

GLOBAL CIRCLE FOR REPARATIONS AND HEALING

**PRESENTMENT TO THE HOLY SEE IN
FURTHERANCE OF REPARATIONS**

**Welcoming the Roman Catholic Church to the Global
Efforts Towards Reparations and Healing for Africa
and Its World-Wide Diaspora Resulting from the
Transatlantic Slave Trade and Its Aftermaths**

Vatican City

July 18, 2022

Preamble

We, representatives of the Global Circle for Reparations and Healing, encouraged by the words and spirit of *Fratelli Tutti*, in which Pope Francis calls the world to a renewed sense of our oneness as a human family, deliver this presentment to the Roman Catholic Church on this 18th day of July 2022, in Vatican City.

Herein, we briefly outline the Church's leading role in the Transatlantic Slave Trade, and its horrendous aftermath, and the Church's moral and legal obligation of redress.

I. We, descendants of Africa, the birthplace of humanity and the cradle of human civilization, come before the Holy See in the quest for full accountability, reparations, and healing. We seek redress for sinful actions ordered, blessed, condoned, and promoted by the Roman Catholic Church that paved the way for the oppression and suffering of African people on the continent and across the Diaspora from the 15th century to the present moment.

II. We come at a time of global reckoning in which countries and institutions throughout the world are being called to account for their centuries-long crimes against the humanity of African people.

III. We come in the names of our beloved ancestors who, beginning in the 1400s, became the victims of Europe's massive trafficking and enslavement of African human beings—a process that brutally uprooted, killed, and dislocated millions in the largest forced migration in the history of the world. We come in the names of our beloved ancestors who remained on the Continent, but for whom the normal patterns of familial, religious, spiritual, social, cultural, economic, and political development were profoundly disrupted—first, by the uprooting of those who were enslaved, and then, by colonization.

IV. We come in the names of our precious Africa and its worldwide Diaspora who suffer today as a result of the continuing devaluing of Black lives and the underdevelopment of Black communities around the world.

V. We come as representatives of a part of the human family that was cast out centuries ago by the European lie of white superiority and Black inferiority. That lie, which was endorsed and promoted by the Church, created a false hierarchy of humanity that placed “white” people at the top, and relegated “Black people to the bottom, and all too often, not in the human family at all.

VI. We call upon the Holy See to build on the steps it has taken so far, and assume full responsibility, to atone, and to make amends for its blessing of, and complicity in, the crimes against the humanity of African people—including the trafficking and enslavement of African men, women, and children, as well as the colonization of Africa, and for its special role in marking Africa and its people as inferior — paving the way for the multigenerational degradation and oppression of Black people in Africa and throughout the Diaspora.

VII. We come intent on reclaiming our rightful place in the circle of humanity. We urge the Holy See, in light of the stirring call of *Fratelli Tutti*, by Pope Francis, to value the “different faces of the one humanity,” to urgently lead the world in building a global culture of repair and healing, and otherwise taking transformative action for Africa and its worldwide Diaspora as detailed in this Presentment.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Asientos were monopoly contracts on African plunder and slavery given to the Monarchs of Portugal and Spain by the Roman Catholic Church. Later these Monarchs granted asientos contracts or sublicenses to merchants, providing the principal legal rights and means of supplying enslaved people to around the world.

These monopolistic contracts sanctioned what today constitute both war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Total war is defined as “warfare that includes any and all civilian-associated resources and infrastructure as legitimate military targets, mobilizes all of the resources of society to fight the war, and gives priority to warfare over non-combatant needs.” Further, total war that is unrestricted in terms of the weapons used, the territory or combatants involved, or the objectives pursued, especially one in which the laws of war are disregarded.

A **war crime** is a violation of the laws of war that gives rise to individual criminal responsibility for actions by the combatants, such as intentionally killing civilians or intentionally killing prisoners of war; torture; taking hostages; unnecessarily destroying civilian property; deception by perfidy; rape; pillaging; the conscription of child soldiers; committing genocide or ethnic cleansing; the granting of no quarter, despite surrender; and flouting the legal distinctions of proportionality and military necessity. A total war that does not distinguish between civilian and military targets is considered a war crime.

