Towards an understanding of racial diversity in the Church of England that leads to embrace

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Abstract

The Church of England has expressed a desire to increase racial diversity, especially within its leadership. True racial diversity is evident when racial and cultural differences are valued in the life and worship of the Church. The aim of this dissertation is to explore the nature of racial diversity in the Church. It will argue that this diversity should be expressed as embrace of difference rather than people of BAME heritage assimilating into the dominant western norm. The theological conversation surrounding race and the Church reveals an institution complicit in the racist practices of the Empire and slavery, and which admits to institutional racism. Moreover, accusations of cultural racism have been levelled at the life and worship of the Church. The presentation of some research, which uses the small case study method, presents further perspectives on the nature of racial diversity from the lived experience of BAME ordinands and deacons. A reflection on Acts 2 provides a biblical 'blueprint' for the nature and character of a racially diverse church which is to be marked by humility and submission. The metaphor of 'embrace,' as articulated by Miroslav Volf, is presented as a model for addressing the question of racial diversity. This embrace of racial diversity is then explored in the life and mission of the Church. Undergirded by a spirituality of prophetic dialogue, the Church needs to discern the 'missio Dei' at work in the local and national context in order engage in dialogue, pursue racial justice and practise hospitality in worship.

Contents

List of diagrams

Abbreviations

UK   United Kingdom

USA   United States of America

BAME   Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

Introduction

This dissertation aims to explore the nature of racial diversity in the Church of England (hereafter also referred to as 'the Church'). True racial diversity is evident when racial and cultural differences are valued and celebrated in the life and mission of the Church. However, it is my contention that racial diversity is currently expressed through people of BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) heritage assimilating into the dominant western culture of the Church rather than being able to express cultural difference and diversity.

The dissertation will begin with an exploration of the issues surrounding racial diversity in the Church of England, considering it within the current conversations relating to race in the UK, and race and the Church. This will be followed by the presentation of research which uses the case study approach to present the perspectives and experiences of BAME ordinands and curates on their understanding of racial diversity in the Church. A biblical 'snapshot' on the issue will then be considered through a theological reflection of Acts 2 and it will be argued that the concept of 'embrace,' as articulated by Miroslav Volf, provides a compelling model for addressing the question of racial diversity in the Church. It will then explore the ways in which racial diversity can be embraced in the life and mission of the Church.

A personal reflection

The importance assigned to the role of spiritual autobiography in theological literature about race, identity and faith has inspired me, an Asian woman, to begin with two autobiographical reflections on the issue of racial diversity. I begin with a few biographical details to help contextualise my reflections: I am a person of dual nationality who was born and spent the first eleven years of my life in Sri Lanka after which, due to civil war, my family moved and settled in the UK. It is here that I completed my secondary and higher education and pursued a career as a teacher, prior to taking a career break and then training for ordination.

A seemingly trivial incident during an ordination service at my diocesan cathedral was the first time I felt racially 'othered' in a Christian context. Accustomed to being a racial minority at such events, I noted with interest that there was a Muslim family seated in front of my son and me. When it was time to receive Holy Communion, I waited for the usher to invite us to do so as he worked his way up the aisle. Understandably, he walked past the Muslim family and then, somewhat incredulously, I watched him walk past us too, inviting the people behind us to go forward to receive Communion. As the only other non-white faces in the congregation, the only way I could have explained what had happened was that this man had presumed that we too were not Christians. Dressed in western clothes, it was only the colour of our skin that differentiated us.

I have reflected on this incident many times. Having spent my childhood in Asia, I grew up within a minority but strong Christian community where other Christians looked like me. When we came to the UK, we found unconditional love and belonging in every church we attended. Race or the colour of our skin was never an issue. This incident opened my eyes to the fact that, for some people, being an Asian and Christian was a contradiction in terms. For the first time I realised that for some people Christianity was a 'white' religion.

The second incident occurred last summer, over a decade later, when I was invited to read one of the lessons at the ordination service at the same cathedral. The intentionality in inviting me, a BAME ordinand, became clear when I realised that the only other BAME ordinand at college was invited to do the other reading. We both gladly accepted the invitation, choosing to view it as an effort to positively affirm the role of BAME Christians within the Church. However, it did raise some crucial questions regarding the nature of racial diversity within the Church.

As educated, middle-class Christians, who have lived most of our lives in the UK, we are both largely assimilated into the British way of life; we look different but for all intents and purposes we are able to present a very British version of Christianity. What, I wondered, did this suggest about the nature of racial diversity in the Church of England in an increasingly multicultural society? DeRay Mckesson maintains that

'diversity is about bodies, inclusion is about culture.'[1] Is the current focus in the Church of England on racial diversity mere tokenism, a 'tick box' exercise to have people who look different but largely assimilate into the dominant western culture of the Church?

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[1] "[Video] DeRay Mckesson: Equity vs. Equality in Tech. Which Is Fair?," *Black Enterprise*, October 30, 2017, https://www.blackenterprise.com/video-deray-mckesson-equity-vs-equality-tech/.

Definitions

Any discussion around race involves using words and phrases that, though commonly used, can have a range of meanings and assumptions ascribed to them. Some of the key terms will be briefly defined below; a more complete list of definitions can be found in Appendix 1.

BAME: an acronym for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic; 'used to refer to people in the UK who are not white,'[2] and one that will be used in this piece of writing in keeping with the current usage in the UK and the Church of England.

Black: while 'black' can be used as a descriptor of skin colour of people of African origin, it is also a political term. For many, 'black' is a proudly chosen symbol of identity relating to common African roots. Often encompassing all people of colour, black refers to all those who are victims of racism in a world that is divided according to lines of colour. Though the word is sometimes capitalised (as in the work of Beckford and Reddie), I will use the lower-case version of the word, following the convention set by theologians such as Cone, Carter and Jennings.

Diversity: the acknowledgement of any dimension that differentiates people and groups one from another. Racial diversity concerns respecting, representing and celebrating the differences between different racial groups.

Embrace: a reference to the concept of 'embrace' as articulated by Miroslav Volf in 'Exclusion and Embrace' as 'the dynamic relationship between the self and the other that embrace symbolises and enacts.'[3]

Race: the grouping of people based on shared heritage (based on factors such as language, history and culture) and physical characteristics (such as the colour of their skin).

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[2] "BAME | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary," accessed June 8, 2020, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/bame.
[3] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 141.

Chapter 1: Race and the Church today

The focus of this chapter will be to contextualise the discussion on racial diversity in the Church of England within the current, more general discourse surrounding race in the UK, the academy and the church. A consideration of current issues related to race in the UK will be followed by an overview of the Church of England's response to issues of race and an examination of the theological conversation around the issue of race and the Church.

The racial landscape in Britain today

Diversity and inclusion are regarded as normative values in British society and its public institutions. Undergirded by a legal framework (such as the 2010 Equality Act) which promotes equal opportunity for all people, there is an emphasis on respecting and valuing every individual. The promotion of racial diversity is therefore regarded as fundamental within the multicultural context of the country and there has been a perception of Britain as a post-racial society, with an attendant reluctance to speak about issues of race in both public and private spheres.

Nevertheless, 'institutional racism' in the UK, first clearly articulated in the Macpherson report into the killing of Stephen Lawrence in 1989, has remained a reality of life for the BAME community. In her book, *White Privilege: the myth of a post-racial society*, Bhopal argues that

> within a neoliberal context, policy making has contributed to maintaining the status quo in which a post-racial society remains a myth, with covert and overt racism and racial exclusion continuing to operate at all levels and white identities remaining protected and privileged above all others.[4]

The silence surrounding much of the conversation about race has been slowly broken. Fuelled by global fears surrounding terrorism and immigration, the discussion around race gathered momentum in the debate surrounding 'Brexit.' In a climate of fear and uncertainty, the rhetoric around 'Britishness' and the threats

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[4] Kalwant Bhopal and Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, *White Privilege: The Myth of a Post-Racial Society* (Bristol, UK Chicago, IL: Policy Press, 2018), 8.

to national identity and culture from immigrants and foreigners, was voiced once again and racism was 'used as a vehicle to promote'[5] a political agenda, reflecting a similar process taking place in the presidency of Donald Trump in the USA.

At the same time, the simmering frustrations of the BAME community finally erupted in the 'Black Lives Matter' protests in the summer of 2020. The horrific killing of an unarmed black man in the USA sparked a wave of protests across the globe. In the UK context, the toppling of the statue of a slave trader, symbolised the denial of Britain's colonial history and the continued racial inequalities that lie at all levels of British society. At the time of writing, there appears to be a more honest and open conversation on issues of race in this country; it remains to be seen if the pledges towards greater racial equality are fulfilled in the months and years to come.

Discussions on race in popular literature

The changing racial landscape has also encouraged 'insiders' to vocalise their thoughts on life in the UK as people of colour. Popular literature has highlighted the issues of identity, belonging and 'colour-blindness' that have been central to the 'uniquely British problem we have with race and identity.'[6] In *Brit(ish)* Hirsch, a person of mixed racial heritage, recounts her quest for identity and belonging in a country where 'we are taught not to see race… We have convinced ourselves that if we can contort ourselves into a form of blindness, then issues of identity will quietly disappear.'[7] However, she realises that, despite her efforts to assimilate, she is an 'eternal outsider,'[8] because as long as racism exists, 'not seeing race' shuts down analysis of the issue.'[9] Meanwhile, in *White Fragility*, DiAngelo explores this issue from the perspective of a white American:

> Socialised into a deeply internalized sense of superiority that we are unaware of or can never admit to ourselves, we become highly fragile in conversations about race… White fragility is not weakness per se. In fact, it is a powerful means of white racial control and the protection of white advantage.[10]

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[5] Ibid., 13.
[6] Afua Hirsch, *Brit(Ish): On Race, Identity and Belonging* (London: Vintage, 2018), 9.
[7] Ibid., 10.
[8] Ibid., 19.
[9] Ibid., 26.
[10] Robin J DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's so Hard for White People to Talk about Racism*, 2019, 2.

The struggle to belong that Hirsch articulates finds resonance in stories of other people of colour. *The Good Immigrant*, with contributions by twenty-one BAME writers, explores 'what it means to be a person of colour now' in a country where 'the universal experience is white.'[11] Shukla argues that 'the biggest burden facing people of colour in this country is that society deems us bad immigrants…until we cross over in their consciousness, through popular culture, winning races, baking good cakes, being conscientious doctors, to become good immigrants. And we are so tired of that burden.'[12]

This burden, heavy on the backs of those who try so hard to assimilate and belong with all the privilege that education and talent can bring, lies even more heavily on those who do not have such privilege. Eddo-Lodge argues that 'existing racial inequalities are compounded rather than erased by class inequalities.'[13] This fact has been repeatedly illustrated whether in relation to the death rate in the pandemic or the Grenfell fire.

