

European Baptist leaders 'repent' of colonial-era sins_61404

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BERLIN, Germany (ABP)—European Baptists leaders "repented" for their century-old role in colonizing Africa, which they admit divided and exploited the continent.

The European Baptist Mission, the mission society of European Baptists, recognized the 120th anniversary of the Berlin Congo Conference of 1884, during which political leaders from 14 Western nations divvied up Africa for colonization.

The Baptist leaders adopted a statement in which they repented for the civil strife and economic injustice that resulted from Europe's colonization of Africa, according to the Baptist World Alliance.

"This division of Africa, which was planned, decreed and made possible by the Berlin Conference, resulted not only in a political splintering of Africa, but also in a destruction of natural ethnic, social and national connections, which led to tensions that continue to cause bloody conflicts," the European Baptist Mission statement said.

The European Baptist Mission, founded in 1945 by the European Baptist

Federation and other Baptist groups, met in Berlin this spring to mark its own 50th anniversary. The group sends out missionaries for medical work, schools, theological education and project management to seven African and five Latin American countries.

The 1884 Berlin conference—called to resolve a dispute over control of the Congo—involved Belgium, Denmark, the German Empire, England, France, Italy, the Netherlands, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Portugal, Russia, Sweden, Spain, the Ottoman Empire and the United States.

While only 10 percent of Africa's land was in European hands in 1876, 90 percent was controlled by those 14 colonial powers by 1902, the statement noted.

The European Baptists said the world's industrial powers—particularly the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund—continue "to treat African nations as cheap suppliers of raw materials, and have often used unfair trade and customs agreements to gain access to their markets, while closing themselves off for those exports."

"As European Christians who follow the example of Jesus Christ, we must confess that we have profited from the inequality of nations and markets," the EBM said. "We must confess that we are a part of a system that has for too long accepted these past and present injustices without resistance, and that has pocketed these profits for itself and its own prosperity without a guilty conscience."

The Baptists leaders asked African Christians for forgiveness for "allowing the spirit of colonialism to make a mockery of the spirit of Christ." They vowed to work for justice and called for a "New Berlin Conference" to right the wrongs of the 1884 meeting.

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