

# Anti-Racist Churches

Ecumenical Anti-Racism, Anti-Xenophobia, and  
Anti-Discrimination Contextual Bible Studies

Eric Nii Bortey Anum  
Masiwa Ragies Gunda



World Council  
of Churches



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Contextual Bible Studies

Eric Nii Bortey, Anum & Masiwa Ragies, Gunda

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# Preface

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Overcoming racism, xenophobia, and related discrimination has always been an aspiration of the World Council of Churches (WCC) since its inception in 1948. All through its first four assemblies, the WCC engaged in robust discussions during and between assemblies and constantly expressed its conviction of the wickedness of racism. At the inaugural WCC assembly in 1948 in Amsterdam, the assembly lamented the fact that instead of helping society to overcome racial injustice, “the Church has failed . . . it has reflected and then by its example sanctified the racial prejudice that is rampant in the world,” yet, “it knows that it must call society away from prejudice based upon race or colour.”<sup>1</sup>

The 2nd Assembly at Evanston (1954) declared “that any form of segregation based on race, colour, or ethnic origin is contrary to the gospel, and is incompatible with the Christian doctrine of man and with the nature of the Church of Christ. The Assembly urges the Churches within its membership to renounce all forms of segregation or discrimination and to work for their abolition within their own life and within society.”<sup>2</sup> This Assembly also recommended the creation of a department dedicated to coordinate racial justice work in the fellowship. At the WCC 3rd Assembly in Delhi (1961), the assembly proclaimed the “option for the oppressed” and called member churches “to ensure that there is no race discrimination in the Church.”<sup>3</sup>

At the 4th Assembly in Uppsala, Sweden (1968), informed by several high-level consultations that had taken place in between the 3rd and 4th Assemblies, the WCC reiterated and expounded on the incompatibility of racism and the gospel, proclaiming that “racism is a blatant denial of the Christian faith,” that “racism was linked to economic and political exploitation,” and called for the strengthening of the “secretariat of the race relations of the WCC.” Through the outrage of the assembly delegates, the WCC went on to launch the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) in 1969, which became a focal point for the WCC’s involvement in the activities of the civil rights movement in the USA, as well as the war of liberation and anti-apartheid resistance in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and South Africa respectively. The fifth Assembly in Nairobi (1975), Kenya was decisive by proclaiming “racism is a sin against God.”<sup>4</sup>

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1 WCC, *The First assembly of the World Council of Churches, held at Amsterdam, August 22nd to September 4th, 1948, The Amsterdam Assembly Series vol. 5*, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1948), 81.

2 WCC, *The Evanston Report. The Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1954), 158.

3 WCC, *The New Delhi Report. The Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1961), 103-104.

4 WCC, *Breaking Barriers: The Official Report of the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of*

Events of the past few years have rudely reminded us how far we are from celebrating the death of racism, xenophobia, casteism, and discrimination all over the world. The worsening climate crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing shortages of water and food, digital and technological advancement, conflicts, and economic and political insecurities have all exposed how deeply racially divided the world remains. Africans, People of African Descent, Asians, People of Asian Descent, Dalits, Indigenous Peoples, Roma, and many other marginalized people around the world have experienced racism, xenophobia, and discrimination wherever they have been. The continued visibility and popularity of far-right political and social movements, whose propaganda is accompanied by incendiary rhetoric targeted at refugees, migrants, and citizens who do not fit into their narrow definition of citizenship reminds us of historic harms that were instigated by such inflammatory language. As Christians, we have an obligation to challenge society and to provide an alternative perspective to the people of God.

These Bible studies continue on this long legacy of WCC's commitment to contribute to the dismantling of racial prejudices, racial discrimination, systemic racism, xenophobia, casteism, and all other forms of discrimination. We call on all Christians to explore these sins and sinful practices in their own communities and begin to take decisive actions empowered by the word of God. We believe we can overcome because the holy triune God is with us.

Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay  
General secretary  
World Council of Churches  
March 2024



# Foreword

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At the close of the WCC 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, the assembly message counselled, “We join our voices with the Amsterdam assembly (1948) that ‘war is contrary to the will of God,’ and the Nairobi assembly (1975) that ‘racism is a sin against God.’ We lament that we have to repeat these statements.”<sup>5</sup> Writing a foreword must be an exciting exercise, yet this foreword is accompanied by the trauma and sadness of knowing that it is accompanying a powerful resource for Christians to overcome an attitude, practice, and system that destroys the very fabric of humanity and has also destroyed the fabric of the interdependence of creation through systems of exploitation that have left the planet at the precipice.

In January 2020, the year felt and looked like any other year; however, barely three months into the year, our lives were fundamentally altered by the COVID-19 pandemic and the global lockdowns that were enforced within and between nations and states. The pandemic gave us many lessons about our lives, one of the most important being the way it illustrated the intersectionality that punctuates our lives. There was no single dimension of our lives that is not connected to all other dimensions—political, economic, religious, cultural; everything was connected—health, gender, housing, racism, xenophobia, discrimination. Access to the critical life-saving vaccines, developed in record time as the pandemic was decimating communities around the world, became illustrative of systemic racism in the world: poor and racialized nation-states had obstacles placed before them that made it difficult to access the vaccines. If it were not for China and Russia availing their own vaccines to many global South nation-states, the outcomes of the pandemic would have been dastardly. The vaccine hesitancy that was also observed from racialized communities was a reaction informed by experiences of historic racially motivated, unethical practices and experiments using black and brown bodies.

As the WCC was making final preparations for the 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, Russia started war in and against Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The attack on Ukraine happened six months before delegates from the 352 member churches, ecumenical partners, and other sisters and brothers gathered in Germany. While the diabolical nature of Russia’s actions were never truly contested, what emerged from this war was instructive. At a time when refugees from the Middle East and Africa were being told Europe had no capacity to be compassionate, there was a dramatic change of heart and capacity as millions were welcomed from Ukraine. The WCC applauded this demonstration of compassion and solidarity in welcoming Ukrainians even as we were ashamed at the apparent racism that was embedded in this compassion. As they sought to flee from the war front, Africans

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5 WCC, “Message of the 11th Assembly: A Call to Act Together” in *Christ’s Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity: Report of the WCC 11th Assembly*, (Geneva: WCC, 2023), p.7, paragraph 12.

and Afro-Ukrainians, Asians, Asian-Ukrainians, and people from the Middle East and of Middle Eastern descent experienced racism from both Ukrainians and other white Europeans at border crossings across Europe. The coverage of the war on various media platforms and channels exposed the deep-seated racism that characterizes European and North American perspectives on the worth of black and brown bodies.

The WCC remains committed to contribute to the dismantling of racist ideologies, cultures, and systems that continue to fuel the separation of people into racial boxes. We acknowledge that our commitment is for our member churches to provide an anti-racist, anti-xenophobic, anti-discriminatory alternative to wider society. This small booklet is one of many of our dedicated resources to equip and strengthen the sense and reality of equity, diversity and inclusion in our member churches.

Rev. Dr Kenneth Mtata  
Programme director for Public Witness and Diakonia  
World Council of Churches  
March 2024

## Introducing WCC Transversal 6

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In July 2021, the WCC launched a transversal with the title “Overcoming Racism, Xenophobia, and related Discrimination.” A transversal focuses on a theme that impacts and interacts with all programmes and activities of the WCC. Overcoming Racism, Xenophobia, and related Discrimination is the sixth transversal of the WCC. The process leading to the launch of this transversal started in 2016, when the WCC leadership went to the USA on a solidarity visit following the cold-blooded massacre of a group of African–American Christians inside the Mother Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in the USA state of South Carolina on 17 June 2015 by a 21-year-old white supremacist, Dylann Roof. That Christians, African Americans, could be targeted and killed inside a church sent shockwaves in the ecumenical movement. The response of the WCC was bold and resulted in this transversal and in challenging itself to prioritize racial justice in most, if not all, its programmes and activities.

While this programme is new, it is also not new. In 1969, the WCC launched the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR), informed by conversations at the 4th Assembly in Uppsala, Sweden, which was held under the shadow of the assassination of Rev. Dr Martin Luther King, Jr, who had been invited to give the sermon in the opening prayer at the assembly. The WCC has been lauded for helping the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa, helping freedom fighters in Zimbabwe, and accompanying the civil rights movement in the United States, all through the work of the PCR.

The focus of this transversal is global and is motivated by the multiple experiences of racialized communities, including Africans, People of African Descent, Asians, People of Asian Descent, Indigenous Peoples, Dalits, Roma, Quilombolas, Haratines, People of Middle Eastern Descent. We are equally motivated by the fact that Africans and People of African Descent are also racially discriminated by other racialized communities, on top of the racial discrimination that is inflicted by Westerners, People of European heritage (white people). We are equally motivated by the intersections of racism, xenophobia, related discrimination, and injustice in the access to health, housing, economic opportunities, and education. Systemic racism does rear its ugly head in the impact of the climate crisis where the greatest offenders appear to be the least affected and the least offenders are paying the greatest price, losing homes, livelihoods, and their dignity, in the face of a degree of indifference by those who have amassed wealth through ways that have harmed the climate.

We raise awareness and do advocacy with international multilateral bodies. Through these activities we produce resources for use by member churches, ecumenical partners, other Christians, and people of goodwill looking for resources

to continue their quest for racial justice, for a world without racism, xenophobia, casteism, and all other forms of discrimination. Through the Collective for Anti-Racist Ecumenism (CARE) Network, we have a global platform for actors whose goal is addressing systemic racism, xenophobia, casteism, and all other forms of discrimination from around the world.

Dr Masiwa Ragies Gunda  
Programme executive for Overcoming Racism, Xenophobia, and related  
Discrimination  
World Council of Churches  
January 2024

# Introducing This Booklet

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In 1975, the WCC at its 5th Assembly in Nairobi, Kenya, made a revolutionary pronouncement, that is, the assembly declared that “racism is a sin against God.”<sup>6</sup> Its 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, reiterated the same call and expressed a sincere regret that this call had to be reiterated. Racism, xenophobia, casteism, and other forms of discrimination continue to dominate human relations around the world. As Christians, we pray and act to address the various problems that we encounter in this world. This small booklet is a compilation of anti-racism, anti-xenophobia, and anti-discrimination Bible studies. The WCC encourages Christians around the world, especially member churches, to do at least one anti-racism, anti-xenophobia, and anti-discrimination Bible Study every month. Two bonus Bible studies have also been included in this booklet.

## **Who can use this booklet?**

This booklet is developed with Christian communities in mind. We encourage study of the Bible in communities or groups. Bible studies enrich our understanding, widen our horizons, and deepen our perceptions. This is especially true where we allow ourselves to exchange ideas, perspectives, and views with others. A Bible study session is an exchange platform where we all bring our respective thinking and understanding on a particular issue and put it on the table alongside other views from fellow participants. Discussions seek to unpack our different views, and in so doing, we deepen our understanding. Further, Bible studies must then inform our actions in our daily lives. Every Bible study must give us principles to live by and practical actions that we commit to undertake. Done in groups, Bible study creates a community of actors. This, however, does not mean individuals cannot read and benefit from these Bible studies; it is possible for individuals to use this booklet, but it is better to do the Bible study in a group or community.

