



ANVIL

Journal of Theology and Mission

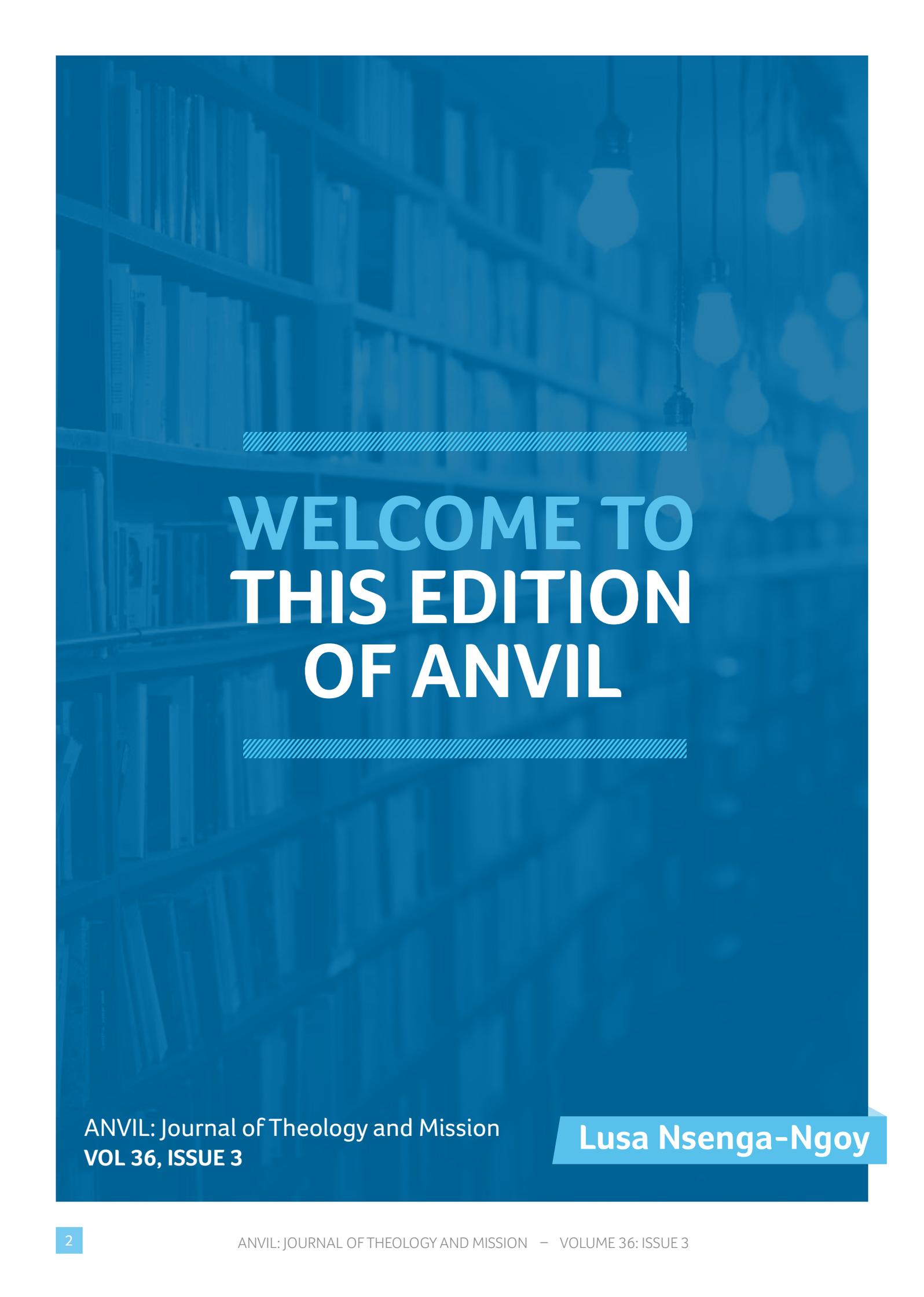


CHURCH
MISSION
SOCIETY



Faultlines in Mission: Reflections
on Race and Colonialism

VOL 36, ISSUE 3



WELCOME TO THIS EDITION OF ANVIL

ANVIL: Journal of Theology and Mission
VOL 36, ISSUE 3

Lusa Nsenga-Ngoy

THE EDITORIAL

While it is premature to assess the legacy of this year in history, we can certainly agree that 2020 has brought to the fore the imperative need to revisit the past, paying particular attention to societal and systemic fractures adversely impacting the lives of many around the globe. In the wake of George Floyd's murder, millions of people took to the streets of our cities demanding radical change, and calling for the toppling of an old order and its symbols of power, objectification and commodification.

This issue of Anvil is inspired by a willingness to offer an introspective response to this global wave of protest calling for racial justice and asking with insistence whether black lives do indeed matter in our societies and institutions. It felt imperative to ask the question of Church Mission Society and its particular contribution to the subject both in its distant and more contemporary history. While this is not set out as an assessment of CMS's record on questions of systemic racism and the legacy of imperialism, this issue aims to examine potential fault lines in Christian mission, with a particular attention to the legacy of empire in our formulation of missional practices and strategies.

At the invitation of Cathy Ross and James Butler, both from CMS, Dr Harvey Kwiyani, Rev Shemil Matthew, and I agreed to co-edit this issue of Anvil. From the outset, we wanted this volume to offer a more personal approach, and provide a more reflective and introspective tone. At the heart of this edition is a commitment to pose a number of critical questions examining the tension between imperialist/colonialist ideals and Christian ideals of redemptive justice and liberative narratives. Through the various contributions, we hope to outline possible avenues towards a critical missional framework that offers a solid pathway towards a future in which racial justice and reconciliation are an achievable reality.

We have invited contributions from a variety of voices to help us address the theme of **Faultlines in Mission: Reflections on Race and Colonialism**. These consist of longer essays, personal reflections, interviews, poetry and book reviews. Each contribution seeks to speak with the authority of personal experience.

Harvey Kwiyani's article offers us a crystal-clear view of how white privilege and white supremacy have provided the buttresses for empire and have made mission in their own image. To illustrate this, he movingly weaves his own story from his childhood in Malawi to living in George Floyd's city of Minneapolis to now forming part of the tiny minority of black and brown people who lecture in theology in the UK. His article challenges white people's ability to experience such little discomfort at empire, mission history, the slave trade and the current context for mission.

My own reflection entitled **Hope reimaged: making the world that ought to be**, is an invitation to lift our gaze beyond a vision of personhood essentially defined in self-reflective and polarised moods. My reflection draws from the concept of afrofuturism whose aspiration is an attempt to release the imagination in order to sublimate the impossible, to reimagine a different world, a better world. This reimagining is inexorably turned towards the future, a future in which what was alienated is sublimated. My hope is to rethink mission at the intersection between eschatology and immanence. I explore how the murder of George Floyd offers a critical vantage point from which to rethink and redefine mission in ways that lead towards transformed structures and restored relationships.

Bishop Emmanuel Egbunu provides a clear overview of the shameful humiliation of Bishop Ajayi Crowther by European colleagues and the far reaching impact this has had. It makes for sobering and painful reading; as late as 1960, an Anglican church in Nigeria still did not want to come under the episcopal authority of a black

bishop. This was only finally rectified by the Nigerian military government in 1991. In 2014 at the 150th anniversary of Bishop Crowther's consecration, the Archbishop of Canterbury challenged those present to consider whom they excluded because of race in their desire for power. These injustices from the past visit and profoundly affect subsequent generations.

In his article titled **Colonialism, Missions and the Imagination: Illustrations from Uganda**, Angus Crichton offers a critical overview of the legacy of CMS's mission with a particular focus on Ugandan experience. He examines the conflicted and often contradictory intersection between European colonialism and Christian mission, and the emergence of a church movement negotiating the tension between assimilation and indigenisation. Angus gives a compelling overview of a movement caught between allegiance to and collusion with the colonial venture on the one hand, and an often-timid critique of the paternalistic approach on the other hand. He also highlights the tension that emerged from CMS's failure of imagination in recognising and releasing indigenous leadership and in fostering local agency. Angus reminds us that despite this, an African-initiated missional movement flourished. In his reassessment of CMS's heritage and legacy, Angus insists that there are lessons to be learned. He invites us to rethink the future of our missional engagement as one that is framed in repentance and reassessment of action. One that reflects mutuality in mission, and acknowledges the shift southward of Christianity's centre of gravity.

In a compelling theological exposé, **Rev Dr Sharon Prentis** invites us to revisit the biblical concept of lament as a blueprint towards a life framed in mutuality and solidarity in love. As she highlights the inescapable reality of sin, personal and corporate, and its propensity towards categorisation, fracture and segregation, Sharon reminds us that Christ's mandate for the church is framed in interdependence and calls for the building of the beloved community. Such a community, she argues, is only possible through a shared commitment to engage with lament as poetic protest that names and articulates the reality of what frustrates reconciliation. As such, lament births hope of a resolution not solely concerned with cosmetic changes, but painstakingly

committed to repentant and restorative work.

When the Poisonous Tree Attempts to Produce an Antidote: colonialism, colonial CMS missions and the caste system in Kerala, is a stimulating reflection on the challenge of a missional organisation caught at the intersection between colonialism and the caste system. In this essay, Rev Shemil Matthew speaks with the integrity of one who considers himself an insider to multiple contexts. He starts by offering an informative depiction of the socio-religious nature of the Varna system and goes on to show how it was distorted at the contact of western colonial ideals in engendering what is known as the caste system that has come to shape

identity questions in India to this day. Shemil reflects further on how unfiltered western philosophical assumptions, preoccupied with categorisation and classification, permeated the western missionary movement and facilitated its collusion with a model of Christianity that excluded and marginalised, and ultimately struggled to foster the effective social change it sought to promote. Shemil has invited his PhD supervisor, Rev Dr Anderson Jeremiah who specialises in Dalit theology, to give a short response to his article, which provides a further layer of insight.

In his essay, **Home is Where the Heart is – a story about race and post-colonialism**, Gilberto Da Silva Afonso reminds us that there is no theology that is not at its heart biography. From his native Angola, to inner city London, to the soulful tunes of Marvin Gaye, Miriam Makeba, and Michael Kiwanuka, and through the complex historical and socio-political landscape of his heritage, Gilberto illustrates both the tension and opportunity of hybridised identity. As he relates his quest for identity and belonging, he denounces the debilitating forces of assimilation and othering. Helpfully, Gilberto's honest and generous account invites all to reconsider paradox and nuance as fundamental ingredients towards a healthy missional engagement for the future. For him, mission needs to migrate from objectification and commodification of black bodies to full integration and participation of those historically marginalised and minoritised.

“What drives us is a willingness to engage in meaningful and continuing conversations about what we believe is a fundamental Christian ideal – racial justice... Our prayer is that as we raise questions and engage with these contributions, they will stimulate our own reflection, and encourage us to remain active agents for racial justice and reconciliation.”

Pastor Dupe Adefala recounts the experience of planting a church in the UK, the challenges of minoritised living, the painful reminder of racial fault lines in British society and everyday experiences of racism in her interview with James Butler. Together, they reflect on practical challenges for Christians and for CMS as they attempt to respond to the issue of racial injustice. The interview concludes with an encouragement to continue the conversation and hold it with a redemptive focus.

Eleasah Phoenix Louis, who self identifies as a church-grown Black-British millennial, brings the perspective of a seldom heard voice in theological discourse. In this thought provoking reflection on **Faultlines and Factions: a theo-political conundrum in the era of Black Lives Matter and New Black Religious Movements**, Eleasah raises a number of pertinent questions about normative whiteness as the frame of theological reflection and missional development, and its failure to imaginatively engage with the experience of oppression and liberative aspirations of many black Christians (especially those of her generation) in their quest for God and realised self. In this essay, she exposes the limits of a modern philosophical framework that seems to only find expression in the tension between theological liberalism and conservatism. She offers a vision that promotes a deconstructed and decolonised reading of identity and theology; one that embraces paradox and nuance, transcending fracture and segregation, and fully informed by a multiplicity of cultural perspectives. Eleasah's description of her research work is a compelling plea to move from the primacy of the universal to the contextual, from homogeneity to plurality, from the critical to the post-critical. She sees in the Black Lives Matter movement and other black liberative or womanist theologies an opportunity to affirm black humanity and agency, and an opportunity to tell anew the experience of the Church in mission.

Awais Mughal brings a deeply personal and moving reflection on **Racism: Dishonouring the Image of God**. Inevitably, the murder of George Floyd casts a

long shadow on her piece. She takes us through an exploration of the expression of racism in the Church's mission and ministry through various interpretative lenses. Awais reminds us of the lasting and pernicious legacy of the pseudo-scientific race theory on the Church's theology and practice, imbuing its iconography with racist ideals. She then reflects on the enduring influence of cultural imperialism and colonialism and its predilection for the language of mastery on Pakistani society, especially its treatment of minority groups and communities. She concludes by highlighting that one of the tasks of mission is to remind the world of God's image in humanity. As we do so with integrity, we can foster the emergence of a society in which we can all flourish in our shared humanity.

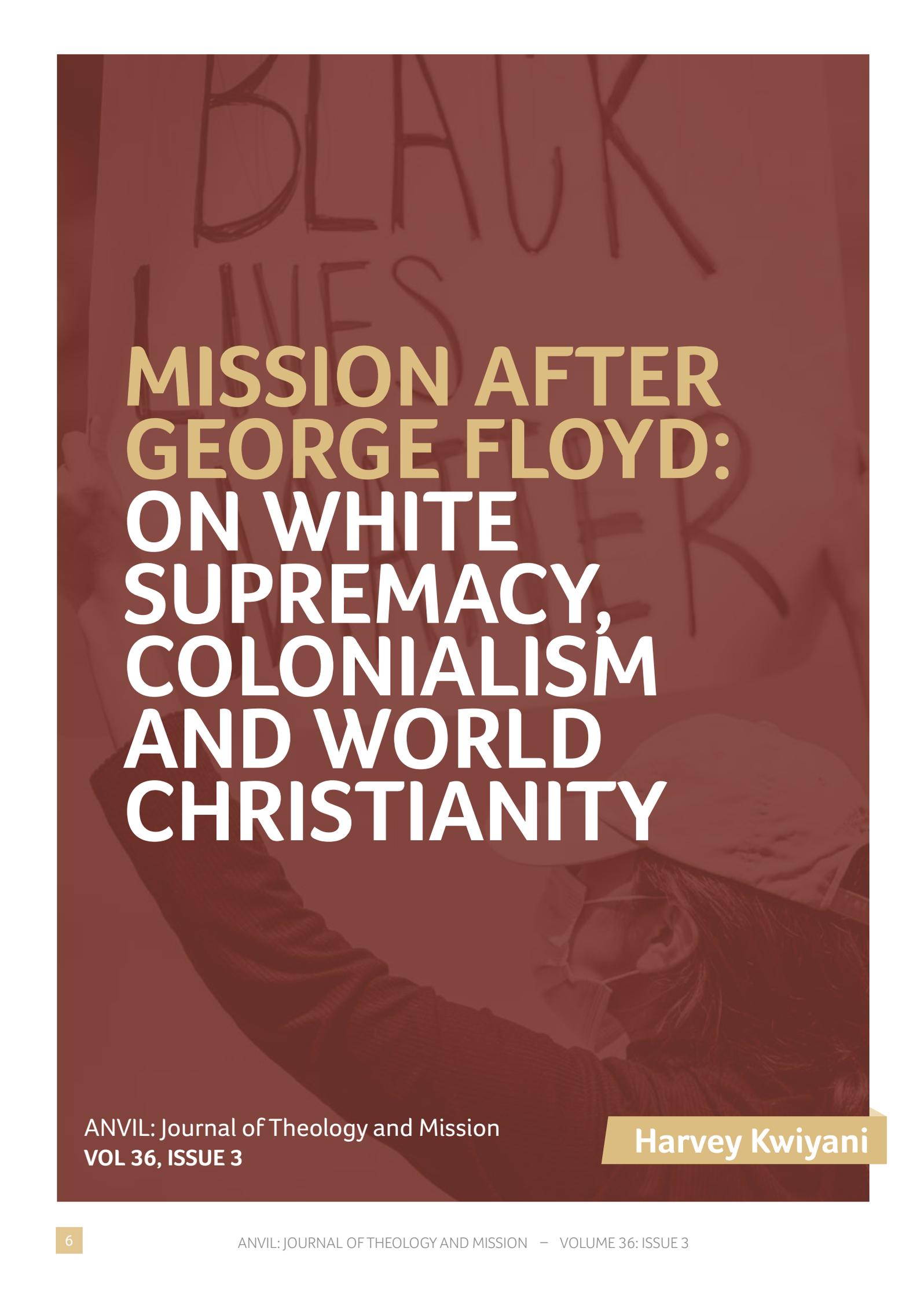
This volume will be punctuated with a poetic reflection. **Let Me Breathe** by Natasha Godfrey is a visceral response to the murder of George Floyd: a protest, a plea, and a prayer. Above all, it is a lament, a prophetic complaint appealing to the heart of God, and whatever humanity is still present in those listening.

Our hope in focusing this volume on the question of race and colonisation is not merely an attempt to join the bandwagon and do our bit for the cause. What drives us is a willingness to engage in meaningful and continuing conversations about what we believe is a fundamental Christian ideal – racial justice. As publisher of Anvil, CMS is mindful of the fact that, as an organisation, it is not in any position to lecture others. Our prayer is that as we raise questions and engage with these contributions, they will stimulate our own reflection, and encourage us to remain active agents for racial justice and reconciliation.

Rev Canon Lusa Nsenga-Ngoy
For the editorial team

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MISSION AFTER GEORGE FLOYD: ON WHITE SUPREMACY, COLONIALISM AND WORLD CHRISTIANITY

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Harvey Kwiyani

This essay reflects my attempts to make sense of the possibilities of a missiology that reflects the current world Christianity in which only around a third of Christians are white westerners – in a world where both colonialism and white supremacy (which have for centuries been the two crutches on which mission stood) have become difficult to justify. I spent the years between 2007 and 2013 in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul in Minnesota, USA. I went to seminary in Saint Paul but I lived right on the border between the two cities. Starting in the summer of 2009, I led a church plant in Saint Paul. Yes, I was too naive to understand the significance of race on American Christianity. The very people who commissioned me to plant the church discouraged people from helping me, saying, “How can you follow a black immigrant African international student?” Nevertheless, with the passage of time, I was lucky enough to lead a sizeable congregation with a significant group of young people from Minneapolis. Between 2009 and 2013, I spent a great deal of time in South Minneapolis, around the area where George Floyd was killed. Since 25 May 2020, when he was killed, I have had countless conversations with my friends in Minneapolis and Saint Paul – some of whom knew George Floyd – as they try to figure out how to be good followers of Christ in the chaos that has seized many American cities. Consequently, the Black Lives Matter phenomenon is something that, for me, feels personal.

Whether in America, in Britain, or in Germany, I have seen things that make me want to remind the world that non-white people are people too, and that black bodies are not expendable. From the six police stops that I *survived* in Saint Paul to the racism that I experienced among my Christian friends in Minneapolis – long before Donald Trump’s dog whistle revealed the hollow of American Evangelicalism and emboldened his white supremacist base to hijack US politics – I have been left wondering if there is hope for black and brown people in the world. Even more, I have struggled with this because, from where I stand, Christianity (and by this, I mean not all Christians but enough of them to justify a generalisation) seems to be entirely complicit in this sin of racism. Christianity has, for the past 600 years, trafficked in racism and preached – in deed, but also in word – the supremacy of the white race over all the others.¹ In doing so, Christianity became a servant of the white race. Even today, when white Christians form less than a third of world Christians, Christianity

still privileges whiteness, and many white Christians still struggle to think any non-white Christian is their equal. The message of the church does not openly sanction this discrimination of non-white peoples, but most white Christians, doing their day-to-day jobs, continue to oppress black and brown people because, of course, they have been conditioned to privilege whiteness – and the gospel of Christ fails to adequately challenge them to think otherwise. It is hard to imagine world Christianity without white supremacy. The folly of this imperial Christianity that wants to evangelise the marginalised and yet keep them oppressed and confined to the margins as second-class Christians is beyond comprehension. Derek Chauvin nonchalantly keeping his knee on George Floyd’s neck is symbolic of the many centuries of white (Christian) oppression of Native Americans, Latin Americans, Africans, Indians and many other peoples, not only in America but also in the UK, Germany, China, Australia and many other countries in the world. (I have, so far, successfully resisted finding out which churches Chauvin and his friends attend – ignorance, in this manner, is bliss.)

The spread of Christianity from Europe to other parts of the world, starting in the fifteenth century and reaching its climax in the second half of the twentieth, was greatly enhanced by racist European ideologies – white people understood themselves to be better than everyone else – and theologies – God has destined them to dominate, civilise and Christianise the rest of the world, and the rest of the races were supposed to help Europeans do this, *for their own good*. Stephen Neill adds that, “The ideas of conquest and of conversion lay side by side in the consciousness of the Christians of the Western world.”² The ideology that, in the nineteenth century, became known as *manifest destiny* – grounded, essentially, in white supremacy, and stating that Europeans had been destined by God to dominate, civilise and Christianise the world – had been extensively used in Latin America right from the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the 1490s. It was used to justify the forceful displacement of Native Americans as the United States expanded westwards in the nineteenth century. This same ideology (with the help of a racist theology that undergirded it) was used to justify the transatlantic slave trade – the kidnapping of Africans from their homeland, the harsh overcrowded ships across the Atlantic, the slave markets in the West Indies and the inhumane working conditions on the plantations – that went on for 450 years. It also

¹ Stephen Neill’s *Colonialism and Christian Missions* is a lame attempt to convince us that western Christian missions did not benefit from colonialism. What it does well, instead, is to show us exactly how European Christians used both their sense of white superiority and the conviction that they had been destined to civilise, even by force, the world. See, for instance, his report on the *Requirement* in *Colonialism and Christian Missions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 43–44.

² Neill, *Colonialism and Christian Missions*, 39.

served to defend both colonising (and evangelising) of Africans, Asians and beyond. Where either colonialism or evangelism was not possible, extermination was always the next alternative.

For the past 600 years, this has been European Christianity's posture to the world. The language used to describe people of the rest of the world was the same – *uncivilised, primitive heathens, barbarians, pagans* – whether it was in 1500, in 1800 or in 1950. One could read William Carey's treatise, the *Enquiry*, which is replete of language that would be unacceptable today.³ Yes, there were some missionaries who refused to trade in white supremacy, people like Bartolomé de las Casas, Matteo Ricci, Johannes Rebmann and Joseph Booth, but these were always the exception to the rule. The whole system of Europe's relations to Africa, for instance, was to colonise (to extract resources) and Christianise (to make colonialism easier). Many of the missionaries participated in this system, most knowingly, but many more unknowingly. Colonialism, be it in Latin America, Asia or Africa, was believed to be fulfilling God's agenda for humanity and was, therefore, part of God's mission. The gospel of Christ became the gospel of European culture and its superiority to the world and was backed up by Europe's and now America's militarism. Jesus not only gained blue eyes and blonde hair along the way, he also got to use the help of American warplanes and British gunboats.

The most troubling thing in all this is that for most white Christians, Jesus is silent amid all these atrocities. If Jesus is not silent, he is invoked to sanction violence and encourage white supremacists to keep the suburbs white. Many white Christians' Jesus does not know how to relate with black and brown people apart from oppressing them – 600 years of church history can testify. While I was writing this essay, another black man, Jacob Blake, from Kenosha, Wisconsin, was shot seven times by police at a very close range. He miraculously survived, but he is paralysed from the waist down. When protestors went to the courthouse two days after his shooting, a young white supremacist man of 17, Kyle Rittenhouse, killed two people and wounded the third, and was later charged with double homicide (among several others); it was Christian communities that quickly raised funds for his legal fees. The faith of these Christians sees no contradiction in following Jesus and enabling white supremacists. The Jesus of these people is *for* white people only. This Jesus oppresses and enslaves non-white people. He sanctions

the colonisation of Native Americans, Africans, Asians and many other people in the world. This Jesus would kneel on people's necks if white supremacy were in danger. Needless to say, I refuse to follow this Jesus. This is not the Jesus who grew up in Nazareth in the Roman colony of Palestine who came to heal the broken-hearted and set the captives free. In his teaching, there is no room for white supremacy, and until racism is totally discredited, God's mission in the world will depend on colonialism. Unfortunately, our theologies today fail to critique racism. Most of them have been shaped by people who either subconsciously hold racist views or do not have an understanding of racism because they have never been discriminated against based on their skin colour. Many of our theologians have benefitted from racism or white privilege and, as such, cannot write against it.

CHRISTIAN MISSION AND COLONIALISM: A MALAWIAN STORY

This story of mission and colonialism is personal to me. It is the story of my village, my people and my ancestors. My great-great-great-grandfather, Ntimawanzako Nacho, was among the first Malawians to come to Scotland for theological training at Stewarts College in 1885 as part of Blantyre Mission's strategy for future leaders in what would later become Nyasaland, and even later, Malawi. Nacho later settled at a place in the Shire Highlands in Southern Malawi called Magomero, where my family still lives today. Back in 1861, Magomero was the first British mission station in Central Africa, but by the time Nacho came to Magomero, it had become a colonial estate belonging to David Livingstone's descendants. It was the main location of an anti-colonial uprising in 1915. As such, Magomero is Ground Zero of both missionary activity and colonialism in Malawi. It is impossible to tell of either mission history or colonial history in Malawi (and, generally, Central Africa) without talking of my people at Magomero. It was, of course, made popular by Landeg White's book *Magomero: Portrait of an African Village*,⁴ which explores the biography of the village from 1850s to the late 1900s. To us Malawians, Magomero is the birthplace of both missionary work and colonialism in Malawi. The colonial government's reaction to the 1915 uprising shaped the history of Christianity in Malawi for the next 50 years, until we attained our independence in 1964, and its implications still remain today, 55 years after independence.

³ William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1961).

⁴ Landeg White, *Magomero: Portrait of an African Village* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

STRIKE A BLOW AND DIE

As the people gathered for their usual Sunday worship on 24 January 1915 at the Providence Industrial Mission at Nguludi in the Shire Highlands of Malawi, then the British colony of Nyasaland, everybody was aware that the service would not be business as usual. It was a strange era and the events of the day before, 23 January, had changed everything. A local (American-trained) Baptist minister, John Chilembwe, had just led a somewhat successful uprising against the colonial government and to prove it, he preached his sermon with William Jarvis Livingstone's severed head perched on a stick right next to the pulpit. The people celebrated – Chilembwe was their Moses, their messiah, the liberator who broke the yoke of Livingstone at Magomero. Most of Nyasaland was peaceful – the British colonial government had, for almost 25 years now, ruled the country with an iron fist. However, they all understood that John Chilembwe had essentially declared war on the colonial government – and that the British government would respond with full force. This was essentially a suicide mission; there was no way they could win. They understood that their mission was “strike a blow and die”.⁵ That blow was struck on Saturday, 23 January, when Chilembwe sent groups of a badly organised militia to kill his neighbour, W. J. Livingstone, at Magomero.⁶ This was the start of a Christian-based anti-colonial uprising wanting to free Nyasaland from British colonialism. Similar Christian struggles against colonialism would eventually help bring the entire colonial project to an end some 50 years later.

