

*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*

Jn 13:35



## Finding the Strength to Love

**T**he work of the BSL interpreters at General Synod, a practical necessity, is a symbolic reminder of why we gather: the call to be one in Christ (Gal 3:28); called to break down barriers of difference that might otherwise divide us.

Given my work to help dismantle the barriers of race and overcome the sin of racism, I was horrified to read the Telegraph article (carried also in the Daily Mail) on International Women's Day that sought to reinforce them.



In a piece that served to critique the value of a diocesan 'anti-racist toolkit', a trustee of one of the national Church of England charities is reported to have made the following statement:

*"It seems extraordinary that, in a diocese which is 95 per cent white, money is being spent on this, including a full-time racial justice officer when parishes are crying out for more clergy."*

The Eastern Daily Press went further, to name my colleague and include her photo making her unsafe. This statement by someone expected to be racially conscious was disturbing on several fronts:

- It seemed to suggest that the work of racial justice is exclusively the domain of minoritised ethnic groups, the unmentioned 5 per cent. It further suggests racial injustice is a numbers game, that is, the 5 per cent minoritised group are not statistically significant enough to be worth the investment. A tyranny of the majority?
- It overlooks the reality that it is not the victims of racism that the work of anti-racism is directed at, but rather the perpetrators. This is why the toolkit was designed to tackle, in part, a 'white supremacist/ Eurocentric worldview' that the Church is "not immune from". This challenge to this work underscores that some still fail to grasp the message to clergy included in the toolkit, to 'become aware of biases and privileges'.

- It reinforces a false and dangerous dichotomy between the investment in racial justice and the supply of clergy, which can serve as a dog whistle to those consumed by notions of ‘wokeness.’ The articles served to gaslight someone working on racial justice.

On the Monday following the incident, I communicated with diocesan racial justice officers to assure them that this matter is being taken very seriously by me, and of my commitment towards eradicating what I consider to be unsafe conduct. I also reminded them that counselling support is available.

Such a perspective is even more disturbing when you consider that it takes place almost five years on from the 2020 Windrush Generation motion at General Synod. That session apologised over the racism experienced by Black and other minoritised ethnic people in the Church of England.

*He told the Synod that there was ‘no doubt’ that the Church of England was still ‘deeply institutionally racist’*

At that debate in February 2020, speaking in response to Fr Andrew Mumby’s introductory speech, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby said he was ‘sorry’ and ‘ashamed’. He told the Synod that there was ‘no doubt’ that the Church of England was still ‘deeply institutionally racist’.

Last month, in his address to the General Synod to present the Final Report of the Archbishops’ Commission for Racial Justice, Lord Boateng, the commission’s chair, opined: “There will certainly be some I suspect, nay I know, in this chamber who will breathe a sigh of relief and for whom the end of the Commission couldn’t come a moment too soon.” Reassuringly only one person voted against the 2025 racial justice motion.

Notwithstanding this affirmation, there remain some allies of racial justice who seek to engage with this work as a programme of activities rather than a personal, long-term commitment to wrestle with the systemic, ideological nature of racism. This work is part of the wider call to love our neighbour.

*If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.*

As Archbishop Stephen often recounts, it was ‘Grace’ that opened his eyes early on to the sin of racism.

I appreciate that this journey of transformation will take time but we must face the ‘fierce urgency of now.’ In the same 2020 address to Synod, Archbishop Justin stated: “We did not do justice in the past, we do not do justice now, and unless we

are radical and decisive in this area in the future, we will still be having this conversation in 20 years time...” There are dangers of complacency in the face of injustice, and history reminds us that waiting for ‘tomorrow’ can be too late.

To safeguard the wellbeing of Global Majority Heritage and UK Minoritised Ethnic communities in the Church, and to reassure those others who have transcended racism and unconscious bias, I recommend that the Church universally adopts and enforces the **Charity Governance Code**, which stipulates under Principle 3 on Integrity:

- Trustees and those working for or representing the charity are seen to act with honesty, trustworthiness and care, and support its values;
- Trustees adopt and follow a suitable code of conduct that reflects the charity’s values and sets out expected standards of ethics, probity and behaviour;
- Trustees understand their safeguarding responsibilities and go beyond the legal minimum to promote a culture in which everyone feels safe and respected.

*Trustees go beyond the legal minimum to promote a culture in which everyone feels safe and respected.*

Integrity, responsibility, and accountability are critical components of the love command and essential to the mission and ministry of our Church. This should be guaranteed to all seeking a hospital for the soul, a school for the mind, and a depository for moral thought. Desmond Tutu reminds us: “If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.”

In the meantime, we are encouraged to keep faith and hold to John 13:35. In one of his most famous writings, the *Strength to Love*, Martin Luther King, Jr, emphasised: “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

I end where I began, on the divine call to unity. Also, to affirm my commitment to gender and disability justice along with all forms of inclusion, I quote Helen Keller, the disability rights advocate and author: “Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.” Let’s counter racism with our love and solidarity.

This is not the message I had planned for 21 March, globally marked as the **International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination**. But perhaps it’s a sobering reminder of the work still to be done. May we remain resolute and unified through these uncertain and trying times, and with God’s grace, find the strength to love.

In Deo fides,

Guy Hewitt

*By faith, in hope, and with love*