston, as head of Britain's most important slave owning enterprise, 'The Royal African Company', was largely responsible for the kidnap and enslavement of over 85,000 Africans, including 12,000 children. The toppling of his statue was the end result of over 30 frustrated years of petitioning by the Afro- Caribbean and other local communities in Bristol, who had been blocked by powerful vested interests. The defence argued that 'Colston's crimes were so horrific that the continued presence of his statue was offensive, abusive and distressing.' (Leeds academic report). Bristol City Council acknowledged that the cultural value of the statue, now placed in the museum, has been much enhanced by the event and the subsequent trial. Moreover, it was deemed right in both Criminal Law (Criminal Damage Act 1971) and the European Convention on Human Rights (Articles 10 & 11), that in this particular case the 'safeguarding of property' is ultimately less important than protecting public safety, preventing a more serious crime, and upholding the fundamental right to protest.

3. Acknowledging and publicly apologising for one set of crimes (past slavery), does not prevent the pursuit of justice in respect of other crimes (modern slavery). And whatever else is the case, we are always connected with the past, and especially in this case, given the fact that it was only in 2015 that the British State paid the final compensation instalment to companies and corporations involved in slavery!

Response 8

(The) views (below) do not coincide with my own. I don't think that (the meeting) fully grasped the 'legacies of' aspect to the consultation. Even with that, while I agree with some of their responses I am in favour of apology and restorative justice.

After meaningful discussions, the meeting

1. Recognised that a significant amount of work had been done to bring this consultation to churches.
2. It was agreed that the transatlantic slave trade was an abomination that should never have happened. However, the meeting felt unable to apologise for the actions of other people who were acting before living memory. It was also felt that the legacies of the slave trade should be included in the church's general work with inclusion for everyone as taught by Christ. It was considered that the draft apology seemed very similar to the one offered by the Baptist

Church which had direct involvement with the trade, unlike the URC and its predecessors and would therefore be inappropriate.

3. It was felt that the concept of reparation after all this time also seemed inappropriate. Despite feeling great sorrow for all that happened in that period, it was also felt strongly that it would be more effective and better to concentrate on, for example, modern slavery and people trafficking.
4. The wording from Lloyd's (as per the link on P2 of the LoS consultation overview document) was felt to be positive, particularly the part about focusing on what can be done now to shape the future and direction which the church could follow.

Response 9

As a black woman I am also challenged to forgive and continue to show love.

I live everyday in fear and anxiety about the safety of my boys and how they can excel in all they do so they will be taken seriously. The pressure that they dress right, talk right and walk right is often a bone of contention with them. No jogging at night and sleepless nights till (my son) is home.

My recent experience at the physio confirmed the above fear is not unfounded but that story is for another time.

Being black sucks in this world sometimes but I would never ask to be another colour if I were to reincarnate. I am very black and proud.

I pray though for a life free from fear of prejudice and lack of justice and opportunities because I am black.

Response 10

Our schedule of meetings did not allow this subject to be considered at a full Church Meeting but we watched the video and discussed the consultation document at a meeting of our World Church Group on 10 February 2022 and this response summarises the views expressed at that meeting.

1. **What is your response to the URC's work and engagement with the Legacies of transatlantic Slavery as outlined in the video presentation and consultation overview paper?**

We fully support the URC's work on this important issue of justice recognising the legacies of the transatlantic slave trade and its continued legacy in our society today. We appreciated the video presentation and the way in which this difficult subject was summarised and presented.

2. **How do you feel about the proposal for the URC to offer an apology for transatlantic slavery and its continuing legacies? And what is your response to the draft Apology and Confession proposed by the Task Group?**

We support the proposal to offer an apology and the wording of the draft Apology and Confession. We are proud to be part of a church that is prepared to address difficult subjects and to stand up to be counted on the issues of justice that it considers to be important.

3. **How do you feel about the proposal for the URC to offer some form of reparations (repairing justice) in relation to the legacies of transatlantic slavery?**

We support the direction of travel outlined in the Consultation Document and look forward to seeing what this might look like in practice as these discussions develop.

4. **What specific ideas for repairing justice would you like to see implemented in your local community (and/or beyond)?**

We have the following thoughts:

i) We have close links with Asha, a charity which supports refugees/asylum seekers living in Stoke-on-Trent. We want to continue to develop and build upon these links and to continue developing our understanding of the issues and experiences facing the people they support, including racism and prejudice. Equally, we understand there may be refugees/asylum seekers placed in Leek in the near future which could provide further opportunities for us to develop our links and understanding.

ii) Where we see instances of racism and prejudice within our own community, we must be prepared to challenge them and speak out.

iii) We will take opportunities, e.g. Racial Justice Sunday, to inform and educate our own congregation on the issues being addressed through this consultation.

<u>Response 11</u>

We used your Legacies of Slavery video at yesterday's meeting of Synod. This prompted the thoughts below from one of the Elders present, which I thought you would like to see.

Reaction to video: The speaker was clear and to the point, clarifying what we should already know
Reparations: Should we make them? Yes, I think we should, but in what form? Personally, as a former trade unionist, and given that slavery was in the world of work, though unpaid, I believe support should be given via organizations which help working people, or retired working people, especially in areas like the NHS where descendants of slaves are likely to work. Also, there are bodies like the Windrush generation action groups which would benefit from help. Some people from West Indian backgrounds have been caught up in the Post Office Scandal (in my view one of the most shocking affairs in recent British history) and there may be funds which would help them fight their cases.

I think it would be better if the URC was very targeted and specific in anything it does, rather than get caught up in some big nation apology thing which Daily Mail readers will tear to pieces!

Response 12

1. We think it's extremely important work. It's vital that the church understands its history well, what has been done well and what was done wrong. This helps us keep growing in our faith. We feel that it is good that the church has looked into slavery and made congregations aware of it. We think this is very important. Acknowledging what happened and labelling it as unjustifiable and indefensible is a good start, but it must be backed up with practical action to show we are committed to loving God fully and our neighbours as ourselves as Jesus taught us (Matt 22:36-40).
2. We do not feel 'apology' or 'confession' is the right word for referring to the past believing as individuals we cannot apologise for something we were not directly responsible for. As a congregation we are deeply saddened that slavery happened. We acknowledge that our ancestors and forebears of the church were likely to have benefitted from the participation of the slave trade. We believe we should acknowledge what happened with the enslavement of people and declare it as unjustifiable, indefensible, and totally incompatible with our calling as Christians. We should also prayerfully consider individually if we ourselves have contributed to racism in any way and if so, repent of that.
3. We would like assembly to be focusing on issues today and in the future including present day slavery and discrimination of all types and to be actively involved in changing attitudes both within the church and in the wider community. We would like to see projects that continue to combat gang culture and racism. A focus on areas where there is a lack of opportunity for good housing, food and good education would be positive.
4. As a church we are actively considering how to widen our engagement within the community working to abolish discrimination and tackling things such as county lines

   We would like it noted somewhere that the Congregational Church was active in the abolition of slavery.

Response 13

I am supportive of what you and your task group are seeking to do.

I would like to share with you a reflection prompted by my preaching last Sunday 6th February using the lectionary text from 1 Corinthians 15:10 where Paul writes: 'But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me has not been in vain**.'**

A statement from someone who previously had persecuted people before his Damascus Road experience. A recognition that God's grace was still at work in him to transform him and his relationships with so many other people.

I also made the link with the story of John Newton and his hymn 'Amazing Grace', and his conversion from being a former sea captain whose life was turned upside down. He realised how much he needed God's forgiveness for his days ferrying slaves from Africa to the new colonies in the Caribbean and North America. Experiences that came home to haunt him. By God's grace his conversion led him to become a minister in the church of England and such a great supporter of the campaign to end slavery.

All this prompts me to ask are there similar or useful stories like those of John Newton in the history of the churches which now form the URC?

I noted the comment in one of your articles: *'Although much about the history remains hazy, it's clear that the URC (like other British institutions) is heir to a racist past that cannot fill us with pride.'*

Are there any John Newton's with a story to tell to inspire people?

Or indeed stories of people like Edward Colson whose business in the slave trade need naming? Are there people, other than William Coward, who it is important to name and remember for their part in the URC's legacy?

Such stories and examples from the legacy of the slave trade can help people understand how what happened then can influence today's situations. This may help us by the grace of God to become what God intends us to become, as we seek together to do what now needs to be done in Jesus' name?

Response 14

Following the Church Meeting on 10th February 2022, the meeting discussed and the following comments were asked to be forwarded to you.

There was a mixed response to agreeing to an apology, there was no definite outcome for an apology or confession from the Church Meeting.

Response 15

We support the work and and engagement on this topic.

- We have looked at the apology at a church meeting and support its wording.
- We have not really been able to discuss 3 and 4 at a church meeting given the timing.
- Our view is also that 'sorry' isn't enough - but it is a good start and we will all need to work on all forms of racial prejudice, so that this document doesn't lose its force.

Response 16

1. What is your response to the URC's work and engagement with the Legacies of (transatlantic) Slavery as outlined in the video presentation and consultation overview paper?

Responses varied from those who met the idea with clear resistance, through those who engaged with it while having questions and reservations to a minority who were on a wavelength with the issues and proposals and responded positively.

This was not an easy discussion to open up. The fact that time was so short (only receiving the request in December) did not help. The church held a Zoom online discussion on February 3rd which was attended by 16 people. Two others sent emails when the meeting was advertised but did not attend.

2. How do you feel about the proposal for the URC to offer an apology for transatlantic slavery and its continuing legacies? And what is your response to the draft Apology and Confession proposed by the Task Group?

The word 'apology' was a major stumbling block for almost everyone who spoke in the Zoom conversation. 'Regret', 'sorrow' and 'sadness' were alternative words some people preferred.

A few felt nothing can or should be said because the URC did not exist at the time of the slave trade and has no responsibility for it at all. One of these people thought for the URC to say anything would be 'quite wrong'.

There was also resistance to the use of the word 'sin' from someone who suggested 'wrong' as an alternative.

On the other hand, one person pointed out that the Church of England has already apologised to descendants of victims of the slave trade.

People wanted to know who an apology would be addressed to and who would hear anything the URC said? Would an apology be made to sister denominations/other churches, national governments, or both?

3. How do you feel about the proposal for the URC to offer some form of reparations (repairing justice) in relation to the legacies of transatlantic slavery?

It was clear not many of us know the history of the ways our churches were founded and where the money came from. In the northwest, many older buildings were built by cotton manufacturers, as one person the Zoom meeting explained. This meant they had connections with slavery in their early days. He suggested that when churches now close and buildings are sold the synod could pay reparations from these funds. He was also keen to see us doing things that cost us resources in a more obvious way.

One person, who was open to the idea of reparations, was concerned whether the money would get to the place where it was intended.
Two people who did not wish the denomination to make an apology also said there is no racism in the URC and opposed the paying of reparations.
Several people wanted to raise instead the issue of modern-day slavery rather than this historical focus.

4. What specific ideas for repairing justice would you like to see implemented in your local community (and/or beyond)?

We had no specific proposals for this, but several people thought the place to start was asking countries affected by the history of the slave trade what help they need.

One other suggestion was that General Assembly should urge all churches to establish links with other churches which have a more diverse membership in ethnic terms. This would allow churches with little or no ethnic diversity to demonstrate support for other ethnic groups and possibly allow them to identify ways in which they might help disadvantaged communities.

Response 17

1. What is your response to the URC's work and engagement with the Legacies of (transatlantic) Slavery as outlined in the video presentation and consultation overview paper?

Whilst the URC must take slavery seriously, I personally believe that we are having to apologise for actions that at the time, the Congregational Church did not agree with, and indeed stood against slavery.

To ignore the fact that Africans were complicit in the slave trade, is wrong. In the end, it comes down to human actions regardless of race.

2. How do you feel about the proposal for the URC to offer an apology for transatlantic slavery and its continuing legacies? And what is your response to the draft Apology and Confession proposed by the Task Group?

Whilst the URC should empathise with those who feel that a wrong was done, what are you apologising for? You cannot apologise on behalf of someone else.

3. How do you feel about the proposal for the URC to offer some form of reparations (repairing justice) in relation to the legacies of transatlantic slavery?

It is not the URC's place to offer reparations. The congregational church took no part in slavery. Who would you offer reparations to?

4. What specific ideas for repairing justice would you like to see implemented in your local community (and/or beyond)?

By standing up against all forms of slavery, and all forms of discrimination, but please do not feel guilty for others actions that, at the time, campaigned against. Empathize and support.

Response 18

How do we respond to what we have read?

First and foremost, we acknowledge the painful legacy of slavery and the hurt that continues to be felt. This must be recognized and none of the questions raised in this response should detract from that reality.

We want to continue to listen to those who have been affected by this legacy. A response is required embracing some, if not all, of the following:

- Acknowledgement and support of those affected
- Sorrow for what has happened in the past
- Just and proportionate appraisal of the benefits to some, of this legacy
- Positive and creative action indicating our resolution to respond positively

But the response must also be tempered by more careful consideration as ***the Consultation Document raises many difficult questions that deserve deeper examination.***

The Consultation Document also rests on some ***theological and historical assumptions that must be questioned. Examining these more robustly might lead to different ways of responding.***

Theological Assumptions

Critical Theory (and its subsidiary discipline Critical Race Theory) is becoming more influential in academic study, political discourse and theological reflection.

Critical Theory divides people, simplistically, into distinct categories: oppressors (for example: white, straight, men etc) and the oppressed (black, gay, women etc). It is essentially, a divisive ideological approach.

The New Testament offers an alternative narrative, categorising people as righteous or unrighteous. This might seem divisive until the fact "…all have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God" (Romans 3: 23) is taken into account. Likewise "as in Adam all die, so in Christ (the pattern of our

new humanity) shall all be made alive" (I Corinthians 15:22). So, the New Testament gives a universally binding narrative, both in its negative and positive aspects. The contrast between the divisive narrative of Critical Theory and the universally binding narrative of the New Testament cannot be overstressed.

The Biblical narrative of "original sin" might seem simplistic. It is certainly straightforward. But by its universal application, it embraces a complexity of human experience. Sin affects all aspects of human behaviour in all cultures, in all times and across all conditions of humanity: slavery, violence, economic exploitation, misogyny, racism, political oppression etc.

The Consultation Document betrays the influence of a Critical Theory framework when it asserts that slavery, and particularly by the statement's context, the Atlantic slave trade, "…one might say, was the original sin" We say "assert" but the insertion of that "might say" is a somewhat revealing qualifier, betraying that the authors of the document seem to be aware that this assertion is false and can be challenged as false. It should be challenged as false because the assertion is a glaring theological error. Slavery (and certainly the Atlantic slave trade) is many things (evil, oppressive, exploitative and sinful) but it is not in any sense the original sin - not even maybe. In passing, let us say that calling the Atlantic slave trade "the original sin" actually narrows the definition of sin to a degree that could, potentially, disable any efforts to address other injustices. We also have to question in what sense historical events of the 15th to 18th centuries can be described as "original"!! ***The theology of the document needs to be more robust.***

But why is this assertion being made, at all? Is it because the authors want to ascribe the guilt of "original sin" to a certain group in accordance with the divisive categorisations which are typical of Critical Race Theory? By implication such a group would be the only ones who are guilty of sin (certainly of the only sins that "matter").

The process of discussing the document has already led to conversations about concepts such as "white privilege" and perhaps, more disturbingly might lead to discussions on "whiteness" (let us hope not, if we are to strive to be an anti-racist Church!). Linking the Atlantic slave trade to the wider issue of white privilege is in stark contrast to the New Testament where the doctrine of original sin is universal in its application to all people, irrespective of race or any other characteristic.

Historical Omissions

But surely such an analysis is justified in the face of the real horrors of the Atlantic slave trade and its legacy? Was it not, after all, an enterprise in which white people inflicted horrors on black people? Such an appraisal might be justified if the historical narrative supports it, without qualification. ***But the historical narrative of the document is not comprehensive.***

The Atlantic slave trade is described in bold and narrow terms: "the forcible removal of some 3.25 million Africans in British ships across the Atlantic…" (The paper, interestingly, ignores the role of Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, French, Danes - and later Belgians as well as Arabian traders).

But, more tellingly, the narrative omits a huge part of both the wider operation of the triangular trade and how it took root and operated in Africa itself.

Slavery was not imposed in Africa by Europeans and the Atlantic slave trade did not "revive the institution of slavery" as the document asserts. Slavery was already long-established in many west and central African societies, such as among the Allada, Asante, Fula, Hausa, Jolof, Swahili and Yoruba and in kingdoms like Benin, Dahomey, Kongo, Senegambia, Songhay, and many other places.
There was routine enslavement of debtors, criminals, prisoners and anyone else who had fallen foul of moral conventions. These are the people who provided a pool of unfortunate souls who were then caught up in the Atlantic trade when opportunity arose.

The document's narrative falls into the trap of portraying Africans as wholly passive victims of the slave trade (in that sense it actually robs Africans of agency and so it could be argued that it perpetrates a form of racism!). But African societies were vibrant, politically advanced kingdoms, sometimes with not insignificant military and economic organisation. They were not a loose collection of defenceless villages suffering the predation of European traders. They were often at war with each other for the very control of the people trade. The Atlantic slave trade was also fuelled by the already-existent trans-Saharan slave trade carried out by Arab and North African traders as well as Africans who lived in the Niger basin.

Sadly, such trading took place at a personal as well as an institutional level. One of the most celebrated individual stories from the slave-trading era concerns a man called Ayuba Suleiman Diallo. He was kidnapped and transported to Maryland but secured release through hard work and force of character and returned, a free man, to Gambia. This celebrated tale is noteworthy (but somewhat tainted) by the fact that Diallo was originally kidnapped by a group of African slavers - while on his way to sell two slaves himself!

So Africans were also involved in slave trading on an institutional scale. Though (lest we also generalise) not all. A notable exception includes the kingdom of Benin who tried, valiantly, to abolish the slave trade for a time. Profession of Islam was also a widespread safeguard against enslavement (although many Muslims engaged in the trade individually and corporately).

But this is not to excuse Europeans, and particularly not the British. What of their involvement? Again the vocabulary of the paper is revealing: the word "British" betrays the assumption of guilt of a particular nation (and by implication, the whole nation) while failing to take account of the complexities of the economic, social and political make-up of Britain at the genesis of the trade.

The designation "British ships" suggests a developed national policy. But there is actually no evidence that European traders came to the coast of Africa with any predetermined, conscious policy to traffic people. That they saw such an opportunity, and exploited it, is no excuse, but neither were they representative of a national endeavour - they were from a particular mercantile

class, albeit unrestrained by the political class of the time - to begin with.

It is worth noting, at this point, that a conscious national policy to colonise Africa did not gain traction among European powers until the late 19th century, many years after the slave trade had officially and legally been abolished by most European nations.

The shortcomings of the document's historical narrative are explained by its concentration, of necessity, on the role (and response) of British people from a British denomination (Let the Belgians, Arabs and Africans make their own response). ***But framing the discussion without reference to ALL the facts will, inevitably, skew any conclusion.*** If we only talk of "British ships" we will, unsurprisingly, arrive at an explanation purely in terms of British racism. If we take into account the complicity of African elites in slave trading, our conclusions about the reasons for the trade will be modified accordingly. Therefore, any correction of the document's historical omissions will also change, fundamentally, the basis on which we respond to the legacy of slavery.

Although the slave trade tacitly encompassed racist impulses and reinforced those impulses (its victims were entirely of a particular ethnicity, after all), the uncomfortable facts of its complete history lead us to a more nuanced interpretation and conclusion: that the trade was not based solely on race but was also inflicted on the dispossessed and poor of Africa by a mercantile class of diverse racial make-up: European African (and Arabian).

This much more complex narrative calls for a different response from one shaped by the simplistic ideology and historical lens of Critical Race Theory.

The Atlantic slave trade can be viewed, not only as a moral transaction between oppressing whites and oppressed blacks but perpetrated by all races. In this sense, the slave trade can be seen as much more explicable by the tenets of Biblical/New Testament ethics, which emphasise the oppression of the poor by the powerful than, by Critical Race Theory, which pitches black against white without discernment nor qualification.

Undoubtedly, economically and politically dispossessed Africans were the main victims: they suffered the most horrors and the bitter legacy of the trade is felt among their descendants the most to this day. This must be acknowledged.

But the narrative becomes even more complex and nuanced when we think in a wider sense. Were there other victims - albeit victims whose sufferings were comparatively less - but, nevertheless, caught up in the complex and exploitative nature of the trade?

The trade was triangular. The document rightly emphasizes the middle passage which was the most horrific side of the triangle: the brutal forced transportation of Africans across the Atlantic. The third part of the triangle is also referenced: the import of agricultural products into Europe that fuelled industrial revolution and Britain's subsequent wealth (although ***the document makes no attempt to address the complexities of this aspect***, e.g. the extent to which cotton and tobacco contributed to Britain's industrial revolution compared, say, to the impact of natural resources like coal and iron.)

