

OVERCOMING RACISM IN THE CHURCH

Ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters,

My name is Hedwig Komproe, and I am currently a board member of SKIN (Together Church in the Netherlands). Tonight, I am stepping in for our chairwoman, Mrs. Rhoinde Mijns-Doth, who unfortunately couldn't be here.

I would like to address the theme "Church and Slavery" with you. In recent years, the issue of our history of slavery has gained increasing prominence in the media and has become a significant topic on both political and scientific agendas.

I was born on Curaçao, to a Curaçaoan Catholic mother and a Surinamese father with a background in the (EBG) Evangelical Brethren Church. Our church attendance took us to the Dutch Reformed Church on Curaçao, specifically the 'Fortkerk' in Fort Amsterdam, Willemstad.

In later life, I discovered that the slave owners and slavetraders, united under the VOC (Dutch East Indian Company) and the WIC (West Indian Company), were the same families as the Protestant church leadership,... both in the East and in the West.

The Dutch States-General (Staten Generaal) regarded the VOC as an instrument of the Reformed church, as stated by Leon van den Broeke (Ship, Market, and Church).

According to Rose Mary Allen and Alma Louise de Bode Olton (Kalakuna ta bai kèrki), the WIC, as a trading and colonization enterprise, had a strong mandate to spread Calvinist Christianity.

All my grandparents were descendants of enslaved people. It saddens me that my parents and ancestors didn't witness the recent developments.

By recent developments, I mean that the the dehumanizing side and the consequences of slavery are now openly discussed, apologies are being offered and accepted, and there is talk of reparations and recognition that slavery was and is a crime against humanity. Although the Dutch history of slavery left deep scars in countries like Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Brazil, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Ghana, Curaçao, Aruba, Bonaire, Sint Martin, Sint Eustatius, and not to forget Saba, due to time constraints, I will briefly focus on the role of the church in the Dutch history of slavery and colonialism, with a particular emphasis on Curaçao.

From a young age, I experienced the harsh consequences of slavery in the church on Curaçao, where apartheid, not as a formal political system, but in practice was still present in our daily lives, in the 1960s. Physical attributes determined the place of individuals and groups in a society composed of distinct communities.

In my daily work as a theologian, psychologist, and pastor, I have often encountered victims of institutional racism. This manifested itself in discrimination in the job market, housing market, police force, education, sports, and even in public transport, on the streets, and in stores. Meanwhile, the Netherlands still claims to be a tolerant, non-racist country that

provides substantial aid to poorer nations. However, it remains regrettable to see how uncomfortable the topic of our slavery history still is in many conversations, even among my friends.

Professor Gloria Wekker aptly describes this in her book "WHITE INNOCENCE," in which she highlights the paradox of Dutch culture: the denial of racism and colonial violence while concurrently dealing with blatant racism and xenophobia. The church played a role in the emergence of institutional racism, even if that term did not exist at the time. This means that the church can also contribute to positive change in line with the spirit of Christianity, as instructed by Jesus Christ. There are examples of such transformations.

150 years ago, slavery came to an end in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. On July 1st of this year, the commemorative year began.

In 2013, the United Protestant Congregation in Curaçao offered apologies for its role in the slavery history. The same applies to the Council of Churches in the Netherlands, to which the Protestant Church belongs, which acknowledged guilt and took responsibility for its involvement in the slavery history. This year, Catholic bishops, in a statement, also expressed their condemnation of slavery.

We are on the right path, and although we may not personally witness the fruits of our efforts, positive change is indeed happening.

I would like to share with you a remarkable process that is underway:

It involves a Reconciliation Movement, to which I was invited through the Moluccan church in the Netherlands to attend gatherings. These gatherings, three of which I have participated in, have taken place in the Dutch Bible Belt.

During these Reconciliation Meetings, initiated by The House of Prayer, I witnessed, for the first time in my life, Dutch people genuinely kneeling and in tears, pleading for forgiveness for the Dutch colonial and slavery history. They addressed representatives from Suriname, Indonesia, Curaçao, Aruba, Bonaire, the Leeward Islands, Papua New Guinea, and South Africa, who were present at these meetings. Of course, it was also up to the affected communities to grant forgiveness, and we did.

I am deeply impressed by these reconciliation gatherings, held two to three times a year, comprising churches of various denominations. It began 26 years ago and has brought together groups from different church denominations for over a decade. These groups include Reformed, Catholics, Pentecostals, Messianic Jews, PKN members, and even descendants of VOC founders (United East Indian Company).

Instead of theologizing and philosophizing, the participants in this movement engage in actions that break down superiority delusions and genuinely achieve reconciliation. An example is that Dutch Christians, on behalf of the Netherlands, went to the interior of Suriname and asked for and received forgiveness from the original indigenous population as well as the Maroons (fleeing enslaved individuals), thereby reconciling with each other.

People experienced liberation and healing from deeply rooted pain resulting from generations of humiliation, abuse, exploitation, rape, and murder.

Other Dutch individuals who are part of this movement have also done this in Indonesia.

Next year, we will all journey from various corners of the former colonial Dutch empire to Jerusalem on Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), October 11th and 12th, 2024, to reconcile with God. This is a unique journey in which Prophet Marthen Su from Papua New Guinea plays a significant role, having received communication from the Lord. If you want to join us....

The Contactperson mr Bernard Hardick. Please ask the staff of Church and Peace for the contact details.

Why am I sharing this? Because it centers around the confession of genuine forgiveness and reconciliation among individuals, groups, and nations, guided by God's Word and particularly for the Body of Christ.

This is not only a path to a brighter future but also a powerful response to institutional racism, reflecting what is promised in Matthew 5:9: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

Thank you and God bless you.