## **How to use this booklet?**

This booklet is a simple resource that provides some brief background to the resource itself and to the WCC transversal on Overcoming Racism, Xenophobia, and related Discrimination. This background information is helpful and reading it can help you better understand the WCC; however, the main aim is to have you engage with the Bible studies in this booklet and where possible, adapt them to your specific context. Before meeting as a group, we advise that you read the biblical text that you will be working with ahead of the meeting. It helps to read whole chapters from which a specific text has been extracted for study. To guide your study, the booklet suggests in-depth questions, and these questions can be adapted

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6 WCC, *Breaking Barriers*, 109.

to suit your specific context. There is a suggested prayer to accompany each Bible study; this can be used at the beginning or end of or before and after each Bible study. These Bible studies and prayers can also be adapted to your specific context and can be integrated into an existing event or programme; we suggest planning 30 minutes to start. Ideally, we encourage taking at least 60 minutes for each Bible study. Facilitators and participants are free to decide on the time that you allocate to a Bible study session based on your specific context. Always remember to have clear actionable resolutions at the end of the Bible study. Small steps make lasting impressions and impact; the group or individual must take action first, and this can be replicated by observers.

### **The prayers in this booklet**

The prayers in this booklet accompany the text that has been chosen for study; however, we invite you to give your creativity free reign and develop your own context-specific prayers to accompany your Bible studies. You may also integrate a song from your context that speaks to the subject under discussion for that day. This can form part of your spiritual engagement to commend your work to God and to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in your quest to discern what God is saying to us on the subject of racism, xenophobia, and related discrimination.

# State of the World: Racism, Xenophobia, and Discrimination and the Intersections

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In the book *Hate Speech and Whiteness: Theological Reflections on the Journey Toward Racial Justice*,<sup>7</sup> the WCC's reference group on the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace harvested its learnings from the pilgrim team visits that had taken them to Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas, and from these visits, racism had emerged as one of the dominant themes and contemporary challenges that Africans, People of African Descent, Asians, People of Asian Descent, and Indigenous Peoples were experiencing in interpersonal relationships as well as systemically. Reports by the United Nations<sup>8</sup> show that "the world envisaged at the time of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, free from racism and discrimination, remains elusive." Africans and People of African Descent remain as the most racially discriminated group in the human family; the racism suffered by Africans and People of African Descent is being experienced in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, the Middle East, North America, Latin America, and the Pacific. There is no place where "Black People" are not racially discriminated against. Other people, such as Asians and Indigenous communities, do experience racism, as well. White supremacy and whiteness, the racist ideology and culture invented in Central and Western Europe, have been so thoroughly exported and adapted around the world that these concepts are being expressed in Indigenous languages and, to a certain extent, are fuelling instances of both interpersonal and systemic xenophobia across the African continent. These same intra-ethnic racial instances are also acknowledged among Asians and People of Asian Descent as well as among some Indigenous Peoples around the world and among Communities Discriminated against on Work and Descent, such as Dalits and Roma.

In recent years, the rise in popularity of various kinds of populist nationalist

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7 Fernando Enns and Stephen G. Brown, eds., *Hate Speech and Whiteness: Theological Reflections on the Journey Toward Racial Justice*, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2022).

8 "Statement of K. P. Ashwini Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism for the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination," 21 March 2023, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, at <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/racism/sr/statements/2023-03-20-Statement-SR-racism.pdf>. "Statement of the Chairpersons and mandate holders of the UN Anti-Racism Mechanisms delivered at the Meeting with the UN Secretary-General, UN HQ, New York," 26 October 2023, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, at <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/racism/eosg-stm-un-chairpersons-mandate-holders-un-anti-racism-mechanisms-26102023.pdf>. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Being Black in the EU: Experiences of people of African descent* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2023). "Report of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance Durban," 31 August–8 September 2001, Organization of American States, at [https://www.oas.org/dil/afrodescendants\\_durban\\_declaration.pdf](https://www.oas.org/dil/afrodescendants_durban_declaration.pdf).

movements (social and political) has been matched by increased cases of interpersonal racially motivated violence and discrimination, especially in the global North. Europe has seen far-right political parties gaining electoral votes at a time when their campaigns are based on inflammatory rhetoric against migrants and citizens who do not fit into the stereotypical local person. The war in Ukraine exposed the racism that is sometimes swept under the carpet under the ruse of “following the law”: white Ukrainian refugees had the red carpet rolled out in front of them across Europe while non-white Ukrainian citizens and residents had to endure the trauma of running away from indiscriminate bombs and encountering racial discrimination on the way to safety.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, migrants from sub-Saharan Africa have encountered horrific racism in North Africa, Europe and the Middle East, where cases of racially motivated modern slavery have been reported.<sup>10</sup> More than 2500 persons died in the Mediterranean Sea in 2023, more than 1500 between Latin and North America; more than 3000 migrants have gone missing or died in Asia Pacific. While there are many other seemingly palatable explanations to these deaths, racism and xenophobia have played a significant role.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the intersections that racism has with health, housing, education, and cumulative wealth in many countries around the world. Poor racialized countries and communities endured vaccine apartheid<sup>11</sup> as rich white countries created obstacles that inhibited others from accessing the life-saving vaccines. There were many other experiences by racialized communities in the rich countries: For some, such communities had to endure unimaginable queues to access testing and vaccines due to under-investment in healthcare services in their areas; elsewhere COVID-19 became an excuse to impose new and unreasonable visa requirements for people coming from racialized countries. Many others were the first responders, the first line of defence for societies that continue to question their humanity, their dignity, and their worth due to the impact of the racist ideology and culture entrenched in the values, norms, and systems in these societies.

The climate crisis in the world—which scientists have been telling us is a result of our activities, especially associated with industrialization—has become yet another illustration of systemic racism and its consequences. The most industrialized states (USA, China, Japan, European states, and others) who have contributed the most greenhouse gases are now the most prepared to deal with the consequences of their historic contributions while those states (Pacific island states, African states, Caribbean Islands, and some Asian states) that have contributed the least greenhouse gases are at present the most vulnerable to the consequences of the climate crisis. The rich states have largely been indifferent, often making commitments but never

9 “UNHCR chief condemns ‘discrimination, violence and racism’ against some fleeing Ukraine,” *UN News* website, 21 March 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1114282>.

10 Hélène Harroff-Tavel and Alix Nasri, *Tricked and Trapped: Human Trafficking In The Middle East* (Beirut: International Labour Organization, 2013).

11 “UN expert urges States to end ‘vaccine apartheid,’” *United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights* website, 14 June 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/06/un-expert-urges-states-end-vaccine-apartheid>.



seeing these through to realization. The most vulnerable people to this crisis are racialized peoples from around the world. Racism is everywhere!



# Contextual Bible Study

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## **The Potential of Contextual Bible Study to Transform Communities**

Christian communities draw upon various sources, including the Bible, traditions, reason, and prayers. Christian communities read the Bible, consult the traditions of the ancestors of the faith, apply their reason, and pray to decide on actions to be taken by the community. The Bible, as the word of God, is the most accessible of the foundational sources for the life of Christian communities. Actions based on discernment of biblical principles are believed to be more sustainable in Christian communities because they are understood as divinely ordained. Contextual Bible studies are meant to remove Christian faith and practice from an abstract pedestal, addressing questions about the afterlife by reconciling Christian faith, practice, and the lived realities of the communities that are reading the Bible. Christian faith has always been concerned about the life of people in this world. Jesus' concern for the poor, vulnerable, marginalized people is well attested throughout the New Testament, especially in the Gospel of Luke. This concern for the poor, vulnerable, and marginalized is not a New Testament invention because it is already well articulated in the Old Testament with an emphasis on the care for widows, orphans, and strangers. Contextual Bible studies are designed to re-member this heritage, reclaiming contemporary concerns for the marginalized and vulnerable as well as re-imagining a future that will affirm and promote a dignified life for all. When done in the spirit of the Jesus movement, these Bible studies have the potential to transform individuals and communities in a way that makes the Bible study participants own the transformation they will undergo. Christianity has the power to transform lives in this world, but history teaches us that Christianity has in the past helped establish structures that created and entrenched inequalities, exploitation, and the dehumanization of some people. Through these Bible studies, we hope that we, as communities, will be challenged to look at the past, reflect on the present, and make commitments toward repentance and atonement for a better future.

## **The Approach to Creating Contextual Bible Studies**

Contextual Bible studies affirm the continuing interventions by God in contemporary contexts; they affirm the importance and significance of lived experiences by the people of God in all places at all times; and they affirm the continuing importance and relevance of the Bible as a resource that helps Christians to make sense of what God is saying to them about their experiences. Contextual Bible studies remove the burden of discerning the will of God from the shoulders of academics, academics, and theologians into a shared burden between academics and communities, allowing communities to own the diagnosis of their problems and taking leadership in the prescriptions required to transform their situations.

Contextual Bible studies are not events but rather processes of discernment; we do not assume that a single Bible study will solve our problems and challenges, rather we encourage treating Bible studies as a process of continuous discernment to be taken as a lifelong engagement. The starting point for Contextual Bible studies is always the lived reality of a given community. The community needs to identify their own challenges for which they desire Christian responses. No challenge is too big nor too small for a Christian response! This booklet provides a selected few Bible studies to address racism, xenophobia, and discrimination, but using these Bible studies, communities can create more Bible studies on the same themes and challenges but can also create other Bible studies for other challenges being encountered in that specific community.

Once a challenge has been identified and analyzed, or once a community has *seen* the challenge, the next stage in creating a contextual Bible study is to bring their lived reality into conversation with the Bible, the word of God. This leads to the word of God *judging* the lived experience or reality of the people. To do this effectively, the Bible study must engage in a critical study of the chosen text of the Bible, putting questions that take the study beyond the obvious and into what might look like uncomfortable frontiers. Once the text has been studied through discussion, debate, and dialogue, the community will move toward *action*. How are we supposed to act to resolve or mitigate the challenge we have identified in our community?

Every contextual Bible study requires facilitation. There is no rigid qualification needed for one to facilitate a contextual Bible study; anyone can facilitate. However, a facilitator will need to be someone who is sensitive to diversity and group dynamics, especially power asymmetries between and among participants. The role of the facilitator is primarily to create a safe space for all to freely participate. Know when to diffuse situations, through verbal interventions or breaks. The facilitator also needs to prepare thoroughly before the session and to share helpful materials with participants even before the session or during the session. It is important for the facilitator to consider the venue, sitting arrangement, ice breakers, time needed, and any other resources that may be needed. Facilitators also will need to know how many participants they will have and to think ahead on the use of plenary and small groups: at what number of participants will you require working in small groups and plenaries? How will feedback be given from small groups to the plenary? As a facilitator, you are *not* a preacher or a teacher; you *are* a facilitator: you manage not command the process!

### **What is contextual Bible study (CBS)?**

Contextual Bible study is a communal Bible study approach to reading the Bible in a group that gives the group space or room to probe the text together deeply, closely, and meticulously.

It gives the group the freedom and liberty to explore historical, literary, or both, dimensions of the text where necessary to ensure clarity and objectivity.

The readings are meant to expose readers to individual, local, national, regional, and global perspectives regarding particular and relevant contemporary problems, obstacles, events, and happenings or worrying trends in their contexts.

As its name depicts, CBS focuses on the context as point of reference that gives opportunity for readers or participants (used interchangeably in this booklet) to engage in current issues confronting them in their context.

CBS is most effective if it is effectively facilitated by an enabler who guides the group through a series of questions that creates a non-threatening atmosphere for group members to participate freely in the discussions without being inhibited, controlled or limited by the facilitator.

The text is printed and read in a way that places all the participants in the same conversational space or on the same conversational page so they can hear the different voices in the text together, preferably in a common language or medium of communication that they understand and that is familiar in their context and community.

The questions, which are drawn directly from the text, are also printed and made available and accessible to the readers. These questions are meant to draw out or solicit from the participants the nuances, images, stories, characters, and moral lessons in the text and how these resonate with the context of the readers.