Crimes against humanity are certain acts that are purposefully committed as part of a widespread or systematic policy, directed against civilians, in times of war or peace. They differ from war-crimes because they are not isolated acts committed by individual soldiers but are acts committed in furtherance of a state or organizational policy.

“The law of crimes against humanity has primarily developed through the evolution of customary international law. Crimes against humanity can be committed during peace or war. They are not isolated or sporadic events but are part either of a government policy or of a wide practice of atrocities tolerated or condoned by a government or a de facto authority. War crimes, murder, massacres, dehumanization, genocide, ethnic cleansing, deportations, unethical human experimentation, extrajudicial punishments including summary executions, use of weapons of mass destruction, state terrorism or state sponsoring of terrorism, death squads, kidnappings and forced disappearances, use of child soldiers, unjust imprisonment, enslavement, torture, rape, political repression, racial discrimination, religious persecution and other human rights abuses may reach the

threshold of crimes against humanity if they are part of a widespread or systematic practice.”

Slavery was declared as a crime against humanity during the 2001 Durban Declaration Conference. The Vatican participated into this conference and has consistently promoted the implementation of its commitments

- These crimes violate several United Nations conventions, which the Vatican as an observer state, has always called for the respect of:
- Nuremberg Charter of 1945,
- the Statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (1993),
- the Statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (1994)
- and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998)

Moreover slavery, as a crime against humanity, is imprescriptible according to the international convention on the Non-Applicability of Statutory Limitations to War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity signed in 1968.

The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, i.e., the total war declared and emanating out of the War Bulls and Asientos de Negros, has been declared a “Crime Against Humanity” by the United Nations Human Rights Commission in the Durban Declaration and Program of Action, resulting from the 2001 World Conference Against Racism, Xenophobia and Other Related Intolerances.

“The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, were appalling tragedies in the history of humanity not only because of their abhorrent barbarism but also in terms of their magnitude, organized nature [and] especially their negation of the essence of the victims . . . [and] that slavery and the slave trade are a crime against humanity...”

HARMS

ONE

The historical record affirms that the Roman Catholic Church sanctioned the destruction of African kingdoms, the plunder of African wealth and resources, total war on African people, and the perpetual enslavement of Africans and their descendants.

Papal Bulls of Total War

The Roman Catholic Church played a major role in shaping the moral conscience of Europeans and the whole world in ways that enabled the objectification, commodification, dehumanization, and suffering of Black African people from the 15th century to the present moment.

Beginning in the 1400s, Portuguese monarchs petitioned the Popes of the Holy Roman Catholic Church to endorse and support their plans for territorial expansion into Africa. In response to these royal petitions, many Pontiffs, the persons claiming authority to be the representatives of Jesus

Christ on earth, issued papal bulls, official public decrees, that authorized war on Africa and endorsed and supported the transatlantic trafficking and perpetual enslavement of African men, women, and children.

In 1418, in response to King John I's request for papal authority to launch a Christian crusade in parts of Africa, Pope Martin V, in his Bull *Sane Charissimus*, "appealed to Christian kings and princes to support the King in his fight against the Saracen Muslims from the Middle East and other enemies of Christ." *Sane Charissimus* legitimized Portuguese military, political, and economic conquests of Africa and established the precedent for future Papal Bulls that would justify the continuing subjugation of Africa and African people. In *Cum Charissimus*, issued in 1419, Pope Martin V reaffirmed his support for King John's mission in Africa.

King John's son, Prince Henry the Navigator, is credited with sponsoring and supporting the expeditions that planted the seeds of European colonization in Africa and launched the trafficking and enslavement of African human beings. Henry, in turn, was sponsored and supported by the Papacy. In 1420, Pope Martin V named Henry head of the Order of Christ, which gave him authority to launch the trafficking of Black African human beings in the name of spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In 1421, Henry gave, as gifts to Pope Martin, several of the Africans captured during his early expeditions.