Long before John Chilembwe's uprising, David Livingstone traversed the land that is now southern Malawi from 1859, dreaming of a possible British colony

in that part of Africa. Livingstone's time in southern Malawi followed a successful visit to England between 1856 and 1857 during which he published his instant best seller, *Missionary Travels*,⁷ and gave lectures in several cities and universities; Dublin, Manchester, Glasgow, Oxford, Leeds, Liverpool, Dundee, Halifax and Birmingham and, of course, his home, Blantyre. The climax of the speaking tours was at Cambridge University on 4 December 1857, where he concluded his speech with a shout:

I beg to direct your attention to Africa. I know that in a few years I shall be cut off in that country, which is now open. Do not let it be shut again! I go back to Africa to try to make an open path for commerce and Christianity. Do you carry on the work which I have begun. I leave it with you!⁸

“Many white Christians’ Jesus does not know how to relate with black and brown people apart from oppressing them – 600 years of church history can testify.”

In immediate response, some students at Oxford and Cambridge Universities formed a mission association that they called Oxford and Cambridge Mission. Later, Durham and Dublin Universities joined and the association changed its name to simply Universities' Mission to Central Africa, or in short, UMCA. Livingstone returned to Central Africa straight away, finding his way up the Shire River and seeing Lake Malawi for the first time in September 1859. His sense of mission in Africa was built on what he called the “Three Cs: Christianity, Civilisation and Commerce”. He believed that Britain would Christianise, civilise and bring a new form of commerce (to replace the slave trade) to Africa. In one

letter to his friend, Professor Sedgwick, he stated, “All this [expedition's] ostensible machinery has for its ostensible object the development of African trade and the promotion of civilisation, [but] I hope may result in an English colony in the healthy highlands of Central Africa.”⁹ The outworking of Livingstone's Three Cs led to a fourth “C” – colonialism – that would eventually overshadow the first three Cs. Livingstone himself was convinced that “it [was] the mission of England to colonise and to plant her Christianity with her sons

⁵ This was the actual title of George Mwase's book on the events surrounding John Chilembwe's uprising in 1915. See George Simeon Mwase, *Strike a Blow and Die: The Classic Story of the Chilembwe Rising* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1975).

⁶ William J. Livingstone was cousin to Alexander Livingstone Bruce, who was son to Agnes Livingstone and, therefore, a direct descendant of David Livingstone. William was stationed at Magomero while Alexander L. Bruce was manager at the Luwelezi Estate, a few hours away in Mulanje. In January of 1915, A. L. Bruce was up in northern Malawi, fighting for the Crown in the First World War.

⁷ David Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1858).

⁸ Meriel Buxton, *David Livingstone* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 106.

⁹ Oliver Ransford, *David Livingstone: The Dark Interior* (London: John Murray, 1978), 159.

[sic] on the broad earth which the Lord has given to the children of men [sic]".¹⁰ Indeed, it was Livingstone's desire for Britain have a colony in Central Africa, and the Shire Highlands would be his Ground Zero. Between 1859 and 1860, he wrote extensively to his dear friends, Sir Thomas Maclear and Sir Roderick Murchison:

It is that the interior of this country ought to be colonised by our countrymen... I see more in that for the benefit of England and Africa than in any other plan... I am becoming everyday more convinced that we must have an English colony in the cotton-producing districts of Africa... Colonisation from a country such as ours ought to be one of hope, and not despair... the performance of an imperative duty to our blood, our country, our religion, and to humankind.¹¹

“This leads me to the wider problem... Mission, as we speak of it today, is a European creation. (Of course, the same can be said of both its ecclesiology and theology.)”

He later added that if large numbers of the British urban poor emigrated to Africa they could begin new lives, no longer “crowded together in cities... in close ill-ventilated narrow lanes... But they [English colonists] can take a leading part in managing the land, improving the quality, increasing the quantity and extending the varieties of the production of the soil; and by taking a lead too in trade and in all public matters, the Englishman would be an unmixed advantage to every one below and around him, for he would fill a place which is now practically vacant.”¹²

In Livingstone's defence, Tim Jeal suggests that Livingstone's ideas of colonialism are quite different from what we understand to be colonialism today. He says:

His contemporaries, when they heard the words “The British Empire”, did not think of multiracial subject nations bowing to a central imperial power. Their pride in Empire was not the late-Victorian love of prestige and power, but more a pride in the idea that British men and women had settled in distant

and previously thinly populated parts of the world, and were there reproducing all that was best in the British way of life – a free press, trial by jury and government by representative institutions. Most of Livingstone's fellow-countrymen during the 1850s saw Empire as the link of common nationality that bound together, more by voluntary union than by power, a mother country and her white settled, and soon to be self-governing, colonies overseas. In this family, the West Indies and, above all, India

were seen as strange anomalies simply because they, unlike for example Canada, Australia and New Zealand, had large “native” populations and were not predominantly “British” and white.¹³

I am not convinced Tim Jeal is right. We know that the British Raj in India started in 1858, long before the European colonisation of Africa, and that the Raj was

not about “reproducing all that was best in the British way of life”. Thirty years after Livingstone brought the UMCA to my home, Malawi became a British Protectorate. In the following year, Livingstone's family – his daughter Agnes, and her husband, Alexander Low Bruce – acquired the land that had been given to the UMCA plus 70,000 acres around it and turned it into a colonial estate. This estate was the centre of the events of 23 January 1915. My ancestor, Mtimawanzako Nacho, died by suicide in 1945 after years of conflict with his neighbours of the A. L. Bruce Estates.

BISHOP COLENZO IS DEAD

Chilembwe's mentor, a Derbyshire man by the name Joseph Booth, was a missionary in Malawi in the 1890s.¹⁴ He arrived in Malawi in 1891 and was deported from the country by the British colonial government in 1907. He, however, visited South Africa in 1896 to promote African agency in mission especially among the Zulu Christians. As a white man, though, he was met with extreme suspicion. In the 1890s, the Zulus had a

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹² Tim Jeal, *Livingstone* (New York: Dell, 1973), 224.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 188.

¹⁴ For more on Joseph Booth, please see Harry W. Langworthy, “Africa for the African”: *The Life of Joseph Booth* (Blantyre, Malawi: Christian Literature Association in Malawi, 1996). Also Harry W. Langworthy, “Joseph Booth, Prophet of Radical Change in Central and South Africa, 1891–1915,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 16, no. 1 (1986).

reminder for anyone wanting to deal with white people: “Bishop Colenso is dead.”¹⁵ That was to say the only white man they could trust, Bishop Colenso, was dead. It was of no use trusting any white man because white men – both missionaries and colonial farmers – were all violent “men of guns”. Bishop John William Colenso (born in Cornwall in 1814 and died in Durban in 1883) was the first Bishop of Natal and as his biographies say, a fervent defender of the Zulu against both the Boer and British aggressions, including the Anglo–Zulu War of 1879.¹⁶ He also defended other African tribes, gaining a title *Sobantu* in the process – the father of the people. His death at a time when the Scramble for Africa was brewing made it difficult for the Africans to trust Europeans. In 1897, Booth published a fiery anti-colonialist manifesto entitled *Africa for the Africans*, which planted seeds that would lead to Chilembwe’s uprising in 1915.

Magomero is just one example of what happens when mission and colonialism become one. That David Livingstone’s mission station became his daughter’s colonial estate and that its managers then persecuted local Christians, burning their houses and schools and forcing them to work on the estate for free, reveals the problem of attaching mission to colonialism. After the murder of W. J. Livingstone, the British government killed many Malawian Christians, jailed many more, including several British missionaries who sympathised with the Africans, especially of the smaller denominations like the Churches of Christ. Laws were passed that required all the major churches to have white leaders. Any new churches that required registration had to have Europeans as leaders. All black-led churches were closely monitored to make sure there would be no repeat of Chilembwe’s uprising.

As a Malawian Christian from Magomero, my family has lived the story that proves that mission and colonialism were, for most Africans, two sides of the same coin of *imperialism*. Magomero shows why missionaries have been called the “religious arm of the colonial empires”, “the ideological shock troops for the colonial invasion whose zealotry had blinded them”,¹⁷ “the spiritual wing of secular imperialism”,¹⁸ or even “imperialism at prayer”.¹⁹ In a nutshell, for many of us in the non-western world, mission and colonialism were strange

bedfellows. I do not have space to rehash the history. I do not have problems with the historicity of the relationship between mission and colonialism. This leads me to the wider problem at the centre of this essay. Mission, as we speak of it today, is a European creation. (Of course, the same can be said of both its ecclesiology and theology.) The word “mission” itself did not mean the sending of Christians from Christian lands to non-Christian lands to convert the “heathens” or “pagans” until after the Reformation. It was the Jesuits (and the Society of Jesus was formed in 1540) who first used mission the way we do today. Contemporary mission is a European creation of a particular era when Europeans were becoming aware of the wider world beyond the bounds of Western Europe. That world, in the minds of the Europeans, needed to be Christianised and civilised by Europeans who were lucky to have been chosen to be both Christians and civilised people of that time. Beginning in the West Indies, moving down to Latin America, then up to North America, Asia and then Africa, Europeans worked hard to Christianise and civilise the world. At the centre of that effort was the belief that Europeans were destined to be superior to all the other peoples of the world. In a nutshell then, the very concept of mission as we understand it today has racism and white supremacy in its DNA. Mission, understood in this Eurocentric sense, could be easily used to serve European interests around the world. It is for this reason that the discipline of missiology continues to be a white-dominated subject even though white Christians form less than a third of world Christians. It is again for this reason that our very definitions in missiology, for instance that of a missionary, are still shaped by Eurocentric ideas – British Christians teaching English in Uganda are missionaries while Ugandan Christian nurses in Britain are migrants. It is also for this reason that when we talk about mission, we always generally speak in terms of sending European missionaries to other parts of the world like Africa even though Africa is more Christian than Europe. The “heathen” – to use the European language of the last century – is now in Europe, yet mission organisations are still focused on converting the Africans. Of course, Roland Allen and others have shown us that mission, as we practise it today, looks quite different from what we see in the New

¹⁵ George Shepperson and Thomas Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting, and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1958).

¹⁶ He seems to have been a passionate defender of all things African, especially against British colonialism. See George William Cox, *The Life of John William Colenso, D.D.: Bishop of Natal*, vol. 1 (London: W. Ridgway, 1888).

¹⁷ See, for instance, Edward E. Andrews, “Christian Missions and Colonial Empires Reconsidered: A Black Evangelist in West Africa, 1766–1816,” *Journal of Church and State* 51, no. 4 (Autumn 2009): 663–64.

¹⁸ John D. Omer-Cooper et al., *The Making of Modern Africa: The Growth of African Civilization*, vol. 2 (New York: Longman, 1968).

¹⁹ Lamin O. Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 88.

Testament.²⁰ Our missionary methods would, strictly speaking, be unrecognisable to Paul.

Essentially, we need to rethink mission for a world where images of a blue-eyed blond-haired Jesus are questionable. We need to learn how to engage in mission when all that the missionary brings is the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ minus a superior culture that seeks to civilise. Of course, empires colonise. That is what they do. Effective colonisation of a people must involve a changing of the people's life philosophy, self-identification and culture. Christianity has been an integral part of the expansion of European empires since the fifteenth century. The world Christianity that we celebrate today has emerged because of the past 600 years of western domination of other parts of the world. There has been the Spanish/Iberian Empire that colonised Latin America while the Portuguese Empire colonised Brazil and parts of Africa and India. At its peak, the British Empire stretched across all time zones. The era of European colonisation of Africa was short, largely running from the 1880s to the 1960s, but it has had drastic effects of the continent, many of which are yet to be resolved. At some point in the twentieth century, 6,000 British farmers owned the fertile 60 percent of Zimbabwe's land, leaving millions of indigenous Zimbabweans to live on the remaining 40 per cent.²¹ Of course, in the nineteenth century alone, a quarter of Europe's population migrated to the Americas, Africa, Australia, colonising and Christianising as they went. We are now living through the age of the American Empire, but the tides are changing. Samuel Huntington suggested in his 1996 book *The Clash of Civilisations* that the western civilisation now faces competition from other civilisations.²² Today, it is evident that both Russia and China have become even more influential players on the global political scene. This will, without a doubt, have an impact on western missions. As long as we keep attaching this beautiful and life-giving *missio Dei* to empires, it will always be used to marginalise, dominate and colonise others.

Non-western Christianity (which forms almost 70 per cent of world Christianity) is a religion without imperial powers. In many aspects, it is a religion pushing back against empires and in this sense, it is closer to pre-Constantine Christianity. Of course, it helps to remember that Jesus Christ was executed in his home country by a colonial power. The challenge for all of us

as followers of Christ in the world is to put into practice the words of Paul that we are one in Christ – that in him, there is neither Greek nor Jew, neither male nor female, and neither free nor slave. Our baptism into the body of Christ makes us all equal, and that is the most important thing. But the call is not only to treat those of our faith as equals, as if it gives us a warrant to treat those outside the faith as less than us. All humanity is God's humanity, made in God's image. It is God who made us different *and* equal, and I am certain that God did not mean the differences to negate the equality. White supremacy is a lie invented by humans. It has benefitted many white people for generations going back 600 years when it has been ferociously enforced in parts of the world. It has created a world order in which to be white is normal; everyone else is a person of colour. This black skin is God's work, God's gift to the world through me. Unfortunately, it is not a gift that is easily received – it covers me in a colour that many find unacceptable. If anyone really believes that their skin colour makes them individually better or superior (without the privileges that come with being white and living in a world shaped by white people for other white people), they have to encounter Christ again. God's Spirit will not let the sin of racism in all its forms – including both white supremacy and black supremacy and every colour in between – go unrevealed.

MISSION AFTER GEORGE FLOYD

The death of George Floyd has made it possible for us to talk about race in ways that were not possible before. It is possible for us to actually have an audience and a conversation about the plight of black people. George Floyd's death has made it difficult to ignore or deny the existence of racism and white supremacy. Many white people *finally* agree that black people are often treated inhumanely by systems designed to protect and preserve whiteness, that black people are often treated as if they are a threat to whiteness – to white lives, white bodies, white properties, white everything. Black people have, for ages, complained about racism in this world and have always been told to shut up and move on. Four hundred and fifty years of the European slave trade – we are not even talking about the Arabic slave trade, which went on for much longer – was followed by 80 years of colonialism and another 60 years of neo-colonialism, yet, when black people complain, they have often been told “all that happened in the past”. My hope is that this anti-racism momentum that has galvanised many

²⁰ Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962).

²¹ Sam Moyo and Walter Chambati, eds., *Land and Agrarian Reform in Zimbabwe: Beyond White-Settler Capitalism* (Dakar: CODESRIA African Institute for Agrarian Studies, 2013), 42.

²² Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Touchstone, 1997).

to stand with the Black Lives Matter movement leads to real changes in our societies. Of course, I am not entirely optimistic about this – black oppression has been around for 600 years. It only changes strategies – the slave trade, the Jim Crow laws in the US and colonialism in Africa, and then mass incarceration in the US and economic colonialism in Africa. European Christianity has been complicit in all this, and it will be complicit in whatever new strategy of oppressing black people will emerge. At least for now, we can *name* racism and white supremacy for the evil they are. I hope that both mission agencies and the discipline of missiology will be transformed.

For mission agencies, engaging in mission in a world where racism and white supremacy are discredited will be a new adventure for most of us, but I am certain it will take us closer to mission as it was intended to be. Many mission agencies will have to find new ways to exist with diminishing help from western empires due to growing secularism on the one hand (which has weakened western Christianity) and the rise of non-western empires on the other. Current western dominance in mission does not reflect the true picture of world Christianity, and the only way we can justify it is by pointing back to the colonial era – this is how it has always been. The very methods of western mission in the world are questionable today, and yet many of them cannot afford to let others lead. In a world *without* racism or white supremacy, most of the mission agencies in the West would be led by Latin Americans, Africans or Asians, to a greater success and better faithfulness to God’s mission. Any European or North American (we can include Australian and New Zealander) mission organisation that sends missionaries to other parts of the world and has more than half their leadership and personnel as white is part of the problem. This is a gross incongruency in a world where, potentially, most missionaries will come from Latin America, Africa and Asia.

For missiology – the teachers, their pedagogy and the resources they use – must reflect the very fact that mission is no longer a western phenomenon. The very fact that black and brown people form less than 5 per cent of theology and missiology lecturers in the UK is symptomatic of the problem. Black and brown people form 14 per cent of the population in the UK, yet they comprise a significantly large percentage of theology and missiology students across the country. It should

not be possible to teach mission in any of our cities with an all-white team. Yet this is common, and generally speaking, most theology and missiology syllabi across UK institutions will have no less than 100 per cent white-authored books for students to read. Our church planting courses seem to ignore the fact that African movements are planting the most churches and are growing their churches the fastest, and the possibility that they know a thing or two to teach.

CONCLUSION

“Black Lives Matter” makes a critique of a system that Christianity helped create. The church must listen. It must reflect. Having done that, it must make practical steps to correct itself. I sincerely hope that changes will happen in these few months that will make us a more perfect bride for Christ and partner for God’s mission. May the Lord help us.



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HOPE REIMAGINED MAKING THE WORLD THAT OUGHT TO BE

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Lusa Nsenga-Ngoy

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.” Maya Angelou

“And if all others accepted the lie which the Party imposed – if all records told the same tale – then the lie passed into history and became truth. ‘Who controls the past,’ ran the Party slogan, ‘controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.’” George Orwell

We have all witnessed the drama that unfolded on a street corner in the city of Minneapolis as the lifeless body of a then anonymous black man was carried on a stretcher, away from the gaze of the onlooking crowd. As I first watched the video, incredulous and unsure of what I was witnessing, a familiar protest and a rage slowly arose from my soul. Once I understood what was happening, I tried to avert my eyes, but the images of this agonising man were indelibly etched in my mind and the sound of his dying pleas continued to haunt my mind with echoes of the anguish of a life accustomed to powerlessness and abuse. In him I saw myself and a host of black lives violated and stripped of all humanity. In this scene, I saw played out 400 years of history in which the full weight of a society imbued with white supremacist logic and ideology refuses to lift its knee from black necks.

In that instant, through that story, I was acutely reminded both of my identity as a black man and of how the fetishisation of black bodies has, throughout modern history, been the locus of fantasies that have contributed to cultural, spiritual and physical decimation. This murder was not an isolated incident, but belongs to a narrative with well-rehearsed themes and motifs; one that penetrates and permeates all spheres of the racialised spaces we inhabit.

The ghastly murder of George Floyd at the hands of Derek Chauvin, a white police officer, would have likely remained just another inconsequential and unfortunate incident of twenty-first century America if it had not been for the diligent work of a 17-year-old schoolgirl. As Darnella Frazier posted her 10 minute and six second long video in the early hours of 26 May, little did she imagine the impact that these images would have on her community, let alone the world. Indeed, this tragic event triggered an unprecedented worldwide wave of protest calling for an end to systemic racism and affirming in a global chorus that Black Lives Matter. Darnella has since been heralded as possibly the most influential filmmaker of the century. As such, her actions in posting this video may be interpreted less as reporting that titillates our voyeuristic tendencies, but instead as an invitation to unlock an essential

characteristic of human identity: imagination.

If she is the filmmaker we want to celebrate, we ought to recognise that the script from which she captured this scene is directly drawn from the heart of a society whose essence is forged in the ideology of white supremacy. Sadly, as the evidence suggests, it comes with provision of a multiplicity of prequels and sequels that all follow a similarly tragic story line. It is indeed impossible to understand George Floyd’s death without understanding the personal, cultural, social, legal, structural, philosophical and moral scaffolding that supports and sustains a society that assigns intrinsic value to some lives while denying that same value to others. Recognising that is choosing to see the ubiquitous reality of racism in all aspects of life.

As a young black woman, Darnella attempts to escape what seems like an inextricable narrative that perpetuates the genocidal intents of its architects. Her publication of this gruesome video becomes therefore a prophetic performative act that invites the viewer to question the status quo and challenge the architectonic structure of ignorance, exclusion and abuse. In this simple act, this black teenager invites the viewer to re-examine the narratives that we are so keen to preserve.

Through the eyes of this inconspicuous teenager, George Floyd’s callous murder becomes an allegory of the world we are entrapped in, one that is destined to devastate, colonise, and subjugate all areas that make for mutual flourishing. Her short film becomes a witness against what disfigures, commodifies and objectifies. Her video is a protest against a world that marginalises and minoritises. This allegory asks questions of us. It interrogates and challenges our assumptions and invites us to imagine, or better to reimagine, this world beyond exclusivist universalism preoccupied with categorisation and classification.

Darnella Frazier’s video is an implicit critique of the status quo. It firmly locates us at the intersection of race, power, violence and gender. It names our collusion and silences, and provokes us out of the numbing grips of privilege into committed action. It invites us to explore oppression and resistance, and to break the hold that imperialist narratives so easily have on humanity. Crucially, it demands that we rethink personhood beyond categories that foster fracture in order to reset a vision of humanity freed from the diktat of mastery¹.

The challenge, I find, is to think of a world beyond the default assumptions that we have been fed,

¹ A helpful exploration of the question of mastery can be found in the compelling work of Julieta Singh, *Unthinking Mastery: Dehumanism and Decolonial Entanglements* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018).

where identity is not experienced as being bound by what we know about life, but where we experience a liberative expression of personhood that transcends circumstances. This world becomes possible and viable through imagination. Indeed, imagination has powered in no small way radical changes throughout history, fostering a collective narrative of a world none of us have lived in, but long for. William Blake encapsulates it beautifully as he states that “What is now proved was once only imagined.”² Andy Sterling refers to it as the stickiness of imagined futures. This is, in essence, the mark of afrofuturism.

THE FUTURE REIMAGINED

The term afrofuturism was conceived in the 1990s by the white American author Mark Dery in his essay “Black to the Future”, in which he explores speculative fiction within the African diaspora. He defines afrofuturism as a reimagining (not merely reinterpretation) of the future through black culture and African tradition.

Afrofuturism finds its expression in any field from literature, arts, cinema and music to science and technology, and is infused with Afrocentricity. Its influence is evident in the work of Octavia Butler, in the music of Sun Ra, Erykah Badu or Janelle Monae. More recently, the successful movie *Black Panther*, from the Marvel universe, brought to the fore themes of afrofuturism.³ This is what Malorie Blackman does in her speculative fiction *Noughts and Crosses*, where she depicts a version of history in which twenty-first century Britain is ruled by people of African descent who have colonised and enslaved white Europeans. Part of Blackman’s aspiration, like many of the proponents of afrofuturism, is an attempt to release the imagination in order to sublimate the impossible, to reimagine a different world, a better world. This reimagining is inexorably turned towards the future, a future in which what was alienated is sublimated.

“As in biblical prophetic chronology, there is a shift from a linear vision of time to a dimension where past, present and future collapse into each other, carrying the seeds of hope for a redeemed future.”

This rethinking of history beyond existing categories creates a sense of agency. It is an extension of the mind, a quest for transformative and liberative novelty. In this perspective, the use of imagination is not mere escapism, but a tool of resistance and resilience helping to deconstruct the epistemology that commodifies and objectifies black lives. In many ways, it could be argued that this imagining advocated by afrofuturism is an intentional bridging of past, present and future. Indeed, afrofuturism is about a vision of life harkening to the past, rooted in the present and pointing towards the future. As in biblical prophetic chronology, there is a shift from a linear vision of time to a dimension where past, present and future collapse into each other, carrying the seeds of hope for a redeemed future.

Furthermore, this radical rethinking of history does not hypothesise the devastation of other worlds in order to build itself. Instead, it is concerned with an imaginative effort to build the true, the good and the beautiful.

It critiques homo-social and heteropatriarchal environments that enforce particular ideas of what it means to be human. One of its implicit questions is how to deconstruct the learned ways of entering the world and how to develop an ethics that will help us inhabit the world to come. From an afrofuturist perspective, this only becomes possible when we recognise that our relationship to the world is never *a priori*, but always mediated through history and human interrelatedness.

This has strong resonance with the vision of the temporal and spatial continuum as understood in many African cultures. For my own people, the Luba of Katanga, it is best illustrated in the fact that we use the same word for yesterday and tomorrow; the difference only informed by the context. Yesterday determines today and tomorrow. Equally, tomorrow will define a future yesterday. The corollary is that no single act, no single moment, exists in isolation from all others. Therefore, memory and legacy become vital categories in defining human agency and interaction

² William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

³ Mark Dery, Ed, “Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tata, and Tricia Rose” in *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyber Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 180–222.

with the environment they share. Furthermore, our cosmogony does not envisage a binary and polarised universe. Instead, it believes in a world order where the sacred and the profane are intricately intertwined, thus framing the socio-spiritual ecology in ways that affirm mutuality and interdependence. It is often best encapsulated in the notion of Ubuntu, the African philosophy of life that postulates personhood in relational terms, highlighting mutuality in responsibility and resisting the attempt to imperialise perspective. It sets collaboration and deliberation at a premium.⁴

Inevitably, this approach causes us to rethink some fundamental theological questions, in particular on issues pertaining to eschatology. If we accept the hypothesis of a vision of time that is not linear, we may also presume that history is not geared towards a climatic point, but that every moment in time is both a genesis and an apocalypse. Every moment in time holds all the potential and aspiration contained in the moment and movement of creation. Relatedly, every moment contains all the force of the eschaton that calls for justice and judgement. In any case, both genesis and apocalypse are predicated on the vision of a world as it ought to be, reconciled with and within itself.

Such a world vision collided with the one promoted by western missional ventures of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, established on a radically different narrative of the world and subjected to a rhetoric of mastery and subjugation. This missional approach contributed in devastating and colonising not merely the land, but also the imaginative capacity of a people, stripping them of agency. Western Christian missionary enterprise typically served as an extension of the imperial and colonial project. Furthermore, western mission, in its inability to divorce its epistemology and hermeneutics from imperialist and colonising narratives failed to incorporate subjugated people in the narratives they built of the future. The church and society that emerged out of it still bear the scars of these dehumanising and objectifying narratives.

INTERRUPTIONS AND THE IMAGINATIVE REFRAMING OF THE FUTURE

In light of this past, Mark Dery's question resonates with renewed pertinence and urgency: "Can a community whose past has been deliberately rubbed out, and whose energies have subsequently been consumed

by the search for legible traces of its history, imagine possible futures?"⁵

I would argue that part of the answer dwells in our capacity to rethink and critically examine the past as a redeemable category. To that end, we have to name the faultlines of history and discard the postulation that it has a neutral footprint. We need the courage and humility to face the disruption and interruption that can only emerge out of a refusal to yield to absolutist processes and narratives. Perhaps this is the kind of wisdom echoed in Kierkegaard's claim that life is only understood backwards, but must be lived forwards.

It could be argued that in the story of faith as shared in Jewish and Christian traditions there is an expectation to embrace the dislocation and disruption of history that leads to radical reorientation. Indeed, biblical narrative is saturated with stories of disorientation, interruption and dislocation, as if to remind the reader/hearer of sacred literature that God does not operate in straight uninterrupted lines. Instead, there seems to be a bias towards interruption. The story of incarnation is itself framed in interruption, dislocation and reorientation.

It is to me evident that as we reassess the legacy of historic missional enterprise and reframe the Church's mission and ministry for the future, we need a new hermeneutical imagination to see that the world-that-is is not the world-that-ought-to-be. We need to draw wisdom from the black intellectual tradition that is not categorised, but has to interface with all aspects of the experience of black life as it sets the foundation for a future in which all flourish, including black bodies.