But the document overlooks the realities of the first side of the triangle: the transport of cheap goods for consumption by those aforementioned African elites. This oversight obscures the fact

that the first stage in the process was TRADE: not an uncontested forced removal, a harvesting of human beings, but the willing provision of that human cargo by African elites in exchange for goods.

If dispossessed Africans could be taken at no cost, then why was that first leg of the trade (as a trading venture) even necessary? But ships carried cargoes to Africa for consumption by Africans. It was, in fact, the flooding of African markets by cheap commodities, and consequent devaluing of African currencies, that enabled European nations to edge ahead economically, paving the way for colonisation in later centuries. But at the time of the trade itself, European and African mercantile classes were trading, freely and on an equal footing.

The question lingering behind this wider view is how the mercantile classes of Europe were able to provide cheap goods unless they did so on the backs of exploited labour? Exploitation of poor Europeans enabled goods to be sold and transported cheaply in the first place. In fact, historians have argued that capital accumulation that enabled early industrial European development (and production of surplus goods for export) can be traced directly to measures like the enclosures that robbed the poorest classes in Europe of livelihoods and rights.

So here, in the background, lie some hidden victims of the Atlantic slave trade. The extent to which the provision of cheap commodities fuelled industrial revolution and subsequent wealth generation in Europe, paved the way for further exploitation of the poor.

Here again, we have an analysis of the trade that sits well within the ethical framework of the Gospel of Jesus and Apostolic teaching with their pronounced emphasis on the division between rich and poor (of all nations and races - as opposed to the division between black and white espoused by Critical Race Theory).

A proper historical analysis of the Atlantic slave trade leads us to the inevitable conclusion that it was not, at heart a racist endeavour (although it undoubtedly carried a racist element). But primarily it was a playing out of economic and political power with perpetrators and victims of all races in all places.

There is a much more complex narrative of interlocking oppressions and disadvantages at work. ***The document fails to address these complexities.***

Practical Outcomes

This has major implications when we consider three practical responses to the legacy of slavery: apologising, restorative justice and addressing White Privilege:

Apologising

If the Atlantic slave trade was an evil perpetrated by mercantile classes of different races on oppressed and dispossessed people (chiefly on the dispossessed of Africa but also on the working classes of Europe), then ***an apology on the basis of race relationships must be modified***

accordingly. An apology by a particular national government might also be ruled out because it was an economic class war, often played out within nations not by nations.
Within nations, various classes fought for political freedoms for themselves and others. The popular movements against oppression that began in the European and American world in the late 18th Century (The US War of Independence, French Revolution, Chartism, Abolition, Latin American wars of Independence, the American Civil War etc) actually had remarkable parallel social and political movements in the nations of Africa over the same period. The overall, historical battles were mainly on class and economic rather than race or national lines.

The bitterest legacy still lies with the descendants of African slaves and that is where any apology needs to be directed - but the question from whom the apology comes is fraught with difficulty. Should the descendants of the exploited workers of the industrial revolution apologise? Many millions of Britons are their descendants. Looking further back in history, many are descended from the serfs of the Middle Ages who were slaves in all but name. To what extent have their political and economic prospects also been blighted by the legacy of the slave trade and the industrial revolution?
We recognise the particular legacy of the slave trade among the Afro-Caribbean population of the United States of America and other Latin American countries. But there are many other economic and ethnic groups descended from immigrants to the Americas whose arrival on that continent was the result of economic exploitation in other parts of the world. For example, Irish forced to flee as a result of the potato famine and Scots forced to emigrate because of the clearance of the highlands by Scottish aristocracy.

It is interesting thatthe document makes reference to the ways in which the United Reformed Church has benefited from the legacy of slavery without spelling out much detail. ***More work obviously needs to be done on the extent of the benefit to our denomination.***
But, likewise, there needs to be much more consideration of the extent to which the URC has NOT benefited, in that our spiritual antecedents also came from a place of economic and political struggle rooted in many of our congregations among the working and lower middle-class of the Industrial Revolution. Before that, the politically disenfranchised classes of the 17th century were among our spiritual antecedents. Many of them fought against slavery.

This is because there is a deeper theological issue at stake. Borrowing from the language of *Appreciative Inquiry* we recognize that "words create worlds". The use of the word "apology" is, in itself, problematic carrying connotations of personal responsibility. But should anyone be asked to "apologise" for something for which they bear no personal responsibility?

We can be sorry that something has happened. In that sense a "lament" would be a better description. We might also be sorry for the extent to which we might have benefited from slavery's legacy, but can anyone assess that benefit with any accuracy? ***More work needs to be done in identifying, as much as possible, the exact nature of the legacy of the slave trade (both good and bad) before we can move beyond lament to apology.***

The prophet Ezekiel, with God's people in exile, had intimations through the Holy Spirit (along with Jeremiah) of a new Covenant that God would make with his people. Jeremiah declared that proxy relationships would give way to direct relationship to God, as "all would know (Him)" for themselves. For Ezekiel, this New Covenant played out morally in terms of personal responsibility as individuals would bear the responsibility of their own sins and no one else's (Ezekiel 18). Paul caught this vision in his exposition of the freedom that would be the inheritance of Christ's new people for whom there would be no condemnation (Romans 8:1).

To seek an apology runs the risk of infringing the very freedom that the Gospel offers and violating conscience. Surely any debate on the legacy of slavery and concerning liberation must avoid this at all costs? But, notwithstanding this, a lament and sorrow for the historical fact and the legacy might be entered into, lovingly and freely.

Restorative Justice

Who should apologise obviously has implications for the notion of any kind of restitution. An apology implies liability which may explain the hesitation of national Governments in issuing apologies!

But this is extremely difficult and complex because we face the difficulty of untangling history. Who can actually say who has benefited or suffered from the slave trade and to what extent? What other factors are at play in individual and community lives? On recent episodes of the ancestral research programme *Who Do You Think You Are?* a number of black celebrities discovered that their own ancestors owned slaves. This may seem trivial but it highlights the extreme complexity of the way the historical legacy of slavery has unfolded.

But while some history is difficult to untangle there is some history that can be done so more easily. An area in which we might act with more certainty is in regard to payments made to former slave owners. These are firstly, most likely kept on record and secondly, were paid until very recently. So, while it might be difficult to untangle the history of benefit and suffering, it is relatively straightforward to identify payments made to former slave owners.
Surely a campaign to address this terrible injustice should be focused here? If the Atlantic slave trade was an oppression visited by a particular class, then they are the ones who are responsible. It is the beneficiaries of their wealth who should make reparation. This might be a tough ask as we are then engaging with some rich and powerful players. But has the Church ever shirked such a challenge?

But this also highlights the possibility that our attempts to act justly will, inadvertently, create further injustice. Descendants of the workers of the industrial revolution have already, in one sense, "paid" reparation in that everyone in the United Kingdom contributed, in some form, to the compensation that was paid to former slave owners (or they were certainly deprived of any advantage that the investment of such sums in common causes might have yielded for their living standards). If, for example, the British government (or any institution) was called upon to

compensate the descendants of former slaves (having already paid out to slave owners) would this be just? Surely not. So tackling payments to slave owners is a better starting point than to risk perpetrating an injustice on the general population all over again.

Likewise, until the responsibility of (and benefit accruing to) our denomination and individual churches can be gauged with any certainty, then payment from denominational or congregational resources run the risk of compounding injustice. It is extremely difficult to work out both responsibility and just-deserts in an equitable way (which is not to say it should not be attempted if felt to be part of the just response).

So do we pay nothing? The way many within the URC, have benefited from the slave trade is very difficult to quantify, but we are still called to respond at the point where we find ourselves now: to respond more positively in our present situation than those in the past responded to theirs. So while it is very difficult to quantify our response to the historical slave-trade in monetary terms, we can with more certainty, make a decision about addressing the realities of slavery in our current context. People trafficking remains rife in the UK. ***Our attempts at restorative justice might include sums freely- offered to support charities and agencies addressing these issues now.*** This runs far less risk of perpetrating further injustice and far greater possibility of making a creative and positive difference to real issues, in the present.

White Privilege

The document does not refer to this directly, although the Critical Theory approach (and verbal presentations of the document we have already heard) lead us to anticipate that this will become a subject of debate and further response.

The paper makes a very strong link between the Atlantic slave trade and contemporary racism, ***although the way it establishes such links is rather tenuous.*** For example, it asserts dogmatically that the "equation of slavery with race solidified a sense of superiority among whites" without presenting any evidence. If this was the case, then what prompted the abolitionist movements in Britain, Europe and the United States? Were these movements not based on a fundamental recognition of equality rather than superiority? "Some whites" would be a more accurate phrase. Thomas Arne's "Rule Britannia" could easily be applied to the hundreds of Royal Naval personnel who gave their lives trying to stamp out slavery following its abolition - ensuring Britannia's stance AGAINST slavery really did "rule the waves".

Again, the document asserts that "the idea of racial hierarchy is the status quo which continues to shape every aspect of our world and our relationship today". We note the dogmatic assertion implicit in the words "every aspect"! Is this really the case or is it the inevitable conclusion when our thinking is shaped by the tenets of Critical Race Theory which asserts that oppression must be the norm in relationships? For many, of all races, this is not a description of reality.

This is not to say that racism is done with - but the document gives little attention to the progress that has been made (often with the active involvement of white people supposedly steeped in

"privilege" and institutions supposedly steeped in institutional racism). ***Which begs a massive question whether there are other causes of racism that are much more pressing in our day and age than the legacy of slavery?***

When we consider the concept of privilege the problem for many not-so-advantaged white people is that they actually feel only marginally more privileged than people from ethnic minorities (if at all!). White privilege is real: white people very rarely experience discrimination in the UK because of the colour of their skin. But racism is also part of a complex and infinite range of discriminations. All individuals may suffer a form of discrimination on a micro level, albeit hurtful and demeaning. We recognize that Black people experience this much more because of racism.

But the discriminations occurring on a macro level, relating to issues like job security, economic oppression, poverty, lack of opportunity, poor health and housing (cited as the more serious manifestations of institutionalised racism in the UK) are the very issues suffered by poorer classes in general (including white people), not just by people of a particular race.
Is it fallacious to assert that racial discrimination leads logically to the idea of white privilege? In a limited sense, no, as white people will not experience it. But in a practical sense, very much so as, by the most important measures, they may also experience a lack of privilege. The most cogent example is the case of white working class girls in Rotherham and other post-industrial towns across the UK who suffer horrendous sexual abuse at the hands of a powerful, wealthy, physically stronger (and institutionally protected) ethnic minority. The concept of white privilege is completely meaningless to them.
This means that the concept of "white privilege", while having some reality, has a very limited application and this renders it a somewhat meaningless concept in the face of other oppressive realities that many people are dealing with.

If white privilege is simply the by-product of racial discrimination against black people then we need to ask what substance it actually holds. Is addressing white privilege chasing the wind? ***The way to address it is to address the discrimination that allows it to even breathe.***
Again: "words create worlds" - while it is true to assert the existence of racism (and we should) it does not follow that the "privilege" implied, thereby, for white people is of much consequence. The word "privilege" implies that their lives are somehow better than they actually are, if complex socio-economic factors are ignored. When they hear the term "white privilege" they hear the word "privilege" much louder than they hear the word "white" and it just does not ring true. And the word "white" in that context, when heard, actually feels like racism!

So the concept of white privilege is, in fact, hugely offensive to many disadvantaged white people ***(and risks being a stumbling block to their response to the Gospel if the Church continues to use it indiscriminately and carelessly).*** It is an ideological sledgehammer when the forensic skill of a surgeon's scalpel is required. Fortunately, God's word is such (Hebrews 4: 12-13).

Conclusion - Addressing Racism

Is racism addressed by the divisive identity politics of Critical Race Theory or rather a Gospel imperative that there is no distinction between slaves and, free, Jew and Gentile, black and white, male and female? "We are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28) when we are forgiven through Christ's grace and become a new creation (II Corinthians 5:17) and part of his family (Ephesians 2:19).

The Atlantic slave trade was perpetrated by elite classes of many races. This resulted in social, political and economic inequalities across the board, in society and globally. Addressing these injustices, based on Critical Race Theory, and its accompanying ideological tenets like white privilege, only results in alienation and division. In a wider context, our analysis of the Atlantic slave trade as primarily a mercantile endeavour might foster a sense of empathy between the poor of all races and the victims on every side rather than division. We are actually more united in our response to slavery's legacy than we realise.

The Gospel is about uniting the oppressed and the poor of all races within the Kingdom of God and breaking down walls. (Ephesians 2: 14-17). An analysis that undergirds this is more in line with the Gospel and Apostolic faith. The Church has something much more positive to say than simply echoing the divisive tenets of Critical Race Theory.

The Church needs to repent our adherence to Critical Theory and return to preaching this distinctive, all- embracing Gospel of personal transformation and corporate reconciliation.

Response 19

We wish to submit the following response to the consultation papers circulated on 4th January 2022.

- We agree wholeheartedly with the need to consider, discuss and respond in some way to the legacies of slavery.
- We believe that this is a hugely important issue and as such is one that needs further consideration and prayerful thought.
- The 4-week deadline that churches were given to respond does not give us sufficient time to give this the due diligence and prayerful consideration that it needs.
- We agree that in order to give this the full and proper consideration needed then churches need more time and more support/resources to understand the issues at hand and the potential responses or actions needed thereafter.

That being said, given the limited time we have had to consider this, we can also provide the following further thoughts.

- We have read (Response 18) to the consultation and agree with him that there are many issues and questions that remain unanswered by the consultation documents circulated.
- We would like to see those questions and issues considered further before any proposals are

sent to General Assembly.

- We support suggestion that the United Reformed Church should consider supporting charities and organisations that work to stop people trafficking that is all too prevalent in the UK today.

We look forward to hearing more from the Legacies of Slavery Task group on this issue.

Response 20

I'm afraid as our service is cancelled for Sunday (…which) has meant that the planned church meeting has been postponed for a week. This means that we have not been possible to have a ratified decision about the request regarding the Apology… However, I would like to reply as follows:

Church members and leaders have all had a chance to read the proposal, which was circulated a month ago. Two years ago, we put on a production over several evenings of the musical "Cargo", about the abolition of slavery. This involved dozens of old and young, members and non-members, and was very well received. It had a lasting impact on our minds.

After that we held a series of discussion groups, including some people not members but from the community, and we thought through various ways we could take our thoughts further.

If this Apology had been available, then I have little doubt but that we would have endorsed it then. As it is, now, I am confident that the church would agree to its issue.

Response 21

Thank you for the considerable work and inspiration leading to the opportunity for me to comment on the URC Consultation 'Legacies of Slavery'. I note that this swift consultation ends today.
Legacies of Slavery is an important engagement of the Church in order to educate Church members and others on Slavery and encourage them to see how their own lives are shaped by Slavery.

I was educated in a school which was endowed by Slavery by a headmaster who bore the name of his Slavery family in a building which had been purchased with funds derived from Slavery. Wells, Somerset might appear to be an unlikely beneficiary of metropolitan Slavery, but is a tiny, grandiose city of large mansions around its Cathedral, whose funding came from Slavery. Only now are the Cathedral and voluntary groups looking at this aspect of our built environment and looking towards establishing a proper memory of Slavery in our locality.

I was educated in schools not far from Bristol, one of the main British centres of Slavery, but was

taught nothing of this appalling local history. Other local history such as the Dissolution of local monasteries and the Monmouth Rebellion was taught. Our Church is below Glastonbury Tor whose estate manager managed family properties and finances created out of compensation for Slavery.

One major point which I found missing from the URC consultation documents is the damage done by the Slavery Nations to the constitutional evolution of the Enslaved Nations. The Enslaved Nations lost their mighty, young people who could have been expected to play a major part in the social and economic development of their countries. This is a major cause of constitutional underdevelopment in the underdeveloped world today.

One point made in the documents is only partial: the documents note the enormous compensation paid to slave owners which was then invested to produce the industrial revolution. This pre-eminence of industrial development in the former Slavery Nations, however, also, in turn supported their 19th Century empires which exploited the Enslaved Nations even further, leading to their inability to develop economically in a free world.

An apology is due. I hope that two further points should be added to the draft Confession and Apology:
Firstly, we are not re-writing history: we are teaching history which has been suppressed by the establishment in the former Slavery Nations.

Secondly, Slavery history should not be interpreted by the so-called "standards of the time" - which really means the standards set by the seared consciences of the establishment in the Slavery Nations. Slaves knew kidnapping, transportation and slavery was wrong. Moral people at the time were arguing for abolition. As noted by Mr Corbyn in in this year's Bloody Sunday Memorial Lecture, in 1798 the Society of United Irishmen expressed their strident opposition to the Slave trade and Slavery and their solidarity with Toussaint Louverture, the native general in Haiti who committed his life to the total abolition of Slavery. The French Revolution government abolished Slavery much earlier than Great Britain. Slavery persisted in the USA, Romania and Russia until the second half of the 19th century. The Standards of the Times defence is more the go-to excuse for the economic interests of individuals or groups of the time and now.

I would therefore suggest adding the following or similar wording to the draft Confession and Apology:

collectively repent of the hurt caused by our Church and its antecedent bodies IN THE FACE OF THE CLARITY OF OPPOSITION TO THIS SIN BROADCAST BY THE VICTIMS, SAINTS AND OTHERS OF THE TIME, the divisions we have created, our reluctance to face up to the sin of the past, OUR FAILURE TO DILIGENTLY UNCOVER THE EXTENT OF OUR PART IN THIS SIN, OUR SHAMEFUL SUPPRESSION OF WIDER KNOWLEDGE OF OUR PART IN THIS SIN, AND OUR UNWILLINGNESS AND FAILURE TO ENCOURAGE EDUCATION FOR OURSELVES AND OTHERS ABOUT OUR PART IN THIS SIN, AND 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.

I would also like the Church to encourage and support concrete actions by herself and others, not just offeringwords.

Two important actions are as follows.

Firstly, the soonest removal of symbols of glorification of slave owners and their slave capital inheritance where they can easily be physically removed, and prominent notices of apologies and acknowledgements where such assets are too big to be removed. The recent jury verdict in Bristol regarding the removal of the Colston statue demonstrates that when members of the public are presented with reasonable arguments for removal, they agree.

Secondly, positive discrimination to those from Enslaved Nations to become preferred beneficiaries of trust and charitable capital deriving from Slavery, as practical reparations from those funds.

I would suggest adding the following or similar wording:

to find constructive ways by which we can turn this apology and confession into concrete actions of 'repairing justice', ENCOURAGING THE SOONEST REMOVAL OF SYMBOLS OF GLORIFICATION OF SLAVE OWNERS AND THEIR SLAVE CAPITAL INHERITANCE WHERE THEY CAN EASILY BE PHYSICALLY REMOVED, AND PROMINENT NOTICES OF APOLOGIES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS WHERE SUCH ASSETS ARE TOO BIG TO BE REMOVED, AND POSITIVE DISCRIMINATION TO THOSE FROM ENSLAVED NATIONS AS PREFERRED BENEFICIARIES OF TRUST AND CHARITABLE CAPITAL DERIVING FROM SLAVERY, AS A PRACTICAL REPARATION FROM THOSE FUNDS and so contribute to the prophetic work of God's [coming?] kingdom.

Response 22

Having considered the above matter at a church meeting, the members of URC overwhelmingly, but not unanimously, support the principle of offering an apology and reparations in relation to the transatlantic slave trade and its continuing legacy.

Response 23

The discussion document on Legacies of Slavery and draft Apology and Confession were discussed at a Leadership/Trustee meeting (equivalent to Elders in URC) and the proposal was made that we should support this document. This was then taken to a congregation meeting for approval today which it received.

Our discussion was not about the content of the document, or even about the detailed points in the proposed statement, but about whether Apology was the right word to head the title. We wanted to lament the situation and recognise the impact on our own lives here and now, expressing sorrow to those who still suffer the ongoing inequities. We also wanted to commit ourselves to doing whatever we can to take action.

We would therefore support this becoming policy for the URC.

Response 24

My response to your Legacies of Slavery document.

Your statement saying there has been no white slavery since the 1400's as far as I have researched is incorrect.

Matthew 19:14

"Jesus said, Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

200 years ago many children were totally undervalued as they were when Jesus said this to his disciples. Your document is doing exactly this, ignoring what happened to thousands of poor children who were slaves in this country from the age of 7 until the age of 21.

In the late 18th and early 19th century children from the age of 7 were brought, in wagons from London, to work as slaves in the Northern mills, until they were 21 years old. This was at beginning of the Industrial Revolution, at the same period of black slavery. Slaves were what these children were as the following information will prove.