The CBS *session* may or may not lead to the formulation of action plans by the participants; however, the CBS *process* does lead to formulation of action plans or better still will lead to transformed actions by participants.

CBS leads to the broadening of the horizon of the readers. It also affects the negativities of the readers and as well as the facilitator. It also creates understanding, awareness, and a change of perspective on certain issues which come from the open, free, and contextual engagement with the text communally.

The main tool for CBS is the questions. The questions are to be open-ended questions that act as catalysts, ensuring that the participants interact with the text and interrogate the issues in their community in the light of the text. This encounter between the text and context in a careful and close manner results in reactions and responses to the major talking points of the text in specific ways that resonate with the context of the readers.

The uniqueness and strength of this approach to the Bible is the way it ensures that participants engage in frank discussions, open dialogue, or conversation with each other in the light of scripture.

The constituency of the readers is normally made up of ordinary users of the Bible, who might be popular and not necessarily professional theologians. So, any church or congregation or assembly, mission, and para-church organization or simply a non-denominational, community group, or institution can do CBS together.

CBS functions better in small group discussions rather than big groups. You may decide to have a hybrid where plenary orientation is given and participants go into smaller groups then come back to share with the bigger group.

Four main components are:

*Community*—Contextual Bible study is primarily focused on the people that will actually participate in the Bible study. CBS is about deepening personal but most importantly communal relationships within the community but also with God. CBS is designed to be a communal process that engages a specific community.

*Context*—Communities are all the groups of people that populate the entire planet. While we all share in the image of God, we also live in very different contexts. We also share some experiences as people, yet each community also has unique experiences. The specific context—political, social, religious, cultural, economic, and environmental—must inform the CBS process.

*Critical*—In many cases, critical is associated with scholars, but we understand critical to be related to the questions that the community puts to their context and also to the Bible. Ask the what, how, and why questions about the context and the text. Where possible, this must also involve asking questions about the making of the text. CBS goes beyond the obvious approach to situational analysis or textual interpretation.

*Change*—This is the goal of Bible studies, to be agents and catalysts of change or transformation both at a personal and a communal level. These Bible studies are instruments to equip us with knowledge and skills to respond as Christians to the lived experiences of our communities. Change is the ultimate aim.

“Our sympathies are with America and its allies. But we will make it clear thru the United Nations and other diplomatic channels that beautiful words and extensive hand outs cannot be substitutes for the simple responsibility of treating our colored brothers in America as first-class human beings.’ ... So if we are to be a first-class nation, we cannot have second-class citizens.”<sup>12</sup>

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12 King cited words spoken to him by Ghanaian Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah. “Remarks in Acceptance of the Forty-second Spingarn Medal at the Forty-eighth Annual NAACP Convention,” The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute website, 28 June 1957, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/remarks-acceptance-forty-second-spingarn-medal-forty-eighth-annual-naacp>.

# Contextual Bible Study: January

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## Exodus 1: 7-10

7 But the Israelites were fruitful and prolific; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.

8 Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.

9 He said to his people, “Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we.

10 Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.”

### *Notes on the Text*

Exodus is the second book in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and the second book in the Christian Bible. The name comes from the Greek words referring to “going out.” This book covers the “going out” of the Israelites from Egypt, where they had lived for some centuries. We learn from the Bible that about 70 Israelites went into Egypt fleeing famine in Canaan. By the time they left Egypt, they had increased very much; the actual number is difficult to say though some biblical texts give the impression of around two million people (Ex. 12:37). Their lives in Egypt had started well. Joseph, who had become a senior official in Egypt, had made sure the Israelites were well catered for, but at some point, Egyptians had developed mistrust about them, and the new rulers started exploiting them, using them as slaves or forced labourers with no remuneration. It is at that point that God heard their cries and raised Moses to liberate them from this bondage. As they were being liberated, God constantly implored them never to forget to care for the widows, orphans, and strangers. We do not know exactly when this book was written nor the actual person who wrote the book.

### **Ice Breaker: Session 1 (10 minutes)**

*Do this session in plenary, asking questions and letting participants answer. Ask the plenary to affirm each answer and write the agreed answers on a chart.*

1. What is xenophobia?
2. What are some of the reasons for it?
3. Are there instances of xenophobia in our community?

### ***Notes on Xenophobia***

Some people have so much emotional and political attachment to their nation-

states to the extent that they completely dislike the idea of foreigners moving into their geographical space, irrespective of the reasons for such relocation. These feelings can then lead to animosity and sometimes hatred and dislike, that can lead to propaganda, repatriation, even forced eviction, deportation, or just violent attacks on innocent foreigners. Xenophobia is the irrational fear or dislike or hatred of foreigners. Many communities exhibit this attitude, especially if they think their problems are being caused by the influx of foreigners. Sometimes, foreigners are blamed for all the bad things that happen in a community—crimes, droughts, erosion of values, norms, and culture.

### **Questions for CBS Session or Meeting: Session 2 (30 minutes)**

*If your group is made up of more than ten participants, divide the group into smaller groups of at least five participants per group. Ask each group to appoint a secretary to write down their agreed positions and to have someone who will give feedback to the whole group.*

1. What is the text about?
2. What is it saying about the Israelites as immigrants?
3. Why was the pharaoh threatened by the population growth of the Israelites?
4. How justified were the king's reasons for being xenophobic?
5. What lessons do we take from this scenario with regard to xenophobia?
6. How do we effectively handle such xenophobic situations that are spearheaded by leadership from within a community against immigrants?

### **Feedback in Plenary: Session 3 (15 minutes)**

*Ask the groups to give their feedback to the whole group, focusing especially on what the participants have learned and can put into practice in their families and community.*

### **Song and Prayer (5 minutes)**

Lord Jesus, you migrated from heaven to earth and you suffered at the hands of the powers of this world.

You know the plight of many on our globe who are suffering from the xenophobic laws that are passed to limit their freedom and to stir up hatred, verbal and physical attacks, and animosity against them in diverse ways. Lord, may you protect those who are being abused by the systems that generate xenophobia that they happen to be born or migrated into.

Lord of the heavens, may you cause us to be accommodative to foreigners and aliens.



# Contextual Bible Study: February

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## 1 Kings 12: 16–19

16 When all Israel saw that the king would not listen to them, the people answered the king, “What share do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Look now to your own house, O David.” So Israel went away to their tents.

17 But Rehoboam reigned over the Israelites who were living in the towns of Judah.

18 When King Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was taskmaster over the forced labor, all Israel stoned him to death. King Rehoboam then hurriedly mounted his chariot to flee to Jerusalem.

19 So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.

### Notes on the Text

1 Kings is part of a collection of Old Testament books that are known as the Deuteronomistic history; this collection begins with the book of Deuteronomy and includes Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, as well as 1 and 2 Kings. These books appear to have been finalized after the destruction of Israel by Assyria around 722–21 BCE (Before the Common Era). When we read the stories of Israel from Genesis 12, there was the belief that God’s people would not be defeated by the kings of this world, yet in 722–21 BCE, Israel was defeated, and many Israelites were sent into exile. These books struggle with the question, How was it possible for Israel, the chosen people of God, to be defeated? Was God also defeated? Throughout these books, a theological explanation of what had happened is given; that is, God had allowed the chosen people to be defeated and plundered because they had been disobedient to their God. Their defeat was punishment from God; God had used the Assyrians to punish the Israelites. We learn that the perfect situation was for all Israelites to be ruled, first by God and when this failed (1 Samuel 8), then by the house of David, and this also failed soon after the death of Solomon, son of David.

### Ice Breaker: Session 1 (10 minutes)

*Do this session in plenary, asking questions and letting participants answer. Ask the plenary to affirm each answer and write the agreed answers on a chart.*

1. What is tribalism?
2. What is racism?
3. What is the difference between tribalism and racism?

### **Notes on Tribalism and Racism**

When you have different groups of people who want to unite under one leader, there are bound to be challenges with regard to the process of integration, for example, tensions between those who are regarded as or regard themselves as superior and the ones that are regarded as subjects or see themselves as inferior or looked down upon. Ethnic sentiments could be aroused in the process, and they need to be handled properly. When people begin to assert the superiority of their tribe over all others—actively promoting privileges and opportunities to members of their tribe with tribal affiliation being the most important criterion—that is tribalism. And when groups begin to assert the superiority of their ethnic group<sup>13</sup> over all other groups, asserting privileges and opportunities to members of their ethnic group over all others, with ethnicity being the most important criterion, that is racism.

### **Questions for CBS Session or Meeting: Session 2 (30 minutes)**

*If your group is made up of more than ten participants, divide the group into smaller groups of at least five participants per group. Ask each group to appoint a secretary to write down their agreed positions and to have someone who will give feedback to the whole group.*

1. What is tribalism? What is the difference between tribalism and racism?
2. What is the story concerning the 12 Tribes of Israel about?
3. Why do you think the people of the ten northern tribes complained?
4. What impression do you get from the response from the tribe of Judah?
5. What is your view of the reaction from the northern tribes?
6. What are the implications of this for racism and racial discrimination?
7. How can we correct such situations in contemporary times?

### **Feedback in Plenary: Session 3 (15 minutes)**

*Ask the groups to give their feedback to the whole group, focusing especially on what the participants have learned and can put into practice in their families and community.*

### **Song and Prayer (5 minutes)**

Almighty God, we thank you for your plans and purpose for the nations. We pray

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<sup>13</sup> Ethnic groups are often presented as “races,” however, race, which implies inert qualitative differences between different ethnic groups, has been scientifically proven to be false. All human beings belong to one species, and our diversities are based on the different environments that we live in, and millennia of adapting to our environment has created the diversities. We have different ethnicities, but we are one family.

that as we interact with each other as nation-states, churches, and ethnic groups with different histories with regards to our relationships, geographical locations, settlements, and cultural boundaries, you will instil in our hearts love, unity, and reconciliation. Remove from us all claims to superiority over any of your people, O God, and instil in us a humbling attitude of equality and equity with all your people. Remove in us a claim to entitlement to undeserved and unearned privileges and give us strength to disavow privileges we have received in the past and to exercise our agency for equality, inclusion, and equity in our community and beyond. We plead for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

## Contextual Bible Study: March

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### **Genesis 21: 11–17**

11 The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son.

12 But God said to Abraham, “Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you.

13 As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring.”

14 So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

15 When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes.

16 Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, “Do not let me look on the death of the child.” And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept.

17 And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is.”

### ***Notes on the Text***

The book of Genesis is the first book in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and the Christian Bible. The book is generally divided into two sections that are related. The first section (Gen. 1–11) is commonly referred to as the primeval history; the focus of these chapters is the global beginnings of creation. These chapters are not history, as we know history and need not be read the same way we read history books. They are theological myths and legends or sagas about a time that we cannot date, hence the reference to simply “the beginnings.” The second section (Gen. 12–50) is referred to as the patriarchal history or the story of the fathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). Abraham is thought of as the founding father of the Israelites and that lineage passed from him to Isaac and then Jacob. Jacob becomes the father of the 12 tribes of Israel. Even though Abraham had been promised land and a nation, he never got to possess the land and struggled to have children and ended up having only two sons. The two sons were born to two mothers: a maid-servant of Sarah, Hagar, and Abraham’s wife, Sarah. The two sons were Ishmael and Isaac. The relationship between Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael, and Isaac was

complicated, and it ended with Abraham sending Hagar and Ishmael away. There is no agreement as to when and by whom this book was written. The general readers of the Bible regard it as having been written by Moses, but this is widely rejected by scholars.