Any faithful reading of Scripture and any redeeming expression of the Church's mission may therefore require a commitment to expose received wisdom to the scrutiny of imaginative reframing of personhood and history in ways that foster mutuality and effect liberation. Only then are we able to build a sense of shared identity that is not bound by what we know of life but transcends it. Only then can we envisage a truly culturally and ethnically integrated expression of the church in her mission and ministry.

The ethics and aesthetics of afrofuturism do not set the questions *a priori*, but promote a continued and concerted action. This means that it cannot solely depend on categorisation, but needs to take experience seriously. Such an approach is less susceptible to the diktat of imperialist and exclusivist narratives. Instead, it stands as an invitation to an ethics that is communal,

⁴ For more insights into the concept of Ubuntu, a good starting point could be the recently published volume by Ogunde James, Ed., *Ubuntu and the Reconstitution of Community* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019).

⁵ Mark Dery, *ibid.*

global and planetary. It reminds us that our rapport to the world is mediated by history. We are conditioned by memory, and therefore any aspiration towards a redeemed world demands honest engagement with memory (especially the kind that induces trauma) and bold assessment of history's legacy.

In this vein, Jessie Sutherlands, in her work fostering community change, often speaks of the need to do radical emotional composting. She argues that we cannot do away with the disfiguring power of the past, but we can channel it into a gift to help heal the same world that hurts us.⁶ However, as with afrofuturist philosophy, the commitment is towards the emergence of a new world, emancipated from the values and norms of the old one. Both perspectives require interruption of the forces of subjugation and objectification and posit agency that leaves a legacy of community as the ultimate expression of personhood in this new world. In substance, our embodied selves can be an interrupting presence that help dismantle narratives that foster fracture and disintegration and ultimately suffocate hope.

Crucially though, this process engenders the kind of repentant reflection and action that should lead to redeemed and reconciled relations in solidarity with the historically excluded, persecuted and oppressed. It persists in the face of the violence and the abuse and insists that we practice togetherness and accept the invitation to live together in love. It requires of us an unrelenting denunciation and renunciation of philosophies preoccupied with category and classification and that we oppose systemic racism that is, in many respects, their ultimate brainchild.

A FUTURE AND A HOPE

Afrofuturism is only another critical lens among so many. However, as an artform, a practice, a methodology, it invites us to reconsider the vital question of who can tell a story of the future and who can feature in it. Moreover, as a possible theological frame, it helps us consider the question of what might it mean for black people (and indeed all historically marginalised and minoritised communities) to have a future despite a distressing past and present. The

divine promise of a future and a hope (Jer. 29:11) helps crystallise the question and give it a definitive theological category. The question of hope and future is an essential concern of the God who is invested in human history and committed to transform it in partnership with humanity.

Hope is the imagination that unlocks us from the cage of the worlds we build away from solidarity. In other terms, hope helps us develop a "we" that is not constructed as an alternative "I", and therefore takes us beyond the readily available reality of our own construction that only serves our own narratives. Hope makes possible the emergence of a new community that is communal and holistic in ethos. Such community helps us demystify and demythologise the pragmatic approach that is often predicated around the primacy of the individual at the expense of the collective.

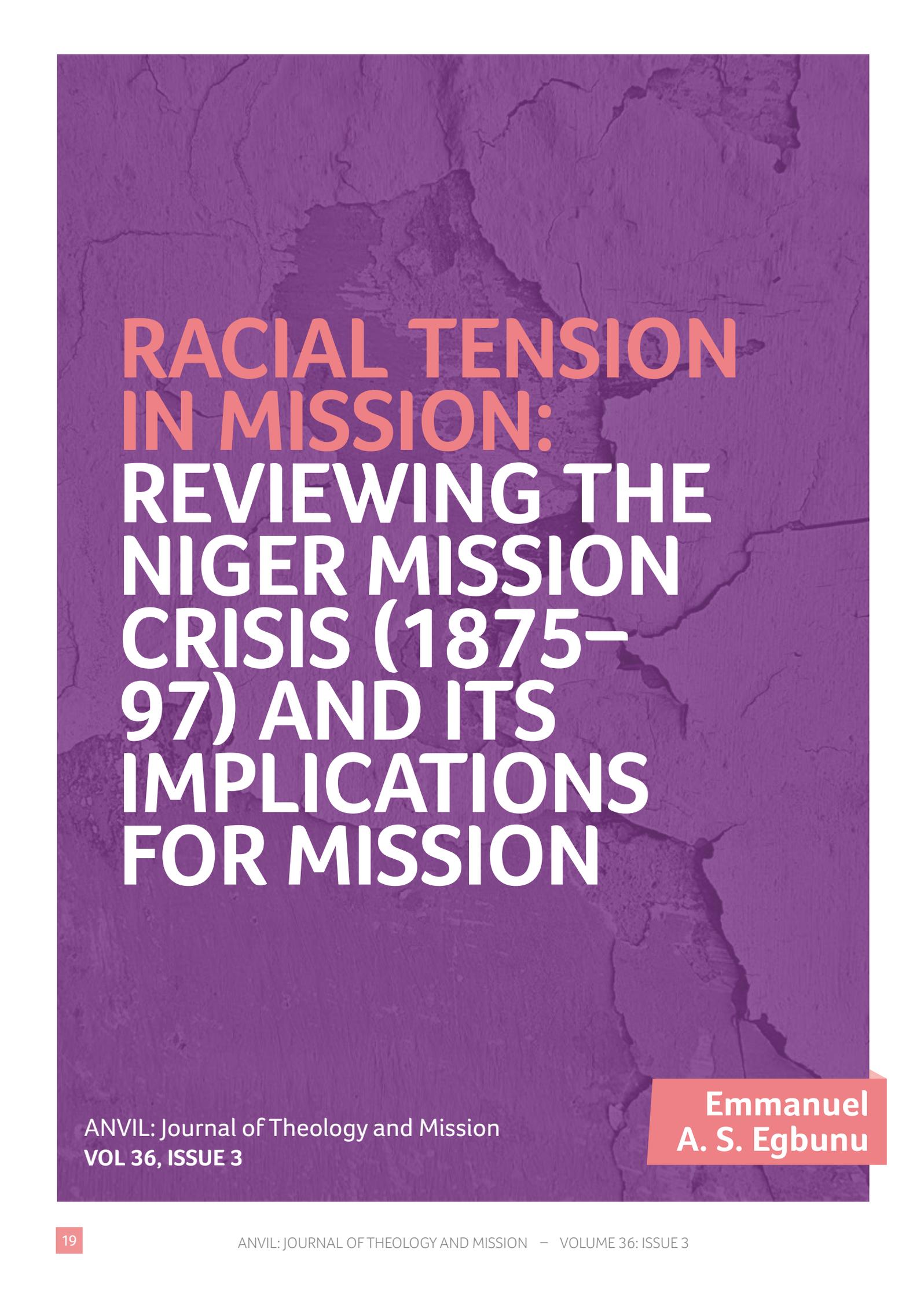
When it comes to capturing new realities, we ought to be mindful of the iconography that informs our understanding of reality. We live in a world where we are not only creating our own images, but we are being fed them continuously. They then conjure up a vision of the world, not as it is, but as it is imprinted by the stories we are subjected to. And people of African descent have tended not to be incorporated in many of the storylines about the future, including those stories told through western-centric missional narratives. And yet, afrofuturism reminds us that black stories matter, because they are as much my stories as they are the stories of white bodies. We should therefore care about each other's stories and use them as imaginative ferment for the redeemed future many of us long for.

What might tomorrow's mission look like? Afrofuturism might give us an insight in the possibility of such a world. It might help us to use imagination to retell the stories of our lives and of our world, to actively take action that helps to value our shared humanity. Like apocalyptic literature, afrofuturism invites us to reimagine a world that transcends the limitations of the world that entraps us. It resets the concept of personhood, of time and our own sense of reality and some of the paradigms we function under.

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⁶ Jessie Sutherland is the founding director of Intercultural Strategies, an organisation committed to helping divided people, communities or groups to work more cohesively and achieve a sense of mutual belonging.



**RACIAL TENSION
IN MISSION:
REVIEWING THE
NIGER MISSION
CRISIS (1875–
97) AND ITS
IMPLICATIONS
FOR MISSION**

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**Emmanuel
A. S. Egbunu**

INTRODUCTION

The sustained replanting of Christianity in Nigeria in 1842, which went beyond the coastlines to the interior, was like light penetrating darkness, bringing the transformation of the gospel to spiritually unenlightened world views.¹ CMS was the most visible player in this venture, and the acronym CMS still evokes nostalgia among many native communities in Nigeria as the midwife of Christianity with its associated benefits of western education and health facilities, among others. The earliest generations of elite and nationalists – both Christian converts and those who stuck to their religious beliefs – have traced their formation to these initiatives. CMS therefore enjoys the undisputed reputation of a benefactor institution.

Furthermore, the recaptives (liberated Africans) saw the rehabilitation efforts by CMS, sequel to the abolition of slave trade, as the restoration of their humanity from the shackles and dehumanisation of slavery – that blot on the African and western consciences.

Sooner or later, however, history always places events in the dock, and the sweet and the sour, the sentimental and the unsavoury, are cast in inescapable motifs that constrain a rethink. The Niger Mission Crisis is no exception. That dark period in the otherwise laudable CMS Niger mission encounter has been described as “the turning of the tide” (Ade-Ajayi), that period in the 1880s being “a transitional period, a decade of conflict and bitter racial feeling, of schismatic movements in all the existing missions, except of course, the Catholic”.² Olaseinde Ajayi refers to the period 1873–85 as “the end of an era... the gathering storm”,³ highlighting the early administrative issues that insinuated that the African mission agents were unfit for any meaningful work in the mission. Lamin Sanneh refers to it as

“The momentous drama in which Bishop Crowther was intended as the sacrificial victim had been confidently staged on the dismantled policy of Henry Venn, with missionary lightweights propped up to challenge Crowther’s Episcopal authority and alienate his achievement.”

“the debacle... years of turmoil”, highlighting how, by some unusual appointments, Edward Hutchinson, as lay secretary of CMS, undermined the legitimate roles of Bishop Crowther and virtually scandalised the enormous goodwill extended to the CMS by the native converts who were the chief beneficiaries of their initiatives.⁴ Jesse Page writes about “storm clouds” and “the crucible” but considered it needless to recount issues that had passed with time.⁵

THE HOPEFUL YEARS AND THE FIRST SIGNS OF RACIAL TENSIONS

Two key players come into focus in the administrative contrasts that played out – favourably at first, and tragically at a later stage. They are Henry Venn (CMS general secretary 1841–1873) and Hutchinson (lay secretary 1872–82), whose roles were critical in the events that have shaped history in different directions.

Henry Venn’s three-selves principle of a native church that would be self-propagating, self-financing and self-governing advocated that the foreign missionary should move on to the regions beyond, which would allow “the euthanasia of a mission”.

The rescued slave boy Samuel Ajayi Crowther became the principal actor in this hopeful venture. He kept close

to his heart the unrepayable debt of gratitude he owed to CMS. He was rescued on 7 April 1822 by an English patrol ship (men-of-war) and nurtured by CMS in Sierra Leone. Whatever he became thereafter he owed to the kind-heartedness of CMS. They taught him the gospel, baptised him (on 11 December 1825), trained him, put him on the second Niger expedition in 1841, and influenced his ordination in 1843 and his subsequent consecration as bishop in 1864. Venn, the CMS general

¹ This relates to the general human depravity without the light of the gospel, rather than a wholesale condemnation of the African culture as savage.

² J. F. Ade-Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841–1891: The Making of a New Elite* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1965), 235.

³ William Olaseinde Ajayi, *A History of the Niger and Northern Nigeria Missions, 1857–1914* (PhD diss., University of Bristol, 1963), 191.

⁴ Lamin Sanneh, “The CMS and the African Transformation: Samuel Ajayi Crowther and the Opening of Nigeria,” in *The Church Mission Society and World Christianity, 1799–1999*, Kevin Ward and Brian Stanley, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000), 192.

⁵ Jesse Page, *The Black Bishop Samuel Adjai Crowther* (New York Fleming H. Revell Company, 1909).

secretary, might well be called the chief architect of much of these developments. There was much goodwill and commitment from the supporting churches in England as reports from the mission field acquainted them with the progress and needs of the mission. His charge at his first synod in 1866 captures much of this.

As the possibility of Crowther becoming a bishop crystallised, Henry Townsend, also a pioneer CMS missionary, based in Abeokuta, mobilised every possible effort to resist this on racial grounds, until it became unconcealed rivalry and hostility. His correspondence with the CMS home office was filled with arguments emphasising white supremacy over the black man, sometimes using inflammatory language, sometimes even contradicting himself. According to him, “Native teachers of whatever grade have been received and respected by the chiefs and people only as being the agents or servants of white men...”⁶

Townsend was so strong in his distrust of black leadership that he opposed the ordination of even people like T. B. Macaulay, who had been trained at the same CMS training institution at Islington where he himself had been trained. The same objection was extended to Theophilus King, who had been a capable catechist at Lokoja in 1841 and had trained at Fourah Bay College, becoming Crowther’s able assistant in translation. As Townsend put it, “I have great doubt of young black clergymen. They want years of experience to give stability to their characters; we would rather have them as schoolmasters and catechists.”⁷ His views were shared by most of the white missionaries, and at a point the CMS home office felt constrained to caution about the tone of his letters, which had become unworthy of his vocation.⁸

Evaluating the progress of the mission at the approach of its 65th anniversary, an article in the *Church Missionary Intelligencer* asks probing questions and provides hopeful answers. This evaluation saw much potential in the possibility of the African Christian being entrusted with the task ahead:

Already the African Christian has been tried in this service. He has shown himself not only capable of understanding and receiving the truth of Christianity, but of communicating it to his fellow-

countrymen. On him the African climate exercises no malign influences; to him the languages of Africa present no impediment.⁹

The writer became more specific in pointing to Ajayi Crowther:

The native evangelist has been, tried and found to be reliable. We, at the first, doubted him, and feared to use him; but providential circumstances compelled us to bring him forward... He has been tried alone on the banks of the Niger. No white brother has stood by him there to counsel and direct him... Withdrawn from European superintendence, he has realized the presence of God, and walked conscientiously and in the fear of the Lord.¹⁰

He asks where such an African clergyman could be found to be entrusted with the episcopal responsibility, and points to the positive testimony of CMS about the Revd Samuel Crowther, who by then had put in nearly 21 fruitful years of ordained ministry. “To delay any longer the native Episcopate would be unduly to retard the development of the native church.”

Crowther’s biographer, Jesse Page, remarks that on the day of his eventual consecration, 29 June 1864, it had been arranged that Crowther should be presented by the two colonial Bishops present, but in the palpable excitement of the event, “the Bishop of Winchester, with kindly thoughtfulness, stepped forward, and waving aside Bishop Nixon, took his place beside Crowther, so that on such an occasion a double honour should be rendered to the African prelate,” walking him up to the archbishop.¹¹

BISHOP CROWTHER’S AMBIGUOUS EPISCOPAL JURISDICTION

Even though Henry Venn jubilantly called it the “full development of the native African church”,¹² his enthusiasm was not shared by the other white missionaries on the field. Crowther’s jurisdiction was ambiguously delineated as “the countries of Western Africa beyond the limits of our dominions”. Unpacking that vague description, Ade-Ajayi traced it as “West Africa from the Equator to the Senegal, with the

⁶ Cited in Ade-Ajayi, *Christian Missions*, 181: “Isaac Smith, Henry Townsend, David Hinderer and C.A. Gollmer to Major Strait, 29 October 1851; CMS. CA2/016.”

⁷ Cited in Ade-Ajayi, *Christian Missions*, 181: “Townsend to Venn, 21 October 1851, CMS CA2/085.”

⁸ Sanneh, “The CMS and the African Transformation,” 190.

⁹ *The Christian Missionary Intelligencer: A Monthly Journal of Missionary Information*, vol. XV (London: Church Missionary Society, 1864), 97–103.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Page, *The Black Bishop Samuel Adjai Crowther*, 188.

¹² Cited in Ade-Ajayi, *Christian Missions*, “Venn to Lamb, 23 January 1864; CMS CA2/L3.”

exception of the British colonies of Lagos, the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone”.¹³

In a diocese so vast, with a mandate so ambiguous, Crowther was based in Lagos for administrative convenience, and yet Lagos was not part of his diocese, for the whites were there, and it was not considered a good idea that white men should be seen to be under the authority of a black man.¹⁴ His work spread to Igboland but administrative problems and other difficulties like transportation and the lack of cooperation of the British traders and white colleagues like Townsend and the others in the Yoruba Mission made his ministry turbulent, especially towards the end. Venn had written, appealing to each of the European missionaries, “Be you a brother to Bishop Crowther. You will be abundantly repaid. God destines him for a great work. I should rejoice to be a helper, however, to him.”¹⁵ Townsend would have none of that, nor would any of the European missionaries. It was a shocking realisation for the Parent Committee.

Crowther faced other challenges, for most of the workers he recruited came from Sierra Leone and were more interested in comfortable conditions and their status than the sacrifices that the ministry demanded. Some of his assistants had serious moral lapses. In Bonny, for instance, a pioneer agent, J. K. Webber, raped a 10-year old schoolgirl, and there were similar cases about that same time. All these reflected badly on Crowther’s disciplinary competence.

BISHOP CROWTHER’S HUMILIATION

Things began to unfold very quickly as one thing led inevitably to another. The distrust in Crowther’s ability to run a “purely native mission” became louder.

When his mission supporters in England provided a steamer named *Henry Venn* for his missionary work, he placed it in the hands of an African merchant with the intention of making it pay its way by trading on the Niger and to provide for the mission from its profits. The European merchants insinuated that it would be used in competition with their business interests rather than propagating the gospel. Hutchinson, the sitting CMS lay secretary, overruled Crowther by appointing J. H. Ashcroft, a European lay agent to take over the financial and administrative responsibilities of the Niger mission in 1879. According to him, it was to relieve Bishop

Crowther of the concerns about the temporal affairs of the mission and leave his “mind free for the more solemn and important spiritual duties”.¹⁶ It turned out to be actually a demotion for the bishop, for the steamer was hardly available to him even for his episcopal visits.

Though Bishop Crowther was willing to welcome Ashcroft, the administrative anomalies of this arrangement became evident, for the latter saw this position as one that placed him in supervision over Bishop Crowther himself. When the brewing power struggle surfaced and escalated into a full-blown crisis, Hutchinson had more confidence in the account of the European laymen than in Bishop Crowther, who was their own man. The racial and commercial discrimination could no longer be concealed. By 1880 a Commission of Inquiry was set up to look into the affairs of the mission. Dismissal of many African agents, new appointments and restructuring were arbitrarily carried out without sensitivity to the African personnel. The person and position of the venerable old bishop was rudely assaulted and he was constrained to dictate his resignation. Ade-Ajayi makes this sobering and haunting comment on the scenario:

Few scenes could have been more painful to watch than the grey-haired old Bishop of over 80 active years, tormented and insulted by the young Europeans, trembling with rage as he never trembled before, as he got up to announce his resignation from the committee.¹⁷

Unknown to Bishop Crowther, Revd J. B. Wood, the secretary of the finance committee, wrote a damaging report which charged African mission agents with serious offences and scandalous crimes ranging from immorality to manslaughter. It soon became public knowledge in England, while the bishop was still unaware. The lack of consensus in opinion at the home office concerning these damaging allegations, with no input from the bishop himself, necessitated the setting up of an investigation committee consisting of Hutchinson and Revd J. B. Whiting to investigate the situation more objectively. Revd Whiting was more sympathetic to the African perspective and the need for fair hearing. The meeting was held at Madeira in March 1881, but Wood, who wrote the report, was himself absent. Bishop Crowther however had his opportunity to defend the allegations by placing the accusations in

¹³ *Ibid.*, 206.

¹⁴ Jeanne Decorvet and Emmanuel Oladipo, *Samuel Ajayi Crowther: The Miracle of Grace*, (Lagos: CSS Bookshops, 2006), 102.

¹⁵ Cited in Ade-Ajayi, *Christian Missions*, 195: “Venn to Mann, 24 April 1865; CMS CA3/L3.”

¹⁶ Cited in G. O. M. Tasie, *Christian Missionary Enterprise in the Niger Delta 1864–1918* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 89: “E. Hutchinson to S.A. Crowther, 26 April 1878, enclosed ‘Memorandum on the Financial Arrangements for the Niger Mission’.”

¹⁷ Ade-Ajayi. *Christian Missions*, 253.

context. Far-reaching decisions were taken to redress the situation: a training institution was recommended for Lokoja, and a pay rise was approved to encourage the African agents' wives to give up trading and be fully devoted to the ministry with their husbands. Hutchinson, Ashcroft and Kirk, who were the key collaborators, either resigned or were dismissed. Within this turbulent period, Bishop Crowther suffered the loss of his mother and the prolonged ill health and eventual death of his dear wife.

BISHOP CROWTHER'S LIMITATION AS A DISCIPLINARIAN

It must be conceded that the charge of administrative incompetence brought against Bishop Crowther had to do with the discipline of his workers. In Ade-Ajayi's view, however, Bishop Crowther was a pastor at heart and was not inclined to hastily apply dismissal on erring staff. Rather, he preferred the gentle and hopeful option of suspension as an opportunity for reflection, repentance and restoration. He was more concerned about reclaiming the prodigal rather than losing them. Ade-Ajayi however concedes that "for a pioneer he was too reasonable, too soft a disciplinarian". That notwithstanding, the insolence of the young missionaries who came to discredit Bishop Crowther's longstanding achievements was inexcusable. Ade-Ajayi describes them as "able, young, zealous, impetuous, uncharitable and opinionated"; the oldest of them, the Revd J. A. Johnson, was only 29.¹⁸

ETHIOPIANISM

The missionary enterprise, which had been struggling to extricate itself from the stranglehold of colonial complicity, found itself on a collision path with the eruption of nationalistic passions in the form of Ethiopianism – an African nationalist movement expressed through the medium of the church, inspired by Ps. 68:31: "Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hands to God." This was fast gaining ground in the period 1875–90. According to E. A. Ayandele, its legitimacy was on solid ground:

Unrestricted access to the Bible, with its notions of equality, justice and non-racialism, provided the early converts with a valid weapon which they were not reluctant to employ against the missionaries who brushed these ideas aside in

church administration and in their relations with the converts.¹⁹

A major feature was the assertion of racial independence in both politics and mission. Prominent Africans like James Johnson (also referred to as Holy Johnson) and Mojola Agbebi, who were highly educated, were frontliners even as key mission staff, the one CMS, the other Baptist.

There were other far-reaching effects of the humiliation of Crowther. The Nigerian Baptists, seeing what had happened, and with their Southern Baptist missionaries withdrawn during the American Civil War, asserted their control of the mission and, by 1888, broke away as the Native Baptist Church, taking with them the great African pioneers. Agbebi was the key player.

At Lokoja, where CMS had its strategic mission station in the Lower Niger Mission, the same factors of racism and high-handedness were played out, and Ayandele confirms the impressions about Christianity in Lokoja at this time from the perspective of the young breed missionaries:

They branded all the converts in Lokoja adulterers and harlots and dismissed them from Church membership until they confessed their iniquities one by one; the Muslims were told that the African missionaries who had been working in Lokoja were not Christians but *kafiris*, that is, infidels.²⁰

This certainly was the picture of a house divided against itself and was by no means a positive image of mission.

G. O. M. Tasié's work *Christian Missionary Enterprise in the Niger Delta 1864–1918* takes a penetrating missiological look at the factors that have often been sentimentalised by social and political historians. For him, these nationalistic interpretations undermined the critical importance of a strong ethical foundation that was required in the encounter of Christianity with the indigenous world view that they sought to influence at this time. He pitched the issues against the fundamental ethics and teaching of Christianity. Beginning from the leadership question, he observes that even though Bishop Crowther was physically, mentally, psychologically and spiritually equipped for the difficult ministry terrain of the Niger Delta mission, he was clearly weak as an administrator and disciplinarian.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 250.

¹⁹ E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842–1914, A Political and Social Analysis* (London; Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd, 1966), 176.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 215.

THE AFTERMATH OF THE NIGER MISSION CRISIS

Kenneth Onwuka Dike provides a sympathetic assessment of this tumultuous time that has been prone to many frenzied interpretations:

Throughout the last ten years of his episcopate, Crowther was painfully aware of the evils that assailed the Mission from within. It may be that as a leader he was too gentle, too soft for a pioneer, relying as he did on guiding his staff by persuasion and example rather than by strict disciplinary measures. But as already indicated he was working against heavy odds, and it is against the background of his immense difficulties that he must ultimately be judged. Looking back the historian is impressed not by the Bishop's failures but by his successes: had Crowther been given the tools required for the job, most of the short-comings of his Mission could have been avoided.²¹

Three strands appeared to have emerged from the crisis. CMS remained rigid about having nothing short of flawless native agents, while the native agents would not entertain any excuse about CMS actions being motivated by anything other than racial prejudice. Neither CMS nor the African agents seemed to have taken into serious account the shift from the earlier days of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton (MP and advocate for the abolition of the slave trade) and Venn, who had faith in the contribution of the African to the missionary enterprise in Africa. While the new missionaries were obsessed with the urgency of evangelisation, the African elite were becoming increasingly nationalistic in their disposition, especially in the face of mass displacement of native agents.

Tasie concludes with the opinion that the African agents “were not dismissed because they were Africans but because their standards did not measure up to the responsibility they bore for the spiritual welfare of their congregations”.²²

The matter of a successor to Bishop Crowther only protracted the crises, as the post went to Joseph Sidney Hill, who had earlier been a CMS missionary in West Africa. To assuage the bruised feelings and dashed expectations, two African clergy, namely Charles Philips and Isaac Oluwole, were made assistant bishops. That an African bishop was not appointed

to replace Crowther confirmed the suspicion that the view of some missionaries about the racial supremacy of the Europeans was upheld. This had its fallout in many places, the most significant being the rapid spread of the African Church and the independent African churches. European missionaries became the main personnel of CMS in the Lokoja area for a long time, even though they did not all exhibit racist tendencies. Indeed, some of them blended so well with the indigenous culture in many parts of the north, like the Nupe and Hausa missions where, in later years, Revd J. L. McIntyre, Revd C. N. Daintree, Dr Walter Miller and Max Warren, among several others, became part of the communities. However, this scenario of white domination of the missionary scene in both CMS and sister mission organisations such as the SUM and SIM made the mission churches essentially foreign in outlook, and delayed the process of indigenisation.

One of the most succinct descriptions of Bishop Crowther's life is given by no less a person than Eugene Stock, the CMS historian, in his preface to the biography by Jesse Page: “He lived in an atmosphere of suspicion and scandal, yet no tongue, however malicious, ventured to whisper reproach against his personal character. Some might criticize his administration; no one ever questioned his sincerity and simplicity.”²³

Lamin Sanneh's summary of the entire episode is quite sobering, if not indeed disturbing:

The momentous drama in which Bishop Crowther was intended as the sacrificial victim had been confidently staged on the dismantled policy of Henry Venn, with missionary lightweights propped up to challenge Crowther's Episcopal authority and alienate his achievement. Through irregular procedural arrangements, the CMS allowed Crowther to be outflanked until the substantive powers he held as bishop were effectively curtailed, his priestly stature was diminished and the man himself was reduced to a sorry sight.²⁴

CONCLUSION

Many reparatory steps have been taken since then, resulting in the recognition and reabsorption of the Niger Delta Pastorate, which had disconnected in the wake of the crises. There has been expansion of CMS work in other areas, such as the medical work at Iyi

²¹ Kenneth Onwuka Dike, *Origins of the Niger Mission 1841–1891* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1962); Project Canterbury, anglicanhistory.org.

