

Kairos 30th Anniversary Statement:

Dangerous Memory and Hope for the Future

We gathered in Johannesburg (near Cottesloe) from 17 to 20 August 2015, to celebrate how the 1985 South African Kairos document, “Challenge to the Church,” responded to a moment of truth in the most painful days of Apartheid. That Kairos document inspired three decades of Kairos movements in many different contexts. This celebration has now re-inspired us toward a common humanity and a concern for human dignity and our environment.

The pain of Marikana and the reasons behind it (multinational profit before people and corporate greed) hovered over our conference.

The 2009 Kairos Palestine document, “A Moment of Truth,” a cry from the Palestinian Christian community, carries a disturbing echo of the dangerous memory of the South African story of Apartheid. Kairos Palestine has evoked a powerful global response from Kairos contexts around the world. The catalyzing power of Kairos Palestine was deeply felt in our gathering. We were inspired by this renewed energy. Palestine is the space where our sacred texts are contested.

There was much to celebrate in this gathering. Our Kairos conversations were intentionally multi-generational and broadly international. We were grateful to engage deeply with Muslim and Jewish perspectives. We found much joy in our solidarity and shared struggles. We were particularly encouraged by the inter-generational nature of this gathering and how that can be nurtured and encouraged. We are particularly inspired by the birth Zinzi Kairos Mbenenge during the conference. “... for unto us a child is given”!

A NEW KAIROS

We have reached a new moment of truth, a new Kairos. We recognize how the coming of Jesus and his teaching about a new kingdom and a new reign against the Roman empire of his day has completely passed us by. We lament that, by and large, the church of today has become distracted from this mission of preparing the way for God’s reign.

In our time, we find that various sites of pain and struggle are joined in a Global Kairos, a shared quest for justice. In our discussions, we named our shared struggle against the scourge of this global empire of our times. Empire is an all-encompassing global reality seeking to consolidate all forms of power while exploiting both Creation and Humanity. The empire we face is not restricted by geography, tribe, language or economy. Empire is an ideology of domination and subjugation, fueled by violence, fed by fear and deception. It manifests itself especially in racial, economic, cultural, patriarchal, sexual, and ecological oppression. Empire deceptively informs dominant, white supremacist, capitalist paradigms controlling global systems and structures. Global empire is sustained by weapons and military bases (hardware) along with ideologies and theologies (software).

We rejoice that resistance against empire is manifested in a plurality of struggles throughout the world. Struggles against ecological injustice, gender injustice and patriarchy, landlessness, abuse of people on the move, refugee vulnerability, political and religious persecution, social exclusion, denial of indigenous rights, neglecting children's rights, harm to LGBTI persons, access for the differently abled, and racial supremacy represent only a portion of the struggles against empire. Since 1985, Kairos documents have expressed resistance to these and other realities in Central America, Europe, Malawi, India, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Palestine. In this conference, we were pleased to receive new Kairos documents from siblings in Swaziland, Nigeria, and the United States. The memory of unjust suffering in all contexts is dangerous to the purposes of empire.

In our listening to one another, we found that the context of suffering and pain created by Israel's oppression of Palestine contains all aspects of empire. Palestine is therefore a microcosm of global empire, a critical site of reflection that can bring experiences in other locales into sharper focus. Palestine does not eclipse other situations around the globe but instead intensifies the need for greater interconnection and mutual engagement.

All Kairos movements emerge from sites of grave injustice and deep pain. Every Kairos document is a cry to God and to the world. We confess, however, that we have served two masters and preached a gospel that requires nothing of the rich young ruler, even as we build empire on the widow's mite. We recognize that we and our church institutions have often closed our ears to our siblings' cries and drowned them out. In many cases, very little action has followed. The church has often been ambiguous and cautious in its response to human suffering. Sometimes, the church has engaged in active opposition to the liberating work of God present in communities of resistance, increasing church complicity in structures of injustice. The church has often provided theologies of domination in the service of Empire. In our discussions, we found that the South African Kairos indictment of Church Theology is as relevant in our time as it was in 1985.

RESISTING IMPERIAL THEOLOGY

The dangerous memory of the South African Kairos document provided a prophetic critique of State Theology, theologies that validate and confirm forms of state terror. It identified as heresy theologies that justify Apartheid. In our time, we are called to expand this critique and rejection of state theology to address Imperial Theology, the 'software' that justifies imperial exploitation and oppression. We were encouraged to find that, although Empire seeks to divide communities from one another, peoples' resistance can unite us across religious, ethnic and culture divides.

Imperial theology is at work in the continued oppression of Palestinians and the crisis now engulfing what is known as the Middle East. Analysis and rejection of the State Theology supporting Apartheid in South Africa was an essential element in exposing and resisting that sinful system. In its dominant forms, Zionism has been used to justify the dispossession, transfer, massacring, ghettoization and exploitation of the Palestinian people. Zionism has become an element within the dominant structures of empire. Politically, we call for an intensification of all economic and political pressures on the State of Israel, including the Palestinian civil society call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS). In our biblical

interpretation, we strongly distinguish between biblical Israel and the modern State of Israel. Theologically, we declare to be heresy any Christian theologies that support the Zionism informing Israeli oppression.

We now therefore resolve

- to act and pray, inspired by the dangerous memory of Jesus Christ, God's siding with suffering and poor communities, aiming to do all we can to return the global and local church to the mission of Jesus to enact the reign of God, opening toward a new way of relating to humanity and the earth;
- to encourage all Christians to respond to the Palestinian Christian call to "come and see" the living stones of the Holy Land, providing hope to all who suffer under the cross of illegal Israeli Occupation;
- to advocate that international law must apply equally to all. We reject the imperial dictate that imposes sanctions on some regimes while vetoing and criminalizing popular calls for sanctions on egregious violations of international law;
- to impress upon our churches, seminaries and theological institutes the need to deepen theological engagement with the pressing challenges of the world, including the global systems and structures of empire and to promote Kairos spirituality;
- to reflect intentionally on the South African experience of the effectiveness of the BDS efforts and express our full support for an intensification of BDS as an effective, nonviolent strategy against global empire;
- to create appropriate systems to ensure that young people will be nurtured and mentored in the Kairos understanding of faith, hope, and love and supported in their growth into leadership;
- to express public support for those working against corruption in South Africa; while we rejoice that political apartheid has ceased in South Africa, we lament that economic apartheid continues; we commit to working toward Kairos Africa to ensure that the hopes of the next generation of the African continent are not dashed by Empire; and
- to foster and nurture the Global Kairos for Justice movement; we are because you are.

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed but not in despair, persecuted but not abandoned; struck down but not destroyed. (2 Corinthians 4)

20 August 2015