

The Oxford Journal for
Intercultural Mission.

Issue three – Spring 2024



OJIM

ABOUT THE JOURNAL

The Oxford Journal for Intercultural Mission is a popular and easy-to-read journal published quarterly by St Paul's, Slough – the designated intercultural mission-resourcing hub in the Diocese of Oxford. Occasionally, a special issue will be published to mark or celebrate an event such as Race Equality Week, Black History Month or South Asian Heritage Month.

The journal will offer a range of reflections on issues impacting the growth of intercultural mission and ministry in the Church of England. These will include UKME (United Kingdom Minority Ethnic) and GMH (Global Majority Heritage) participation, governance structures, ministry discernment and training, racial justice, cultural awareness, preaching and evangelism.

We aim to provide a forum for bloggers, church planters, students, leaders, teachers, and preachers to share experiences, expertise, research, and intercultural mission tools to inspire a movement and growth of intercultural worshipping communities within the Church of England. Find us online at oxford.anglican.org/ojim

Editors and Contributors

General Editor

Timothy Wambunya

St Paul's, Slough
Diocese of Oxford
(Buckinghamshire Area)

Assistant Editors

Naomi Hill

St Paul's, Slough
Diocese of Oxford
(Buckinghamshire Area)

Kip Chelashaw

Church Planting Mission Partner
Diocese of Nairobi
(Anglican Church of Kenya)

Production

Ruth Hamilton-Jones and Steven Buckley. Design by 15-north.co.uk
Cover image: Shutterstock/15 North

Photographs: authors' own unless otherwise indicated.

Martyn Snow

Diocese of Leicester

Naomi Hill

Diocese of Oxford
(Buckinghamshire Area)

Ned Lunn

Diocese of Bradford

Peter Tate

Holy Trinity Hazlemere
Diocese of Oxford
(Buckinghamshire Area)

Israel Oluwole Olofinjana

Evangelical Alliance (London)

John Root

Diocese of London
(Edmonton)

Daniel Odhiambo

Church of England Chaplaincy of
Amsterdam in the Diocese of Europe

Godfrey Kesari

Diocese of Chichester

Requirements

Articles

OJIM publishes articles that are 1500–1800 words (including endnotes and bibliography). Usually, the General Editor will invite a contributor to submit an article, giving them the theme for the issue and the deadline for submission. However, prospecting contributors to OJIM should submit articles by email to the General Editor to: EditorOJIM@stpaulsslough.org.uk

OJIM is an easy-to-read journal. Therefore, articles use clear, concise English and consistently adopt UK spelling and punctuation conventions and one type of referencing throughout the article.

To ensure consistency of style in other areas, please contact the General Editor for style guidelines.

Book Reviews

The General Editor selects the books to be reviewed and individuals to do the review. Even so, prospective reviewers may contact the General Editor suggesting a specific book to be reviewed or submitting a book review for consideration.

Disclaimer

The opinions in any article published in this journal are the author's alone and do not necessarily represent the editors, St Paul's, Slough, or the Diocese of Oxford.

INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR



The Rt Revd Dr Timothy Wambunya leads the intercultural mission-resourcing hub at St Paul's, Slough, in the Diocese of Oxford. Tim was in the first cohort of black ordinands who began training at the Simon of Cyrene Theological Institute in Wandsworth. He was ordained more than 25 years ago and served his curacy in Southall, in a majority Asian congregation. After that, he was incumbent in Islington, North London, with a significant African Caribbean congregation. He was then a mission partner, serving as the Principal of Carlile College, Nairobi, before being consecrated Bishop in the Anglican Church of Kenya. He holds a PhD in Paremiology.

This third issue of the *Oxford Journal for Intercultural Mission* focuses on Black History Month (BHM), observed every October. We take a step back to consider what makes Black History Month important, and what our response to it should be in October and beyond. As it is an annual opportunity for everyone to focus on racial issues locally, nationally and globally, what might our churches plan for Black History Month 2024?

Black History Month reminds us of the enduring legacy, remarkable resilience, and triumphant achievements of black people from every corner of the globe who call Britain their home. This month provides our society with a unique and meaningful opportunity to pause and reflect upon the challenges faced and the richness and diversity of cultures, experiences, and voices that enrich our broader intercultural mission community. Within the pages of this edition, we endeavour to bring to the forefront stirring stories of faith, visionary leadership, and unwavering courage and dedication from individuals who have indelibly shaped the landscape of intercultural mission, often surmounting

formidable obstacles. Still others have leveraged their privileged positions to the astonishment of some of their own and the delight of many black people to champion intercultural mission.

The articles encapsulated within these pages will take you on an engaging journey through the corridors of time and across geographical boundaries. From historical accounts that honour pioneering figures who blazed trails in intercultural mission to the voices of the present, offering profound insights into the complex challenges and opportunities defining our world today, our primary aim is to foster a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics that define the intercultural mission field.

Our distinguished contributors, representing diverse backgrounds and experiences, have graciously shared their knowledge, personal journeys, and passionate convictions. Through their words, we aspire to illuminate the intersections of faith, culture, and mission, thereby nurturing meaningful dialogue and reflection within our expansive intercultural community in the UK.

As we embark on this enlightening journey through the pages of this issue, let us collectively acknowledge and celebrate the achievements of the past and the potential of the future. We must recognise the ongoing work required to confront systemic inequalities, amplify the voices of under-represented communities, and cultivate genuine intercultural collaboration.

In the true spirit of Black History Month, we extend a heartfelt invitation to engage with these articles thoughtfully. Let us ponder how we can collectively build bridges of understanding, empathy, and solidarity in our mission endeavours. May the profound insights shared within these pages inspire and challenge us as we strive to advance the cause of intercultural mission in a world undergoing rapid transformations.

Bishop Tim

THIS QUARTER

Martyn Snow, the Bishop of Leicester, in his article, 'Seeking an intercultural church for a multicultural world', describes how the Diocese of Leicester came to see interculturalism and racial justice as a priority, and his hopes for the Church of England more widely to do so as well. He discusses his journey in seeking racial justice and fostering diversity within the Church of England. The article highlights efforts to increase representation, address past injustices, provide training on unconscious bias, and promote interculturalism.

Naomi Hill, in her article 'Black history is British history', examines the relevance of engaging with black British history as a Christian who does not have African heritage. She highlights significant events that can change the way our history is perceived.

John Root asks, 'Why do we need Black History Month (BHM)?' He explores the importance of BHM in celebrating overlooked black history while acknowledging potential pitfalls. He emphasises the need to recognise the stories of pioneers, migrants, and

ordinary people in black history, going beyond celebrity worship. The article also stresses the importance of white people learning black history and focusing on what black people truly offer, while avoiding comparisons with white achievements and fostering an integrated society.

Daniel Odhiambo, writing on 'Notable black Africans in our redemptive story', highlights the presence of black Africans in the Bible, shedding light on significant figures such as Moses' Cushite wife. He emphasises the importance of recognising these individuals as part of the biblical narrative and their contributions to redemptive history.

Ned Lunn, writing on 'Improvisation as intercultural practice', says the term 'black history' suggests a singularity rather than what it is: an often-competing set of multiple histories. He argues that the principles of improvisation can help navigate the challenges of telling and hearing conflicting accounts of historical events.

Peter Tate, writing on 'Using art to communicate an intercultural Jesus',

advocates using mission as the 'mother' of church art and using multiple images to guard against exclusively my-culture Jesus mindsets.

Israel Oluwole Olofinjana's article, 'Black African pastors championing intercultural mission in Liverpool', reviews how Daniels Ekarte and Dr Tani Omideyi developed their leadership beyond the four walls of the church to become community pastors impacting different ethnic groups in society.

Godfrey Kesari, in his article, 'Fighting for racial justice in the church is not an elective', highlights the persistence of racism in the Church of England, particularly in the contrasting treatment of refugees from different regions. Kesari advocates for education, empathy, and intercultural gatherings to combat racism, stressing the importance of prioritising racial justice and deconstructing racially unjust structures. He concludes with a message of hope, emphasising the inevitability of racial justice and the importance of unity among all people.

SEEKING AN INTERCULTURAL CHURCH FOR A MULTICULTURAL WORLD



The Rt Revd Martyn Snow

has been Bishop of Leicester since 2016 and a member of the House of Lords since 2022. He is the lead bishop for lay ministry and is a member of the Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns. He has a background in the global church, having been born in Indonesia and later working in West Africa. Martyn is a leading and pioneering champion for intercultural mission in the Church of England.

I was hesitant when invited to write an article for *The Oxford Journal of Intercultural Mission* about my part in seeking racial justice. White allyship is a contested concept in many circles – can people like me truly jettison the privilege and the colonial mindsets in which we were raised? Can we ever really empathise with the experience of people of Global Majority Heritage? I think the answer is probably no. On this side of heaven, human egos, biases, and instincts for self-preservation cannot be fully conquered. But can justice wait for purity? Like any commitment – whether to Christ or another person in marriage – the longer you walk by it, the more it shapes you, and paradoxically, the more you appreciate what you do not know. This is the journey of sanctification, and I don't think it is a coincidence that it is also my experience of seeking greater racial equality as Bishop of Leicester.

Leicester is known for its diversity. According to the 2021 Census data, it is the first plural city in the UK where no

ethnic group has a majority. 43.4% of residents identify as Asian, compared to 40.9% as white. 7.8% identify as black, black British, black Caribbean or African, and 3.8% describe themselves as being of mixed or multiple ethnic groups. This ethnic diversity is matched by religious diversity: 35% of Leicester's residents are Christian, 33% are Muslim, 25% are Hindu, and 6% are Sikh (there are also Jewish, Bahá'í, and Buddhist communities here). When I was installed as Bishop of Leicester, I arrived knowing of the city's strong reputation for interfaith work. However, I was quickly struck by the lack of representation of Global Majority Heritage Christians within the diocese. That was the beginning of our journey to becoming a diocese which makes interculturalism and racial equity a priority.