These are the facts:

WHITE SLAVERY AT HIGHER WOODHILL (AND AT BURRS) (A MILL IN BURY)

In 1796, an advert appeared in the *Manchester Chronicle*, containing within a single sentence both a tempting offer, and a palpable threat:

"*RUNAWAY. Two hired servants from Messrs Calrows Cotton Mill, near Bury, on Wednesday the sixth of June. Thomas Warburton, aged 19. Had on when he went off a blue jacket and striped trowsers: is short made, has brown short hair, and wants a joint of the little finger on the right hand. William Kelly, 12 years of age. Had on when he went off a blue jacket and linen trowsers, is short made, and has brown hair. Whoever will give intelligence of the above lads, so that they can be found, shall be handsomely rewarded; and anyone employing them after this public notice will be prosecuted as the law directs.*

Higher Widdle, near Bury, Aug. 1"

The context of this 'manhunt' becomes clear to anyone availing themselves of John Waller's excellent book, *'The real Oliver Twist: Robert Blincoe: A life that illuminates an age'*.
Waller's contention was that Charles Dickens based his character 'Oliver Twist' upon Robert Blincoe, a seven-year old orphan who was taken from the workhouse at St Pancras, to work at Litton Mill in Derbyshire, in 1799.

Oliver Twist as represented within Charles Dickens' narrative.

In later life, Blincoe was to relate his narrative to the prolific Bolton journalist and author John Brown, who published this to a horrified public. Blincoe's ill treatment at Litton Mill had been nothing short of barbaric, and it was only now that the middle classes became aware of the fate of any child unlucky enough to be passed from the parish overseers to northern millowners. Such a child was legally bound, or 'indentured', to his or her employer, until the age of 21.

The youngest such children were just seven! For just bed and board, they were required to work for up to 15 hours per day, six days per week. And just like Warburton and Kelly, you too would be 'short made' if you were fed watery gruel every day, and you too would lose fingers (or even limbs) if you were worked continually in an exhausted state in very close proximity to unguarded mill machinery.

But no-one would make any fuss about orphans brought from far-away places such as Birmingham or even London, and captured absconders were frequently sent to prison for several months, before being returned to the millowner whose conduct had caused them to run away in the first place.

Between the 1790s and the 1830s, many tens of thousands of such child apprentices were brutally worked to exhaustion (and sometimes to death) in textile mills across the north of England.

Historian John Ainsworth related how a new batch of apprentices had arrived at Burrs Mill, and mistakenly used tough oat-cakes to light a fire, disbelieving that this 'bread' might in fact represent part of their diet from then onwards.

The immediate fate of the boys Warburton and Kelly is nowhere recorded, but it is not likely to have had a happy ending, especially if they were returned to the 'care' of Calrow's overseers at Higher Woodhill. We take a walk through Burrs Country Park for pleasure now, but it is difficult to conceive just how these 'slave children' might have viewed this same location just two centuries ago.

Workhouse Children

Many parents were unwilling to allow their children to work in these new textile factories. To overcome this labour shortage factory owners had to find other ways of obtaining workers. One solution to the problem was to buy children from orphanages and workhouses. The children became known as pauper apprentices. This involved the children signing contracts that virtually

made them the property of the factory owner.

John Brown, the author of *Robert Blincoe's Memoir*, explained how eighty children were taken from St. Pancras Workhouse: "In the summer of 1799 a rumour circulated that there was going to be an agreement between the church wardens and the overseers of St. Pancras Workhouse and the owner of a great cotton mill, near Nottingham. The children were told that when they arrived at the cotton mill, they would be transformed into ladies and gentlemen: that they would be fed on roast beef and plum pudding, be allowed to ride their masters' horses, and have silver watches, and plenty of cash in their pockets. In August 1799, eighty boys and girls, who were seven years old, or were considered to be that age, became parish apprentices till they had acquired the age of twenty-one."

Robert Blincoe was disappointed when he arrived at Lowdam Mill, ten miles from Nottingham. "There was no cloth laid on the tables, to which the newcomers had been accustomed in the workhouse - no plates, nor knives, nor forks. At a signal given, the apprentices rushed to this door, and each, as he made way, received his portion, and withdrew to his place at the table. Blincoe was startled, seeing the boys pull out the fore-part of their shirts, and holding it up with both hands, received the hot boiled potatoes allotted for their supper. The girls, less indecently, held up their dirty, greasy aprons, that were saturated with grease and dirt, and having received their allowance, scampered off as hard as they could, to their respective places, where, with a keen appetite, each apprentice devoured her allowance, and seemed anxiously to look about for more. Next, the hungry crew ran to the tables of the newcomers, and voraciously devoured every crust of bread and every drop of porridge they had left."

Pauper apprentices were cheaper to house than adult workers. It cost Samuel Greg who owned the large Quarry Bank Mill at Styal, a £100 to build a cottage for a family, whereas his apprentice house, that cost £300, provided living accommodation for over 90 children. At first the children came from local parishes such as Wilmslow and Macclesfield, but later he went as far as Liverpool and London to find these young workers. To encourage factory owners to take workhouse children, people like Greg were paid between £2 and £4 for each child they employed. Greg also demanded that the children were sent to him with "two shifts, two pairs of stockings and two aprons".

The same approach was taken by the owners of silk mills. George Courtauld, who owned a silk mill in Braintree, Essex, took children from workhouses in London. Although offered children of all ages he usually took them from "within the age of 10 and 13". Courtauld insisted that each child arrived "with a complete change of common clothing". A contract was signed with the workhouse that stated that Courtauld would be paid £5 for each child taken. Another £5 was paid after the child's first year. The children also signed a contract with Courtauld that bound them to the mill until the age of 21. This helped to reduce Courtauld's labour costs. Whereas adult males at Courtauld's mills earned 7s. 2d., children under 11 received only 1s. 5d. a week.

These children were sometimes taken from their parents by force: John Betts wrote a letter to the radical journalist, Richard Carlile, to explain what was happening: "In 1805 when Samuel Davy was seven years of age he was sent from the workhouse in Southwark in London to Mr. Watson's Mill

at Penny Dam near Preston. Later his brother was also sent to work in a mill. The parents did not know where Samuel and his brother were. The loss of her children, so preyed on the mind of Samuel's mother that it brought on insanity, and she died in a state of madness."

Owners of large textile mills purchased large numbers of children from workhouses in all the large towns and cities. By the late 1790s about a third of the workers in the cotton industry were pauper apprentices. Child workers were especially predominant in large factories in rural areas. For example, in 1797, of the 310 wortkers employed by Birch Robinson & Co in the village of Backbarrow, 210 were parish apprentices. However, in the major textile towns, such as Manchester and Oldham, parish apprenticeships was fairly uncommon.

Sarah Carpenter, interviewed in *The Ashton Chronicle* (23rd June, 1849)

My father was a glass blower. When I was eight years old my father died and our family had to go to the Bristol Workhouse. My brother was sent from Bristol workhouse in the same way as many other children were - cart-loads at a time. My mother did not know where he was for two years. He was taken off in the dead of night without her knowledge, and the parish officers would never tell her where he was.

It was the mother of Joseph Russell who first found out where the children were, and told my mother. We set off together, my mother and I, we walked the whole way from Bristol to Cressbrook Mill in Derbyshire. We were many days on the road.

Mrs. Newton fondled over my mother when we arrived. My mother had brought her a present of little glass ornaments. She got these ornaments from some of the workmen, thinking they would be a very nice present to carry to the mistress at Cressbrook, for her kindness to my brother. My brother told me that Mrs. Newton's fondling was all a blind; but I was so young and foolish, and so glad to see him again; that I did not heed what he said, and could not be persuaded to leave him. They would not let me stay unless I would take the shilling binding money. I took the shilling and I was very proud of it.

They took me into the counting house and showed me a piece of paper with a red sealed horse on which they told me to touch, and then to make a cross, which I did. This meant I had to stay at Cressbrook Mill till I was twenty one.

John Birley interviewed in *The Ashton Chronicle* (19th May, 1849)

I was born in Hare Street, Bethnal Green, London, in the year 1805. My father died when I was two years old, leaving two children, myself and Sarah my sister. My mother kept us both till I was about five years old, and then she took badly and was taken to the London Hospital. My sister and I were taken to the Bethnal Green Workhouse. My mother died and we stayed in the workhouse. We had good food, good beds and given liberty two or three times a week. We were taught to read and in every respect were treated kindly.

The same year my mother died, I being between six and seven years of age, there came a man looking for a number of parish apprentices. We were all ordered to come into the board room, about forty of us. There were, I dare say, about twenty gentlemen seated at a table, with pens and paper before them. Our names were called out one by one. We were all standing before them in a row. My name was called and I stepped out in the middle of the room. They said, "Well John, you are a fine lad, would you like to go into the country?" I said "Yes sir".

We had often talked over amongst ourselves how we should like to be taken into the country, Mr. Nicholls the old master, used to tell us what fine sport we should have amongst the hills, what time we should have for play and pleasure. He said we should have plenty of roast beef and get plenty of money, and come back gentlemen to see our friends.

The committee picked out about twenty of us, all boys. In a day or two after this, two coaches came up to the workhouse door. We were got ready. They gave us a shilling piece to take our attention, and we set off. I can remember a crowd of women standing by the coaches, at the workhouse door, crying "shame on them, to send poor little children away from home in that fashion." Some of them were weeping. I heard one say, "I would run away if I was them." They drove us to the Paddington Canal, where there was a boat provided to take us.

John Brown, *A Memoir of Robert Blincoe* (1828)

In the summer of 1799 a rumour circulated that there was going to be an agreement between the church wardens and the overseers of St. Pancras Workhouse and the owner of a great cotton mill, near Nottingham. The children were told that when they arrived at the cotton mill, they would be transformed into ladies and gentlemen: that they would be fed on roast beef and plum pudding, be allowed to ride their masters' horses, and have silver watches, and plenty of cash in their pockets. In August 1799, eighty boys and girls, who were seven years old, or were considered to be that age, became parish apprentices till they had acquired the age of twenty-one.

During this period the Christian Church remained complacent to the fact that many of these mill owners, who owned the child slaves, were the same people who were building churches.

I think that the supporting documentation clearly shows that slavery existed after the 1400's. It is both incorrect and naive to suggest that slavery did not exist after 1400 as well as saying that all slaves were black.

More research on this period may find that the division between the North and the South of England started during the Industrial Revolution. Mill owners, once they had made a fortune and others with wealth, moved south to get away from the polluted over crowded northern towns.

Has any research been done on the descendants of these child slaves? Perhaps they are still living

in poverty in overcrowded northern towns.

The Media state that there are over a million slaves in the UK today many as young as seven working in the sex trade.

As a church we should be putting all our time and energy into spreading the good news of Jesus Christ, which could help so many people who are suffering from social and mental issues of our time.

Response 25

1. We feel that the Task Group's work has been as thorough as possible over this difficult subject.
2. The proposal is appropriate and we do feel that the proposed draft Apology and Confession to be most apposite.
3. It is difficult to envisage just what form such reparation could take. To give money seems quite inadequate and misplaced, but we would be most interested to hear just what the Task Group's proposals will be on this, assuming that the General Assembly gives its approval.
4. As indicated, we could come to no agreed form of reparation that would fit the gross injustices suffered.

We would like to express our thanks to the Task Group for the time and effort they have clearly put into creating the Consultation document.

Response 26

We are hoping to have further discussions on this theme but I submit the following minute in our Church meeting minutes of Jan 23rd 2022.

" Legacies of Slavery Task group. There was discussion about the consultation documents prepared by the URC Task Group. We considered the questions raised by the group and the need to issue an apology for past events. Some members considered that though it is appropriate to acknowledge our history, the issuing of an apology is not something to which they could subscribe even though some individuals in the wider Church may find the concept of an apology to be helpful to them. Some considered that the report was too narrow in its focus and should have emphasized practical ways of removing current instances of racial injustice and to combat the broader issues of modern slavery. This feedback will be passed to the task group."

Response 27

Unfortunately we did not have the time to arrange to include this in a service or have an ordinary church meeting where it could have been discussed. It was tagged onto the end of our AGM and I feel I did not have enough time to answer all the questions fully with the information I had from

the zoom consultation/discussion. There was no opportunity to talk about reparation and no opinions given. I did pass on all the information by email and also made available printed copies for people to read, however some commented that it was "long and involved". Another comment was that rather than focusing on the past we should be concentrating on "modern slavery", - and my reply that this consultation was leading to that was largely ignored.
Conclusion - (my own) we definitely need more education. I have separated the cultures as I think that might be useful to your thinking.

Response 28

1. Transatlantic slavery is a fact of history - which we now consider abominable. It was a practice that we cannot approve of.

2. A URC apology ... it is hard to apologize for something that was done by other people long ago. However, we recognize the need to acknowledge the practice of the transatlantic slave trade as utterly wrong. And 'apology' can and should be made for the ongoing effects of the history of the transatlantic slave trade - and that apology must mean that we look at our awareness and attitudes now.

3. We must commit to a future that is different - and the work of becoming an 'anti-racist' church is something we'd support.

Response 29

Having read all of the subject matter my first response was a mixture of anger and disbelief. Why you may ask;
The country is recovering from the worst pandemic for over a century, the economy is in danger of going into recession, people are being forced into fuel poverty, food banks are on the increase and what is the URC response to all this, to apologise for something that occurred over 200 years ago. Then you wonder why congregations are diminishing and churches are finding it difficult to attract new members. It used to be that in times of national crisis people would turn to the church, I doubt very much that happens today.

Child and adult slavery is happening today in various parts of the world, that's what the church should be vocal about.
Christians are being tortured and killed around the world for their beliefs. The church should be organising demonstrations outside of every embassy that is responsible for these atrocities. Instead, I hear nothing, I read little or nothing.

Speaking as someone who has been on the receiving end of racial prejudice because of my colour, both verbally and physically, it is my strong belief that organisations such as BLM inflame matters. They are a left-wing anti-democratic anti-police and anti-white political organisation. Who are they, or anyone else to say black lives matter? Are we not equal in the eyes of God? If the church really wants to make things better and have a fairer just society then they can start by treating everyone equally.

Response 30

Overwhelmingly it was felt that the most important thing today is that we should learn from history, take responsibility to learn from the evils of the past slavery and prejudice perpetrated by our ancestors, and focus now on the need to be outspoken on issues of modern day racism, modern day slavery and human trafficking, and by being careful not to support companies who still use it today.

It was hoped that the URC and our church do recognise the need to be proactive in promoting anti – racism in our communities to ensure a fair society. That ALL lives should matter.

The majority response from the congregation was that we can't rewrite history, and people didn't believe we should be held accountable for the legacies of slavery.

The majority response was that we should not apologise , but 4 people were happy to apologise if it was felt that it would go some way to helping people to move forward.
Some of the congregation though weren't interested and thought it a waste of time and money.

Moving forward we all felt that today it's vital that we work as Christians, to stand up to racism wherever we find it, and to shine the light and love of God on all we meet.

Response 31

Sadly, we did not have time for everyone to watch the video, which we will try to do over the coming months.

1. **What is your response to the URC's work and engagement with the Legacies of (transatlantic) Slavery as outlined in the video presentation and consultation overview paper?**
   There was a mixed response, with some members feeling that this was a well prepared and important piece of work, whilst others couldn't see the relevance.

2. **How do you feel about the proposal for the URC to offer an apology for transatlantic slavery**

and its continuing legacies? And what is your response to the draft Apology and Confession proposed by the Task Group?

Again, a mixed response with some feeling that this was a long overdue apology, with some surprised to hear that the Baptist Union had offered a similar apology many years ago. Several people voiced concerned at the use of the word Apology, wanting to reframe this as an Acknowledgment or Acceptance that this dreadful trade took place.

3. **How do you feel about the proposal for the URC to offer some form of reparations (repairing justice) in relation to the legacies of transatlantic slavery?**

There was concern about what this might entail, further detail being requested.

4. **What specific ideas for repairing justice would you like to see implemented in your local community?**

No ideas were forthcoming (but as the Minister, I'm keen that we explore this more fully and try to develop some ideas, I sense that this will be a long process) …

<u>Response 32</u>

Our Elders met on 2nd February 2022. Having read/viewed the LOS material they considered the questions for consideration and wish to make the following responses.

- The Atlantic Slave Trade and the treatment meted out to those enslaved by it were wrong. No right thinking person in today's society can view them in any other way.
- We, accept and recognise that much of our city and the wealth of certain families were built on the proceeds of the slave trade. We cannot condone that but neither can we change it.
- However: Attitudes and accepted behaviours change and adapt over time. Sadly the behaviour of those involved in the Slave Trade was seen as acceptable and even beneficial in their time, just as the position of women as chattels, the appalling treatment endured by Industrial Revolution factory workers and the practice of sending small boys up chimneys was accepted as normal then. But, thankfully, not today.
- The Transatlantic Slave Trade involved many different people, including some non-whites who also benefitted from it.
- In our view one can only apologise for one's own misdeeds. To apologise for someone else's actions is meaningless.
- Words are cheap. A proper apology has to come from the heart, from the person who has committed the misdeed.
- The URC did not exist at the time of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Its component denominations did but, again, their norms were very different from those of today.
- It is dangerous to judge the past by the standards of the present. Future generations may well judge our own society's accepted practices as unacceptable.

So,

- Overall our view is that the Transatlantic Slave Trade was an evil, but an evil of the past. We cannot change what happened then but we can and should learn from it so that it NEVER happens again.
- Unfortunately slavery itself is not a thing of the past. Both genders and many nationalities are trafficked and sold as slaves in today's world. Perhaps we should be doing what we can to halt that ongoing trade rather than trying to make ourselves feel good by making rather meaningless gestures which are too little, too late.
- Christianity teaches us that all humans, whatever their gender or colour, are loved and valued by God. (That was not always the case and some of our gay friends are still not accepted by the church.) As Christians, surely it is our duty to treat everyone as equal and try to love them as Jesus does. That is the way to go forward and that is the message we should be spreading. Inclusivity comes from meaningful deeds, not meaningless words. History will judge us by how we act.

Response 33

After careful, and prayerful consideration we strongly believe that we should not apologise for the past but that we should learn from it and move forward.

Response 34

Legacies of slavery a response.

May I begin by clearly affirming my support for speaking out against slavery and thank the task group for their work. However clearly slavery is a result of original sin but to claim it is 'the original sin' discredits our Bible based denomination.

The shipping of slaves across the Atlantic again is clearly a stain on our nation and those who had such scant regard for other human beings must be condemned. I do however think we need to ask who brought these people to the slave markets, it seems that these people were from neighbouring tribes and kingdoms or slave traders from North Africa, and while I recognise that we should not make excuses or try pass responsibility I do think that this is a much more complex picture than that painted in the document.

I also find it difficult to apologise for history. The times we are talking of were days when my grandfather's grandfather was working down the mines of the Durham coalface as a young child pushing coal tubs to the surface, coal which also played a major role in Britain's commercial and industrial revolutions. At the time of nationalisation, the mine owners were also paid for their property without any thought for those who had suffered doing the work to create their profits. While I do not feel apology is the appropriate course of action, I do feel some expression needs to be made and I personally feel a Psalm of Lament to be an appropriate Biblical reaction. We must have those within our church able to form such a response.

I also feel that if we are to offer some financial response this would be best done through funding charities involved in modern slavery. Indeed, this is where I would like to see our response directed in positive support in the fight against modern slavery in all its forms be that through young girls trapped in the sex trade, or those smuggled into our country and living in sheds or lorry containers.

Finally, I would observe that there is a real slant towards racism in the document, another blight upon our nation. May I ask that rather than combining these two issues we begin a proper meaningful debate about racism in our church and nation, remembering black lives matter but so does every other life no matter what colour or background, for in Christ there is 'no longer any distinction between Gentiles and Jews, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarians, savages, slaves and free men, but Christ is all, Christ in all.' (Colossians 3:11). Let this be the bases of our discussion as we recognise the wrongs of past and present and seek to bring the message of God's healing Grace.

Response 35

Having distributed the documents to the congregation and members, (our minister) led a service focused on the legacy of slavery on Sunday January 30th and this service was followed by a church meeting in which the questions below were discussed.

Please note, we could not watch the video together as the 4G signal in our sanctuary is not good enough for live streaming (are we meant to livestream YouTube other than for personal use anyway?) and we could find no downloadable source of the video. This is a more general issue that URC communications need to address.

1. **What is your response to the URC's work and engagement with the Legacies of (transatlantic) Slavery as outlined in the video presentation and consultation overview paper?**

We consider that the URC is right to engage with this issue.

We are concerned that this particular engagement might lead to tunnel vision and blind us to some of the other forms of slavery and exploitation that have taken place and are taking place.

We fully understand the reason for this focus on Trans-Atlantic slavery but there is risk that such focus could indeed lead to a sense of hurt, through being ignored, of other individuals. An example was given of a hypothetical person who was trafficked to the UK from Eastern Europe for some form of slavery.

