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Racism in the Church of England

JOHN ROOT

Introduction

The publication of *Seeds of Hope: Report of a Survey on Instruments for Combating Racism in the Dioceses of the Church of England* by The Committee on Black Anglican Concerns has stimulated debate about racism in the Church of England. This article is an attempt to clarify ways in which the Church of England is racist.¹

In surveying the debate about racism and the Church of England over the past decade, rhetoric is more easily found than detailed analysis about what is wrong and what might be done about it. *Seeds of Hope* is a sober and constructive document (quite unlike what much press coverage suggested, as for example, the highly misleading *Times* article 'Intolerance in Church: Daniel Johnson on the perils of hunting racists'.) Here, as elsewhere, however, racism tends to be more vilified than specified. So, concerning the 1988 BCC Conference reported in *Rainbow Gospel*, Jerome Mack, a black American participant commented:

The salient issue which dominates my impression of the Conference was the absence of a balance between rhetoric and action. Indeed, many of those to whom I spoke voiced concern at the continual 'breast beating' hegemony of the victims juxtaposed against the silence of the majority. Outstanding speeches notwithstanding, I was struck by the similarities of this conference and those I attended during the early days of the American Civil Rights movement. There, too, innumerable hours were spent bemoaning personal experiences of discrimination without a consistent focus on strategies to address or eliminate them.²

To move, in Mack's words, from rhetoric to strategies for change is the aim of this article, which may make it seem unduly cold-blooded for a situation where people's dignity and self-worth have been so sorely wounded. But only so are institutions changed. The article is based on the following assumptions:

1 Racism is a serious problem in the Church of England. It has disobeyed God and failed in its witness. Evidence for this will appear throughout this article.

2 Such allegations need to be specific, not general. Only then can appropriate responses be made. For this, free and open discussion between black and white is essential. White people need to take time to hear black people's criticism of the Church, but they also need to speak and, if they disagree to argue. One danger at present is a high-minded over-readiness to

1 I am most grateful to Lorna Dwyer and Jocelyn Codrington, and particularly to my wife Sheila Root for their very helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

2 *Rainbow Gospel*, British Council of Churches, London 1988.

acknowledge guilt, lest we hear the dreaded allegation of 'racist' made against us. We need to take on board the warning of the British-Nigerian writer Adewale Maja-Pearce about 'the word "racism" itself having been invested with a potent magic which suddenly deprives its hearers of the ability to think, not dissimilar to the stories I heard as a child in Nigeria of apparently healthy men expiring on the spot at the sound of an enemy's curse.'³

3 'Race' does not occur in a vacuum. People have other, and very often more important identities than the colour of their skin. Discussions of racism in the Church of England have frequently failed to relate colour or ethnic identity to other variables such as age, sex, migration, and as this article will particularly emphasise, social class and educational performance. Dividing society and church into monolithic blocks of black and white is conceptually convenient and occasionally useful; but in reality oftentimes it can bungle rather than clarify our understanding of people and situations.

What is racism?

Classificatory schemes can be a worthless intellectual diversion; nonetheless understanding the different ways racism operates is important in clarifying how it works in the Church of England. The following threefold classification covers the main variations in how racism is understood. Each type is illustrated by the ways in which they might affect selection for the ordained ministry. This choice of illustration is not to suggest it is an area where racism is particularly prevalent, but simply because it is an area of which I have some experience, and which illustrates the factors at work neatly. It is also, of course, a very important area.

Direct racism

By this I mean a simple tendency to reject people because of their colour or ethnic identity. For whatever reason, a person doesn't like blacks, Asians, Jews or whoever, and rejects them. Such rejection means denying to people what they have a right to: a job, housing, equal treatment before the law, or open welcome into the people of God. People's opportunities, freedom and potential are thus denied. Although definitions of racism often link it with belief about the inferiority of others, this is strictly irrelevant. People may express racism towards those they fear as in some way superior, for example in anti-Semitism.⁴ The personal causes for direct racism are inevitably diverse; what is important is the result: injustice and oppression to those on the receiving end.

This is the most common understanding of racism, and when people deny that they are racist, or they criticise racism, it is often only with this damaging but still incomplete aspect in mind.

3 Adewale Maja-Pearce, *How Many Miles to Babylon: An Essay*, Heinemann, London 1990.

4 See the quotation from the Rampton Report in *Rainbow Gospel*, p 11. Thomas Sowell in *The Economics and Politics of Pace*, William Morrow & Co, New York 1983 (p 17) offers an opposing view.