In 1442, Pope Eugene IV issued Bull *Illius Qui* which granted "full remission of sins to knights who took part in any expeditions against the Saracens" under Henry the Navigator, and gave assurance to his Order of Christ that military actions in Africa would be considered "just" wars in the eyes of the Church.

In 1452, Pope Nicholas V in the Papal Bull known as the *Dum Diversas*, authorized Prince Henry to force Black Africans into perpetual enslavement. He granted to the Crown of Portugal:

"...with our Apostolic authority, full and free permission to invade, search out, capture and subjugate the Saracens and pagans and any other unbelievers and enemies of Christ wherever they may be, as well as their kingdoms, duchies, counties, principalities, lands, towns, villas and other properties... and to reduce their persons into perpetual slavery. And appropriate all their kingdoms, commands, retainers, dominances, and other possessions, lands, towns, villas, and any possessions to yourself and to your successors on the throne of Portugal in perpetuity. By reason of our Apostolic authority, we allow you and your successors to use and enjoy these assets fully and freely."

These Bulls and others provided the justification for the trafficking and enslavement of Black African human beings, as well as European imperialism and colonization in Africa—all in the name of Jesus Christ.

According to Christian theologian and ethicist Katie Geneva Cannon, "The transatlantic trade in Africans was founded on Christianity..." [Prince Henry of Portugal] "considered conversion and enslavement as interchangeable terms, experiencing no cognitive dissonance in using Christianity as a civilizing agent for making converts into slaves."

(It is important to note that the Catholic Church's view of the enslavement of Black Africans was different from its view of indigenous people in the Americas. When in 1537, Pope Paul III, with *Sublimus Deus*, abolished the enslavement of indigenous peoples, he issued no similar condemnation of the enslavement of Africans—essentially blessing the continued dehumanization of our ancestors, us, and our children. The first pope to formally condemn the trafficking and enslavement of Africans was Gregory XVI in 1839, 300 years after being first ordered.)

Asientos

The war Bulls were followed up with **monopoly contracts** known as “Asientos de Negros” or “Asientos” which were sanctioned and/or granted by the Catholic Church to private merchants as well as to Portugal, to the Genoese, to France, to England and to the Spanish.

The Asientos de Negros constituted the legal means of supplying African “slaves”, -- specifying the number of enslaved people to be delivered annually, the ports of entry, and lump sums and head taxes to be paid.

The Asientos ensured that the Catholic Church received licensing fees, tariffs, taxes, and other fees, securing up to 50% of the profits from the trade of enslaved Africans to the Church. Eventually, the total war against African nations and enslavement of their inhabitants and descendants, ordered by the Bulls above, became known as the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

According to UNESCO, more than 170 million deaths occurred during this total war on African life. A minimum of 36,000 slave trade voyages have been documented. Thomas Cooper, in the *Supplement to Mr. Cooper's Letter on the Slave Trade*, asserts that for every 100 people with African lineage and heritage who were kidnapped, trafficked and enslaved, 1,000 were murdered. Joseph Miller, in *The Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade 1730-1830*, asserts that for the 100 seized, only 57 made it to the Americas, with another nine dying immediately after. Whereby only 28-30 of the initial 100 actually were alive 4 years after their seizure.

TWO

The historical record affirms that the Roman Catholic Church contributed to the creation of a false racial hierarchy of humanity by endorsing the lie of White superiority and Black inferiority.

Enslavement is as old as humanity itself. Throughout human history, different groups of people have been trafficked, enslaved, and colonized by others. But the transatlantic trafficking and enslavement of Black African human beings and the subsequent colonization of Africa was

different. It was based on a Biblical justification that Black African people were marked for perpetual enslavement and that they were inferior.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., once said, “Somebody told a lie one day. They made everything Black, ugly and evil.”