We are complicit in this when we, even unknowingly, buy goods from a factory in which this person was forced to work without a wage, and no means of leaving.

We considered the analogy of Holocaust Memorial Day last week. The scale and nature of the Holocaust is undeniably horrific, and of course we agree with the sentiment 'never again'. The reality though is that whilst we are looking back at the horrors, so called ethnic cleansing is happening to this day in various parts of the world.

2. **How do you feel about the proposal for the URC to offer an apology for transatlantic slavery and its continuing legacies? And what is your response to the draft Apology and Confession proposed by the Task Group?**

There was a sense that the legal status of an apology was less significant than a common interpretation. We believe that we can make an apology to someone whom we have wronged. We don't feel we can apologise for what people we never knew did. To offer an apology in this way seems an act of political correctness and devalues the meaning of sincere apology, which should come directly from the heart of the perpetrator of the wrongdoing. We wholeheartedly agree that we regret such things ever happened and apologise for our complicity, both knowing and unknowing, in perpetuating the legacy and the hurt. For this reason, we would like the third bullet of the apology and confession to have the highlighted words removed "offer our apology to God and to our sisters and brothers in Africa, the Caribbean, and their descendants, including those in our midst, for all that has created and still perpetuates such deep hurt, which originated from the horrors of slavery." Likewise, we are not comfortable of the use of the term "antecedent bodies" in the 4th bullet. How can we speak for them?

The rest of the apology and confession we think is well put.

3. **How do you feel about the proposal for the URC to offer some form of reparations (repairing justice) in relation to the legacies of transatlantic slavery?**

We found this question difficult to address in abstract and our responses overlap with question 4. An overwhelming view was that whilst acknowledging and learning from the past, we must focus on looking forwards. It is noticeable that people who have suffered irreversible tragedy gain comfort from e.g., securing a change in the law that could prevent such a thing happening to others.

- Can we be more clearly vocal in our anti-racism, ensuring we understand the difference between not racist and anti-racist - perhaps through working with/supporting organisations for whom this is a focus?
- Seek out information on, and increase awareness of modern-day slavery, trafficking and exploitation, including in this country and in places we buy our goods from – encourage responsible consumerism.

4. **What specific ideas for repairing justice would you like to see implemented in your local community (and/or beyond)?**

- Both Fairtrade and environmental action contribute to improving livelihoods in Africa and the Caribbean. Publicity materials, to this effect, for churches who are Fairtrade and Eco Churches would be great.
- A pledge for individual churches that can be used in worship and on noticeboards, web sites etc.
- An information leaflet with examples of what being anti-racist might mean for individuals in our daily lives and social interactions.

Response 37

The Leadership Team has discussed the documents related to the Legacy of Slavery issued by the denomination.
We are in full agreement with and embrace the proposed Apology and Confession to be presented to the General Assembly at Swanwick.
We acknowledge that as members of a predominantly white, Western society we enjoy a lifestyle developed from a prosperity built on the exploitation and inhuman treatment of our black brothers and sisters. We recognise the collective trauma which has embedded itself in the consciousness of 'black culture' over the centuries and wish to do whatever we can to bring about healing and justice.
We abhor all forms of slavery, both historical and contemporary, and will work to build attitudes within our own communities which uphold the dignity and value of all people of all races and creeds.

Response 38

We received the documents and the consultation video discussed as soon as they were issued. They were asked to bring their views to a Trustees' Meeting which was held last night in order that a collective response could be forwarded to your team.

Question 1

There was overwhelming appreciation of the work done and the materials produced. Trustees felt that the URC can be congratulated for the depth of detail which had gone into producing the background to the debate. Several expressed the view that the team can be regarded as "ahead of the field".

Question 2

It was felt that our views were reflected in the responses already compiled and forwarded to us. This is an enormous task and the draft Apology and Confession expresses the difficulties and sensitivities very aptly. It adopts the appropriate tone and it requests forgiveness in the right manner.

Question 3

This was felt to be a question which would divide opinion. Trustees felt that this would need to be done step by step and shared with other denominations so that reparation is seen to be done by all Christians.

Question 4

As an Ecumenical Partnership (URC/Methodist) we propose to be conscious of future information from both denominations. It was felt that the Methodist guidance was "not in the same league" as the materials from the Task Group. As a church, we attempt to incorporate the idea of a rainbow

nation into our work and are planning to incorporate this theme into some new artwork.

In summary we feel that the Task Group's publications have been laudable. The work needs to go public. It needs to be kept "live" in all we do. We will be supportive at every step.

Thank-you for the in- depth work your team has done and for sharing the materials with us.

Response 39

This is something I would not have thought about, but having read it, I agree that it is right to consider and repent for the terrible actions of our forebears in relation to slavery.
I note that the bible mentions slavery, as it was part of the culture then, but the fact that all should be considered equal in Christ does not equate with treating anyone as a second-class citizen.
And so I agree it is appropriate for the URC to repent before God for this, and issue the apology, also for every person to he encouraged to examine ourselves, consider, repent and get rid of any inherent racist tendencies which we may have inherited, even subconsciously, and to be always aware of these going forward to ensure a fair society.
This is already happening in the media and education, but we need to make sure every church also has no shred of racism in it. The younger generation are better with this, we need to make sure that some of the toxic views of the older generation are not perpetuated.
As regards leadership of the church, I think some of the apparent inequality could be because traditionally, non white believers have been in the baptist or pentecostal churches? Is that because they felt excluded from the others though? As regards reparations, apart from education of our churches towards diversity, I don't know what can be done, I think any specific targeting of non white communities would come across very wrong, we just need to highlight the horror of slavery and prejudice in any form, and work towards diversity, as the church is historically very bad at this. Interfaith dialogue may also help.

Response 40

We are an anti-racist church, open to all irrespective of ethnicity, nationality, gender or sexuality. We are all appalled by the history of slavery and acknowledge that our country was shamefully involved, but we feel that a lament of sorrow about the behaviour of our country and our church in the past would be more appropriate than an apology for something which happened in the distant past and that we should now move on, ensuring that we remain aware of our own behaviour.

Response 41

Just to say thank you for the huge amount of work and thought which has gone into this and into

the document produced - which I fully support.

Just a question - why Apology and Confession? Confession and Apology seems a more logical order. It works better for me. We have to know what is wrong and own it before we apologise. However I recognise that for some it might read better as it is - and it is absolutely not a deal breaker - just something to raise now rather than on the floor of Assembly (and if someone else does raise it you can now say it has been raised and thought about!).

Response 42

Context

I have been a member of the United Reformed Church for over forty years. I have been an Elder for approximately eight years. It should be noted that the comments below **are mine and mine alone**.

I am married to a black woman from Mauritius whose great grandparents were slaves and it is suspected in the family that her grand parents were child slaves before abolition. Thus I am not uninformed on the subject.

Comments

I was frankly amazed when I saw this consultation. Our Church is struggling with our excellent Minister, having to oversee three churches. We have a small group of Elders who struggle to fulfill our day to day responsibilities in relation to the church. Today I led the service. Because we only have 1/3 of a minister we have to find ways to continue worship. I take a service once a month. If it was not for the fact we have a retired minister in the congregation (now in her 80s, we would not be able to manage weekly worship.

Financially we rob Peter to pay Paul almost every month. We are eating our way through our reserve investments (for which I have had to take responsibility following the sudden death of the previous incumbent). Our congregation is largely elderly, with only two children attending regularly.

The subject of the legacy of slavery has little relevance to the day to day struggles of a local church. The church secretary has circulated the consultation papers to the membership. Out of respect to her and the democratic traditions of the church we will have a brief debate. However, perhaps you can tell me what item I can leave off the church meeting agenda to accommodate this? We have to limit our discussions at both Elder's and church meetings as if the meetings are longer than about an hour people leave and we become inquorate. It is difficult, bordering on the impossible to encourage members to stay at meetings to discuss those items that are legally essential to the running of the church without having to discuss something that has no relevance to the day to day running of our church.

You will not be unaware that the Church of England has come under attack for the approach of its hierarchy and Bishops who are more concerned with bureaucracy than with the existence of its parish church's. It is most disappointing to see the URC heading in the same direction; jumping on fashionable bandwagons rather than supporting its local church's.

As a local church our biggest expenditure is M&M contributions. This is approximately half of our outgoings in a year. As it would appear that the URC has money to spare to spent on this initiative then I would argue you do not need such a large contribution. I suspect that the costs of this consultation, video etc. would pay for a Minister. I will therefore be proposing to church meeting that we reduce our M&M contribution by 30% as a response to this consultation.

I am well aware of the requirement of the church to partake in the social agenda; but fundamentally you need a church to be able to take that position. I was, for many years a labour part and trade union activist and am still a trade union member. I often see this type of issue occurring. The URC, it may be argued, cannot "fix" declining membership and a lack of ministers so distracts itself with "worthy causes" that have no impact in the reality that local church's face.

I am aware that you may will dismiss these views as being old fashioned etc; but I am the person, along with my fellow Elders spending hours and hours of their time keeping the local church going. I also make a considerable financial contribution to the local church both directly and indirectly. The URC was, until your consultation, a major beneficiary of my not inconsiderable estate. Not any more. I do not want my hard earned cash being used to talk about "legacies of slavery" when the local church is being ground down. It really is a matter of priorities, I do not see "legacies of slavery" being more important than maintaining a URC presence in this town. Repatriations – oh please….,

Response 43

Hello, I read your documents which were sent round to our church and church members. I found myself feeling angered, and I wrote a response which I shared with church members. I received a number of replies with comments which I have attached to my response. Please find all this in an attachment

Response 43a

It seems that the powers that be in the URC are finding something else for us to feel sinful over. I care about the people around me whoever they are. I love to meet people from different backgrounds and communities, but yet again, there is this pressure to feel bad about ourselves. One's self esteem is a very fragile but important commodity, and is necessary for our mental health. Yet, so often the church attacks this. We are not allowed to celebrate the good in our society.

I feel in no way responsible for the antics of the British aristocracy, who for generations have wielded power to their own advantage. My family, although white, were also victims. The slave trade funded the industrial revolution, and various enclosures acts allowed the slave traders to become wealthy landowners. Tenant farmers are still to this day paying rent for the privilege of growing our food. My grandfather, as a teenager worked as a scavenger in a cotton mill, crawling about risking life and limb under moving machinery, to gather fallen pieces of cotton.

There are many inequalities in society, and we need to work to give opportunities to everyone, whatever their ethnic background, and to erode unearned privilege. But let us do it in a spirit of love, to one another, to all men, but not in a spirit of blame and contrition.

Like you my grandparents were brought up in poverty. My grandfather was working in the coal mines at eight years of age. Lord Bute made plenty of money from coal. We all agree with the end of slavery and that black lives matter as well as white, or yellow ,or brown but like you I feel that the URC are just bringing up another thing to beat us over the head with. I wholly agree with your response and I too feel anger that we are again somehow made to feel guilt for our forefathers actions.

Response 43b

Thank you for sending us your very articulate response. I agree with your sentiments and feel our time and thoughts would be much better spent dealing with the inequalities in our society today rather than dwelling on those in the past for which we can do little.

Response 43c

Totally agree - there is so much inequality today that we must try to address. We hear of young children in some countries having to exist by picking through rubbish on waste tips, young girls from Eastern Europe are sold as sex slaves, and even illegal trading of body parts- we must work harder to wipe out shocking inequalities such as this. Not easy to do, obviously, but infinitely more relevant than past events we cannot alter

Response 43d

Very well said. I was thinking myself of the horrors of the industrial revolution, Highland clearances and the rest.

Response 44

Elders' Response to Slavery Consultation 27-01-2022

It was not possible to consult members of the Congregation partly because of our still being closed,

but also because of the very short period given for the response.

Living and working in Liverpool, we are aware of the history of Slavery and how our city was involved. We are proud that our city has been proactive in tackling the problem for many years. We have a Slavery Museum and there have been tours round relevant sites. There has been a suggestion that instead of changing street names, blue plaques should be put up with useful information.
We are pleased that the URC is tackling the problem of Slavery, which fills us with horror. However, we feel we live in a very different world which makes it difficult to totally empathise.
Racism is still a huge problem in Great Britain and the world today and must be recognised. Young children are not racist but accepting. It is adults who pass on these ideas.
Reparation is difficult – yes, we must tell people that we recognise the wrongs of past years, but any funds should be spent to stop the 'Slavery' of today and used to educate people so that we accept that we all matter whatever our colour.

Response 45

Our Church has now had the opportunity to discuss your Consultation Document and your proposals on an Apology and Confession on Slavery particularly transatlantic slavery.

Whilst we could go along with the first three points in the proposed Apology, we struggled with the final three points. We thought the transatlantic and British Colonial slaveholding to be too narrow and that the wording to be rather harsh towards the Church.

The point was made, the Church also benefited from the exploitation of workers, particularly children in our mills and pits. Indeed, most non-conformist churches were built by mill owners. An Apology is empty unless we do something about slavery in the world today, the amount of people being trafficked is prolific. In our area too, there is exploitation and grooming the likes of which we have not seen before so we felt the focus should be on the present rather than the past.

That said we recognise that much has been done in so many areas of society to promote racial equality and understanding – one can see this in our legal structures, employment law and in the very varied racial mix of successful people in the media, entertainment and sporting worlds to mention a few. From time to time, it is sadly inevitable that issues such as the brutal murder of George Floyd and the alleged racial abuse of a Yorkshire cricketer recently will occur and are such a setback and a reminder that much is still to be done.

Because of the difficulty of apologizing for the actions of our antecedents (over which we had no control) we would prefer to 'recognise' that with hindsight their actions were totally against God's will. We must resolve to commit ourselves going forward in a true spirit of sorrow for the past to repairing justice and to work to promote true racial harmony and to eradicate all the many different

forms of slavery which still exist in the world today.

Response 46

Thank you very much for your work in this area and the information you have sent us.

We support your work and agree with the need for apology. However there is no mention in the material of the slavery that still goes on: workers kept as slaves in this country and living in fear that if they speak out they will be sent home; young people trafficked from other countries for the British sex trade.

Much as we need to apologise for the past, we also need to help those who are suffering now, to ensure that in 20 years' time we are not apologising to them for doing nothing.

What commitments can we make as a church to educating ourselves about what slavery looks like in this country, and where to go with our questions if we see something that makes us suspicious?

Response 47

Five URC members were present, and there was one written response

URC Legacies of Slavery Consultation

We are unanimous in not caring for the word "apologise" with all its implications and would prefer the phrase to "acknowledge" the hurt caused in the past. There was a lengthy discussion of this whole topic. We are all much better informed than we were about the history of the Transatlantic Slave Trade but do not feel that **we** can apologise for the past atrocities;(we do understand however that an apology -or acknowledgement-can be a huge comfort to those affected in the past and the present,) To quote your own paper, "although we're not responsible for the sins of our forebears centuries ago, we definitely are responsible for allowing them to poison our society in the 21st Century".

Note supplied from 1 member- "We would be happy with apologising for our slowness in acknowledging the issues and any hurt caused by the church currently and in the recent past". This was not specifically discussed in the meeting, and the concept of the word APOLOGY was rejected at the time

What we can do, after a slow start, is to become aware of current incidents which are reported daily such as domestic slavery in this country, and the latest news of young girls in Romania being groomed for trafficking to the UK. Here in our part of (locality) we live in a largely "white, Anglo Saxon Protestant" and rural spot. Diversity and open racism is found further away in Halifax, Leeds

and Manchester, but with little direct experience ourselves it is important that we recognise how sheltered we have been from facing the legacies of slavery. Other associated topics seen as important were the controversial issue of cutting Foreign Aid and the failure to distribute Coronavirus Vaccines equitably.

Response 48

I have been thinking about how to constructively broach the Legacies of Slavery discussion in our Church Meeting in a way that helps members to open up a discussion about racism and the impact of slavery. In an increasingly multi-ethnic local church this is an important discussion, but not one to embark on lightly. I am still not clear to how to do this and am taking some advice. However, it is clear to me that if we can see a way to a useful discussion of this it will take more than one church meeting. We would probably need to broach the subject at the January Church Meeting (this Sunday), give people the paperwork to go away to read and return to it in February Church Meeting. However, I note that the deadline for feedback is 7th February, which we are clearly not going to achieve on this basis.

Is there any point feeding back to you in late February, or given that your deadline has passed will it be too late (in which case I can save myself the trouble of putting this on the Church Meeting agenda)?

Response 49

The legacy of slavery report was discussed at our church meeting in January and further discussed in our elders meeting with the following being the outcome.

Legacies of Slavery Consultation. – Discussion took place and it was general agreement that we wanted to stand against injustice, therefore we support the sentiment but there were split views about making an apology feeling it was too late to do so. It was mentioned that we maybe ought to concentrate more on modern day slavery.

I hope this is of some use to you on our thinking.

Response 50

1. **What is your response to the URC's work and engagement with the Legacies of (transatlantic) Slavery as outlined in the video presentation and consultation overview paper?**

We should be fully aware of Slavery and its impact on the countries involved. We should also be willing to learn from the mistakes of the past and move forward together but the URC should not be required to apologise for events which took place many years ago by someone else.

2. **How do you feel about the proposal for the URC to offer an apology for transatlantic slavery and its continuing legacies? And what is your response to the draft Apology and Confession proposed by the Task Group?**

Slavery was abolished due to the work of abolitionists such as Clarkson and Wilberforce and rightly so. Their tireless work demonstrated the strength of feeling and repentance of the time.

3. **How do you feel about the proposal for the URC to offer some form of reparations (repairing justice) in relation to the legacies of transatlantic slavery?**

History demonstrates the reparation justice in the strength of feeling of repentance already in practice, as we continue to share the horrors of slavery through education and example.

It is of great concern to see the statue of Edward Colston pulled down from its plinth and defaced. Not because we agree with his involvement in the Slave Trade, but because it does not allow for redemption and the good, he eventually did for the city of Bristol. If we remove/alter the past we fail to learn from it and are in far greater danger of repeating it.

4. **What specific ideas for repairing justice would you like to see implemented in your local community (and/or beyond)?**

To offer a warm welcome and the hand of fellowship/friendship to all who enter.
To continue to use programmes of education to enlighten and share the need for **JUSTICE** for all.

Response 51

We are a small congregation in an area of council housing and a small transitory population living in temporary housing as well as number of supported living projects for the vulnerable. The congregation is culturally diverse. The church members had copy of the paperwork prior to Christmas and at the Church Meeting on 23rd January chaired by one of our Team Minister. We discussed the papers and questions.

1. **What is your response to the URC's work and engagement with the Legacies of (transatlantic) Slavery as outlined in the video presentation and consultation overview paper?**

We support the work and pray that as a denomination we accept the need for an apology.

2. **How do you feel about the proposal for the URC to offer an apology for transatlantic slavery and its continuing legacies? And what is your response to the draft Apology and Confession proposed by the Task Group?**

The church felt strongly that it was clear cut that the church needed to offer an apology and that

the white members of our church have continue to have benefited from the slave trade and that the slave trade was wrong and a sin against black people. We felt why has it taken this long to act however we acknowledge it remain a controversial and painful issue but that the draft apology and confession seems to meet the right tone and wording as a response to this sin.

3. **How do you feel about the proposal for the URC to offer some form of reparations (repairing justice) in relation to the legacies of transatlantic slavery?**

It is right that this needs to be addressed and maybe offering some funding/grants or project to help build bridges and address the issue is needed but how that works we were unsure.

4. **What specific ideas for repairing justice would you like to see implemented in your local community (and/or beyond)?**

We need to work in providing a welcoming inclusive anti- racist Christian fellowship and witness to the community. We will need to consider this question more at future church meetings.

Response 52

(We) endorse the work and engagement of URC concerning the Legacies of Slavery, but were concerned that more should be undertaken to combat modern slavery.

Response 53

The conditions of the pandemic have limited the opportunities for our Congregation to meet together and our next meeting will address the issue of registering for Same Sex marriage. We are unable to provide a response from a Congregational Meeting before the deadline. Whilst I am sure the members of our church would strongly support any statement that is against racism I wonder if there would be much enthusiasm for the process of apologising to a rather vaguely defined group of people about things that happened in former generations with a rather vague connection to the church.

Response 54

1: I'm afraid that our church, felt the whole consultation was 'overkill' and that the need is for a drive towards , not just racial equality but social justice for all.

2: We feel that acknowledgement for past wrongs be given and regret expressed.

3: Once again, education is the key, both to lift the slave mentality from black people and for white people to accept that everyone is equal, regardless of colour, creed, ethnicity or sexual orientation.

4: We have no first hand knowledge of problems as our town has only about 2 or 3 black families living here.

Sorry if this is not want you want to hear but it is as expressed by our church leadership team.