As applied to selection for the ministry, a selector who didn't like black people would obviously be inclined to reject candidates on racist grounds. I doubt if this applies to many selectors; any to whom it does apply clearly should be weeded out.

Unconscious racism

Like the above, unconscious racism is personal, but is based not on deliberate rejection, but on holding negative assumptions about ethnic minorities, which may very often co-exist with denial that one is prejudiced or a refusal to recognise it within oneself. Typical assumptions will concern the lack of dependability, reasonableness, intelligence, or 'character' of non-whites; compensated for by condescending affirmation of strengths, usually in 'peripheral' areas, such as sport, music or spirituality. The result is blindness to the actual gifts that a black person has, and unwillingness to recognise their authority.

The particular danger of such racism is that it is less easily perceived (by white people) and more easily denied than direct racism. Direct racism, like our clothes, is the result of conscious choice. Unconscious racism, like our body odour, can cling to us without us knowing it. I believe this is the most damaging form of racism in the church today. Yet vehement condemnations of racism often fail to touch it – 'since racism is evil and we are not, therefore we are not racists'. Whilst the awful consequences of racism need recognising, an over-emotive attack on it hinders rather than aids self-perception. Because unconscious racism is elusive, it is often hard to prove; and black complaints about its effects can too easily be dismissed as special pleading or a 'chip on the shoulder'. Yet the results are serious, for example, whilst we expect black people to sing in the choir, we don't expect them to be perceptive or creative home group leaders.

As regards selection for ministry, the results can be particularly invidious. It is hard to identify selectors who will be approaching black people with low expectations of what their potential might be, or who find it hard to recognise their gifts. Yet such attitudes are rife in our society, so that the potential of people from outside traditional Anglican culture can easily be overlooked. The Advisory Board of Ministry of the Church of England (and the corresponding bodies and systems elsewhere) needs to be aware of such dangers, and working to correct them in selectors.

Institutional Racism

Here we are looking at the way institutions, rather than individuals operate, and in particular the way they may represent the interest of some groups, normally those in power, at the expense of others. Decisions may be made in a routine way with no thought given to the implications for black people; or choices may be made which reflect the interests of the powerful, who are almost always white, or (as with immigration and nationality legislation) they may have the intention of discriminating against black people without it being strictly provable. So a church with multi-racial membership may serve entirely English food at the Harvest Supper because they had never

thought of doing otherwise, or because an all-white group has kept control of the catering, or because they want to give the message that black people aren't really welcome.

Whatever the intentions, the outcome of a myriad of such decisions – alongside a policy of 'rules are rules and they are colour blind' when those rules operate in favour of white people – is that black people are disadvantaged and excluded, at times without anyone making a deliberate decision to do so. Therefore the way institutions operate, and in whose interests they make decisions, needs to be scrutinised in order to see how they disadvantage certain groups.

As regards selection for ordination, the Church of England chooses to operate in certain ways, as for example in the criteria applied to candidates. Probably no one would maintain that if you squeezed the New Testament the present criteria would inevitably be distilled from it. Criteria rightly reflect an interaction between the New Testament, the Church's tradition, and a particular social situation. Some qualities are prized and others neglected, because the criteria reflect the concerns of the church and culture that produced them. Thus the situation of 'non-normative' groups in England can easily be ignored, and candidates from such backgrounds disadvantaged because there is less congruence between the criteria and their cultural background. To take an example: hospitality is highly valued in the New Testament, less valued in traditional English society but much more highly valued in the culture of many ethnic minorities in Britain. It does not figure largely in Anglican selection criteria.

As regards understanding institutional racism, an important point about criteria for selection for ministry is that they operate in terms of culture and class rather than in terms of 'race' in a narrow way. They also disadvantage many white people who do not come from middle-class backgrounds, whilst some black people will not be disadvantaged by them.

Black people in the Church of England

In assessing racism in the Church of England, it is necessary to try to get a fairly accurate picture of what the situation is, particularly about membership and participation by black people. Firm documentation is rare. The studies of the Birmingham diocese by John Wilkinson and Renate Wilkinson in *Inheritors Together* are by far the fullest.⁵ Otherwise it is necessary to rely on my own impressions from multi-racial parishes and on hearsay. Nonetheless the picture that emerges from such a variety of scattered sources is fairly consistent.