²² Tasie, *Christian Missionary Enterprise in The Niger Delta*, 134.

²³ Page, *The Black Bishop Samuel Adjai Crowther*, vii.

²⁴ Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 169.

Enu from the 1890s, the founding of a teacher training college at Awka, then to Egbu and Patani, and Isoko by 1910. In western Nigeria the CMS bookshop was opened in Lagos. In northern Nigeria work among the Nupe, where Crowther had interacted considerably in earlier years, began in earnest by 1903. The hospital at Ado Ekiti opening in 1936 and expansion into Hausaland in 1905 by Dr Walter Miller all became the brighter side of the mission story.

The commendable efforts at resolving the crisis notwithstanding, it still showed up in the diocese of Lagos. On the eve of Nigerian independence (1 October 1960), the parish where the governor general worshipped, then known as “St Saviour’s Church”, amended their constitution to ensure they were not under the episcopal oversight of a black bishop. By the inauguration of the Church of Nigeria as an autonomous province on 24 February 1979, they were still hiring and firing their clergy without reference to the bishop. This face-off continued until matters were resolved by the Nigerian military government, which decreed that all Anglican Churches come under the authority of the Nigerian bishop enthroned. The decree was gazetted (as Decree 26, 1991). Archbishop Joseph Adelitoye changed the name of the parish to Our Saviour’s Church, as a part of the diocese of Lagos.²⁵

Several decades after, these issues have never been far from the mind of the African Christian leaders. A clear indication is the theme that was considered at the first African Anglican conference in 2004: AFRICA COMES OF AGE. The suspicion of unchanging imperialist tendencies remains an ever-present concern.

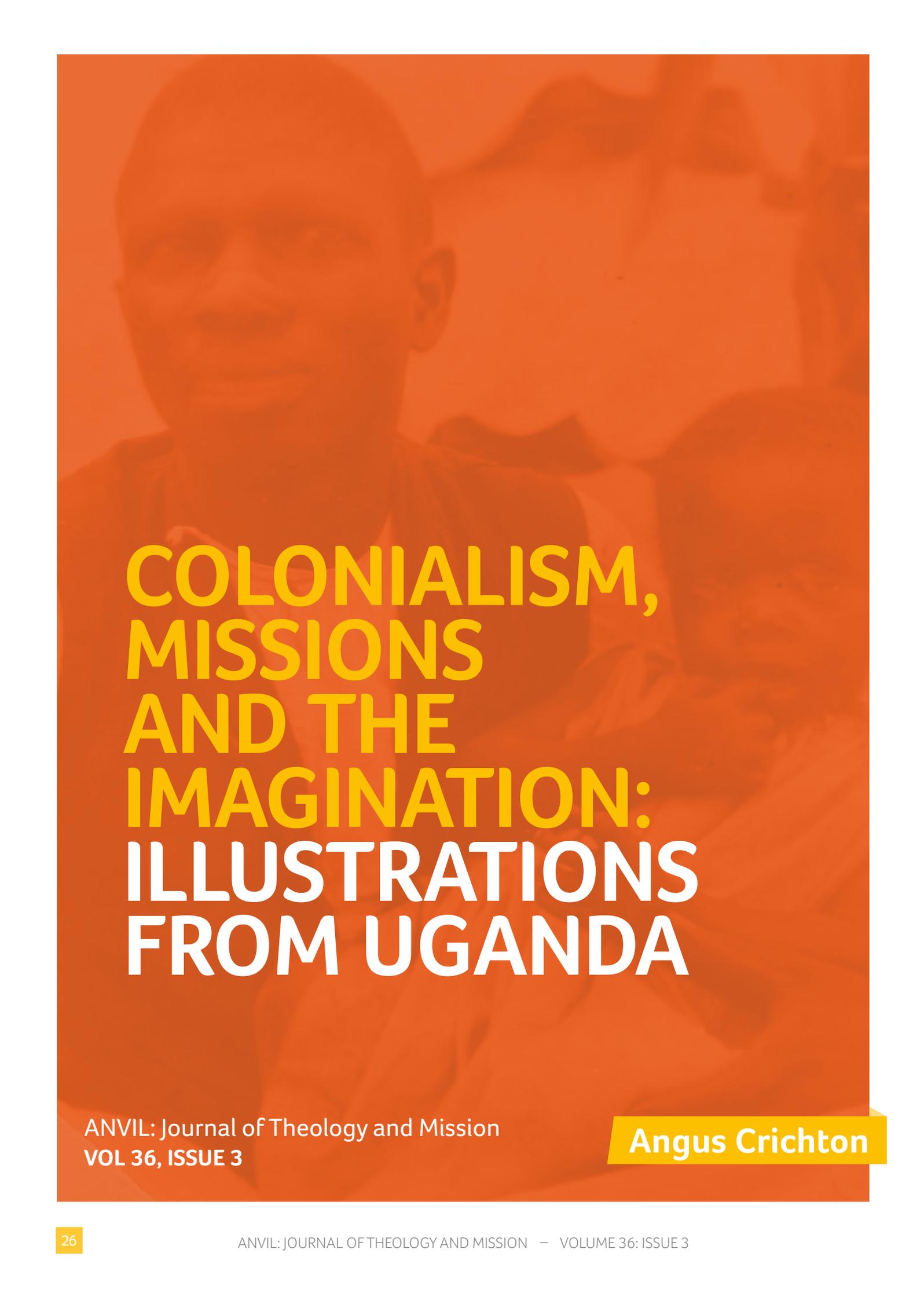
At the 150th anniversary of the consecration of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther in 2014, the 105th Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, held a service of thanksgiving on 29 June 2014, with representatives of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) in attendance. In his sermon, he described Crowther as “the apostle of Nigeria”, a “hero” who had been “betrayed and let down and undermined” after being “falsely accused, not long before his death”. He went on to say the service was one of thanksgiving, but also of “repentance, shame, and sorrow for Anglicans, who are reminded of the sin of many of their ancestors”. The archbishop then warned the congregation not to condemn Crowther’s opponents without holding up a mirror to today’s Church: “Whom do we exclude by reason of race... or in our desire for power?”²⁶

The Most Revd Emmanuel A. S. Egbunu, ably supported by Biodun, his wife, is the bishop of Lokoja diocese, where Gbebe, the first CMS station in northern Nigeria, is located. He has done doctoral research on the legacy of the CMS in the Lokoja Niger–Benue Confluence Area (1891–1941) and is the author of *Signposts on Heaven’s Highway* (on spiritual formation) and *Birth Pangs and Other Poems*.



²⁵ Amobi U Nmezi, *From Colonial to Cosmopolitan: The Story of Our Saviour’s Church, Tafawa Balewa Square, Lagos (1911–2011)* (Lagos: Our Saviour’s Church, TBS, 2015).

²⁶ Madeleine Davies, “Canterbury remembers Crowther,” *The Church Times*, 4 July 2014, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2014/4-july/news/uk/canterbury-remembers-crowther>.



**COLONIALISM,
MISSIONS
AND THE
IMAGINATION:
ILLUSTRATIONS
FROM UGANDA**

ANVIL: Journal of Theology and Mission
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Angus Crichton

I begin with a confession. I am a white British author writing about European colonialism and Christian mission in Africa within an *Anvil* issue devoted to racial justice. I can't offer any special pleading in mitigation, so this is what I can offer you. This article details how European missionaries and African Christians engaged with the onset of British colonialism in one African country.¹ I will give concrete historical examples that bring pain and anger to black people and shame to white people like me. For these very reasons it is a story that still must be told and yet we can be reluctant to hear it. In part this article came to be written because a supporter wrote to Church Mission Society (CMS) with concerns about a Wikipedia page describing CMS missionaries as complicit in the British colonial takeover of Uganda.² From what follows, you can judge if this concern is warranted. As with those we love in our families, Christian organisations also have their deficiencies as well as their glories. The church and the Kingdom of God are never one and the same: at its best the church points to Christ, at its worst it is a scandal before Christ. This is a story with much scandal, but also glimpses of the Kingdom.

EUROPEAN MISSIONARIES IN AN INDEPENDENT AFRICAN KINGDOM

The missionaries of the Anglican Church Missionary Society and the Roman Catholic White Fathers arrived in the kingdom of Buganda in the 1870s (see Figure 1 for map), following a well-developed trading system between the capital and the coast of East Africa and Egypt that had been pioneered by Muslim traders since the 1840s. These Europeans came to an independent African kingdom, with its own sophisticated structures and which exerted

considerable regional influence both north and south of Lake Victoria. Like other foreigners, they only resided at the capital with the express permission of the Ganda monarch, Mutesa I. CMS's first resident missionary in Buganda, Charles Wilson (aged 26) spent his first six months in the capital without another European missionary. He and his team of coastal porters and craftsmen were completely dependent on the Ganda court for their accommodation and daily sustenance. To even communicate, including to preach, Wilson's English was translated into first the regional trade language Kiswahili and then Luganda.

His position became more marginal when the Ganda chiefs arranged for his expulsion to a more remote residence from the palace. When he failed to comply with Mutesa's requests for firearms, he and his party went without food for days at a time.

Wilson's experience was to characterise European missionary experience in Buganda for more than a decade. Mutesa was past master at playing the

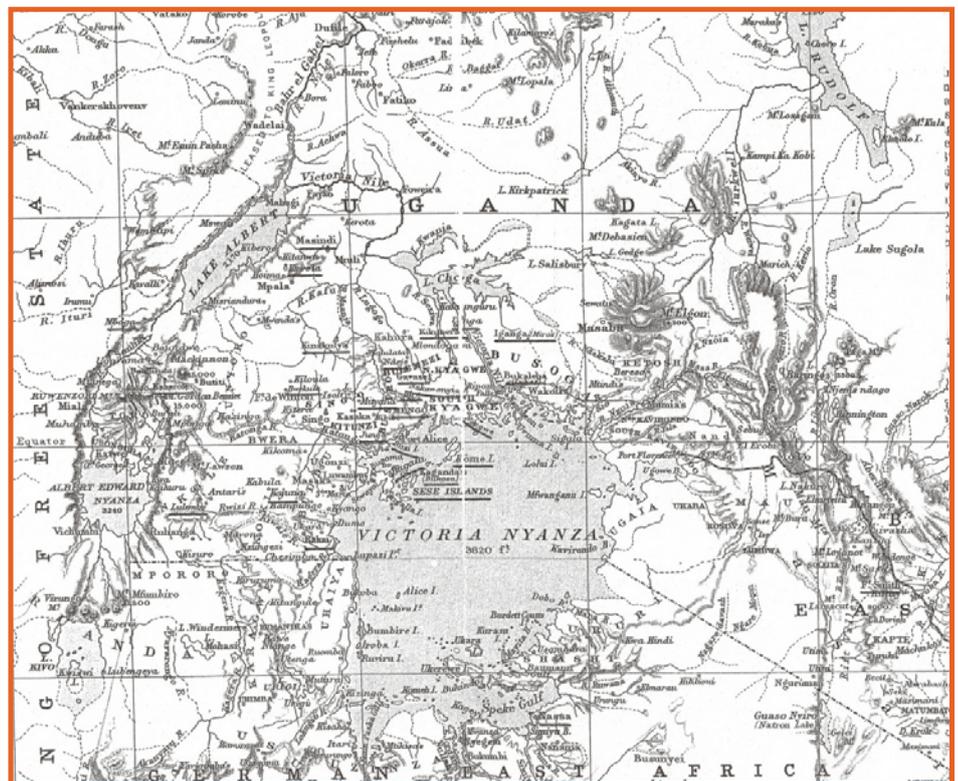


Figure 1: Map of East Africa in the 1890s (Taken from The CMS Annual Proceedings (1893–4))

¹ Rather than clogging the text with endnotes, I have provided a bibliographic note at the end of this article listing the archives and publications on Ugandan history upon which I have based what follows should readers want to check my sources of information. I have also avoided indigenous terms often used in academic publications on Uganda. The article focuses in the main on Buganda, one of the precolonial kingdoms that was incorporated into the colonial creation Uganda (marked "Uganda" on the map in Fig. 1). The people of Buganda are the Baganda (single Muganda), their language Luganda, and I have used the Ganda as an adjective to apply to all things relating to the Baganda.

² The problematic sentence was deemed to be: "A few years after, the English Church Missionary Society used the deaths [of the Uganda Martyrs] to enlist wider public support for the British acquisition of Uganda for the Empire" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uganda_Martyrs).

emerging religious factions off against each other: Anglican, Catholic, Muslim, traditionalist. Missionaries who offended were barred from court, or worse banished to Lake Victoria's southern shore. Ganda converts to all three external religions were killed on the monarch's orders during the 1870s and 1880s. An incoming Anglican missionary bishop and his 50 African and Asian followers rode roughshod over court sensibilities as to who could enter the kingdom from where. It cost them their lives. As the religious identities of Ganda converts fused into political and military groupings, winners took the kingdom, losers were banished in multiple cycles of alliances, victories and defeats, with external European agents only playing a decisive role in the latter stages. European missionaries in Uganda entered initially as guests of and were dependent on the Ganda monarch at multiple levels, their presence only tolerated because of what the court wanted from them: guns (and other European trade goods) not the gospel, alliances with encroaching external powers for Buganda's benefit and the wondrous tool of literacy.

EUROPEAN MISSIONARIES AND THE COLONISATION OF AN INDEPENDENT AFRICAN KINGDOM

The missionaries' dependent position altered in the 1890s as Belgian, British, Egyptian, French and German agents impinged on Buganda and her neighbours. CMS missionaries on the ground and administrators back in London were swift to lobby for the extension of British power into Buganda. In this they were continuing three decades of anti-slavery campaigning, missionary enthusiasm, private British commercial initiatives and British government policy in East Africa. It was the mercenaries of a British trading company with their maxim guns that intervened decisively on the side of the numerically inferior Anglican politico-religious party to catapult them to power. The resulting political settlement privileged Anglicans over and above the other politico-religious groups in terms of chiefly offices and therefore landholding. It is a settlement that has blighted Ugandan politics with instability and division ever since. CMS in London firstly advocated this trading company to remain in Buganda and raised £16,500 from the British public to enable this, and then actively lobbied the British government for Buganda

to become a British protectorate.³ The White Fathers similarly were not slow to advocate for an alternative European power in the region deemed more supportive of Catholic Christianity, in this case Germany. CMS and White Fathers missionaries were actively involved in negotiations between Ganda chiefs and British officials in the signing of the agreement that placed Buganda under British "protection".

This agreement transformed Buganda's relationship with its neighbours. Buganda had overreached itself with commitments south of Lake Victoria and was facing eclipse, above all by neighbouring Bunyoro. Now, allied with superior British military firepower, it was time to settle old scores. For the British, a convenient way to prevent the Ganda religio-political groups from relapsing into infighting while at the same time acquiring military glory all around was to launch a combined conquest of neighbouring Bunyoro to the west of Buganda.⁴ Suppressing Nyoro slave trading provided the useful justification, fuelled by prior hostile reporting from Samuel and Florence Baker, a British adventurer husband-and-wife team from the 1870s. Meanwhile the Ganda chief Semei Kakungulu saw no need to wait for British military support. With little more than a vague nod from a departing British agent of the crown, he and 2,000 Ganda followers (half armed with guns) set off eastwards and carved out for themselves a kingdom against disparate peoples (armed with spears and shields), some of whom had defeated a Ganda army back in 1884.⁵ Christian agents, both European and Baganda, accompanied these advances west and east. One CMS missionary and a Ganda deacon went as chaplains to the Ganda army invading Bunyoro, while another missionary fell into the role of supply officer for families of Sudanese mercenaries working for the British. Another CMS missionary decided to go on a holiday eastwards with his wife and ended up establishing a mission station in the shadow of Kakungulu's fort. His Catholic counterpart stumbled into a pitched battle between Kakungulu and one of the eastern groups, negotiated the surrender of the latter, entertained Kakungulu to tea and obtained from him permission to start a Catholic mission in the area. Kakungulu had already taken with him an Anglican Muganda deacon and several Baganda evangelists. Anglican and Catholic missionaries saw these projections of Anglo-Ganda military and political power as providential opportunities to introduce Christianity

³ This is around £1.4 million in today's money, which would have been around 16 per cent of CMS's income in 2019. In 1891–2, CMS's income was £269,377, so the sum raised represented but 6 per cent of CMS's income. The relative difference demonstrates the financial reach of CMS at the end of the nineteenth century in comparison to the twenty-first century.

⁴ Again Bunyoro is the name of the kingdom, Banyoro the people, Nyoro the adjective. On Fig. 1 Bunyoro is marked "Unyoro".

⁵ Kakungulu's advance stretched from Lake Kioga to Mount Elgon (see Fig. 1).

(E). SPECIMEN TIMETABLE FOR VERNACULAR SCHOOLS.

:o:										—Afternoon—		
Morning.												
	8-8.5.	8.5-8.15.	8.15-8.40	8.40-55.	8.55-9.15	9.15-20.	9.20-50.	9.50-10.15	10.15-11.	2-2.30	2.30-3	3-4
Tuesday.	in classes.	Repetition Scripture.	Scripture. N. T.	 address.	Drill.							
Wednesday.	Prayer	Repetition Catechism.	Scripture. O. T.	 and Short	Singing.				VI and VII only		crafts.	VI and VII only.
Thursday.	Opening	Repetition Scripture.	Scripture. N. T.	Service. Collects	Drill.	Interval.	Reading.	Arithmetic.	Standards	Writing.	Handi- crafts.	Standards
Friday.		Repetition Scripture.	Catechism.	 Hymn,	Singing.							

Figure 2: Syllabus taught at a CMS-sponsored Ganda village school in 1910 (Church Mission Society Archives, G3 A7 O 1909/343)

into areas coming into what became the Uganda Protectorate. Military forts and mission stations can literally be mapped together onto the same geographic location in these eastern and western advances. Buganda provided both political and ecclesiastical agents in both locations, with Luganda imposed as the language, riding roughshod over local structures, languages and cultures. It bred deep resentment which flowered into local liberative movements in subsequent decades, both in and beyond the church. Hitching our missionary chariots to politico-military horsepower is a human, not just a European tendency, as these Ganda examples illustrate.

Always needing to run its empire on the cheap, the nascent colonial government devolved education, healthcare, the introduction of cash crops and novel industrial processes to the missions, making a series of grants in return. In all of these, the missions often proceeded as if there was little of value in pre-existing cultures of Uganda's peoples. The syllabus taught in an Anglican village school was overwhelmingly European in orientation (Figure 2). CMS tended to sponsor Luganda publications that translated pre-existing

titles by European authors rather than those by Ganda authors. Traditional therapeutic systems were labelled as both dangerous and sunk in witchcraft. Ganda family structures were swiftly labelled as incompatible with Christianity (as understood in Late-Victorian Britain). While CMS missionaries wrestled for decades with their response, most started with the assumption that "there is no true idea among the people generally of Christian family life."⁶ Lambeth decreed in 1888 that the fruit of the vine must be used at the Lord's table and over the next decade ruled out both the physical use of banana beer and its linguistic reference in the Luganda translation of the Prayer Book.⁷ Grape vines do not grow in tropical climates. This required wine to be shipped to the East African coast and carried a thousand miles inland on porters' heads to Kampala and meant there was no obvious linguistic equivalent for use in the Luganda prayer book. When rendering into Luganda the demonic forces of the New Testament, the word for ancestors was chosen, the very people honoured by their communities for having lived exemplary lives and upon whom their wellbeing depended in succeeding generations. One CMS missionary applied Rudyard

⁶ Martin Hall in *The CMS Annual Proceedings* 98 (1896-7), 120.

⁷ Further research is still needed on this topic. Frustratingly brief minute notes in the SPCK archive indicate that CMS translator George Pilkington's suggestion of Luganda equivalents for bread and wine were referred to and rejected by Lambeth. However I have yet to confirm this by researching the Lambeth Palace archives. Bishop Tucker unsuccessfully lobbied Lambeth for banana wine to be used in communion in 1897.

Kipling's derogatory epithet to the peoples of northern Uganda, among whom he worked for over 30 years:

When, therefore, races are conscious of no power higher than the malignant capacity for mischief and the hardly invoked assistance in trouble which is all that they ascribe to their local demons, they are not likely to emerge from the slough of mingled savagery and folly which earns for them the description "Half devil and half child".⁸

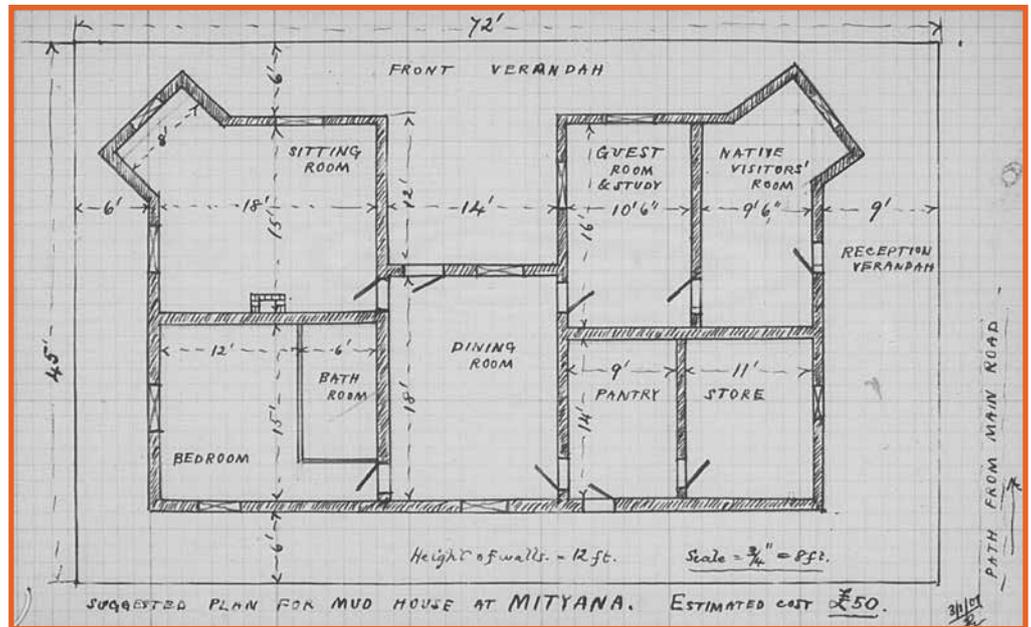


Figure 3: Plans for the construction of CMS missionary housing in Mityana, Buganda, 1901 (Church Mission Society Archives, G3 A7 O 1901/67)

Such pejorative "Africans are..." sentiments were commonplace and therefore Africans required European tutelage to European Christian norms for decades to come. From the 1900s onwards, missionary housing was constructed with external verandas onto which a "native visitor's room" opened (Figure 3), demarcating an external setting for European missionary/African interactions. The entanglements between Christian missions and colonialism were not only political, economic and military, they were also cultural and religious.

Yet this is not a monolithic story. The missions that welcomed European colonialism also questioned and even challenged it. In Uganda, the conflicting and contradictory nature of this relationship is well-illustrated in the person of Bishop Alfred Tucker, Uganda's first Anglican bishop. On the one hand, it was Tucker who actively lobbied for Buganda to remain under British influence, was actively involved in negotiations between the Ganda chiefs and representatives of the British government and enthusiastically wrote back to CMS in London: "All has been divinely ordered, and already fruit is being borne. On April 1st the Union Jack was hosted at Kampala (the fort) and we all (missionaries) met together for special prayer and praise."⁹ On the other hand Bishop Tucker also repeatedly protested to the colonial government

in Uganda and in Britain about how oppressive their system of forced labour was to the African populations. He engaged in a 10-year battle with his fellow CMS missionaries to create a constitution for the Anglican Church that placed Europeans and Africans within a single structure. In doing so, the latter would have outvoted the former by virtue of sheer numbers (see Table 1 below) and so Europeans would have come under African control. The final result fudged the issue. The long-serving CMS missionary John Roscoe, in partnership with the Muganda prime minister Apolo Kaggwa, devoted many hours to researching Ganda customs, a sideline from his main church-based ministry. A fellow CMS missionary disparaged such pursuits as "hunt[ing] about in the dust bins and rubbish heaps of Uganda for the foolish and unclean customs of the people long thrown away."¹⁰ Roscoe's findings are of a similar quality to those of Kaggwa, standing the test of time. Yet his insights into Ganda marriage structures did not translate into his willingness to consider options beyond a rigid application of monogamy, even though the marriage practices of Old Testament patriarchs and monarchs, now rendered into Luganda, undermined this. In contrast, the African-led Anglican Church Council, constituted in 1893, took a more conciliatory approach to individual cases where four years of religio-political conflict had resulted in spouses being separated, killed

⁸ A. L. Kitching, *On the Backwaters of the Nile: Studies of Some Child Races of Central Africa* (London and Leipzig: T. Fisher Unwin, 1912), 270.

⁹ Tucker to Stock, 16 April 1893, Church Missionary Society Archives (CMSA) G3 A5 O 1893/232.

¹⁰ Walker to Baylis, 13 March 1907, CMSA G3 A7 O 1907/98.

and new partnerships formed. Occasionally one can see a CMS missionary collapse in their minds the cultural difference between a Muganda and a Briton. As the CMS missionary doctor Albert Cook reviews the objections to Christianity that Ganda villagers make to Ganda evangelists (rather than to a European missionary), he realises that he has heard similar reasoning back in Britain. Cook sees, while Tucker overlooks, Benjamani Nkalubo (Figure 4), who has remained in eastern Uganda, in the shadow of Kakungulu's fort, while CMS missionaries have been invalided home. Nkalubo has lost first his son, then his wife, yet has persevered in his role as an evangelist: "Truly great things can be done with such teachers. Elijah's mantle has not yet ceased falling."¹¹ These sentiments are rarer in comparison to those that disparage, demean or dismiss African sensibilities and abilities, yet they are there in the record alongside the latter.

The relationship between Christian missions and the colonial government of Uganda took many twists and turns in the subsequent decades. It could be summarised as one of frustrated expectations on both sides. The missions hoped for preferential treatment for causes close to their heart, for example Christian marriage legislation and adequate resources to run their social service institutions. They were often disappointed by what they got in practice. Colonial governments hoped for uncritical support from missionaries with whom they shared a common national and religious identity, but were irritated by their partisanship and complaining. Ugandans frequently thought each supported the other. Colonial political control ended before missionary ecclesiastical control, with Bishop Kiwanuka's Catholic diocese of Masaka to the west of Kampala being a notable exception, led by an all-African clergy by the end of the 1930s. A young CMS missionary, attending one of the first conferences on African history at Dar-es-Salaam in 1965, was gripped by the ferment surrounding missions and colonialism. Her searing honest reflections in her letter back to Britain received numbered annotations from a CMS administrator questioning or rejecting her insights.