Response 55

Having discussed this at Elders' level, our response to the consultation papers is as follows:

- As the papers say, this was a long time ago, and whilst we agree with points made in the background information, none of it seems to be new.
- But we ask why is there a need to offer a meaningless apology, to be read only by those who might come across it, for something we cannot begin to put right or compensate for? Words have no value unless they are followed up with practical action. What real action is going to be taken? We cannot see how this begins to make amends for the dark days of the past – no words can.
- What legacy of slavery exists today that can be put right by just offering what might be seen by some as just some sanctimonious words?
- But surely what is relevant is what we are doing today to ensure everyone is treated fairly and has equal opportunities. Shouldn't we be focused on dealing with today's racial injustice, along with taking all steps to ensure we really are an anti-racist and all-inclusive church.
- Slavery, albeit in a different way, occurred in many parts of the UK right through the 19thC and well into the 20thC. At one time Blackburn was the wealthiest place in the UK but that wealth, built on King Cotton and coal, was owned by the few who made their money at the expense of the majority of the working population. They received very low wages, lived in desperate conditions in tied property, with no redress and no chance to escape. This was slavery in all but name but these people are generally ignored by groups who seem very keen to focus on the more "fashionable" legacy of transatlantic slavery.

As a white, older-aged Eldership, we accept we cannot fully understand the problems faced by many of the minority groups and we do not try to pretend that we do. But you to will appreciate that from the above brief points, our Eldership see this proposal as a distraction from the real problems being suffered by too many in today's world. On that basis we cannot support the making of this Statement of Apology.

However, we would support a programme of repairing justice that is more than just nice words, both in here in the UK and in any parts of the world which are still scarred by the legacies of slavery.

Response 56

I write to protest in the strongest terms about the suggestion that the URC should apologise for historic abuses. This is the very worst type of pointless, politically correct virtue signalling, that makes us a laughing stock. It can achieve nothing because we are talking about history and that can't be changed. One should never and can never judge history by present day values.

As an Elder for well over 40 years, if the Church were to apologise on my behalf I would no longer be a member of the URC and would find another denomination in which to worship.

Having just left an Elders meeting where this subject was discussed, I am glad to say that all the Elders present agreed with my comments.

In addition I would also like to ask how much money, time and resources have been wasted by the URC considering this none subject!

Our Church was recently asked by Synod what we felt were the factors that prevented growth of the URC, I have to say this paper perfectly demonstrates why the Church membership is dwindling so quickly.

Response 57

1. We are very much in support of the URC's work in this area, feel that it is long overdue and very thought provoking
2. We feel that the apology and confession are admirable, we endorse them fully and recognise with shame that our city of Liverpool has benefited from the profits of slavery.
3. We feel that it is important to offer appropriate reparation and believe that education is part of this. We feel that the Museums in Liverpool have led the way in helping to educate the people of our city and the many visitors who come here on the issues relating to slavery. We feel that offering reparation is an important part of mission
4. We also recognise that there are broader issues that relate to other countries which were affected by our era of empire, including India. The "hostile environment" created by the British Government in relation to immigration has continued to compound the legacy of racism. One of our members wrote the following: "There is an important task in raising awareness of the legacy of the British Empire generally. The book "Empireland" by Sathnam Sanghera is an excellent resource. The legacy of exploitation in India and many other colonies also needs to be faced up to.

Response 58

Consultation was congregation wide as requested, though feedback was very very limited in comparison, sadly, so this is what we have:

1. Nothing to add
2. We can't add much more to the apologies already made for this sad period.
3. However it is in the past and there seems to be very little more that can now be done to change the past.
4. To be honest we would rather see the URC make more effort to deal with current day slavery of young girls and boys and certain adult working men and women.

Response 59

The Committee's Report was discussed at our recent Church AGM and as a result I am writing to register my objection to the suggestion that most families (in the UK) would have had slaves. I am sure this is just not true. I have managed to research my family tree back to the mid 1660's, and my families were either agricultural labourers in the Scottish Border Counties or Shepherds in the Cheviot Hills in Northumberland.
There is no possible way that such peoples - and they were a large portion of the population - would own slaves. They barely managed a living for themselves let alone would be able to purchase a slave. Do you have any regard for the conditions people like these endured - living in tied cottages, often comprised two rooms, one window only and a dirt floor, very often father, mother and six children. Each year they had to attend the hirings which meant they waited in a market square for a farmer to come along and hire them for a further year. The family then moved to the new farm if they were lucky enough to be hired

Have you taken any regard to the coal mining industry when small boys and women crawled in narrow seams hauling coal which the miners had hewed out. Then there are the boy chimney sweeps, half starved to keep them small and thin enough to climb the chimneys. I could go on.

Does the URC intend to apologise for this? Nothing really can be done to help any of these people, they are long dead.

Some members of our Church, myself included, expressed our deep regret that the slave trade had ever happened, it was wicked and cruel, but to apologise would be devaluing the word and intent of 'apologise'.

The motion was carried by the meeting, as it would be expected, as most would feel to object was to support slavery, so the response from our Church would be in favour. However, I wish to emphasise
that not all the membership supported the motion.

At a time when the United Reformed Church is experiencing so many difficulties for its own membership, many Churches, including my own, will not have a designated Minister and must therefore rely on the Elders arranging a person to lead the service each week, and, if we are lucky

will have the services of an ordained Minister infrequently. We are now also informed that an ordained Minister might not be
available in the event of a funeral and I presume there will be no way an ordained Minister will visit or attend a member prior to death. To someone who has been e member for over 60 years it comes as a great shock. There is also so much needs fixing to help people living in the here and now, I cannot understand why the United Reformed Church uses its resources to compile a very long report on the Slave Trade.

Response 60

At our Elders meeting last night we felt we could not agree with the approach taken by the group. The history of slavery and **all parties** involved should and rightly be condemned, we feel we cannot take on the sins of our forbears, but work now to heal all parties, especially slavery that is taking place right now.

Response 61

I sent a response to the LoS consultation which was co-signed by a number of people after I shared the contents with colleagues and some members among our congregations.

A husband of one of our members asked if I would forward his own response to you (to the Consultation document and my response to it) which I do so without any further comment from me! (In italics below)

The gentleman is not a Church Member (an atheist, in fact). His wife was also supportive of me forwarding his response and they both wish to remain anonymous.

He used the word "rebuffal" in line 1 - I have changed it to rebuttal which I presume he meant.
He also used the word "Synod" for the LoS Group so I have substituted "the URC Group" for the sake of clarity:

What [X] has written is a detailed rebuttal of the original paper. He has not offered an alternative text. [His] comments are very well-informed and altogether excellent in my view. They go way beyond the simple question of whether we should apologise, repent or regret (although [he] does a demolition job on the apology idea.)

In all senses, this is not a simple black and white issue; it's about class (rich vs poor regardless of race) as much as anything else. [He] is surely right (and decidedly Christian) about that.
In short, the point is that what the URC Group have written is so shallow and crass as to be totally unfit for purpose. My advice would be to send [X's] piece as it is to the URC Group , with a demand/request that their paper be completely rewritten. [X] himself would be well placed to

produce an intelligent redraft. Too bad if this provokes a schism within the URC - it would serve them right for trying to be trendy!

Response 62

1. What is your response to the URC's work and engagement with the Legacies of (transatlantic) Slavery as outlined in the video presentation and consultation overview paper?

- I have often wondered why I was born a WASP male in a democracy, with all the privileges that follow, rather than, say, a black or brown disabled woman, born into bonded labour? The only answer that makes any sense is that it was simply a matter of chance but God (who loves everyone equally) can bring good out of all situations, so our task in this context is to join with others (especially in the URC) who feel in a similar way, to work hard towards changing the terrible, cruel, oppressive systems of the world from within (*Cf* Mark of Mission 4). It is not easy because one is continually working against an 'invisible' culture in (White) society and not absent even among the warm-hearted people in the church.

- Therefore, as a humble member and lay preacher within the URC, I warmly welcome the Legacies of Slavery project. This surely is timely and of the Spirit.

- I understand why it is necessary to concentrate on one particularly brutal aspect of the widespread evils of millennia of slavery and racism (interpreting the term 'slavery' more broadly than 'ownership by another' to include servitude and all who are exploited without opportunity to escape) – to spread too thinly would risk achieving nothing. However, enslavement of others (like the scourge of war) seems, at least potentially, a frightening part of our individual human nature rather than something regrettable 'out there'. White privilege (although a particular problem for WASPs) is incidental – I have felt Arab privilege in Dubai and Jewish privilege in Israel on brief visits and it is just as ugly.

    - The issue is partly our hard-wired tribal nature (without which homo sapiens might not have survived in the jungle to be here today). It can motivate family loyalty [although Jesus was wary] and enjoyable competitive sport but more darkly is behind racism, supremacy, conflict, nationalism, colour prejudice and other evils. Even more pernicious is the 'tendency of power to corrupt': it is very hard to pass the opportunity to own a 'slave'!
    It's not just about the way some unreformed males used to treat 'their' women. Most of us take for granted having dozens of obedient 'energy slaves' from vacuum cleaners to electric fans (thank you, fossil fuels). There is little doubt that we would have slipped easily into owning human slaves had we been wealthy enough in an earlier time. Even some church-people still buy unfairly-traded goods (I do, when I lack the energy or cash to track down fair alternatives – or I just avoid asking the question) – but the exploited primary producers and processors may even today be little better than slaves (or sometimes {China?} literal

slaves).

- And then there are horrifying aspects like human trafficking and the bonded labour of children, which seem straight from Hell. Altogether there are umpteen millions of hapless 'slaves' today, some simply to boost the bottom-line of their owners (or de facto controllers) but some trapped and treated in the most appalling ways. The difference between being owned as a slave for life and 'temporary' enforced servitude must feel technical.

- Nor, although it is outside the scope of the current initiative, should we forget the ever-swelling ranks of the Precariat. They are in a worse place than the day-labourer of Jesus' time. They are the victims of a world-order that ensures that to those who have, it will be given and from those who have not, it will be taken away even what they have. I wonder if the abolitionists are saying to us: 'We tackled the evils of our time; you tackle the evils of yours.'

- So, although it is right at this time to concentrate briefly on the abolition of the abhorrent slave trade and, for what it was worth, the later abolition of slavery [replaced with 'apprenticeships', then with ex-slaves continuing to work for low wages while the owners were handsomely compensated and the slave ports kept their ill-gotten wealth], we will best honor the memory of the slaves and the abolitionists by redoubling our efforts to hasten the time when all God's chillun got shoes to walk on this earth.

2. How do you feel about the proposal for the URC to offer an apology for transatlantic slavery and its continuing legacies? And what is your response to the draft Apology and Confession proposed by the Task Group?

This is essential but obviously has to be handled with sensitivity if it is to lead to truth, forgiveness, reconciliation and progress in the middle of on-going injustices..

At the beginning (under the section: 'To this end . . .'), I would add a reference to the fact that we are all incorrigibly racist by nature (see 1 D above) and can only be reformed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

3. How do you feel about the proposal for the URC to offer some form of reparations (repairing justice) in relation to the legacies of transatlantic slavery?

Replacing the word 'reparations' by 'repairing justice' is neat because a sincere reparation will indeed tend to repair/restore justice. It is not, however, obvious without unpacking that repairing justice requires the modern sense of 'reparation', which is 'making payments' or the equivalent. In

fact, the UK is probably wealthier now than it otherwise would have been, and Africa and the Caribbean poorer, as a consequence of slavery of African people, let alone of colonialism and its aftermath as a whole. Natural justice, for a humanity that aspires to see itself as one great race, tribe or family under one Just Parent God, surely requires some measure of re-sharing? The Government may have decided against reparations but the URC has been at pains to uphold its responsibility to a higher moral authority *vis-à-vis* the Government and must make its own decision.

It would be a good legacy were future generations able to look back and observe that 2022 marked a point of inflection in the sorry history of slavery and servitude – this requires actions as well as words.

4. What specific ideas for repairing justice would you like to see implemented in your local community (and/or beyond)?

I live in a very nearly mono-ethnic community and it would be presumptuous to suggest what other communities could attempt.

I still prefer the term: 'reparation' (in the modern sense), but since reparations are presumably intended to repair justice, this is not a problem. My suggestions more generally would be:

A. Not simply to send money abroad or spend money here. No amount of money can ever undo the harm done to Africa for the loss of people nor in the Caribbean for the way people were treated – and any implication that it could would be insulting. On the other hand, unless it is costly for us, it might be suggestive of cheap grace. There must be changed behaviour.

B. Additional help with mitigation, adaptation and resilience in the context of climate change. What we do not want, of course, are 'off-setting' schemes, not least because they are redolent of eco- colonialism. We would need to ask what would be acceptable.

- My first thought was that children in the UK (of all colours) and in Africa and in the Caribbean could grow (suitable) tree seedlings for a virtuous triangular trade for (re)forestation in all the countries concerned, but there would probably be unacceptable risks of transmitting plant disease, so that is out. But a back-to-back scheme might be practicable?

- We could run climate / biodiversity fundraising events (the key point being educational: to look at / compare climate-related / biodiversity-related issues in Africa, the Caribbean and the UK). We could raise money for requested projects.

- It would also be a nice celebration of reconciliation if, say, the URC raised the money for some

land in the UK (near Bristol?) and in Ghana and in Jamaica (say) and provided some suitable trees from all three continents to grow on the patches (we might have to source the trees through Kew). It does not have to be a large project but could be a symbol of hope in dangerous times, like Jeremiah buying a field.

Response 63

A small group of us met on Zoom and having read the document ourselves then watched the video together before sharing our thoughts on the questions. I hope that you will find our responses helpful and encouraging.

Thank you for the work you are doing on this important subject. I look forward to being at General Assembly in the summer and hope we shall be able to agree to the apology, confession and practical ways of repairing justice.

If I can be of any further assistance, please don't hesitate to be in touch.

Response 63a

1. **What is your response to the URC's work and engagement with the Legacies of (transatlantic) Slavery as outlined in the video presentation and consultation overview paper?**

- We learned a lot about the issues which were successfully brought into current times
- We appreciated that blame was not laid on our generation and we agree that we can't change the past but we can change the future for example the way we speak, changing our culture
- We felt the video (and Karen in particular) is very inspirational
- We support the aspiration to be actively anti-racist
- We have a direct connection with David Livingstone and the work being carried out at the Livingston memorial in Blantyre which is seeking to develop his legacy as a pioneer against slavery
- Our towns are mostly white, our congregations are 100% white, people don't think of racism as an issue, none of us have direct lived experience of racism but the primary school in Glasgow where one of our members is a senior teacher has 23 first languages within the school community so Scotland is changing and we need to unpick the casual racism which pervades society/language.
- We are far more conscious now of our privilege as white members of the community. We need to use our privilege to advocate for others and seek justice
- We must also own the shame of the legacy of slavery that Prince Charles, and Prince William has spoken of today in Jamaica

2. **How do you feel about the proposal for the URC to offer an apology for transatlantic slavery and its continuing legacies? And what is your response to the draft Apology and**

Confession proposed by the Task Group?

- We think it is right to offer an apology and we felt the draft was well composed
- We think it is right to not only apologise but also to make our confession. Faith cannot be separated from our actions or failure to act.
- Action must follow an apology and confession

3 How do you feel about the proposal for the URC to offer some form of reparations (repairing justice) in relation to the legacies of transatlantic slavery?

- We think that reparations should be made though we found it more difficult to think about what this might include
- We thought that supporting ways to ensure that everyone throughout the world had access to covid vaccination was a way of repairing justice as the global south, including Africa and the Caribbean, has been disproportionately affected by covid

4. What specific ideas for repairing justice would you like to see implemented in your local community (and/or beyond)?

- We thought that in our pastorate we could educate ourselves more about the issues and people's experiences. We could share the video at the next Joint Pastorate service in Hamilton and hear more about the legacy work taking place at the David Livingstone memorial
- We can use the Livingstone memorial as a resource on our doorstep. Righead's fellowship group is going there for an outing and we have used it as a venue for Elders' Away Days in the past
- We can use our links with our Beavers, Cubs and Scouts to encourage them to think about the language they use especially on social media, and developing an anti-racist culture. We could use this as a theme for a future Founders Day service
- We have had a visitor to the church who is now living in East Kilbride who comes from Ghana. We want to continue welcoming him to the congregation and hope that in time he would be willing to share his experience of living in London and then East Kilbride with us.
- We recognise that self-awareness is very important and that though global societal change is necessary we can all do a small bit to make a difference.

<u>Response 64</u>

The response to the consultation is as follows

1. The Elders would like to thank the Task Group for its detailed response to this issue.
2. The Elders agree with the draft apology.
3. The Elders feel that reparation for actions taken so long ago are difficult to determine and are dubious about how useful they can be as a healing tool.
4. The Elders do not have any specific ideas for repairing justice but feel that education is important in fostering equality in society,

Response 65

As the consultation period ends, I wanted to state my own response to your proposed Confession and Apology for Transatlantic Slavery and the benefits that members of our churches have historically drawn from it. The concise version: I endorse the statement and hope that the resolution will pass General Assembly this summer.

I think the case made in the Consultation Overview is unanswerable. The human horror of the "triangular trade" created within the British Empire, with the profitable support of many white Christians, is beyond argument. The Confession and Apology flow naturally and logically from that, as indeed does the call for repairing justice. Another word for the process we need to engage in is atonement.

And yet, other views are available. For example, I have heard the Overview described as bad history because it does not acknowledge the leadership of many in our faith tradition in the abolition movement. In fact, the revised December version does touch upon their contribution, but in the context that it does not represent the whole of our story.

There is a season for everything. We were right to celebrate the achievements of Wilberforce and his allies some years ago on the anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade (even though slavery itself did not end then; even though we have since begun to realise the deficiencies of the traditional "white saviour" narrative). We are now in a different season. The present point is that a less palatable side to our legacy needs in turn to be exposed to the light. The admission that some Presbyterians, Congregationalists and other non-conformists enthusiatically embraced the institution of slavery does not negate the heroism of the abolitionists in our tradition. But to be entitled to extol the glories of the latter, we also have to be honest about the former.

Similarly, I have heard it argued that only the elites grew wealthy on the backs of the enslaved; most of us are descended from humble people who were themselves poor and oppressed. This does not stand up. Never mind the implausibility that any of us, the product of scores of ancestors, can safely claim that none of them ever took a hand in promulgating slavery. The wealthy classes bequeathed us so much of the built environment, institutions and social fabric that we enjoy today, but still enjoy unequally. We all have a stake in this, like it or not. The discovery that even in my working lifetime, some of my taxes have gone to pay off the debt incurred in compensating slave owners for their loss of human "property" makes me feel grubby and complicit.

What of the privilege we carry into the present day? As a cisgender straight white male in middle age, I would describe the experience of the past few years as a process of scales falling from my eyes. I am not from a moneyed background and have not always felt especially privileged. So it has taken some reeducation to understand that I have all too comfortably considered myself aligned with less privileged groups while in fact oblivious to many of the barriers and micro-aggressions

they routinely face, or the advantages that I have unwittingly enjoyed. For decades I have espoused the "right causes"; I have considered myself on the side of the oppressed and yet, in my silence and complacency, unknowingly reaped many of the benefits of the oppressor. The inheritance of wealth built on the unpaid labour of slaves, in the places of education, work and worship to which I have variously belonged, is the historical side of that. Ongoing social inequality is its present and there is a direct line to be drawn between the two.

Still, there is a strategic dimension to be considered before leading the discussion into the territory of white privilege. It shouldn't be beyond us to see that we have perpetuated in the church the structural inequalities of wider society, even as we have declared ourselves inclusive and opposed to racial discrimination. Yet not every white person has been moved by Black Lives Matter to read Reni Eddo-Lodge, David Olusoga or Ben Lindsey and catch sight of the beam in their own eye. I'm all too aware I have a lot more still to read and discover myself.

Others (often encouraged by our governing party and its press) have reacted against the exposure of structural racism. The term "white privilege" is not universally understood or admitted, even in the Church. If the point of the present text is to get a resolution through General Assembly as a declaration of intent and a beginning to the real work of reparative justice, I can see some sense in leaving that part of the discussion to follow.

In some quarters I have also heard disquiet, sometimes with theological underpinning, about the idea that we might be expected (or even able) to apologise for sins that we have not personally committed - for wealth and privilege passed down to us through no action or volition of our own. Part of the answer to this, I think, is to recognise that we do not consider ourselves individuals alone, but the Body of Christ: part of a Church with a collective history and collective duty in the present. If we stand together as a church, we must accept collective as well as personal responsibility.

Conversely, I observe that as good churchgoers we have no trouble acknowledging our own personal imperfections in a general sense, Sunday after Sunday. Why then should we become touchy when our complicity in a specific wrongdoing is pointed out to us? Even if we didn't "mean" it?