### **Ice Breaker: Session 1 (10 minutes)**

*Do this session in plenary, asking questions and letting participants answer. Ask the plenary to affirm each answer and write the agreed answers on a chart.*

1. What are the different situations in which children are born in our community?
2. Are children always treated in the same way? If not, why not?
3. Are children of the same father but different mothers treated in the same way? If not, why not?

### ***Notes on Parentage and Discrimination***

Issues concerning different parentage and the growth of nations of unequal historical heritage have always been a challenge. People go back to history to establish their legitimacy and in doing so sometimes dehumanize and discriminate against others. In many communities, children are discriminated against if they are born outside of marriage or if their mother was accused of disturbing a stable marriage by becoming a second wife. Children whose fathers refuse to accept their mother as a wife are sometimes also discriminated against by others in the families of both the mother and father. Orphans are also sometimes discriminated against and made into beasts of burden by their supposed carers. In some families, children that are successful or show signs that they will succeed in the future are privileged more than those who are considered failures or on the path to failure.

### **Questions for CBS Session or Meeting: Session 2 (30 minutes)**

*If your group is made up of more than ten participants, divide the group into smaller groups of at least five participants per group. Ask each group to appoint a secretary to write down their agreed positions and to have someone who will give feedback to the whole group.*

1. What is this text about?
2. Why do you think Abraham was upset about Ishmael?
3. If the statement in verse 13 that Ishmael is also Abraham's son is about discrimination, what aspect of it shows discrimination?
4. What is God's viewpoint about Ismael and the promise to him?
5. What do you think Hagar's emotional state and feelings concerning discrimination will be in this story?

6. What examples do you see of this story in your context of discrimination?
7. How can this type of discrimination be dealt with in your context today?

**Feedback in Plenary: Session 3 (15 minutes)**

Ask the groups to give their feedback to the whole group, focusing especially on what the *participants have learned and can put into practice in their families and community*.

**Song and Prayer (5 minutes)**

O Lord, open our eyes to the plight of people of different descent than us who are going through discrimination and displacement. Mothers and children who are refugees in other lands through no fault of theirs who are being discriminated against and going through deserts with no water or food, no water or shelter, like Hagar and her son, Ishmael. May they experience God's intervention in their plight. May you also let their handlers appreciate their plight because we all share a common humanity. Embolden us to know we could be their oases and be manna in their deserts. **Amen.**

# Contextual Bible Study: April

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## Leviticus 19: 33–34

33 When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien.

34 The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

### *Notes on the Text*

Leviticus is the third book in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), and its name in Hebrew is Law of the Priests because it is a collection of mostly priestly regulations to be followed by the people of Israel and the Levites or the Priests. There are many laws that are found in this book, and these can be divided into three main categories: ceremonial, civil, and moral laws. Ceremonial laws help separate one group from those surrounding them; dietary laws are a good example of ceremonial laws. Civil laws are given to regulate relationships within the community; laws prescribing reparations and business ethics are good examples. The import of both ceremonial and civil laws is culture-specific, and these are constantly revised and updated as contexts change. While these laws are meant for a particular people, adoption by other people is purely optional. Moral laws are normally seen as transcultural and are shared across cultures and communities, often withstanding the test of time. Laws governing murder, respecting parents, and caring for the vulnerable appear to be good examples of moral laws.

### **Ice Breaker: Session 1 (10 minutes)**

*Do this session in plenary, asking questions and letting participants answer. Ask the plenary to affirm each answer and write the agreed answers on a chart.*

1. Are there people in our community whose stories include movement from some other place to where they are now?
2. Why were people in the past moving from one place to another?
3. Why did some people stop moving around?
4. Why are people moving from their birthplaces in contemporary communities?

### *Notes on Migration, Strangers, and Foreigners*

The Bible is full of migration of people from one place to the other. People migrate across continents, regions, and nations. There are so many examples in the Bible that

show that economic migration is not related to one nation or one type of people. There are also the realities of war that cause displacements and also make people become refugees in another place. Today, conflicts, the climate crisis, economic inequalities, inequalities in educational opportunities, and the general search for the proverbial greener pastures are increasing the pressures, forcing people to move from home to faraway places. People are losing their lives, experiencing trauma, and going through mental health episodes because of the risks involved in the process of moving, the disappointments of seeing a reality that is different from the fantasy of those greener pastures, and the pressures of those left behind.

### **Questions for CBS Session or Meeting: Session 2 (30 minutes)**

*If your group is made up of more than ten participants, divide the group into smaller groups of at least five participants per group. Ask each group to appoint a secretary to write down their agreed positions and to have someone who will give feedback to the whole group.*

1. What is this text about? What kind of law is this and why?
2. If it is about foreigners, which particular group of people can we term as aliens in this text?
3. What were the challenges that the Israelites faced in coexisting with foreigners?
4. Why were they being admonished to treat them as citizens?
5. What practical steps do the Israelites need to take so as not to be xenophobic and discriminatory toward foreigners?
6. What are the resemblances in this text to your context?
7. What practical steps can be taken to normalize relations with foreigners?

### **Feedback in Plenary: Session 3 (15 minutes)**

*Ask the groups to give their feedback to the whole group, focusing especially on what the participants have learned that they can put into practice in their families and community.*

### **Song and Prayer (5 minutes)**

O Lord God our Father, we lift up many individuals, families, and communities who, for one reason or another, find themselves living in places around the world, places that were not their ancestral lands but that are becoming their children's ancestral lands. We lift up communities that continue to be followed by the label "migrant," even if they now know of no other place but these places. We lift up children born into these families and communities who are made to live and exist in liminal spaces with inadequate acceptance and embrace. There are those who have migrated for



economic reasons. There are others who have to leave their countries for political reasons, and others are displaced through wars, and they have become refugees in places not by choice but by circumstances beyond their control. There are those who are victims of climate change, making their previous homes inadequate spaces for the abundant life you promised us all. The economic architecture of this world, with its racist and colonial privileges, has forced many to migrate.

We lift up the multitudes of God-fearing people around the world, who, through the disinformation led by extremist social and political movements, are made to associate migrants with crime and evil, for they need the guidance of the Holy Spirit to acknowledge and appreciate the myriad ways in which the migrants contribute to nation and community building. O Lord, we pray that through your Holy Spirit, you will widen and deepen the hearts and minds of those receiving foreigners to be accommodative and compassionate toward them. May the concept of our common humanity and your attributes of love and mercy be shared broadly in the hearts of the receiving communities and countries. In Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## Contextual Bible Study: May

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### **Galatians 2: 11–14**

11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned;

12 for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction.

13 And the other Jews joined him in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

14 But when I saw that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, «If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?»

### ***Notes on the Text***

The Letter to the Galatians is one of the letters in the New Testament that are believed to have been written by the Apostle Paul. There are two main theories on when this letter was written: For some scholars, this was one of the earliest letters written, between 48 and 49 CE (the South Galatian theory). Another group suggests this letter was written around the time of Paul's third missionary journey, around 54–55 CE (the North Galatian theory). However we look at it, this letter is one of the earliest written documents of the New Testament. The letter deals with many troubling questions on the relationship between the followers of Jesus Christ and Judaism—was following Jesus dependent on adherence to Judaism, or was it something independent of Judaic prescriptions? The letter also addresses the inconsistencies exhibited even by the leaders of the nascent Jesus movement when among adherents of Judaism and Gentile converts. Since Judaism prescribed dietary restrictions for adherents, were Christianity or the Jesus movement's Gentile converts supposed to observe these restrictions? Should leaders of the Jesus movement uphold the dietary restrictions always or only when it was convenient?

### **Ice Breaker: Session 1 (10 minutes)**

*Do this session in plenary, asking questions and letting participants answer. Ask the plenary to affirm each answer and write the agreed answers on a chart.*

1. What are the practices that separate us (nation, tribe, clan, family) from others around us?
2. What are some of the stereotypes that we have about other people?

3. Are there people who often change what they do to fit in with different groups? Explain.

### ***Notes on Culturally Sanctioned Discrimination***

Discrimination is any unfair treatment or arbitrary distinction based on a person's race, sex, religion, nationality, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability, age, language, social origin, or other status.<sup>14</sup> The Old and New Testaments do carry voices that have been rightly identified as promoting discriminatory practices, especially around the ideas of the election of Israelites as God's Chosen People and all other people as only good to be enemies of God and, by implication, of Israelites. In the New Testament, "racism" or ethnocentrism centered mainly on the way Jewish people treated Gentiles or non-Jews. The early apostles were not exempt from this ethnocentrism since they were also Jews by birth, and all of them remained adherents of Judaism even as they were leading the nascent Christian movement. In many communities, culturally sanctioned discrimination and ethnocentrism are widespread. Most communities have myths, legends, and sagas about their identities. Such narratives help separate *us* from *them*; they give us a sense of our superiority, the superiority of our ways, and the inferiority of the other's ways. But when we travel to other communities, we encounter their stereotypes about us and how we are considered inferior in their own narratives. When outsiders come to live with us, do we embrace their ways or do we demand they embrace our ways?

### **Questions for CBS Session or Meeting: Session 2 (30 minutes)**

*If your group is made up of more than ten participants, divide the group into smaller groups of at least five participants per group. Ask each group to appoint a secretary to write down their agreed positions and to have someone who will give feedback to the whole group.*

1. What is this text about?
2. This passage marks the confrontation between Paul and Peter. What is the main problem that caused Paul to confront Peter?
3. Why did Peter behave the way he did that caused Paul to criticize him?
4. Why did other Jewish believers also follow suit and act in the same way as Peter did?
5. What kind of situation can you identify with in your context in connection with this incident?
6. How can we ensure that such a situation will not continue in our midst?

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<sup>14</sup> "Prohibition of Discrimination, Harassment, including Sexual Harassment, and Abuse of Authority," UN Women website, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/uncoordinated/antiharassment.html#:~:text=Discrimination%20is%20any%20unfair%20treatment,social%20origin%20or%20other%20status.>

### **Feedback in Plenary: Session 3 (15 minutes)**

*Ask the groups to give their feedback to the whole group, focusing especially on what the participants have learned and can put into practice in their families and community.*

### **Song and Prayer (5 minutes)**

In the name of our triune God, we repent of our sin of hypocrisy. Our lives have been punctuated by our constant quest to fit in: fit in with our families, fit in with our neighbours, fit in with our faith community, fit in with our professional community, fit in with the trends of our time. In our quest to fit in, we have become multiple variants of ourselves, O God. We have opposed discrimination when we have been victims and embraced it when we have been perpetrators. For this we sincerely apologize to you and to all our sisters, brothers, and all others in between and beyond, and most importantly, we are sorry that we have allowed our cultural identity markers to be the basis upon which we have denigrated and rejected your image in all of your people, O God. We invite the Holy Spirit to guide us toward a discrimination-free society in which we will relate with all in a consistent manner in all places and spaces. Help us become agents of anti-discriminatory Christianity and ecumenism. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Contextual Bible Study: June

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### Acts 10: 30–36

30 Cornelius replied, “Four days ago at this very hour, at three o’clock, I was praying in my house when suddenly a man in dazzling clothes stood before me.

31 He said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God.

32 Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon, who is called Peter; he is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.’

33 Therefore I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. So now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say.”