In 2017, we appointed the Revd Lusa Nsenga-Ngoy (now Bishop of Willesden) as our first Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Mission and Ministry Enabler (language we have since moved away from, in favour of Global Majority Heritage). His first task

was to research how diverse our church leadership was, and he discovered that there were only two Global Majority Heritage stipendiary clergy (less than 3%) and not many more lay leaders in the diocese. Lusa then took the lead on an ambitious proposal to the Church of England for funding to establish six intercultural worshipping communities, whose experiences and learnings could then be rolled out, as appropriate, across the diocese. Guli Francis-Dehqani soon joined us as Bishop of Loughborough (now Bishop of Chelmsford). Born in Iran, Bishop Guli became one of five serving bishops from a Global Majority Heritage background – none of whom were diocesan bishops.

But, before we took positive steps forward, we needed to reckon with our past. We commissioned a researcher from the University of Loughborough to conduct focus groups with Global Majority Heritage members of our churches and church leaders so they could voice their experiences of the Church of England to

date and what changes they wanted to see in the future. There was much to unearth: stories of sidelining, segregation, silencing, and suffering racism as a daily reality. There was much to lament: grief untold and guilt unrecognised.

The more I heard and learned, the greater my sense of the injustices faced by Global Majority Heritage people, and the more I recognised how I participated in and benefited from the structures which disadvantaged people of colour. So, in the February 2020 General Synod, I tabled an amendment to a private member's motion lamenting racism in the Church of England to include an apology. In my speech, I added my own:

'I want to apologise personally, as well as on behalf of the institution, because I know that I have not always received others in the way they have received me. And to those who say the Church of England seems to be apologising for everything at the moment I say, yes, we're starting to learn a new language and taking our first steps into a new culture defined by humility. Finally, we are facing up to our failings as individuals and as an institution, and there is no other route to healing and new beginnings.'

Then, on 8 June 2020, two weeks after

George Floyd's death, I and several colleagues took the knee. Socially distanced outside the Cathedral, we knelt for eight minutes and 46 seconds, the length of time that a US police officer knelt on George Floyd's neck. Once I began seeing the inequality, the injustice and even the inhumanity, I couldn't not see it, and the calling I felt to use my position as bishop to bring about change became clearer.

Our Intercultural Worshipping Communities programme has been the chief way we have been able to start changing the culture across the diocese to be more inclusive. The first year of that programme was dedicated to increasing knowledge of the ethnic and cultural differences within the local communities, and a biblical foundation for interculturalism. This included unconscious bias training, intercultural communication training, and seminars on 'Becoming Black' and 'Understanding White Privilege'. In that time, I saw a discernible shift in the nature of conversations around the diocese and how language was being used – it seemed many were grasping that racial justice was, and is, on God's agenda. Over time, ideas like praying in different languages and singing songs from different cultures, which once seemed so novel, grew an air of familiarity around them. It is increasingly how we do things around here – part of the culture we are building together.

Of course, a culture is inseparable from its people. So, as well as offering our clergy and ordinands unconscious bias and anti-racism training and thinking about how the curricula in our schools support anti-racism, we have to think carefully about recruitment. There are still significant barriers facing people of Global Majority Heritage when it comes to having their vocation recognised and how they are supported to understand and navigate the ancient and often alien structures and processes of the Church of England. It is a peculiar landscape for all of us, but the trip hazards are especially prominent for Global Majority Heritage clergy – little reminders, often, that they don't 'really' belong. When considering applicants for key positions in the diocese, I typically look for cultural competence – a humility that makes room for others leads with empathy, and is always open to learning. I am learning that's a skill that is prevalent among people of Global Majority Heritage – engaging across cultures, speaking two 'languages', and having multiple modes of operating is a survival skill in a white-majority society.

As for me, I have been blessed to have colleagues who have vulnerably shared their experiences and insights with me and been courageous in challenging and educating me. Now, more than speak out, I try to echo: there are powerful, prophetic voices all around us, calling on the Church

to live up to its calling to be a witness to God's love for all people. Once I have heeded their cry, sometimes the best thing I can do with my platform and my privilege is to ensure they get a fair hearing from others.

Our journey towards interculturalism has not been perfect, and nor is it complete. Undoubtedly, there is more to do and learn for us and me. I do not share any of this because I claim to have done anything special or praiseworthy. I would be delighted if the story of what we have done in the Diocese of Leicester was overwhelmed by a cacophony of other such stories for tackling unconscious bias and raising up the gifts of all God's people to be business as usual for the Church of England. So, I share our experiences in the hope that others will join us, and one day, it is business as usual.

The Church of England has stated its ambition to become a 'more diverse', as well as a 'younger' church, and is beginning to reckon with the racism which scars its past through its Contested Heritage programme of work, the forensic accounting which demonstrated how significantly the Church Commissioners has benefited from the transatlantic chattel slave trade; and the £100 million



impact investment fund which was set up as a consequence. But the journey must continue. Anti-racism and unconscious bias training must be rolled out across the Church of England, particularly for anyone involved in selection and recruitment. Work is already underway to develop curricula which helps children in our schools to understand Christianity as a global religion

with different cultural expressions. But we would also benefit from investment in developing cultural competency training and resources that help people in every area of church life know how to love their neighbour, their sister or brother, across cultural differences.

BLACK HISTORY IS BRITISH HISTORY

Wonder, particularly if your family doesn't include anyone of African descent, what you make of Black History Month? After all, in the last census, only 4.2% of the British population identify as black. Do you subconsciously assume that it's not for you, that this history they talk of is not linked to yours, or even to your present? Perhaps you assume it's not really British history? You might even wonder why this secular initiative is relevant to the church of God.

Counting yourself out of events like Black History Month is an easy assumption if the people it celebrates don't look like you or anyone in your family. However, like lots of assumptions, it is based on a half-truth because whilst understanding your immediate family history is fun, to usefully apply the lessons from the mistakes and successes of the past to the present day, we need to understand the whole picture. As Winston Churchill once said, 'Those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.'¹ Many of us would like to think that the world revolves around us (as Winston Churchill would have preferred, ironically!²), yet truthful history reinforces

the Bible's message that we are actually part of a bigger picture, both positive and negative. And that bigger picture involves people of every heritage, including those whose roles have in the past been deliberately 'whitewashed' out of the picture.

In a country like the United Kingdom, this inclusive history is particularly important because of the impact of the British Empire on our country and the countries it colonised,³ which, of course, involved industrial levels of trading African people to the Americas and the Caribbean as slaves, as well as colonising (and evangelising) huge swathes of the African continent itself. Silence on that world-changing power is very odd, given the wealth that flowed back to the UK and the influx of African heritage migrants since, but for many of us, it has only been glancingly mentioned at school.

In the church, we might even argue that knowledge of how African and British history interact is even more important than in wider society, given widespread ignorance over the shameful investment of the Church in chattel slavery and the more

widely advertised campaign against it by figures such as Granville Sharp and William Wilberforce.

But the bonds of the British Empire are not the beginning of African presence in the history of these islands; in fact, it was when England and Wales were ruled by the Roman Empire that the first documented presence appeared. Amazingly, the North African emperor Septimius Severus visited the British Isles to secure Roman defences and died in York in 210 AD. There are inscriptions documenting the presence of a legion of soldiers from Mauretania (present-day Morocco and Algeria) stationed on Hadrian's Wall in Cumbria in the third century. No doubt, given the multicultural nature of the Roman Empire, there were plenty of Africans in the British Isles whose names are lost to history.

More than that, British Christians (including me) have been sadly ignorant of figures like Hadrian, an African abbot who fled North Africa as a refugee and was sent from Italy to help shape the growing English church in 670 AD by founding a large monastery in Canterbury and teaching many who spread the gospel across the island.



The Revd Naomi Hill was born and bred in England's home counties to British English parents. Nonetheless, awareness of different cultures was a natural part of her upbringing, especially when her family entertained students from other countries. She lived in Pakistan for seven months after university, teaching English. She has a Kenyan sister-in-law and two bicultural nephews. After a BA (Hons) in English Literature and History in York, Naomi worked in Cambridge and Sheffield, after which she studied for ordination at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, where she gained a Bachelor of Theology. She was ordained in 2006.

From that time on, there have been traces of African heritage people across the country,⁴ including some high-profile servants of royalty such as Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's first wife, who arrived with black people in her retinue when she moved to England from Spain. Whilst the number of Africans probably didn't rise to very high figures, their presence reminds us that Britain has never been an isolated state but has often been fully involved in global trade, including the slave trade, which started under Elizabeth I. Sadly, the all-too-human failing of suspicion and hostility towards 'outsiders' was present right from the beginning, mixed with superstition and an ambiguous attitude to whether Africans could also become followers of Jesus.

With the rise of the slave trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the history of the British Isles became even more entwined with that of Africa. In ports heavily linked to the slave trade, we see the beginnings of a more substantial black British community. In Liverpool today, some black families can trace their heritage back ten generations.⁵ In London, a perpetual centre of migration and mixing, we can trace significant numbers through census, baptism, marriage, and funeral records. There was, inevitably, a lot of hostility and discrimination. Still, there were also innovative exceptions such as Charles Ignatius Sancho, abolitionist, writer,

composer, and the first African to vote in parliamentary elections (because he was a property-owning man) in 1774 and 1780.⁶

St Paul's, Slough, in the Diocese of Oxford, where I currently serve, is tasked with encouraging people of all kinds of UKME heritage to seriously consider whether God is calling them to serve within the Church of England. We might be forgiven for thinking that this encouragement is a unique and recent innovation, given the scarcity of UKME clergy. However, while researching this article, I discovered that the first black clergyman in the Church of England was ordained in the eighteenth century. Bryan Mackey is generally acknowledged as the first black British clergyman in the Church of England. He was born in Jamaica to a white father (a gentleman, William Mackey) and a black mother. Educated at Brasenose College, Oxford, he was ordained as a deacon in May 1793 and as a priest a year later.⁷ No doubt there are many threads to unpick from Bryan's story, coming as he did from an island powered by enslaved Africans and white slave owners (we might well wonder at the status and relationship of his parents). Nonetheless, he is part of all our histories, too, though sadly forgotten for a long time.