The Church of England and issues of racial diversity: an overview

In the last General Synod (February 2020), the Archbishop of Canterbury stated that that the Church of England was 'still deeply institutionally racist.'[14] These comments were part of a motion lamenting racism in the Church of England. A picture was painted of an organisation that was riddled with conscious and unconscious racism, and one in which BAME people were 'consistently… under-represented in lay and ordained leadership roles.'[15] Canon Mallett succinctly summarised the root of the problem when she said that 'many BAME people are still feeling battered and bruised by a system that has good intentions, but lacks intentionality.'[16]

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[11] Nikesh Shukla, *The Good Immigrant* (London: Unbound, 2017), Editor's note.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Reni Eddo-Lodge, *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People about Race*, Expanded edition (London Oxford New York New Delhi Sydney: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 192.
[14] "General Synod Digest: Act to End Racism, C of E Told," accessed June 4, 2020, https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2020/21-february/news/uk/general-synod-digest-act-to-end-racism-c-of-e-told.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.

This assessment of the problem is borne out in the initiatives and publications that relate to this issue. Despite the hostility they faced in the post war years, 'many black people had been christened and confirmed as Anglicans so they decided to remain in the Church of England,'[17] yet 'it is difficult to trace any impact the presence of Black Anglicans had on the theology, liturgy, government or identity of the Church before the establishment of the Committee for Black Affairs in 1986.'[18] This group developed into the Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns (CMEAC) which has spearheaded the issue of racial equality and diversity through a number of reports, publications and initiatives.

There has been discernible but slow progress: for example, the proportion of BAME ordinands has increased from 4% in 2016 to 8% in 2018.[19] However, with the retirement of Archbishop Sentamu there will no longer be any diocesan bishops of BAME heritage. The church's latest publication aimed at recruiting more BAME clergy states that 'we need ethnic diversity at all levels in the church's ministry' and argues for intentionality to do that. However, recent charges of racism in the recruitment of BAME clergy suggest that the culture in the Church is still not one that always values diversity.[20]

The conclusion of one of the Church's publications on racism is an effective summary of the current situation regarding race: 'the Church has improved in its understanding of the issues but needs to work much harder at positively implementing equal opportunities policy at all levels. The Church has to be genuinely committed to

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[17] Glynne Gordon-Carter, *An Amazing Journey: The Church of England's Response to Institutional Racism : A Report on the Development of the Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns (CMEAC), the Former Committee on Black Anglican Concerns (CBAC).* (London: Church House, 2003), 12.

[18] John Laurence Wilkinson, *Church in Black and White: The Black Christian Tradition in "Mainstream" Churches in England : A White Response and Testimony* (Edinburgh; Bonn: Saint Andrew Press ; Pahl-Rugenstein, 1993), 33.

[19] "Statistics – Thinking Anglicans," accessed June 13, 2020, https://www.thinkinganglicans.org.uk/category/statistics/.

[20] Harriet Sherwood and Roz Scott, "C of E Accused of 'Utter Hypocrisy' over Backing for Black Lives Matter," *The Guardian*, June 10, 2020, sec. World news, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/10/c-of-e-accused-of-utter-hypocrisy-over-backing-for-black-lives-matter.

sustained efforts in its processes to combat institutional racism effectively through its policies and practices; window dressing will not do.'[21]

Race, theology and the Church

The Bible presents a picture of a God who shows no partiality and one where unity and racial diversity are central to God's purpose for humanity. And yet the history of Christianity presents the church as complicit in racism and the subjugation of people due to the colour of their skin. This section, which serves as a literature review, will explore the theological response to the issues of race and diversity, especially in relation to the Church of England and the UK context in the last half of last century and this century, as these are most pertinent to the discussion.

The painful story of black Christianity in the mainstream white church, and the Church of England in particular, is charted in *Church in Black and White*.[22] While the story on British soil only began with the post-war migration of Afro-Caribbean people to the UK, Wilkinson, a white clergyman, illustrates how the Church's deep complicity in the slave trade and the racist ideology of empire resulted in a relationship between black and white Christians that can only be fully understood in terms of oppressor and victims. He charts the history of the Church's response to black Christians which, at its worst, was hostility and, at best, was a failure to recognise the contribution of black Christians who were 'invisible'. Arguing that it is only through conformity that black Christians find acceptance within the Church, he maintains that the 'subordination of Black identity to White is a continuance of colonial church practice.'[23]

Written almost three decades ago, the relevance of the book is a painful reminder that change has been slow. Moreover, it resonates strongly with *Ghost Ship: Institutional Racism and the Church of England*,[24] the most recent reflection on race and the Church. Providing an alternative 'insider's view', France-William, a BAME

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[21] Gordon-Carter, *An Amazing Journey*, 156.
[22] Wilkinson, *Church in Black and White*.
[23] Ibid., 101–2.
[24] A. D. A France-Williams, *Ghost Ship: Institutional Racism and the Church of England*, 2020.

clergyman, presents 'my version of the story of people of colour.'[25] This is a sorry tale of black and brown clergy left languishing at the bottom of the 'ship'. Echoing Wilkinson's insights on the power of the dominant white culture, he maintains that 'it feels like one way one could possibly ascend the ranks of the Church of England is to convert to whiteness… The Church of England can operate as a Club, and equates whiteness with power.'[26] A compelling argument is presented that racial diversity cannot be achieved by merely recruiting more BAME clergy into an institution that is 'not designed with us in mind;'[27] what is needed is for the ship to be dismantled and reassembled before it is too late.

France-Williams' work highlights the importance of giving voice to the authentic experiences of the those whose identities and voices are suppressed, an importance that is echoed throughout the literature on race. These voices are significant in providing a counter-narrative that resists the version written by those in power. In the British context, *A Time to Speak*[28]and *Rejection, Resistance and Resurrection,*[29] presents the lived experiences and perspectives of BAME Christians. These books acknowledge that for too long people of colour have been 'victims of spiritual "colonization" [who] have been observed and pronounced upon…This "colonization" of our Black hearts is no longer acceptable to us: it's time to speak for ourselves.'[30] Covering a range of issues, from the interpretation of the Bible, the 'white-washing' of biblical history, worship and community, the 'power of their storytelling lies in its embodied truth.'[31] These are voices that warn that racism lies not just in outright rejection and hostility, but also in prejudiced views and stereotypes, in cultural dominance in worship and an insistence that others always 'conform to western ways to prove [their] Christianity.'[32]

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[25] Ibid., 20.
[26] Ibid., 21–22.
[27] Ibid., 196.
[28] Paul Grant, Raj Patel (editors), *A Time to Speak* (Birmingham: CRRU/ECRJ, 1990).
[29] Mukti Barton, *Rejection, Resistance and Resurrection: Speaking out against Racism in the Church* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2005).
[30] Paul Grant, Raj Patel (editors), *A Time to Speak*, 1.
[31] Barton, *Rejection, Resistance and Resurrection*, 3.
[32] Ibid., 76.

Other prophetic voices within the Church have denounced racism within society and politics as well as within the church. The writings of Kenneth Leech exemplify such a stance. In *Race*[33] Leech offers a critique of race and racial policy in the UK. His incisive critique of a system in which a veneer of tolerance and respectability hides racial injustice and equality is particularly pertinent to the Church today in its drive towards diversity:

> much of the current language about "inclusion" and "diversity" evades and obscures the reality of racism… "Inclusion" can often mean that groups and individuals who fit certain criteria are included, or simply that they are physically present though they play no significant role. "Diversity" can be seen as an end in itself, while inequality and oppression remain unchallenged.[34]

While Wilkinson, France-William and Leech represent voices within the Church of England, Black theology offers a more scathing and systematic theological critique of racism from outside. As a theology of liberation, it offers a voice to the racially oppressed as it seeks to 'interpret the gospel of Jesus in the light of the black condition.'[35] Whilst the focus of this discussion is on the British context, the relatively recent work of Carter and Jennings within the corpus of black theology in the North American context are particularly pertinent in providing a theological analysis of the racially discriminatory practices experienced by Christian people of colour within the Church. The central thesis of *Race*[36] and *The Christian Imagination*[37] is that Christian theology was complicit in the formation and sanctification of the concept of whiteness, encouraging the separatist practices of the church and the theological academy. They locate the source of the problem in the supersessionist understanding underpinning modern western theology. Crucial to the attempt in reimagining the diseased Christian imagination is the importance given to the voices of black experience and their Christian self-understanding.

In the UK context, the voices of Beckford and Reddie illustrate two different approaches to the black theological method which challenge this diseased

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[33] Kenneth Leech, *Race* (London: SPCK, 2005).
[34] Ibid., 44.
[35] James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 40th anniversary ed (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2010), 5.
[36] J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[37] Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

imagination. Based on social and cultural analysis, Beckford's interpretation highlights the 'cultural racism'[38] that characterizes the black Christian experience in the UK. His synthesis of Jamaican culture with his Pentecostal faith in *Jesus is Dread*, for example, highlights the inadequacy of western theology to interpret the injustices that characterize the black experience.[39] Similarly, his critique of black Christians, expressed so powerfully in the character of the 'house Negro' and the 'field Negro,'[40] provides a vital insight into the power of whiteness in the worshipping environments of black Christians and the fact that it is not always imposed on people of colour; it is often a conscious or subconscious preference. Recognising the racism still present within the 'master's house,' Beckford concedes that 'being inside the White Church provides Black people with an important strategic field for empowerment through resistance.'[41]

The importance of raising critical consciousness in order to provide such resistance, characterizes the practical theological approach of Reddie. He argues that 'often in white-majority Christian-influenced societies, the emphasis is upon 'integration' and a colour-blind' doctrine of difference…Black people are being persuaded … to be less like themselves and to be the same as that which is characterized as the standard or the norm, namely White people… a seemingly polite but nevertheless insistent imposition that one 'becomes like us' in order to belong.'[42] Reddie's participative method of theology utilises, amongst others, Freire's concept of 'conscientization,' in order to raise critical consciousness among Black people in order to challenge the normative white interpretation of Christian faith and worship.

There have been several other responses to the issue of race in the church. Anderson's concept of 'gracism'[43] is noteworthy in centring the discussion (which is often emotive and hostile) within the concept of grace. Other works recognise the

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[38] Robert Beckford, *Jesus Is Dread: Black Theology and Black Culture in Britain* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1998), 35.

[39] Beckford, *Jesus Is Dread*.

[40] Ibid., 43.

[41] Ibid., 58.

[42] Anthony Reddie, *Is God Colour-Blind?: Insights from Black Theology for Christian Ministry* (London, England: SPCK, 2009), 7.

[43] David A. Anderson, *Gracism: The Art of Inclusion* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2007).

challenges that are inherent in creating a Christian community which is racially diverse, and it begins with the recognition of difference. For example, Hylton argues that 'diversity is at the heart of God's plan and purpose for the world,' adding that 'in order to fully embrace diversity we need to be aware of the issues that keep people apart.'[44] Although not specifically focused on the church context, Volf's *Exclusion and Embrace* provides an important contribution to the discussion, especially in terms of the embracing of 'otherness' and reconciliation which lies at the core of this discussion on racial diversity.

