

SPEECHES DELIVERED TO GENERAL SYNOD

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Healing, Repair and Justice

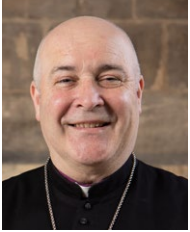
The Church Commissioners' work to address links with enslavement

At the February 2024 session of the Church of England's General Synod, a presentation was given on the Church Commissioners' work to address historic links with African chattel enslavement. It followed a [report](#), published in early 2023, which found the Commissioners' endowment had historic links to slavery, partly traced to an early 18th Century fund Queen Anne's Bounty.

In response to the report's findings, the Church Commissioners' Board took steps to begin addressing past wrongs, with a commitment to £100 million of funding in the nine years following 2023. An Oversight Group was set up to propose objectives and a structure for the investment, and the [resulting report](#) suggested a name: "The Fund for Healing, Repair and Justice," and outlined that its foundational principles should be healing, transparency and non-repetition of the harms it aims to address. Most importantly, the fund will be guided by its engagement with those descended from enslaved Africans.

The Synod met in February and heard from members of the Oversight Group and Church leaders about this important work's progress. Speakers included: The Most Reverend Stephen Cottrell, Archbishop of York; The Right Reverend Dr. Rosemarie Mallett, Bishop of Croydon; Jonathan Guthrie, writer and financial commentator and Roy Swan, Director at Mission Investments and Ford Foundation - you can find the text of these speeches in this document.

Since then, a great deal of media attention has been given to this work, following the publication of the recommendations of the independent Oversight Group about taking it forward. Sadly, there has been quite a high level of misreporting, and so we want to take this opportunity to bust some of the myths that you may have seen online or in the newspapers.



The Most Reverend Stephen Cottrell

Archbishop of York

Stephen Cottrell is the 98th Archbishop of York. He has previously served as the Bishop of Chelmsford, Bishop of Reading, Canon Pastor at Peterborough Cathedral and Diocesan Missioner for the Diocese of Wakefield. He is a member of the Church of England's Committee for Minority Ethnic Concerns and the House of Lords.

In those days they will no longer say 'The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge' (Jeremiah 31. 29)

Of course Jeremiah is going on to say that we must all be responsible for our sins. However, the terrible legacy of enslavement sets our teeth on edge today; leaves a legacy of racism, inequality and discrimination that is our sin as well, for we continue to live with the knowledge that our church colluded with, encouraged and profited from human enslavement. Our teeth are set on edge: not just with shame, but with the knowledge that enslavement is a reality today, and that we are yet to mend and resolve the contradictions in our theology and our history which enabled this to happen. We must face up to it in order to repair it. This is what the work of the Commissioners begins to enable us to do.

For as the abolitionist debates themselves made clear, we know that Scripture itself is not always consistent on slavery. Paul might write in Galatians 3 that our life in Christ eradicates distinctions between slave or free, but he also tells us that we should treat our slaves kindly, not actually set them free.

Humans were then, and today continue to be, treated as commodities, being owned and traded. This not only falls short of the new humanity we have in Christ, it denies and contradicts it.

I can't help but think of that slave bible, a copy of which is in Lambeth Palace Library – a copy of the scriptures to be used in plantations and removes from the biblical corpus for instance the first 18 chapters of the book of Exodus – a story of exile and return, of liberation from slavery and a precursor to the work of God in Jesus Christ. In fact that slave bible reduces the 1189 chapters of the bible to a mere 232. 90% of the Old Testament and 50% of the New Testament was removed. Sisters and brothers, there may be contradictions in our tradition, but the big picture of Scripture is clear, so why are we still eating the sour grapes of excuse, prevarication and collusion today.

Even with the great step forward of the abolition of slavery, did we compensate the enslaved? No, we thought freedom was enough and ended up compensating those who had profited from this hideous trade.

The enslavement of others is nothing less than a rupture in the body of Christ. And yet, what we are exploring today in this presentation is forward looking and gloriously hopeful and flows

from a reimagined theological vision of what it means to be in Christ and how this works out in all of our lives. For the whole arc of the Christian faith is about repairing rupture, about healing, and about justice – it is about being in Christ and set free to live Christlike lives ourselves.

The work of the Commissioners invites us to build a different future. We cannot compensate those who suffered so much because of our false and debilitating theologies, but we are invited to face the past honestly (our teeth are on edge), and then in the words of Isaiah 58 which have been so instrumental in guiding the theological vision which underpins this work, repair, heal and at last do justice.

That's what Jeremiah 29 also drives towards: a different future. And Isaiah 58 challenges us to remove the yoke, to share our bread with the hungry, to clothe the naked, and to be like a watered garden and to repair the breach.