In “The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought,” the historian James H. Sweet observes that the “most prevalent explanation for the presumed inferiority of blacks came from the Old Testament. The story of Ham has functioned to justify the subjection and degradation of blacks for over a thousand years.” Sweet adds: “Despite the absence of any characterization of Canaan’s according to color, race, or ethnicity in the biblical version, in Genesis Rabbah, [by the fifth century] the ethnic identification of the sons of Ham had begun to shift toward the peoples of African descent.”

The Catholic Church helped provide the theological foundation on which the systems of the transatlantic trafficking and enslavement of African people, the colonization of Africa, and the false racial hierarchy of humanity were constructed. This gave free rein to the governments of Portugal, Spain, and other countries that would justify their treatment of African people as subhuman beings, not only for the period of their enslavement, but in perpetuity.

In sanctioning the lie of white superiority and Black inferiority, the Papal actions marked an entire continent and its people as inferior—as less than human—thereby consigning African people to a permanently degraded status.

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LEGACY/INJURIES

The Roman Catholic Church’s many actions sanctioning the Transatlantic trafficking and enslavement of African human beings and the colonization of Africa contributed to the creation of a global racial structure that has placed Africans and people of African ancestry at the bottom rung of humanity.

Due in no small part to actions of the Roman Catholic Church, the world today is subject to a hierarchy of humanity in which whiteness confers maximum human value and Blackness dramatically diminishes human value.

For more than six centuries and 30 generations, the theft of labor and knowledge of the people of African lineage and heritage on both sides of the Atlantic, and the boundless wealth that it produced, has redistributed income and wealth earned by the people of African lineage and heritage on both sides of the Atlantic to generations of people of European lineage and heritage on both sides of the Atlantic, creating transgenerational poverty for the former, and transgenerational wealth and privilege for the former.

In the words of the Catholic priest Father Pius Onyemechi Adiele, author of *The Popes, the Catholic Church, and the Transatlantic Enslavement of Black Africans 1418-1839*:

“These were for Black Africa, not only lost centuries but also centuries of organized international condemnation and murder of millions of her innocent and defenseless sons and daughters, years of political crisis, economic setbacks, social unrest and developmental stagnation in all its ramifications... Four hundred years of European, Christian cruelty of papally and theologically sanctioned inhumanity that afflicted on Africa a loss in men, in happiness, freedom and dignity.”

These actions, and the lie of white superiority and Black inferiority that supported them are at the root of the devaluing of Black lives and the underdevelopment of Black communities all across the globe.

They created the gross disparities between white and Black people in nearly every area of life and every measure of well-being all around the world. And it is why, according to one author, “Blacks are at the bottom of every good list and at the top of every bad list in America.” The same can be said for every nation in which people of African descent live.

It is the reason why, according to the United Nations (2015), people of African descent all over the world, are today among the “poorest and most marginalized groups,” who “have limited access to quality education, health services, housing and social security, ... and all too often experience discrimination in their access to justice, and face alarmingly high rates of police violence, together with racial profiling.”

Today, one in three Africans— some 422 million people—live below the global poverty line. They represent more than 70 percent of the world’s poorest people (World Poverty Clock, 2019). In Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, and Uruguay combined, Afro-descendants represent 38 percent of the total population, but about half of all the people living in extreme poverty, according to the World Bank’s 2018 Afro-Descendants in Latin America Report. In the United States, one of the wealthiest nations in the world, nearly one fifth of African descended people live below the poverty line, according to the U.S. Census.

By all global measurements, there is a stark dichotomy of privilege and poverty between European and African nations resulting from the centuries of Christian crimes.

The 2020 Human Development Index divides nations into four categories: 1) very high human development; 2) high human development; 3) medium human development; and 4) low medium development. The following charts compares European nations (actors and beneficiaries of the War Bulls) and African nations (victims of the War Bulls).