AFRICAN AGENCY REGARDLESS OF EUROPEAN COLONIAL CONTROL

It would be possible to end such an analysis at this point. To do so would be a grave oversight, for it perpetuates the fallacy that European missionaries are the most significant agents in African Christianity. They never were. African Christianity is an African

story: most Africans heard of Christ from other Africans. They appropriated the faith for their own reasons, sometimes bewildering European missionaries in the process. They forged theological insights, church practices and sociopolitical responses in the light of African realities. A few missionaries grasped this, increasingly from the 1960s; most expected their converts to resemble them. In Uganda, European political control lasted only two generations. There were those present when the British flag came down at independence in 1962 who remembered it going up in 1900. The Baganda Christian elite had their own very clear reasons why they wanted to sign a treaty

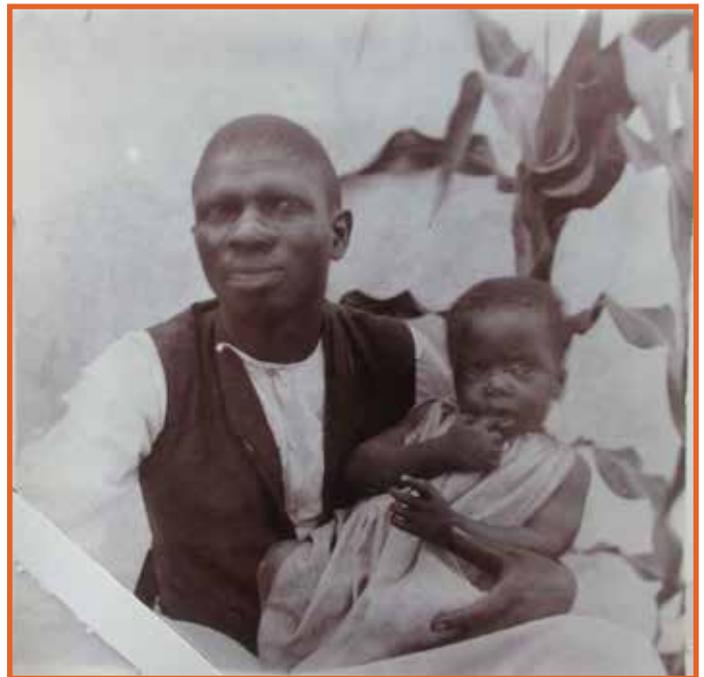


Figure 4: Benjamani Nkalubo, CMS evangelist at Budaka in eastern Uganda during the 1900s (Church Mission Society Archives, ACC 611/F2 A)

with Britain in 1900. When a British imperial agent thought he could steamroll them into direct rule by British colonial officers, he received a rude awakening. The Baganda walked out of the negotiations with their kingship, chieftainships and council intact, landholding revolutionised and Buganda's territory expanded beyond anything it had achieved in the last three centuries. Outworkings from this this treaty continue to haunt Uganda to this day, but one thing the Baganda elite were not is passive victims at the hands of British imperialism. Quite simply Europeans need to get over the sense of their own importance, both for good and for ill, in the African story.

¹¹ Albert R. Cook, *Uganda Memories* (Kampala: Uganda Society, 1945), 174.

	European Missionaries	African clergy	African lay teachers	African Christians	Communicants	Scholars
1887	3	-	-	300	50	-
1892	13	-	36	3,400	120	400
1897	43	10	521	14,457	3,343	742
1902	82	27	2,199	38,844	11,145	12,861
1907	104	30	2,036	65,433	18,078	32,393

Table 1: CMS European Missionaries and African Christians in Uganda 1877–1907
(Statistics taken from statistical returns in CMS Annual Proceedings)

Right from the outset of the Ugandan Christian story, Ugandan converts outstrip European missionaries (Table 1). The story is one of the leading examples, a result perhaps more of its chronicling than of its exceptionalism, of how African converts set the pace of the Christian advance, with European missionaries repeatedly playing catch-up. Rebecca Nkwebe Aliabatafudde first saw a European missionary when she went to seek baptism in 1886. Her entire instruction in literacy, in Christian faith and practice (including silent prayer), in the supply of precious Christian literature came from other Baganda Christians. Evangelists like Benjamani Nkalubo led this advance, initially from Buganda and then from other regions, utilising precolonial systems of exchange, as well of those opened up by colonialism, often traumatically so. It was they who first moved into a community, negotiated the right to remain with the local authority, gathered enquirers around them to learn to read and to pray. Some were severely persecuted for their efforts. Their salary was significantly less than those offered by the nascent colonial government, which needed western-educated Ugandans to interface between African subjects and European colonial administrators. Notable individuals such as Sira Dongo, Yohana Kitagana and Apolo Kivebulaya persevered for decades at their posts and are to whom entire Christian communities in northern and western Uganda and in eastern Congo look back to as their founders.

These early generations made the first moves away from a Europeanised understanding of the Christian faith. Apolo Kivebulaya instinctively demonstrated as well as proclaimed Christ's power with healings in the manner of Elijah. The CMS missionary Robert Walker was bewildered by how Ganda converts could combine their newfound faith with heroic militarism. In contrast, for Apolo Kaggwa, prominent in battle on horseback, it was the failure of traditionalist bullets to find their mark that demonstrated divine favour for the

Anglican cause in comparison to traditionalist folly. Most African religious systems have a strong this-worldly orientation, bringing blessing and warding off misfortune in this life with no compartmentalisation between the political and the sacred. Therefore within a Ganda religious framework, Kaggwa's political theology is both intelligible and enduring while Walker's is bizarre and has not stood the test of time for Ugandans. Where Christianity (and Islam) brought new information, it was the apocalyptic dimension that caught early converts' imagination, producing anxiety about the overthrow of the existing world and subsequent judgement. The first generation of converts prized both acquiring and using literacy. If missionary-sponsored publishers privileged European authors, Baganda authors and entrepreneurs established their own publishing ventures, often short-lived, but from which a steady stream of Luganda publications emerged throughout the colonial period and beyond. A sole preoccupation with the catalogue of European-authored Luganda titles perpetuates a double injustice: not just the excluding of African voices, but the overlooking of African agency through alternative avenues. Ganda authors created their own structures to give voice to their own perspectives on life and faith without waiting for or needing European permission and assistance. Twenty years after the New Testament was published in Luganda, the Anglican synod decreed that the ancestors would no longer be equated with evil spirits and that a Greek loan word be used instead. While missionary-sponsored education dismissed and derided African cultures, it was that very same education that provided Ugandans with the tools and the pathway to challenge and overthrow colonial rule. While African-initiated Christian movements during the colonial period were rare in Uganda in comparison to neighbouring Kenya, Reuben Spartas broke away from Anglicanism to form an independent church "established for all right-thinking Africans, men who wish to be free in their own house, not always

being thought of as boys.”¹² When he finally settled on a home within the Greek Orthodox Church, he delighted in telling the CMS missionary bishop that he, Luther and other Reformation Protestants, not Spartas, were schismatics in the overall chronological sweep of church history. Africans were never just passive victims in the face of European political, cultural and ecclesiastical colonialism. Active resistance took many different forms as the Spirit of Christ inspired them to walk in the freedom and dignity that is theirs as image bearers of the divine and co-heirs with Christ.

THE PAST IN THE PRESENT: APOLOGY, ACTION AND ATTITUDES

As already indicated, I am hesitant to write on this subject. The above analysis is focused on one area and focuses in the main on the pre- and early-colonial periods. Certainly this case study cannot stand in for an entire continent or for other colonised continents. Interactions between diverse colonial regimes, missionary bodies, African churches and nationalist movements produced a wide range of responses to the issue under discussion. By focusing on a particular country, I wanted to avoid sweeping generalisation, instead attempting to reveal both the complexity of the relationship and its more disturbing aspects. The articles by Emmanuel Egbunu and Harvey Kwiyani in this edition of *Anvil* explore this relationship in Nigeria and Malawi, in the latter case expanding the focus beyond CMS to other missionary agents. Both also show how Africans struck out to create independent church structure beyond European control. The liberation theologians have taught us the first step is to identify and name the principalities and powers that reside within systems and structures. This is a small contribution to name these in one African country in one period. This naming must continue and to be voiced primarily by African scholars rather than individuals like me; the challenges facing the former I will comment on below.

Some may want to stop reading at this point. There is more than enough material here for you to formulate your own response to a path you have walked down countless times before in personal experience. You know what Ali Mazrui meant when he described the peoples of Africa as perhaps the most humiliated in history.¹³ Anything I write is second-hand and derivative, for you it is primary and personal. Harvey Kwiyani’s article is a strong example of the latter, going right to the very heart of Magomero, his home village in Malawi. However one of the many things I have learned from my African sisters and brothers such as Harvey over the last 20 years is that the issues here are in the present, not just the past. Indeed the present is shaped by the past, above all our imaginations. One of the most disturbing aspects of slavery, abolition and colonialism is images of African peoples that underlies all three, images based on woeful European ignorance. All presume that Africans are passive rather than active agents of their own destinies and therefore can be enslaved, liberated or ruled over by Europeans.¹⁴ Evidence abounds to the contrary; the above is but one collection of examples from a single location and period. Therefore a continued commitment to becoming less ignorant by learning from and with Africans is an appropriate European response to this toxic history. Those used to being “experts” need to realise they know nothing and listen. I am profoundly grateful for the African voices from books, through friendships, with students in the classroom and from the archive that have instructed this very white, ignorant Englishman (see further below). In that spirit, I am reluctant to say more, and yet what follows is a result of applying insights from the British parliamentarian Bell Ribeiro-Addy and the Indian parliamentarian Sharishi Tharoor as they reflected on Britain’s imperial legacy.¹⁵

Apology: Black people have been calling for decades for Europeans to issue an apology for the suffering and humiliation of African peoples through slavery and colonisation. In light of Black Lives Matter, some have heeded these calls, including the Church of England,

¹² Quoted in F. W. Welbourn, *East African Rebels* (London: SCM Press, 1961), 81.

¹³ Ali A. Mazrui, *The African Condition: A Political Diagnosis. The Reith Lectures* (London: Heinemann, 1980), 26.

¹⁴ Both British pro- and anti-slavery campaigns were united in their shared ignorance of Africa, the former marginally less so with some knowledge of the coast. For both, African societies were characterised, either by nature or through external European stimulation, as slaving societies, with attendant images of violence, depravity and heathenism. As anti-slavery arguments grew in acceptance, this generated pressure for the British government to become more involved in African countries to civilise, Christianise and provide alternative legitimate commerce. The terminus of this policy was British colonisation to eradicate slave trading. CMS’s advocacy for Britain taking control of Buganda is an example of this policy.

¹⁵ Bell Ribeiro-Addy made her comments during her maiden speech on 13 March 2020 and the relevant section can be watched at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gH9cVOwnUmo>. Sharishi Tharoor’s eight minute articulate and impassioned contribution to the Oxford Union debate “This house believes that Britain owes reparations to her former colonies” on 28 May 2015 went viral and can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f7CW7S0zxv4>. I was sent this material by my friend and colleague Dr Paddy Musana, as he observed Black Lives Matter from Uganda.

underlining its 2006 apology.¹⁶ In June 2014 a service of thanksgiving and repentance on the 150th anniversary of Bishop Crowther's consecration was held at Canterbury Cathedral. As I listened to the address by the then head of CMS, I could not hear the word "apology" or "sorry". Emmanuel Egbunu at the end of his article comments on the Archbishop of Canterbury's address at the same event, noting both his lauding of Crowther and his lamentation of European racism. The Archbishop's apology comes in the opening paragraph of his sermon.¹⁷ While I have demonstrated this history defies a simplistic binary reading (black good, white bad), I have also shown that white CMS missionaries were actively involved in the political, economic, social, cultural and religious colonisation of black Ugandans. If we have "been on the wrong side of history not least when it comes to race" and want to "come afresh to the fountain of grace",¹⁸ a clear, unequivocal apology is long overdue to our African brothers and sisters as well as to our Lord.

Action: Jesus warned us repeatedly that words without accompanying actions are meaningless. I have neither the wisdom nor the office to determine what this means for an organisation like Church Mission Society. However, I do know the posture required of us, as a CMS general secretary observed more than 20 years ago: "we must decrease that others may increase".¹⁹ Phrases such as *missio Dei* trip easily off the tongue. Yet European decrease and African increase means reordering priorities, reimagining structures, declaring Ichabod to entire programmes, indeed organisations, based in Britain and working on the African continent. We prefer *missio mei* (the mission of me) in both its individual and institutional expressions, cutting covenants in our quest for security and significance. The fragile, pioneering movement of one generation consolidates into the self-perpetuating institution in another. The ongoing decline in British churchgoing computes across to the contraction of mission agencies. Endowments without donors severely curtails outreach. Therefore in practice British mission agencies have retracted missionary reach on other continents. They can no longer sustain their imagined leadership of the Christian faith in Africa. African churches in contrast have wisely chosen mass migration rather than the voluntary agency as their mission structure, moving in effect entire congregations to British shores, rather than isolated clusters of

"professional" missionaries funded from Britain. The painful challenge for these African missionaries in Britain, just as for their British antecedents in Uganda, is to engage with a cultural and religious world so very alien to their own, compounded by that world's often hostile attitude to black people.

This unwillingness to embrace African increase is all too apparent in the field I spend my days, that of researching and publishing African Christianity, where resources are still stubbornly concentrated in northern institutions. This is not an observation on crafting Christian thought globally, but specifically crafting Christian thought from and for Africa. Still the great library and archival collections are located in the north, opportunities for research grants and sabbaticals go to northern-based scholars, too much reflection on African Christianity is published in the north using structures that preclude return to the continent, not least the book's price. Of course African scholars are not passively waiting for some northern-led solution to these issues, although these periodically still do fly and flounder. There are tremendous resources on the continent for the study of African Christianity, the greatest being living libraries of African Christians prophesying and praying, rejoicing and repenting, discerning and delivering, teaching and transforming. It is amazing not how little, but how much research and publishing is carried out by innovative African research and teaching institutions, all within a context and from a resource base that would stop comparable British organisations in their tracks. Yet this very group of scholars that need most access to some of the key primary sources, to interrogate and recast this toxic history, in practice have the most restricted access. Our readiness to embrace world Christianity, while functionally placing ourselves still at the centre, suggests our imaginations have yet to be liberated from colonial shackles.

Attitudes: My honest evaluation is that the demeaning images of African peoples logged in 19th century European hearts still reside within us all in the 21st. I make this statement on the basis of 30 years of experience in British churches and mission organisations with ministries in African countries. Rather than listing a catalogue of incidents, I will interrogate a single. I would describe such attitudes as reoccurring rather than occasional. The incident is the placement of my wife and me as CMS

¹⁶ For details see the following statement on the Church of England's website: <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/news/church-and-legacy-slavery>

¹⁷ The Archbishop of Canterbury's sermon is available at <https://www.anglicannews.org/news/2014/06/archbishop-welby-on-the-first-black-anglican-bishop.aspx>.

¹⁸ Quotations are from the executive leader's address at the Crowther consecration anniversary, found at <https://churchmissionsociety.org/our-stories/crowther-talk-canterbury-cathedral>

¹⁹ Simon Barrington-Ward, "My Pilgrimage in Mission," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 23, no. 2 (April 1999): 64.

mission partners between 2005 and 2010 in Uganda, during which we encountered the following statements:

- I expressed reservations to CMS staff in Britain about my being placed in a Ugandan theological institution because I had no experience of pastoral ministry in Uganda. I was informed that while the agency would not ‘send’ me to work in a British theological college, they would to one in Uganda.²⁰
- The Ugandan principal of this institution told me that a key benefit of having a British mission partner on staff was to keep the institution on the radar screen of Christian organisations and churches in Britain.
- When my placement had the potential to move towards supporting Ugandan scholars to publish their research on Ugandan Christianity in Uganda, CMS staff in Britain observed that this would be harder for British sponsoring churches to connect with in comparison to my wife’s placement. Using her midwifery training, my wife supported teenage girls who had been driven from their homes because they had fallen pregnant outside of marriage.

I list these statements not to question their pragmatic veracity nor to cast aspersions on the individuals concerned, all of whom have deliberately not been named. With no training in or experience of theological education, I indeed would not have been employed by a British college. My unease is with the underlying attitudes that are shared by all players, African and European, myself included. The great Ghanaian educator James Kwegyir Aggrey insisted that “nothing but the best is good enough for Africa.”²¹ Therefore why do British churches, a mission agency, a mission partner and a Ugandan theological institution think that a no-experience lecturer is good enough for Africa, but not for Britain? Why is a placement to facilitate the return to Uganda the fruits of Ugandan Christian scholars deemed more difficult for British churches to engage with than one supporting vulnerable, young Ugandan women? I suggest this is because a series of historic and damaging couplings: Africans are coupled with lack (of theological knowledge and the resources to address this) and helplessness (preyed upon young women rendered homeless); Europeans coupled with abundance

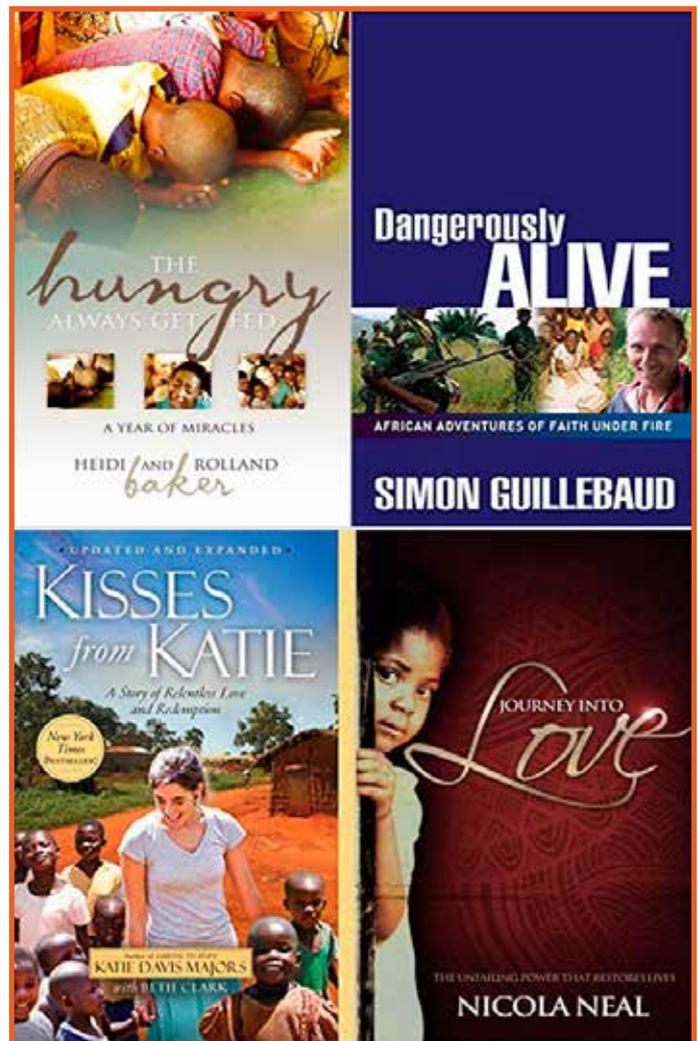


Figure 5: Book covers on display in the bookshop at the British Christian festival New Wine in August 2018. These are reproduced in no way to pass judgement on the individuals who have served in different African countries, but to show the role white Christian agents are imagined to have in relation to “African need”. In contrast, the bookshop manager could not offer me a title that foregrounded the role of Africans in the growth of African Christianity.

(of theological knowledge, of finances, of skills) with which to elevate Africans. One only has to look at the bookstall of a major British Christian festival to see this attitude replicated on book covers: white people featured ‘saving’ black people (see Figure 5). Zac Niringiye laments how this has infected African imaginations as well:

²⁰ The language used in the placement of mission partners is ambiguous. The idea of being sent is rooted in the idea of being called beyond one's immediate geographic and cultural context to minister in another and reflects the movement of missionaries from “the Christian west” to “the rest”. At a functional level I was employed by the Ugandan theological institution, but funded by British churches and individuals through CMS, an employment arrangement which would be decidedly irregular at a British theological college. However, my reservations were not about funding structures but about my appointment with no experience of either theological education or Ugandan pastoral life. Similar ambiguities surround the term “support”, see below.

²¹ Nnamdi Azikiwe, *My Odyssey: an Autobiography* (New York: Praeger, 1970), 37, 38.

Africa's crisis is not poverty; it is not AIDS. Africa's crisis is confidence. What decades of colonialism and missionary enterprise eroded among us is confidence. So a "national leader" from the United States comes—he may have a good-sized congregation, but he knows nothing about Africa! — and we defer to him. We don't even tell him everything we are thinking, out of respect. We Africans must constantly repent of that sense of inferiority.²²

So the principal made annual pilgrimages to the source of the radar signals to seek "support" for the theological college.²³ Yet he found these signals both diminished and distorted: diminished by the gradual, relentless decline of British churchgoing; distorted because "support" is often (but not exclusively) attached to British mission partners.

While European political colonisation of African countries has now ended, its legacy lives on in our imaginations on both sides of the Mediterranean. We are deluding ourselves if we think any of us, European or African, are not infected today by four centuries of European humiliation of Africa and her peoples, notwithstanding four centuries of African resistance. European repentance must include not only apologies and actions, but repeated, ongoing cleansings of our imaginations. Otherwise history will continue to repeat itself. May the Lord have mercy on us all.

TESTIMONIAL POSTSCRIPT

It was above all through my placement with CMS in Uganda that this white, ignorant Englishman became more educated in the wonders of God on the great continent of Africa. As we sat in the congregation of the Anglican All Saints Cathedral in Kampala I witnessed with my eyes what I read about in books: a sermon on the political theology of the hills of Kampala; the power of the provost's prayers over all others in the face of family calamity; echoing amens from the congregation to intercessions that renounced corporate sin to ward off Ebola — I could have been with Moses on Mount Ebal. My classes in the theological college were small and the dean never checked what I taught, so the inherited western theological syllabus went out the window. Instead my students and I embarked on experimental learning together. We visited the fourth Anglican cathedral built on Namirembe hill to critique its imported European architecture in comparison to the Ganda aesthetics of its three forerunners. We

attended a day-long service at Samuel Kakande's Synagogue of All Nations Church to explore approaches to healing and puzzled together on case studies which they brought on the same topic: was it prayers via the ancestors or via Jesus to the Creator God that brought the much desired baby? Some of the historical examples above have literally been pulled off lecture handouts from 13 years ago. To Martin Kabanda, Loyce Kembabazi (now late), Fred Kiwu, Shadrack Lukwago, Barbara Majoli (née Tumwine) and others, I owe more than I ever gave them, alongside inspirational mentors Paddy Musana, Zac Niringiye and Alfred Olwa. Our paths with Christ as he graciously invites us into his mission are more twisting than straight, exhibiting our and others' grime as well as glory. And yet on these paths, the living God reveals to us glimpses of his kingdom. This white Englishman now inhabits a hugely expanded universe because he has witnessed the treasures of the peoples of Uganda turned to Christ in worship and service.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE

My understanding of the article's subject matter is the result of 15 years' learning about Ugandan Christianity. A key experience in this regard was my involvement in creating and publishing of the following book: Paddy Musana, Angus Crichton and Caroline Howell (eds.), *The Ugandan Churches and the Political Centre: Cooperation, Co-option and Confrontation* (Cambridge: Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide, 2017). On this title's theme, my most significant tutors have been Zac Niringiye (for example see his chapters in Musana et al., *The Ugandan Churches*, 119–138, 239–260) and John Mary Waliggo (see "The Role of the Churches in the Democratisation Process in Uganda 1980–1993," in *The Christian Churches and the Democratisation of Africa*, ed. Paul Gifford, (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 205–224). A bibliography of over 200 published and unpublished items on the Ugandan Churches and Politics is in "Appendix 2: Bibliography of the Ugandan Churches and the Political Centre," in *The Ugandan Churches*, ed. Musana et al., 291–308. Sources I utilised are listed below, following the order of my article.

D.A. Low's *The Fabrication of Empire: The British and the Uganda Kingdoms, 1890–1902* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009) is a comprehensive overview of the British colonisation of Uganda making full use of both African and European sources. John V. Taylor's *The Growth of the Church in Buganda: an Attempt at Understanding* (London: SCM Press, 1958) contains astute insights. Charles Wilson's experiences are based on reading his

²² Bishop Zac Niringiye interviewed by Andy Crouch, *New Vision*, 29 July 2006.

²³ "Support" is a term often used by mission agencies to describe how individuals and churches join in partnership with an agency to send a mission partner to minister in a particular setting, often beyond Britain. Such "support" consists of prayerful interest and regular financial giving towards the individual's living and ministry costs and a contribution to the agency's overheads.

correspondence to CMS for 1877 in CMSA (C A 6 O 25 Wilson).

For CMS actively campaigning and fundraising for the British Imperial East Africa Company to remain in Uganda, followed by it becoming a British protectorate, see D.A. Low, "British Public Opinion and 'The Uganda Question': October-December 1892," in his *Buganda in Modern History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971) 55–83.

Christianity's advance into Bunyoro and eastern Uganda coupled with Anglo-Ganda political and military power summarises my own research published in "'You will just remain pagans, and we will come and devour you': Christian Expansion and Anglo-Ganda Power in Bunyoro and Bukedi," in *The Ugandan Churches*, ed. Paddy Musana et al., 23–56.

My comments on Luganda Christian publications and translation issues are based on:

my unpublished research in the archives of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledges and the British and Foreign Bible Society in the University Library Cambridge and the library of the International Committee of Christian Literature for Africa, transferred to the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies and listed in Michael Mann and Valerie Sanders, *A Bibliography of African Language Texts in the Collection of the School of Oriental and African Studies University of London, to 1963* (London: Hans Zell, 1994), 56–68.

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Sira Dongo/*The Life of Rev Canon Sira Dongo, The Apostle of the Lango and the Acholi, from a Slave to a Canon*. Acholi original and English Translation. English translation published in *Source Material in Uganda History, Vol 4*, (Dept. of History, Makerere: Kampala, 1971).

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THE NEED FOR LAMENT

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Sharon Prentis

Do you care to feel my pain and take this journey with me?

On it you will discover it is yours too and together we will question

How can we be so oblivious to each other's need?

Then together we will lament and express our sorrows

Then God will hear.

No one can dispute the strength of emotion that followed George Floyd's death. Not for the first time, the fatal impact of institutional discrimination was captured on millions of television screens. What was different were the global protests that followed, heightened during the pandemic, reflecting the reality that racism was not just about name-calling, but concerned the power to take lives, limit opportunities and marginalise. For many white people who were unaware of such things, nor had thought about the cumulative effects that racism had on the black mind, body and spirit, this was a revelation. On the Sunday that followed, sermons were preached and prayers said about the societal sickness of inequality, and racism especially, that continues to plague society.

However, the past few months have also brought about an equally uncomfortable revelation: the church is not immune from this illness! Stories from those of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) heritages disclose the pain and sense of alienation many experience. For a significant number, the body of Christ is not what it should be in terms of what Tomlin identifies as its call to "Catholicity"¹ as described in the New Testament (Acts 2:9). Neither is it fulfilling its vocation as the multi-ethnic, multicultural family of God as N. T. Wright suggests.² The pandemic and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests stripped away any pretext of unity-in-diversity. It exposed the misconception held by many Anglicans that racial, ethnic and cultural harmony was a common experience. With those events, the error of that assumption was revealed and the disconcerting truth became evident in the way we, the Church, looked, worshipped and conducted mission. In the aftermath, many white church leaders and congregations struggled with what change is needed, fearing that it would be perceived as superficial at best,

or further compound the problem because of existing cultural hegemonies. Where to start was the dilemma. This article suggests it starts with acknowledging the brokenness, through lament, protest and introspection so that a route to transformation can be found.