Of course, the most visible and most recently impactful episode of black British history is the arrival of people from the

Caribbean after the Second World War to help rebuild the bombed-out and broken nation. Already British citizens, they came in their thousands to do the worst jobs and could only rent the worst accommodation due to the rampant and then legal racist discrimination. It seems to many of us that the church is still paying the price of the reflexive racism from clergy and laity that met migrants during that Windrush era when they attempted to attend Anglican churches on their arrival in the UK. Far too many British churches did not recognise the gift that God was bringing, and migrants had to set up their own churches, many of which thrive in the UK to this day.

However, in the twenty-first century, the encouragement, energy and passion that African heritage migrants, not just from the Caribbean but also directly from the continent of Africa itself, have brought to the church in the last hundred years has breathed new life into many fellowships. They brought the vigour of the Anglican church in their countries of origin with them.

So, when we take a moment to reflect, we discover that British history is more interconnected with the worldwide picture than we think; our language, our culture, and our faith are a glorious tapestry of global influences. Those of us whose family tree is (as far as we know) from purely within

the British Isles can be encouraged by the opportunities afforded by events such as Black History Month to discover a richer and more nuanced understanding of the overlapping worlds in which our ancestors lived. As Christians following a middle-eastern messiah, we can remember that amongst his early followers were people like Simeon called Niger (i.e. black), one of the prophets and teachers of Acts 13, who built the foundations of the faith for missionaries to eventually reach the then barely known British Isles with the gospel. Black History is British History, and Black History is also Christian History.

A Collect for Black History Month

Compassionate God,
who sent Jesus Christ
to deliver us from all manner of injustices
and inequalities,
create in us new hearts and enlarged
visions,
to see the image of God in every person
irrespective of background, race and
ethnicity.

May we be generous in our love of
others

as we work towards ending
misunderstanding, racism, and injustice;
creating communities of human
flourishing,
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.

Amen.



WHY DO WE NEED BLACK HISTORY MONTH?



The Revd John Root is the father of *Intercultural Mission in the Church of England*. For 31 years he was vicar in Alperton, near Wembley, where the church started two Asian-language congregations. Before that, he was vice-principal of Ridley Hall, Cambridge. He ministered in Harlesden and a church plant on a housing estate in Hackney. He is now involved in retirement ministry in Tottenham. John does a weekly blog, *Out of Many, One People: thoughts on the church in a multi-ethnic society, on faith and race* (accessed at johnroot@substack.com). His wife, Sheila, is from Malaysia and of a Malayalee background. Their son is a co-founder of an IT start-up company.

Every year, as we approach Black History Month (BHM) in October, this question can be heard ambiguously. Heard negatively, it asks if all the fuss over BHM is necessary. Heard positively, it invites us to list why – in schools, churches, across an ever-growing list of other institutions – it is worth giving energy to. In this article, I take the latter approach and add some ‘buts’, expressing concern about how it can misrepresent or trivialise.

1. We need to celebrate the overlooked

At its most basic, BHM is simply a riposte to those who think that black people have no history worth recording or repeating. In a superb article in *The Guardian* before last year’s BHM (24/9/2022, available online), the writer Zadie Smith records:

‘It’s incredible to think of now, but by 1999, I’d gone through fifteen years of formal education, including a three-year English degree, without ever being

given a book to study that made any reference whatsoever to the presence of individuals like me in the country in which I was born. Not a novel. Not a history book. Nothing’.

An important part of what has been overlooked is the story of the migration of people like her mother, who faced all the challenges of entering the unknown, bearing with and facing down intense racism, and establishing community structures and pathways in a new land. Pioneers and migrants – in any continent and in any direction – tell stories that are bracing and deserve respect. The children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of people like Zadie Smith’s mother ought to have the everyday, unheroic struggles of their forebears celebrated.

Much further back, the histories of black people, largely before or without white people, need celebration. History is not a blank black slate that only comes alive and takes meaning when white chalk is written on it. Whilst some of that story is quite

spectacular – the widely dispersed Benin bronzes are an obvious example – much of it was ordinary people doing what for them were ordinary things, yet expressing unique and valuable cultures. The Muslim traveller Ibn Battuta paid tribute to the peace and security he encountered in his journey through the fourteenth century (in Western chronology) Mali:

‘Of all peoples, the Negroes are those who most abhor injustice. The Sultan pardons no one who is guilty of it. There is complete and general safety throughout the land. The traveller here has no more reason than the man who stays at home to fear brigands, thieves or ravishers’.

Historiography has moved well beyond the telling of great people, great events and great wars to attending to what it was like for ordinary people living everyday lives but often facing environments and developing cultures hugely different from our own. It is that history that BHM should open our eyes to.

But those planning Black History Month must realise the dangers of trying to make black history spectacular in a society that too often only gives attention to the spectacular and the star-studded. Focusing on 'celebrity' black people, especially entertainers and sportsmen, says too little to the overwhelming majority who will not achieve celebrity status. BHM's tendency to promote hero worship has been criticised. Too often, today's heroes are found to have feet of clay by tomorrow. Do the planners of this year's theme focusing on the achievements on black women now regret fronting it with Diane Abbott?

Similarly, there is a danger of over-hyping historical black achievements. Bob Marley's 'half the story has never been told' too easily gives rise to conspiracy theories that stories of black achievements have been suppressed. Discussing BHM on the footballer Troy Deeney's television programme on the need for greater focus on black history in education,⁸ the world heavyweight boxer Anthony Joshua spoke as though there had been a cadre of great black scientists we had never been told about. There haven't been. At times, I have felt uneasy and suspicious about the presence in BHM programmes of Afrocentrist histories lauding the achievements of pre-1500 Africa, for example, by Cheikh Anta Diop.⁹

2. We need white people to know black history

Quite rightly, black people resent their portrayal as only enslaved, helpless victims – a complaint that critics like Troy Deeney in the TV programme above have often voiced. Therefore, the positive emphases mentioned above are important. But black enslavement in the Americas – its intense brutality, cultural destructiveness, and profitability – is a central element of the last four centuries and needs focusing upon.

One of the positive consequences of Black Lives Matter has been to shift the dial to much greater attentiveness so that the rightly inspiring story of abolition is set proportionately against the greater and overwhelming iniquity of the slave trade and enslavement. Whilst the debate over reparations – why, in what way, to whom – is not solved by emphasising the iniquities of the past, widespread popular awareness of the evil is essential to proper debate.

But the danger that BHM 'ghettoises' black history, therefore, needs recognising. What we should really attend to is 'black and white' history. The actor Morgan Freeman has said, 'I don't want a black history month. Black history is American history'. Emphasis on 'black history' risks turning black people into a special case: a group

needing special attention, even remedial attention, to use a word with an explosive history. The reasons above provide proper reasons to justify that attention. Still, we must constantly ask why 'black history' has to be a special case rather than simply an aspect of world history or British history. Troy Deeney's programme saw BHM as a confining concession rather than a genuine widening of the syllabus. And, as black history becomes a part of the general syllabus, should there be an exit strategy for BHM?

3. We need to focus on what black people really offer

'History' is really now a misnomer for the wide range of events that BHM programmes now, rightly, cover. The events listed on the BHM website have virtually no serious history but range over black experience much more widely. In effect, they provide a proper riposte to the theme of deprivation by emphasising accomplishment.

Music, where black people have made the greatest contribution to the contemporary world, deserves, and receives, a high profile. Jazz, gospel, blues, reggae, rock, and rap have all become constituent parts of modern life. There is a danger that – as lamented in Psalm 137 – black music becomes trivialised and exotic

entertainment when it has been a major, partly wholesome, and partly noxious shaper of modern sensibilities across all sides of the 'black Atlantic' and much further afield. Political and social puritans can dismiss the attention to black music and other art forms as a distraction from 'real world' issues of political power and economic justice, and the warnings deserve serious attention; nonetheless, music reaches more deeply than these things into our very sense of being human.

Music comes out of the heart of our being. The power of black music emanates from a sense of being in an essentially communal world. Harvey Kwiyani writes:

'Typical of cultures in the southern part of Africa, Malawians believe in the concept of *umunthu* (similar to *ubuntu* in South Africa, which says, 'I am because we are'. Essentially, we teach children to say, 'I belong, therefore I am.' It takes individuals to make a community, but it also takes a community to make the individuals.' (*Multicultural Kingdom*, p. 121).

Music's ability to connect to facilitate community and our need for community means that black music's capacity is not marginal but a central aspect of our society.

Nor can music and a sense of belonging be detached from another area of black contribution – the Christian faith. Both the importance of churches in black life and the importance of black churches in British Christianity are widely recognised. Yet, the secular mindsets of most local authorities and national institutions mean that black Christianity plays a marginal rather than substantial role in BHM. The whole range of British Christianity should address the need for BHM to properly exhibit the central role of black Christianity in black life. (There is uncertainty here – does 'black', following its USA origins, refer to the Caribbean diaspora or also include the now-larger African background population? The programmes, and I suspect the organisers, tend to reflect the former whilst seeking the higher profile given by the wider definition.)

But there are complex issues to be unravelled here. The importance of black contributions across the arts/community/faith nexus should be highly esteemed. On the one hand, this ought not to enhance what the sociologist Paul Gilroy has described as 'the hierarchy of creativity generated by the pernicious metaphysical dualism that identifies blacks with the body and whites with the mind' (*The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, 1993, p. 97). BHM must play an important role in

encouraging young black people's 'mind' aspirations. Lord Tony Sewell's day job of encouraging young black people to pursue careers in science and technology is vital in encouraging them to aspire to achievement in central but unsung areas of modern life. The 2016 film *Hidden Figures* about three black women mathematicians working at NASA was valuable in this respect.