34 Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality,

35 but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

36 You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all.”

### *Notes on the Text*

The Acts of the Apostles is generally regarded as the book that tells the history of the early church; it is the first book after the four gospels. This book is believed to have been written by the author of the Gospel of Luke. We do not know when the book was actually written, but it is believed to have been between 70 and 90 CE, possibly by a Christian who was living in Rome. The book was originally written in Greek. The book covers many issues, but one can also think of it as a testament to the leadership and work of two main protagonists in the spread of the Christian faith, Apostle Peter (chapters 3–12) and Apostle Paul (9–28). Central to the many issues therein is the enabling power of the Holy Spirit and intra-Christian relations—between Palestinian Jews and Diasporic Jews as well as between Jews and Gentiles. Is Christianity an exclusionary faith, and are Christians supposed to be an exclusive community, or are they supposed to be inclusive, embracing diversity? Acts is one of the books in the Bible in which God’s option for the poor and vulnerable comes out strongly. God chooses to take sides with those who are often excluded or marginalized in mainstream circles.

### **Ice Breaker: Session 1 (10 minutes)**

*Do this session in plenary, asking questions and letting participants answer. Ask the plenary to affirm each answer and write the agreed answers on a chart.*

1. Do we know of groups of people that are marginalized or favoured in our community?
2. What are the reasons for their marginalization or being favoured in our community?
3. How are their lives affected by this marginalization or favouritism?

### ***Notes on Marginalization***

Among others, one of the issues this text talked about is favouritism. Favouritism can manifest itself in diverse ways, and it can cause splits, disharmony, and disunity. Favouritism creates marginalization in families and communities; those favoured receive privileges, while those not favoured are marginalized and denied opportunities, even entitlements or rights. Favouritism can end up as norms and values of systems and structures such that it becomes systemic. Some people are marginalized because of their ethnic, tribal, clan, family, or religious background. Marginalized people are treated with suspicion mostly based on stereotypes that we have about them. Marginalizing people for whatever reason appears contradictory to the Christian faith.

### ***Questions for CBS Session or Meeting: Session 2 (30 minutes)***

*If your group is made up of more than ten participants, divide the group into smaller groups of at least five participants per group. Ask each group to appoint a secretary to write down their agreed positions and to have someone who will give feedback to the whole group.*

1. What is the main point that Peter wants to stress in this text?
2. The key characters in this text were Cornelius and Peter. How were they used to convey the message about favouritism to you?
3. What attribute of God do we have here?
4. What are some of the situations in our contexts that call for the demonstration of this attribute of God?
5. How can we operationalize God's attribute of impartiality in our communities?

### **Feedback in Plenary: Session 3 (15 minutes)**

*Ask the groups to give their feedback to the whole group, focusing especially on what the participants have learned and can put into practice in their families and community.*

### **Song and Prayer (5 minutes)**

Our Father in heaven, we thank you for the lessons that we learn from the scriptures concerning our relationship with one another. We find that our human nature tends to make us prefer to relate more easily with people of our ethnic groups or our social or political or doctrinal circles. We sometimes ignore or overlook the anomaly in this type of selective or nuanced way of relating to people generally. We confess such sins to you and ask for forgiveness. We thank you for the emphatic statement, based on Peter's experience, that God clearly shows no favouritism. May we learn from God's example not to show favouritism in any situation or to any people. **Amen.**

## Contextual Bible Study: July

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### **Acts 2: 1–5**

- 1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.
- 2 And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.
- 3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.
- 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.
- 5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem.

### ***Notes on the Text***

In the previous Bible study, we highlighted that the two main protagonists in the Book of Acts are Peter and Paul. Another dominant presence in this book is the Holy Spirit. The ecumenical movement, represented by the WCC, and many other Christian communities believe in the triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In a very simplified approach, there is a sense in which the Trinity has acted in succession: the era of the presence of the Father, the era of the presence of the Son, and the era of the presence of the Holy Spirit, into which the Book of Acts ushers us. In each era, God is the enabler of people. In tracking the missionary activities post-resurrection, the author of Acts is tracking the powerful interventions of the Holy Spirit, who is acting through different people—widows, strangers, apostles, and so on. Some early followers of Jesus believed it was a sect within Judaism, while others believed the new movement was global. Language would not stand in the way of this global movement; all languages were to be deployed to realize the global dimensions of this new movement. In the early church, language presented some real problems. There were Jews who lived in the diaspora and had visited Jerusalem and joined the early church. They did not speak Hebrew or Aramaic but spoke Greek and other languages like Persian. Discrimination happened when speakers of Hebrew or Aramaic were favoured, leading to the appointment of the first deacons, whose prominent protagonist was Stephen. Language is a powerful tool.

### **Ice Breaker: Session 1 (10 minutes)**

*Do this session in plenary, asking questions and letting participants answer. Ask the plenary to affirm each answer and write the agreed answers on a chart.*

1. Do spirits speak in special languages?



2. In what ways does the ability to speak on behalf of ancestors, spirits, and God confer authority or power on the speaker?
3. How do we communicate and perceive people that do not speak our language?

### **Case Study: Christian Service in South Africa for the Day of Pentecost**

The day of Pentecost is one of the days we are very familiar with in Christian circles.

Most people associate it with the coming of the Holy Spirit. Most importantly, in Pentecostal circles, it is linked closely with speaking in tongues.

I (Eric) had a very interesting experience when I visited South Africa some time ago. I had intended to attend a Pentecostal church. I saw a signboard and went into the church, but I saw that I had strayed into a white Pentecostal Afrikaans church.

I went and sat down in a pew, and someone came to me and said, “Are you sure this is the church you want to attend?” I said, “Sure!” Then he said, “Well, this is an Afrikaans church and also white. I am not sure this is the church you want to attend because I am not sure you understand Afrikaans. Across the road, just a few blocks away, there is an English Pentecostal church. I think that is where you are being directed and not here.” I answered, “Well, the body of Christ is one, so I will stay here. I am sure I will enjoy the service even if I don’t understand the language.”

But I sat for a couple of minutes, and I then became conscious of my environment and started getting intimidated by the white presence and the loud outbursts in Afrikaans, people talking and greeting each other as the service had not started yet. In fact, I started feeling uncomfortable.

Then I said to myself, “Perhaps the Afrikaans gentleman is right. There is a language barrier, and they want to perpetuate it.” So, I got up, and stormed out of the place to the English Pentecostal church, which was a mixed church of both Black and white, and I really enjoyed it.

### **Questions for CBS Session or Meeting: Session 2 (30 minutes)**

*If your group is made up of more than ten participants, divide the group into smaller groups of at least five participants per group. Ask each group to appoint a secretary to write down their agreed positions and to have someone who will give feedback to the whole group.*

1. What is this text saying to us about the day of Pentecost?
2. What impression did the day create in the minds of the original people who were present?
3. What message was the speaking in tongues on that special day meant to convey to the gathering that day?
4. What message has it conveyed to generations that have been reading it

over the centuries?

5. What do we learn concerning the power of language as a tool for discrimination?
6. In what practical ways can we eliminate the use of dominant languages to marginalize or dehumanize others from minoritized cultures and speaking minoritized languages?

### **Feedback in Plenary: Session 3 (15 minutes)**

*Ask the groups to give their feedback to the whole group, focusing especially on what the participants have learned and can put into practice in their families and community.*

### **Song and Prayer (5 minutes)**

Almighty God, the father of all humankind. In your own wisdom, you created humankind, and in your own power, you allowed different language groups to emerge and coexist together as groups of people with diverse languages.

We thank you for language, which is a powerful tool for communication and also for the development of values in communities. Unfortunately, even though we appreciate the relevance of language, it has been and is still being used for colonization, imperialism, and the marginalization of others in church and society.

We pray for awareness for the church to realize that God understands and is present in every language and that discrimination and deliberate attempts to discriminate against others based on language are unacceptable and must not be encouraged.

Cause us by the power of the Holy Spirit to support and be instruments to revive the language or dialect of groups at risk of becoming extinct.

This is our prayer, in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

# Contextual Bible Study: August

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## Matthew 28: 19–20

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

### *Notes on the Text*

The Gospel of Matthew is the first book in our New Testament. It is one of four gospels that are found in the New Testament. This gospel has a close relationship to two other gospels, Mark and Luke, and the three are called the Synoptic Gospels; they share some materials and are closer to each other than they are to the fourth gospel, the Gospel of John. It is believed that Matthew was written later than the Gospel of Mark by someone who lived in Palestine and for a Jewish Christian community. It pays attention to and explains issues in a way that would make sense to people from a Jewish background. For example, it traces the genealogy of Jesus back to Abraham, the father of the Jewish people; it emphasizes the sacredness of mountains and associates important things with mountains, like the Sermon on the Mount. Circumcision, Jerusalem, and extensive use of the Old Testament are indicators of this Jewish connection. In the post-resurrection encounters between the resurrected Lord and the Apostles, one command has stood out, the ‘great commission’ cited above. While Jesus has been the major protagonist of the kingdom of heaven (the Matthean representation of what other gospels call the kingdom of God), what was going to happen now? The response to this question is the great commission.

### **Ice Breaker: Session 1 (10 minutes)**

*Do this session in plenary, asking questions and letting participants answer. Ask the plenary to affirm each answer and write the agreed answers on a chart.*

1. What are commissions in our society? What other words do we use to describe commissions?
2. Who is the owner of the work that is done in the context of a commission?

### **Case Study: Experiencing the Divisive Nature of the Great Commission**

Ironically, this passage is called the great commission in Christian circles. In response, several missionary groups, Christian organizations, and churches have taken it as a command to be obeyed over the centuries. Why has the implementation of this

great commission not brought about more unity and impartiality in the world? Why has it rather led to great polarization around the world, among Christians and across faiths? How do we explain the fragmentation of the churches, if all believers are supposed to have the same mandate and same goal of mission to the world?

For example, the African churches in Europe are so busy reaching Africans in the diaspora that they see the great commission as reaching the African people of the diaspora more than anything else.

I (Eric) was on sabbatical in the USA at Kennesaw State University, and my white Christian colleagues took me to Black churches around the city of Atlanta. and thought that perhaps I would settle into those churches better since I am a Black African. I was not comfortable on a particular Sunday when, after church in a Black church, we went for lunch at a restaurant, and I noticed that it was only Blacks who were at the restaurant. Apparently, after Sunday services, most Blacks met there for lunch and fellowship.

My colleague, a white Christian lecturer, came to pick me up after lunch to take me home. He sat in the car and did not get out. When those of us in the restaurant had finished eating, he waited for me to get into the car and then said, "I am sure you enjoyed yourself." But I was very uncomfortable with the situation.

Furthermore, during that sabbatical in Atlanta, I got calls from members of Ghanaian churches miles away from where I was who asked me to join their churches since I am a Ghanaian. They were very busy doing the great commission among Ghanaians who have come to the USA and are living in the Atlanta area. I turned down their requests because I thought I needed to broaden my horizons by attending churches in the area that I was living in.

I spotted a Lutheran church very close to the fellows' residence where I lived, just a five-minute walk away, and that was the church I attended for the year I was on sabbatical, and even though it was predominantly white, I really learned a lot and built very lasting relationships.

### ***Notes on the Great Commission and Colonization***

The great commission was a motivating factor for Christian missionaries. From the early missionary journeys of the Apostles, they believed the resurrected Lord had tasked them to spread the good news of the kingdom. In Acts and in the letters of Paul and the gospels, there were instances where the evangelizers sought more than spreading the good news; they sought to conquer or colonize people by spreading the good news clothed in their culture. During the era of European imperialism and colonization, when Europe went all over the world in search of resources, Christian missionaries were equally spreading their work and quest to Christianize the world. The great commission ended up reading more like a command to colonize, conquer, and subjugate peoples who were not Christians to make them Europeans and Christians. Theologies, education, economies, cultures, and spiritualities of other peoples were destroyed and replaced by European alternatives. The great

commission that was supposed to reconcile God, humanity, and creation became a racist and colonizing instrument in many places around the world.

