**MARKS OF A COLONIAL CONTEXT in CONGREGATIONS**

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**Which of these MARKS are present in the Congregation?**

**The Congregation (as institution through its governance and ministries) …**

**Social Analysis:**

1. Does not provide knowledge and resources to critically examine what is happening: obscures the history—fails to link outcomes of a colonial conquest (i.e., the exploitive enrichment of whites and co-incidental, consequential impoverishment and immiseration of Native Americans and African Americans) with contemporary racial hierarchy and racial disparities; neglects historical-critical analysis.
2. Does not understand its own material assets, and those of most of its members, to be the result of the colonial enterprise and colonialism’s living legacy of genocide and exploitation of peoples of color. Instead interprets its material assets, and those of most of its members, as representing the results of virtuous work, racial traits of a superior civilization, or even a blessing from God. Portrays the colonizer group as having a “natural” mandate to continue controlling the material assets in its possession under a self-serving rationality of “good stewardship.”

**Theology**

1. Does not acknowledge the colonized nature of Biblical knowledge received through the Church and the fact that, because the Church has so absorbed “colonial theology,” it has not yet found a place to stand for critical introspection.
2. Engages in a *colonialist* interpretation of New Testament and the Jesus movement without any awareness that it ***is*** a colonial reading and without appreciating how the reader’s self-interests are being served by the traditional (colonialist) reading (interpretation).
3. Sees the post-Constantine, white Christian message as being non-problematic and “enlightened.”
4. Has not yet undertaken or advocated for church-wide (conscientious) effort to unearth the information and interpretations that have been historically suppressed which would allow members of the church to recognize the anti-colonial nature of Jesus’ life and stories.
5. Regularly uses the symbolism of lightness to represent goodness and darkness to represent evil, as well as other symbolism suggesting the rightness of the colonizer identity and worldview. Disregards the destructive harm this inflicts on colonized people – responding as if this harm is of no “real” significance or moral import.
6. Holds a worldview that understands morality as an individual, optional concern (*Christianity* as individual spirituality) and not as an ethical-political stance – closed to opportunities of political awareness or involvement that would include questioning its own use of resources.
7. Is silent about (sometimes because of true ignorance of – not knowing that one does not know) the historical references in scripture, causing congregants to miss the imperial context of Jesus’ life and to not recognize the ways Jesus was speaking against Empire.

**Privileging Colonizer Cultural Norms and Epistemology:**

1. Holds a worldview that understands morality as an individual, optional concern and not as an ethical-political stance and collective issue – closed to opportunities of political awareness or involvement that would include questioning its own wealth and resources.
2. Rarely or only sporadically uses critical thinking skills to identify and address the colonial nature of the knowledge, social contexts, and interactions in the institution – and is oblivious or unresponsive to the fact that some of its members are very aware of, and disturbed by, the limited nature of the dominant views within the institution.
3. Engages in a colonial understanding of human nature, of human relationships, of epistemology (way of knowing, worldview, “framing” as in the *white racial frame),* and of pedagogy without any awareness that these ***are*** colonial understandings and without appreciating how its self-interests are being served by these interpretations.
4. Is silent about (sometimes because of true ignorance of – not knowing that one does not know) the historical references in language, court decisions, law, and the US Constitution, causing citizens to miss the imperial context not only of the birth of the nation but of all of its land acquisitions (wars against Native American nations, Mexico, and Spain) and much of its labor, and to not recognize the ways actual US history violated the basic rules of justice, truth, freedom, and right doing.
5. Does not discern the colonized nature of “common sense” knowledge circulating within the society, propounded by idea leaders of all institutional sectors including academia and broadcast through media representing vested colonial interests, because our common sense knowledge has so absorbed the colonial ideology (including the elements of the *white racial frame*) that it has not yet found a place to stand for critical introspection.
6. Has not yet undertaken or advocated for a conscientious effort to unearth the information and interpretations that have been historically suppressed which would allow members of the institution to recognize and value anti-colonial resistance stories of the oppressed in US society and history and that of anti-colonial allies.
7. Regularly uses the colonial semiology such as symbolism of white to represent goodness and black to represent evil, as well as other symbolism suggesting the rightness of the colonizer identity and worldview. Disregards the destructive harm this inflicts on colonized people – responding as if this harm is of no “real” significance or moral import.