A preliminary point to make is the major distinction between those ethnic minorities in Britain who come from substantially Christian backgrounds in the Caribbean and Africa, and those minorities from south Asia, amongst whom Christians are a small minority. Increasingly, differences in how these groups experience life in Britain are emerging, so that the umbrella term

5 John Wilkinson, Renate Wilkinson, James H. Evans, Jr, *Inheritors Together: Black People in the Church of England*, Board for Social Responsibility of the Church of England, London 1985.

'black' for all ethnic minorities is increasingly unsatisfactory. But as regards experience of the Church of England, there is considerable agreement across both groups that racism is significant and damaging to further participation. However, because Afro-Caribbean people form by far the majority of black people with significant experience of the Church of England, it is their story that will predominate in what follows.

In his study of *West Indian Migrants and the London Churches* in the early 1960s, Clifford Hill estimated that 70% of West Indian migrants had been members of 'traditional' churches in the Caribbean; after migration to London only 4% continued to attend such churches.⁶ There was then a massive fall-off in church-going after migration. Why? Coming to Britain was itself a secularising experience – there was pressure to work long hours, shifts and Sundays; secular or profane alternatives to church-going were more abundant; the weather was cold and the churches were empty. The decline of the social significance of church-going for migrants should not be under-estimated. It had simply ceased to be a social event in England in the way that it was in the Caribbean, and therefore lost much of its attraction.

But not least racism in church was a potent ingredient in the stew of reasons for this massive lapse. In *Inheritors Together* John Wilkinson records four personal reports of rejection.⁷ These range from the vicar directly telling someone not to come again, through to coldness and lack of welcome. For people for whom religion was central and England was 'home', such rejection was a double blow. The pressures of migration to a secular society would inevitably have faced the churches with a pastoral challenge. What is tragic is that the Church of England's response showed such an absence of human decency or warmth, let alone any vision or vigour.

By contrast, black Pentecostal churches grew. However it is misleading to assume, as is often done, that this was simply the consequence of racism in the 'traditional' churches. Pentecostalism was already strong and growing fast in Jamaica, the home of over 60% of West Indian migrants. Most black Pentecostal pastors I know in Britain were Pentecostals before migration. The most common West Indian response to Anglican racism was to lapse, not to transfer to a black-led church. The growth of the latter came about through positive evangelism, albeit in a community still with a nostalgia for church-going. Joel Edwards, of the Afro-Caribbean Evangelical Alliance, has commented that it is no compliment to black-led churches to be told they have grown by default. To see their growth as due simply to failure by the 'traditional' churches, rather than their own faith, vision and energy, seems to imply that it is still only white people who can make things happen, even if only negatively.

According to the MARC Church Census, the growth rate of black churches has slowed – a massive 20% increase between 1975-79 dropped to 1% for 1985-89. By contrast the 1980s saw rapid growth in another constituency: multi-racial charismatic churches. The outstanding, but not the only example is Kensington Temple, with a Sunday attendance of over 3,500, plus 2,000

6 *West Indian Migrants and the London Churches*, Clifford Hill, London 1963.

7 *Inheritors Together*, p 13.

attending 'satellite' churches. The majority are non-white, with an unusually high proportion of Africans. Young people of Caribbean background are by no means absent, though the appeal tends to be to the more successful. Such churches are important in showing that where there is vibrant spiritual life, then growth, not least amongst young adults, is possible. It should be observed too that such churches counter racism by the warmth of their relationships and the affirmation of multi-racial leadership, rather than through formal policies.

Meanwhile 'traditional' churches have also benefitted from the continuing desire of older black people to express the faith they grew up with. Thus since the fall-off of the early days, where churches have made serious efforts, there has been some regaining of lost ground. Renate Wilkinson's research shows that 'at least 7% of all regularly worshipping Anglicans in the Diocese of Birmingham are black'.⁸ In the Deanery of Brent several churches have majority black congregations. Whilst this is encouraging, if the black Anglican community is considered more closely then a number of features emerge, some of which suggest that the situation of the Church of England amongst the black community is less secure than sheer numbers might suggest.