Human Development Index (HDI) Category	African Nations*	Percent	European Nations	Percent
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Very High Human Development	-	0%	50	86%
High Human Development	3**	7%	6	10%
Medium Human Development	11	24%	2	3%
Low Human Development	32	69%	-	0%

*Sub-Saharan

**Botswana, South Africa and Gabon

These statistics do not begin to describe the pain of centuries of lost hopes, lost dreams and lost lives. They do not begin to describe the deep emotional anguish of living in a world that so profoundly devalues Black lives. The Holy Roman Catholic Church owes a profound moral and financial debt for its sins and offenses against Africa and its people, in the form of full reparations, including economic, social, political, and emotional reparations.

REPARATIONS

Compelled by international law, customs, and norms regarding redress for total war, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, and encouraged by the words and spirit of the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, in which Pope Francis calls for a deepened sense of our shared humanity, we seek *full* reparations and healing for people of African ancestry.

There have been many Papal statements apologizing and asking for pardon for the Church’s role in the slave trade, colonization (at least with respect to the Americas), and the sin of racism.

And yet, as Pope Francis was recently compelled to tweet, “Racism is a virus that quickly mutates and, instead of disappearing, goes into hiding, and lurks in waiting. Instances of racism continue to shame us, for they show that our supposed social progress is not as real or definitive as we think.”

For all their good intentions, the Papal apologies and statements have not been in full alignment with international law, have not assumed full responsibility, and have not recognized the Church’s obligation for repair and healing. Nor have the Papal apologies acknowledged the magnitude of the harm that has been caused by the Church.

However, in our quest for full accountability, we are encouraged by the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*. Pope Francis, in writing about humanity as “one family,” calls for human beings to strengthen the bonds of love and friendship among us. In doing so, he has opened a door that should lead to genuine reparations and healing.

In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis stands against the spirit of domination of the other that characterized the Papal Bulls that authorized the war against Africa and Africans. He invites the world to dream as a “single human family,” and calls for a new vision that acknowledges the dignity of each human person.

Pope Francis’s recognition of the need to remember the past in order to move forward with an “honest and unclouded memory” suggests that our demands for reparations and healing should be met with a favorable response.

Consequently, from all the above, the Holy Roman Catholic Church has a profound moral and legal obligation of full reparations. The Church can begin to meet its obligations in the following ways:

A Statement of Full Acknowledgement

Building on Pope Gregory XVI’s condemnation in 1839 of the trafficking of African human beings and Pope John Paul II’s apologies for the trafficking of African human beings, the Church should fully acknowledge, recognize, and ask for forgiveness for the harms caused in shaping a global racial consciousness that resulted in a false hierarchy of humanity grounded in the lie of white superiority and Black inferiority. That lie continues to marginalize, oppress, dehumanize and drive discrimination against Africans and people of African descent—resulting in many of the most egregious acts against man and God in the history of humanity.

An Apology Consistent with International Norms, Customary Law, and Christian Values

Offer a wholehearted official apology for the Church’s role in the trafficking and enslavement of African people, the colonization of Africa, and promulgating the lie of white superiority and Black inferiority—all of which have led to the continued degradation of African life and the limitations of the life chances of Africans and people of African descent. This apology must be consistent with international norms, customary law, and Christian values.

Call on Other Offending Western Nations to Engage in Moral and Legal Redress

Immediate and wholehearted use of its geo-political influence in calling on all Western nations to move swiftly and without reservation in following the Church’s lead in making amends, and acknowledging, observing, and fulfilling the mission of the International Decade of People of African Descent 2015- 2024, declared by the United Nations.

Rescind Papal Bulls on the Enslavement of Africans and People of African Descent

Like our Indigenous sisters and brothers, we recognize the legal weight and strength of the 14th, 15th, 16th, and 17th century Papal Bulls that are being used today to continue to deny human rights, justice and fairness to redress past harms caused by Christian nations acting based on Papal decrees. We ask that the Church compile a complete list of these edicts in order to rescind them.