If, as a church professing a doctrine of sin and redemption, we are unable to acknowledge the sins of our own institutions and our own Christian forebears alongside the sins we have personally perpetuated, we must forego our right to preach to others. Instead we will find ourselves schooled by the universities and companies, banks and insurers who are ahead of us in seeking to redeem the racism in their past. So let's catch up.

Throughout these ramblings, I realise I have used "we" with an assumption that "we" are the white inheritors of white forebears in faith. Of course, that supposed "we" is far from being the whole of

church or society, past or present. I leave my words as they are in an admission that it is so easy to slip into racist assumptions, even when you are trying to speak against racism. I am a work in progress. So is the Church.

Thank you for your part in lifting the scales from our eyes (my eyes) and for leading us (me) in this painful but necessary process. I hope your work will come to fruition at General Assembly and beyond.

Response 66

(Our church) has a diverse congregation from a range of countries around the world with a wide range of theological perspectives across the congregation. The local environment is probably best characterised as suburban rather than an inner-city location. We have an active social programme including work with children and families from the local area, management of a contact centre for separated families running every week, meals and social activities for older people, an active ecology group, a Faith in Community Group which considers social and political issues affecting the community and several other activities.

We do our best to recognise and include special Sundays, such as those relating to social justice, poverty and equality. We have identified concerns about hate crime and discrimination and taken modest action in terms of writing to politicians and police.
Some members of our congregation have visited slave castles and prisons in different parts of the world and stood in the cells from which people were transported to slavery and sometimes to their deaths. This experience leaves a lasting impression.

We regret that we have not had time to engage in extensive discussions about this important subject prior to submitting this initial response, which comes from the Minister and Elders. However, we intend to continue the dialogue with church members and give further feedback before General Assembly.

This submission was drafted by members of (our) Faith in Community group and reviewed and amended by Elders. It is submitted on behalf of the Minister and Elders of (our church).

1 What is your response to the URC's work and engagement with the Legacies of (transatlantic) Slavery as outlined in the video presentation and consultation overview paper?

We recognise that this is an important subject and welcome the focus of the national church on promoting an active debate within the church and more widely on the legacies of slavery and the evils of modern slavery. We acknowledge the history and the direct involvement of some former church members and leaders in the slave trade. We recognise that our social and economic

structures are shaped by the past which includes the heavy involvement of business in our country in the slave trade and therefore that our country has prospered on the back of the slave trade and that, as a result, we are the beneficiaries of privilege.

Our church community has had the debate - which others have also experienced – about the extent to which people living today can be held responsible for the sins and errors of the past. This is not an easy debate and there are different views. Some feel strongly that they have no responsibility for past evils whilst others recognise that the past 'benefits' of the slave trade are entrenched in modern economic structures and give a continuing privilege to people in this country. We also acknowledge that the slave trade profoundly disrupted family and social structures in the places from which slaves were taken and in the slave plantations and for generations afterwards and that the social and relationship consequences of these disruptions are still being played out in today's world.

We do not wish to jump to trite conclusions about the reasons for current discriminations, but we do note that the persistent racism around the world results in a disproportionate number of people from Black and minority ethnic communities, including many from former slave backgrounds, who are in prisons, suffer from mental health problems and/or experience poor job opportunities among other social problems. We also note that many from those communities are making substantial and positive contributions to our local and national life, often in leading positions.

We also note that the church, and the URC in particular, has taken positive stances on issues of equality, discrimination and racism over recent decades and indeed some were heavily involved in the historical campaign to end the slave trade and are involved in challenging modern slavery today. We are aware of the argument that the slave trade ended because of economic rather than social and moral forces, but that should not detract from the fact that some church leaders and church people took courageous steps to challenge established thinking, often at personal risk. We also note that the churches took a strong stand against apartheid in the 1960s and 1970s, although we know that there were people within our churches who held opposing views. Whilst the URC and other churches cannot claim a moral high ground in all of this debate, it is wrong not to acknowledge the very significant role of many, including some church leaders, in challenging racism and political leaders.

We also think it is relevant to note that slavery in Africa – and indeed in all continents – was an economic and social fact for centuries and that the Atlantic slave trade was dependent on African intermediaries who delivered slaves from the interior to the white slave traders. This would not have happened on the scale which it did were it not for the transatlantic slave trade, for which white Europeans were largely responsible, but it is misleading to characterise slavery as a purely White endeavour enslaving Black people.

Finally, we do consider from personal experience and international contacts and friendships, that the mission activities of the churches, and of our church in particular through the London

Missionary Society and other groups, did make a positive contribution to social development in many places. We recognise the active debate about the extent to which colonialists and missionaries suppressed indigenous cultures and traditional caring arrangements and the importance of decolonialising many educational curricula and cultural assumptions. However, this should not detract from the immense benefits of the provision by churches of health and education services for many populations around the world and the bringing of the gospel message of our duty to live by God's love and respect for all people equally. Of course, the fact that this principle was not applied to enslaved people is all the more shocking.

Our responses to the following questions are briefer, taking note of the arguments and analysis set out above.

2 How do you feel about the proposal for the URC to offer an apology for transatlantic slavery and its continuing legacies? And what is your response to the draft Apology and Confession proposed by the Task Group?

We welcome the honesty of the dialogue which is being promoted and consider that it is right and proper for the church to take this initiative. We also recognise that a failure to act could leave the church vulnerable to significant and possibly destructive criticism. This can also be said about other topical debates around equality issues.

We consider that it is appropriate for the church, with its own histories and historic connections, to associate itself with others who have recognised the evils which were done in the slave trade, the economic benefits it brought to this country and therefore to all living here and therefore our place in benefitting from the evils of slavery.

We do not wish to engage in textual analysis at this point, but we do feel that the apology does not acknowledge, even in mitigation, the positive contribution of many in the churches to the struggles against the legacies of slavery, including apartheid and continued racism. We feel there needs to be some acknowledgement of that in the statement.

3 How do you feel about the proposal for the URC to offer some form of reparations (repairing justice) in relation to the legacies of transatlantic slavery?

We need to give more thought to the question of reparations. We can see there are arguments in favour and note the powerful and live debates in the Caribbean and elsewhere advocating for a framework of reparations. We also recognise that the church as an institution now has limited resources and is in a very different social and economic position from earlier times. We are not opposed to a debate about reparations but have not reached a settled view in our context.
We recognise the injustice in the fact that substantial compensation was paid to slave owners but none to the victims whose lives were disrupted for ever, with consequences extending for

generations. We also acknowledge that receiving countries in the Caribbean and sending countries in Africa have suffered not only through slavery but also changing trading patterns, which are driven by international bodies such as the World Trade Organisation and European Union which are dominated by the privileged developed economies. As a church which strongly supports Christian Aid and other aid organisations and has given significant grants (as a proportion of our resources) to projects in Africa, we have accepted our responsibility to share God's resources and to promote respect and equality.

In a sense, the harm done is so great that any financial reparations could be seen as insulting. On the other hand, we recognise that those affected are seeking not only an apology but something more tangible.

We accept a duty to promote equity and fairness in the distribution of economic resources and wellbeing but are troubled by the impossibility of quantifying what reparations should entail. We do see it as important and a priority that the United Reformed Church and local churches are committed to challenging racism and demonstrating that all God's people are respected, valued, listened to, and have opportunities that have not been provided/available in the past.

4 What specific ideas for repairing justice would you like to see implemented in your local community (and/or beyond)?

Our church is already engaged in a number of initiatives to promote respect, social and racial harmony and reconciliation, in the context of a multi-racial church community. Our membership and congregation are now far more diverse than even 20 years ago and we have recognised the responsibilities and challenges which this presents now and over coming years.

We have welcomed refugees and in a modest way supported initiatives to support refugees locally.

We have made donations from a substantial legacy to development projects in Africa and locally.

We are actively supporting Christian Aid and other overseas aid organisations and some in the congregation have personal links with overseas projects to which they give time and money.

Our social outreach welcomes people of all backgrounds – we have had a banner of welcome in many languages outside the building. We acknowledge the need to continue working to make our environment truly welcoming and inclusive and that this is a gospel calling. This outreach includes work with young families, older people, separated families, young people and people from the community using our open spaces.
We have spoken up about the dangers of hate crime locally and nationally in letters to local politicians and public officials and in public statements.

We believe that the church and individual churches need to be seen to be active and positive in this field, visibly standing for the importance of mutual respect and challenging the voices of those who express racist and hate opinions. Churches also need to understand people's fears and anxieties which can drive people to hold racist views and provide leadership and guidance about how to deal with those feelings in a constructive way and not to respond with hatred of people

who are not responsible for those problems.

The consequences of an unfair and unequal world are affecting everybody. We know the research which demonstrates convincingly that the more unequal a society, the greater the incidence of all kinds of social problems, including crime, violence, marital breakdown and anti-social behaviour. These problems frequently (but not always) relate back to the consequences of slavery. The debate about how best to respond will not be resolved quickly.

The church has a moral and inspired duty to engage in these challenging debates, difficult and painful as they might be. We have a duty to respond in ways which promote the Gospel values of respect, love and harmony and which challenge hatred, racism and inhumanity.

Response 67

1. **What is your response to the URC's work and engagement with the Legacies of (transatlantic) Slavery as outlined in the video presentation and consultation overview paper?**

We are supportive of the work of the URC on the legacies of slavery – believing this is an issue that must be addressed by the church. It opens up our thinking to this and wider issues of racism – and we are aware that we have much we need to learn.

2. **How do you feel about the proposal for the URC to offer an apology for transatlantic slavery and its continuing legacies? And what is your response to the draft Apology and Confession proposed by the Task Group?**

Yes, we think that something needs to be said and done to recognise the damage done by the transatlantic slave trade – and its lasting legacy in attitudes and racism in our country today. We struggle with the word 'apology' – finding it hard to 'apologise' for something done long ago by other people – and wonder if 'recognise' or 'acknowledge' might be alternative words. Some, in our discussion, found the proposed text for the URC resolution long and complicated and wondered if it could be simplified.

3. **How do you feel about the proposal for the URC to offer some form of reparations (repairing justice) in relation to the legacies of transatlantic slavery?**

We found it difficult to understand how this could be done. We didn't think financial reparation could be an option – no amount of money could make up for the hurt and legacy of slavery. Exploring the idea of 'restorative justice' … as things that could be done as a means of challenging racism and establishing better support and inclusion, sounds a positive way forward. We felt that this would need to mean different pieces of work and action in different places depending on the issues in each context.

4. **What specific ideas for repairing justice would you like to see implemented in your local**

community (and/or beyond)?

The village where we are situated is predominantly a community of white people … we thought we could do some work on understanding racism. Raising the issue, making thought provoking literature available, enabling conversations around the attitudes of white people who rarely see or understand racism … and conversations around what 'diversity' and 'inclusion' mean. We thought a conversation that aims to engage with people in our village around these issues would be good.

Response 68

At the elders meeting, this matter was fully discussed with everyone having sight of the consultation documents a month beforehand. Below are the points raised from the discussion.

Legacies of Slavery Consultation – after discussion the Elders made the following comments:

(i) What are we apologising for – how can the URC apologise for their ancestors' behaviour when the URC didn't exist until 1972. Surely by apologising for something we are admitting guilt and once we've done that, where do we go?

(ii) We can't change history and history teaches us not to repeat certain things.

(iii) Our job is to continually make people aware that racial injustice does exist, to educate and to ensure we welcome everybody and treat everyone equally.
With God's Blessing on all the work you do.

Response 69

1. **What is your response to the URC's work and engagement with the Legacies of (transatlantic) Slavery as outlined in the video presentation and consultation overview paper?**

We were excited and challenged to see this done. The video was very helpful and has led us to ask many further questions and seek out more information and understanding about the Legacy of slavery both in terms of our own prejudice and privilege and in the way it has shaped systems and structures within our society.

We wonder whether the paper itself is in some places too weak? Eg Line 8 - has the hurt been aggravated or has it just been made more visible to white people by protests against it? Further on - Slavery the original sin? And ' not compensated ' for their enforced hard work, the suppression of their freedom...' - that's the least of it surely - the forced removal of their children, the rape, the

torture...?

2. How do you feel about the proposal for the URC to offer an apology for transatlantic slavery and its continuing legacies? And what is your response to the draft Apology and Confession proposed by the Task Group?

In general, we are very supportive of the Apology. In our church meeting there was agreement that racism today needs to be addressed but one speaker questioned whether an apology for slavery helps to do this.

Points we note: as a congregation we would use the term "siblings" rather than "sisters and bothers" – the term siblings recognises and includes the existence of non-binary people within our church and world.

Bullet point 4 – wonder if the word Damage might be more realistic than Hurt?

Bullet points 4&5 – wonder if the word sin is helpfully meaningful? Might some more specific terms like Prejudice/ Greed/ De-humanising of others, make a clearer statement of what caused the harm?

3. How do you feel about the proposal for the URC to offer some form of reparations (repairing justice) in relation to the legacies of transatlantic slavery?

The discussion in our Church meeting was lively with a broad range of views being expressed. We will be interested to think about how this can be done meaningfully. We would hope that we could at least begin to acknowledge and celebrate that the slaves were the people (the vital element) who achieved what the west now has by way of industrialisation and culture, leading to the modern culture of today.

There are benefits to society of the world having been brought out of the middle ages but this could not have been achieved without an enormous workforce - the 3 1/4 million African people deliberately stolen/abducted from their countries in western Africa, enslaved and brought into the Caribbean and southern United States for the very purpose of becoming that immense workforce.

Our buildings, institutions and western lifestyle have developed from, and still depend on, the work and skills of workers.

Enslaving millions of people, removing them from their families and culture for perpetuity was evil, but whatever good has resulted for western societies from the results of their enforced work is theirs to celebrate. Their vital contribution, then and continuing to this day, must be recognised. It could be argued very reasonably that their descendants today should enjoy even more of the fruits of their labour, not less, as has been the case over generations.

We need more information about whom reparations will help and how they will effect more systemic equality for people of colour in our society.

4. What specific ideas for repairing justice would you like to see implemented in your local community (and/or beyond)?

This needs some careful thought and sustainable action. We hope to enable more Black and Brown people in leadership at all levels of society. We are wondering if we can offer support to Black & Brown students at our local University? As a church we would also like to educate ourselves about Scotland's role in slavery. To start this process we will have a screening of the youtube video 'Hiding in Plain Sight - the Legacy of Slavery and Colonialism in Edinburgh' and go on a Black HIstory Walk through Edinburgh led by Lisa Williams, founder of the Edinburgh Caribbean Association.

Response 70

As a minister, I have heard stories of people feeling their contributions in meetings has been ignored or side-lined, making them feel, 'what's the point of being part of this committee or church meeting?'. Young people, women and black and minority-ethnic people have told me that when they have contributed something in a meeting, someone has cut across them, gone on to another subject, or there has been silence. Someone told me that having been ignored, the subject came up later, raised often by a white male older minister, which was then discussed by the meeting. I would say that these experiences are not just isolated incidents happening to a few people, but happen often. Such behaviour is not at all helpful when we are trying to be inclusive and embracing, particularly involving Black and Asian people in the life and decision making in committees of our church. We need to be proactive in working towards real inclusivity in our practices and programmes. This includes more understanding of group dynamics and enabling everyone to participate. There needs to be racial justice awareness training and re-training.

More needs to be done in Theological colleges and with all who facilitate meetings, enabling all to participate.

Another experience I find very common, is that when you want to find minutes, there is little or nothing recorded about serious subjects such as the 'Legacies of Slavery'. For example, during the Synod meeting in October 2021, (Veronica and Sandra) gave a full and inspiring presentation about the Legacies of Slavery and our moderator allowed the interesting discussion to go on for an hour. This is all that was recorded in the Synod meeting minutes:

'Veronica and Sandra spoke to the Legacies of Slavery presentation. 10 people raised concerns or questions arising from the presentation and Veronica can understand how the Legacy of slavery affects them, despite the 190 years since slavery was officially abolished in British territories'.

Perhaps if people were encouraged to send in evaluations of particular issues addressed at synod and other meetings, we could move forward in becoming a church where all are valued and diversity is more fully celebrated

Response 71

1. ***What is your response to the URC's work and engagement with the Legacies of (transatlantic) Slavery as outlined in the video presentation and consultation overview paper?***

This work, presentation and consultation is long overdue, with the Baptist Union having already considered the matter in 2007, but is to be welcomed, no matter how late in the day and we hope that congregations throughout the URC will have had the opportunity to consider the paper and video presentation.

In our own experience we have often heard the words "I'm not racist, but", which usually ends with a comment being made that is racist in nature, which indicates that racism remains very much an issue in the church. We have also been concerned at the little understanding there is within our churches about the issue of the legacies of slavery, and the work that many have been doing to raise this issue.

The opportunity to say sorry, and to look at practical ways, constructive ways, of taking concrete actions of 'repairing justice' is something that we must look at as a church in order to show that we are a church enthused about justice for all as a sign of our commitment to walk the way of Christ.

2. ***How do you feel about the proposal for the URC to offer an apology for transatlantic slavery and its continuing legacies? And what is your response to the draft Apology and Confession proposed by the Task Group?***

We are fully supportive of this proposal and the draft apology and confession proposed by the Task Group.

However, we think that this apology and confession should go further and consider the damage that has been done by the British in its colonialism over the years. It is not just the official slave trade that caused damage but the way in which the British controlled many other parts of the planet which has left a legacy of debt and destruction in many places.

As one example relating to what happened after slaves were freed:

"The Act of Emancipation in 1834 and their emancipation in 1838 led to a severe shortage of labourers working in sugar, coffee, tea, cocoa, and rice and rubber plantations in the colonies. The plantation owners worldwide succeeded in bringing pressure on the British colonial authorities in introducing the system of indentured Indian immigration based at Calcutta and Madras…
…Under the indentured system villagers in large numbers were recruited from Northern India and the Madras Presidency to go out to the tropical colonies to work on sugar and other plantations. The system was based on five years' indenture, during which a labourer was bound down to the estate manager in such a way as he could be criminally prosecuted if he left the estate."
(Indian Indentured Labour in Fiji by Eugene J D'Souza 2000 accessed from

www.jstor.org/stable/44144422 14/4/22)

Under this system a large number of Indian indentured labour immigrated to Fiji and other Pacific Islands that were colonised in an aim of exploiting their natural resources and hand in hand with the evangelisation of the indigenous peoples.

With indentured labour being a part of the definition of modern slavery, we would therefore ask whether the URC can include other colonised nations in their apology and confession into concrete actions of 'repairing justice' and so contribute to the prophetic work of God's coming kingdom?

3. *How do you feel about the proposal for the URC to offer some form of reparations (repairing justice) in relation to the legacies of transatlantic slavery?*

We think that this is something we seriously need to consider as a Christian community, but the form of reparations needs to be the subject of discussion between the URC and those communities/countries that have been harmed.

Those communities may be in the UK today, or may be in countries overseas and we would recommend further wide consultation with those organisations, such as CWM, who are working with the issues that the legacies of slavery discussions have highlighted to date.
Repairing justice should, as stated in our response to 2 above, also include those parts of the world such as India, the Pacific, many parts of Africa as well as the Caribbean.

4. *What specific ideas for repairing justice would you like to see implemented in your local community (and/or beyond)?*

We would be delighted to see the URC enter into an arrangement with the Pacific Theological College whereby an ongoing commitment to provide annual scholarships to students from poorer communities within the Pacific to enable them to study could be established.
This model could also be mirrored in other parts of the world as education is clearly one of those things that can have a lasting benefit to a community, and builds resilience for the future for a community.

Response 72

In my local church, when I led the Racial Justice Sunday Service in February, aided by a few of our young people, I was able to glean comments and ideas from members of the congregation and the young people's group. So the reflections below are my own, but include some thoughts from others.

I agree with all the observations and recommendations in the document, but my reflections are rooted in ideas relating to reparations/ repairing justice at grass roots level. My hope and vision is

that all young people in general and young black people in particular, can experience what Jesus promised, 'I have come that you might have life, life in all its fullness '. Where young people have been experiencing outcomes of the legacies of slavery in a more heightened way in these past 3 years, there is a need for initiatives and projects to enable young people to turn their lives around when things have gone wrong for them. Secular society have been involved in this work for many years. I know real stories in the place I lived for 29 years… whereby young black men were drawn into post code gangs some ending up in prison. I know of a few that received help and resources in turning their lives around and then became mentors and youth workers themselves. Also, the self-esteem and achievements of young black people were becoming more and more apparent through such a process as the years went by.