On the other hand, the temptation to portray black achievements in this area as comparable to white achievement should be resisted, as in the approach 'If they've got Florence Nightingale, we've got Mary Seacole'; 'If they've got a long list of great inventors, we have the person who invented traffic lights'. Whilst I can understand the intentions of schools that present children with the factoids just mentioned, it seems to me a forlorn approach, inviting and an 'Is that all?' disappointment.

In this sense, we should aim for an increasingly integrated society where BHM might lose its salience as white people become more community-focused and faith-orientated and where black people are increasingly high-achieving in scientific or business areas where they have so far been under-represented. (In this respect, I appreciated the approach of the Indian film director, Shekhar Kapur, whose response

to his Hollywood success in directing *Elizabeth* was that he did not want to make Indians proud but should make the world proud of their pride. So BHM should intend to make the world proud of black people's pride and, by extension, make black people proud of the achievements of other peoples.)

But meanwhile, BHM needs to focus on what black people have to offer the world. Paul Gilroy wrote, 'Blacks today appear to identify far more readily with the glamorous Pharaohs than with the abject plight of those held in bondage. This change betrays a profound transformation in the moral basis of black Atlantic political culture' (quoted in Stephen Howe's *Afrocentrism*, p. 108). For BHM to adopt the pharaonic, high-visibility model of power is to go along with the current Western model that it is worth gaining the whole world at the cost of losing your soul (Mark 8:35). BHM certainly makes good use of its potential to offer us the life-affirming riches of black music. That music can enable a much-needed sense of belonging together in our society. And the roots of that music and belonging lie in a life-giving faith in God. Perhaps BHM can more consciously connect with those roots.

NOTABLE BLACK AFRICANS IN OUR REDEEMPTIVE HISTORY



The Revd Daniel Odhiambo is an Anglican pastor-theologian from Kenya. He currently lives in Amsterdam, where he supports the Church of England Chaplaincy of Amsterdam in the Diocese in Europe. He holds a Master of Arts in Intercultural Theology and a Master of Evangelical Theology from the Theologische Universiteit Kampen and Tyndale Theological Seminary respectively. Daniel is passionate about intercultural ministry and is academically interested in how the Reformed-Protestant tradition can be contextualised for today's multicultural world. He is married to Javella, a Rwandese.

Picture an auditorium filled with students from various universities. As the speaker on the stage introduces himself, they mention that they are an alumnus of one of the universities represented in the audience. A wave of recognition and unity sweeps through the audience. Among the diverse crowd, scattered applause initially ripples from current students at that particular university but gradually builds into a symphony of claps and cheers from everyone. The applause is more than mere appreciation; it expresses shared connection and solidarity.

Similarly, the seemingly endless lists of names in the book of Numbers serve a purpose beyond their apparent details. They are meant to evoke a sense of belonging and camaraderie in the readers as they discover and establish connections within the narrative. And that is the purpose of this short article as I introduce some black Africans of note in redemptive history.

Locating the black race in the text

While there is no doubt that the world of the Bible, whether the ancient Near East or the Greco-Roman world, was multicultural, there is a lot of speculation as to who exactly fits into our modern understanding of the black African heritage. It seems clear that even nations like Israel and ancient Egypt were quite multi-ethnic. It is, therefore, a stretch, for example, to claim that the Egyptian people and culture were synonymous with black African culture. The scholarly consensus is that Egyptians were probably a mixture of both black African and Asiatic elements.

Most scholars agree that the Old Testament ethnic group from Cush were black African people. Jeremiah, for example, refers to the unique skin of the Cushites without any explanation of who they were or where they lived ('Can the Cushite change his skin or a leopard his spots?' [Jer 13:23, Christian Standard Bible]). This implies that Jeremiah's audience was familiar with the term 'Cushite' and the uniqueness of their skin colour.

The Cushite empire was centred in the area south of Egypt, in modern Sudan, and stretched south and eastward into the regions of present-day South Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia and across the Red Sea into what was ancient Sheba. Daniel Hays notes:

'The Cushite civilization extended over a period of more than 2500 years. Its populace was urbane, civilized, literate, artistic, and religious. During this era, Cush was a major actor on the geopolitical stage of the ancient Near East – and she is owed her proper place in history alongside the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Hittites, Hebrews, and other important peoples of the ancient world. This was a black civilization, African on African soil, known and respected throughout antiquity.'¹⁰

The Hebrew Bible consistently uses Cush (kūš) for the region and its inhabitants. English translations are, however, confusing because of their inconsistent translation of

the Hebrew word. The various translations are 'Ethiopian', '(the) Cushite', 'Cushi', 'Nubian', 'black man', and 'Sudanese'. 'Ethiopian' is the most common modern rendering, which is how the Septuagint translated the word. This is probably the influence of the Greeks, who called all the black people Ethiopians ('the burnt faces').¹¹ The New Testament, therefore, also translates it as 'Ethiopian'.

Cush is introduced to us quite early in the Bible, mentioned as the region where the second river from Eden flowed (Gen 2:13). We then encounter Cush in the Table of Nations in Genesis 10, the new humanity coming from Noah after the flood. The third mention is Moses' wife.

Moses' wife (Numbers 12:1–16)

The two main characters in the Pentateuch – the first five books of the Bible – are Yahweh Elohim and Moses. Moses is the one person who dominates this narrative. He is a big deal! But Moses is also a remarkable man. In this passage where his Cushitic wife is mentioned, verse three tells us of his humility in almost hyperbolic terms: '... Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married... Now the man Moses was very humble, more so than anyone else on the face of the earth.'

(Numbers 12:1–3). God shows up when his siblings attack Moses, and his anger burns against them. God says this: 'Not so with my servant Moses; he is entrusted with all my house. With him I speak face to face – clearly, not in riddles; and he beholds the form of the Lord.'

Moses had married a Cushite wife, and while we are not told what Miriam's problem with her was, the most informed guess is that it was a racial issue.¹² It was that she was a Cushite! This also makes sense of the punishment Miriam is given. Yahweh strikes her with a skin disease, and she becomes as white as snow. This makes sense best as an intentional and appropriate response to Miriam's prejudice against the black wife. But there is more. Miriam is also sent away from the camp for a time – a temporary expulsion from the family of God – while Moses' Cushite wife is affirmed.

So here is a black woman, married to probably the greatest man in the Old Testament. God so affirms her that he burns with anger when that arrangement is questioned. Indeed, by striking Miriam's skin, it must be that it is the racism against this black woman that God is judging.¹³ And so the black woman becomes part of the covenant people of God.

Phinehas (Numbers 25:1–14)

If we grant that Moses married a black woman and that there is already some form of racial prejudice in the story, we should expect that there were more black people in the area. Moses' wife did not come out of the blue! Phinehas is another significant character in the Israel story; indeed nearly as significant as Moses. When Psalm 106, for example, reflects on Israel's stormy history, Phinehas and Moses are the only two people mentioned, and they are set up as the two great intercessors of the wilderness season. Even more curious and theologically significant, Phinehas' action is said to have been credited to him as righteousness – a phrase only used about Abraham and in which the New Testament attaches considerable significance.

So, who is Phinehas? He is introduced to us first in Exodus 6:25 as the last person in the priestly lineage of Levi. He is, we are told, the son of Eleazar, Aaron's son, and his mother is one of the daughters of Putiel (an Egyptian name). We meet him again in Numbers 25, a significant event in Israel's story. Israel, at least the men, have succumbed to the intentional seduction of Midianite/Moabite women, who are also luring them into idolatry. This pervasive sexual immorality and pagan worship becomes a matter of grave concern, and

the Lord sends a plague to the camp. But as they are gathered, having listened to the Lord's word, an Israelite man openly takes into his tent one of the Midianite women, a blatant and defiant act of rebellion.

Zealous for God's holiness, Phinehas swiftly leaves the gathering and acts fast and firmly – he follows them to the tent and kills them both. This decisive act of courage saves Israel from God's wrath – the plague.

It is significant, first, that someone other than Moses intervenes and saves Israel at this critical time. Indeed, God takes this action so seriously that he makes a covenant with Phinehas: 'It shall be for him and for his descendants after him a covenant of perpetual priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the Israelites.' (Num 25:13). That is, the Israelite priesthood is now bestowed on Phinehas forever. All the other priestly factions, Aaronites, Levites, and Zadokites, will now need to be related to Phinehas somehow. His significance in the story continues beyond this, and we meet him again in Numbers 31 and Joshua.

And yet, for his significance, it is quite probable that his identity plays a role in how the narrator platforms him in the narrative. The Hebrew dictionaries point out that the word Phinehas means 'the black man', 'the negro', 'the Nubian', or

'the Cushite'. Daniel Hays notes that it is a loan word from Egyptian and points to scholarship that it was a common New Kingdom Egyptian name that connotes either a person with unusually dark skin or a true African.¹⁴ It is, therefore, quite plausible, considering that Phinehas was a great-nephew to Moses and Moses also married a Cushite wife, that Phinehas' mother was a Cushite, and Phinehas turned out to be black in appearance and thus named 'the black man'.

What we have here then is a black man related to black Africa, though of course mixed race, with whom Yahweh made an eternal covenant; that all legitimate Israelite priests will have to be related to the black man, and just as God credited righteousness to Abraham, God also credited righteousness to this black man. One wonders how different black history would have been if the initial Bible translators knew Egyptian and thus translated Phinehas as 'the Negro'.

Ebed-melech (Jeremiah 38:1–13)

Jeremiah's proverb about the unique skin of the Cushites/Ethiopians has been mentioned. We have a remarkable man in the book of Jeremiah who is explicitly said to be a Cushite. His name is *Ebed-melech*, though this is probably not even his name because Ebed-melech means 'servant of

the king'. He is, we are told, a Cushite, a fact that the narrative stresses, and a high-ranking official in the royal palace.

The context is that Jeremiah has been accused of being a traitor for suggesting that rather than continue to fight Babylon, the most strategic action they could take is to surrender. Indeed, this was the word of the Lord because Babylon would win anyway. Like all Jeremiah's messages, this message was very unpopular with the Hebrew officials, who then, with the king's permission, threw Jeremiah into a cistern and left him to die. But when Ebed-melech hears about it, he decides to act – taking the bold and even dangerous step of confronting the king publicly, and he is allowed to rescue Jeremiah.