Issue an Encyclical On Reparations and Healing for African People, and On Extinguishing the Lie of White Superiority and Black Inferiority

We ask that Pope Francis, Episcopus Servus Servorum Dei, as Servant of the Servants of God, issue a new encyclical recognizing the profoundly immoral wrong committed by the Church against Africa and her descendants.

We ask that, with this new encyclical, the Pope acknowledge what science has confirmed: that Africans were the first humans from whom all other human beings originated, who gave birth to great cultures and civilizations, who introduced a system of values and reverence of the Spirit and God from which the Catholic Church has been the recipient and beneficiary. We ask that with this encyclical, Pope Francis, Episcopus Servus Servorum Dei, proclaim to all nations their obligation to take all steps necessary to repair the harms caused by the trafficking and enslavement of African people, and the colonization of Africa, and extinguish the lie of white superiority and Black inferiority and to help people of African ancestry heal from the trauma of these actions.

Establish a Papal Commission on Reparations and Healing for African People

We call on the Pope to convene a Vatican Commission on Reparations and Healing that would serve as joint Vatican-African Diaspora-African Commission. Representatives from the Diaspora would be drawn from national Black reparations commissions in each of the following regions: North America, the Caribbean, Central America, South America, Europe, Asia, and Australia- Pacific Islands and the continent of Africa. The purpose of the Vatican Commission on Reparations and Healing would be to work with and assist the African diaspora in its efforts of repair and healing globally. It would include developing reparations and healing proposals funded by the Catholic Church. The Commission would be charged with ensuring the enactment of these proposals as well as maintaining and monitoring the redress efforts.

A Commitment to Financial Support for Global Reparatory Justice and Healing Organizations and for Reparations for the Descendants of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

While the human costs of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade are impossible to monetize, economists and historians across the world have given a sense of the financial costs of the stolen labor as well as the obligations for financial repair.

The “Truth Commission Conference” in 1999 in Accra, consisting of private individuals from nine African countries, the United States, the United Kingdom, and three Caribbean

countries recommended US\$777 trillion in reparations (1.139 quadrillion in 2016 U.S. dollars with reference year 1999).

Political scientist Daniel T. Osabu-Kle (2000) proposed international slave-trade reparations based on the population loss that many regions in Africa suffered from the transatlantic slave trade and trans-Saharan slave trades, putting the cost of reparations at \$100 trillion in year 2000 U.S. dollars, assigning a value of \$75,000 per person lost, based on a model of the historic development and population growth of Asia over the same period. Osabu-Kle put the cost to Africa alone as \$75 trillion in year 2000 U.S. dollars.

While it will be impossible to ever financially repair the economic and human costs of the Catholic Church's role in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, a primary dictate of the Vatican Commission on Reparations and Healing must be to calculate and *commit to* financial repair for the stolen labor, land and lives of people of African descent. Therefore, the commission must also include experts and representatives who will define and design the details of repair, including but not limited to historians and economic experts who can calculate that which appears to be incalculable.

That repair must include the commitment to an immediate and generous use of the Church's global financial resources to support on an ongoing basis reparatory justice and healing organizations engaged in the work of reversing the anti-African global consciousness, extinguishing the lie of white superiority and Black inferiority, and helping Black people heal from the multigenerational trauma caused by the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and its continuing legacy. The Church has various organs, committees, and offices with enormous resources to aid the African diasporan and continental reparations commissions and civil society and healing organizations formed to ensure the healing and repair of African and African descendant people.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Our aim with this Reparations Presentment is to end the historical amnesia of the Church and to deepen a conversation to which Pope Francis's *Fratelli Tutti* has opened the door – with the goal of righting historical wrongs committed by the Roman Catholic Church against the people of Africa and people of African descent – wrongs that continue to undermine our health, well-being, and the quality of life, wrongs that collectively add up to and meet the standard of crimes against humanity.

We are not here to cast aspersions or attack the Catholic Church, Pope Francis, or the global Catholic community. We are here to speak the truth and call for action to aid in the repair and healing of African peoplehood around the world. We are the Global Circle for Reparations and Healing.

We seek immediate attention to this presentment.

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