In considering how the URC might offer some forms of reparations in relation to LOS, I would like to suggest that churches could do some research in their localities to discover where there might be a need for suggestions mentioned in the previous paragraph. As a church if you discover work going on relating to repairing justice with young people and vulnerable adults then you could show support and encouragement for those engaged in the work. Other churches may even see the need to initiate a project yourselves. Would it be possible for CYDOS to be involved in supporting churches who may feel led to take up such initiatives. Also we should not just assume when children/young people are church goers, that they are ok. In the 2 churches where I am involved, there are 3 young black people currently with mental health issues, affecting their school education resulting in failures all round, breakdown of communication with those in church and in youth activities, losing a grip on their lives all round, linking up with other young people who are not helpful company. These 3 young people who used to be in the thick of things, are now hard to reach. The change in behaviour showed itself in and after the lockdowns. Two of them have mothers who do shift work, were not able to work from home and have irregular shifts. Their children were therefore left at home without help with their work for many hours each day. People could argue that this would be the same for white children. That is true . However, I know that a very high percentage of black parents are working in shift work type jobs as well as coping with the usual economic issues and different aspects of racism as well.

Rather than applying our time and resources only to our young people in church and church run activities, these being extremely important, let us encourage our churches to reach out to the more disadvantaged and vulnerable in our society. As we go through this process, it may also help to develop greater awareness of the need for working towards an anti-racist church and will hopefully help to eradicate negative stereotypes and conscious bias in relation to black and Asian people.

Therefore for reparations/ repairing Justice I would like to see:
- Synods allocate finance for grants towards this work with young people in our communities

-CYDOS to allocate some time to encouraging and supporting churches engaging in projects mentioned above and -engagement in on-going education re/ becoming an anti- racist church.

Response 73

Our Elders Meeting on Friday 25th March gave consideration to the papers sharing the information on this topic.

As indicated in the 1st paragraph of the consultation document, there is awareness of recent events which have highlighted the issue of all aspects of discrimination which have arisen from a variety of ages, generations and situations. We are in common with those who deplore the spread and continuity of the many ways in which individuals or groups continue to be disadvantaged or are put at risk.

Groups and government responses have resulted in a variety of reactions to historical events. Some have taken extreme action in banning, disowning, destroying or apologising for the events of the past. Care needs to be taken that history, and current events, are noted and understood in the light of circumstances of the time. Events of history need to be used as a guide for the present and future and should not be changed or deleted to suit current thinking.

Elders were mindful and concerned about the present-day problems of the many forms of injustice, recognising that this was evident beyond issues of colour. This we thought to be of greater significance than apologising for the actions of past generations.

The consensus of opinion was not to support the idea of an apology.

Response 74

The documents regarding Legacy of (transatlantic) Slavery were circulated to Elders and considered at the Elders' Meeting held last week.
Following initial discussion I read out comments prepared by an Elder, who was unable to attend this meeting, in which he set out his reasons for disagreeing with the proposals of the Legacies of Slavery Task Group and the proposal for an apology and confession by the United Reformed Church.
Following discussion the meeting agreed, with one abstention, that the views be supported and Synod be advised accordingly.
I attach a copy of those comments to this email.

SLAVERY
Comments on URC Consultation documents

I have to say that I have been very concerned and upset about what seems to me a manifestation of a sort of hysteria that has gripped the nation in the wake of the divisive Black Lives Matter protests. A climate in which this country is held to one set of standards and the rest of the world

another, and we are given no credit for the good we have done in spreading liberal democracy, freedom of speech and religion.

Slavery is an atrocity, but one committed throughout history by every civilisation (including the black kingdoms of West Africa who built their economies around it), until the first country in the history of the world, Britain, put morality before profit and abolished the vile practice. And do we get credit for this revolutionary step? No, the church instead complains that we compensated the slave owners. We are supposed to have benefited from slavery. Well, I am sure that my ancestors got precious little benefit from it when from the age of ten or so they risked their lives down pits - indeed the British working class lived in conditions little better than slavery into the start of the 20th Century.

As for racism, science has demonstrated by brain scans that we are all of us racist when shown pictures of people of a different race. Jesus' words about he who is without sin casting the first stone have never been more relevant. The Middle East is riven by racial and religious conflict, Hindus and Moslems regularly murder one another in India, as do Moslems and Jews the world over. The church refers to British racial superiority in India, a country divided for its whole history by caste in which the lowest caste, the untouchables, are so because they are blacker than the rest of Indians. Africa is riven by tribal (for which read racial) wars, and Kenya and Uganda when they got independence expelled all Asians in an act of ethnic cleansing, only for those Asians to be granted sanctuary in the UK. The church has swallowed wholesale the PC view that only white people, especially the British, can be racist. In a sinful world there should be no selective apologies.

Of course discrimination exists, but it is far better than ever before. A report has confirmed there is no institutional discrimination in Britain, where Asian children do better in schools than whites. To pretend otherwise and tell coloured children the system is biased against them, does them no favours. We have three high profile government ministers who are Asian, and any discrimination in the media is all positive discrimination, in which black actors are shoehorned into roles in historical dramas in which their presence is a complete fiction, and both historical drama and serious history seem determined to remedy what they see as the fault of whiteness - and if that isn't racist, I don't know what is.

Other countries do not see the need to apologise for their sins. We alone seem determined upon shaming our citizens. That is one thing for the BBC, but no church should see its role as being to make people feel guilty, and demoralise them because of their colour. It is an attempt to render the whole of our history and the sufferings and privations of our ancestors as something immoral and shameful

Response 75

URC Legacies of Slavery (LoS) consultation - Sunday 22 May 2022

Church members and friends had been sent the three URC documents prior to the meeting and hard copies of them were available at the meeting. Around 25 people attended the meeting. Our minister, who was unable to be with us at the meeting, had recorded a wonderful introductory video which was played at the start, followed by the video featuring Karen Campbell. We welcomed the Synod Racial Justice Advocate, Pat Poinen who came up from Darlington for the morning. There followed a group discussion to consider the four questions. There was someone in each of the groups to chair and take notes. The following represents what was said. Clearly not every word spoken is recorded here, but hopefully the main views and suggestions of those present have been included. Pat Poinen spoke briefly at the end of the meeting and was happy to be contacted by email if anyone had further questions. This document will be circulated to everyone at the Synod Office.

1. What is your response to the URC's work and engagement with the Legacies of (transatlantic) Slavery as outlined in the video presentation and consultation overview paper?

'Brilliant we're talking about this'
'This is a positive step'
'Seeing the video and hearing about this is an important first step'
'How do we respond? It is hard to respond on an individual level – we can do more together'
'This is a good thing to be doing'
Someone commented that in Newcastle some people of colour are managing but others are not.
Another said that amongst black people the inequalities of society are disproportionately high.
'We did it and are still doing it'
'Important to engage with this'
'The poor Windrush people – 'a negligent government'
One person spoke of her family's involvement in a YMCA exchange when they hosted a girl from Alabama. The girl ended up working in Harlem and experienced at first hand the challenges that black people faced growing up in the US.
Another said that the issue is deeper than just the results of slavery: it's to do with wider attitudes to 'the Other'.
'There is a need to learn from the mistakes of the past.'
'Long awaited'
'Really welcome the response'
'Recognise the evils of the past'
'There is injustice on many fronts'
'Not just a race issue, but it is such a huge issue, it must be tackled'

One person said it is a racist society and where people ignore the past and pretend we are not racist.
Another spoke of a veneer of tolerance where the problem is ignored and we make ourselves feel better.
There is a need for more laws to reduce discrimination.
'Why is the URC concentrating on the injustice of slavery? There are many other injustices: race, religion, sex, class, poverty'

2. How do you feel about the proposal for the URC to offer an apology for transatlantic slavery and its continuing legacies? And what is your response to the draft Apology and Confession proposed by the Task Group?

Someone said that there were aspects about offering an apology which made them uncomfortable when we as individuals are not directly responsible. The person felt a deep regret for what had happened but felt it was not something for which an apology was appropriate.
Someone spoke of the problems of big businesses – Nestle, for example, in the cocoa world and the importance of Fairtrade. Within churches people seldom consciously opt for Fairtrade.
One group did not have a problem with the statement of apology but thought it was long-winded and wordy.
Someone thought the apology should be more precise.
'There is quite a lot of duplication in the apology'
'We agree with the spirit of the apology'
Someone said that the apology is fine but it has to be backed up with action.
Another spoke of the buildings, parks and gardens which were paid for with money from slavery at the expense of black people.
Someone said they were appalled that the slave traders were compensated.

3. How do you feel about the proposal for the URC to offer some form of reparations (repairing justice) in relation to the legacies of transatlantic slavery?

Someone said that there was a problem with reparations.
'*Repentance means change now'*
Educational scholarships were suggested.

4. What specific ideas for repairing justice would you like to see implemented in your local community (and/or beyond)?
Educational opportunities/scholarships
Education – in services, sermons, messy church, on notice boards
Trying to influence institutions and agencies to apologise and to change
Educating ourselves about Windrush and other issues

'What about the Windrush people who were sent back?' 'Should they be offered the chance of returning to the UK?'
'We can raise awareness of and support refugees and asylum seekers locally – we are trying to do this at the moment'
'Education – education!'

Response 76

The Church Meeting considered the Legacies of Slavery Task Group Report and watched the video on 22nd May 2022.

This was a difficult subject for us as most members had not given a lot of thought to the Atlantic Slave Trade and as there is not a large Afro Caribbean population in the North East our contact with people of Afro Caribbean descent is very limited.

During the discussion it became apparent that perhaps most of us did not appreciate the hurt still felt by Afro Caribbean peoples due to the Atlantic Slave Trade and the importance they give it to developing racist attitudes apparent today.

The discussion took in the use of language and common terminology that means different and upsetting things to other peoples, and the question of diversity and why different races have a tendency not to interact, and what divides us on religion, background and race.

It was felt we cannot change the past but what is important is attitudes in the future.

Education on the subject was thought to be very important.

Some spoke about their own historical family background and past links with the slave trade.

We are obviously aware of the presence of racism in wider society and agree that we should continue working to promote racial justice as part of our Christian commitment to justice for all.

If General Assembly is mindful to support the recommendations of the Legacies of Slavery Task Group Report then we would be in agreement with that.

Response 77

We discussed the URC Legacies of Slavery consultation at our Elders Meeting on 13th April 2022. This was our initial response:

- Clearly, much work had gone into exploring this issue and that demands a serious response
- It is right and proper that the congregation should look at the mistakes of the past and how that affects the present day
- This feels like a huge topic for us to address

- Several Elders struggle with the concept of apologising for something that others did before you were even born. What does 'apology' actually mean in such circumstances?
- We recognised that some form of public acknowledgement of the historical role of and contemporary injustices in the church would be highly significant for some people
- Any response made by the URC must include dealing with racial justice issues in the here and now.
- As a congregation, we will address legacies of slavery in a Church Meeting which is devoted to this issue. To maximise involvement and the prospects for a fruitful conversation, we will precede that meeting with a Bible study series on unity and diversity in church and society (in May and June) and address the issues in preaching and worship (during June and July), holding the Church Meeting in mid-July
- We appreciate that this means we will not be able to respond to the Task Group as a congregation prior to General Assembly 2022, but feel it is better to proceed in this way in order to engage effectively with such an important matter.

Response 78

The Elders, spent part of their recent meeting looking at the consultation document from the URC, "Legacies of Slavery" Task Group.

We had a very open and frank discussion on the matter. At the end of this discussion, we felt that we could not whole heartedly support the apology and confession proposed by the URC, to go to General Assembly for approval.

We do understand the hurt that is still felt by members of the African and Caribbean communities.

Whilst we acknowledge we cannot alter history, our feeling is that the best way to apologise for historical slavery, is to work to eliminate slavery in today's society.

However we do feel that we can fully support committing to continue working to promote racial justice as part of our Christian commitment to Justice for all. We also feel it is important to recommit ourselves to walking together in the Spirit of Christ so that all people may be blessed and Gods creation healed.

Response 79

Our Church wishes to submit the following response to the consultation papers circulated on 4th January 2022.

- We agree wholeheartedly with the need to consider, discuss and respond in some way to the legacies of slavery.
- We believe that this is a hugely important issue and as such is one that needs further consideration and prayerful thought.
- The 4-week deadline that churches were given to respond does not give us sufficient time to

give this the due diligence and prayerful consideration that it needs.

- We agree that in order to give this the full and proper consideration needed then churches need more time and more support/resources to understand the issues at hand and the potential responses or actions needed thereafter.

That being said, given the limited time we have had to consider this, we can also provide the following further thoughts.

- We have read [X']s response to the consultation [See Response 18] and agree with him that there are many issues and questions that remain unanswered by the consultation documents circulated.
- We would like to see those questions and issues considered further before any proposals are sent to General Assembly.
- We support suggestion that the United Reformed Church should consider supporting charities and organisations that work to stop people trafficking that is all too prevalent in the UK today.

We look forward to hearing more from the Legacies of Slavery Task group on this issue.

Response 80

Further thoughts on the URC response to the Legacies of Slavery. This is an imperfect document which I hope will point to lines of enquiry as we navigate this journey.

Precis

For me, this apology continues the development from the LMS to CWM in 1977 and the associated debates. It gives a clear signal that the past is just that, places our current and future activities in a new context and thus provides an unambiguous moral basis for any future campaigns - such as countering Modern Slavery - that the URC might take up.

As an apology, it allows clear acknowledgement and regret for the nature and scale of the trade and the reach, through time and across the Globe, of its tentacles. The imputation of self-abasement that some make seems to imply a willingness to identify with the enslavers rather than the abolitionists. References to the USA are relevant because, of course, it was once part of the British Empire.

Thoughts

It occurred to me that, to some extent the act of apologising for the Legacies of Slavery - whether direct or indirect benefits - reflects the formation of the Council for World Mission itself.

No more the London Missionary Society, dispatching missionaries from our corner of Europe to promote a theology and culture consistent with the notion of the European Christianity's superiority; instead a partnership recognising the mutual validity of reformed theologies and practices around the world.

That transformation itself signalled a transition from old to new: an admission that the old ways had outlived any validity and must be forsaken decisively and symbolically as well as structurally and functionally. It meant changes in the way CWM's efforts are financed and organised: in its own way a strand of reparation as it is impossible to recognise the activities and achievements of 18th and 19th century missionaries without seeing how much of their access to territories depended on, and was identified with, the European imperial imperative: something the missionaries themselves were not shy to record.

An apology from the natural descendants of the old 'missionary' denominations would from a vital part of a status quo which has, for over nigh on half a century, recognised just how mixed were the blessings those missions brought. If we are to rightly value the theologies and liturgies we inherited from our reformed forbears, we must accurately place ourselves as well as those forbears in rightful context.

For some, this orientation should stop short of apology. Even some who would enthusiastically voice support for CWM.

Why?

Why would the descendants of, often poor, Europeans, the spiritual descendants of Christian Dissenters choose to identify with those who brutally oppressed their own ancestors, rather than with those who were oppressed by the same ilk as the oppressors of those ancestors? Why would they prefer to gloss over the unashamedly-recorded failings of those with whom their only common ground would appear to be an assumed skin colour, while all the time denying any love for racism?

What could they possibly lose through an apology for something they themselves would not deny was fundamentally wrong?

Where could they possibly find common ground with slave, plantation and mill owners whose descendants in bloodline and mindset continue to exclude them from whole swathes of their own country?

Perhaps …

For some it comes from how they see the nature of apology: In itself it is it as an opportunity to acknowledge what has been done wrong, express regret that it happened and define better future behaviour. However some clearly see it primarily as an act of humiliation and self-debasement. Why?

Some appear to nurture the notion that there is a place for them at a “top table” from which others are excluded. That ‘table” is seen as the rightful place for those who never need to apologise for their actions: a place that confers a ‘droit du seigneur’ which excuses actions which would be unforgivable in those of lesser status. It begets plausibly-phrased but contradictory and bogus arguments such as:

- “Other empires did it …” (while cherishing the singular status of the Greatest Ever Empire)
- “We also did a lot of good …” (referring to actions which were designed and
- carried out purely for the benefit of the Imperial powers)
- “Africans already enslaved each other…” (Which would African civilisations were credible enough to Europeans to emulate)
- “Africans supplied the slaves,…” (Which would mean that African civilisations
- were sophisticated enough to have participated on an equal basis with Europeans)
- “It was bad but “they" were worse off before “we” civilised them (Which, if true,
- contradicts the two previous arguments because Africans could not have functioned as equally culpable partners in the massive Triangular Trade, thus implying European culpability)
- “The wealth of Empires was the result of the hard work and creativity of
- Europeans, not African slavery …” (This rather misses the point of Empire- building and flies in the face of both the records and the wealth, land and influence rapidly and accumulated by the commercial ‘barons’ of sugar, tobacco, and other similar commodities)
- “Once Britain abolished slavery, it fought to police the slave trades of other
- nations …” (More of the time-spanning ‘ethical balance sheet’ approach, which ignores the continued bloody rivalry between Imperial nations and facts such as the support that Confederate American states received from the UK in their fight to maintain slavery and Britain’s continued trade in slave-produced commodities from the USA and Brazil)
- English, Irish, other European poor white people from other regions were also
- enslaved and suffered like the Africans. (There is no doubt that the poor were, and are, treated dreadfully, but their oppression compounds, rather than nullifies, the horror. The descendants of African slaves in the Americas mostly bear European names, have little or no affinity to African traditions and regions and have been subject to draconian laws and norms which have excluded them from equal participation in society. Descendants of poor white people in these areas, however, appear to be able to maintain links to the customs, countries, counties and often villages of origin and preferential treatment compared to African descendants points, at least, to a difference in status which would imply a difference in treatment. The laws and social norms maintained throughout the USA and the British Empire after slavery was abolished also betray the essentially racist nature of the trade and the institution.)

However I would liken the Transatlantic Slave trade to the drugs trade in its destabilising, corrupting and distorting influence on national and international politics, trade and culture. Few, if any parts of society were, or are beyond its reach: We still consume, in vast and often unhealthy quantities, the sugar, alcohol, tobacco, coffee, tea, and other products and by-products of the slave industries; the Caribbean nations set up as offshore farms, are still there with few alternatives but to trade in Western pleasures; the profits and politics of the now-established families, industries and firms still reach deep into our legislative and social infrastructure.

I believe that the URC should set its face firmly towards the future that it desires. In order to do this, it must clearly separate itself from those things that tie us to the horrors of the past.

An apology would give a clear signal of this desire for separation.

As I said previously, we are called to love one another in such a way that the world might see that we are the disciples of Jesus. The direct descendants of African slaves, the slave nations who suffered the corrupting impact of the trade are well- represented within our congregations and spheres of influence.

The world is watching, What it sees must show us at our best.

Response 81

In addition to the logical and reasonable comments that can be made there are some theological points I would like to submit to the elders:

1. The apology is an act of Priesthood. In the same way that Jesus, although blameless, was able to accept (even insist on) being baptised by John the Baptist, we as a denomination should make this apology as an act of priesthood to affirm both our separation from that barbaric era and to set ourselves apart to be better in future.

   We must do this.

2. It is an act of Priesthood because we have not come up with the idea of an apology ourselves. Our partner churches in Africa and the Caribbean have required an apology from the nations responsible for the wholesale enslaving of their ancestors, the undermining of their civilisations and the continuing legacies of that era. The Council for World Mission has made its own response and has asked its member bodies to consider their responses. As its UK member denomination, we should apologise for any role in, or benefit from, the obscenity of the transatlantic slave trade. Our response is to God and to them as brothers and sisters in Christ and in fellowship of the Priesthood of All Believers to firmly and humbly put this era

behind us so that we can minister better, prophetically and in intercession, to the world in future.

We must do this.

3. Time after time in the Bible we see people being called by God to radical acts of prophesy and declaring that they either were not talented enough (Moses), not brave enough or just plain didn't want to do it (Jonah). In each case, God provided resources and help or just plain humbled the refusers in order that His work may be done and His kingdom grow.

   We must do this

Response 82

As a part of the request that I begin a Synod-wide study based on the Legacies of Slavery, a small group of us, in pilot group mode, have met around the Draft Apology and Confession document.

From that we chewed on our experience, the issues, the video/materials and the language of the Draft Apology and Confession. One part of that produced two LoS sessions for Synod – that's getting near to launch (we're behind the clock as far as the Assembly is concerned).

The second part of that exercise was to provide feedback to you, in line with the request that was published on the website. Ideally, I would have liked to offer you a Synod-wide summary of responses. That's just not been possible. Nevertheless, our conversations as a group were substantial and satisfying.

It was agreed to give a summary of our reaction and he solicited feedback from the group, including mine. I added comments at the end, which represent my response to the documents.

To be clear, this does not attempt or pretend to represent the view of the synod, with that important caveat, we do hope it helps you as you prepare for Assembly and beyond.

Thank you for all you do.

Response 82a

This comes by way of an interim reflection on discussions held by a small group in the synod. It is by no means a completed report particularly because this is a matter that must never be regarded as 'done'. It is part of an on-going struggle to counter racism which does not end with the passing of an Assembly resolution.