Recognising the fact that 'the centre of gravity in the Christian world has shifted inexorably away from Europe'[45] to the global south provides an important perspective to this discussion. In *The Next Christendom* Jenkins argues that 'considering Christianity as a global reality…[forces us] to see the religion not just for what it is but what it was in its origins – and what it is going to be in the future.'[46]Yet it is clear that the western church's theological discourse and expression of faith remains what Soong-Chan Rah compellingly describes as 'culturally captive' to white Christianity, arguing that we must 'explore ways that the Christian community can reflect biblical more than cultural norms.'[47] Indeed, there is a missional need for a truly diverse church which joins in the 'missio Dei' at work in our increasingly multicultural societies. The church 'stands at an exciting moment of opportunity and challenge. God, through his sovereign grace, has brought together many nations, ethnicities and cultures. This gathering is a work of God and not the work of man.[48]

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[44] Owen Hylton, *Crossing the Divide a Call to Embrace Diversity* (Nottingham (Eng.): Inter-Varsity Press, 2009), 19.

[45] Philip Jenkins, *The next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, 3rd ed (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1.

[46] Ibid., 271.

[47] Soong-Chan Rah, *The next Evangelicalism: Releasing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2009), 21.

[48] Soong-Chan Rah, *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010), 15.

Chapter 2: BAME perspectives on racial diversity in the Church of England

This chapter will focus on some research that was undertaken to explore BAME perspectives on the issue of racial diversity in the Church of England. It will consider the methodology and procedure that were used and report the data. Due to constraints of a word limit, I have decided to allow the participants to 'speak for themselves' and analysis of the findings will be limited to a brief conclusion at the end of the chapter.

Research design

The aim of this research was to explore perspectives on the nature of racial diversity from the lived experience of BAME members of the Church, with a focus on the extent to which diversity is understood as assimilation into the dominant western norm of the Church. This piece of qualitative research utilised the small case study methodology in the form of individual interviews.

Methodology

The choice of a qualitative research methodology resulted from the need to explore the complex nature of an issue such as racial diversity, especially as it related to current lived experience. As Cresswell argues, 'we conduct qualitative research because we need a *complex*, detailed understanding of this issue [that] can only be established by talking directly with people.'[49]

The chosen method for this research was individual semi-structured in-depth interviews.[50] To ensure accurate recording of the information, the interviews were recorded, and a transcript of the script was produced. The importance given to an individual's perception is undergirded by the view that 'perception is reality of the

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[49] John W. Creswell and John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 2nd ed (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2007), 40.
[50] See Appendix 5 for interview questions

perceiver' and that 'varied, subjective perceptions (once analysed) grant us insights needed to construct a persuasive understanding of the phenomenon under study.'[51]

Choice of participants

Six BAME ordinands / recently ordained deacons from Trinity College, Bristol, were chosen as the participants for the research. This sample contained all the BAME ordinands at college in the last two years.[52] These individuals represent those committed to the mission of the Church who could reflect on the issue of racial diversity from a number of perspectives (as members of a congregation, as ordinands and as members of clergy). The sample, though limited in size, contained a relatively representative range of participants: male and female participants who represented a range of ethnicities, immigrant generations and ages.

Ethical considerations

A consideration of potential ethical issues, in line with the Common Awards Ethics Policy, revealed that no safeguarding concerns were anticipated.[53] Prior to the interview, the participants gave their informed consent to all aspects of the research and reporting process.[54] Each participant received a completed transcript of their interview to verify the accuracy of the script. In order to maintain anonymity of the responses, the respondents were identified by a letter (A-F) which is used when reporting the responses. Moreover, anonymity was maintained when reporting the data by excluding personal, identifiable details where possible, and the personal pronouns assigned to the participants do not necessarily correspond with the gender of the participant.

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[51] Richard L Starcher, Leanne M Dzubinski, and Jamie N Sanchez, "Rigorous Missiological Research Using Qualitative Inquiry," *Missiology* 46, no. 1 (2018): 52, doi:10.1177/0091829617741911.
[52] Due to the unexpected lockdown caused by COVID one BAME ordinand could not be interviewed as planned.
[53] See Appendix 4
[54] See Appendix 2 and 3

Reflexivity

Maintaining a reflexive approach throughout the qualitative research process is important: as researchers, 'we (re)present our data, partly based on participants' perspectives and partly based on our own interpretation, never clearly escaping our own personal stand on a study.'[55] As a BAME ordinand, a fellow student and a member of the BAME support group at college, mine was a dual role of being an 'insider' as well as the researcher. This 'insider' status arguably allowed for greater honesty and openness in the responses as 'participants might be more willing to share their experiences because there is an assumption of understanding and an assumption of shared distinctiveness.' However, it must be acknowledged that this shared status can lead to greater subjectivity in the research process and analysis.

Scope of study

Constraints of time and accessibility necessarily limited the scope of the study and the reported findings are presented as a range of personal perspectives. Some common themes and ideas emerge from the data and the aim is that these perspectives can shed light on the complex nature of racial diversity within the Church and highlight issues and concepts which can be considered and explored further.

Delimitations in this piece of research were the choice of participants from one theological college and the choice of members of clergy or ordinands rather than members of the congregation. A bigger sample, size drawn from a variety of contexts and drawing a wider range of participants, would have enabled the research to produce a more representative range of ideas.

Reporting the data

The findings of the research will be reported using the themes identified in the questionnaire: namely the biographical and ethnic background of participants,

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[55] Creswell and Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*, 43.

assimilation and the Church, ethnic minority identities in the Church and diversity in the Church.

Biographical and ethnic background of participants

Of the six participants interviewed, two were female and four were male. Aged between 24 – 40 years, all the participants were graduates and had, or were working towards, post-graduate qualifications. Prior to ordination training, most had professional roles outside the church.

Most of the participants were British nationals and identified their ethnicity as Asian Chinese, Asian Indian, other Asian or Black African.[56] Two-thirds of the participants were born abroad and had lived in the UK for varying lengths of time, from three to twenty-five years. The other two were second and third generation immigrants.[57] Five out of six of the participants had spent a significant amount of time living abroad either as expatriates or citizens.

Whilst several participants had been members of non-Anglican churches at some point in the past, all of them described the social demographics of the Church of England churches they attended as 'completely' or 'predominantly white' and most of them were 'mostly middle class.'

Assimilation and the Church

The participants were asked to determine the extent to which they, as people of BAME heritage, had assimilated into British society, the Church of England and Trinity College. They answered on a scale of 1 -10 and the results can be seen in Figure 1, the higher numbers relating to a higher rate of assimilation. These, along

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[56] As classified in "List of Ethnic Groups," accessed June 20, 2020, https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/ethnic-groups#list-of-ethnic-groups.

[57] Second generation immigrants are defined as "native born children of foreign born immigrants." "The Second Generation: 'Migrants' or 'Natives'?," *The Migrationist*, March 1, 2013, https://themigrationist.net/2013/03/01/the-second-generation-migrants-or-natives/.

with the answers to subsequent questions, revealed that the level of assimilation into each category was a complex interplay of personality, personal history and context.
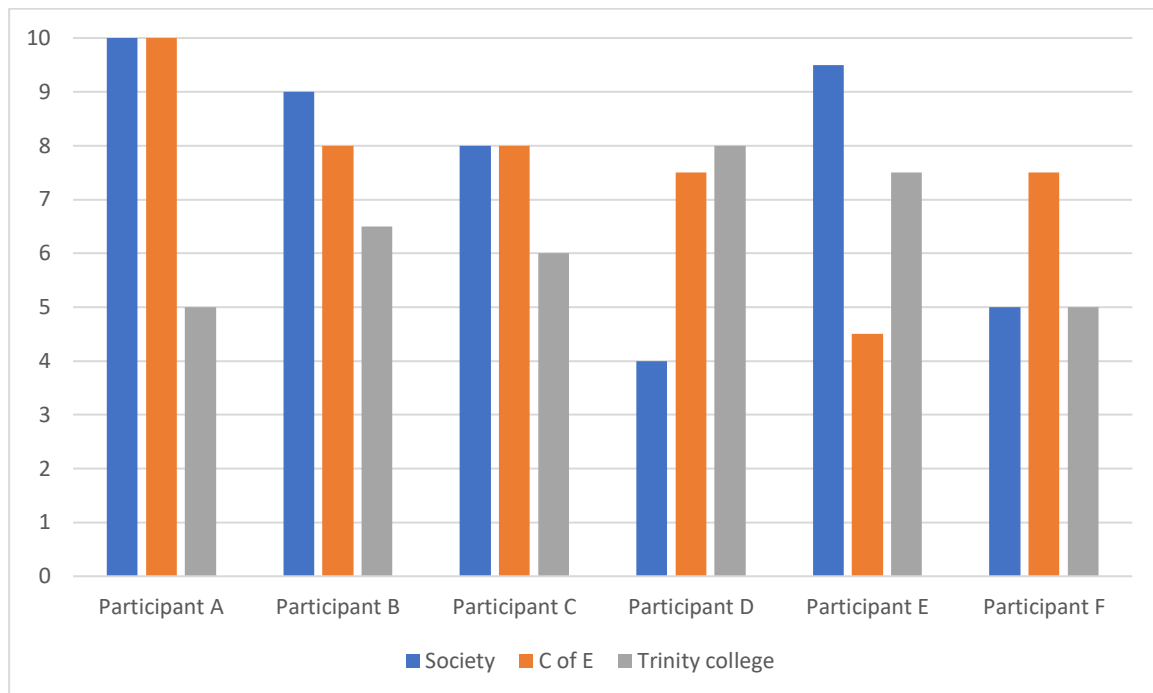
Figure 1: Degrees of assimilation

Assimilation and society: The bar chart reveals that the majority of participants felt well assimilated into British society. This was largely a result of learnt behaviour; a realisation of the importance of assimilating in order to find acceptance:

> watching my parents with their accent, with their culture not really always fitting in, I think taught me … that if I talk this way I would be more easily accepted…It's just something that I've learned from a very young age…I want to fit in. (Participant A)

Where the degree of assimilation was lower, the reasons were significantly different. Participant E, a relatively recent immigrant, felt that the word 'assimilation' did not fully reflect her experience. It was rather 'growing a greater understanding of the context …in my learning of working in difference. Everywhere I go I am always a minority.'

Assimilation into the Church of England: Reasons were given for high levels of assimilation into the Church. Even within the Church, there was a clear sense that there is a need to 'fit in': 'It's not necessarily that the people are welcoming of

me…they're not creating a space where I can feel I fit in. I'm doing the fitting in' (Participant A). At the same time, the familiarity with the Anglican tradition, either due to long-standing family membership within it or participation in the wider Anglican communion abroad, were important factors in aiding a high sense of assimilation.

Barriers to greater assimilation were identified. Participant D explores the power dynamic at play:

> Being assimilated into the Anglican structures and authorities means that you have to wrestle with how much you are empowered and how much you have permission and as someone who … doesn't look white, it feels less so. I think it makes a difference that I'm an ordinand and have leadership backing behind. I am not sure that if I wasn't that people would see the value that you bring.'

At the same time, the greater awareness of BAME issues recently can themselves be an obstacle: 'I think there's a lot more awareness of BAME and there's a lot more intentionality about it. So suddenly I feel as if I stand out … and then when I place myself within it, I realise that maybe I'm not as integrated into it as I might like to be' (Participant E).