Significant characteristics are:

- *Attendance rather than participation.* Renate Wilkinson's figures show disproportionately low numbers of black Sunday school teachers, PCC members and Synod representatives.⁹ This is a common story of churches in multiracial areas.
- *More women than men.* This is generally true of the Church of England, and becoming more so according to the 1989 MARC Europe English Church Census.¹⁰ Comparisons with the black Anglican community are only impressionistic, not statistical, but in my experience the predominance of women is even greater.
- *A predominance of over 45s.* That is, it is the generation who migrated to Britain in adult life who are to be found in our churches. Black people who have been born, or had most of their schooling in Britain, are far rarer. (Again this is by observation; I know of no statistical evidence.) Black church-going parents with non-church-going children are numerous. It means that British-born black Anglican leaders will remain scarce unless the church becomes very much more effective amongst young people.
- *Educationally less qualified.* West Indians migrated as a predominantly artisan community, and those born before 1960 are less likely to have qualifications, according to the 1984 *Third PSI Survey*.¹¹ This was more true of men and might help explain why black women seem more at home in a church which is noticeably weak in its ministry to the academically less qualified.

8 *Inheritors Together*, p 22. Brian D. Jacobs in *Racism in Britain*, Christopher Helm 1988, p 106 observes a similar growth in Trade Unions.

9 *Inheritors Together*, pp 24f.

10 Peter Brierley, *'Christian' England*, MARC Europe, London 1991, pp 85-89.

11 See the tables on pp 145-147 of *Black and White Britain — the Third PSI Survey*, Colin Brown, Heinemann, London 1984.

Areas of racism in the Church of England*Direct racism in parish life*

The explicit or covert rejection of black migrants in the early days has already been mentioned, and can be readily documented, though the seriousness and appalling consequences of that sin in the Church's life should not be forgotten. A development of the same rejection was the refusal by several parishes to accept black clergy as incumbents. I know of several cases from the early 70s where the most probable explanation of a parish's refusal to accept a particular clergyman is that he was not white.

Things are not quite the same now: apart from anything else it is against the survival instincts of most clergy to reject possible worshippers, whilst church members are conscious of their church's need for support if it is to survive. I also believe that several decades of Christian teaching have had some impact, and that many Anglicans are more aware of the sin of direct racism. Nonetheless racism is a many-headed hydra. Things that would not be said within the clergy's earshot can still be audibly said behind a black person's back. People can be greeted in church but ignored in the street. Looks and body language as well as words can convey to people that they are not wanted. Black people have learned well to read such signs. Thus well-meaning church leaders can find attempts to draw black people into the life of the church inexplicably frustrated. Exploration may indicate that an atmosphere of unwelcome is still being communicated to black people.

Likewise the church has often failed to listen seriously to what black people have to say. The church warden quoted by the Revd David Moore, in a perceptive contribution to *Time to Speak*, who complained of his vicar 'You know, it's funny, but when I say what he wants to hear, he quotes me, but when I say things he don't want to hear he goes deaf' was voicing not just a churchwarden's complaint, but a common black experience.¹² Indeed where clergy still see racial diversity as a source of 'difficulty', this unspoken sense of unease communicates itself to the whole church. If ministry to black people is felt to be an unwelcome burden, progress will be limited. Black people's comments about church life frequently stress the importance of the clergy's attitude. A positive and welcoming attitude goes a long way to drawing black people into the worshipping life of the Church.

Not affirming black identity

But such warmth is not enough. If some churches in multi-racial areas still remain largely white enclaves, many others have substantial black congregations, but with very limited impact upon either the leadership or the style of the church. Clergy who say 'We do not think of our congregation as "white" or "coloured"' will almost certainly produce this sort of situation. As Renate Wilkinson comments 'when Black and White are treated the same, the outcome is not equality but inequality'.¹³

It is not uncommon for churches to be stuck in a situation where they are ministering to the sense of religious need felt by many black people,

12 Paul Grant & Raj Patel, eds., *A Time to Speak*, CRRU/ECRJ, Birmingham 1990, p 20.

13 *Inheritors Together*, pp 26 & 28.

particularly those brought up in church-going backgrounds in the Caribbean. It is good that churches meet this need and provide a place where people can come to worship and pray, and for some this may be all that is appropriate. But usually being part of the body of Christ ought to involve more than occasional Sunday attendance, with only perfunctory and superficial relationships with fellow Christians beyond that. Yet we have seen the evidence that many black people attend rather than participate in church life. People need to be receiving and giving love and support, bringing their personality, gifts and identity into their worship and service to God, growing in their ability to serve, understand and share their faith.