Salvation from death for God's genuine prophet thus comes from the most unlikely of places – a black foreigner. And the Lord rewards him for this act: even though Jerusalem will fall to the Babylonians, Ebed-melech would survive. Ironically, the reason stated is that he trusted in Yahweh. When the entire Jewish nation is being punished by exile for not trusting Yahweh, a black African man is rewarded for trusting in Yahweh. Ebed-melech is bold, compassionate, and exhibits an admirable moral rectitude, all flowing from his trust in Yahweh. And he becomes part of the faithful remnant in Israel.

The Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–40)

The Ethiopian eunuch is probably the most famous of these Cushites/Ethiopians. To begin with, it is quite striking how he parallels Ebed-melech. Both are high-ranking officials, and they are both, when we meet them, in a foreign land among the Jews. Both represent the inclusion of black people into the family of God in their respective contexts and believe in God and his prophets at the moment when Israel and its leaders reject them. The Ethiopian eunuch believed God's messengers precisely when persecution broke out against the apostles.

The conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch is a significant event in the Luke–Acts narrative and, indeed, the spread of the gospel. Jesus had commissioned his disciples to be his witnesses starting from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). By the time we get to Acts 8, the apostles are already scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. The only step remaining is 'the ends of the earth', and it is here that we meet the Ethiopian eunuch as the Holy Spirit leads Philip to him. This is 'the ends of the earth' moment in salvation history, and it is not a Roman; it is an Ethiopian. How striking that before the gospel ever reached the Roman world, before Paul took it to Europe, the Ethiopian eunuch was converted, and he went home

with it rejoicing. This black African man was the gate for the gospel going to the ends of the earth!

Simeon called Niger (Acts 13:1)

Simeon, called Niger, is not a central character in scripture as he is only mentioned once (though some scholars think he is also the Simon of Cyrene who helped carry the cross of Jesus). The mention is, however, significant because it confirms that there were black Africans among the early Christian church and that they were part of the leadership in this new burgeoning church in Antioch. Many commentaries agree that *Niger* was a reference to his black complexion, and

this verse is undoubtedly also meant to showcase the multi-cultural composition of the church leadership in Antioch.

Bibliography

Welch, Tim. *Africans, and Africa in the Bible: An Ethnic and Geographic Approach*. Oasis International, 2019.

Hays, J. Daniel. *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*. NSBT. Leicester, ENG; Downers Grove, IL: 2003.

Hays, J. Daniel. 'The Cushites: A Black Nation in Ancient History', *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153, no. 611 (1996).

Conclusion

Many other names have been associated with Africa in the Bible. It is not always easy to tell; some are too much of a stretch. What is clear, though, is that the Biblical story platforms black African people right from the beginning. But not only that; several Africans mentioned were remarkable. They stand for boldness, moral rectitude, missionary zeal, leadership, contending for holiness, and above all, they are a testament to the God of all the earth who includes everyone into his family, irrespective of one's skin colour or place of origin. That is not to say all the black Africans are heroic. Some do not do well, and that is for another article. But black Africans can look at those I have mentioned and be proud, cheer and clap as they establish connections with them as people who share their racial heritage.



IMPROVISATION AS INTERCULTURAL PRACTICE



The Revd Canon Ned Lunn is the Canon for Intercultural Mission and the Arts at Bradford Cathedral, working with different faith and ethnic communities in preparation for Bradford being the UK City of Culture in 2025. He writes regularly on the intersection between intercultural practice and art on his blog, nedlunn.com. He also teaches Contextual Mission and Ministry at Leeds School of Ministry.

In October last year Bradford Cathedral hosted an exhibition called 'Journeys of Hope' in partnership with the university. It told the stories of the Ugandan Asian diaspora, who travelled to Britain in 1972 after being expelled from their homeland by Idi Amin, and the Windrush generation, who arrived in the 1940s seeking to fill labour shortages after World War II. These black histories of migration are just two examples of the many journeys of peoples who have made Bradford their home and made it the intercultural city it is. The exhibition aimed to open up dialogue between 'different journeys of hope from the various communities who continue to tell important, positive stories of Bradford's black history.'¹⁵

Bradford is a 'city of travellers'¹⁶ and is proud of its City of Sanctuary status. Each neighbourhood is a weaving of different and contrasting stories of departures and arrivals; some forced, others chosen. For some, the life before Bradford is tinged with sadness and pain, while

others hold onto that previous life with pride and delight. Some have found life in Bradford challenging and hard, while others have thrived and discovered new life. The various migrant and refugee communities are not all natural bedfellows; we should not simply group them under one demographic umbrella. The Ugandan Asians' experience, for example, is very different from those who came from the Caribbean in 1940. Even the considerable number of people who came from the different regions of South Asia after the partition have diverse cultures and faiths. A shared experience of foreignness in the UK does not solve the issues that have ravaged lives in other parts of the world. To see these distinct groups just as 'UKME' or 'GMH' peoples is, therefore, unhelpfully reductive, as is equating their experiences one to another.

The conversation we hoped to facilitate by hosting this exhibition is how we all, regardless of race and ethnicity, tell our histories truthfully and reconcile our understanding of the past when others may

differ. Ultimately, we want to acknowledge that 'black history', like 'white history', is not one history but many histories of diverse cultures and experiences. So, the history of Ugandan Asians is shaped significantly by their poor treatment by some indigenous, black Ugandans. Black Ugandan history is shaped by their experience of the white British who colonised them. These histories also interact with the history of South Asia, particularly when others were sent to Uganda, and they were left to fight for independence and face the poorly managed transition by the British Empire afterwards, which included the partition of India. Pakistan's history, uniquely, tends to tell the benefits for the Muslim majority of the partition and, therefore, the scars of the white British colonisers are different from their neighbours on the subcontinent.

All these are 'black histories' but relate differently to 'white British history', which is not singular but multiple. All are necessary to tell and hear but require different responses. We, with ancestral links to empire, can maintain a colonial

mindset if we generalise others' history into a unified category of 'black history'. This also exacerbates the issues around historical wrongs and, in some cases, misunderstandings. Telling history is not straightforward, and attempting to legislate or police it is complex and dangerous.

This is my point: all history is selective and interpretative. The way we look at the past says more about how we see the present and what we hope for the future. The temptation is to rewrite the past or erase the problematic parts from history that do not help tell our story into the future. We naturally cherry-pick from our cultural memory to shape our present-day policies and decisions. To pretend otherwise is ignorant and reckless and opens us to authoritarian ideologies. This is why intentionally telling and hearing black histories in all their diversity and conflict is so important. It should inform and challenge both 'white histories' and other 'black histories' but also lead us to know and tell shared histories so that we can all enact a global, intercultural present and future.

I am increasingly aware of the stories we tell ourselves, the cultural frameworks we place around our understanding of the world and how we cast ourselves in certain roles within our different personal narratives. I have also become more aware

of the role people cast me in as a white British man, whether I fit the character or not. I can be, in their vision, a mere totem of wider categories that I may or may not identify with. I experience how others treat me differently, some with unwarranted reverence and others with unmerited disgust. As I attempt to listen and engage with my neighbour, hearing the story they tell about themselves and the world we inhabit together, I try to see through their narrative lens to make me more conscious of the barriers that hinder understanding and relationship. This is an improvisatory exercise and one that, I want to argue, should shape our intercultural practice.

As a student in theatrical improvisation, the principle of 'Yes and...' helps to create new, shared worlds with other 'performers'. This principle, along with the primary principle of listening, is key, I suggest, to all cultural dialogue.

Improvisation is based on the premise that every interaction/dialogue, in the context of performance, consists of at least two people making 'offers'. An offer is any word, expression or movement that impacts the shared environment/space. 'Yes and...' encourages the receivers of an offer to respond affirmatively ('Yes') but also to add an offer of their own that connects in some way to the original offer ('and'). In this way, the principle establishes

a mutual exchange of affirmative offers that build on one another to a shared reality.

As I listen to someone share their worldview or culture with me, outside of the improvisational performance context, I still need to listen in order to understand. As I listen, I should imagine myself within that perceived world and respond appropriately. My fellow 'improviser' may, at some point, attempt to cast me in a particular and potentially unfavourable or dissonant role. How should I respond to that? A great temptation would be to 'block' the offer. Blocking is about rejecting an offer and thus breaking the collaborative relationship required to create a shared world. The 'Yes, and...' principle leads me to respond with curiosity and somehow accept the offer, work from there, and, if necessary, somehow transfigure it. So, when legitimate, painful and traumatic black histories bring new perspectives to my particular view of history, I can simply utilise the 'Yes and...' principle, accept the offer and rightly acknowledge responsibility for the role I continue to play within real power imbalances. The 'and' could open an exploration of how those unjust structures might be transformed.

Sometimes, however, the other's history is too selective and interpretative. The telling of that story aims to shape the present and future for their benefit. How do we

remain engaged whilst challenging the truthfulness of their telling of history? In these instances, we can maintain the 'Yes and...' principle by utilising what is known as 'overaccepting'.

Overaccepting is accepting in the light of a larger story. The fear about accepting is that one will be determined by the gift and thus lose one's integrity and identity. The fear of blocking is that one will seal oneself off from the world and thus lose one's relevance and humanity. Overaccepting is an active way of receiving that enables one to retain both identity and relevance.¹⁷

Samuel Wells, in line with Stanley Hauerwas' ethics, outlines this improvisatory move as a way of remaining engaged in differing narratives to our own whilst holding onto our own personal integrity. Overaccepting is a form of 'out-narrating' a cultural worldview by situating all the offers 'within a more determinative, peaceable, and hence more encompassing narrative.'¹⁸ This means seeing ourselves and our interlocutors and all their 'givens' from the perspective of God's story: past, present and future. As we listen to their history, ask where God is in this and how we can move towards that great eschatological end together.