Here's a good line for Lent:

'This is the fast the Lord chooses; to loose the bonds of injustice... to let the oppressed go free.' (Isaiah 58. 6)

This is the theological challenge of this work and its outworking in the vision of justice and healing which flow from it.

'For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.' (Galatians 5. 1)



The Right Reverend Dr. Rosemarie Mallett

Bishop of Croydon

Born in Barbados and residing in the UK, Bishop Rosemarie transitioned from academic research in Africa and the Caribbean to ordained ministry. Serving since 2004 in the diocese of Southwark, she is now a Bishop and holds fellowships at Westminster Abbey Institute and Jesus College, Cambridge.

In 2007, I was one of the clergy moved by the then Archbishop's apology and lament over the church's role in transatlantic chattel slavery, and then like many others became frustrated by the quantity of reports and paucity of action. However, as I listened in to yesterday's session on the latest Racial Justice report, one of the speakers quoted this verse from Isaiah 43:

Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

Synod, there are growing shoots of good practice underway in the Church of England with the development of representative GMH groups and through the Racial Justice Unit funding. I feel that this work, the work we are talking about this morning, the work of the Church Commissioners also goes some way towards that making of a new thing, towards finding a way in the wilderness and rivers in the deserts.

Eight months ago, the Church Commissioners' after a very thorough and careful selection process, brought together an independent Oversight Group of 14 quite different specialists, primarily African descendants, to begin the work of helping them shape and deliver a response to the research findings of the Spire project, and also to articulate a way forward for a Spire Impact Investment Legacy Fund, built from the Commissioners' commitment of £100 million of funding over the next nine years.

Friends, the Oversight Group is composed of people from a mix of disciplines (theology, finance, law, philanthropy, community organising, academia, African diaspora studies) and from a mix of backgrounds (including descendants of victims of chattel slavery along with people from other ethnic groups and ancestries, and at least one known descendant of chattel slaveholders). The mix of the group was intentional, to allow us to draw on the input and insight of these people so as to ensure a holistic approach. The diversity of thought in the group has been the key to its successful working. Every member has different beliefs, different areas of passion, and most importantly, different skills and expertise to bring to the task.

Very few of the group knew each other personally. This meant that a lot of work was put in place to build relationships and group dynamics and as we learnt to trust each other, the Church Commissioners and the Subgroup [Board], and trust in the process that we had all signed up for.

From the outset, the group committed themselves to maximise the time we could work together, to collaborate and co-create. This was because we could sense the Commissioners' intentionality, and the desire for change. We agreed on core principles of repetition, transparency and healing, a vision of bold investment in communities impacted by African chattel enslavement and we set working ground rules of deep listening and respect for all perspectives. We committed to a community engagement and consultation process.

So therefore, the programme that has been recommended to, and accepted by, the Commissioners has come about after deep listening to the community, here in the United Kingdom and globally. It is a bold and hope-filled programme that seeks to bring about culture change in the missional work of the Commissioners and concomitantly the Church of England. The recommendations and programme of action will allow the Commissioners to commence what we feel is an audacious programme of impact investment, research, and engagement to help bring about a better and fairer future for all, particularly for communities affected by historic slavery.

This work, we recognise that it cannot heal past scars of institutional racism. We recognise we cannot repair the hurt felt by brothers and sisters across the country at the lack of welcome or encouragement. But what this work can do, it can change the way we work in the present, by building programmes based on justice, healing and repair, and it can provide a legacy for a hopeful future. This takes us one step further as repairers of the breach. And, my friends, it is a most necessary step.



Jonathan Guthrie

Writer and financial commentator

Jonathan is an award-winning journalist, writer and consultant. He worked at the Financial Times from 1993 to 2024, latterly as Associate Editor and Head of Lex, the daily investment column. A prolific columnist and reporter, he has covered business, nature and the City's involvement in enslavement. He is now writing a book.

As a speaker here, I am quite frankly a visitor from another planet.

My world is the City of London. It's three earth miles and a thousand philosophical light years from here.

I've covered it as a journalist for almost four decades.

It's a vibrant, dynamic place. But its history is deeply entwined with African chattel enslavement.

City merchants advertised for the return of escapees at a coffee house there. A statue of a kneeling African adorns the Royal Exchange, adjacent to the Bank of England. The Guildhall once hosted a trial concerning an insurance claim - for a cargo of massacred Africans.

As we've heard, the Church has its own shameful artifacts. The Slave Bible and the accounts of Queen Anne's Bounty.