'Such 'minimal participation' – 'just creep in for worship and creep back out' as a quotation in *Seeds of Hope* puts it – is one symptom of the church failing to engage with the inner life of black people.¹⁴ A second symptom is the failure to attract or to hold young black people, who do not have the experience of community church-going such as is found in the Caribbean. For them there are no deep memories to be evoked by church attendance which might partially compensate the lack of present satisfaction. Young black people who used to be sent to Sunday school by church-respecting parents have almost universally lapsed; increasingly the current generation of black parents (who by now will mostly have had their schooling in Britain) feel no more pressure to send their children to Sunday school than do their white counterparts. Young black people are more alienated by expressions of racism than the older generation. Already conscious of rejection by other traditional British institutions, the Church of England can too easily be dismissed as no different. They are also more influenced by secular British culture; very few indeed are the 'traditional' churches that have succeeded in making the gospel good news within their culture.

But what is this black 'identity'?¹⁵ Like any identity it is more easily sensed than expressed. It cannot be tidily or exhaustively defined; there will be exceptions, variations and loose ends. One obvious place to see the difference from white emotional and religious expression is at a funeral. Not only the greater attendance, but the freedom in expressing grief, the sureness in giving emotional support, the sense of what is appropriate all put black funerals in a different league. Similarly the readiness to offer emotional support in sickness or celebration, generosity in supplying food and hospitality, and freedom of religious expression in extempore prayer or singing are all areas where there is a richness to black life that offers immense promise to the church, and which older people are used to expressing in church life.

Behind this is an implicit theology, which includes the traditional African confidence in the power of God to act on our behalf and his readiness to reveal himself in dreams, visions and other ways, leading to a ready expectation of finding God's reality in everyday experience. Slavery in the

14 *Seeds of Hope*, General Synod of the Church of England, London 1991, p 23.

15 I am most grateful to John Wilkinson for the loan of his University of Birmingham M. Litt. thesis *Church in Black and White. The Black Christian Tradition in 'Mainstream' Churches in England: A White Response and Testimony*, which was most helpful in writing this section.

Caribbean and North America ran this religious understanding through the most brutal experience of physical suffering and cultural oppression. At the same time people were coming into contact with the faith that their masters professed. From this came emphases on Christ as suffering with us (as evidenced by continuing seriousness about Good Friday) and, beyond our present suffering, the hope of finally sharing in his victory (as evidenced in black hymnody).

As long as this identity is not recognised, black people will continue to attend Anglican churches on white terms. From a secular standpoint this spiritual disenfranchisement may seem a light burden compared with other forms of discrimination, such as in employment. But from the standpoint of both biblical faith, and of the historical experience of black people, it is a much more damaging wound to the heart of the community. In England the traditional churches failed to sustain this faith. Black Pentecostalism became the most obvious and recognisable attempt to provide an alternative. Rastafarianism is a more radical (and ultimately, I believe, tragically futile) expression of the same concern. More widespread, and more neglected, is a generalised folk tradition of religious faith, prayer, proverbs, customs and the like which seeks to express a religious sense.

It is not only the black community which suffers. The human growth and enrichment of white Christians suffer as they fail to receive the nourishment to their own spirits that equal relationships with black people can give. The church remains stunted and rather pale. Moreover it has failed to draw on the many gifts of the black community which lie beneath the surface of often rather dutiful church-going. The gifts that are utilised are often the more peripheral – singing in the choir or handing out the books. By contrast more vital gifts – of prayer and spiritual discernment, pastoral empathy and support, encouragement and rebuke, abilities in teaching and administration – have often lain dormant. All this constitutes racism and behind it can lie low and demeaning expectations, and a failure to give people their God-given worth.

I believe that this more than any other area constitutes the real racism, and failure, of the Church of England; the failure both to develop the resources of the black people who attend, and by that to discourage the next generation from attending, lies at the heart of the Church of England's problems. Lack of confident and creative participation in the Church by black people, especially young people, creates a log-jam which makes it impossible for there to be, for example, a ready source of black ordinands or of black people prepared to participate in the national structures of the Church.

Exclusion from church structures

This is a common area of accusation against the Church, and an area which has seen perhaps the greatest number of positive suggestions. The lack of black people in the committees and synods of the Church is indeed a serious indication of how little the Church has been open to what black people have to offer. But to address these issues as primary is to show an alarming lack of awareness of the real situation of black people in the Church. Until a confident black identity and participation has been established at the base

– in the parishes – all other strategies for change will be ineffective. Thus the workshop on 'Racism in Church Structures' at the *Anglicans and Racism* Balsall Heath Consultation recommended 'because we are a multi-racial Church, this means *no decisions with regard to the life of the Church should be made by all-white groups*'.¹⁶ But such recommendations – excellent in principle – will be still-born until parishes are first seeing black people moving into leadership and decision-making.