There are, of course, obvious links between this approach to intercultural mission and dialogue and Jesus' great incarnational move towards humanity. Too often, however, our vision of incarnational mission stops at the reception of the other and their offers. We dare not take the next necessary missionary step of responding with an 'and'. We either passively accept history as told by the other and take on the role offered to us, whether justified or not, or we block history and deny its truth, either factually or experientially. Jesus' overacceptance of us never stopped at accepting the story we told ourselves and others. Instead, he redeems the history and changes it by his framing of interaction within the kingdom of God. He replaces the faulty lenses of all human cultures with a clearer vision of God's salvation narrative at work in and through himself. Christ's 'and' was not always verbal but performative acts to empower, subvert or redeem.

The path to reconciliation with our personal and ancestral history involves hearing the wider story of others' telling of the same events. When conflict occurs in the dissonance between these narratives, it is important to explore how we receive an alternative offer while maintaining some sense of inner integrity and identity.

Overacceptance and all improvisational principles require trust and unwavering commitment to listening, not just to receive but with an active imagination ready to contribute to a shared creation of new realities together. The way I teach improvisation is by gradual exposure to the counterintuitive magic that occurs when these principles are put into practice. I pray that people glimpsed that redemptive magic at work in our conversations over the exhibition and in the wider intercultural work at Bradford Cathedral into the future.

USING ART TO COMMUNICATE AN INTERCULTURAL JESUS

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) campaign has rightly raised the issue of the use of colonialist artefacts in public squares, most conspicuously in the dumping of the statue of former slave trader Edward Colston into the River Avon in Bristol. Churches are now also addressing the issue of how artefacts involving former slave traders are displayed within their buildings. An added aspect of church imagery concerns whether the portrayal of Jesus as a white male also reinforces the narrative of white colonialism – after all, if the divine Head of the Church is a white male, should it not also be right that human heads of colonies be so?¹⁹ Stained-glass images of Jesus may contribute to such a story. Such images can also appear in other contexts, like learning resources for children or in PowerPoint service presentations.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, has spoken of statues in churches associated with slave traders and refers to a careful review of their use in light of

the BLM campaign.²⁰ While this review also concerns images of a white Jesus, he is less concerned about the possibility of removing those, instead pointing to the many cultural portrayals of Jesus as black, Chinese, or Fijian worldwide.²¹ It could be argued that since no single portrayal is accurate, a white Jesus is equally valid and still deserves space. Welby does acknowledge that the Middle Eastern portrayal is more accurate. One approach to choosing appropriate imagery might be to look for accuracy.

There is an undoubted advantage in portraying a more accurate Middle Eastern Jesus, a great written example being Kenneth Bailey's classic book, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes*.²² I have benefited greatly from this book, so accuracy is clearly of value. But what, then, about any less accurate portrayals? Can they help present the message of an intercultural Jesus, and if so, how?

Firstly, we should consider whether images can present that message or any message.

This is a fundamental question for some churches, which can feel uncomfortable about image-based communication since they come from a tradition focusing primarily on word-based ministry. Churches rightly value scripture, so is art around the edges (often physically in the building) even worth bothering about? Words are uniquely important in our faith, given that revelation comes through them in scripture. But it can seem miraculous that we can encounter an infinite God through words, a miracle of revelation. Lakoff and Johnson describe how humans need to use metaphors to make sense of things transcendent to ourselves.²³

An example is time, with its hard-to-understand properties at a scientific level, which we instead speak of in everyday use in the metaphor, 'time is money'; thus, we say how we spend, save and waste time. Using words to describe an infinite God can seem to me like two spiders talking about what the humanoids in the room are doing; not only is what they say so far beyond a spider's understanding



Peter Tate provides learning opportunities for public services, businesses, and colleges to better interact with faiths and cultures using face-to-face and digital approaches, a previously developed role at St John's Church, Southall. He has a master's degree in Cross-Cultural Theology and in the use of Digital Education to build faith and cultural awareness. Peter is from Northern Ireland, where he experienced first-hand the challenges arising from faith and cultural interactions.

and experience, but they do not even possess the language to describe it if they did understand. Trying to understand an infinite God through words is beyond us. But that is why the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, so we can at least behold God's glory if not fully understand it.²⁴

There is a case, though, that exploring words using art can speak to us at a deeper level than words alone. In a fascinating podcast, Ted Harrison recognises these 'limitations of language' for grasping religious experience at a deeper level.²⁵ He proposes that words are 'not fit for purpose' to do so. Harrison shares that art can take him beyond words to help him better grasp the transcendent. This has also been my experience: during lockdown, since folks couldn't go to churches or galleries in person, I ran the St Martin-in-the-Fields/National Gallery Inspired to Follow religious art study course to a captive audience, exploring religious experience through art alongside Bible texts.²⁶ As well as speaking deeply to me, I got much positive feedback on how it affected others, certainly more so than when I preach, although that may reflect more on my preaching ability! One person even said it was the highlight of their year, something that surprised me. This suggests that Harrison's proposal that art can speak to us at a deeper level is worth exploring, including to help communicate the

message of an intercultural Jesus. In the following paragraphs I propose two steps towards exploring this.

Using mission as the mother of church art

Seeing images of Jesus that connect with how we physically look at ourselves can affect us deeply but also have an adverse effect on others outside our group. A recent example for me was seeing a Pietà digital photograph in Peterborough Cathedral by Marc Bratcher, an artist with cerebral palsy (see photo at bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-65604810). The artwork depicts Mary, with cerebral palsy, holding her dead son Jesus. This was well received by disability groups, but Bratcher describes the image's challenge to those from Christian perspectives holding to the immaculate nature of Mary, with the objection being that since Mary was immaculate, then she could not also be disabled.²⁷ In light of this, the artist added a statement that he was 'not categorially saying that Mary was disabled' but 'like examples [such as an Asian Jesus], [the artwork] offers the chance of a significant part of the Christian community, and indeed all society, to see themselves reflected in the Christian story in a way that they never have before'.²⁸ It certainly made me think twice. This shows well both the

potential power of art to enable mission to marginalised groups and to challenge theological perspectives on disability for those not from that group. It strikes me that there is likewise a challenge with racial inclusion. How might art play a part?

The first step comes from a missiological saying I find insightful: 'Mission is the mother of theology', meaning that theology is typically born out of mission contexts. This is seen in the theology from New Testament letters like Paul's to the Romans, written to make the Christian faith relevant to groups new to it. Likewise, I propose that mission be the mother of art used in churches, which can be chosen to connect with and include marginalised groups, starting where they are. This can help guide our choice of art.

A trickier task can be addressing mindsets within established church groups to welcome new groups, enabling an intercultural community where groups interact rather than a multicultural one, where groups may meet without mingling. Images used that don't fit with traditional perceptions, perhaps like the Pietà above, may well create cognitive dissonance in established groups so that they dismiss the image with thoughts such as, 'Well, the artist doesn't know much about Middle Eastern culture' without really engaging with the point of it. Exploring art together

can be one way to overcome this. One regret I have about art discussions during lockdown was not exploring cross-cultural aspects, asking questions like, 'What effect might this painting have had due to setting the Bible story in the seventeenth century Dutch or Italian context of the time?' or 'What might it look like set today?' This can help raise intercultural awareness. Discussion worked better in a group setting, letting people learn from the insights of others as well as what they observed themselves. Images like this could also be used in church settings, adding questions to create discussion.

Using multiple images to guard against exclusively my-culture Jesus mindsets

Engaging with images of a black, Chinese or Fijian Jesus can work well in churches reaching out to one cultural group or in homogenous outreaches to interest groups like a youth culture or a music community. This can be a good early point of contact but can cause people to adopt a mindset of having an exclusively my-culture Jesus, which affects reactions when encountering a different culture later. For example, images of an exclusively white Jesus in English churches over many years may have reinforced the historical lack of welcome to groups outside of that culture arriving in England post-Second World War. Using

a single image type like this is no longer appropriate in many UK church contexts, where multiple cultures learn together and from each other. Or, at least, that is what we are aiming for.

By using multiple images, greater learning occurs than the sum of what each group gets from seeing their own culture's Jesus. When I spoke with Dutch students arriving in England each year to learn about cultural awareness, I would say to them, 'You won't know what it means to be Dutch until you live outside the Netherlands.' (This is not quite true, but it spoke to them where they were at just then.) My purpose was to convey that when we live cross-culturally, a moment comes when we realise that not everyone thinks as we do. We become aware by comparison. Otherwise, it is like asking a fish, 'What do you think of the water?' if they have no experience outside water.²⁹

Similarly, with multiple images of Jesus, we can learn how Jesus identifies with my culture and other cultures in ways we had never thought about. This is a liminal moment when we realise Jesus is intercultural, from which we can never go back to old ways of thinking about Jesus.³⁰ We can then, together with all the saints, start to grasp how wide and long and high and deep God's love is in Jesus Christ.³¹

Bibliography

Harrison, Ted. *Four Thought: 'Turning to Art'*. BBC, 1 February 2023, Podcast: [bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001hpbb](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001hpbb)

Lakoff, George; Johnson, Mark. *Metaphors we live by*. Second edition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Tate, Peter. 'Shift the Power: Powerful Questions + Transformative Learning'. Global Learning Partners, November 2020. Podcast: open.spotify.com/episode/5oBpfC7TNDgImtA82pvT0N

BLACK AFRICAN PASTORS CHAMPIONING INTERCULTURAL MISSION IN LIVERPOOL



The Revd Dr Israel Oluwale Olofinjana is the One People Commission Director at Evangelical Alliance. He is an ordained Baptist minister with extensive experience leading multi-ethnic Baptist churches. He founded the Centre for Missionaries from the Majority World, an initiative providing cross-cultural training for reverse missionaries in the UK. He holds a PhD in African-British Theology and has authored several books. Israel is a Yoruba Nigerian.