The group was primarily concerned about how to present the Apology in a meeting of church members, seeking ways to avoid confrontation and argument and recognising that this is no hypothetical matter but enabling people to speak their minds honestly and without fear and for others to listen with respect even if not in agreement. It was suggested that time be given at the beginning of the process to gauge attitudes and understanding prior to discussion, to then later understand if a change of attitude was apparent as a result of discussion. It was helpful that two members of the group already had been involved in a church discussion on the matter and thus brought insights into responses made.

Dominant in our discussion was the understanding of the term 'apology' and the question of to whom the apology is to be given. On the one hand there are the countless people who were brutally treated and who lost their lives because of the slave trade and on the other hand there are our contemporaries of African and Afro- Caribbean background who are still treated abominably because of the racism that continues to be found in society. An apology to the latter group is possible but can one apologise to people who are dead? The parallel here is with regard to some Jewish attitudes towards the Holocaust – how does one 'apologise' to those who lost their lives in concentration camps? Sadly, because there is no answer to this the sore remains open.
Therefore, the question arose as to whether what is required is an **acknowledgement** of the past evil together with a determined effort to involve oneself in the struggle against racism.

We recognised the danger of the exercise being undermined by, and possibly even limited to, arguments over the need, or otherwise, for an apology rather than a creative exploration of our continued intrinsic racism, an awareness of the nature of past and present 'Western' exploitation and recognition that much of the wealth of this country is predicated on slavery.

As a consequence, do we do better to recognise and acknowledge what has happened and deal with the present and future to seek change with determination rather than simply regretting the past? Is it actually someone else's past? That said, one recognises the nature of corporate human failings.

We see a difference between an apology which could finish up being 'done and dusted' and a deep and heartfelt regret with the corollary that one does one's utmost to struggle for justice. One has heard in recent months political leaders offering superficial apologies, which turn out simply to be a matter of form.

Heartfelt regret and an honest, determined effort to strive for justice expressed in a pragmatic way would probably carry more weight for many of us.
Of course one is sorry for what has happened, but repentance and the search for forgiveness require a change in the way one lives one's life. Striving for a different future must be the outcome, acknowledging but not dwelling on the past.

Whilst we have not spent time analysing in detail the 'Legacies of Slavery' document some issues do come to mind.
The opening of the document is in danger of stereotyping. Black British colleagues rightly complain about the way in which the portrayal of 'successful' Black people is in terms of their being footballers and athletes. One recognises that the point being made is that they are well received when successful but condemned if there is no success.

Concern was expressed that the documents focus essentially on chattel slavery in its Afro-Caribbean and Afro-American context with the implications of such slavery for the UK. Whilst this is the essence of the LoS Task Group's concern, and rightly so, we would seek an acknowledgement that slavery is to be found expressed in different ways in different contexts. To say that slavery had not been practised in the Indian sub-continent is quite simply not the case. Granted it was not practised in the same terms, but slavery it was, and in some cases economic slavery continues.
Do we need greater honesty with regard to the position of the predecessor bodies of the URC? Whilst the LMS was not financed by slavery as was the SPG (USPG's forerunner), one has to recognise that the Congregational Union was sometimes significantly supported by the Wills family of Bristol when funds ran short. Best not to paint too rosy a picture. As is written we are heirs of a racist past.

How does one sum up the conversations we have had thus far?

There is no doubt that the group were convinced of the need to recognise past evil and that our generation has benefitted by slavery. Would the group endorse the draft apology? That would probably be difficult to answer. Greater clarification is needed regarding the nature and meaning of the word *apology* and the question of to whom the apology is to be given.

That said, the group members were convinced of the need to recognise the evil of the past, the continuing insidious nature of racism and the need to repent, where repentance is reflected in a determined struggle against racism in all its forms and both in the individual and the collective in whichever institution it is to be found.

Dominant in our thought was that it is to the future we should turn our thoughts and actions. Dr. Phyillis Felton, pastor of a Black congregation, whose "parent" church endorsed a "separate until Blacks equate" philosophy in the 19th century, told representatives of both congregations, the Black church and the White church, that whilst racism is a "reference point in our respective histories, it is not our residence – we are moving on." That sense of the search for and commitment to, a strategy to counter racism is the challenge before us all.
(Not mentioned in our discussions but of significance is Raquel S. Lettsome: Mary's Slave Song: The Tensions and Turnarounds of Faithfully Reading *Doulē* in the Magnificat. See: https://doi.org/10.1177/0020964320961670)

I concur with what has been said above. I would add that the document that is commonly referred to as "Draft Apology and Confession" uses "apology" twice, once in the third solid bullet of the 3rd major paragraph: "offer our apology to God and to our sisters and brothers in Africa . . ." and again in the second open bullet in the third major paragraph. In the latter case, it characterizes the entire document: "this apology and confession" — The suggestion, "acknowledgment", is more suitable to the general thrust of the draft than apology, especially noting the problems with "apology" language. I ask what is the purpose of this document? What I fear is that it will be debated, revised, and then approved . . . but what next? How will it rise above a therapeutic transaction?

I bring two related concerns: the Draft's implicit assumptions about the identity of the first- person plural (our) and the absence of a robust theological imagination/framework for what is being proposed.

First, this document assumes that the URC is a White church, notwithstanding the second solid bullet's attempt to acknowledge the diversity in the church: "shared in and *suffered* from the legacies of slavery". With that exception, the solid bullet points assume a White URC. The URC is certainly a church that lives with a White legacy and, in many contexts, is mostly White in its complexion, but in other settings it reflects at least some of the diversity of the UK. And what is interesting, too, is that in our group, there were diversities within our diversities, if that makes sense.

It's for this reason and others that the first-person plural in a confession like this becomes incredibly complicated. Given the predominant emphasis of the document, if it is to be shared by the whole church, the body speaking as it were, it asks people of African and Caribbean descent to "offer *our* apology to God and to our sisters" — who is meant by "our"?

- "**our** continuing failure to hear and see God in all our neighbours"
- "hurt **we** have caused"
- "divisions **we** have created"
- "**our** reluctance to face up to the sin of the past"
- "**our** silence" and so on

An even more profound issue, which is my second concern, is that this is not a theologically grounded confession. You cannot get to God by being better humans, or being more sincere in apologizing, but by being truly human in the hands of a loving and reconciling God. Some instances of the explicit theological language in this text illustrate the high anthropology its authors assume:

- "We have heard God in Christ:"
- "We are urged on by a movement of God's Spirit"
- "We offer our apology to God;"
- "Our continuing failure to see God and hear God"

- "recommit ourselves to walk together in the Spirit of Christ" etc.

Where is the Trinity? Where is the resurrection? This document idealizes our human capacity to grieve, confess, or work in its aspiration to be just. In fact, I wonder if there isn't a theology of the cross at work here, but without resurrection. Some Black theologians in the US have been particularly critical of theologies of the cross, arguing that, "Jesus didn't stay on the cross" — the assumption of any theology that over-extends the meaning of the cross leaves him there, crucified but not risen. The document needs the new creation. At present, without the new creation, it leaves us with our failures (legacies) and our work assignments but no substantial glimpse of God's future in-breaking reign.

Response 82b

Background: we engaged with the question at a personal/human level, took the temperature using a poll, viewed the video, and then, in the second session, "checked" in at a personal level, read an edited for length version of the consultation summary and the full confession and apology, discussed, then took the temperature using the same poll from the first session. The specifics aren't given in the summary, but the young people reported that they felt more confident that they understood the issues around LoS than they did the first session.

Feedback Session 1

Statement One
"I have a good understanding of the concerns of the Legacies of Slavery, along with the related issues of Black Lives Matter, White Privilege, and structural racism."
Neutral: 25%
Agree: 50%
Strongly agree: 25%

Statement Two
"I am happy that we are talking about repairing justice where people of colour are concerned, including assessing our denomination's own story and complicity in racism and imperialism."
Agree: 100%

Statement Three
"I am eager to understand the urgency of racial justice and the issues that intersect with it (especially White Privilege and imperialism)."
Strongly Agree: 100%

Statement Four
"I believe it is important to find ways to repair justice, including through reparations."
Strongly agree: 100%

Statement Five
"I support the issuing of an apology."
Strongly agree: 100%

Statement Six
"I am happy to proactively adopt active anti-racist practices in Christian life and mission."
Strongly agree: 100%

What does it mean to apologise?
An apology must be real/true. It must be substantial and action-based. It needs to be practical. Once offered, it must be adhered to – not like King John and the Magna Carta! Failing to be/do any of the above means that it wasn't sincere.

What might reparation/repairing justice look like?
Needs to go further than just giving money (although there should be some financial reparation involved). It needs to involve respect and support (although we didn't look at who or what should be supported) and it must be more than simply verbal. It will require an honest look at how we govern ourselves as a church.

What might dismantling racism/white privilege involve?
The leadership of the URC needs to be more diverse, to reflect who uses our churches (interesting phrase – not 'who belongs to our church!). It will involve talking honestly and openly about the issues.

Feedback Session 2

Have we noticed anything in the last week that has brought the issues of LoS to mind?
- Roe v Wade – most affected will be poor and black. Most unaffected will be rich and white (who can afford to visit another state to secure a termination)
- The 'Immigrants to Rwanda issue – with the European Court of Human Rights judging that the scheme was illegal (a ruling upheld by the British courts) leading to the government mooting the idea of withdrawing from the ECHR
- Have been studying Exodus – particular connections with Miriam's story – reminding that God not only hears injustice, but responds to it.
- Been aware of how white artists have appropriated Black music, or told black people's stories
- Sometimes the only way for people from other countries (particularly colonised or invaded countries) to find out about their history is to buy books – or buy back cultural artefacts that were stolen from them.

Initial Reactions to the Consultation Document and Draft Apology
- Wording is crucial. It needs to be clear that this is an apology by white people, nobody else.
- It needs to be written in the language of the people, not the language of a committee.

- It must be made accessible to the people who need to see/hear it. This means it should be produced in different languages and formats.
- We liked that Prince Charles was so open and spoke so strongly – but recognise that he is one individual and the Monarchy he represents, as with the Church, is complicit and has benefitted from slavery.
- We liked that it commits the Church to a practical response – but were unsure what this might look like. Possibly pledging to donate to some organisations in other countries.
- But the most important question we asked was: WHAT NEXT?

Temperature of the Room Survey.
The results were, probably, skewed by the fact that we had a contributor who hadn't accessed the previous session.

- It was apparent that people felt more engaged and confident with the issue(s) than they had last session.

Response 83

We have now been able to discuss this issue at the Elders meetings of 2 of the churches I serve and they have asked me to share their thoughts.

The overarching feeling from both elders meeting was that whilst there was no disagreement that wrong had been committed there was a deep concern about how it is possible to apologise for the sins of those in the past and that they felt strongly that the most significant thing we can do now is to acknowledge the past pain that has been caused and its ongoing impact and then act and work to challenge racism and work to become an anti-racist church. Within this conversation there was a strong sense of needing to discuss more deeply the issue of racism to aid understanding of the impact that past actions have had on particular people and the ongoing pain this still causes. Both churches felt they needed to know more.

There was also a question of whether an apology would actually mean anything and be accepted and whether there might be a more helpful way to show our sorrow about what had happened in the past.

One of the churches is very much linked to Pilots and concern was expressed about the perception that Pilots was bad because of its link with those who were also involved in slavery in the past. In this meeting there was concern that the work of the missionaries of the past was very much a part of our legacy and there was concern expressed about how we can now see our history as having anything positive in it. Some at the meeting spoke of the missionary movements as being what they thought church was growing up so this issue is difficult because it challenges some long held views and ways of understanding and living out the great commission that have been honoured and seen as precious.

Many thanks for the chance to have these initial conversations and I look forward to using the resources that come from our ongoing work on this matter.

Every blessing for your work,

Response 84

The Elders discussed this two months ago and were unanimous in their decision to back the recommendations made by the Task Force.

As Church Secretary I took the subject to the May Church Meeting where we had a wide-ranging discussion about living in multi-racial Britain where one moment we can be idolising the prowess of black footballers when they score & the next abusing them verbally when they miss penalty shoot outs. We talked about racist attitudes in Britain which often mean there is prejudice shown in housing, education, pay to people who have been born and brought up here.In short we recognised that in the UK racial hierarchy has continued.

The BLACK LIVES MATTER campaign had affected our congregation strongly & this had been heightened by the impact of Covid on non-white people.

We discussed the hidden slavery in Britain and how it was important that a light should be shone on that. Some years ago we had a Speaker at the Church from Hope for Justice which focused on women & men who were subject to appaling conditions in Britain and put to work in Car Washing stations, Nail Bars and on the land.

The Church here is totally committed to promoting racial justice as part of the URC's push to being actively anti-racist. It is reasonable for there to be more "black faces" in key positions within our denomination.

In short our Church stands together in asking for forgiveness and to recommit ourselves to walking together in the Spirit of Christ so that all peoples may be blessed and God's creation healed.

Response 85

I write with a face from Africa, a surname from Britain, an ethnicity from the Caribbean and an accent from London.

These are Legacies of Transatlantic Slavery and, despite the activities of other countries, I write from a British perspective because I, and all that I carry, am part of the bequest to Britain from transatlantic Slavery.

I do not try to recount a complete history, the available facts are on open record. But a fact-based perspective. I use the collective 'we' because I believe that all of us in Britain today share the Legacy to a greater or lesser degree.

The management of a global empire and the capital and culture that linked it demanded the most efficient methods available for administration, cultivation and collaboration. Whole cultures and traditions were forever altered so that our wheat and fish could be Canadian, our tea could be Indian (or Kenyan), our rum Jamaican and our potatoes Irish.

The price paid was to sear our collective conscience by romanticising or looking the other way from the human suffering necessary: soldiers, sailors, slaves, field and factory workers; and refugees from famine, war and oppression.

We weren't the first or only large empire but, as I have been told repeatedly, we were the first global empire and we appropriated and advanced both the virtues or our predecessors - philosophy, diplomacy, science, law, arts etc and their vices - warmongering, conquest, slavery, torture, impoverishment etc.

And we knew at the time they were vices: we had seen them close up in the hunger and misery inflicted on the population at home through enclosure of land. Millions emigrated or were transported across the world to get away from it. Expressions of individual and organised opposition to African slavery are as old as the Trade itself.

The sheer scale of the transatlantic slave trade meant that if African civilisation and commerce had not been on a similar level to European, their participation in the slave trade would have been short term or impossible as any lesser development would have meant no demand or infrastructure for distributing the goods and the people in which we traded. A demand that funded ships, docks, banks and insurance and motivated enterprise and creativity, while at the same time draining nations of the people and energy to emulate us, often by force.

This was no charitable enterprise: some went from poverty to wealth in a few years - wealth enough to provoke the envy of kings, justify, just for example, expensive, bloody, wars to oppose Napoleon, sell heroin to China, try to re-enslave newly liberated slaves of Haiti and, of course claim and give vast tracts of land to the British Crown.

For a professedly Christian nation to allow the merciless use of people as cogs in a vast, global combined harvester meant persuading them that these were not humans, but a sub-species. This was at a time when animals were afforded neither souls or rights.

Our best minds rose to the challenge and established the myth of white supremacy. After a time, it would be all they knew. Even our own John Williams wrote about using the paraphernalia of English High Tea as a gateway to creating the kind of converts he could recognise as Christian.

The size of the slave-based economy left few other credible avenues for investment. The wealth generated - and the revenues 'returned' to the Exchequer in London, resulted in much of the architecture, art and 'high culture' that we treasure. It laid the foundation for our hugely successful financial sector and created the USA, Canada and Australia as we know them. The financial security underpinned 20th century social and democratic changes, in housing, education and health, that even the most reactionary claim to treasure today.

The Transatlantic slave trade alone was worth enough for the UK Government to pay slave owners from just three regions approximately £20 million (over £600 billion pounds today) as compensation for the abolition of slavery: 40% of the Treasury tax receipts. (Much of it was converted into Government annuities, hence the 2015 announcement that it had only just been repaid.)

It would be impossible, with any credibility, to deny that some of that all-pervasive wealth found its way into some of our grander (now) URC buildings, charities and institutions at home and abroad - and perhaps Revd. Williams' ill-fated ships.

(That we knew it was indefensible, is evidenced by the massive effort exercised by the British government just prior to Independence of its colonies to destroy documents and records of activities that would bring Britain into disrepute. But even then, much of what remains in the public domain is profoundly shocking.)

Its literally unspeakable implications run deep: no wonder many would venerate unspeaking statues to those who profited rather than broaden their own knowledge of the history they claim the statues represent. Indeed, when current or past oppression of non-Africans is quoted, it is more often aimed at silencing references to the legacies of the Transatlantic Trade rather than to express solidarity and genuinely commit to eradicating similar evils.

Some try to dismiss the idea of an apology as "virtue signalling": 2,000 years ago, an obscure Middle Eastern philosopher said that if his disciples showed love for one another, the World would know who they were. He told them that if others saw their good works, they would glorify his Father in Heaven. Perhaps our virtues are what we should be signalling.

This is not some fashionable gesture, this is a response to our brothers and sisters in Christ across the world, through the Council for World Mission. We reply, not to some petulant child, but to the measured request of the Church across the world and, by that, to the whole world.

It is not a new concern: it predates the current project by many decades. It resonates with post-war concerns that, for better and worse, led to the creation of modern Israel and other reparations. But we are not being asked to create a nation, just to openly identify with those most disadvantaged by the source of our nation's enrichment and commit ourselves to against repeating the evils of the past.

So why not?

Why not give the world a contemporary, tangible indication that we are capable of uncomfortable love? Why not rob the church-decriers of another strand of inconsistency with which to chastise us? Why not draw a line in the sand and show that we can acknowledge our past without letting it hobble us? Why not set our face to a future which fits Christs picture of the Kingdom at its best?

Our response is also visible to those in our congregations at home and our partner congregations. The ones for whom our visible love proves we belong to Christ.

When our loved ones tell or show us that our past actions have cause hurt, do we just shrug and say we mustn't apologise for the past? When our loved ones are visibly and audibly distressed, do we simply try to shut them down, using our own hurts to justify our retort?

Are there difficulties? Of course. But if a credible apology is beyond us, despite our collective wit and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, then perhaps we should leave wrestling with the eternal to other denominations.

It would be wrong to reject this request at home. It's wrong in the church.

Let's do it and let's do it well.

Response 86

I include below the result of our debate hoping that it can become part of the larger process.
The proposed declaration reads very powerfully, and we'd support the sentiments set out in it. However, there are some obvious difficult balances to be struck in framing any document of this kind, and we felt that some adjustments of emphasis would better reflect our feelings and might also save the URC from some unhelpful and needless criticism.

First, we should surely be focusing mainly on looking forward - being church in 2022 and beyond. It's always right to use history to guide our thoughts, especially history of things that the church has done wrong or has failed to do right in the past. That should help us to do better in future. But we shouldn't wallow in the past. And, surely we shouldn't be spending so much time and effort apologising for past misdeeds that we risk taking our eyes off the challenges of the future.

Second, if we're looking back through the centuries, should we really single out just our failures to treat ethnic minorities properly? It could make us look as though we're not worried about our antecedents' awful treatment of LGBTQ+ people, women, children, the poor, those of other faiths, etc, many of which are still evident today. The URC has of course acknowledged many of these failings at different times, both nationally and locally: but never with such a powerful emphasis and in such a high-profile way as the current proposed apology for slavery and for racism. We would welcome some reference to the fact that our efforts to achieve a fully diverse world must require us to reflect on all the groups and communities that we have hitherto failed to appreciate and welcome.

Third, in focusing so strongly on the hurt suffered by African and Caribbean peoples and their descendants there is a risk that we look like ignoring or downplaying the fact that
slavery and racism have affected, and continue to affect, members of all ethnic groups. We rightly preach that the Gospel is for everyone, and we must surely take great care to avoid appearing to say the opposite in this declaration. We understand the danger in the current climate of emphasising that "all lives matter", but we cannot be seen to be implying that all lives do not matter.

We pray your work may be blessed and that the result will contribute to justice, peace and understanding.

Response 87

1. Is the United Reformed Church still benefiting from slavery?

2. Can we acknowledge that not all slave traders were white?

3. If the URC has to apologise, I think it should be from the whole URC family? I sensed that some people didn't want to apologise for a historical event.

4. How does the group see White privilege, and how can we move forward away from white privilege or use white privilege to bridge the gap, so that white privilege is a thing of the past?

Response 88

I have just been watching your inspirational video about the legacies of slavery project that was shown at the meeting of Eastern Synod.
As a former RJ advocate, I wanted to thank you.

Also – a thought regarding reparations – I had an idea about this: could the URC nationally commission a black artist to produce an artwork (sculpture maybe) that could be displayed in or on the city centre URCs in Bristol and Liverpool (as the main slave ports) as a permanent reminder never, ever to take this path again – and to counteract the status of slave owners.
Then maybe smaller reproductions could be made and sold to churches and the profit invested in anti-racism education.
Just a thought. Grace and peace