Assimilation into Trinity College: Overall, the lower degree of assimilation into theological college seemed to emanate from a different sense of culture and lack of understanding: 'I think a lot of people … have a much stronger cultural heritage in the English aspect of it, so carry all that with them' (Participant D). Participant A spoke of feeling less assimilated as a result of conversations about other races and faiths among fellow ordinands: 'there were these really awful tropes and old stereotypes…it made me feel suddenly like…they are talking about my people even though it wasn't about my religion… and I suddenly felt that I was different.'

Factors that helped with assimilation in Church

Participants identified several factors that helped them in the process of assimilation, underscoring the fact that the process of assimilation requires the willingness as well as the ability to do so. These factors included living abroad and having to relate cross

culturally, education, prior profession, financial stability and personal security with their identity.

Many participants also recognised that their role in ministry determined the extent to which one assimilated into a given context. This was mostly seen in terms of a higher level of assimilation in order to minister more effectively: Participant B, a deacon, explains his reason for assimilating: 'I try to focus on God and I'm there to serve the people around me.' Participant C sees the pastoral necessity of it: 'I care very much about how others feel pastorally, so if it helps that I come across as western so that people can accept the word being preached…then I will do that.' She adds that as a result of exploring issues of race as part of her theological study, 'I have begun to be more outspoken about some of the injustices I've seen and that causes tension…I'm willing not to be so assimilated for the sake of something more important.'

<u>Ethnic identity, conformity and compromise</u>

Most of the participants felt that they did not have to compromise their ethnic identity. Participant B explains, 'I think people are actually quite good at allowing people to be different and diverse.' At the same time, however, most felt the need to conform to the dominant ideal within the church, whether it be ethnically or otherwise. Participant F described a pressure to conform to the dominant western ideal in a way that stifled his individuality. He describes his supervisors being dissatisfied with his preaching, an area he felt that God has called him to:

> one of the leaders … mentioned that …it's important that you go and get trained how to communicate the gospel the way we do it here which is, in a sense, telling "you go and become like one of us in order to reach us" but then that's defining the purpose and the reason… the uniqueness with which God has made me.

Ethnic minority identities in the church

There was a range of responses to ethnic minority identities in the Church, from welcome, to tokenism and being treated as an inferior.

Reactions to ethnic minorities and tokenism

Initial reactions varied from welcome to indifference and tokenism: Participant A felt his current church 'are more welcoming….people do come here …from different backgrounds' whilst Participant C has experienced a more varied response: 'sometimes I've gone to an event with a friend who's white and the reception he gets is a lot more warm.' Participant F had a sense of being 'used' as a token when it was expedient to do so:

> in the beginning there was …lots of stereotypical thinking about being black and being a minority and telling me what to do…when it came to work, people want to dominate. When it came to big events, tokenism. "Oh we got the black guy," you know.'

However, whilst ethnicity was sometimes celebrated, especially at diocesan level, generally it was perceived that it was merely accepted or ignored, which Participant A describes as 'white washing'. Discussing the lack of celebration of racial diversity, Participant D maintains that 'maybe that's part of the problem because it's not celebrated. Very, very flat white rather than celebrating diversity of different cultures… there's richness and lessons and wisdom that white people can learn from everyone else…'

Ethnic minority identity and faith

Ethnic identity clearly had an impact on the participants' understanding and expression of faith, although the extent of that impact was clearly related to the extent of self-identification with their ethnicity. This was largely seen as a benefit in their role as a leader/potential leader within the Church. The benefit was perceived in relation to increasing the racial diversity of the leadership, with the attendant benefits that a plurality of perspectives and experiences bring to the life and mission of the body of Christ.

Participant E saw the benefits of a BAME identity in conversations regarding racism in the Church, and his ability to 'highlight issues…they may not naturally be able to identity because of their world view.' Participant C spoke about the presence of

ethnic diversity in the church as essential for more accurately reflecting the Kingdom of God. She argues that the Church is not an:

> 'accurate reflection of the Kingdom of God and, therefore, is not a true reflection of the gospel to those who don't know Christ yet. We live in an age where disenfranchisement is massive…People feel excluded for all sorts of reasons. I think the Church should be the one place where that narrative is broken and so when people see that I am … a part of Christ's body, that is a witness to the inclusivity that might be open to them.'

A more diverse expression of worship and faith

The participants spoke about the benefits of a more diverse expression of the faith. Participant E speaks about a 'generosity' in worship that comes from having observed different styles of worship and Participant C explains that her ethnicity and differing worldview helps her interpret the Scriptures differently. Meanwhile, Participant D's experience of Christianity on the Asian subcontinent has helped her to perceive concepts of family, community and authority in a different way to that perceived by the more individualistic western Christianity.

Expressing difference

All participants described the difficulty in speaking honestly in relation to race and ethnicity. Participant A describes this difficulty: 'I also know the eye rolling…! When I speak, I really have to think about what I am saying and how might that upset…' Participant E expresses that he 'would always feel quite scared' to speak about looking at church in a more ethnically diverse way 'because of the strength of how things are within the Church of England currently.' However, as Participant D explains this ability to express differences seems to be 'about leadership and empowerment…As a minister, I definitely feel like I'm more able to make my own call on things but as an ordinand, half so I guess. Probably as a congregation member, not so.'

Perceptions of racial diversity in the Church

There was a consensus that the Church of England was 'not very diverse [and] lacking because of it' (Participant D). Participant A explains that 'people's intentions are good' but 'policy is poor' and 'there isn't anything in place for people like me.' Moreover, he maintains that current issues to do with the Church and diversity must be understood in the context of the Church's complicity in colonialism and imperialism: 'I think people just have ideas and they think that just by having more people of colour, we'll fix the problem without actually understanding history.'

Conclusion

The perspectives of these BAME participants would suggest that diversity in the Church of England can often be regarded as assimilation into the dominant norm rather than embracing difference. While there is difference in opinion among scholars, assimilation theorists argue for the necessity of assimilation to some extent within the host culture[58] and this understanding was reflected by the participants who perceived that their need to 'belong' made a level of assimilation inevitable. Moreover, it is significant that all the participants had the necessary social and educational skills to make such assimilation possible. Indeed, the participants' desire to assimilate to a greater degree for the purposes of ministry resonates with Rah's view of the need for cultural intelligence and competence for ministry in a multicultural environment.[59]

Therefore, perhaps a significant issue for consideration is the degree to which this assimilation is required rather than voluntarily chosen by a BAME Christian based on their ethnic self-identification. Moreover, to what extent does this conformity prevent the expression of cultural diversity and racial authenticity? The participants' experience of restrictive cultural and power structures resonates with Beckford's

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[58] Christina Boswell and Gianni D'Amato, eds., "Transnationalism or Assimilation?," in *Immigration and Social Systems*, Collected Essays of Michael Bommes (Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 107–24, doi:10.2307/j.ctt46mtgj.10.
[59] Rah, *Many Colors*, 84.

charge of 'cultural racism' within the Church.[60] Indeed, based on the view of the participants, there is still a great distance that needs to be travelled before the Church displays a culture where racial diversity is embraced in every aspect of its life and worship.

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[60] Beckford, *Jesus Is Dread*, 35.

Chapter 3   Acts 2:1-21: A reflection on racial diversity and the Church

This chapter will present a reflection on the nature of racial diversity and the Church based on Acts 2:1-21, with a particular focus on the gift of tongues, that miracle of speaking and hearing, which offers a compelling vision of unity in diversity.

Diversity in the Bible

The themes of diversity and race run through the pages of Scripture, pulsing through the biblical story from beginning to end. It is the Trine God who creates a diverse world, and humans are made in the image of God whose very nature is unity in diversity. Any theological reflection of racial diversity begins with the acknowledgement that 'we are creatures of the earth – interconnected and interdependent – reflecting God's diversity. From the beginning, diversity (not homogeneity) has been God's intention.'[61] Even the particularity of God's covenant with Abraham (and therefore Israel) was a means through which God's grace could flow to all nations (Gen 12:3). This is the vision that is captured at the 'end of the story' as 'all tribes and peoples and languages' stand before the throne of the Lamb (Revelation 7:9).

The Day of Pentecost

The story of the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) presents a pivotal moment in this story in the birth of the church, a new people whose nature is unity in diversity. The Pentecost event is significant in the conversation about racial diversity in the church because provides a 'blueprint' for the church, displaying the essence of the content and character of Christ's body on earth. Three key ideas in relation to racial diversity will be explored: firstly, the idea that this racially diverse but united body is a fulfilment of prophecy; secondly, that it is a divinely inspired departure from the status quo; thirdly, that very the act of speaking and hearing of tongues reflects attitudes necessary for the 'deep joining'[62] that it is to characterize this new community.

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[61] Inclusive Church (Organisation) and Michael N Jagessar, *Ethnicity: The Inclusive Church Resource.*, 2015, 65.
[62] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 248.

Fulfilment of prophecy

A racially diverse but united body is firstly a fulfilment of prophecy. In his speech that follows the coming of the Holy Spirit, Peter explains to the bewildered crowd that this event happened in accordance with the Scriptures (Acts 2:16,17). Adding to the words of the Prophet Joel, Peter firmly places the events of Pentecost within an eschatological framework of 'the last days,' the dawn of a new age that was heralded in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This, therefore, was not just the fulfilment of the prophet Joel, but a fulfilment of God's plan as it began with Abraham who was to be a light to all nations; this was what was spoken by the prophets (Isaiah 2:2, Micah 4:1,2) when they envisioned 'all nations' worshipping the Lord. And central to this fulfilment was that 'now the spirit is being democratized.'[63] No longer is the Spirit being poured out to selected individuals; it is being poured out on all flesh. Peter, at this point, still sees this as referring only to Israel and yet as the story of Acts proceeds, he begins to comprehend the extent of God's saving grace which was now open to all flesh, both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 10).

Divine initiative

Secondly, the sheer radical nature of this vision of a diverse community points to the fact that what had happened and what was being revealed was of divine origin. The world of the disciples, like our own, was marked by deep divisions and tensions: ethnic, class, gender, slave and free. Exploring the ethnic makeup of the New Testament world, Hays describes it as one 'with a wide range of ethnic diversity' and one in which animosities between groups such as the Jews and Samaritans ran deep[64]. Jennings paints a picture of life for Jews 'caught between diaspora and empire;'[65] a life among Gentiles, 'always on the verge of being classified enemy.'[66] 'Neither the Roman empire nor diaspora Israel could tolerate the common, because it

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[63] LeAnn Snow Flesher, "Caution: Uncontainable Tongues of Fire! (Acts 2:1-21)," *Review & Expositor* 109, no. 3 (2012): 476.
[64] J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 14 (Leicester, Eng. : Downers Grove, Ill: Apollos ; Inter Varsity Press, 2003), 156, 166.
[65] Willie James Jennings, *Acts*, First edition, Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 6.
[66] Ibid., 6.

represented a massive disruption to the political, religious, economic and social designs.'[67] In such a world, nothing short of the revolutionary outpouring of the Spirit of God could bring forth a diverse community united in the praise of the one God. The radically universal nature of Jesus' ministry is to now define the ministry of his disciples too

However, as Jennings concedes, this is too often contrary to human inclination:

> The Spirit seems always to be pressing the disciples to go to those to whom they would in fact prefer to never share a space, or a meal, and definitely not life together. Yet it is precisely this prodding to be boundary defying and border-transgressing that marks the presence of the Spirit of God.[68]

And if the Church is to walk in step with the Spirit, it is imperative that it is obedient to that 'pressing' of the Spirit. This will have clear implications for the mission of the Church as well as the building of community within it.