### **Questions for CBS Session or Meeting: Session 2 (30 minutes)**

*If your group is made up of more than ten participants, divide the group into smaller groups of at least five participants per group. Ask each group to appoint a secretary to write down their agreed positions and to have someone who will give feedback to the whole group.*

1. If the text is called the great commission, then what is it about?
2. What is the reason why Jerusalem, Judaea, and the segregated Samaria were to be reached, in that order, with the good news?
3. The commission is to go as far as the ends of the earth. Why is it so?
4. Why do you think minoritized groups in diaspora like to honour the great commission among people of their own ethnicity and colour rather than those of other ethnicities and colours?
5. What is the essence of the great commission in terms of understanding of our humanity, our frontiers, and racial perspectives in our present contexts?
6. What do you think we need to do differently in response to the great commission?

### **Feedback in Plenary: Session 3 (15 minutes)**

*Ask the groups to give their feedback to the whole group, focusing especially on what the participants have learned and can put into practice in their families and community.*

### **Song and Prayer (5 minutes)**

We thank you, Lord, for giving us your son, Jesus Christ, to come and die for our sins.

We come before you to repent of our sins of turning your commission and mission into a colonizing and destructive commission and mission that saw us joining hands with empires of this world in subjugating your people and creation for our own selfish benefits instead of ushering our sisters and brothers into the beautiful world characterized by your good news.

Our going astray was not for lack of instruction and guidance because your son, our Lord Jesus Christ did not leave us without instructions; it was driven by our human desires. He gave His great command and commission to go into our world and share the good news with all communities. We were instructed to reach out indiscriminately, to embrace all, because you embraced us and you embraced all. Lord, give us a heart that is not socially conditioned toward discrimination,

marginalization, colonization, and domination of those to whom you will send us to share the good news of the kingdom. May you, O Lord, liberate us from the stereotypes and prejudices that create barriers to us sharing the gospel freely with others. **Amen.**

## Contextual Bible Study: September

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### **John 4: 4–12**

4 But he had to go through Samaria.

5 So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.

6 Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

7 A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.”

8 (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)

9 The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)

10 Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.”

11 The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?”

12 Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?”

### ***Notes on the Text***

The Gospel of John is the fourth gospel in the New Testament. It is believed to be the last gospel of the four gospels to be written, around 100 CE in Ephesus. It is also believed to have been written for Christians of a Hellenistic background, that is, non-Jewish or Palestinian–Jewish Christians. It retells the story of Jesus like the other gospels but does not always follow the same sequence of events. No gospel presents the divinity of Jesus better than this gospel, and it is regarded as having a high Christology. Jesus is not shy in asserting his divinity in this gospel. The author is traditionally believed to be John, the disciple of Jesus, who in this gospel is presented as the disciple that Jesus loved more than the others. The author aims to make the readers “believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.” (20:31) The miracles are interpreted and used differently in this gospel when compared to the other gospels; here it is the spiritual significance of these miracles that is important. With the feeding of the 5000, it is not the physical leftovers that are important; it is the spiritual significance of Jesus as the Bread of Life that stands out.

### **Ice Breaker: Session 1 (10 minutes)**

*Do this session in plenary, asking questions and letting participants answer. Ask the plenary to affirm each answer and write the agreed answers on a chart.*

1. Are there times when our journeys take us through places and communities that we do not particularly like?
2. How do we prepare for such journeys?
3. What do we expect from the people we will encounter in these spaces and communities?

### **Case Study: Sharing the Cup**

The story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well is an important story concerning how Jesus dealt with others who were discriminated against because of historical, social, and cultural barriers. Was Jesus a racist? Either he was racist, or he was not. There is no middle way.

*Wine or juice experience explains things further.*

I (Eric) remember, in 2002 I officiated at a communion service of people from different denominations and coming from more than 20 countries in El Salvador for the “Through the Eyes of the Other” Intercultural Bible Studies Consultation. I was told that there are those who took communion with fruit juice who would not like to share a cup with those who took communion with an alcoholic drink.

So, I held two jars, one labelled “juice” and the other labelled “wine.”

During the sharing of the elements, when the person whose turn it was to partake got to me, I asked, “Wine or juice?”

And I gave the cup in accordance with the choice of the celebrant.

Just like this story, the main barrier is that Jews would not like to share a cup with Samaritans, just as those who took juice would not like to share the cup with those who took wine.

### ***Notes on Racial Prejudice, Discrimination, and Racism***

Racial prejudice refers to the attitude of looking down on the humanity, practices, and customs of some groups of people based on stereotypes our own society has created about such groups. Racial prejudices can lead to racial discrimination at interpersonal or systemic levels. Racial discrimination refers to the unfair treatment of an individual or a group based on their ethnicity; the amount of melanin their body has, which affects the pigmentation of their skin, hair, and eyes; their language; and their culture, and so on. Racism emerges mostly in those instances when specific communities institutionalize their racial prejudices to the point where social, political, legal, economic, and education systems begin to act on these prejudices as the bases for laws and policies, thereby creating legal and seemingly



legitimate obstacles for some groups while enabling and privileging the insiders in the distribution of and access to opportunities and advantages in the community.<sup>15</sup> Our world is currently running on systems that are racially prejudiced toward Africans, People of African Descent, Asians, People of Asian Descent, Indigenous Peoples, and other communities that are discriminated against based on work and descent. Central and Western Europeans created this system, and it was exported and implanted in many communities around the world through imperialism and colonization. The system continues to influence how people relate around the world and influences how we understand beauty. This system had a dual transaction with Christian theology leading to the white God, white Jesus, white angels, and white people as opposed to the black devil and black as the colour of sin and evil, as the colour of all bad things like black-market, blacklisting, blackmail, blackout, and so on.

### **Questions for CBS Session or Meeting: Session 2 (30 minutes)**

*If your group is made up of more than 10 participants, divide the group into smaller groups of at least 5 participants per group. Ask each group to appoint a secretary to write down their agreed positions and to have someone who will give feedback to the whole group.*

1. What is this text about?
2. If it is about relationships between two groups, what were some of the major sticking points that the debate between Jesus and the Samaritan woman raised?
3. What was the bone of contention concerning racial segregation that the woman was putting across in her discussion?
4. What is the main point Jesus tried to put across here in response to the woman's standpoint?
5. What is the relevance of this story with regard to racial interaction?
6. What lessons do we learn from this in relation to our own contexts?
7. How do we heal the divisions and stereotypes of racial discrimination and xenophobia that we face in conversing with the *other* from another ethnicity or nation-state?

### **Feedback in Plenary: Session 3 (15 minutes)**

*Ask the groups to give their feedback to the whole group, focusing especially on what the participants have learned and can put into practice in their families and community.*

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<sup>15</sup> "Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice," 1978, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-race-and-racial-prejudice>.

### **Song and Prayer (5 minutes)**

God almighty, we thank you for making us beneficiaries of the gospel through Jesus Christ. We thank you for the examples Jesus left us when he walked on this, your earth, which you have graciously made our home. He shared his messiahship freely and publicly for the first time with the Samaritan woman to show that he was not racist. Lord, Jesus, even though being a Jew, dared to ask to share the same cup with a Samaritan to show us his heart concerning racism. O Lord God, as we learn from this example, change our heart condition to shun racism in all forms and refrain from shunning others and looking down on them in our interactions. **Amen.**

# Contextual Bible Study: October

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## Romans 1: 13–15

13 I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as I have among the rest of the Gentiles.

14 I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish

15 —hence my eagerness to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

### *Notes on the Text*

The Letter to the Romans is the first in the section of letters in the New Testament. It is the longest not the earliest of Paul's letters in the New Testament. This letter is one of Paul's authentic letters, possibly written from Corinth between 56 and 58 CE. While most of Paul's letters are written to communities that he established during his missionary journeys or to people he converted, the Letter to the Romans is different in that it is directed to a community that was already in existence and was not established by Paul. He hoped to meet them in the future after they had already read his letter. Even though he had not yet met the Christians in Rome, it appears that Paul had some acquaintances in Rome who were informing him of how this Christian community was faring. Salvation and justification by faith are among the stand-out themes in this letter that has been called the gospel of Paul by some because of its depth and breadth. The universal relevance of the good news of Jesus Christ is equally expressed and articulated in this letter. The indiscriminate nature of the good news is seen in the way Paul resists, not only in this letter but also in the other letters, the perpetuation of old classes and categories that were meant to exclude, favouring instead an all-inclusive, classless good news of the kingdom.

### **Ice Breaker: Session 1 (10 minutes)**

*Do this session in plenary, asking questions and letting participants answer. Ask the plenary to affirm each answer and write the agreed answers on a chart.*

1. Why do we choose to visit places and people, especially those we have never visited before?
2. How do we prepare for such visits?

### ***Notes on Racializing and Depriving Communities***

Racialization is a recent addition to the English vocabulary and refers to the process by which a group of people are defined by their “race” or ethnicity in ways that

privilege or deprive them of fair opportunities in various spheres of society, such as education, health, and economy.<sup>16</sup> Our world is always interested in classification and categorization of people in various ways. Even though classification and categorization have their merits, sometimes this can have negative effects on people, with some feeling that they are better than others and therefore not wanting to associate with them. Where racialization has happened, it has created two main classes—the superior and the inferior—with the superior receiving all privileges while the inferior is deprived of a very basic entitlement or right, that is, their dignity.

### **Questions for CBS Session or Meeting: Session 2 (30 minutes)**

*If your group is made up of more than ten participants, divide the group into smaller groups of at least five participants per group. Ask each group to appoint a secretary to write down their agreed positions and to have someone who will give feedback to the whole group.*

1. What is this text about?
2. What kinds of discrimination is Paul concerned about in this text?
3. What are the similarities between what Paul is talking about here and your context?
4. Why is Paul concerned about coming to Rome to meet with the Roman Christians?
5. How can we handle discrimination that relates to those who are considered uncivilized?
6. How do we bridge the gap between those considered educated and those seen as uneducated?
7. How do we handle discrimination that is based on a classification of people as not deserving the gospel?
8. How do we make ourselves “all things to all people” (1 Cor. 9:22) by being able to free ourselves from racism, xenophobia, and classism?

### **Feedback in Plenary: Session 3 (15 minutes)**

*Ask the groups to give their feedback to the whole group, focusing especially on what the participants have learned and can put into practice in their families and community.*

### **Song and Prayer (5 minutes)**

Oh, God of love. You love all humanity, and you demonstrate it by making your sun shine on all your creation. You give rain to all, and you don't discriminate in your treatment of all, irrespective of our frailties and weaknesses. We thank you

<sup>16</sup> “Race, Racialization and Racism: An interdisciplinary guide,” The University of Winnipeg website, <https://libguides.uwinnipeg.ca/c.php?g=370387&p=2502732>.

for such love that you shower lavishly on all creation. We pause to reflect on our dealings with each other. We often fall short, O Lord, in not being able to treat each other fairly and justly because of the boxes that we create and put ourselves in. We confess today that these boxes are not of your making and are sinful, for they have dehumanized your people. Lord, forgive us and let your Holy Spirit liberate us from these boxes that inhibit us from opening up to each other so we can realize the benefits of sharing with others what you have endowed us with and also benefit from each other and support each other. **Amen.**

## Contextual Bible Study: November

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### 1 Samuel 16: 7–12

7 But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”

8 Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.”

9 Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.”

10 Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen any of these.”

11 Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.”