It is unfortunate that the chapter in *Living Faith in the City* (the progress report following on *Faith in the City*) is so largely concerned with central and bureaucratic issues in its section on 'The Church and Minority Ethnic Groups'. Rightly it is concerned to see more black people in ordained ministry, greater black representation on Synod and the various boards and councils of General Synod, and with the staffing of the Committee for Black Anglican Concerns and so on. These are all worthwhile aims, but there is no recognition that the number of black people in Church of England parishes concerned with these sorts of things is still very small. Likewise *Seeds of Hope* too easily accepts the assumption that creating diocesan committees and making specialist appointments is a sign of progress. But for a burgeoning number of committee places and diocesan desks to be chasing a static number of black Anglican activists will choke rather than liberate the ministry of black people. Like too much else in the Church at present, such tendencies seem designed to reduce, not increase, the degree of contact between church and community.

One particular area of controversy as regards Anglican structures has been the question of black representation on General Synod. In September 1988 the Committee for Black Anglican Concerns brought forward proposals that there should be a minimum of 24 black members of General Synod, through the black elected members being joined on Synod by the co-option of the highest voted unsuccessful candidates in order that the combined total made 24. Thus far this has been the clearest example of 'positive discrimination' to be considered by the Church of England. The proposal was ultimately voted down in Synod, to the considerable dismay of many black Anglicans.

Yet I believe Synod was right in that the proposals would have undermined rather than strengthened black synodical participation. In a wider context, it is by no means clear that 'positive discrimination' achieves its aims. One of its chief critics, the conservative black American writer Thomas Sowell, in a comparative international study of 'Preferential Policies', discerned five negative 'patterns' about such policies, one of which ran: 'Within the groups designated by government as recipients of preferential treatment, the benefits have usually gone disproportionately to those members already more fortunate.'¹⁷ Sowell's explanation of this was that take-up of the benefits of preferential policies depended on possessing certain advantages already, such as education. Thus the 'pool' of potential beneficiaries

16 *Anglicans and Racism. The Balsall Heath Consultation 1986*, Board for Social Responsibility of the Church of England, London, p 37.

17 Thomas Sowell, *Preferential Policies — an International Perspective*, William Morrow & Co., New York 1990, p 15.

was not the whole designated group, but a small segment who were more favourably placed.

The proposals for black membership of the General Synod illustrate this well. They would not lead to, say, black London Transport workers from Willesden being on Synod. Work, over-time, family, mortgage, household repairs are too demanding for most black people to afford several days out of the working week each year to attend Synod, particularly when election tends to ride on the back of other commitments. The effective pool of black Synod members is chiefly clergy and church workers and a small number of professionals. That rich source of lay members – full-time housewives – is far smaller in the black community. Thus 'black representatives' on Synod are likely to be very unrepresentative of black Anglicans.

This not to say that the shortage of black people on Synod is not a serious issue. But it is far better approached by grasping the real nettle, namely, that Synod primarily excludes people who are not middle class, rather than people who are black. Most, though not all, black people are not middle class. The point was perceptively made in an excellent article on 'The white-black class muddle' by Clifford Longley in *The Times*.¹⁸

The General Synod has still not yet grasped the point that its practice of meeting on three or four full working days, two or three times a year, necessarily eliminates wage-earners and is bound to concentrate synod membership on to the retired, the self-employed, or the professionals.... Both at national level and in the vast majority of parishes the Church of England has a predominantly middle class 'feel' to it, both in what it does and in the type of person it attracts. In relation to the exclusion of black participation from church life, that 'feel' tends to be labelled white; whereas what really characterises it is its class, not racial bias. A working-class person of whatever race would not feel at home in it.

The small number of black clergy

There are probably fewer than 100 black clergy in the Church of England; well below 1% of the total, which is a much smaller percentage than the black population of the country (4-5%), or of black membership of the Church of England. In addition, whilst a considerable majority of black Anglicans are of Afro-Caribbean background, proportionately fewer black clergy are, and fewer still share the experience of black people who have grown up in England. What does this say about racism in the church?