The gift of tongues

Thirdly, the gift of tongues is a miracle of speaking, hearing and understanding which reveals both the content and the character of this new community. At the first Pentecost this infilling of the Spirit and the giving of the gift of tongues enables the message of the gospel to be brought home to those who hear it. This is evident from the response of the crowd who are astonished and amazed because 'each one heard them speaking in their native language' (Acts 2:6). Whilst there is debate about the exact nature of 'glossolalia,'[69] the universality of the message of the gospel in this act is widely acknowledged. Moving from east to west and north to south, and covering the key communities of the Jewish diaspora, Luke presents the reader with an international crowd composed of visitors and residents in Jerusalem who all hear the

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[67] Ibid., 10.

[68] Ibid., 11.

[69] Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2007), 96–98.

gospel in their own tongues. 'Nothing could have demonstrated more clearly than this the multi-racial, multi-national, multi-lingual nature of the kingdom of Christ.'[70]

The significance of the God-given ability to speak the language of 'the other' warrants further reflection. Jennings compellingly argues that the Spirit creates joining through the intimate medium of language : 'the followers of Jesus are now being connected in a way that joins them to people in the most intimate space – of voice, memory, sound … to speak a language is to speak a people.'[71] The speaking the language of the other is not merely an expression of intimacy and relationality. It is also an act of submission to the ways of the other in a posture of humility:

> To learn a language requires submission to a people. Even if in the person of a single teacher, the learner must submit to that single voice, learning what the words mean as they are bound to events, songs jokes, everyday practices, habits of mind and body, all within a land and the journey of a people. Some people learn a language out of gut-wrenching determination born out of necessity. Most, however, who enter a lifetime of fluency, do so because at some point in time they learn to love it.[72]

In today's world, marred as it is by wounds of colonialism and slavery, living under the grip of neo-colonialism with its linguistic and cultural imperialism, the church needs to learn to approach the other in the same posture that one would when speaking the language of the other: in humility and submission, motivated by a deep desire to love the other and so create the community of 'deep joining.'

The miracle of hearing is no less significant, for it is hearing God's praise in that most familiar language, the language of our mothers, our native language. As Bock argues, 'God is using for each group the most familiar linguistic means possible to make sure the message reaches to the audience in a form they can appreciate.'[73] It is the 'heart language' of intimacy that God chose in reaching his people, affirming the beauty of culture and diversity. 'Our native language and culture is natural,

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[70] John R. W Stott and Graham Benzies, *The Message of Acts: To the Ends of the Earth* (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 2005), 68.
[71] Jennings, *Acts*, 28.
[72] Ibid., 30.
[73] Bock, *Acts*, 102.

necessary and welcome to us as the air we breathe.'[74] This appreciation of the beauty of diversity was part of that first Pentecost; this, rather than monochromatic worship that assumes assimilation into the dominant, must characterize the gathering of believers in the body.

Many interpreters see an allusion to the story of the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9) in the God-given ability to speak and hear different languages at Pentecost. Some see the confusion of languages at Babel as a punishment but, in light of the diversity evident in creation, it seems more probable, as Volf argues, that it is the attempt of 'imperial architects [to] unify by suppressing differences'[75] that is the problem. Whilst there is not the scope to explore this issue further, Jones' argument persuasively focuses on the desire to understand and the capacity to do so:

> The diversity of tongues is present at both Babel and Pentecost…The key difference seems to be that with Pentecost there is a new capacity among God's people for listening and speaking and hence also for understanding. This capacity comes from heaven.[76]

For too long, the issues of race have been highlighted – the Church of England's publications are witness to this fact – but there has been a reluctance to understand and begin the process of change. Even after the miraculous outpouring of the Spirit the disciples were slow to understand the implications of what had happened: 'The disciples would begin to see the wider implications only as the Spirit of God continued to impose on them gestures of communion.'[77] This is a reminder to the Church that it needs to listen with the desire to hear, understand and speak out and that this can only be done in the power of the Spirit of Truth.

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[74] "Acts 2 Commentary - The Coming of the Spirit - BibleGateway.Com," 2/3, accessed June 23, 2020, https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/IVP-NT/Acts/Coming-Spirit.

[75] Miroslav Volf, "A Vision of Embrace: Theological Perspectives on Cultural Identity and Conflict," *The Ecumenical Review* 47, no. 2 (April 1995): 226.

[76] L.g. Jones, "The Gift and Task of Language," *Christian Century* 109, no. 17 (May 13, 1992): 514.

[77] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 267.

Conclusion

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all flesh on the day of Pentecost anticipates the vision of the multitude from every nation standing before the throne of the lamb of God (Rev 7:9,10). This image of unity in diversity has always been a part of the Christian story and yet it has so often been neglected or ignored due to sin and the human need to dominate. The story of Pentecost reminds us of the urgent need to be open to the Spirit in a way that enables the Church to create a community of 'deep joining' that appreciates the beauty of the other and embraces it.

Chapter 4   **Embracing racial diversity**

The metaphor of embrace, as articulated by Volf, offers a compelling model for embracing of 'the other' within the context of racial diversity in the Church. This chapter will be a reflection on the metaphor as it relates to the church now and in the vision it provides for true racial diversity in the church.

Volf's metaphor of embrace

In *Exclusion and Embrace*, Volf provides 'a theological exploration of identity, otherness and reconciliation.'[78] Whilst the genesis of the book was an attempt to provide a theological response to the war in the former Yugoslavia, it became a wider response to the resurgence of 'new tribalism'[79] around the world, with the understanding of the need to place 'identity and otherness at the centre of theological reflection on social realities.'[80] It is this recognition that makes it deeply applicable to the issue of racial diversity in the church, an issue that is ultimately one of identity and otherness and the need for reconciliation.

Volf proposes the metaphor of embrace as a way of 'thinking about identity - personal as well as communal - in relation to the other under conditions of enmity.'[81] Volf draws on three interconnected themes: 'the mutuality of self-giving love in the Trinity', 'Christ's outstretched arms on the cross for the "godless"' and 'the open arms of the "father" receiving the "prodigal."'[82] The rooting of this metaphor in the nature and character of God makes it particularly applicable to the Church.

Identity and otherness in the Church

Central to this conversation about racial diversity is an understanding of identity as it relates to the Church of England. The view of Participant D that 'there is a British way

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78 Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*.
79 Volf, "A Vision of Embrace," 203.
80 Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 17.
81 Ibid., 140.
82 Ibid., 29.

that the Anglican church seems to epitomise' is repeated throughout the literature. Isiorho, for example, argues that the Church's prophetic voice stands in tension with its position as the 'established Church, an organ of the state, whose interests and identity are generally perceived to be coterminous with those of conservative middle England.' [83]

The experiences of being the other is borne out in countless testimonies of BAME Christians. The more explicit othering experienced by black Christians in the 1960s and 70s is generally, thankfully, rare. However, the 'colour blind' philosophy that pervades current race talk along with formal rules that prohibit discrimination has meant that 'implicit and private exclusion still takes place, often in the form of unconscious but no less effectual aversion.'[84] This is seen most basically in the very fact that a distinction is made between white and BAME Christians, where those who are not white are often perceived as other, often with the attendant view of 'inferior.'

The Drama of Embrace

Volf's act of embrace has four elements: 'opening the arms, waiting, closing the arms and opening them again'[85] and each of these will be considered in relation to the Church of England and racial diversity, with a recognition that these have a communal, institutional application as well as a much more local and individual one. Volf conceives the four elements as part of an integrated movement: 'for embrace to happen, all four must be there and they must follow one another on an unbroken timeline.'[86]

Act one: Opening the Arms

'Open arms are a gesture of the body reaching for the other. They are a sign of discontent with my own self-enclosed identity, a code of desire for the other.'[87] The

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[83] David Isiorho, "BLACK THEOLOGY IN URBAN SHADOW: COMBATING RACISM IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.," *Black Theology: An International Journal* 1, no. 1 (November 2002): 47.
[84] Volf, "A Vision of Embrace," 201.
[85] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 141.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.

open arms relate firstly to invitation and welcome. Just as the prodigal son longed for home, a place of safety in a hostile land, BAME Christians turned to the Church when they first arrived in the UK in the 1960s and 70s, many finding neither invitation nor welcome. Sadly, as the case studies illustrated, this can still be the experience of some BAME Christians. However, the situation is generally different now: an estimated 15% of the Church of England's membership is made up of BAME people, suggesting that they have indeed found a place of welcome. The fact that this is not reflected in clergy and leadership roles is recognised by the leadership of the Church who express the need to redress the balance at all levels of the institution.

The extent to which this invitation is genuine is seen in whether the opening of the arms truly expresses a desire for the other in all their otherness: 'I do not want to be myself only; I want the other to be a part of who I am and I want to be a part of the other.'[88] The experience of BAME Christians would suggest that the desire for the other is a limited one, one that is held in tension with the need to preserve the boundaries of a particular British version of Christianity. Participant A observes the welcoming of different ethnicities in his church whilst qualifying the statement: 'Now if you ask whether they would embrace us [by] changing the way we worship to accommodate different cultures, that would be a different conversation.'

It would seem, therefore, that the arms are indeed open to some extent: there is invitation and welcome, but this is conditional and by no means an unreserved welcome. Despite the aims of the institution, true welcome of the other cannot happen without creating a culture which values and appreciates difference, and is not afraid to adjust its own identity to incorporate part of the other.

Act two: Waiting

Volf explains what is entailed in waiting: 'The open arms reach out but stop before touching the other. They wait…Before it can proceed, it must wait for the desire to arise in the other and for the arms to open.' The importance of reciprocity cannot be overstated: a genuine embrace cannot be forced or manipulated. Having expressed

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[88] Ibid.

the desire to engage in racial diversity more intentionally, the Church is, in many ways, in this stage of waiting. This is ironically a position of power and powerlessness. As Volf explains, it is the 'power of signalled desire, of created space…not the power that breaks the boundaries of the other and forces the fulfilment of desire.'[89]

This waiting requires vulnerability and humility which accepts that the other may not want to be embraced because of painful memories. Many BAME Christians who found rejection and hostility from the Church may choose not to accept the invitation because 'of the painful memory that once started as an embrace ended in a rape.'[90] This state of waiting therefore requires the Church to reflect deeply on its history and practice and repent in order to present a self that is to be desired by the other. As Volf argues, 'the embrace itself – full reconciliation cannot take place until truth is said and justice done.'[91] As Participant A explains, a move towards racial diversity in the Church begins 'with repentance and reconciliation…and acknowledging the ugly truth of the history of the place, the history of our Church.' Volf's argument that 'repentance is an act of relinquishing power'[92] is particularly pertinent here.