12 He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.”

### *Notes on the Text*

In ancient manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), there is only one Book of Samuel, but in Christian Bibles, there are two books of Samuel. These books are part of the Deuteronomistic history; they share theological positions with others (Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, and Kings). The author of these books is not known, though there are some valid arguments for thinking that these books were finalized after the fall of the kingdom of Israel and were written or compiled by persons who were loyal to the house of David as the sole legitimate royal house for the chosen people. However, these authors were even more loyal to the God of Israel and were willing to let the humanity of David and other leaders come through by intentionally recording their shortcomings and weaknesses. In fact, the authors seem to intentionally put across an understanding that says God’s ways are not like the ways of human beings and what we see is often deceitful because we only see external manifestations, whereas God sees beyond external traits. The Books of Samuel tell the story of how and why Israel moved away from being a theocratic (God-ruled) society to a kingdom, with the protagonist Samuel being the transitional priest-cum-judge-leader, who grudgingly hands over power to Saul, who is then replaced by David, who goes on to establish dynastic rule.

**Ice Breaker: Session 1 (10 minutes)**

*Do this session in plenary, asking questions and letting participants answer. Ask the plenary to affirm each answer and write the agreed answers on a chart.*

1. How do we choose leaders, friends, or schools?
2. How do we select candidates for work or placement?
3. How do stereotypes influence our decision-making?

***Notes on Deceptive Standards***

Stereotypes are powerful instruments that are rarely based on evidence or facts but on prejudices that are built over singular experiences and applied across an entire group of people.<sup>17</sup> In our communities, we develop and inherit standards based on any number of factors but mostly on stereotypes that we have about other people and ourselves. These stereotypes guide us when making choices and decisions, whether it is about choosing which school to send our children to, which country to go to and work in, which person to settle down with, which community to marry from, which person to hire for a job or to lease an apartment from, to hire for a managerial or menial job, to give a mortgage to and at what interest rate, to co-operate with or to buy from. Our standards sometimes lead us away from the most deserving candidates or individuals or communities.

The world, our world, has its standards to judge people. For instance, your name, your colour, your geographical location, your ethnic background, or your rank or race can be used to judge you or discriminate against you when you are seeking a job or even looking for a flat in a certain neighbourhood. The rising tides of nationalisms around the world are creating deceptive standards and narratives against migrants or citizens descended from migrants.

**Questions for CBS Session or Meeting: Session 2 (30 minutes)**

*If your group is made up of more than ten participants, divide the group into smaller groups of at least five participants per group. Ask each group to appoint a secretary to write down their agreed positions and to have someone who will give feedback to the whole group.*

1. What is this text about?
2. What were the measures that Samuel used to make the choice of a suitable king?
3. What was the weakness in the measures that Samuel was using to select a king for Israel?
4. In what ways do we also fall into the same category in using the same

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<sup>17</sup> “Gender stereotyping: OHCHR and women’s human rights and gender equality,” United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights website, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/women/gender-stereotyping>.

measures that Samuel employed in his choice of a king for Israel?

5. In your opinion what made him finally get it right?
6. Are there any practical examples of similar situations in your context?
7. What structures can we put in place so that we can get things right so as not to discriminate against others merely based on appearance?

### **Feedback in Plenary: Session 3 (15 minutes)**

*Ask the groups to give their feedback to the whole group, focusing especially on what the participants have learned and can put into practice in their families and community.*

### **Song and Prayer (5 minutes)**

God of all glory, we honour you and magnify your name for creating us each as unique individuals with unique features and also for placing us in different locations for different reasons. We praise you for your sovereignty. Sometimes we misjudge people by appearances, and sometimes we rush to do so passionately without seeking your face for guidance and direction. Lord, we ask that you open our eyes to the people we work with or live with so that in being colour conscious we are not being racially biased or ethnocentric in our judgements of people in our working relations, engagements, appointments, and even our promotion of people in our organizations or institutions.

May we be seen as people who are fair in our judgement so that others will surely testify to it and follow our example. **Amen.**



# Contextual Bible Study: December

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## 1 John 4: 18–21

18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.

19 We love because he first loved us.

20 Those who say, «I love God,» and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.

21 The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

### *Notes on the Text*

Traditionally, this letter is believed to have been written by the Apostle John, who was believed to have written the Gospel of John. Since the author of the Gospel of John is not absolutely known, we will say this letter was written by an author who belonged to the Johannine school of Christianity. This is because this letter shares style, vocabulary, and ideas with this gospel; however, there are some differences that also suggest that this letter was written after the gospel. The date suggested for authorship of this letter ranges from 90–110 CE.

The purpose of the letter is to combat certain false ideas, especially about Jesus and to deepen the spiritual and social awareness of the Christian community (1 Jn 3:17). Some former members (1 Jn 2:19) of the community refused to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ (1 Jn 2:22) and denied that he was a true man (1 Jn 4:2). The author affirms that authentic Christian love, ethics, and faith take place only within the historical revelation and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The fullness of Christian life as fellowship with the Father [God] must be based on true belief and result in charitable living; knowledge of God and love for one another are inseparable, and error in one area inevitably affects the other.<sup>18</sup>

Unlike most letters in the New Testament, this letter comes through as a theological treatise that challenges and hopes to dismantle false theologies or heresies that denied the humanity of Christ while upholding an exclusive divinity of Christ (Docetism) or that claimed that Jesus was a stepping stone to gaining secret divine knowledge (Gnosticism). It creates a powerful theological basis for the interdependence and interconnectedness of our relationship with God and with each other.

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18 “1 John: Introduction,” United States Catholic Bishops’ Conference website, <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/1john/0>.

**Ice breaker: Session 1 (10 minutes)**

*Do this session in plenary, asking questions and letting participants answer. Ask the plenary to affirm each answer and write the agreed answers on a chart.*

1. What are our bases for loving and caring for people other than ourselves?
2. What are our bases for withholding love and care from other people?

**Case Study: Relationships**

There was an interesting discussion between me and a worker in a firm comprising workers of different nationalities. We were talking about relationships at workplaces. I asked her about her own personal experience as a professional, non-European (non-white) woman working in Europe. In response, she remarked, "As for my boss, he does not like me or talk to me because I am Black; he just hates me and other Black people." My question to her was, "How do you know?" She remarked, "Oh, it is obvious; when he comes to the office, he only sends me memos and responds to my memos. When he accidentally comes to one of the offices where I am talking with a person who is white, he will come and greet that person ignore me and get on with what he came to do. When he meets other Blacks in the office, he ignores them and shows openly that he does not like Blacks and hates them." My next question was, "What have you done about it?" She said, "I told one of the top management officers, and he said, 'I am aware, but you should know that this is a predominantly white working environment, so there is bound to be a few people who are not used to working with Blacks, so you should try and accommodate him.'" My next question was, "If so, what is the way forward?" "I am looking for another job," She said.

Does this sound familiar? Is this something you have experienced, heard, or suspected?

***Notes on Stereotypes, Racism, and Fear***

Fear plays a critical role in the construction of identities, stereotypes, prejudices, and discriminatory systems. Among many other factors behind the emergence of the white supremacist racist ideology was the fear of the other. In general, fear comes from knowing that danger lurks around the corner, but in some cases, fear comes out of the stereotypes that we have created and inherited. When Europeans first came into contact with people in Africa, they were shocked at how these African peoples were dressed; they barely covered their bodies. They were equally shocked at how most of these communities celebrated their sexuality, which was done publicly through song, folklore, and dance. They were not ashamed. From these observations, stereotypes were created—Africans were obsessed with sex, Africans were primitive, Africans were closer to animals than advanced or superior people, that is, the Europeans who had strict sexual codes.<sup>19</sup> These stereotypes gave rise to

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19 Paul Schrader, "Fears and fantasies: German sexual science and its research on African

the imposition of laws that turned Africans or Black men into criminals, lawless, rapists, thieves, rebels, and so on. The stereotypes helped cement the racialization of Africans and Black people. The entire populace of Africans and Black people were painted with this single brush. Then the fear of Black men set in. The fear that they would wantonly impregnate white women was a particular fear in the colonies. Black men were criminals even before they committed any crime. Literature and media helped entrench the fear by constantly covering and publicizing Black criminality so that children were raised to fear Black people and continue to be raised like that. Then, there comes the fear of the unknown. What would racialized communities do if they became more powerful than us? Will they seek revenge for what our ancestors and ourselves have done to them? Trying to second-guess those whom we have harmed produces fear in us.

### **Questions for CBS Session or Meeting: Session 2 (30 minutes)**

*If your group is made up of more than ten participants, divide the group into smaller groups of at least five participants per group. Ask each group to appoint a secretary to write down their agreed positions and to have someone who will give feedback to the whole group.*

1. What is this text about?
2. If it is about love, what aspect of love is it talking about?
3. Why is it that some people who are religious seem very committed to their religious loyalty and affection to their deity (god) but find this difficult in their human relations with other human beings that they meet in physical form?
4. Why do people from diverse ethnic, faith, or racial backgrounds feel uncomfortable in other people's spaces?
5. What are some of the obstacles to loving other human beings as spelled out in this text?
6. How can the obstacles be handled to enable cordial and equal relationships between people, which will then reflect their proclamation of love for deities that they cannot see or relate to physically?

### **Feedback in Plenary: Session 3 (15 minutes)**

*Ask the groups to give their feedback to the whole group, focusing especially on what the participants have learned and can put into practice in their families and community.*

### **Song and Prayer (5 minutes)**

Heavenly Father, we know that love covers a multitude of sins. We, believers, express our deep love to you through our worship, religious rituals, and all other faith-based actions that indicate our love for you, who is Spirit. We express our deep love for you in songs and prayers, our desire to fellowship with you and with other Christians because of our belief in one God, one Savior, Jesus Christ, and as partakers of the same Holy Spirit.

We pray that these bonds of fellowship would drive away fear and replace it with bonds of love that will enrich our personal relationship with one another by removing fear, prejudice, and suspicion from us. **Amen.**

# Contextual Bible Study: Bonus 1

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## Philippians 2: 1–4

1 If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy,

2 make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.

4 Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others

### *Notes on the Text*

The Letter to the Philippians is another of Paul's letters found in the New Testament. It is believed that Philippi was the place where Paul established his first Christian community in Europe. The letter was possibly written around 55 CE when Paul was imprisoned at Ephesus; however, the dates discussed range from 55 CE to 61 CE, a period during which Paul was imprisoned at least three times, in Ephesus, in Caesarea, and in Rome. This is a letter from prison, a prison that allowed people in Philippi to constantly visit Paul and feed him with information about what was happening in Philippi. Ephesus was the nearest place, hence the idea that the letter was written when Paul was imprisoned at Ephesus. The letter itself speaks about unity, humility, and the growth, joy, and peace that are possible in a Christian community. The letter also battles the infiltration of the community by the Judaizers, people who insisted that the true gospel demanded that Gentiles first embrace Jewish customs, especially circumcision and dietary laws. This was a major problem that Paul had to address in most of his letters. In urging humility and unity, Paul decisively challenges selfishness.

### **Ice breaker: Session 1 (10 minutes)**

*Do this session in plenary, asking questions and letting participants answer. Ask the plenary to affirm each answer and write the agreed answers on a chart.*

1. Why do foreigners appear or become more successful than locals in our communities?
2. How do we, as locals, respond to the success of foreigners in our communities?
3. Do foreigners or locals have strong communal ties? Why?

### **Case Study: Xenophobia and Selfishness**

In 2022, Ghanaian spare parts dealers had the feeling that Nigerian spare parts dealers were making more money and had more business and were making more profit than them, so the Ghanaians went round forcibly locking up Nigerian spare parts shops in the Ashanti Region of Ghana, specifically Kumasi, the region's capital city. Indeed, sometimes there arise situations where people of receiving communities start thinking that foreigners are taking the jobs that they should have. Sometimes, hate messages are sent, and some people, as a result, threaten to physically attack foreign nationals, to beat or assault them out of the belief that the businesses or jobs in their country should only be for them and not for nationals of other countries.