The Church responded to the latter by proposing a permanent capital fund. That sent an important message. Capital derived from African chattel enslavement still sits heavily on Britain's balance sheet.

Endowments are a good way to counter corresponding deficits. These are the discrimination, disadvantage, and deracination against which descendant communities contend.

Well, I'm honoured to be a member of the project's Oversight Group. A body consisting of distinguished historians, theologians, social entrepreneurs, fund managers – and, somehow, me.

My specific job, with colleagues, is to help assimilate and formulate messages.

Church leaders told our group to Be Bold: no half measures would do. Descendant communities urged us to Be Humble: £100 million is a drop in the bucket. Pragmatists told us to Be Focused: the reparatory movement is broad. No one initiative invalidates or is a substitute for another.

The first phase of our work is almost done. What messages might the Church reasonably hope that the fund will send?

We believe it should serve as penitent recognition of one strand of the Church's involvement in a great crime against humanity.

We think it should represent a small contribution towards the wider effort to repair the resulting breach in human unity.

I have a personal view. In my day job, I've watched City institutions with enslavement heritage writhing, as Britain's selective amnesia starts to dissipate. The lexicon of bad debt has a phrase to describe it: "extend and pretend".

I think it has taken real courage from the Church to propose this fund – and to ask a strong-minded, independent group to plan it. There are plenty of risks here. Risks that many others have shied away from.

The difference, in my opinion, is that the Church has morality at its core, however compromised and disputable. In business, ethics remains more of a buzzword than a reality.

Don't expect many such compliments. The road ahead is going to be hard. Many will say £100 million is too little. Many will say it is too much. A fund that aims to unlock great potential without replicating past wrongs has a lot to prove.

But to us, it seems like a start. The Church should be congratulated on making that start – so long as it sticks to its course as a pathfinder.

Thank you.



Roy Swan

Director, Mission Investments, Ford Foundation

Roy leads the Ford Foundation's global impact investing endowment and previously led Morgan Stanley's \$13 billion+ U.S. impact investing program. Roy graduated from Princeton University and Stanford Law School and serves on the boards of the Global Impact Investing Network, Parnassus Funds and Freddie Mac.

Good morning everyone and “thank you” to the Synod for inviting me here to speak. I am humbled and honoured to be with you today and I'll also mention, as a way to boost my own credibility, that I am a Preacher's kid. True, I am but a pew-warming Preacher's kid, so I was raised in that spirit.

Throughout history, people have turned to our leaders for relief and direction in times of greatest need. In 1948, when England and its neighbours reeled in the aftermath of World War II's death and destruction, America donated over \$250 billion in today's dollars under a programme called the Marshall Plan to rebuild Western Europe.

But the Marshall Plan wasn't just about money, it was also a generous, symbolic gesture that inspired hope. And hope, much like faith, is a propelling force, essential for us to overcome adversity in even the darkest of times.

When I received a phone call from London last summer with news about the Church Commissioners' work on this reparative initiative which is intended to lighten the heavy weight of sin and immorality it had carried for generations, I was dumbstruck. Not only is this effort rooted in humanity and morality, it's an ultimate adherence to what it means to walk in the Christian faith.

Much like the Marshall Plan, it's an investment that has the power to inspire hope and rebuild what was once lost.

It is not an overstatement to say that at this very moment, here in this Synod, we are discussing a gesture by the Church Commissioners for England that is to the Black descendants of chattel enslavement what the Marshall Plan was to England and the European Alliance.

The Commissioners' £100 million fund is a commitment to hope and rebuilding that will unleash Black peoples' potential, ingenuity, genius, and innovation. The Church Commissioners are leading by example, and like the Marshall Plan, this fund will facilitate compounding contributions to the global economy.

Unlike the Marshall Plan, where one nation, America, gave funding to England and just a few others, this initiative will bring many investors together to invest in a brighter future for all. I have not even a shadow of a doubt that this historic action will inspire others to act—some who also sponsored the transatlantic chattel slave trade and others will join because they wish to be a part of

this journey which is tantamount to the road from Damascus.

Yes, we will all benefit from this fund. And yes, there is irony in the fact that even the direct beneficiaries of wealth that originated from chattel slavery, wealth that has compounded and grown over the centuries, will gain even more wealth as a result of this fund.

A similar irony was recognised in America nearly 150 years ago, when a prominent former Confederate soldier who fought to preserve slavery lobbied the American government to pay reparations to freed slaves. That former Confederate soldier knew that giving back a portion of the wealth extracted from Black former slaves over centuries wouldn't just help the slaves. He knew the wealth would return to the white people who had been the slave owners and the government through a virtuous economic cycle of spending and investing, and it would therefore bolster and accelerate economic and wealth growth in both the white and Black economies.