**Embodies Colonial Power Relationships:**

1. Perpetuates the legacy of colonial arrangements (accommodation, silence, conformity) – arrangements of those who have control and power to continue to have control and power. Absolute power remains with the colonizer. Although that power may be invoked infrequently, it is always “there.”
2. Believes itself justified in dictating what best serves the well-being of the colonized, instead of committing itself to creating a social reality where the colonized may freely exercise their own power of self-determination, working to create the future the colonized understand to be best for themselves.
3. Treats the colonizer experience in the U.S. as the norm and standard of social interaction, failing to understand the significance and value of, and need for, institutional adaptations and adjustments in light of the experience of the colonized.
4. Devalues, dishonors, and delegitimizes the office, role, and contributions of the colonized people serving within a colonizer organization, so that the colonized and his/her priorities are not given the same degree of deference, attention, and support as would be given to the person or the priorities of a member of the colonizer group having the same office, role, priorities.
5. Selects leaders, department heads, and staff with little consideration for their aptitude for brokering or negotiating cross-cultural difference and retains them or advances them with little consideration of their job performance in brokering or negotiating difference (cultural, racial, gender, class), so that status quo colonizer norms may very well prevail – unchallenged.
6. Has no vehicle available to learn or appropriately represent the worldviews of the colonized; so, the worldviews of the colonized are not present for consideration as an alternative perspective or corrective.
7. Fails to create an environment or context in which people of color can “shine” – be at their best and contribute to their fullest – as a corrective to the prevailing images and expectations of people of color’s alleged inadequacy, incompetence, or cultural deficiency.
8. Communicates and interacts with communities of color from a position that is hierarchical, superior, and patronizing, producing interactions that are entirely “unhelpful” for members of a colonized group, that carry a punitive tone, and that fail to provide needed support.
9. Assumes that what a member from a colonized position is seeking to accomplish and the obstacles s/he is contending with are the same as what members from the colonizer position are trying to accomplish and contend with. And, so, when differences become manifest, evaluates the differing aims and responses of members of colonized groups as being inappropriate, not beneficial.
10. Presumes an ability to understand the behaviors and responses of members of colonized groups within the institution without looking at what may be behind such behaviors and responses. Assumes cultural homogeneity.
11. Fails to accurately recognize and appreciate certain coping responses by people of color that may be made in response to something oppressive operating within the institution or that may reflect peoples’ of color wider understanding as to how to cope with oppressive systems in society in general.
12. Is not actively involved in teaching oppressed (colonized, the poor) to liberate themselves from oppressor (colonizer, the rich).
13. Understands itself to have the power, right, and ability to define the interests of the colonized; often operates from an assumption that assimilation to the social world constructed by whiteness is “necessary” rather than profoundly destructive for the colonized (and the colonizer).
14. Its primary work is never to decolonize itself – this can never be accepted as what the “interests of the colonized” most require. A vast of messages from the colonized that this is, indeed, what is most needed cannot be understood (willful ignorance or disinterest in trying know and understand) and are disregarded.