Last August, I had the privilege of **visiting Liverpool Lighthouse for the second time to see their amazing work in the community. The people behind these community initiatives are Dr Tani Omideyi and his wife, Dr Modupe Omideyi, Nigerians who migrated to the city in the 1970s. Amongst other community initiatives they lead are an intercultural church called Temple of Praise, Love and Joy Ministries, a community park called Bright Park and a gospel festival seeking to transform the city. Liverpool Lighthouse is in the Anfield area, near Toxteth, where another Nigerian named Daniels George Ekarte led a community church from 1931 to 1964.**

This article reviews how two black African pastors, Daniels Ekarte and Dr Tani Omideyi have, in the past and the present, championed intercultural mission and transformation initiatives in the city of Liverpool.

Daniels George Ekarte (1896-1964)

Daniels Ekarte, born in Calabar, Nigeria, became a seaman and migrated to Liverpool around 1915. Not long after arriving, he started the African Churches Mission (ACM) in Toxteth, Liverpool, in 1931. Liverpool's prosperity in the mid-nineteenth century had depended largely on the slave economy. The impacts of the First World War in Liverpool were an increase in unemployment and poor living conditions. This was coupled with the racial discrimination that was prevalent at the time. Intercultural marriages between black men and white women were a major tension in Liverpool. The children of such marriages were termed 'half-caste' children (today known as mixed-race or of dual heritage) and were rejected by many. These children were labelled as 'mongrels'.³² This was the socio-economic milieu into which the ACM was born.³³

Ekarte began to organise services in slums,

private rooms and fields for the black and Asian people in Liverpool and, through anonymous donations and with help from the Foreign Missions Committee of the Church of Scotland, he later rented two knocked-together houses on Hill Street, Toxteth. Ekarte's church became a community centre for black, Asian and poor white people. He visited people in prison and hospitals, besides giving free meals to individuals experiencing poverty. In addition, the church had a Mothers' Union, Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, Brownies, and musical activities.³⁴ Ekarte also started a music school, and because many black children were not getting into secondary education or technical schools, he started secondary classes.

He became a voice for the oppressed and marginalised in society by defending them in his sermons and publicly speaking against racial injustice. Ekarte also believed in and fought for racial equality. For example, he campaigned for equal

payment for black seamen because their white counterparts received higher wages. This brought him in direct opposition with the local authorities, which negatively affected the ACM.

The Second World War brought about the birth of mixed-race children resulting from the union between African-American soldiers and English women. Society rejected these children; therefore, Ekarte decided to transform the ACM into an orphanage home for them and a rehabilitation centre for some disillusioned and ostracised mothers. He achieved this, but this urban community project was ordered to close in 1949, and the children transferred to the city's children's home. Ekarte was barred from any further contact with the children. The local authorities did this partly because they could not tolerate African campaigning for racial equality and openly rebuking the British government for plundering the resources of Africa through colonialism. In addition, the National Health Service had started in 1948, meaning new infrastructures were being set up as social changes occurred. Lastly, ACM also suffered from financial constraints. After this, the mission's life continued but struggled to survive.

Finally, in 1964, the local authorities demolished the mission housing building. The blow of the mission closing was too

much for Ekarte, and he died that same year. Ekarte was and remained a hero in the sight of Africans and other marginalised people for advocating on their behalf in Liverpool, but was a controversial figure in the eyes of others.

Dr Tani Omideyi

Dr Omideyi was born in Ibadan, Nigeria, to a family of five. The family were committed Anglicans with a strong faith and love for music. The combination of strong faith in God and music have been defining characteristics of all the projects in which Dr Omideyi is involved. He migrated to Britain in 1974 to study Chemical Engineering at the University of Aston in Birmingham. After Dr Omideyi and his wife had been involved with an Elim Pentecostal church in Runcorn, they sensed God calling them to start a ministry in Liverpool. They both obeyed and started evangelising on the streets. They later found favour with a church that allowed them to rent their building. I found it very striking that the ministry context for the Omideyis at this time was very similar to the urban challenges that Ekarte faced. The Omideyis described Toxteth as follows:

'The evidence of decay, decline and depopulation could be seen clearly in the boarded-up houses, large stretches of waste ground covered with

rubble and fly-tipped rubbish, broken pavements strewn with litter – there was litter everywhere – and dog excrement. We were not yet acquainted with Liverpool's particular political and socio-economic problems, but we could see that the Granby area was a black ghetto – virtually everyone, whether resident, trader or customer, was black.'³⁵

The Omideyis had a vision, not just for a church, but for a church that could transform lives and the city they now live in. In the 1990s, the church moved to the Anfield area, purchasing an old Presbyterian church and, later, an old cinema building, which is now the building that houses the Liverpool Lighthouse, including different community initiatives and the Temple of Praise church. There are several community projects such as a school – Harmonize Academy, a community park – Bright Park, and Love and Joy Ministries that the Omideyis have pioneered, but I will highlight three of them.

Temple of Praise: an intercultural church

There are many multicultural churches across the UK due to our multicultural, multi-ethnic society. Still fewer intercultural churches are counter-cultural to that society. In Britain we have multicultural churches of different types, ranging from those with segregational inclusivity,

a diverse context where different ethnicities co-exist but not meaningfully, to performative inclusivity that focuses on ethnic diversity as a tick-box exercise. Temple of Praise church is different. They intentionally created an environment best described as radical inclusivity that integrates God's people from different backgrounds, nationalities, classes, and ethnicities. They have done this through creative evangelism that uses gospel music, dance, and drama to reach other people in the city. They have also achieved this by creating a welcoming space for all, but going beyond welcoming to belonging and integration. Temple of Praise exemplifies how an intercultural church can transform lives and a city.

A community park: Bright Park

One of the special initiatives that Love and Joy Ministries is involved in is restoring a community park called Bright Park. I had the opportunity to visit this park to understand the vision and its impact on the city. I reached several conclusions. Firstly, it is unusual to have an African pastor interested in environmental issues to the extent of getting involved in a woodland park. Many African pastors I know are still trying to understand the environmental problems, let alone taking the initiative to invest in a park. Secondly, this community park provides many social amenities for Liverpoolians, such as picnics, dog walking,

running, sports, community activities, and opportunities to volunteer and help with the project. Thirdly, this six-acre wooded green space is a heritage site. It has historical value dating back to the Vikings and trees from around the world. Lastly, this green space promotes wellbeing for people who might suffer from mental health issues. It is a space many found useful for their mental health during the pandemic.

Liverpool Gospel Music Festival

Anyone who meets Dr Tani will quickly discover his love for music, and how he has used that to bless the community. He developed a vision to create a platform for gospel music in Britain and take gospel music beyond the four walls of the church to reach out to the community. Therefore, the idea was not to set up a gospel concert or church worship night but a festival to bring the community together in Liverpool and beyond with music, food, art, culture, sports, and so on. Thinking about the community and not just the church was crucial in planning this event. At the heart of the event planning was how Liverpool as a city can be transformed with the gospel.

Conclusion

This article has briefly reviewed how two black African pastors, in the past and the present, championed intercultural

mission and transformation initiatives in Liverpool. I have considered the urban ministry of Daniels Ekarte and Dr Tani Omideyi in the cultural city of Liverpool. Significantly, I have observed that they are both black African pastors who migrated to the UK as economic migrants but became missionary migrants when they responded to God's call. Secondly, they both started independent churches, taking the initiative to lead rather than joining existing denominations, and pioneering new work and ministry. Another important point is that both men developed their leadership beyond the church to minister to a multicultural community. In this effort, they transformed the city by engaging with the social, economic and political issues impacting Liverpool. Lastly, in developing a public ministry, they both engaged in intercultural mission that impacts different ethnic groups in society.

FIGHTING FOR RACIAL JUSTICE IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND IS NOT AN ELECTIVE

Undoubtedly, the issue of racism continues to cast a shadow over the Church of England, revealing itself prominently in the contrasting treatment of refugees arriving from different regions. While there is a strong global consensus in supporting those fleeing conflict and seeking refuge, observing the disparities in how we extend that support is disheartening. The stark contrast in the treatment of Ukrainian refugees compared to refugees from black African countries is a glaring example of the racial bias that persists within our church and society.

While undoubtedly important, the preferential treatment afforded to Ukrainian refugees raises important questions about the underlying racial biases that influence our responses to humanitarian crises. It compels us to examine why certain groups receive more immediate empathy, support, and resources than others. This differential treatment underscores the uncomfortable

truth that racial bias is deeply rooted in our church and society, often manifesting itself even in situations where compassion and solidarity should prevail. Following the invasion of Ukraine and the haemorrhage of refugees to Europe, Church of England clergy showed overwhelming compassion and welcome for these refugees. No such compassion and solidarity have ever been extended to black African refugees – not by Church of England clergy or UK society.

It is essential to acknowledge that refugees from black African countries, like their Ukrainian counterparts, are fleeing harrowing circumstances – conflict, persecution, and dire living conditions. Their need for safety and a chance at a better life is no less urgent. Yet the disparate responses should serve as a poignant reminder that the fight against racism is far from over. It highlights the need for continued education, awareness, and advocacy to dismantle the systemic biases perpetuating such disparities.

Addressing racial bias in our responses to humanitarian crises is a moral imperative and upholding the principles of equality and justice should be the foundation of our church and society.

As we confront these uncomfortable truths, we must strive for a Church of England and society where compassion knows no boundaries and every refugee, regardless of their origin, receives the support and empathy they desperately need. Only by acknowledging and actively combating racial bias can we work towards a more equitable and inclusive world, one where the value of every human life is recognised and upheld, regardless of the colour of their skin or their country of origin.

How can the Church of England accelerate its dull fight for racial justice? First, it must be upfront about the persistence of racism as a yet-to-be-resolved historical crisis. It must constantly acknowledge that its structures are not entirely free from the



The Revd Dr Godfrey Kesari is a priest within the Church of England. As a child, he grew up in India. He had his theological education both in the USA and the UK. Before his ordination, he worked for the Association for Theological Education by Extension (TAFTEE). He is currently the Racial Justice Officer for the Diocese of Chichester and the Interim Secretary of the Anglican Minority Ethnic Network (AMEN).

scourge of racism. It is a welcome sign that the church has now begun to grapple with racism more earnestly. The church is rightly regarded as the body of Christ. Therefore, pursuing racial justice ministry is not optional for the church. It is a moral and theological imperative – the church must confront and contest racism.