A connection cannot *automatically* be made between the comparatively small number of black clergy and the charge of racism in the selection of clergy. Whilst inequality of outcome is sometimes taken as proof of prejudice, this makes no allowance for the fact that different ethnic groups have very different characteristics. In the case of the Church of England we have already seen that black Anglicans, compared with all Anglicans, are disproportionately older, female and with fewer academic or professional qualifications. All these factors tend to work against being recommended for

¹⁸ *The Times*, 19 January 1987.

training for ordination, and together they go some way to explaining why black Anglicans currently produce few ordinands. Nor do I know of any evidence that black people have been not recommended for training simply because they are black (which is what a simplistic understanding of racism can be taken to imply).

Nonetheless there are two ways in which racism may reduce the number of black people coming into the Anglican ministry. First, as already mentioned, is the distorting effects of unconscious and institutional racism in selection. Secondly we have generally not learned how to be an effective expression of the faith of black people. In putting forward possible explanations for the small number of black clergy, Barney Pityana suggests 'that Black Anglicans do not feel sufficiently part of the Church of England to want to serve in its ordained ministry'.¹⁹ That is, it is an expression of the larger malaise which I have explored above.

However to push immediately to produce more black ordinands may be misplaced. In his contribution to *Inheritors Together* James H. Evans Jr summarises a debate as to 'whether or not the appropriate strategy for black people in the Church is to get black representatives into positions of authority or to concentrate on building black base communities within the church'.²⁰ It needs stressing that the former can only be effective when the Church has first succeeded with the latter.

Consequently the major thrust needs to be on our evangelistic and pastoral effectiveness with young black people, which alone can create the pool of people from whom black ordinands will subsequently come. To ignore this stage shows an unhealthy pre-occupation with ordained ministry in itself, rather than with the overall life of the Church. Whilst potential black ordinands should be sought out and encouraged, nonetheless to press quickly for more black ordinands can raise several problems – the encouragement of inappropriate candidates, pressure on the Advisory Board of Ministry to prove its 'anti-racism' by recommending black candidates who may be unsuitable, or simple disillusion when black candidates fail to emerge in sufficient numbers from what is at present an alarmingly small pool of active young black Anglicans.

A common point running through these last two sections is that the 'structural bias' in the Church of England is anti-working class as well as anti-black. (Another example is that the context of ministerial training which I believe is strongly influential, is almost exclusively that of cathedral or university town, or affluent suburb. Black and white working-class ordinands have to be trained in a dislocating context.) To quote Clifford Longley's article again:

The (ACUPA) report had many things to say not just about the church's failure to relate effectively to its black membership but also about the wider problem of the church's failure to relate effectively to the working-class population of England as a whole.

Yet the remedy in the case of black interests has been pursued; the

19 *Anglicans and Racism*, p 28.

20 *Inheritors Together*, p 67.

commission's remarks concerning the gap between the church and working-class culture have remained just words on the page.... That ('classism') may be one of those problems which are deemed not to exist because they are so intractable: nevertheless a 'commission on working-class Anglican concerns' would be an interesting experiment, particularly if combined with measures of positive discrimination.

By the same token, where are the proposals to increase working-class membership of Synod, or to see more working class ordinands, or appropriate lay training? Working class people generally find the Church of England an alien institution; racism doubles the problem for black working class people. One opportunity of the present time is that the head of steam gathering around 'race' issues in the Church of England might create initiatives (of which the Simon of Cyrene Theological Institute is a good example) which would pioneer the way for similar experiments in relation to working class ministry. Interestingly, the American observer, James Evans, puts as one of his suggestions for a black theology for the Church of England that it will 'Build alliances with the white working class people who often feel as alienated as black people in the church and whose goals may be similar.'²¹

Lack of advocacy

This accusation of racism in the Church focuses not on its internal life, but on its failure to use its influence on the life of the nation to further justice for black people. The Church of England has silently colluded in the oppression of black people, and has not broken ranks with the racist society it is part of.

It is a criticism voiced not infrequently by black people. At the BCC Conference reported in *Rainbow Gospel* it was made both in the address by Martin Mabiletsa, and in the 'View from the Base' by Veronica Barnes. The very impressive 'Second Story' of a young black man recorded by Renate Wilkinson speaks of his disillusion as a student: 'There was an anti-racist march and the Bishop of Leicester took part. I was impressed, but somehow it didn't seem enough. The church was never represented at these marches in any significant way.'²² It is not uncommon to meet black church members who express a similar sense of betrayal.