LAMENT AND PROTEST

Brueggemann suggests that lament plays a significant role in Israel's faith relationship with God.³ Used for communal and individual expressions of sorrow, their purpose was not to bring relief but to be honest about the despair. The book of Lamentations is a case in point, offering a unique insight into the expression and anguish of suffering during a time of desolation. Consisting of five poems, it describes the plight of Israel and God's action at a time of great calamity. The use of poetic expression acknowledges suffering as a path to redemptive possibilities – a path that leads ultimately back to God.⁴ Like the books of the Pentateuch, Lamentations derives its title from the first word, "Eyka!", a cry or exclamation meaning "how" or "Oh!" as an express of shock or grief.⁵ The despair conveyed by the term is expressed at the beginning of nearly all the poems contained in the book of Lamentations, the intention being to capture the pain and confusion of the Israelites following the destruction of Jerusalem in the summer of 597BC. Full of imagery, the text reflects the devastating impact, humiliations and degradations captivity had upon the people. In Lam. 1:1, Zion is personified as a woman who has lost family; she sits alone, condemned of all the sins committed by Israel's male leadership. She laments her situation: "Bitterly she weeps at night, tears upon her cheeks... there is none to comfort her" (1:2).

Expressions of grief and lament have two main purposes: first, as a form of poetic protest and appeal that bears witness to the wickedness and gross injustice that cannot be tolerated; and secondly, as a way for God's people to articulate their sorrow, anger, confusion and disappointment at the destruction caused by their sin. Lament gives space to the questions "why" and "how" this could happen and seeks earnestly for a response from God. Through emotive imagery and words, the poet shows that the city's destruction causes such distressing emotional and spiritual trauma that hope seems almost obliterated.

¹ Graham Tomlin, "Christ, Catholicity and the sin of Racism," *Academia.edu*, accessed 4 September 2020, https://www.academia.edu/43753394/Christ_Catholicity_and_the_sin_of_Racism.

² N. T. Wright, "Undermining Racism," accessed 4 September 2020, <https://ntwrightpage.com/2020/06/14/undermining-racism-complete-text/>.

³ Walter Brueggemann, "Lament as Wake-up Call (Class Analysis and Historical Possibility)," in *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts*, ed. Nancy C. Lee and Carleen Mandolfo (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 221–36.

⁴ Issiaka Coulibaly, "Lamentations," in *Africa Bible Commentary*, ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Press, 2006), 926.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 927.

God's wrath in this context is not an unprovoked anger but a just response brought about by Israel's breaking of the covenant agreement, the worship of other gods and the oppression of the poor. Because of the disobedience, divine justice permits the Babylonians to conquer the city. And so, this poem acknowledges that God's wrath is justified. Nevertheless, as the poet laments, they continue to ask God to show compassion once again.

Chapter 3, the longest poem in Lamentations, culminates in a lone voice speaking of the collective suffering and grief. The language used is evocative of the laments found in Job, Psalms, Isaiah and other parts of the Old Testament. Like those texts, the poet speaks about the hope of God's justice despite the prevailing circumstances and suffering experienced. There is no protest to God because the consequences are evident and acknowledged to be deserved. However, the outcome of their actions is immense.

Lament acknowledges the connection between action and consequences, desolation and consolation. Until that acknowledgement is forthcoming, the transformative work of restoration cannot begin. We find ourselves in the situation of racial inequity today due to the denial of the historical injustices that continue to reinforce, both overtly and covertly, notions of racial superiority and white privilege.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Central to the issue of racism is the acknowledgement of personal and structural sin. During the twentieth century, the Christian conception of sin changed from the emphasis on individual sin to a perspective that embraced more structural dimensions – not absolving the individual from their complicity in structural sin, but nevertheless acknowledging the larger forces that promote systems of economics and status based on self-interest endorsed by privilege and the subjugation of others. For more than 165 years, Britain, along with other nations, played a major role in the transatlantic slave trade, profiting significantly from the traffic of human beings.

Derek Nelson's examination of nineteenth-century Christian abolitionist Charles Finney's stance on slavery illustrates this.⁶ Finney, an abolitionist, argued that the sin of enslaving others was down to individual choice. This position, though condemning the act of

ownership of slaves and the brutality it brought about, never considered the complicity of powerful social interests, nor held them to account for the impact of slavery long after it was abolished. These antecedents of racism found in our history and which have shaped social structures still have a deleterious impact. The reluctance to discuss the subject of reparation, even in a theological sense of making amends and forgiveness, fails to recognise the cumulative impact of iniquity and the generational legacy it has left.

Whether we care to admit it or not, the church, like other historical institutions and organisations, has profited as a result of that history. Evidence of the benefits are well documented.⁷ Of the many words that have been spoken since May 2020, few have been couched in terms of the lament that we are not where we should be. Perhaps there is genuine paralysis of actions by this understanding; or perhaps, it is something more fundamental – the failure to acknowledge the extent of supremacy that has led to a denial, in deeds if not in words, of Christ's mandate to love others as we love ourselves.

Put simply, segregated churches come from a reluctance to embrace difference – not just doctrinal and denominational differences, but those based on ethnicity, social background and identity even within the same domination. It is not always intentional or malevolent. People tend to gravitate to those most like them. This human inclination towards homogeneity is further compounded in the face of widening social inequities and the unwritten rules that define who is acceptable. It is also played out in the lack of diverse representation in the body, be it leadership or in the congregation. A paucity of diversity means that the church is impoverished. A predominantly monocultural representation (culture being defined here in the widest sense) is at odds with Christ's mandate to go out into the whole world and make disciples. Mutual interdependence in Christ is a distinctive Christian identity and witness. If that identity is not expressed through its constituent parts, then power of that witness is undermined.

BELONGING AND CHURCH

An insight into barriers that undermined mutuality was gained recently when some research I was involved in highlighted the importance of identity, belonging and the connection to faith. In 2018, the

⁶ Derek R. Nelson, *What's Wrong with Sin? Sin in Individual and Social Perspective from Schleiermacher to Theologies of Liberation* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2009).

⁷ Church of England Committee on Black Anglican Concerns, "Seeds of Hope: Report of a Survey on Combating Racism in the Dioceses of the Church of England" (General Synod, 1991).

University of Birmingham carried out research for the Anglican Church in Birmingham.⁸ The intention was to understand BAME perceptions of church culture around invitation, welcome, inclusion and belonging in the diocese. Using a validated psychological measure across a wide range of groups of different ethnic backgrounds, Christians of BAME heritage reflected lower levels of belonging than their white counterparts. Many also spoke of a deep sense of rejection. Where there were clear attempts made to include them and celebrate cultural/ethnic identity, the sense of belonging was more pronounced. The data also reflected that people of BAME heritage had a greater sense of affiliation with the wider Anglican Communion than their own local church. Reasons given included experiencing racialised behaviour that resulted in “othering” or another negative connotation. Not everyone had a negative experience. Many had also worshipped in the same church with no difficulty. The study concluded that while the nature of belonging, association and identification in congregations is complex, ethnicity and culture does play a significant role. In Birmingham, we were confronted with the empirical evidence of BAME peoples feeling estranged in church.

The nature of diverse church challenges their members to go beyond their usual norms to develop a spiritual aptitude for living in ways that honour difference. A context is created where the priorities of one group’s familiar ways of being become secondary to others. People from these contexts come together to learn from one another and engage in mutual relationships that recognise the gifts of others. However, if the power dynamics are not addressed, and one culture remains dominant, true intercultural fellowship, as an expression of unity in Jesus, is difficult to achieve.⁹

In the New Testament this intercultural unity is conveyed in the key words for fellowship – *koinōnīa* and *metochē*, which describe interdependent mutual relationships within a community of believers. Such *koinōnīa* is rooted in fellowship with God as Father (1

John 1:3, 6) and love for others, which is orientated in extending a radical hospitality to everyone. It is countercultural in its emphasis on creating familial associations across cultural and social boundaries and opposed to the membership of an exclusive club where coexistence without mutual dependence is acceptable. Relationships are purposely different in the former, being based on mutual love and shared faith (John 13:34, Jude 3, Titus 1:4). From the beginning, those early Christians “devoted themselves” to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, and the breaking of bread and to prayer (Acts 2:42). It is easy to idealise relationships in the early church, but social divisions have always been evident in the body of Christ from the beginning.

LAMENTING WITH ONE ANOTHER

An outward sign of unity is the ability to stand in solidarity with others in times of sorrow as well as joy. The prophet in Lamentations gathers together the bitterness and sorrow felt by the people to make them known in a communal rehearsal of this lament. The first book of John speaks of a communal love that goes beyond words and theory, evidenced in truth and action (1 John 3:18). Consequently, racial injustice amounts to disunity, undermining the ability to love and serve one another (*agapate allelous*: John 13:34, John 15:17). Fellowship dictated by the experience of one group contradicts the call to mutuality and interdependence. Authentic Christian community is a result of mutual love (John 13:34) based upon a shared salvation (Jude 3) and shared faith (Titus 1:4). A functional

unity in Christ is an admission of what Christena Cleveland sees as being intentionally mindful in our ways of being together: “This is what we enact as we celebrate the Eucharist. In receiving Christ’s broken body and spilled blood, we, in a sense, receive all those whom Christ received by suffering.”¹⁰

These are the unexpected signs of God’s kingdom in times of increasing moral desolation and escalating

“The nature of diverse church challenges their members to go beyond their usual norms to develop a spiritual aptitude for living in ways that honour difference.”

⁸ Sanjee Perera-Child and Andrew Davies, “The Minority Anglican Project” (The Edward Cadbury Centre for Public Understanding of Religion at the Department of Theology and Religion at the University of Birmingham: Unpublished Report, 2019).

⁹ Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Jann Aldredge-Clanton, eds., *Intercultural Ministry* (King of Prussia, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 2017), x.

¹⁰ Christena Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ: Recovering the Hidden Forces That Keep Us Apart* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2013), 36.

injustice – when we can enter honest and courageous conversations that facilitate the truth-telling needed for healing. Here, the example of Lamentations gives an insight. The poet does not offer superficial optimism, nor neat solutions that deny the pain and suffering of the situation. Instead, it expresses it in raw detail through poetic form! The unresolved nature of the grief due to being separated from God becomes paradoxically the seedbed of hope, because who else can redeem and bring about justice? Contrary to what is going on around them, the author of Lamentations knows that the mercies of God have not failed and they are “new every morning” (Lam. 3:23). His mercies are an indication of the hope for healing and reconciliation work.

The deep work of grace is required because of distorted relationships. According to Willie James Jennings, it starts with the church understanding that its Christian imagination has become attached to individualistic and racialised identities that undermine all attempts at meaningful reconciliation.¹¹ Meaningful engagement with one another acknowledges the deformity in our relationships before we can develop a sacred understanding of our diversity in Christ.

HOW LONG, LORD, HOW LONG?

The final poem in Lamentations is different because it breaks the acrostic pattern of the previous poems. It is as if the poet has abandoned all attempts to contain the grief and is overwhelmed. What then ensues can only be described as a torrent of feelings. What the recent protests have indicated is that those who are the subjects of brutality can only contain it for so long. Repression of historical pain and outrage will eventually find its own expression. This may be done in ways that are constructive and healing to the physical and corporate bodies or ultimately destructive. The power of the lament poetry arises from the need to express the depth of the suffering that is experienced while demanding attention from a sovereign God. Injustice impacts both the subject and perpetrator to the extent that neither escapes its impact. Both are inextricably

linked. Seeking forgiveness is a necessary requirement for hope: it is also integral to repentant action and restitution. Both are necessary to move forward together. As Miroslav Volf writes:

The principle cannot be denied: the fiercer the struggle against the injustice you suffer, the blinder you will be to the injustice you inflict. We tend to translate the presumed wrongness of our enemies into an unfaltering conviction of our own rightness.¹²

HOPE WITHIN THE SORROW

The final poem in Lamentations takes the form of a communal prayer in which the author appeals to God about the misery of the people and pleads for the creation of something dramatically different. There is a change in tone, almost abandonment to God’s mercy as the author, as a representative of the people, confesses the effect of collective sin while also expressing bewilderment. No immediate resolution is apparent other than the assurance that God is God. The expression of the pain through lament is part of the healing.

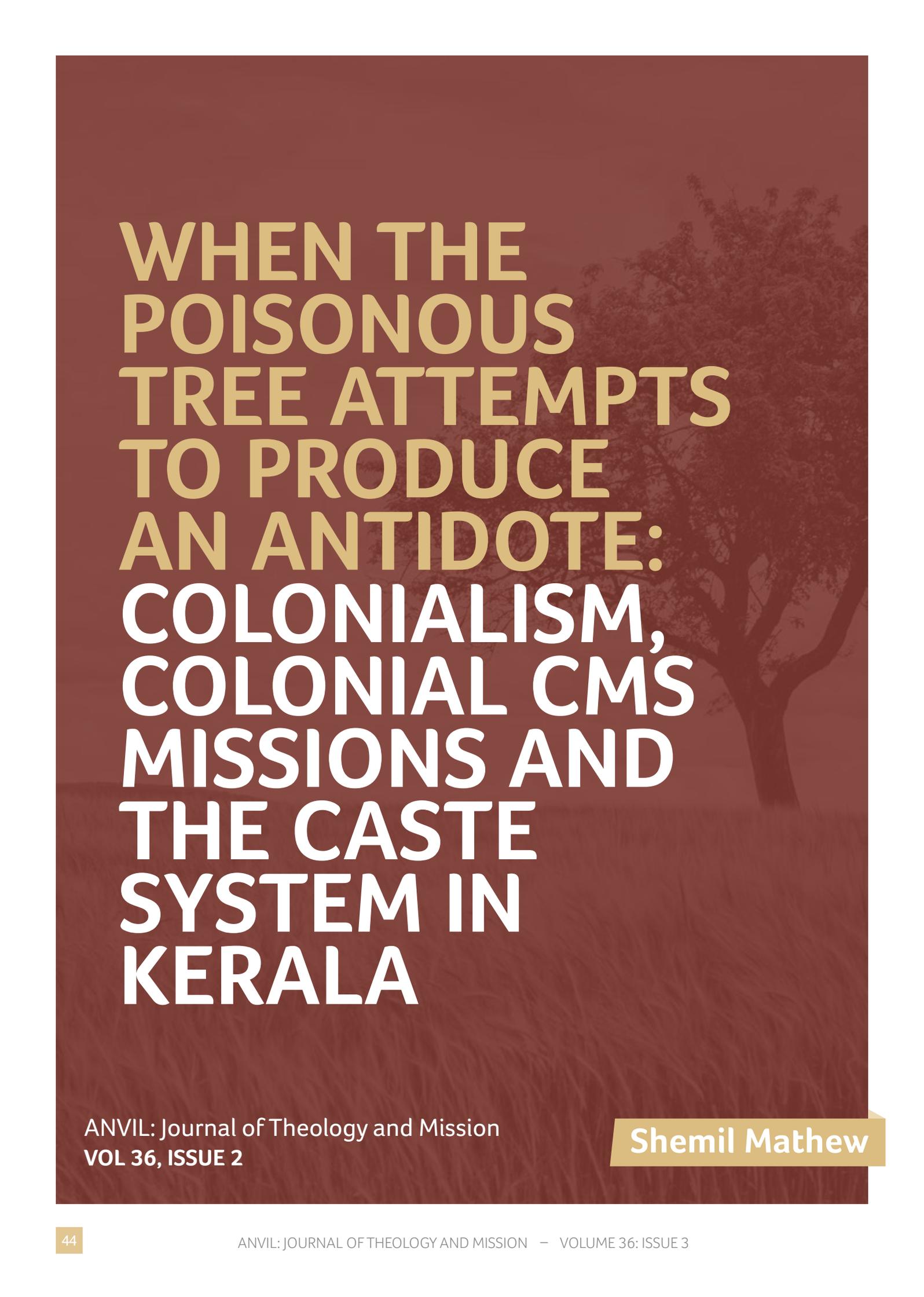
These strange times call for a different consideration. Lamenting is an opportunity to identify the historical antecedents, collective pain, to confess wrongdoing, to ask difficult questions of injustice, to own misdeeds of an ecclesiology that settles for and reinforces the status quo, and to see God differently amid the suffering. The church should lament the invisibility of some, the denial of others and the missed opportunities to form deep bonds of empathy and even deeper relationships. The final poem in Lamentations culminates in a prayer that describes the ravages of captivity. God is asked to restore the people (5:21). At the end of Lamentations, we are confronted with seemingly unresolved grief, the chaos of which can only be answered, if God so chooses. The poet shows that there is no hiding from the suffering of others, the pain we inflict and the pain we all carry.

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¹¹ Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and Origins of Race* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2011).

¹² Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 217.



**WHEN THE
POISONOUS
TREE ATTEMPTS
TO PRODUCE
AN ANTIDOTE:
COLONIALISM,
COLONIAL CMS
MISSIONS AND
THE CASTE
SYSTEM IN
KERALA**

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Shemil Mathew

I am writing this article at a time when there is a heightened interest in race, racism and racial prejudice in the UK. There are two reasons behind this increased interest: the first is the discovery that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the black, Asian and ethnic minority communities disproportionately both in terms of infection rate and severity of the infection; second is the Black Lives Matter protests that erupted around the globe in response to the murder of George Floyd on 25 May 2020. In many ways, these related issues also inaugurated a *καιρός*, *Kairos*, moment, reminding many of the “not so great” history of Great Britain. Questions were raised about the role of the church in the slave trade and its colonial legacy as well as the issue of present-day racism within the church. This article is being published in *Anvil*, a publication of Church Mission Society (CMS). As it is a mission agency started in response to the need for mission in newly “discovered” and colonised lands, it is indisputable that the history of CMS is entangled with that of British colonial expansion. The poisonous tree in my title represents the colonial establishment with its branches of political, social, economic and cultural oppression. The antidote, born out of the same tree, is the colonial missions. This article is not an attempt to find excuses for crimes of racial prejudice or exploitation of the colonial era; rather, it looks at an example of CMS missionaries who attempted, though only with marginal success, to work against the caste system of Kerala.

In a number of ways I am writing this paper very much as an insider. My ancestors were part of the ancient Church of India. There is a family tree hanging in my ancestral home proudly affirming my lineage to those Namuthiri (a caste group) families believed to have been converted by St Thomas. I am also an insider of the caste system. My school leaving certificate says my caste is “Syrian Christian” and for most of my early life I took for granted the privileges I had as a high-caste Christian. I am also an insider in terms of CMS’s legacy and its current existence as a missional community. Sometime in the nineteenth century, my great-grandfather converted from the Syrian Church to the Anglican Church through the influence of CMS missionaries. My education from pre-primary to university level was in schools established by CMS in India. Moreover, after completing my theological degree, I worked for CMS on and off for 10 years.

The physical and geographical context of this paper is the current south Indian state of Kerala. From a Christian point of view, Kerala is home to one of the oldest Christian communities in the world (dating back

to 52AD with the arrival of St Thomas, the apostle); it was also a significant field for CMS missions in the nineteenth century. The central theme of this article is the complicated relationship between the racial prejudices of the colonial era and its effect on the age-old racial oppression perpetrated in the form of the caste system. I start with a short description of the caste system as we know it today, then proceed to argue that it is the result of an interplay of the existing Varna system and British enlightenment thinking in the context of ever-growing colonial/imperial exploitative ambitions and greed. Just as pseudoscientific racial categorisations and racism were used as an effective tool of oppression in justifying and perpetuating the transatlantic slave trade, caste in Kerala became a tool of oppression. I look at how the poisonous tree of colonialism also produced colonial mission movements such as CMS, which attempted to work against the caste system. I conclude that this attempt at being an antidote for the caste system was limited by its association with the poisonous tree of western colonialism and the world view associated with it.

VARNA (वर्ण) SYSTEM

The word “varna” means colour. As it was practised for centuries in India, the Varna system divides society into occupational categories, putting the Brahmins or the priestly class at the top with the agrarian and menial labourers and tribal people at the bottom. This system is both social and religious, with associated myths and ritual impurity ascribed to the lowest of the Varnas. Just like the Indian religions (and the nation itself) of the precolonial era, there was not a particularly consistent or organised system across the subcontinent. It operated based on the relationship between the people groups, not on one particular individual’s merit or ability. When significant social changes occurred, such as the arrival of a new group, the system shifted to assimilate the new group and assigned them a place within. Penelope Carson, in her article on the interaction of Christianity, colonialism and Hinduism, building on this flexible understanding of the Varna system, argues that in precolonial Kerala it was much more flexible than the British understood.¹ She gives two examples to illustrate this point. The first is that of the Hindu converts to Christianity and Islam; both of these groups were assigned a particular place within the system. The second is the Jewish and Christian immigrants that arrived in Kerala in the fourth century, who were also assigned a status in the system.



¹ Penelope Carson, “Christianity, Colonialism, and Hinduism in Kerala: Integration, Adaptation, or Confrontation?” in *Christians and Missionaries in India: Cross-Cultural Communication since 1500*, ed. Robert Eric Frykenberg (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 148.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CASTE SYSTEM: A RELATIONAL SYSTEM BECOMES A SET OF PSEUDOSCIENTIFIC RACE CATEGORIES

The word “caste” was derived from the Portuguese word *casta* – meaning race or breed. The Varna system came to be referred to as the caste system in colonial times. Today the caste system is a rigid and closed matrilineal system with no allowances for social mobility. Postcolonial critiques of the caste system such as those of Nicholas Dirks and Shashi Tharoor (a member of parliament from Kerala) argue that the shift from the Varna system to the caste system is the result of interaction between the post-Enlightenment British mindset and colonial establishment’s desire for expansion and exploitation.^{2 3}

Colonialism, in its genesis and ideology, is heavily indebted to Enlightenment thinking and scientific reasoning born out of a desire for progress. The Industrial Revolution, from the perspective of those leading it, required cheap labour (resulting in the slave trade) and raw materials. In this context, scientific reasoning provided not only new avenues for profit-making but also often moral and religious legitimacy for exploitive relationships such as slave and master and the colonialist and the colonised.

The pseudoscientific race theories that prevailed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (and perhaps to this day remain in our societies) provided a clear framework for such divisions. Johann Friedrich Blumenbach’s race categorisation, for example, divided the people of the world into five groups: the Caucasian or white race; the Mongolian or yellow race; the Malayan or brown race; the Ethiopian or black race; the American or red race, including American Indians.⁴ This formed the roots of the understanding of race in the colonial period. Blumenbach was the first to coin the word “Caucasian” and asserted the superiority of this white race over the others. His understanding of “superiority” gave Christian Europe both the motive for engaging in a mission of civilising and the confidence to colonise. At the same time, further division of the colonial subjects

into categories (often opposing one another) was part of the Indian colonial administration’s “divide and rule” policy. Tharoor argues that the scientific tools of anthropology and statistical tools such a census were used not to fuse the diverse groups but to “separate, classify and divide”.⁵

A secondary reason (though it’s not an excuse) for the colonial desire to classify and divide peoples could be that Enlightenment reasoning could not understand societies and people groups who had a different way of thinking. In his book *Homo Hierarchicus* (1970), Louis Dumont provides a western sociological analysis of the Varna system, arguing that one of the main reasons for the misunderstanding of the caste system was that it emphasised the totality of the society, thereby making it unintelligible to the colonial West.⁶

The British colonial administration and anthropologists of the period went to great lengths to classify and categorise the castes of India. The first step towards this was translating the hitherto obscure Hindu law book *The Manusmṛiti* (Sanskrit: मनुस्मृति), which contained a precise classification of the Varnas as we know it today. The word “caste” was used to represent the system, making a clear shift from occupational and relational categories of the Varna system to one that is decided by birth with no possibility of mobility. The Indian Penal Code amendment of 1870 was based on the caste lines that were constructed and from that point Indian society became divided into castes. In other words, we have to agree with Tharoor when he argued that caste was another incident where “the British had defined to their own satisfaction what they construed as Indian rules and customs, then the Indians had to conform to these constructions”.⁷

THE MISSION OF HELP: EIGHTEENTH- AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY COLONIAL MISSION THEOLOGY OF SUPERIORITY

CMS has a peculiar history in Kerala because, unlike the other places where missionaries were sent, CMS missionaries in Kerala were sent to work not with people of other faiths but with the ancient Christians

² Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

³ Shashi Tharoor, *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire In India* (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2016).

⁴ Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *The Elements of Physiology*, trans. John Elliotson (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1828).

⁵ Tharoor, *An Era of Darkness*, 123.

⁶ Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications*, trans. Mark Sainsbury (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970).

⁷ Tharoor, *An Era of Darkness*, 123.

of India.⁸ Although earlier traders and colonialists were always followed by missionaries, both the British East India Company and its successor, the British Raj, were opposed to any missionary activity in their area. In his *A History of Global Anglicanism*, Kevin Ward elaborates on this anti-missionary sentiment with reference to Warren Hastings, the governor general of India between 1774 and 1784 who argued that missionary activity is “not consistent with the security of the Empire as it treats the religions established in the country with contempt”⁹. For many years, an Anglican priestly presence in India was limited to colonial army chaplains; early missionaries such as William Carey, whom I will discuss below, were denied access to land in British territory.

The theology of mission and evangelism held by CMS missionaries (and the colonial missionaries in general) was no doubt influenced by the new status of Christian nations as colonial masters. This can be seen in the case of William Carey, the Baptist missionary to India hailed as the father of the modern missionary movement: his famous pamphlet explaining the need of missions to the colonial world was entitled *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*.¹⁰ This title clearly highlights two critical characteristics of the colonial missions: firstly, the evangelisation of groups of people newly subjugated by colonial expansion was seen as a duty rather than a mere opportunity; secondly, the fulfilment of this obligation was considered the responsibility not of the conquering nations or their churches but of the individual people of these nations. This sense of personal obligation added to an already underlying individualistic theology that emphasised personal salvation held by the Anglican evangelical missionaries of CMS.

“Colonialism, in its genesis and ideology, is heavily indebted to Enlightenment thinking and scientific reasoning born out of a desire for progress.”

The language of obligation and burden came out of a perceived understanding of moral and religious superiority of the British missionaries and their churches. This superiority complex can be visibly identified in the records of official conversations between the ancient Church of India (known as the Syrian Church of India – a name dating back to the Portuguese colonial era, due to the affiliation to the patriarch of Syria as opposed to that of Rome) and the Church of England. One of the earliest such records is that of the Revd Claudius Buchanan, vice-provost of the College of Fort William in Calcutta, with the Metran (Metropolitan) Dionysius of the Syrian Church, facilitated by the then British Resident Colonel Munro.¹¹ This conversation is recorded in Buchanan’s book *Christian Researches in Asia* (1812)¹² and is analysed in detail by Stephen Neill.¹³ Its two main themes were the translation of the Bible into the local language Malayalam and a possible union of the Indian Church with the Church of England. The Metran was happy to consider both options provided that

the traditions of the Indian Church were protected. Buchanan rightly sensed the anti-Roman sentiment that existed in the Indian Syrian Church and understood it as a common factor that might unite the churches; he failed, though, to see the connection between this anti-Roman sentiment and the Syrian Church’s earlier encounters with colonial Christianity.¹⁴ Furthermore, Buchanan didn’t comprehend that this sentiment was only a small part of the identity of the Syrian Church: the Indian Church was proud of its heritage, dating back to the days of St Thomas, as well as its unique liturgy and doctrine. Neill writes:

[Buchanan] believed himself to have discovered a

⁸ Vinil Paul, “Colonial Kerala: Dalitha Vidyabyasatheinti Rarstriya Charitram (A Political History of Colonial Dalit Education),” *Mathrubhumi* (May 2020), 20–25.