In some countries, foreign nationals are cheated by business owners if they don't have legal documents. This normally manifests in low wages, inconsistent payment of wages, no insurance or pension for undocumented foreign workers and greater profits for business owners.

These are all selfish attitudes that are inward and not outward-looking.

#### ***Notes on Xenophobia and Selfishness***

Xenophobia “denotes behaviour specifically based on the perception that the other is foreign to or originates from outside the community or nation,” and xenophobia exists when “individuals are denied equal rights on account of real or perceived geographic origins of the said individuals or groups, or the values, beliefs and/or practices associated with such individuals or groups that make them appear as foreigners or outsiders.”<sup>20</sup> There are such very close connections between racism and xenophobia that xenophobia could arguably be understood as racism done by one people to another that shares close resemblances, for example, Western European to Eastern European, Black South African to Black Africans, Ghanaians to Nigerians, Zimbabweans to Mozambicans and so on. Xenophobia can become systemic like racism when political leaders begin to introduce stereotypical clauses in laws, policies, and political rhetoric to deny opportunities to those perceived as foreign.

Selfishness is the attitude or character of always considering only one's self and one's own interests without regard to the welfare and well-being of others. In very recent times, the president of the United Nations General Assembly in 2008 spoke of the danger of individualism and selfishness. “If we are to seize the opportunities, we must move beyond lamentations, speech-making and statements of good intentions and take concrete action based on a firm resolve to replace the individualism and selfishness of the dominant culture with human solidarity as the golden rule that guides our behaviour,”<sup>21</sup> he said. Selfishness is incompatible with

20 “Guidance on Racism and Xenophobia,” 2020, UNHCR, at <https://www.unhcr.org/media/unhcr-guidance-racism-and-xenophobia>.

21 “General Assembly President calls for solidarity to defeat culture of selfishness,” United Nations website, 23 September 2008., <https://news.un.org/en/story/2008/09/274072>.

the Christian faith and this is attested in several passages both in the Old and New Testaments (Psa.119:36; Mar.12:31; 1 Cor.10:24, 13:4-5; Jam.3:16). Selfishness is watering our gardens with the tears and blood of others.

### **Questions for CBS Session or Meeting: Session 2 (30 minutes)**

*If your group is made up of more than ten participants, divide the group into smaller groups of at least five participants per group. Ask each group to appoint a secretary to write down their agreed positions and to have someone who will give feedback to the whole group.*

1. What is the text about?
2. How do selfishness and xenophobia affect relationships?
3. Why is the writer concerned about personal gain and conceit?
4. In what ways do these self-centred attitudes manifest themselves in unequal relationships, xenophobia, racism, and discrimination?
5. What intentional practical measures can be implemented or undertaken to transform such attitudes?

### **Feedback in Plenary: Session 3 (15 minutes)**

*Ask the groups to give their feedback to the whole group, focusing especially on what the participants have learned and can put into practice in their families and community.*

### **Song and Prayer (5 minutes)**

Lord Jesus, we thank you for the example you left us when you walked on this earth. You not only taught us the right way to live, but you also demonstrated it by giving your life as a ransom for our sins. Truly, this was a high level of selflessness that actually not only thought of others more than yourself but that led to you readily giving yourself for others. May this example spur us on to move away from our selfish attitudes in relating with one another. Truly let us not value ourselves alone but value other people equally in our dealings with them, as human beings like ourselves. Amen.

## Contextual Bible Study: Bonus 2

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### Genesis 1:26–27

26 Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

27 So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

### *Notes on the Text*

The book of Genesis is the first book in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), as well as in the Christian Bible. It is regarded also as the first book of Moses, even though scholars now widely agree that this book was not necessarily written by Moses. This book is commonly divided into two main sections: the primeval history (chapters 1–11) and the patriarchal history (chapters 12–50). Even though the sections are regarded as histories or historical, they are not history in the sense of facts about what happened but rather are more understood as theological interpretations of founding myths and legends of the fathers (and mothers). The primeval history section addresses the aspects of life that could be regarded as pre-historic events and the events happen in places and spaces that cannot be established with any degree of certainty. In them, the presence and actions of the divine and mythical human and non-human figures are pivotal for everything that happens, whether it be creation, the fall of humankind from grace, the origins of sin, or the destruction of creation or humanity. The origins of languages are touched upon in this section. In the second section, the focus zeroes in on an individual, Abram (Abraham), and in conjunction on Sarah, Hagar, and the gradual growth of Abram’s lineage through Isaac (and in conjunction, Rebecca) and Jacob (and in conjunction, Leah, Rachel, and the slave women). These stories of the patriarchs are now associated with places and spaces that we can identify in Israel and Palestine and surrounding areas. The patriarchal stories end with Jacob and his family migrating to Egypt where Joseph has risen to become an important official in the administration. While this book relates the stories from ancient times, it is believed to have reached its final form around 400 BCE, having been revised and edited during or after the Babylonian exile.

### **Ice Breaker: Session 1 (10 minutes)**

*Do this session in plenary, asking questions and letting participants answer. Ask the plenary to affirm each answer and write the agreed answers on a chart.*



1. Can we order the following in order of their superiority or importance: rivers, forests, men, women, mountains, domestic animals, and wild animals?
2. Are there expressions that affirm the equality of all people and the importance of all creation in our language? List a few such expressions.
3. Are there expressions that negate the equality of all people and the importance of all creation in our language? List a few such expressions.
4. Which expressions are more popular—those that affirm or negate? Why?

### ***Notes on Myths of Origins***

In many communities, the story of their beginnings is always murky and vague; there are no real facts about origins. However, many people feel inadequate unless they have a story of the beginning. This desire and need for understanding one's origins give rise to the social construction of the myths of origin and legends of the progenitors. Myths are normally regarded as stories that try to reconstruct the beginnings of the universe and how the universe works even to this day. Their focus is to attempt to explain why things are the way they are by attributing beginnings to acts of divine entities like gods or God. The major protagonists in a myth are mostly gods and spirits. There are many such stories from all over the world. Legends tend to focus on the activities of individual persons; however, they also tend to exaggerate the exploits of such individuals to the point where such persons appear almost like superhumans or demigods.<sup>22</sup>

For millennia, humankind has been searching for legitimation of their origin. This has produced so many ideas over the years and several theological theories and myths, including some racially offensive ones that suggest that some ethnicities are superior to others beginning with creation or due to a curse that came to a particular ethnic group following creation and labelled them as retrogressive and not progressive. We are aware of how the Hamitic myth (based on Genesis 9) was developed to justify and legitimize the enslavement of Africans in the past but was equally used to deny African agency in Africa's past civilizations.<sup>23</sup> The myth or science of evolution (based on Charles Darwin's theory of evolution) was used by some to place people in a hierarchy of humanity, with white Europeans regarded as the highest state of being human while black Africans were regarded as the lowest state of being human, a state considered closer to animals than that of Europeans.

22 Philip Wilkinson, *Myths and Legends* (London: DK Publishing, 2009), at [https://archive.org/stream/263840739MythsLegendsPdf/263840739-MythsLegends-pdf\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/263840739MythsLegendsPdf/263840739-MythsLegends-pdf_djvu.txt). See also "Myths Fact Sheet," 2016, Storytime Magazine, at [https://www.storytimemagazine.com/downloads/storytime\\_school\\_magazine\\_teaching\\_resources\\_myth\\_pack.pdf](https://www.storytimemagazine.com/downloads/storytime_school_magazine_teaching_resources_myth_pack.pdf).

23 Awa Princess E. Zadi, "The Hamite Must Die! The Legacy of Colonial Ideology in Rwanda," (master's thesis, CUNY, February 2021), [https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5217&context=gc\\_etds](https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5217&context=gc_etds). Kevin Burrell, "Slavery, the Hebrew Bible and the Development of Racial Theories in the Nineteenth Century", *Religions* 12:742. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12090742>.

Centuries of both formal and informal education dominated by these theories have led to the perpetuation of racism, xenophobia, and related discrimination. Various branches of education—ranging from theology, sociology of religion, and social anthropology—as well as legal systems, Western approaches to medicine, responses to the climate crisis and gender binaries, and approaches to humanitarian and diaconal service have all tended to perpetuate these discriminatory and racist perspectives that are not helpful but destructive. Through misinformation and deliberate brainwashing, people have mis-educated their children to believe these racist lies. Since all colonized and dominated peoples were forced to learn these perspectives through the lenses of their colonizers, they have now internalized such self-defeating ideas and use them to fuel xenophobia and discrimination against those they consider foreign and inferior to themselves.

### **Questions for CBS Session or Meeting: Session 2 (30 minutes)**

*If your group is made up of more than ten participants, divide the group into smaller groups of at least five participants per group. Ask each group to appoint a secretary to write down their agreed positions and to have someone who will give feedback to the whole group.*

1. What is this text about?
2. What does it say specifically about the relationship between humankind and God?
3. How then are some people able to convince others that they are first-class human beings and others are second-class human beings?
4. What do you think are the reasons behind the development of theories that promote the idea that some people are first-class humankind and others are second-class humankind?
5. What can be done to do away with such ideas and theories?

### **Feedback in Plenary: Session 3 (15 minutes)**

*Ask the groups to give their feedback to the whole group, focusing especially on what the participants have learned and can put into practice in their families and community.*

### **Song and Prayer (5 minutes)**

Lord God Almighty, we thank you for the beauty of your creation. We thank you for the diversity that is inherent in your creation. We thank you for allowing diversity to be part of the beauty of your creation, for not allowing this diversity to bring disunity in your creation. We thank you for the way you created us as female, male, and all others and endowed us with wisdom from above to steward your creation. We repent of our sin of using diversity to create disunity in your creation. For this, we sincerely ask for your forgiveness. We repent for mistaking stewardship for unaccountable ownership of your creation. For this, we sincerely

ask for your forgiveness. Thank you for creating ALL humankind equally and also with no partiality, as you created us in your likeness. We repent of our sin of not recognizing your image in the people who are different from us; and of enslaving, colonizing, destroying their memories of your presence; and of interventions in their communities, destroying their knowledge and ways of knowing; of wanting to re-create them in our image and likeness. For this and more, we sincerely ask for your forgiveness. You never indicated that any colour of people or any geographical location was better than another or a particular ethnic group was more intelligent than others. We pray that you free us from this prejudice that has created a lot of animosity and unrest among different ethnicities. We pray for courage to face the past, acknowledge the harms inflicted on our sisters and brothers, and repair the harms to rediscover our unity. We pray for courage to respond to the effects of the climate crisis and conflicts, even when people different from us are the victims and not we ourselves. We pray in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Holy triune God, hear us and lead us. **Amen**

God's created world is today groaning under the burdens that God's creation has had to carry for centuries, caused by our appetite to consume. The spirit of uninhibited consumption led to the exploitation of creation, the enslavement of peoples, the colonization of lands and peoples and the wanton extraction and exploitation of natural resources from far and wide. Entire groups of people have been racially exploited. The World Council of Churches acknowledges that even faith communities, including some of its member churches and their members, have participated and contributed to the many cases of racially motivated exploitation, past and present.

The World Council of Churches stands in solidarity with victims and survivors of racism, xenophobia, casteism, and all other forms of discrimination. Through this booklet, the WCC is offering a resource to Christian communities to develop biblically-based Christian responses to overcome these scourges.



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