

## **"Racism is a sin which disfigures God's image in us."**

*A quotation from the Report by the Archbishops' Anti-Racism Task Force, 'From Lament to Action', published 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2021*

### **Bishop David writes**

I support fully the recommendations published today in the far-reaching Report The Report, 'From Lament to Action', is both challenging and hopeful. It is clear that the Church of England is institutionally racist and that there have been decades of inaction. In its recommendations, we have a clear programme for change and a timetable for action for the church locally and nationally.

Reading the report was a stark reminder that the Church has fallen far short of the Christian Way and causes deep injustice and suffering. In lamenting and turning away from this sin, I am determined that racism will no longer be a part of the Christian church.

One of the most challenging and productive activities for me in the past year has been to be led forward by partners in the West Midlands time4change process, with its new commitment to The Birmingham Charter <https://www.time4change.uk/the-charter> In Birmingham we are focussed on tackling this injustice and acknowledge there is much more to do. I look forward to engaging and acting with all colleagues in the Church of England and everyone across the city and region as we continue the journey to address and answer the issues.

### **Canon Janet writes**

In recent months we have referred to "Black Lives Matter" in sermons, prayers and on one Sunday, in discussion in Zoom 'break-out' rooms. It was really good to have been part of a very open conversation in the break-out room I joined with very positive embracement of the increasingly multi-cultural neighbourhoods in which we live. However, I sensed the difficulty many of us face in how we refer to one another. This is particularly poignant for me as for a time I was an English migrant living in Scotland. I could have been an immigrant (see point 9 below) but I didn't know how it would work out. As someone who would describe themselves more as British or Northern than English I found myself somewhat bemused and put-out to be referred to as being from 'down south!' Today, I find it offensive to be constantly referred to as a 'guy' though I'm assured that etymologically the word is neutral. It doesn't like that to me but I don't think being called a 'doll' (as per the musical) would be any better!

So how should we refer to one another? I asked Revd Canon Dr Sharon Prentis Intercultural Mission Enabler & Dean of Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic Affairs for Church of England Birmingham (I call her Canon Sharon!) for advice and she sent me this paper 'Terminology' I am finding it really helpful and keep referring back to it. It definitely isn't something to read once and put to one-side.

On Good Friday our '**An Hour at the Cross**' focussed on a variety of images of Jesus from the 1999 publication, "The Christ we share" from USPG/CMS/Methodist Church. The images were in the last pack we sent out. If you didn't join us on Good Friday, the service is still on our YouTube channel

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhechUN8Nz4>)

Fr John Richards is very clear that Black Lives do Matter (37 mins in) and Ordinand Claire Whitmore (49 mins in) spoke very movingly about the experience of worshipping on Good Friday as part of a multi-cultural congregation in London. *Her words follow:*

At the church I went to in London, Good Friday was always marked with **adoration of the cross**. One by one, each of us would leave our seats to stand at the foot of a cast iron sculpture: a life size cross, with a life size Jesus crucified on it, elevated so that Jesus' feet were just above head height. One by one, we would kneel, bow our heads, or kiss the foot of the cross, taking an intimate moment to look up to Christ, before returning to our seats.

The first time I did this, I noticed particularly the young black men from our congregation. They usually had cool trainers, sometimes under the cassock of a choir member or acolyte; razor sharp haircuts, or locks, or dreads; tall and short; younger and older. I watched them one by one kneel at the foot of the cross, at the foot of a depiction of a brown skinned man, dying at the hands of a hostile government in a place that treated him as a second class citizen. The resonance is so obvious I almost don't want to insult you and limit the echoes by naming them. But I will say this: those young men are 19 times more likely to be stopped and searched by police than others. They are five times more likely to be excluded from school than their white peers, after all other background factors are taken into account. Police rode horses into the crowds of Black Lives Matter protesters last summer.