Volf argues that both victims and perpetrators need to seek forgiveness. The idea of the 'non innocence' of the victim is contentious within a context of the continued racial marginalisation of minorities. Yet Volf powerfully argues for the difficulty of sustaining innocence in the face of continued injustice: anger and unforgiveness remain and can dictate relationships. This time of waiting is therefore a time for BAME Christians to seek forgiveness for unforgiveness, in order for them to move forward to embrace the other.

Act three: Closing the arms

Closing the arms, the goal of the embrace, is a reciprocal action that is both active (holding) and passive (being held): 'in an embrace a host is a guest and a guest is a

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[89] Ibid., 143.
[90] Ibid., 142.
[91] Ibid., 29.
[92] "Conversations with Miroslav Volf Part 2," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 18, no. 3 (2000): 91.

host. Though one self may receive or give more than the other, each must enter the space of the other, feel the presence of the other, and make its own presence felt.'[93] Where no space has been created for the other, true reciprocity is not possible. In relation to racial diversity, the movement has been predominantly one way: it is accepting the other into the Church but not creating the opportunity in which that presence can be felt in any meaningful way. Describing the Church as 'not very diverse,' Participant D argues that it is 'lacking because of it …the important thing for me is that it's about being a place that… [has] open bridges to different cultures, rather than it being a place that is one white bridge.'

Volf anticipates the danger of a one-sided embrace arguing for the necessity of a 'soft touch': 'I may not close my arms around the other too tightly, so as to crush her and assimilate her, otherwise I will be engaged in a concealed power-act of exclusion…Similarly, I must keep the boundaries of my own self firm, offer resistance, otherwise I will be engaged in a self-destructive act of abnegation.'[94] This is an important reminder that the Church of England needs to continue to respect its own cultural heritage. However, sadly, all too often, the history of the Church and present day practice illustrates that the embrace has been anything other than a 'soft touch' in relation to the other. Rah argues that 'the physical violence of colonialism has been replaced by the social and psychological violence of Western, white captivity,'[95] describing the reality of many BAME Christians. Participant E explains: 'we don't want to be simply assimilated into a pre-existing model of the church and get absorbed into it and lose our identity…We want to add to the church and bring our uniqueness, our difference.'

Act four: Opening the arms again

The final act of embrace, opening the arms again, is important in order to the preserve the authenticity of the self and the other: 'the opening of the arms underlies that, although the other may be inscribed into the self, the alterity may not be

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[93] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 143.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Rah, *The next Evangelicalism*, 119.

neutralized into an undifferentiated "we."'[96] Nathan explains the damage that is done when the arms refuse to open again:

> There is a temptation within some British churches to ask members of ethnic minorities to give up their cultural baggage in order to be accepted. In other words, we must assimilate into a majority culture to be of any use to the church… Without [the] acceptance of self and others the congregation is robbed of a unique Christian expression and the beauty of diversity in worship and fellowship innate within the Body of Christ.[97]

Written three decades ago, Nathan's view is sadly still relevant today. In describing the pressure to conform to a 'western' style of communicating, Participant E says this: 'I felt a pressure to follow a certain delivery approach, a certain pastoral tone but then I look like a cheap imitation…Many people from my part of the world are very expressive…We're very different…that's the way God's uniquely wired me.'

Conclusion

It is a recognition of the fluidity of identity and the mutual self-giving that makes Volf's metaphor so relevant to the conversation on racial identity in the Church today. Jenkins argues that 'identification, whether of ourselves or of others, is a process; something we do.'[98] Those BAME Christians who enter the dominant cultural space have already, to a greater or lesser degree, adapted individual identities in order to belong and, due to their minority status, will continue to do so. The Church needs to recognise the fluidity in its identity and be willing to embrace an identity which is no longer tied to whiteness and a particular version of Englishness. This will entail a mutuality of self-giving that desires and recognises the value in the other and which will entail the forfeiting of power and privilege. This will not be easy for an institution so firmly entrenched within the mechanics of the state. However, making space for the other is essential if it is to become more truly racially diverse and a more accurate representation of the Body of Christ and more missionally relevant to a multicultural context.

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[96] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 144.
[97] Ronald Nathan, 'Issues for a black minister' in Paul Grant, Raj Patel (editors), *A Time to Speak*, 12,13.
[98] Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity*, Fourth Edition, Key Ideas (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 6.

Chapter 5   Embracing diversity in the life and mission of the Church

This final chapter will explore what it means to truly embrace diversity within the life and mission of the Church of England. It will argue that the concept of 'prophetic dialogue' as articulated by Bevans and Shroeder[99] provides a spirituality and method which undergirds the true embrace of racial diversity by the Church of England. It will explore how prophetic dialogue can enable the Church to discern the 'missio Dei' at work in the world today in order to engage in dialogue, address racial injustice and display hospitality in worship.

A spirituality of prophetic dialogue

Bevans and Shroeder propose prophetic dialogue as a 'comprehensive theology of mission,' a 'synthesis' of the three main mission theologies of the second half of the twentieth century.[100] Moreover, they argue that prophetic dialogue provides a means of understanding the various elements of the practice of Church's mission from both a prophetic and a dialogical perspective which actually 'functions much more as a *spirituality* than as a *strategy*.'[101]

Considering the issue of racial diversity within a spirituality of prophetic dialogue enables a radical reframing of the conversation on racial diversity. It is no longer a predominantly one-sided conversation, but a two-way dialogue conducted in an attitude of, what Bosch describes as, 'bold humility – or a humble boldness.'[102] Within this context the outsider and insider need to be willing but also have the courage and humility, to 'speak out' and 'let go.'[103]

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[99] Stephen B. Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, American Society of Missiology Series, no. 30 (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2004), 348–98.

[100] Stephen B. Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 2.

[101] Ibid.

[102] David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Twentieth anniversary ed, American Society of Missiology Series, no. 16 (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2011), 501.

[103] The spirituality of inculturation proposed by Bevens and Shroeder can be applied effectively to the situation of the Church if the roles of the insider and outsider are reversed. Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 88–100.

Discerning the 'missio Dei'

A spirituality of prophetic dialogue entails first discerning the 'missio Dei' that is already at work in the area of racial diversity in the UK today. This will enable the Church to be a prophetic voice which fulfils its missional mandate, as expressed in the Five Marks of mission, especially to 'proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom' and 'transform unjust structures of society'[104] in an increasingly pluralistic and multicultural society. This acknowledges that the mission is God's mission; it's about God's 'gracious invitation to humanity' to be 'partners with God in the patient yet unwearied work of inviting and persuading women and men to enter into relationship with their world, with one another and with Godself.'[105] It is a recognition that racism and a lack of racial diversity destroys the relationships that are integral to God's mission.

Engaging in prophetic dialogue

The ability to truly listen is vital to the process of prophetic dialogue. Its success depends on a number of factors. Firstly, it is required by everyone in the conversation in a spirit of openness. The need for white Christians to listen to the perspectives of people of colour is repeated throughout the literature and case studies. However, it is also important that people of colour also listen in a posture of grace. Anger and frustration at the injustice suffered can prevent this from happening. It is only through listening that one can understand the perspective of the other and enable the conversation to move forward.

Secondly, the listening needs to be entered into with a spirit that is prepared to 'let go' of anything that hinders the process of mutual conversation. The Church, therefore, must 'let go' of ideas of what is normative in terms of leadership, theology and worship which are largely conceived in white, educated and middle-class terms. Rather, there needs to be an understanding that this is just one expression of faith in

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[104] Anglican Communion Office, "Anglican Communion: Marks of Mission," *Anglican Communion Website*, accessed July 31, 2020, http://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx.
[105] Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 285.

the multi-coloured Body of Christ. Understanding the power of culture to 'subvert our faith,' Volf argues for this necessity to listen to other cultures:

> In order to keep our allegiance to Jesus Christ pure, we need to nurture commitment to the multicultural community of Christian churches. We need to see ourselves and our own future with the eyes of Christians from other cultures, listen to voices of Christians from other cultures so as to make sure that the voice of our culture has not drowned out the voice of Jesus Christ, "the one Word of God.[106]

Whilst this 'letting go' relates mainly to those in the Church who have held on for too long, there is also a need for BAME Christians to find a way to 'let go' of feelings of misunderstanding, unforgiveness and anger which can prevent the conversation from taking place in the first place.

The need to 'speak out' is the third characteristic of successful dialogue. Speaking out, however, is not an easy option for those whose voices have been historically oppressed or who know painful consequences of such speaking out. The overriding need to assimilate in an attempt to 'belong' makes such an action risky in the minds of many BAME Christians; moreover, challenging authority, especially those in spiritual authority, is culturally inappropriate for some. However, the need to speak out and share one's experience is a courageous but necessary step: 'starting a sentence by saying "in my experience" is a powerful way to home in on what it has been like for a particular individual.'[107]

Setting prophetic dialogue in the context of a spirituality is helpful in shaping its practice through the guidance of the Spirit of God. Inherent to the process is that risk that comes with sharing deeply and personally; in bringing the hidden things into the open; in confessing and repenting. It is a costly process that can be painful. Conflict is a possible consequence. It is only through the guidance of the Spirit, in an attitude of love, that true dialogue can be conducted in a 'place of safety'. Moreover, as Kwiyani argues, this need to dialogue is essential to the mission of the Church in the twenty-first century: 'With the cultural diversity that is fast becoming the norm in most

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[106] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 54.
[107] Barton, *Rejection, Resistance and Resurrection*, 79.

of western life, there is a need for local and foreign Christians to engage with each other and together to partner in mission.'[108]

Racial diversity and justice

Truly embracing racial diversity cannot take place until there is racial justice and the 'other' is recognised and treated as an equal whose difference is valued and appreciated. In order to move forward, the Church needs to firstly acknowledge its past failings and seek repentance and reconciliation and then seek to address the institutional racism that persists through more diverse and representative leadership.

<u>Acknowledgement, confession, repentance and reconciliation</u>

An acknowledgement of past failure in relation to race has largely, and quite correctly, focused on colonialism and slavery. However, there is an urgent need for the Church to also recognise that the colour-blind liberal agenda with its assumption of normative whiteness has pervaded every level of the institution. Indeed, as France-Williams argues, 'unless the status attributed to being white is examined, the white historic Church will continue to both consciously and unconsciously limit the voice, action and influence of her non-white members.'[109]

This acknowledgement is central to the process of confession, repentance and reconciliation. Wilkinson compellingly argues that this can only happen around the cross where 'history forces Black to confront White as *victim to oppressor.'*[110] The continued oppression felt by BAME Christians makes the truthful acknowledgement of these identities in the presence of Christ the beginning of this process. Maintaining that true embrace cannot take place without repentance and reconciliation Volf recognises that 'genuine repentance is not a human possibility but … a gift of God.'[111]

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[108] Harvey Kwiyani, "Pneumatology, Mission and African Christianity in the West," in Israel Olofinjana, *African Voices: Towards African British Theologies*, 2017, 118.
[109] France-Williams, *Ghost Ship*, 8.
[110] Wilkinson, *Church in Black and White*, 172.
[111] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 119.

