# **Sessions Summary: Dec 9 and Jan 27**

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## Liturgical Time:

The liturgical texts in both sessions describe Advent as the brink of a new world: still stalked by life threatening shadows drawing us to what is true and steadfast. The reality of empire puts a question before us: “Are you not with Jesus, the Galilean?”

Opening Worship: We are all on the brink of a new world, whose child we are all filled with. Us in Mary, Mary in us.

Working document: Advent is a time of anticipation and expectation for the God who lies behind the veil to be with us. […] The constant sense of wonder that accompanies Advent is that it is not just our desire to journey with God, but God’s desire to journey with us, that God actually wants to pitch God’s tent among us.

But as in the Advent story, we too are stalked by life-threatening shadows darkening our hopes and expectations at every level and in every moment. […] The star is “rising in the East” and journeying across the skies past the place of dark deceit and deadly politics, to “stop over the place where the child was,” the stubborn shining light of hope and joy and life not just hovering over, but enlightening the darkness below, drawing us to what is true and steadfast: Immanuel. God is with us.

Kakay Pamaran (Philippines): The strong man rules as the oldest empire. Are you not with Jesus the Galileans? It’s the same question asked today of all those who oppose the strong man rules. Are you not with the Galileans?

Commissioning prayer: We are commissioned on this journey to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God, to become agents of transformation in the world (Micah 6:8):

* To do justice, we must witness.
* To love kindness, we must repent.
* To walk humbly, we must be in solidarity with the oppressed.

## Exemplary Experiences:

### Experiences that illuminate important facets of the global dimension of the current crisis

Several contributions highlight that the Covid-19 pandemic exposes and aggravates already existing fault lines of injustice. The contexts most often referred to as being exemplary for the global situation are Latin America, the USA and Palestine:

Gloria Ulloa (Colombia): The pandemic we are all experiencing has highlighted the structural injustice within the social security systems and in the health and public assistance. It has shown us the depth of the socio-economic exclusion made visible in the loss of jobs and the instability of labour, the increase of poverty, the reduced access to basic public services, and the lack of support for access to economic resources as people struggle to survive.

J. Herbert Nelson (USA): I am convinced that we are having the wrong conversation. The conversation should not be about the economic, the conversation should be about how does a nation that called themselves one nation, with liberty and justice for all, begin to look at the human cost that we are pay by trying to keep commerce open while at the same time trying to fight a pandemic of which we have a very little control.

Bisan Mitri: (Palestine): We are facing hardship in a two-fold perspective. […] We Palestinians know the difference between apartheid and a lockdown! Although the response efforts to counter the spread of the COVID-19 virus is materializing in restriction on movement and imposing social distancing and closures measures, we have been subjected to such treatment by the Israeli occupation for decades.

### Response requested:

Jennet Tabe alerted the communion about the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon.

 **Analytic Frameworks:**

Several contributions analyse the current situation as a conflation of three different crises: (a) the climate emergency; (b) nationalism, authoritarianism and racism on national as well international level often legitimised by religious zealotry; (c) the destructive dynamics of a decaying empire. These three developments are dramatically exacerbated by the current Covid-19 pandemic. The working paper calls this situation a **global apartheid**.

Over against all of it seems to be one force: the **global revolution** against injustice, imperialist violence, and greed, and for life, global solidarity and human dignity.

In this struggle the church is to follow God and to stands namely with the poor, the oppressed, the wrong, the destitute, the marginalized, the excluded.

### The current crisis:

Working document: We live in a moment of history that presents us with the conflation of at least three calamitous manifestations: (a) a climate emergency; (b) Today, in far too many cases, national politics is dominated by narrow, ethnic (sometimes Christian) nationalisms, racism, white supremacy, authoritarianism, legitimized bigotry, and religious zealotry. Globally, we are not faring any better; (c) decaying empire. And as with all empires facing its own ignominious end, it presents an even greater danger to the world and to its own people, whom it can no longer distinguish from those it regarded as enemies.