The quotation above is interesting in combining both the fact that the Church was doing something with a sense of being let down despite that. It illustrates the gap between black expectations and white response. Clearly the Church has played an advocacy role for racial justice and against the general outlook of British society in several ways. The Abolition movement was an early example. For the post-war period, Owen Chadwick's biography of Archbishop Michael Ramsey records the warm appreciation of Ramsey's work, including his opposition to Government immigration policies, as chairman of the National Council for Commonwealth Immigrants. Latterly Anglican bishops have been in the forefront of opposition to

²¹ *Inheritors Together*, p 69.

²² *Rainbow Gospel*, pp 15 & 50; *Inheritors Together*, pp 30-33.

the Nationality Act.

Why, then, the sense of disappointment? Partly because such standing against racist national policies has only been partial. There have also been other Anglicans who have openly advocated racist policies, or who have simply stood aside. Partly it may be because of unrealistic expectations about what the Church of England can achieve in the nation. There are several other areas of national life where the Church's protests to the government are ineffective. However it is also true that overall the Church's concern for racial justice has been 'too little, too late'. In particular, in the crucial, early days of black settlement in Britain there was little recognition of the injustices that black people suffered, nor little concern to express oneness in Christ.

However much of the problem still lies with the ethos of the Church of England – comfortable, prosperous, established. Most church members share the perceptions of society generally, perceptions shaped by a press that communicates racism, at times flagrantly; and with little direct and sustained encounter with black people to correct it. *Seeds of Hope* reports the inversion which still exists in the church of seeing black people as the problem: 'the problem for us simply does not exist' says one presumably almost entirely white diocese.²³ But it is easy to accuse, much harder to find out how to bring about constructive, widespread change with the goal that black people find it a reliable working assumption that members of the Church of England will not be racist. Exhortation and teaching will be part of that, but only when there is a strong and active black membership working its way through the whole Church of England will attitudes within the Church really change or the Church be able to speak to the nation with authority. Bishops going on anti-racist marches will always seem disappointingly inadequate until there is much more community between black and white throughout the Church.

Some ways ahead

As a preliminary, fuller information would help clarify the impact of racism in the Church. By and large we lack even the basic information about black participation, such as is provided in Renate Wilkinson's study of the Diocese of Birmingham. *Seeds of Hope* rightly calls for more statistical information, but such statistics certainly need to include variables of age and sex, and even hopefully area of origin, social class and educational level, if racism in the Church of England is to be put into context adequately. What is the respective weight of racial and class disadvantage? How far do the experiences of young black and white working-class men in the Church of England differ? It would be helpful to know.

Certainly much about the Church of England that excludes black people does so because it also excludes working class people – the times of General Synod meetings, the location of its theological colleges, its expectations of clergy, and its general atmosphere. At a structural level in particular there is

²³ *Seeds of Hope*, p 6.

considerable overlap and the issues need to be addressed in tandem. However this is no substitute for countering racism in the minds, behaviour and institutions of both Church and nation. Important as are the more pastoral issues outlined below, their integrity depends on the whole Church being committed to seeking racial justice.

As regards specifically black issues, the major focus recently has been at what might be called a 'senior' level – higher clergy appointments, more black ordinands and Synod members. These are significant developments, but long-term effectiveness requires that we concentrate on the grass-roots level (see *Seeds of Hope* 4:7 and 5:32). Present tendencies often neglect our weakness at 'middle-level leadership', and run the risk of either over-using or mis-using the gifts of black leaders that we have. Such efforts will be doomed to frustration until we see ordinary black church members begin to move up the leadership ladder. The priority at present needs to be working at the local level.

Appropriate activities might include:

- identifying black church members with leadership potential; they are more numerous than is often realised;
- providing training to develop their skills, often at an extra-parochial level; the Simon of Cyrene Theological Institute and Queen's College, Birmingham are developing valuable experience;
- experiment with opportunities for ministry by local black people, including the possibility of lay, stipendiary ministry;
- developing support networks for black Christians who are learning to lead in the rather alien terrain of the Church of England;
- providing in-service training and encouragement to clergy to develop black ministry in their churches;
- learning better how to evangelise amongst black people, especially under 40s, including drawing on the experience of black-led churches

We need both to build on the encouragements of seeing response from older black people, and work and pray for effectiveness amongst younger black people.

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