Words of confession and repentance have been spoken at various times by senior members of the Church but the Archbishop's admission to the continued institutionally racist nature of the Church is a reminder that true repentance that leads to reconciliation happens when actions follow words. This highlights the urgent need to restructure the processes relating to vocations and leadership in the Church to make this happen.

<u>BAME leadership in the Church</u>

The importance of racial justice within the power structures of the Church cannot be underestimated. Firstly, the presence of BAME clergy in all areas of church leadership, including positions of senior leadership, is a prophetic presence, signalling the willingness of the Established Church to lay down power. Systemic change can only occur when BAME Christians have a distinctive, authoritative voice within the institution. As Lindsay argues, 'one of the key solutions to dealing with racial conflict… [is to] dismantle existing power structures that cause inequality and injustice.'[112]

BAME clergy also play an important representative role in encouraging other BAME Christians to be a part of the Church. As Participant F explains, 'as people walk through the doors and they see a leader who looks like them…it's already a point of safety.' Having role models among the BAME Christian community encourages others to be open to the call of God into Church leadership: 'in the absence of role models it is difficult for people to see a place for themselves.'[113]

Secondly, the presence of BAME clergy is a prophetic presence in signalling the diverse nature of the Body of Christ on earth. It is a more biblical picture, a way of correcting the diseased imagination that has pervaded 'white' Christianity and also a more representative picture of the demographics of the church in the world today. This imbalance in BAME leadership 'is a cause for concern in our church, not because it is about redressing an imbalance but because it is a gospel imperative.'[114]

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[112] Benjamin Lindsay, *We Need to Talk about Race: Understanding the Black Experience in White Majority Churches* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2019), 89.

[113] "Everyday People: God's Gift to the Church of England." (Church of England, 2015).

[114] Ibid.

Thirdly, the presence of immigrant Christians in all areas of church ministry provides the Church with people uniquely placed to witness to a multicultural society. The necessity of operating within more than one cultural mode means that immigrants operate 'out of a state of liminality, a sense of in betweenness'[115] which enables greater sensitivity to the demands of multi-ethnic ministry. When these Christians can free themselves from the shackles of having to assimilate to the dominant culture, they will be able to address 'the challenges of multiethnicity. Instead of being captured or intimidated by western, white cultural norms, the second-generation immigrant should be stepping up to take on the mantle of leadership.'[116]

Hospitality in worship

If the visible presence of people of colour is to be more than mere tokenism, the embrace of otherness must be the creation of space so that the other can come in and the space can be transformed by that presence. This requires a generous hospitality in the life and worship of the Church so that the pervasive Eurocentric culture and practice can be influenced and enriched by the presence of the other. The term 'intercultural' will therefore be used to define the 'mutual multi-directional movement between cultures'[117] in the ministry and worship of the Church and be explored in relation to spirituality, biblical interpretation and styles of worship.

Spirituality

In *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society,* Newbigin argues that the gospel has been 'domesticated' into the reigning Western enlightenment plausibility structure.[118] He explains that 'the only way in which the gospel can change our culturally conditioned interpretations of it is through the witness of those who read the Bible with minds shaped by other cultures.'[119] The ability to listen to and learn from each other will

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[115] Rah, *The next Evangelicalism*, 187.
[116] Ibid., 188.
[117] Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 72.
[118] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans [u.a.], 1989), 10,11.
[119] Ibid., 197.

enable the Church to develop a more prophetic voice, in order to affirm and challenge those aspects of culture that are consonant with the gospel, and helping it to develop a theology and spirituality that is more consistent with the values of the Kingdom of God.

In his section on 'Freedom from the western white captivity of the Church'[120] Rah explores several areas where such dialogue will help the church develop a view that is more biblical and less encumbered by the culture that surrounds it. These include drawing on the experience of African American and Native American communities to develop a theology of suffering and celebration which stands in opposition to the prevailing societal emphasis on comfort, success and power. Participant E expresses this powerfully when he talks about his African experience of faith being 'radically different': describing a time of crisis in his country he explains, 'we had no water, no electricity, no money in the bank… and it created an utter dependency on God which the western world knows nothing of.'

<u>Biblical interpretation</u>

Similarly, in the area of theology and biblical interpretation there is much that can be learnt. Kwiyani explains that 'theological cross-pollination will not only enrich ensuing "world theology," it will also enrich the context-specific theologies as they interact with one another.'[121] Away from the academy, less formal theological cross pollination occurs when Christians begin to learn from each other and read the Bible differently. Jenkins argues that the newer churches in the South facing persecution, exile or dictatorship can 'read the Bible in a way that makes that Christianity look like a wholly different religion from the faith of prosperous advanced societies of Europe and North America.'[122] Listening to the voices of Christians from these parts of the world can greatly enrich our understanding of the Bible.

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[120] Rah, *The next Evangelicalism*, 143–99.
[121] Harvey Kwiyani, "Pneumatology, Mission and African Christianity in the West," in Olofinjana, *African Voices*, 120.
[122] Jenkins, *The next Christendom*, 272,273.

Styles of worship

Hospitality in worship is perhaps most obviously seen in the celebration of diversity in the music and liturgy of worship. Intercultural worship is much more than the tokenism of ticking the 'diversity box' by having a song in a different language. It is about truly celebrating a diversity of approaches in worship from the styles of communication from the pulpit to the music and liturgy drawn from the global body of Christ. The overwhelmingly positive response to Bishop Curry's 'black' style of preaching at the wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle illustrates that the church would benefit from much more diverse expressions of worship.[123] However, when Participant F is berated as an ordinand for preaching in just this style, it seems that there is still a wider gap between what is considered normative and what a BAME Christian needs to do in order to minister in a way that is authentic.

Conclusion

The rise of pioneer ministry and fresh expressions of worship within the Church demonstrates a recognition that traditional forms of worship and leadership cannot remain unchanged. The need to embrace racial diversity in the life and worship of the Church needs to be part of this movement of change. Moreover, if true racial diversity is to be considered normative in Christian worship, inter-cultural worship must be embraced by the whole Church, not only those local churches that serve a more multicultural parish. We live in a time when diversity in celebrated in the secular world of music, fashion and food. The Church cannot afford to ignore the enriching beauty of racial diversity in all its expressions of the Christian faith and worship if it wants to continue to be relevant to a multicultural society.

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[123] "Come on Now, Preacher!," accessed August 18, 2020, https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2019/25-october/features/features/come-on-now-preacher.

Conclusion

At the time of writing, the Church of England stands at a 'kairos' moment in relation to racial diversity. The 'Black Lives Matter' protests have reopened the conversation on the reality of racism in the UK. The Church's own acknowledgement of institutional racism is set against the charges made by BAME Christians of normative whiteness and cultural racism. Within such a context, as the literature and experiences of BAME Christians suggest, racial diversity is largely expressed as ethnic minority Christians assimilating into the dominant white norm rather than embracing cultural and racial differences. Despite the 'good' intentions of those in authority, the power of whiteness holds fast, and racial diversity is indeed about 'bodies' rather than 'culture.'

The power of whiteness holds the reins in the world, even amongst many people of colour who have unconsciously swallowed the lie that 'white is better'. It is, therefore, not surprising that the Church, made up of ordinary men and women, reflects its views. Yet in a world of division, the church of Christ is called to be different, to march to a different tune; one that is sounded throughout the Bible and by the Spirit: of unity in diversity. It is vision of equality and a celebration of the glorious diversity that the Creator God ordained and anticipates the multicultural 'church' on the Last Day when all nations, tribes, peoples and languages stand united in the worship of the Lamb (Revelation 7:9).

Monocultural worship takes place on earth: it is sometimes necessary for a purpose; it often reflects the preference or prejudices of the worshippers, but it will always be a pale reflection of the 'blueprint' that the Spirit revealed at Pentecost. The sad reality is that the problems in its own house means that the Church of England, in many ways, lags behind secular society, where there is a much greater celebration of diversity and where BAME people have a more representative presence. The Church needs to get its own house in order to be the prophetic voice that it is called to be.

A desire for racial diversity which does not take seriously the need to embrace difference in the culture of the Church is, in effect, a call for BAME Christians to deny part of their authentic self. The need to belong is the most obvious reason why BAME Christians assimilate into the dominant norm. The refusal to assimilate and to speak

out only occurs when an individual has the ability and authority to do so; it is to do with power. This is a compelling reason for the Church to intentionally focus on increasing BAME leadership at all levels, so that they can be a prophetic presence signalling the diversity of the Church, as well using their experience of difference to steer the Church away from monochromatic, and towards, diverse intercultural worship.

Growing up in an educated, middle-class family in post-colonial Sri Lanka, I have always in some sense straddled two cultures: Tamil and English. This continued when I moved to the UK but I soon, almost unconsciously, learnt that my now minority ethnic culture was perceived as in some way inferior, and I learnt the game of assimilation and 'code switching,' depending on my context and situation. As I enter ordained ministry in the Church of England, I am aware that I can present the normative 'white' version of Christianity. There is always a temptation to assimilate because it is the easier and avoids the painful consequences that often accompany challenge. However, I know the value of racial diversity and the way in which enriches the Body of Christ. Moreover, through my study and Spirit-led formation process at theological college, I have developed a critical consciousness which perceives the importance of my ethnicity for my ministry and challenges me to learn to 'speak out' in order to be part of the change that the Church needs to see.

I may be, to use Beckford's image, a 'house Negro'[124] but I choose to remain in the 'master's house' not because I love whiteness, but because I love the Master, the true owner of the house, who has called me be part of the resistance that can come from within the house. It is the same love that must motivate each member to love the other. Volf concedes that the metaphor of embrace 'will not work' in all cultures,[125] but I believe that the intimacy of embrace is an important reminder of the primacy of love in the conversation surrounding racial diversity. The call to embrace racial diversity is ultimately a call to love the body of Christ and all its members, with all the uniqueness and difference they bring.

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[124] Beckford, *Jesus Is Dread*, 45.
[125] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 29.

Appendix 1

Definitions

Any discussion around race involves using words and phrases that, though commonly used, can have a range of meanings and assumption ascribed to them. Some of the key terms will be defined below.

BAME: an acronym for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic; 'used to refer to people in the UK who are not white,'[126] and one that will be used in this piece of writing in keeping with the current usage in the UK and the Church of England. The American equivalent to this is 'people of colour' which is arguably a more honest term to describe what is, in essence, a description based on the colour of one's skin.

Black: while 'black' can be used as descriptors of skin colour of people of African origin, it is also a political term. For many 'black' is a proudly chosen symbol of identity relating to common African roots. Often encompassing all people of colour, Black refers to all those who are victims of racism in a world that is divided according to lines of colour. It must be noted, however, that for some this is 'a foreign-generated identity term imposed demean Africans and their descendants.'[127]

Diversity: is the acknowledgement of any dimension that differentiates people and groups one from another. 'In a nutshell, it's about empowering people by respecting and appreciating what makes them different, in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, religions, disability, sexual orientation, education, and national origin.' [128] Racial diversity concerns respecting, representing and celebrating the differences between different racial groups. Public institutions and corporations in the UK are expected to reflect diversity in their organisations although some argue that in many areas claims to diversity merely pay 'lip-service' to the concept.