Dario Barolin: do not forget Chinese empire

Najla Kassab: The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the injustices that surrounds the world whether it is social, political and economic. It exposed inequality, exploitation and oppression that are rooted in an economic systems that exploited the dignity of people where healthcare and other fundamental rights are only available to those who can afford it. Almost everywhere the vulnerable, poor and marginalized are most affected by the disease, and by the measures of disease control.

### Global apartheid:

Allan Boesak: Covid 19 has exposed and exacerbated the scandalous reality of what we have come to call global apartheid. The term has become more and more and more and more depressingly so applicable to our world situation.

South Africa with its draconian policies of apartheid declared by the international community a crime against humanity. By the ecumenical movement led by the Communion of Reformed Churches as a travesty of the gospel and its theological justification and heresy and set the world a particularly vicious model of a racial oppression and discrimination, injustice and exploitation so much so that we may speak today of a phenomenon that we call global apartheid which include social-economic exploitation and inequalities, political and social exclusion, racial and ethnic discrimination as well as gender injustices and heteronormative oppression. The common denominator here is not only the racial element but also the systemic violent pervasive and totalitarian nature of the oppression.

### The global revolution against injustice and for life, global solidarity and human dignity

Working document: Over against all of exclusionary, exploitative system of death seems to be one force: the **global revolution** against injustice, imperialist violence, and greed, and for life, global solidarity and human dignity.

Catherine McMillan: “Revolution” (within the working paper) can be misunderstood; need to add the word “love” as a continuation of our Reformed tradition.

### The call to the church

Working document: In our application of Accra today, we must be done with the harmful civility of theological compromise and pacification. We should no longer be hesitant in our embrace of the radical Reformed tradition and of the radical Calvin.

On this basis, we must take a clear, firm stand against the harmful fundamentalist theologies mostly imported from outside to which our people in the Global South have been subjected, and which have caused great harm to our societies. These too, the virus has exacerbated.

We must learn to open ourselves to the wisdom of indigenous traditions and religions to which many of our people in indigenous communities are now turning in order to create new ways of common understanding, solidarity and action.

## Prophetic Theologies:

Several contribution describe the emergence of global apartheid as a ‘God-Crisis’, a moment of truth to which the church has to respond by a *processus confessionis* in the tradition of the Belhar and Accra confessions.

### A ‘God-Crisis’

Allan Boesak: The working paper acknowledged that our “response, therefore, is not simply to *a* crisis, but to the whole complex of crises upon us today. A complex system of dominant and dominating power coalescing to what we dare to name as global apartheid. An exclusionary, exploitative system of death, a scandalous order of a world fallen among thieves.” In the words of Moltmann, it stated that we have what can best be described as a “God-Crisis”.

### The call for a processus confessionis

Najla Kassab: This is a special time, where Crisis could become an opportunity, where in the Midst of our pain and struggle, we see hope, mainly because God is with us, as we strengthen one another. This is a time of building a stronger Communion, a prophetic one, an impactful presence in every place that hurts. Today we meet to initiate a communion wide process on the response of the WCRC on the Covid-19 pandemic based on the guiding objectives of the strategic plan. Where a justice-centred response is timely.

Allan Boesak: Theologically, one could remind the world and the church that the crucified one amongst the crucified ones today has disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them as Colossians 2:15 tells us. So the question here is; can the church sense, discern and act upon the **Kairos moment** the God of history has placed upon us?

Rothney Tshaka: We propose a **“*processus confessionis”***, which is, a steadfast process of advanced acknowledgement, teaching and confession, within the WCRC regarding the devastating impact that the COVID19 has on Civil and Christian communities across the globe.

The confession that Jesus Christ is Lord, is a central tenet in the life of the reformed church. It is for this reason that the reformed church through the ages, thought it necessary to document how it believed and what it believed. These confessions thus originate out of contexts (political, social and otherwise) and are informed by the unavoidability, on the part of this church, of declaring its unfailing belief in the Lordship of Christ in the midst of various challenges confronting her essence. In other words, to say that Christ is Lord and Saviour in a context that suggest that this community should cease to focus on this Christ, presents this church to the world, as a church that has her back against the wall, yet continue to insist in confessing this Christ as Lord.