⁹ Kevin Ward, *A History of Global Anglicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹⁰ William Carey, *An Enquiry Into the Obligations of Christians, to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens: In which the Religious State of the Different Nations of the World, the Success of Former Undertakings, and the Practicability of Further Undertakings, are Considered* (Leicester: Ann Ireland, 1792).

¹¹ Colonel Munro was a devoted evangelical Christian and had an excellent relationship with the queen of Travancore. He was appointed as the prime minister of Travancore and has played a seminal role in the establishment and development of CMS mission work in Kerala.

¹² Claudius Buchanan, *Christian Researches in Asia* (New York: Richard Scott, 1812).

¹³ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: 1707–1858* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 238–39.

¹⁴ In the seventeenth century, Roman Catholic missionaries from Portugal attempted to annexe the Indian Church. This resulted in the famous declaration, known as the *Kunankurishu Satyam*, of the Indian Church rejecting Rome, as well as a bitter split in the church.

primitive, and in the main pure, church which had for the most part escaped what he regarded as the deformities of the church of Rome. He gravely underestimated the differences which in fact existed between the Church of England and the Thomas Christians.¹⁵

The superiority complex evident in this interaction between the ancient Indian Church and the colonial Church of England, perhaps further fuelled by the British colonial establishment in India, was also present in the work of the CMS missions in Kerala. The relationship between CMS missionaries and the Syrian Church was under constant strain as the whole project was founded on the joint misconception that the Church in India was inferior to the Church of England and that it would accept the reforming steps proposed by the missionaries.¹⁶ At the same time, the Syrian Church of India – with its nearly 2,000 years of history and previous experience of defending their traditions from the Roman missionaries – found the missionaries' suggestions of reform offensive.

Cyril Bruce Firth, for example, says that “Mar Dionysius [then bishop of the Indian Church] was alarmed” when he heard that the first CMS missionary, Thomas Norton, was supposed to live and work from the newly constructed seminary.¹⁷ After much discussion, it was mutually agreed that Norton should live in Alleppey (some hours away by boat) and help at the seminary occasionally. Alongside the Mission of Help, Norton (and others who followed) also started local churches of their own.¹⁸ This gave the Syrian Church concern that CMS missionaries may cause a schism. The directive that was given to CMS missionaries until the official end of the Mission of Help in 1836, from both the London and Madras offices of CMS, was not to proselytise Syrian Christians but to work alongside them.¹⁹

CMS MISSIONARIES AND CASTE – POISONOUS TREES ATTEMPT TO PRODUCE THE ANTIDOTE

This paper has so far demonstrated that the colonial establishment was responsible to some extent for creating the caste system as we know it today. Moreover, it has argued that the colonial mission movements stemmed from a feeling of obligation based on a sense of not just political but also racial and religious superiority. Furthermore, it has advanced the idea that the relationship between the Syrian Church and the CMS missions was set up with this superiority in mind. In short: the philosophical, scientific, political and even theological will of the era was in favour of racial classification and of prejudice based on such a classification.

Before we analyse the work of the CMS missionaries, it is necessary to accept that the history of CMS missions in Kerala is often prejudiced against the Dalit Christians.²⁰ Centuries of oppression and denial of access to education robbed the Dalit communities of India of their history. Just like the Indian Christian theology is predominantly a high-caste or Brahminical theology, the history of Christianity in India is also written from the perspective of high-caste Christians. Anglican churches established by CMS missionaries after the independence of India became part of the United Church of South India (CSI). Historians from CSI, such as Samuel Nellimukal in his *History of Social Transformation in Kerala*, consider western missionaries – particularly CMS missionaries – to have started the movement of social transformation in Kerala through their introduction of schools and colleges.²¹ There is much truth in this argument, mainly because the colonial government as such had no interest in investing in education for the masses. However, it must be noted that the education – particularly the theological education – of Syrian Christians was a primary rationale behind the foundation of the Mission of Help. It is often forgotten that this specific remit of

¹⁵ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: The Beginnings to AD 1707* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 239.

¹⁶ Considerable research has been carried out on what went wrong in the breaking of the relationship between the CMS missionaries and the Syrian Church: it all points towards the doctrinal differences between the Syrian Church and Church of England. See P. Cheriyan, *The Malabar Syrians and the Church Missionary Society, 1816–1840* (Kottayam: Church Missionary Society's Press and Book Depot, 1935).

¹⁷ Cyril Bruce Firth, *An Introduction to Indian Church History* (Madras: CLS, for the Indian Theological Library of the Senate of Serampore College, 1961), 169.

¹⁸ The new mission stations and churches that CMS established followed an Anglican liturgical and theological tradition, although services were often translated into Malayalam.

¹⁹ C. Y. Thomas, S. Nellimukal, R. C. Ittyvaraya, M. K. Cheriyan, N. Chacko, G. Oomen, S. Thomas, *Oru Preshithaprayana Charithram* (Church History), ed. Samuel Nellimukal, trans. Shemil Mathew, 3 vols.; vol. 1, *Oru Preshithaprayana Charithram* (Church History) (Kottayam: Church of South India Madhya Kerala Diocese, 2016), 338–406.

²⁰ Accepting the years of oppression and the resulted brokenness of the untouchable/lowest caste of people, the Indian constitution adopted the word Dalit (meaning “broke”) to represent the entirety of the oppressed classes.

²¹ Samuel Nellimukal, *Keralathile Samuhyaparivarthanam* (Kottayam: Kerala KS Books, 2003).

limiting educational and religious activity to Syrian churches actually prevented social transformation by denying Dalits access to education. Although there were a few exceptions before the end of the Mission of Help, access to the educational institutions created by CMS missionaries was entirely limited to Syrian Christians, with the exception of some higher-caste Hindus and Muslims.

Vinil Paul, a researcher of CMS missions in Kerala who has compared CMS with the Basel Mission (a Swiss German organisation that was operational in Kerala in the same period), has highlighted the different approaches of the two mission agencies to the caste system, even after the end of the Mission of Help and the beginning of independent CMS missions. The Basel Mission insisted that once someone became a Christian, they had to renounce their caste identity. In contrast, CMS maintained caste segregation in the churches, either by keeping separate seating areas for different castes or by establishing different churches for higher-caste and lower-caste converts. Paul, in his article on the political history of colonial Dalit education in Kerala, describes the story of the Revd Cornelius Hooton. Hooton was a Dalit convert to Christianity (from Pulaya caste): his family was baptised into Christianity in the 1850s in Cochin by CMS missionaries. Though there were many schools established in the area, children from the lower-caste backgrounds were never admitted to CMS schools as they were primarily for the Syrians. The Revd Richard Collins, the then principal of the CMS College (at that time called East Seminary), decided to admit Hooton in spite of the caste restrictions. This radical move resulted in a severe reaction from the Syrian Christians and ended up in communal violence and riot. Hooton escaped from the college with the help of CMS missionaries and took refuge with the missionaries of the Basel Mission in the northern part of Kerala. He was later ordained as a priest in the Basel Mission churches.²² The practice of caste segregation continued in the churches

“The colonial mission movements stemmed from a feeling of obligation based on a sense of not just political but also racial and religious superiority.”

established by CMS, through the end of the Mission of Help in 1836, through Indian Independence, and into the present day. It still exists in some areas of my home diocese of Central Kerala.

The Mission of Help formally came to an end with the Syrian Church’s Synod of 1836 at Mavelikara, which rejected the reforms suggested by the CMS missionaries. There is a great deal of scholarly discussion around the reason why the Mission of Help came to an end. Syrian Christian scholars such as P. Cheriyan, who analyses the missionary records, argue that the second wave of CMS missionaries – mainly the Revd Woodcock and the Revd Peet – were less tolerant towards what they considered non-scriptural practices within the Syrian Church (p. 217).²³ These practices included praying for the dead, intercession of the saints, etc. However, it also needs to be accepted that

these new missionaries also challenged the practices of ritual purity. For example, Nellimukal cites an incident in 1835, at the Syrian Church of Manarkat where Joseph Peet openly challenged the notion of ritual purity.²⁴

There is no question that the official breaking of ties with the Syrian Church in 1836 enabled CMS missionaries to work among the non-Christian population of Kerala in general and in particular people of lower castes. Referring to CMS proceedings, Nellimukal refers to Peet’s recollection that in his Mavelikara mission he insisted that new converts had to reject caste not just by taking off the visible caste symbols but also by eating together with the people of all castes.

The years that followed separation from the Syrian Church saw a growth in CMS activity among the Dalits and tribal communities of the eastern hills of Kerala. Henry Baker (Jr) started working among the tribal peoples in response to a request by their leaders to provide them with education. Paul, referring to his comparative study of responses to the caste system by the Basel Mission and CMS in Kerala, argues that this request to Baker came as a direct result of the visible social change tribal peoples had witnessed among the

²² Paul, “Colonial Keralatheiy Dalitha Vidyabyasatheinti Rarstriya Charitram.”

²³ P. Cheriyan, *The Malabar Syrians and the Church Missionary Society, 1816–1840* (Kottayam: Church Missionary Society’s Press and Book Depot, 1935), 217.

²⁴ Nellimukal, *Oru Preshithaprayana Charithram* 1, 425.

Dalit communities under the Basel Mission areas.²⁵

Neill, looking at the Madras missionary conference of 1850, says that most mission agencies of the time (except for the Leipzig Evangelical Lutheran Mission) adopted a policy that “no one should be admitted to baptism until he [sic] is shown that he [sic] prepared to break caste by eating food prepared by a Paraiyan [a person of Dalit caste]”.²⁶ This statement affirms that in spite of widespread philosophical, social, political and even theological views of the time, which favoured racial division and segregation, the missionary world view also contained a spirit of social reform and an underlying belief in the value of all life and soul. This spirit of reform was hindered in Kerala by the alliance of CMS missions with the Syrian Church, which effectively stopped them from working with the Dalit communities.

It is apparent that the relationship between CMS missionaries in Kerala and the caste system was complicated. Nevertheless, even with its failings and limitations, it was undoubtedly a relationship that transformed the system for the better.

CONCLUSION

This paper, in its first part, discussed how the caste system, as we know it today, is the result of the encounter between the poisonous tree of colonialism and the Varna system. As a result, the caste system today is closed and matrilinear: the case made for the division of people resembles that of pseudoscientific race theories. The second part of this paper examined another fruit of the colonial expansion: the colonial mission movement’s attempts to work against the caste system and bring social change.

The CMS missionaries, primarily through the establishment of schools and colleges, have brought about considerable social change in Kerala. However, their relationship with the Syrian Church, rooted in their belief in the superiority of the Church of England over the ancient Church of India, and in their hope of the conversion of the Syrian Church to Anglicanism, created a major stumbling block to real social transformation.

FURTHER REFLECTIONS FROM THE REVD DR ANDERSON JEREMIAH

Having written the article, I asked my PhD supervisor, Revd Dr Jeremiah, if he would be willing to offer some further reflections on it. He is from a Dalit background and has written extensively on Dalit theology and the Dalit struggle against oppression. I thought it would be helpful to see how our own backgrounds might bring different perspectives. I am grateful for his response.

In this fascinating article, Mathew identifies significant points about the links between colonialism and various mission organisations in India. Broadly speaking, Mathew captures the fraught relationship between mission organisations and colonial structures. However, with regards to caste system and colonialism in India some points need to be clarified.

Firstly, it is not only the sense of superiority of CMS missionaries, but the same sense of superiority held by the Indian Syrian Church that contributed to the complex and often mistrustful relationship between these two bodies. As it becomes apparently clear in this article, the Indian Syrian Church prides itself as the ancient church in India and to have a foreign colonial mission to come in the name of offering missional help was seen as insulting, to say the least. Such perception combined with theological and ecclesiological differences must have escalated the mistrust and bad blood between these two strands of churches and its mission in India.

Secondly, with regards to the colonial system and its relationship to the caste system, it must be clarified that they didn’t “invent” but, as is the case across various colonial processes, simply *instrumentalised* an existing system of prejudice and discrimination to serve the imperial ambitions. Having said that, the British colonial powers certainly built on the previous colonial exercise in systematising the Indian subcontinent for administrative purposes. Such a perspective was certainly shaped by a racialised world view prevalent in Europe that time. Therefore, it is significant to acknowledge that various mission organisations birthed in such a graded social context of Europe inherently subscribed to them.

Thirdly, the article also helpfully distinguishes between CMS and other non-British mission organisations. This distinction is an interesting one, because mission organisations carried the burden of their colonial association. In this instance, the Basel Mission didn’t have the same intimate colonial relationship as CMS

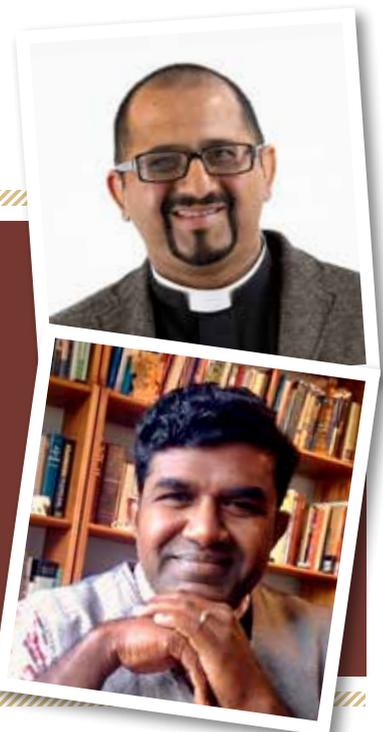
²⁵ Paul, “Colonial Keralatheiy Dalitha Vidyabyasatheinti Rarstriya Charitram,” 28.

²⁶ Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: 1707–1858*, 406.

did with British Empire. Therefore, some mission organisations like the Basel Mission or the American Arcot Mission of the Reformed Church in America from the United States had the freedom to engage in much more creative mission practices in India.

Fourthly, with regards to the attitude to Dalits, the article does well to highlight the lasting impact of caste-based discrimination within Indian Christianity. Mathew sheds light on the affirmative actions taken by CMS and other organisations in developing an inclusive Christian community. Further, it must be borne in mind that the missionaries, as much as they advocated the inclusion of untouchables into the Christian fold, didn't follow a strict rule to discourage the practice of the caste system within the "high-caste" Christian converts. In other words, they turned a blind eye to the continuation of caste practice among the "higher-caste" Christians, in terms of marriage, hospitality and other sociocultural practices. The result was that when Dalit Christians were included in worship, it became unacceptable to the high-caste converts. Therefore, we see several segregated places of worship from CMS background churches in Kerala.

Finally, Mathew certainly touches upon the sensitive issue of Syrian Christians in India continuing to enjoy "privileged minority status" and resisting any process that would question such a notion. What is fascinating in this analysis is how, to a large extent, Syrian Christians were also mimicking the same colonial attitude that they resisted in CMS missionaries. So, it is not simply about "colonialism" but how privilege colours Christian mission.



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HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS – A STORY ABOUT RACE AND POST- COLONIALISM

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Gilberto Da
Silva Afonso

INTRODUCTION – “WHAT’S GOING ON?” (MARVIN GAYE, 1971)

I am stationed at the nexus of issues around race and colonialism. I am a young Christian black man living in the covert neo-racist context of Britain today. At university I studied black political consciousness, human rights law and international development. My identity is formed through both understanding and partaking in the Great Commission, and through wrestling with the abhorrent historic methods of distributing the gospel message utilised by missionaries – an activity that is the result of western idealism echoing modernisation and development theories exported to cultures worldwide.¹

“What’s Going On?”² is a soulful anthem by Marvin Gaye from the early 1970s. The melodic tones prescribed by Marvin Gaye carry a message that is still poignant today. The lyrics helped annotate the struggle for true freedom for many black people who did not have a voice then, and they still resonate with many black communities globally today.³ Music is often used as a soft power approach for addressing the status quo and its qualities have enabled conversations to take place in order to unmask the difficult subject matters in society. In this article I will be referring to a few songs that I believe portray a polytonal quality for addressing the issues of race and colonialism.⁴

This article is a self-reflective panorama informed and typified by being a first-generation immigrant growing up in Britain. I will begin by delineating my journey of assimilation both in society and church and interrogating how the colonial narrative has dominated my name and history. I draw on past experiences that highlight prevailing archetypes perceived to describe the collective struggle of the black experience in the United Kingdom. I then turn to reflect how the gospel has administered a new sense of identity that ultimately finds the issues around race, ethnicity and colonialism as problematic for future mission. I will conclude with some personal recommendations about how the white-majority church can respond.

WHERE ARE YOU FROM?... NO, BUT WHERE ARE YOU REALLY FROM?

Often, I am posed the question, “Where are you from?” Immediately, given that I have an unsuspecting middle-class, English accent, I am inclined to answer with pride that I hail from the north east of England and that despite their many protests, home is where the heart is. However, just as quickly as I have declared my love for the lands of smog and glory, I am accosted with denial. “No, where are you really from?” Suddenly, I am filled with dread that my sense of belonging and identity is in question once again. I am drawn into the trap of believing that I am an “other”⁵ in the land I call home. The reason for this is because the first thing they see is a black man, and not a person with an identity resembling a kaleidoscope.

Nonetheless, I answer politely, engaging with the systemic institutional problems of prejudice and racism. My full name is Gilberto Muxinda Da Silva Afonso – only “Muxinda” (pronounced moo-shin-da) is not of Portuguese descent. Muxinda is in Kimbundu from the northern province of Malanje in Angola, where my grandparents are from. The other names derive from Portuguese and their roots can be traced in various Latin-based languages. My name stands for me as a reminder that my heritage has been impacted by colonialism. I speak Portuguese and though it is classified as my technical mother tongue, it does not escape me that if it were not for the adoption of the Portuguese language during colonial times, I too would be speaking Kimbundu like my father and grandparents – a way to pay homage to the ancestral tribe I come from. Equally, in the same way that the king of Kongo adopted a new name after being baptised in the fifteenth century to denote a new era, I envisage my parents were intentional in naming me Muxinda, passing down names as a way of recalling the former things.

“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.”⁶ It will gradually become apparent for Juliet, from William Shakespeare’s play *Romeo and Juliet*, about an illicit and prohibited love, that much is encompassed in one’s name. One’s appellation encapsulates history, reputation, networks,

¹ Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012),.

² “Marvin Gaye – What’s Going On (Official Video 2019),” *YouTube*, 13 September 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o5TmORitlKk>.

³ Rania Aniftos, “Marvin Gaye’s ‘What’s Going On’ Gets a New, Yet Still Relevant, Music Video: Watch,” *Billboard*, 13 September 2019, <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/8529970/marvin-gaye-whats-going-music-video-watch>.

⁴ Mark Anthony Neal, *What the Music Said: Black Popular Music and Black Public Culture* (London: Routledge, 2013).

⁵ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin UK, 2016).

⁶ “Romeo and Juliet Act 2 Scene 2 | Shakespeare Learning Zone | Royal Shakespeare Company”, *The Royal Shakespeare Company*, accessed 5 September 2020, <https://www.rsc.org.uk/shakespeare-learning-zone/romeo-and-juliet/language/the-balcony-scene>.

social capital, economic standing and power, and often all is assigned before one's words are ever uttered into existence. This underlines how naming, a cultural rite of passage into the world, is paramount. Of course, it is no coincidence that we can only be saved by one name: the Lord Jesus Christ. "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12, ESV).

Unlike many whom I have encountered who can trace their familial ancestry back with a few visits to a local archive or, in today's technological realm, at the swipe of a finger, I unfortunately cannot do the same. The reason for this is colonialism. Colonialism is guilty of perpetuating overt and covert systemic racism and discrimination worldwide. It has destroyed heritage and distorted history.

I was born in Angola in 1992 amidst a brutal and protracted civil war. Angola was subjugated and played host to a proxy war between the Soviet Union allied with Cuba and the United States of America: a severe contest for the ideological recapturing of the Angolan state.⁷ Described as "the magnificent beggar land" by Ricardo Soares de Oliveira,⁸ Angola was colonised by the Portuguese until 1975, making it late to the independence party – a black stereotype that it desired to avoid. International relations theorists and studies of postcolonial African societies will often point to Angola as a textbook example of what state-capture looks like. This is a result of having had a quasi-dictatorship headed by the Dos Santos family through a neo-patrimonial regime

for almost 37 years.⁹ The civil war ended in 2002 by a quelling of anti-government forces by the Dos Santos. Angola later emerged onto the international stage as a self-sufficient petroleum-state.¹⁰

Angola became a Christian country in the fifteenth century under the auspices of the king of Kongo, as previously mentioned, through trade negotiations that took place with the Portuguese colonisers. Initially it embraced Roman Catholic traditions and later Protestantism grew due to an influx of missionaries.¹¹ The adoption of this "new religion" was a prerequisite

to access trade agreements. The out-workings of the Christian faith in practice saw a rise in syncretism across the various polities that came together under the monarchy. This collusion involved a ransacking of the natural resources and minerals and the beginning of the exploitation of slaves. The Atlantic slave trade accelerated the dominance of Portuguese culture in Angola despite efforts from previous heads of state at the time. Thereafter, the very construct of societal norms was dictated by Roman Catholic and Protestant influences. "The state expected a 'missionary contribution to the colonial task', and viewed Christian missionary

work as the 'Portuguese mission' for the world,"¹² so much so that Christianity seemed to be transformed into a vehicle for manipulating the axis of power. The conquest of language and the dismantling of cities by the establishment of trading hubs became a textbook diplomatic tactic of which Henry Kissinger would be proud.¹³ The influences of Christianity also seeped into the civil war divides after independence. During

"The way Christianity was used for the purposes of dividing and conquering was exploitative. One is left with some difficult questions. Why did early church missions not 'give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's'?"

⁷ Patrick Chabal and Nuno Vidal, eds., *Angola: The Weight of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

⁸ Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, *Magnificent and Beggar Land: Angola Since the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁹ Daan Beekers and Bas van Gool, "From Patronage to Neopatrimonialism: Postcolonial Governance in Sub-Saharan Africa and Beyond," working paper (Leiden, The Netherlands: African Studies Centre, 2012), 35.

¹⁰ Assis Malaquias, "Making War & Lots of Money: The Political Economy of Protracted Conflict in Angola," *Review of African Political Economy* 28, no. 90, (2001): 521–36.

¹¹ William Gervase Clarence-Smith, "Angola – People," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed 3 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Angola>.

¹² Didier Péclard, "Religion and Politics in Angola: The Church, the Colonial State and the Emergence of Angolan Nationalism, 1940–1961," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28, no. 2 (1998): 166.

¹³ Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012).

the struggle for control between 1975 and 2002, the incumbent government was supported by the Catholic Church and the opposing factions were supported by Baptists and Methodists who criticised the Dos Santos government.¹⁴

Upon discovering this, my immediate emotions are angst and sadness. The way Christianity was used for the purposes of dividing and conquering was exploitative. One is left with some difficult questions. Why did early church missions not “give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s”?¹⁵ Was the understanding of the sanctity of life so different from the interpretation of the gospel one reads in Scripture today? Did the missions not see how inextricably implicated they were becoming in imposing the horrors of colonialism? As highlighted by Reni Eddo-Lodge and historian David Olusoga,¹⁶ slaves became the commodities that financed many cities across Britain during the colonial period.¹⁷ The difficulty in this truth is that the church as representatives of Christ have been complicit in prior missions overseas that have culminated in these very slaves reaching British shores.

THE NOD – THE BLACK CULTURAL HANDSHAKE

For black people in the UK, the ability to occupy space in the arts, education, media, business, and private and public institutions is a marker for progress – for example, the achievements of Frank Bowling becoming the first black Royal Academician in 2005 after decades of neglect.¹⁸ “The nod” is an unspoken, inherited black cultural phenomenon, which demonstrates solidarity among blacks. It will often happen when one discovers another black person in a space that is not a common space for black people in society.¹⁹ This is especially true where institutional racism abounds. “The nod” greeting signifies a hidden appreciation for managing to destroy the barriers to entry.

My assimilation into British culture began upon discovering baked beans on delicious buttered toast. Since then, I’ve had many more weird and wonderful

experiences and can unequivocally state that I am quintessentially black and British. Negotiating between Angolan culture and integrating into the British one did not come without its challenges. My first exposure and difficulties were found in navigating the school system. Despite starting off in a multi-ethnic area of East London, I still felt like an outsider. I did not speak the language and was forever trying to keep up with my peers, attempting to be accepted into the culture. I began working hard to achieve this by doing things such as supporting Arsenal Football Club and watching the BBC/ITV news religiously to improve my accent. I wanted to sound like Sir Trevor McDonald!

Despite my best efforts, the realisation that I still wasn’t accepted came during the 2004 Euro quarter-final games. As a school, astonished that England had reached this far, we were permitted to watch the Portugal vs England game before the school day began. The whole country was completely behind the golden boots of Michael Owen. Unfortunately England lost out on penalties to the fresh face of Cristiano Ronaldo. I tried to join with the commiserations for the team but was refused access by my peers and was castigated for “being Portuguese”. I tried to distance myself from Portugal, stating that I was Angolan, but alas I was bullied for a few days after that. Colonialism strikes again.

During the month of October, the question of identity has been thrust upon me repeatedly. Black History Month has always been a confusing time for me. I’ve never heard about Angolan history or black British history either,²⁰ only American history. And why is it only a month? As if a month is enough time to discuss the history of all black people. And why isn’t there a white history month? Surely, my white peers didn’t want to be left out... These are questions I’ve had and to this day, which remain unanswered. I learned about slavery through the lens of the African-American civil rights movement, but I was not conscious of the possibility that Angola was somewhere slaves came from.

I quickly discovered that there was a difference between being black African and black British due to the various

¹⁴ Péclard, “Religion and Politics in Angola”.

¹⁵ Matt. 22:21b, “Then he said to them, ‘So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s’” (NIV).

¹⁶ Reni Eddo-Lodge, *Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People About Race* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018).

¹⁷ “BBC Two – Black and British: A Forgotten History,” *BBC*, accessed 3 September 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b082x0h6>.

¹⁸ “Not good enough’: Oscar Murillo criticises Tate over Frank Bowling exhibition,” accessed 12 October 2020, <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/not-good-enough-oscar-murillo-criticises-tate-over-frank-bowling-exhibition>.

¹⁹ Musa Okwonga, “The Nod: A Subtle Lowering of the Head You Give to Another Black Person in an Overwhelmingly White Place,” *Medium*, 16 October 2014, <https://medium.com/matter/the-nod-a-subtle-lowering-of-the-head-to-another-black-person-in-an-overwhelmingly-white-place-e12bfa0f833f>.

²⁰ Anushka Asthana with Aamna Mohdin et al., “Revisited: Britain’s reckoning with its racist past,” podcast, *The Guardian*, 25 August 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/audio/2020/aug/25/revisited-britains-reckoning-with-its-racist-past-podcast>.

data collection forms I have had to fill out. When I was in primary school I was branded as being “fresh off the boat” or a “freshie” because I didn’t know the British culture, which at the time I interpreted as an innocent way of describing new people. Unbeknownst to me, this statement had heavy connotations of a colonial past.²¹ Boats have been the means of entry for many foreigners and the rejection of people from a boat has been particularly highlighted in the recent Windrush scandal.²² This incident filled me with deep anger and fear, hearing of those individuals who had arrived in the UK on their parents’ passports and later been told to return “home” having lived here all their lives.²³ I didn’t arrive on a boat, but I did arrive on my mother’s passport. Will I one day be told to “go home”?