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[126] "BAME | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary," accessed June 8, 2020, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/bame.

[127] Israel Olofinjana, *African Voices: Towards African British Theologies*, 2017, xvi.

[128] "What Is Diversity & Inclusion?," *Global Diversity Practice*, November 14, 2018, https://globaldiversitypractice.com/what-is-diversity-inclusion/.

Embrace: this word, as used in the title, is a reference to the concept of embrace as articulated by Miroslav Volf in 'Exclusion and Embrace' as 'the dynamic relationship between the self and the other that embrace symbolises and enacts.'[129]

Ethnicity: 'race' and 'ethnicity' is often used interchangeably, but 'ethnicity' is generally used to refer to social characteristics (rather than physical) that are shared by a people group. Although ethnicity can be ascribed to majority or minority groups, its usage in the UK is usually limited to minority groups.

Race: is generally understood to mean the grouping of people based on shared heritage (based on factors such as language, history and culture) and physical characteristics (such as the colour of their skin). Despite attempts to argue for the inferiority of people based on biology since the beginning of modernity, 'race, as is not widely acknowledged, is a social and political construct, not a biological and genetic fact.'[130]

Racism: racism is understood to be the prejudiced views and behaviour that disadvantages people based solely on their race. In keeping with common usage, this more general definition of racism will be used in this dissertation, but it can be argued, as Leech does, that racism is by definition institutional: 'it is about structures, about institutions, about social, economic and political processes.'[131]

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[129] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 141.
[130] Mukti Barton, *Rejection, Resistance and Resurrection: Speaking out against Racism in the Church* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2005), 108.
[131] Kenneth Leech, *Race* (London: SPCK, 2005), 24.

Appendix 2

MA Dissertation Participant information Sheet

Title of Study: Towards an understanding of racial diversity in the Church of England that leads to embrace

You are being invited to take part in a research study. In order to help you decide it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. You may wish to discuss it with others. For any further information or questions about my research, please contact me on ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ or email me: ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓

Aims and purpose of the project
The Church of England is currently taking positive action to increase racial diversity within the church, especially within its leadership. The aim of this project is to understand and explore the nature of this diversity as it is currently expressed and consider ways in which the church can move forward in this area. My experience as a worshipper, lay leader and now an ordinand of BAME heritage within the Church of England has coloured my perceptions on this issue. The purpose of these interviews is to gather information from other current / recent ordinands of a BAME heritage in order gain a variety of views on this issue.

Reason for invitation to participate
For the purposes of this study, I am limiting my study to current and recent BAME ordinands at Trinity College Bristol, men and women who have been chosen as leaders in the Church of England and, as such, represent those who have experience of the church on a number of levels and have been accepted by the selection processes of the church. As an ordinand / recent ordinand at Trinity College you have been invited to take part in this study.

Informed consent
You are free to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide you do wish to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. It is usually not practical to withdraw after the research project has been written up. If you wish to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form, and you will be given a copy of it to keep.

Nature of the participation
If you decide to take part, you will have an interview lasting approximately one hour in which you will be asked a number of pre-prepared questions.

The questions relate to issues of race and diversity within the church and it is not anticipated that these will be of a sensitive nature or raise potentially painfully issues.

On the other hand, your contribution could help to better understand the issue of racial diversity within the church.

Confidentiality

Every effort will be made to provide as much confidentiality as possible. Your personal information and data will be used primarily by me and if necessary be available to my supervisor in the course of supervision. If you consent to it, your contributions may be quoted anonymously in the dissertation. Where pertinent and necessary, other personal details (for example pertaining to your ethnicity or educational background) may be included and it is possible that individual identity may be deduced from them (by the internal examiners familiar with members of the Trinity College Community).

Data
The information collected will only be used for the purpose of the dissertation and the participant details and contributions will be destroyed after the assessment has been marked. The data will be securely stored until this time.

Further information
If you would like further information, please contact:
- Me by email: ███████████████████████████ or phone ██████████
- My supervisor, Rev Dr Howard Worsley by email ██

Thank you for considering taking part in this research.

██████████████████

March 2020

Appendix 3

Consent form for research

Participant:

Identification Code:

Title of Project: Towards an understanding of racial diversity in the Church of England that leads to embrace

Name of Student: ███████████████

Name of Supervisor: ████████████████

Please read and sign:

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet about the above-named project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time prior to the research project being written up, without giving reason.

I agree to the interview being audio recorded.

I agree to my contributions being quoted anonymously in the research project and, where necessary, other personal details (such as my ethnicity but not my name) being included.

I agree to take part in this project.

Name of participant: ………………………………………………………….

Date: …………………………………….

Signature: …………………………………………

Participants will be given a copy of this signed, dated consent form. The original signed consent form will be kept by the student.

Appendix 4

COMMON AWARDS RESEARCH ETHICS ETHICS APPROVAL FORM

SECTION A

Name: ████████████████

Tel. No.: ████████████

Email: ████████████████████████

Trinity Bristol College and Bristol Baptist College

Module name and code: MA Dissertation TMM42360

Assignment title: Towards an understanding of racial diversity in the Church of England that leads to embrace

SECTION B - INITIAL DECLARATION

This investigation will include research involving children or young people under the age of 16   No/██

This investigation will include research involving young people aged 16-18

                                                                                                                No/██

This investigation will include research involving adults   ██/Yes

This investigation will include research involving vulnerable adults   No/██

NB This form covers research involving human participants through the use of questionnaires, interviews, focus groups or observations of activity. Separate advice and permission must be sought for any research activity not covered under these headings.

All students must complete all sections of this form. You should include with your application a copy of your proposed Consent Form and Information Sheet for participants. Completed applications should be submitted to Howard Worsley.

SECTION C

Please answer all the following questions.

Where Yes/No is requested, give details if answering Yes (or if necessary to explain No)

1. What are the aims of this study/project?   To explore the nature and understanding of racial diversity in the Church of England.
2. How will the study be carried out? (e.g. interviews, questionnaires, observation) *Please include copies of any questionnaires with your application* Interviews (copy of the interview questions provided)
2.   How many participants will be recruited, and by what criteria will they be selected? Recent and current BAME ordinands will be interviewed: between 4 and 6 participants Criteria for selection: trying (within this limited cohort) to gain the views of a range of perspectives in terms of gender, time living in the UK/ immigrant generation.

SAFEGUARDING	
4. Does the study involve participants who are under 18 or particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent?	No
5. Have any safeguarding issues have you identified? If yes, provide details of the arrangements you will make to ensure safeguarding good practice.	No/
6. Will the study involve discussion of sensitive topics not usually addressed in your placement work?	No/
7. Could the study induce psychological stress, anxiety, or cause harm or negative consequences to the participants beyond the risks encountered in normal life?	No

8. Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses) be offered to participants?	No/█
9. Do you foresee any other particular ethical issues?	No/█
INFORMED CONSENT	
10. Will you ensure informed consent from individual participants? *(please include a copy of your information sheet and consent form with your application)*	█Yes
11. Do you need to seek permission from any institution or service-providers?	No/█
12. Will any interviews be audio or video recorded?	█/Yes
CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY	
13. How will confidentiality of individual participants be maintained? Personal identifiable details (especially names) will not be included but it is possible that in the context of the community people may be identifiable by the details. Where possible, such details will not be included. However, participants will be informed of this possibility and consent will be gained.	
14. How will the confidentiality of the placement or context be maintained? Details related to the identity of the context will not be included – more general, anonymous descriptors will be used.	
15. Who will have access to the data gathered? I will have access to the data.	
16. Who will have access to the final piece of work? The examiners	

DATA PROTECTION

17. How will data be collected (e.g. recording, written notes)

Audio recording and notes.

18. How, and for how long will the data be stored?

Data will be securely stored (manually and digitally) until the final submission and marking of the dissertation.

19. I confirm that data for this project will be handled in accord with the Data Protection Policy for Trinity Bristol College and Bristol Baptist College and IT Acceptable Use Policy.

Signature ████████████ *(digitally signed)*

Date: 3.3.20

SECTION D: SUPERVISORS

Placement Supervisor (where applicable):

Name:

Address:

Tel:

Email:

I have read this form and support the student in their proposed study
Signature:

Module Supervisor:

Name: Howard Worsley

Address: Trinity College Bristol, Stoke Hill, Stoke Bishop BS9 1JP

Tel: ████████

Email: howard.worsley@trinitycollegebristol.ac.uk

> **I have read this form and support the student in their proposed study**
>
> Signature:

SECTION E

> **I agree to conduct this study in line with the ethical guidelines laid down in the document 'Common Awards Research Ethics Policy'.**
>
> Signature of student: ██████████
>
> Date: 3.3.20

ETHICAL APPROVAL HAS BEEN GRANTED/REJECTED

COMMENTS:

CONDITIONS (if any):

Signed:

Name: Howard Worsley

Role in TEI: Vice Principal & Chair of Research Ethics Panel

Date:

Appendix 5

Participant interview questions

Background: general
1) Could you begin by giving me some brief biographical information including your age, educational and professional background and your present occupation.

Racial and ethnic background
2) You are identified as a BAME ordinand / priest. Could you tell me a little about your
- nationality
- racial and ethnic background

Immigrant generation
3) Would you consider yourself a first, second or third generation migrant?
- If you are a first-generation migrant, when did you come to the UK?

Demographic information
4) Briefly describe the social demographics of the (main) C of E churches you have attended.

Diversity and assimilation in the C o E
5) As someone of BAME heritage to what extent do you feel that you have assimilated into the British society?
Answer on a scale of 1-10, with 0 = not at all assimilated and 10=totally assimilated.

6) To what extent do you feel you have assimilated into the Church of England?
Answer on a scale of 1-10, with 0=not at all assimilated and 10=totally assimilated.

7) To what extent do you feel you have assimilated into Trinity College?
Answer on a scale of 1-10, with 0=not at all assimilated and 10=totally assimilated.

Assimilation and the church
8) If you feel that you have assimilated, what are the factors that influenced / helped you to assimilate?

9) Do you think you made a conscious decision to assimilate?

10) Have you felt the pressure to conform to the dominant western culture within the church? If yes, in what areas?
- Do you ever feel the need to compromise your ethnic identity in the church? In what areas?

Ethnic minority identities in the church

11) How is your ethnicity viewed within the churches you have worshipped /ministered in?

- Do you feel it makes a difference in the way people perceive you?
- Is it acknowledged or ignored?
- Is it celebrated or tolerated?
- Do you feel that you are ever been 'othered' / treated differently due to your ethnicity?

12) As a leader /potential leader in the C of E, do you think that your ethnic heritage is a benefit or hindrance or makes no difference.

13) Do you feel your ethnicity and background affects your understanding or expression of faith? If yes, in what ways?

14) Do you feel able to express these differences within the Christian context? If yes, give an example. If no, why not?

Looking to the church: now and in the future

15) In your experience, how would you describe the Church of England in relation to racial diversity?

16) In your opinion, what, if anything, can be / need to be done to improve the current situation?

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