That circular economic effect, which strengthens and stabilises society, is the foundation of development financial institutions that provide funding to developing countries because they know it is in their own enlightened self-interest and facilitates economic trade and security alliances. It is the same philosophy that underpinned the Marshall Plan. And the lesson is: when we help others, we help ourselves.

The Epilogue to that Confederate soldier's story is this: like the English government - the American government chose to restore wealth NOT to the freed Black people from whom wealth had been stolen, but to the former white slaveowners who lost their human slave property when they lost the Civil War; the American Civil War. Thus, the heavy weight of sin and immorality continues to be a drag on social progress and the American economy, which is great but could be even greater.

The Church Commissioners have taken a different path, one that is both righteous and wise: The Church Commissioners recognise that we are all sailing together on ships with a common destiny, and we will all rise together or, in time, we will sink under the heavy weight of sin and unfairness.

Some may see this fund as a loss to the Church. That line of thought ignores our common destiny, ignores the fact that Black people are the Church, and most disturbingly, that thinking pretends that God is not watching.

I encourage anyone spending any time thinking about loss to the Church to instead focus on how this is an investment for the Church, in the world. That is the same thinking that encouraged America to champion the Marshall Plan not as a loss, but as an investment in the future of England and Europe.

This fund is meant to be perpetual, which means the impact investing portion must generate market-rate financial returns. Some may ask whether market-rate impact investing, which is investing done with the dual mandate of positive social or environmental impact, is even possible. The answer is an unequivocal “yes.” All successful investment strategies require thoughtful, careful, patient, methodical, and intelligent stewardship. Even if market-rate impact investing is harder than traditional investing because of the dual mandate, it can be done. But it should not be rushed.

February is Black History Month in America. Every February, I reread the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” written in 1963. In it, he confesses his disappointment with the American clergy. He spoke of an American clergy that feigned concern about America’s oppression of Black people with “pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities”; but while the American clergy used dramatic words spoken with theatrical vigour, the most visible action taken by the American clergy was to turn a blind eye to the tragedy of racial hate. Sixty years later, I stand before you here, expressing my amazement, appreciation and gratitude because the Church Commissioners have taken action resulting in this initiative and this fund.

In that same letter from Birmingham Jail, Dr. King also said: “History is the long and tragic story of the fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily.” The Church Commissioners’ pledge for this fund has given an exception to that rule.

In closing, I will answer the Church Commissioners’ pledge of action with my own personal pledge: I promise to do everything within my power from my platform to make this initiative and this fund a win for all of us. And with that, I “Thank You” for having me.

Myth 1: The Church of England is going to pay £1 billion in reparations

The truth: In 2023, the Church Commissioners announced a commitment of £100 million over three triennia – this commitment is not changing.

Our response is not about paying compensation to individuals, nor is it purely about the money. The fund being established has the primary aim to achieve impact through investments, and it is hoped that these investments will enable the fund to grow over time, leaving a lasting positive legacy, as well as enabling a programme of grant-making.

The £1 billion figure is an aspiration. The Church Commissioners recognises that no amount of money will ever be enough to address the horror of African chattel enslavement. The scale of ambition for the initiative to grow to £1 billion was discussed at an early stage by the Church Commissioners themselves, the hope always being to act

in a catalytic way by seeding the fund with our £100 million commitment. We hope that others may invest alongside us in support of this ambition, for example, institutions with similar histories seeking to address these legacies.

The aspiration is an exciting one and we are grateful to the Oversight Group for encouraging us to be bold in our ambitions. The Church Commissioners hopes this initial commitment of £100 million will form the nucleus of a larger initiative, that this fund will grow over time, and that we will inspire others to act to reach the goal of £1 billion.



Myth 2: Money that parishioners donate is going towards this response

The truth: None of the money given to a parish church will be used for this fund. None of the money for the new fund will come from parish income. And of course, every gift made through the Parish Giving Scheme will go to the intended beneficiary, now and always. The majority of a church's ministry is paid for by the generous giving of its local community.



Myth 3: Enslavement has nothing to do with the Church

The truth: The Church Commissioners' research has revealed that one predecessor fund of the Church Commissioners' fund, Queen Anne's Bounty, invested in and received income from South Sea Company securities. The South Sea Company transported and traded enslaved people. "Over its trading lifetime, the South Sea Company forced nearly 42,000 people to leave the African coast. It disembarked almost 35,000 people, meaning that just over 7,000 people died on the crossing," economic historian Dr Helen Paul writes. Queen Anne's Bounty also received numerous benefactions, some of which may have come from individuals linked to, or who profited from, enslavement.