There is an absurdity about racism. Racism is unreasonable because people do not choose their features or colour. What is the logic in discriminating against someone based on something the individual did not choose or cannot change? The fact is, there is only one race – the human race. Genetic studies have established that we are all the same under the skin.³⁶ And real beauty is much deeper than the skin. God looks at the heart; we must learn to do the same.

For us to gain in our fight for racial justice, people who lead the church must articulate and adduce theological arguments persuasively in the pursuit of racial equity. It is vital that the church frees itself from racism to be able to portray a foretaste of heaven, where people of all nations and tribes will rejoice together with God.

Admittedly, since the publication of the *From Lament to Action* document in 2021, there have been conversations within dioceses on tackling racial inequality. Committees are facilitating dialogue on

bringing about interracial unity. As the title suggests, we not only need to lament the past cruelties to ethnic minorities both within England and elsewhere, like their trade and trafficking, but also act decisively to dismantle existing structures of white privilege and power and create a racially just society.

No doubt racism in the UK has a long record. It is shameful that minority ethnic people are segregated, surveyed, subjected to violence and indignities, and denied justice and freedom today. The slogans 'Black Lives Matter', 'Racism is a pandemic', 'We all bleed red', 'Human rights for all', 'Silence is pro-racist', and 'No justice, no peace' should resonate with all people within the Church of England.

The truth is that not all are racist, but many ignore racism. People of the church must do more than just not be racist; they must fight for racial justice. Fighting for racial justice is actively opposing and disrupting the prevailing racist ideologies and the status quo of racial discrimination. Practical action is needed for reparation, reconciliation, and justice.

Cultural and habitual change is not easy to bring about. Fighting against racial stereotypes is not easy. It is indeed a daunting task. It takes introspection, in addition to consciously making space

for the marginalised and minority ethnic groups within all structures of the church.

A change in people's hearts is vitally important if we are to make current racial inequalities a thing of the past. The key to bringing about the transformation of hearts is education. A sense of respect for all, irrespective of their racial origin, needs to be inculcated in children in churches in their formative years. It is important to ensure that race consciousness does not creep into children at an impressionable age. Sunday school and youth group teaching and sermons should emphasise racial equality and the need to repudiate all past notions of superiority and inferiority based on 'descent' and replace them with the Christian ideals of fraternity and fellowship.

Further, imagination is crucial in combatting racism. Persuading people to imagine themselves in the place of people of other racial origins may lead to intercultural friendships. Empathy for other people's situations is a virtue that can transform people's thinking and enable them to realise that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, in 'the wider family'. Hence, efforts should be made to cultivate this virtue. Intercultural gatherings, too, will help in bringing about a change of heart needed for the emergence of a society bound and held together by a sense of common humanity.

The phenomenon of racism is not viewed by the perpetrator of racism and the victim of racism through the same prism. Their definitions vary. Sad to say, in past decades, the church has tried to sanctify racism to uphold and perpetuate white supremacy and racial inequality. Needless to say, what the church did was utterly wrong. It cannot be denied that the church benefited directly and indirectly from racism. The church must repudiate its old notion of race-based superiority and inferiority and replace it with a correct biblical understanding of human relations.

The church must prioritise racial justice and deconstruct racially unjust structures from the past. Standing alongside minority ethnic people matters; if it results in sharing spaces and opportunities, it must be treated as a very small price for a noble cause and accepted with a philanthropic smile. The bedrock conviction that every human being is made in the image of God should be the guiding principle.

There are true tragic stories for ethnic minorities to tell; they must be heard by the church collectively. All are in the same boat in the church's journey of faith, so no one should be indifferent to others and their suffering. Change for ushering in a society where human equality is affirmed is long overdue. The church must act here and now. Humility, conversations, and the belief

in the Christian tenet of 'all being equal before God' will surely stand the church in good stead when it comes to playing its role as a catalyst for change.

Black History Month is a time to remember the atrocities committed against minority ethnic groups. It is a month to show solidarity with the ineluctable victims of racism. In addition, it is a month to initiate a turning point in the history of the struggle for racial equality and strengthen our resolve to stamp out racism. It is also a time to appreciate that black is beautiful and cherish and celebrate the diversity of God's creation. It is a time to give the marginalised communities their due space without discrimination in the church and wider society. At decision-making bodies at national and local levels, we must ask *who is missing?* Wherever people of any colour are missed, God's glory is diminished.

Sometimes, people avoid the sensitive, serious topic of racism. Still, we must fight racism since it is dehumanising and antithetical to Christian values. Racism begets hatred and hostility. We don't need what is divisive and puts people on the defensive. The Church of England has accepted its deep failures in the past. A country whose colonial power largely rested on stolen wealth and slave labour must do something radical to break from

the past and resume its journey on a more enlightened and righteous path.

Witnessing racism in the church, God must be weeping. We shouldn't be making God, our Creator, weep. We should resolve to strive for human equality and dignity. We have started a journey and still have a long way to go. We should tread the path drawing inner strength from Christ's teachings and endeavour to do our best for the emergence of a church and world free from racism.

The good news is, as Archbishop Tutu would put it, we are on the winning side. His words resonate with us. The triumph of racial justice for eternity is inevitable. It is foretold in the book of Revelation. People of all nations and tribes will live together – with no more tears – for eternity. (Revelation 15:4, 21:4).

People of the church must be taught that racial justice ministry is not an option. If the church wants to reflect a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven, it has no choice but to bring reconciliation and unity between people of all nationalities, tribes, and languages. While we all need our own space to live as individuals, we must also know that God made us for each other. Racism must be annihilated. We are all one in God in Christ. 'Whether circumstances are favourable or not,' the fight for racial justice must continue.

ENDNOTES

1 In a 1948 speech to the House of Commons.

2 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_History_of_the_English-Speaking_Peoples

3 Recommended reading: Sathnam Sanghera's *Empireland: How Imperialism Has Shaped Modern Britain*, Viking, 2021

4 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_British_people for more detail.

5 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_British_people#Slavery_and_the_slave_trade

6 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ignatius_Sancho

7 findmypast.co.uk/blog/history/black-british-firsts-clergymen

8 See blog # 76, 'A Tale of Two Education Approaches'.

9 See Professor Stephen Howe: *Afrocentrism: Mythical Pasts and Imagined Homes*, 1998; for example, 'The nature and extent of pre-colonial formal education in Africa has also been the sign of extravagant assertions of Afrocentrism' (p 150), referring, for example, to the Koranic school of Timbuktu.

10 J. Daniel Hays, 'The Cushites: A Black Nation in Ancient History,' *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153, no. 611 (1996), 280.

11 J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation*.

12 While it is a bit unclear, it does seem that this was a second wife and not Zipporah the Midianite – the daughter of Laban the priest. Having more than one wife was not uncommon then.

13 This thought is an extension of the idea that the plagues God sent to Egypt were not haphazard. They were each an intentional judgment of the different idols that existed in Egypt.

14 *From Every People and Nation*

15 bradford.ac.uk/news/archive/2023/journeys-of-hope-exhibition.php

16 J.B. Priestley, *English Journey* (Manchester: Harper North, 2023) p.197

17 Samuel Wells, 'Improvisation in the Theatre as a Model for Christian Ethics', Trevor Hart and Steven Guthrie, *Faithful Performance: Enacting Christian Tradition* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) p. 161

18 Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (London: SPCK, 2004) p. 92

19 Example objection to white Jesus at ncronline.org/opinion/editorial/editorial-why-white-jesus-problem

20 Reported at theguardian.com/world/2021/may/09/remove-or-alter-your-slavery-monuments-churches-are-told

21 Reported at theguardian.com/uk-

news/2020/jun/26/church-of-england-justin-welby-white-jesus-black-lives-matter

22 Bailey, Kenneth E. *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies In The Gospels*, London: SPCK Publishing, 2008

23 Lakoff, George; Johnson, Mark. *Metaphors we live by*. Second edition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. Summary and preview at google.co.uk/books/edition/Metaphors_We_Live_By/r6nOYYtxzUoC?hl=en&gbpv=0

24 See John 1:14

25 Harrison, Ted. *Four Thought: Turning to Art*. BBC, 1 February 2023, bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001hpbb. Accessed 14 September 2023

26 Course available at stmartin-in-the-fields.org/life-st-martins/discipleship/inspired-to-follow/

27 Pietà and other exhibition pictures at peterborough-cathedral.org.uk/143/section.aspx/142/disability_divine

28 Marc Bratcher Artist Statement at [peterborough-cathedral.org.uk/userfiles/Marc%20Bratcher%20information%20sheet%20\(1\).pdf](https://peterborough-cathedral.org.uk/userfiles/Marc%20Bratcher%20information%20sheet%20(1).pdf)

29 Wallace, David Foster. *This Is Water*. New York: Little, Brown & Company, 2009.

30 For further information on liminality and change, see Tate, Peter. 'Shift

the Power: Powerful Questions + Transformative Learning'. Global Learning Partners, November 2020 <https://open.spotify.com/episode/5oBpfC7TNDgImtA82pvT0N>. Accessed 14 September 2023

31 See Ephesians 3:18

32 Marika Sherwood, *Pastor Daniels Ekarte and the Africa Churches Mission* (London, the Savannah Press, 1994), p. 24.

33 Afe Adogame, 'African Christian Communities in Diaspora,' in Ogbu Kalu (ed.) *African Christianity: An African Story* (Trenton, NJ, Africa World Press, 2007), pp. 431–451.

34 David Killingray and Joel Edwards, *Black Voices* (England, Inter-Varsity Press, 2007), p. 135.

35 Dr Modupe Omideyi, *Transformed to Transform: A Journey to bring Change to a Community* (Liverpool, Love and Joy Ministries, 2017), p. 21.

36 *The Times*, 27 October 2004.



oxford.anglican.org/ojim