**Lacks Moral Commitment/Conviction:**

1. Doesn’t “push,” uphold, or enforce the laws, rules, proclamations, resolutions, or policies it has already enacted in support of equity, non-discrimination, justice, or restitution.
2. Avoids what knowledge is available—decision makers of the organization do not attend workshops (i.e., antiracism) or other events, or engage in serious, engaged study (reading, hearing lectures, dialogue series) that would start to lift away the *shroud* that’s thrown over everything.
3. Defines “what counts,” “what’s important,” as that which contributes to maintaining the status quo. White epistemology (white way of knowing, colonialist worldview) is what counts and is given priority and weight. Therefore antiracism / decolonization work is not counted as essential or critical to the values and mission of the organization. At best, such work is optional.
4. Does not follow-up on what is learned following an antiracism or a white privilege workshop (— hearing but not doing).
5. Fails to address colonialism practices and the colonial mindset in the institution and in its corporate relations with other institutions in the society. And, does not encourage such in its membership. Fails to speak out against the immoralities and hypocrisies that violate basic justice.

**Does Not Acknowledge/Name its Own Position in the Colonial Order –**

**Does not “see itself” in any of the analyses:**

1. Normalizes and sometimes explicitly approves private property (ill-gotten gains—legacy of stolen land and stolen labor), consumption and other “marks of success” in the colonial project – not naming the problematic of wealth and consumption as necessarily being the outcome of an oppressive colonial (capitalistic) system.
2. Justifies and normalizes the culture of exploitation; accepts the *whiteness* of the organization as “the way it is” – the norm – despite the harms experienced by people of color who enter the organization.
3. Assumes the universality and rightness of white norms and of the legitimacy of white privilege, perpetuating the colonial mindset in relations with people of color.
4. Cultivates a colonial cultural climate – instead of condemning the alliance of the organization with the wealthy. The cultural climate is one of celebrating the fruits of imperialism (costly trips, attained political power, high-priced charity, advanced educational or “mis-educational” levels, land base provided by homesteaded farms and GI bill financing, recreation and lake cabins in “white space” areas ….).
5. Is characterized by self-aggrandizement and celebration of the benefits that have come from the colonial project and *whiteness*.
6. Is characterized by self-satisfaction of having realized the values of success in dominant society, with no reference to the costs to other people of what those values represent.
7. Supports the alliance of the organization with the trappings of power, including educated elites from other nations.

**Engages Primarily in Accommodating Political Action:**

1. Uses 501(c)(3) status and other economic factors as rationale to block equity, social justice, or antiracism activity of the organization.
2. Serves as a cultural mediator or cultural broker on behalf of the colonizer community to colonized communities, uncritically transmitting, upholding, or enforcing the values of the colonizer to communities of color.
3. Is invested in the advantages coming from capitalism, from its members who are doing the work of continuing the system, and thereby blocks radical changes – the kinds of changes that would be necessary to restructure things to lift the burden of oppression from the poor.
4. Engages in activities that soften the “punch” of oppression without changing the basic relationships that produce oppression. The attention given to the oppressed is in the form of charity.
5. Recognizes and gives sanctuary to organizations whose work supports the colonial project; does not ally itself with organizations opposing the colonial project – these, latter, are understood as “too radical” or “too political”.

**Dialogue: Marks of a Colonial Context (Optional Exercise)**

Form a small group:

1. STEP ONE: Each member of the group identifies three marks that are particularly insightful or relevant to her/his context. Record the identifying number of the statement selected. Identify only. Do not explain the selection or the reason for the selection.
2. STEP TWO: Now for each statement selected, reverse the meaning of each statement from “colonized” to “decolonized.” That is, imagine what that trait would need to become in a **de-colonized** context. State the **de-colonized** traits voiced in terms that are positive terms (rather than negative). For example: “The organization has an effective grievance process for identifying and addressing racial injustices.”
3. STEP THREE: Each group reads the set of traits for a **de-**colonized context it has generated.
4. STEP FOUR: Referring to the ID number of the statement, write down the ID numbers selected from all groups, each person giving his/her selections, tally the count each statement receives, identify six of the statements with the highest count.
5. STEP FIVE: At the tables in the same discussion groups, participants discuss **action plans** for any two or three of the six.
6. STEP SIX: Re-gathering as an assembly, each group shares one of their action plans.