But this image, named "**Jesus is dread**" plays with the idea that Jesus is dead. In case you don't know, in some Black British culture, "Dread" stands for freedom, power and being uplifted. The Dread Christ is one who sides with all oppressed people in their struggle against anything which denies them full humanity. Inherent in the image is acknowledging truth of pain, suffering and sin, whilst also promising hope and liberation. There are many places to position ourselves in the story of this week. We might see ourselves in the crowd that calls for Jesus' death, or in the disciples who ran away. Maybe the women who stayed at the foot of the cross, Mary holding her son's lifeless body. When those young men looked up to Christ's loving, anguished eyes, they could see a mirror of themselves. And they made me realise anew where I wanted to be in the story. I didn't want to be a person who sat idly by in a systemically racist society that crucified UK minority ethnic people. I want to be part of Jesus' story, resisting injustice and weaving a message of hope. **Jesus is Dread.**



## Terminology

Here are ten suggestions of things to bear in mind when navigating the sensitive issue of terminology in respect to identity and otherness that may affirm each other's worth and mutuality, and lead to mutuality in relationship:

1. Where it is relevant to refer to a person's cultural heritage, it is advised to use the term preferred by the individual themselves, e.g. Asian, Roma, African-Caribbean (instead of Afro-Caribbean), Chinese, black etc.
2. Do not assume that a person's appearance defines their nationality or cultural heritage. In Britain, ethnic identity is a self-defined category by law.
3. 'Coloured' is a term that is regarded as outdated in the UK and should be avoided as it is generally viewed as offensive to many people, because it assumes white ethnicity as normative identity, and therefore not needing to be qualified. The same could be said of the expression 'people of colour', more popular in the North American context. However, this is gaining popularity amongst diverse people themselves
4. Use Heritage rather than Background as it refers to culture, language and ancestry that a person identifies with; even though their nationality may be different. One term that is being used is: global majority heritage.
5. An increasing number of people use 'dual heritage' or 'multiple heritage' rather than 'half caste', 'mixed race' or even 'mixed heritage'. The 'half' and the 'mixed' often carry negative connotations and suggest loss of purity.
6. People are not their ethnicity. Do not automatically use a person's ethnic origin/culture to describe them. The words black and Asian (and similar) should not be used as nouns, but adjectives: black people rather than 'blacks', an Asian woman rather than 'an Asian'...
7. 'Minority ethnic' or 'ethnic minority'? 'Ethnic minority' places the emphasis on ethnicity as the main issue. There can be a tendency to see 'ethnic' as synonymous with 'not-white' and so the term could be perceived as implying the issue is with people being 'not white'. 'Minority ethnic' highlights the fact that everyone has an ethnicity and the issues being referred to relate to minority groups in a UK context. A person from the global majority would be a more positive expression and help reframing context and discourse positively.
8. Just as in the Balkans or anywhere else, internal peoples everywhere should be referred to as ethnic groups or communities rather than 'tribes', tribesman, tribeswoman. The same goes for cultural and artistic motives that should not be referred to as 'tribal'. It is fair to note that many communities around the world would themselves use the word "tribe" when speaking or writing about community,

ethnicity or identity in their context. However, the word 'tribe' carries misleading historical and cultural assumptions and promotes unhelpful and often demeaning misrepresentations.

9. Note that the word 'immigrant' is not a substitute for someone's ethnicity. It may be offensive to many people, not only because it is often incorrectly used to describe people who were born in Britain, but also because it has been used negatively for so many years that it carries many unhelpful imageries of 'flooding', 'swamping' etc. Note the difference between 'migrant' (who moves temporarily within or across borders) and 'immigrant' (who moves across borders and settle). Besides, the term is politically charged and needs to be used with clarity and precision. The same could be argued about the use of terms such as "Asylum Seeker", or "Refugee" "illegal immigrant" (people are not illegal, their actions may be. Talking about undocumented migrants may be more adequate use of terminology)
10. Somebody of an ethnicity other than white is no more a 'non-white' than a woman is a 'non-man'. People are not defined by what they are not.

Language is, of course, only one lens through which we can relate to each other. In the Genesis narrative of Creation, God assigns purpose and worth to all that is called into being (Genesis 1:31a), then tasks humanity with the responsibility of naming the rest of creation (Genesis 2:19). What we call each other and the way we do it matters. However, what matters even more, is the kind of relationships we can build with each other. As Christians, we are called to affirm in each other the shared identity and destiny we have in Christ. We are called to live redeeming lives in which all of God's children are valued, honoured and celebrated. Each encounter holds the opportunity to say the encounter with God new.

Lastly, if in doubt, it never hurts to call someone by their name (Isiah 43:1b). For a more detailed commentary on terminology, you may also consider the following link:

<https://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/raceequalitytoolkit/terminology.htm>

For more on theology of identity, you could read:

Willie Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011

Elizondo Virgilio, *The Future is Mestizo, Life Where Cultures Meet*, Boulder, University Press of Colorado, 2000

Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*; Nashville, Abingdon, 1996

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