### The importance of the Belhar and Accra confessions

Allan Boesak: Belhar has three main pillars; the unity that we have in Christ, the reconciliation brought by Christ and the justice demanded by God. To simply put, Belhar confesses God’s radical indivisible justice, God’s radical indivisible equality, God’s radical indivisible inclusivity, and God’s radical indivisible solidarity. In these things, the churches is called to follow God and to stands namely with the poor, the oppressed, the wrong, the destitute, the marginalized, the excluded in any form of injustice whatsoever.

In Accra confession we look at the world through what we say the eyes of the poor and the oppressed, the powerless and the suffering and then we see then a scandalous world, we confess to hear the cries of the poor knowing that in the cries of the poor and the oppressed we hear the very voice of God. We confess that we see the wounds of God and God’s creation caused by greed and hubris and selfishness but we know also that every wound inflicted upon God’s children is a wound inflicted upon God

Paulo Pereira: The application of Accra today is a must, as well as looking at the Global South in its depths. Fundamentalist theologies are not “mostly imported from outside.” There is, today, a replication of imperial logic inside our communities with life of its own. The thoughts on what is not a prophetic voice but have been assumed as such becomes also essential.

## Acts of Witness

The reality analysed by the concepts of empire and global apartheid call for concrete acts of witness:

Paulo Pereira: As we understand in Latin America, our people are not vulnerable people, but “vulnerabilized” people – people who were forced to be vulnerable. This urges us, as a community of faith, to identify concrete challenges for the lives of the people and for creation, in hope, and engage with them. Not static hope, but practical hope.

## Renewed Understandings what it Means to Be the Church in this Time of Crisis

The *processus confessionis* that shall respond to the Kairos moment of truth that we see exposed by the Covid-19 pandemic requires a **common process of discernment**, where the church asks itself: “What does God require from us?”

### A Kairos for the churches

Victoria Turner: I was recently involved in the KIFE and WCRC Transforming Ecumenism webinars and something that struck me was how lost many of our ecumencial instruments are. The ecumenical movement, in many places, has become a club for powerful institutional leaders to comfortably discuss issues within their exclusivist Christian bubble. The world is not comfortable it is scandalous, and our role cannot be to introspect when our world is built on foundations of injustice.

Dimitris Boukis: for all of us in the Evangelical Church of Greece this has become a period of re-examining our theological identity and ministry priorities, especially since Greece, along with many other countries worldwide «are shut down» with severe locked-downs.

Najla Kassab: Today we meet as one family around the Communion as we are challenged throughout our churches in strengthening our witness in response to the imperatives of the Accra Confession and the call for an economy of life.

## Suggestions for concrete action

This process of discernment requires an interpretation of the signs of the time and a mobilisation of our whole communion as the a confessing, witnessing family committed to our own transformation and radical change in service to the God of Life.

### The signs of the times must be interpreted

Chris Ferguson: At the centre of this is discernment: As the Accra Confession said: “The signs of the times have become more alarming and must be interpreted”. For our global koinonia this mean we must do the discerning together.

### Mobilising the whole communion

Discerning requires us to read the signs of the time biblically and theologically, locally, regionally and globally together to mobilize our whole communion as the confessing, witnessing family committed to our own transformation and radical change in service to the God of Life.

WHO: As far as we are able this must be the whole communion. Involved and engaged. We do are best All our stories, realities, locations and identities. This WHO include all the partners that God provides.

WHAT. The reading of the signs of the time. The COVID 19 pandemic and beyond. Addressing the mandates and calls emerging from Accra, Belhar and the Leipzig General Council. The lived experiences of our churches. A world fallen among thieves. The cries of people and creation.

HOW. First the discernment circles being launched today. Listening, discerning from the diverse perspectives and distinct realities that make up our one family. Critical theological and biblical reflection. This process will be aided by the input of a statement which allows us to focus and summarize our learnings.