In secondary school, I was the only black student in my classes. Of course, this did not come without its challenges. Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) lessons were a particularly interesting time. I would witness my teachers wince through issues around racism and discrimination. It seemed that they thought these topics were only relevant to me, implying that anything to do with race and ethnic diversity only had an impact on black people.²⁴ At the time I felt embarrassed and ashamed that I had to answer for all black people. The pressure of being the stereotype of a black person, whether it be from sports, the token black person in teen films or in music videos on MTV, was overwhelming. A majorly disappointing time was when I auditioned for the role of Othello in the school production; it was given to a white person. For a while, my assimilation felt like I was on trial and the jury already had the evidence before I could even open my mouth to state my name.

“BLACK MAN IN A WHITE WORLD” (MICHAEL KIWANUKA, 2016)

My experience of racism began upon arriving in the UK; in other words, I became black on 24 April 1999. Racism and its effects for me have been varied. I have been physically attacked and verbally abused. As a child, I had to walk the long way home to avoid walking past the local pub and being racially abused by a group of intimidating old white men. This was at the time of Anthony Walker’s death in 2005.²⁵ Another negative experience was applying for a job soon after completing my degree and being told that I was overqualified at the interview after having already submitted my CV. All highlighting the effects of structural racism in society.

The lyrics in the song “Black Man in a White World”²⁶ have undertones of a black spiritual song, essentially offering up a sobering reality for any black person wishing to emancipate themselves from the institutional challenges of today.²⁷ It’s catchy, punchy and yet still melancholy in its delivery. When I first heard this song, it forced me to question where I could see black representation in society. Dr Andrew Wilson discusses the hidden nature of racism in society. He writes, “For many others, conscious and interpersonal forms of racism are only the tip of the iceberg; they are the bits that can be seen, and decried, but they are held in place by a whole variety of institutional, structural and systemic factors that are, most of the time, largely hidden beneath the surface.”²⁸

Attending university introduced me to the activism of unheard-of names, which helped me dive into the pool of self-discovery and self-analysis. I began to immerse myself in the history around black thought, and black political consciousness. Modules I studied involved debates about justifying wars present and past, as well as dissecting colonial France and its relationships with the former colonies. I explored the collection of works called *la Négritude* as coined by Aimé Césaire – an ode

²¹ “BBC Four – Soon Gone: A Windrush Chronicle,” *BBC*, accessed 31 August 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0002sqv>.

²² Anushka Asthana with Amelia Gentleman, “Revisited: The Windrush scandal isn’t over,” podcast, *The Guardian*, 28 August 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/audio/2020/aug/28/revisited-the-windrush-scandal-isnt-over-podcast>.

²³ As dramatised in “Sitting in Limbo”, *BBC iPlayer*, accessed 31 August 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p08g29ff/sitting-in-limbo>.

²⁴ Rachel Humphreys with Reni Eddo-Lodge et al., “Revisited: Understanding white privilege, with Reni Eddo-Lodge,” podcast, *The Guardian*, 27 August 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/audio/2020/aug/27/revisited-understanding-white-privilege-with-reni-eddo-lodge>.

²⁵ “Anthony,” *BBC iPlayer*, accessed 31 August 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m000lb9c/anthony>.

²⁶ “Michael Kiwanuka – Black Man In A White World (Official Video),” *YouTube*, 28 March 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-TYIcVNI2AM>.

²⁷ Rachel Humphreys with Commander Bas Javid et al., “Are the police failing BAME communities?” podcast, *The Guardian*, 8 July 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/audio/2020/jul/08/are-the-police-failing-bame-communities>.

²⁸ Andrew Wilson, “On Structural Racism,” *Think Theology*, 1 July 2020, https://thinktheology.co.uk/blog/article/on_structural_racism.

to his natal lands.²⁹ I studied the works of Frantz Fanon and his critique of the colonised mind.³⁰ I delved further in understanding Edward Said's Orientalism and the notion of "the other".³¹ This journey of investigation proved to be a rude awakening to the negligence to which I had been subjected. I had embraced a false history: one that was colourless and as many have already described, a "white-washing" of the truth.³²

I became so passionate about the topic of race and colonialism that I decided to write my undergraduate thesis about the various strands of thought found within the sphere of black political consciousness. Notable figures I came across included Marcus Garvey, Steve Biko, Miriam Makeba and Stokely Carmichael, who were all keen on pioneering the pan-African movement. These leaders began by being intentional in restoring the belief in an African, or more broadly, a black autonomy, with each exploring how to best address the issue of decolonising black culture.³³

What would a world be like if Africa were the coloniser and not the colonised? *Noughts and Crosses* by Malorie Blackmon explores this idea and her novel has now been adapted into a television series.³⁴ It depicts white people being coerced into worshipping with tribal traditions and wearing traditional African dress, a parallel to Christians in the colonising of Africa, who brought with them their specific way of worship and culture.

Overall, I began to reinterpret history with a fresh perspective, which allowed me to scrutinise the narratives I had accepted for so long. I started questioning what I had been taught about race and colonialism. I came to discover that white privilege and white power dominance was prevalent in all levels of society.³⁵ For example, as pointed out by Ben Lindsey in his seminal book *We Need to Talk About Race*, using the terminology BAME (black, Asians and minority ethnic) assumes that white people are superior, as they are not

included in the classification, and also assumes that the struggles of these individual groups are monolithic. Lindsey goes on to explain how unhelpful this is as a starting point for the church to engage in the healing of its congregations.³⁶ Bryan Stevenson suggests that for one to begin to understand the issue of racism one must reach a deeper level of proximity: up close and personal.³⁷

Too often I have been the only black person in rooms of predominantly white people, having to forgive and give grace when stereotypes of black people are assumed nonchalantly. The result of living in a covert neo-racist society is that one eventually becomes desensitised and exhausted of false promises of change. Since going through a journey of self-discovery, coupled with the recent Black Lives Matter protests, I have become more proactive, learning how history has deep black holes, which are left unanswered due to lack of engagement.

I resonated with the parallels found in many of Dr Martin Luther King Jr's sermons about the promised land. I dared to believe in such a place again.³⁸ My faith in the Lord Jesus Christ has encouraged me to continue the fight for my children to not have to experience the same trauma I often go through as a black man in a white world.

FAITH, COLONIAL OSMOSIS AND THE FUTURE OF MISSIONS – "FROM THE INSIDE OUT" (HILLSONG WORSHIP, 2006)

As outlined in the worship song "From the Inside Out",³⁹ I have been changed by the Lord Jesus Christ in a gradual process of osmosis. I became a Christian in 2007 and was baptised the following year. Finally, I thought, a place where I will be truly welcomed for what I look and sound like. I was thirsty and I received the invitation to drink. In a similar way my history has been

²⁹ Aimé Césaire, *Journal of a Homecoming / Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, trans. N. Gregson Davis (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2017).

³⁰ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008).

³¹ Said, *Orientalism*.

³² "Anthony Reddie & Ravelle-Sadé Fairman – White Power and Black Suffering," *Nomad Podcast* (blog), 23 June 2020, <https://www.nomadpodcast.co.uk/anthony-reddie-ravelle-sade-fairman-white-supremacy-and-black-suffering-n226/>.

³³ Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture), *Stokely Speaks: From Black Power to Pan-Africanism* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2007).

³⁴ "BBC One – Noughts + Crosses," *BBC*, accessed 31 August 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p082w992>.

³⁵ "Fighting the Power: Britain after George Floyd," *BBC iPlayer*, accessed 31 August 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p08hvwsl/fighting-the-power-britain-after-george-floyd>.

³⁶ Ben Lindsay, *We Need to Talk About Race: Understanding the Black Experience in White Majority Churches* (London: SPCK, 2019).

³⁷ "Grace, Justice, & Mercy: An Evening with Bryan Stevenson & Rev. Tim Keller," *YouTube*, 3 June 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MyBFOX5OHRQ>.

³⁸ Peter J. Albert and Ronald Hoffman, *We Shall Overcome* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993).

³⁹ "From the Inside Out – Hillsong Worship," *YouTube*, 3 August 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-9mUDbGsEk>.

dominated by a gradual process of colonial osmosis. This means that there are elements of my story where I have learned to accept the effects of colonialism as they cannot be reversed. After several years in the church, I realised that the same societal issues of race and prejudice were not absent, only masked.⁴⁰

The church needs to be open to changing its attitudes on race and colonialism if it is to become more effective in future mission. A report carried out by the Barna Group entitled “The Future of Missions”⁴¹ shows that in recent years, momentum in recruiting young adults and reaching out to Generation Z has proved difficult due to their deep reluctance to become involved in missions because of the sensitivities around race and colonialism. Young adults are concerned with the various aspects of mission practice. For example, they fear perpetuating dependency in those being helped, they are concerned about the historic models of mission as being western-centric and they may also be sceptical about the success of missions, i.e. the imposition of the gospel on another culture. The perceived lack of engagement by the church is pushing away a future generation of missionaries. The church should therefore be quick to change from the inside out so that from leadership to discipleship, it has a clear message about race and colonialism.

As a young adult and Christian black man, I offer here some recommendations:

To the white majority churches. Black people are not to be regarded as a statistic for meeting quotas. Black people should be given the full range of leadership opportunities, not just leading worship. Black people should not be desired only because of their extra tithes. Black people are not perpetually late. Africa is not one country. Black women should not be treated as invisible. Young black men are not just good for heavy lifting jobs around church. Black people don’t all look or act the same. Black people don’t all know each other even if it seems like we do.

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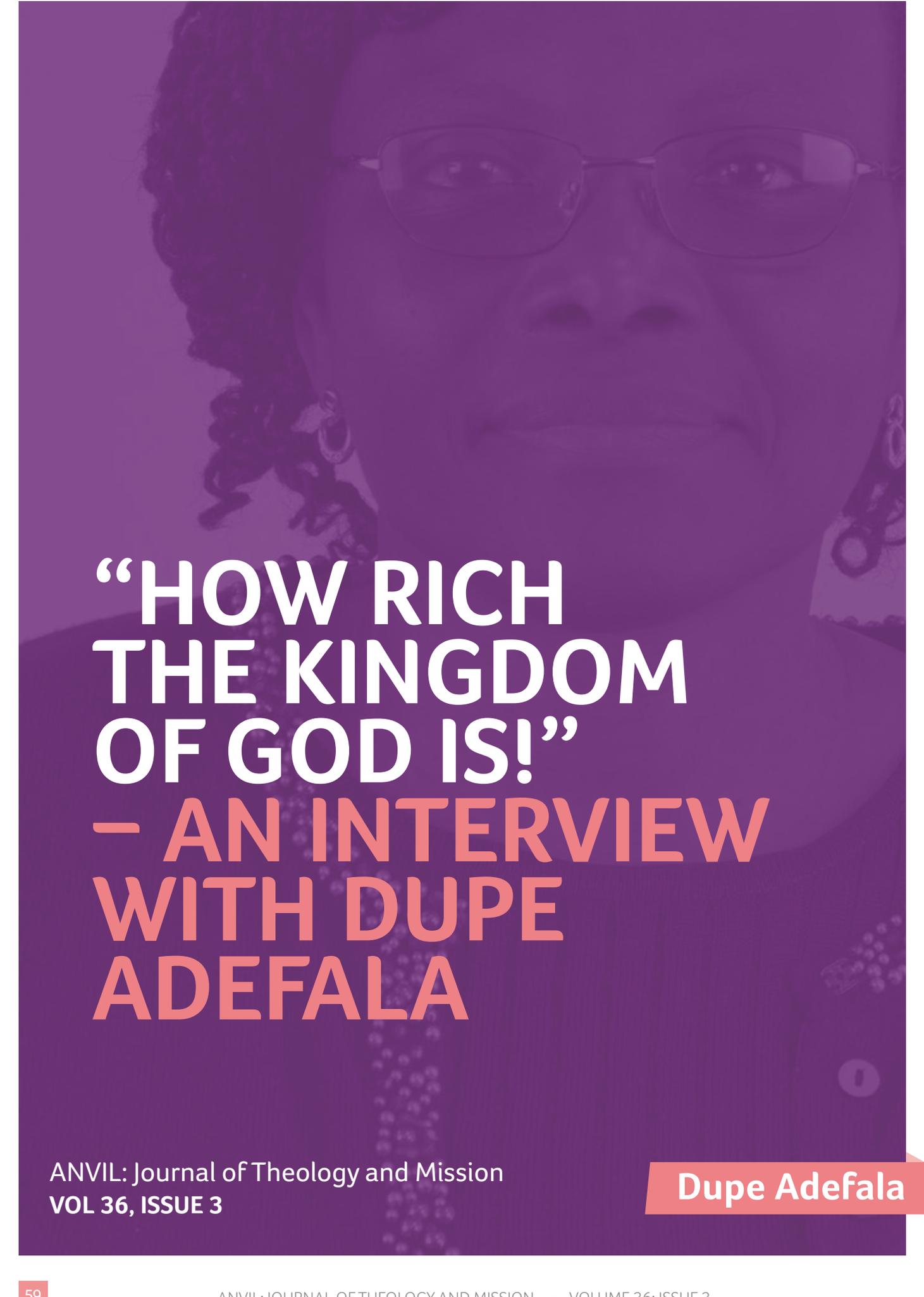


To Christians – be Christ-like. “Don’t just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honouring each other” (Rom. 12:9–10, NLT).

It is my prayer that you will continue to engage in learning and unlearning your conscious and unconscious biases, and that you will be prepared to listen and be prepared to change. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

⁴⁰ I recently watched a play called *Les Blancs*, which clearly depicts these themes (Lorraine Hansberry and Robert Nemiroff, *Lorraine Hansberry’s Les Blancs: A Drama in Two Acts* (New York: French, 1972)). It is the story of a Protestant medical mission in an unnamed African country in the midst of an independence movement against the colonial powers. The mission is no longer at the heart of the community and the relationships between the white settlers and the natives is fractured. There are various themes around ownership, violence and power struggles that are difficult to swallow, presenting the harrowing nature of colonialism during the nineteenth century. (See “What Is *Les Blancs*?” *National Theatre*, accessed 2 September 2020, <https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/file/what-les-blancs>.)

⁴¹ Barna, *The Future of Missions* (Ventura, California: Barna Resources, 2020).



**“HOW RICH
THE KINGDOM
OF GOD IS!”
– AN INTERVIEW
WITH DUPE
ADEFALA**

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Dupe Adefala

Dupe Adefala spoke to CMS pioneer MA lecturer and assistant coordinator James Butler about her experiences of racism in the UK.

Dupe studied her MA with us at CMS. We knew she would have an interesting perspective to bring to this issue of *Anvil* and so I connected with her over Zoom one evening to have a conversation and to hear about her experience as a black Nigerian woman following God's call to come to live, work and plant a church in the UK.

JAMES

Dupe, I wondered if we could start with your story of how you came to be in England and to be the pastor of Word Fountain Christian Ministries.

DUPE

Well, I'm originally from Nigeria. I was born into a Christian family, an Anglican family; we loved God, and over the years in Nigeria we went to church. My mum was particularly involved in the church. My father was not that active but his brother and children were. I'm from a polygamous family and that has its own dimension of living. I married into a Muslim family; my husband was a Muslim (although the family was not actively practising). In Nigeria, it's not uncommon to have Muslims in the family or as neighbours.

Before we came to England I worked as a bi-vocational pastor with a church in Nigeria; I trained and was ordained as a pastor there. I came to the UK with my husband and children in 1998 to take up a role as a project accountant with a company in Wantage. We've lived in Oxfordshire since then. In 2002, I took up a project accountant role in Oxford University and I've worked in some other multinational companies.

In 2002 we planted a church, Word Fountain Christian Ministries, in Oxford with two other families. In the last four years, we've developed two other branches that are also growing and we trust God for them. Word Fountain has people from many African nations, not just Nigerians (Cote d'Ivoire, Uganda, Cameroon, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya). I serve the church in a voluntary capacity. In 2010, I took up sessional chaplaincy at the immigration removal centre near Oxford and ended up as the manager of religious affairs before the centre was closed in December 2018, all by his grace.

JAMES

So you started the church with some friends? What caused you to plant a church?

DUPE

A prophetic word spoken over us in Nigeria that our relocation to the UK was more about mission than

economics – that God was sending us to the UK. I came to the UK in 1990 for a company board meeting at their headquarters. This was two years after I gave my life to Jesus. I came to the UK with tracts and Bibles in my suitcase in anticipation of coming to the country that brought Christianity to Nigeria and being part of what God was doing there. After my official meeting, I would go to Oxford Street and hand out tracts. I was like an alien to everyone that I tried to give a tract to. After my 10-day visit, I just wept in my spirit at the airport and groaned. What happened to the United Kingdom? I didn't have much understanding of contemporary mission work and the state of Christianity in the UK. I felt in my heart that there was something that God wanted me to do, but how was he going to make it happen? I did not know.

On that flight back to Nigeria – the Lord orchestrated it – I sat beside a pastor of another big church in Nigeria. I was sharing my frustration about trying to hand out tracts on Oxford Street and how I was rebuffed and he just told me that the UK is a mission field, and that he's been coming regularly with other ministers to come and see what God would have them do in the UK. He told me that I should not give up, that God has a plan for every nation and that at an appointed time revival will break out. I believed and that sort of comforted me. But whether I would have a part in it or not, I didn't know until 1997. In that year, an opportunity arose for me to come to the UK as a highly skilled migrant with my family. That's another testimony on its own. I just believe it was God at work because he saw the groaning of my heart. We moved in December 1998.

JAMES

You arrived four years before you started the church, so did you attend another church before then?

DUPE

Initially we attended Jesus House in London. Jesus House was the Redeemed Christian Church of God church plant in London. But the commute was a lot, especially because we had young children. By the time we got back on Sunday, got ready for school and work on Monday, we were very tired. So we started going to the local community church. We were part of that church and then we heard another church plant was starting in Oxford, Living Faith Church, so we started with that. But we didn't find rest in our spirit until Word Fountain started. We just had a burden for the mission that God had called us to.

We were the only black family in that church in Wantage. And so God began to link us up with other people who were having the same burden and we started praying about it until August 2002 when Word Fountain Christian Ministries started by the grace of God.

JAMES

One of the things that I've been reflecting on is that I don't have a great deal of experience of being somewhere where I'm in the ethnic minority, certainly not in the UK. I wondered if you could tell us a little about the experience of being in the minority in a majority-white context.

DUPE

When I started my job in Wantage, I went into the company's email distribution list, and I quickly dropped an email to introduce myself to the first name I saw that resembled mine. Twenty or 30 minutes later a lady ran up to me to hug me. I could see that she was delighted to see me. We chatted and she really supported my family settling into the UK. She was an engineer and she is still very close to us. There is a longing within each person for a kindred spirit!

What is the feeling of being in the minority? I would say that I've probably enjoyed positive discrimination because of the companies that I worked with. I believe I've always had favour with the managing directors and the top echelon of employers. I attended Queen's School, Ibadan (an all-female school). I never really had issues about being in the minority. I think there was a bit of toughening up that was done in me. We were nurtured as people, not as girls. When I came into the workplace I didn't have a sense of being a second-class citizen in whatever form, and that stood me in good stead.

Being in the minority in the UK is not just about colour, but language, culture, etc. The richness of who you are doesn't come into play. When it's just you, you're always trying to lean towards the majority. There is that pull. But you've just got to own your own ground or be lost in the crowd.

JAMES

Can you give some examples?

DUPE

Yes – for example, intonation and language. When I speak, people ask, "Pardon me?" And sometimes it's you being lost in the conversation – "What are they saying?" – and I may find it difficult to understand the question I've been asked. You begin to doubt yourself and question whether you really meet up to the standard. It's those issues that I needed to deal with.

I didn't have any problem with people not pronouncing my name very well. At least they make an effort. But sometimes you're not sure whether it was a form of microaggression. Between 1998 and 2000, some scam messages would come through the fax machine, and some colleagues would collect those fax messages and

put them on my table. I didn't read any meaning into that. But with the benefit of hindsight, I realised that people were tying Nigeria to the foreign scams. Because I was the only Nigerian in that department, they put them on my table. I don't know who did it; I just binned them. I felt someone was trying to say something to me in ways that I didn't understand. But by and large, I had faith in those who came to Nigeria to recruit me.

I was given an official house to live in and an official car by my employer. I did not know the gesture was exceptional for a migrant. This was against the backdrop of Britons and other foreigners working in Nigeria as expatriates (not immigrants). Their perks included official accommodation in choice locations, cars, drivers, etc. I thought I was on the same level playing field as an expatriate. However, when my role was made redundant, I realised I was really a migrant or immigrant. It was painful. I had to fight for my final entitlements with the support of a local Citizens Advice.

So at work you're dealing with all that and you're expected to deliver to very high standards. You go to church on Sunday and you're still in the minority. I think for us as a family, we had to catch up with the songs, the sometimes icy relationships, etc. With the benefit of hindsight, the pastor and the leaders of the church tried their best to help us settle, but I don't think we also understood the dynamics of what was going on. My husband didn't feel settled into that church. For example, there was a day when he came home and said, we are not going to that church again. I asked, "Why?" He explained that he could not understand why people who we would have seen at church would just ignore us in the town centre. I really couldn't understand that myself. We thought of church as brotherhood. We are brothers and I don't need to reintroduce myself to you again outside of church. But we found out we had to reintroduce ourselves outside of church. It was just not as welcoming as one would expect it to be. We considered going back to London to the Nigerian community, but the distance was too far for us and it wasn't right for the family. Spiritually we wanted to feel at home in the church where we lived. I'm sure that our children had their own experience as well.

JAMES

What are your reflections on all that has been happening since the death of George Floyd and the prominence of the Black Lives Matter movement?

DUPE

I will say that the George Floyd incident was a rude awakening to the racial fault lines in our communities, and it really made one think about how much people have had to contend with because of their colour. For us as a family it became an opportunity for our children

to tell us what they experienced that they didn't tell us before. We would not have believed the stories if they told us at the time, I think. One that stuck with them was when we moved to a new neighbourhood from Wantage to Grove. There was a particular day we came out of the house to the car, and someone had written on our car, "Go back to your country"! We didn't take it seriously, we just cleaned it off. Our children just felt that was not OK; that it was nasty.

We've had the opportunity to talk about how the children felt or were treated at school. We would go into school as parents for parents' evening and the teacher will just tell you, "Your daughter has been this" and "Your son has done that". But it is only now that the children were telling us, "Do you know this happened? Do you know that happened?" I will give an example. The teacher showed this film *Roots* at school and my daughter had a different take on the film. She spoke up as best as she could to say that the impression the teacher was giving was not correct. Some of her classmates thought that Africans lived on trees and things like that. So she felt in herself the need to speak up and say, "No, I didn't sleep on trees, my family don't sleep on trees." But the teacher felt that she was aggressive.

As the only black girl in the whole school, she took every opportunity to give the "other" narrative – the other side of the story. Like we said, a single-sided story is not helpful. She was considered aggressive and was even punished at times. She was involved in one or two fights just trying to express herself and dignify who she was. We've come to terms with such themes painfully. Very painfully. I have had to apologise to my children. My children believe I'm pro-authority by nature because if you come home and tell me, this person did that to me, I'll say, "What did you do?" I believed is all about cause and effect. So we've had to process some of these very emotional scars.

Whether it's from the church or from the community, we just felt that if it was hostile, it is not a good experience for anybody. The mind does not process why or where anything happened, it is about what happened.

My daughter also reminded me of an event on the day I came to my current job. My daughter had met me after work to travel home together. I'd had a good day and we were walking towards the car park. Someone was driving out and she challenged both of us why we were walking towards the car park. "Why are you coming in here? This car park is for band whatever." I told her my band and she apologised and left. I felt that because I'm a stranger, it was a legitimate challenge. But my daughter said, "No, it's because we are black. If you are white, and you are walking towards a car park, nobody will ask you, 'Why are you doing that?'" Can you see

the microaggression?" And I said, "Wow, is that really why?" The awareness has been heightened, even the occasions that I did not consider before. Black Lives Matter has helped us to really process our experiences and we are still processing them.

We still talk about some of the experiences through the lens of racial fault lines, not just for us, but so that we can help others as well. We can't go back to those experiences, but we can help others as we go forward. We can educate, not just the black, but also the white as to how things play out and the implication on social cohesion. So I believe it's been a lot of learning and a lot of repenting and even crying sometimes. That was my experience.

JAMES

How has it been being a pastor, both supporting and pastoring people who are having these kinds of experiences?

DUPE

Because of the lockdown we've had more virtual connections. I do not think at Word Fountain we've had to talk about racial issues. However, there have been conversations at various meetings and on social media. My understanding is that many black males feel muzzled and are made to feel as if they don't belong. They feel undermined as far as their skills and their ability to contribute to society is concerned. So it is about building up their confidence, encouraging them and championing the fact that it's not going to be like this forever. The implication for younger black males is enormous. They feel that they have no face, say or place in the wider society because of stereotyping.

A good number of people feel that the attention given to racial conversation is just the "flavour of the month" effect. We need to work to get into a more sustainable, positive landscape when it comes to racial conversations and engagement. Because of that bias, many in my community do not think it is worth their time and they believe is just lip service, a box-ticking exercise. Some would rather avoid the conversation and dismiss it as, "That's the way it's always been – nothing is going to change." Some have come to a fait accompli where they say, "We came into their country, they can do to us whatever they like." They feel it is not worth wasting their time on because there's not going to be radical change.

So we tend to hear the negatives, and that actually amplifies what people would have overlooked before. Every act of microaggression becomes amplified. We need to find ways of engaging, across the board, with education. My community needs some education, and I believe the white community needs education as well. My fear is that we may not achieve that long-

standing and sustainable change unless we have honest conversations and begin to understand the roots and truths of the issues.

We have been focusing on the young people. My daughter, my son, they've had conversations with their colleagues, with people globally about what they consider to be issues and how they feel that we should be going forward. But it should always be progressing. It should not come to a place where we think, "Oh, we've dealt with it, let's move on." It's not just about policies, it's about practice and systemic changes.

JAMES

What would be your practical challenges to white Christians and to CMS in response to all of this? What would you like to see?

DUPE

Representation is key. Representation at all levels, not just the higher levels. To be heard, you've got to be seen. Culture is not formed by one person, it is a collective thing. We're not talking about tokenism. We're talking about vocal, visible voices in the hierarchy of the church. When I look at the education CMS deliver we do need to thank God for the efforts that's been made so far, having a good mix of lecturers, but there has to be emphasis on getting a more representative community of lecturers and facilitators. We can't do it by segregation; we need to move towards enculturation by integration. If we are talking about global missions, we do need the voice of every major and minor player in global missions talking about it and writing about it.

This leads to the second thing: the narratives. I do not think my community write enough. The black community seem to be more involved in the practice than the narrative. There are not enough black theologians contributing to or even challenging the current narratives. I do not think we should just be given this space for political reasons, I think those spaces need to be earned. The danger is that my community will want to create its own class of educators and simply do the black versus the white, whereas we should be looking at integration, we should be looking at walking together, we should be looking at facilitating together, standing side by side and making Jesus the focus.

Thirdly, my concern is for the next generation. I believe an institution like CMS can develop level playing fields for the next generation to facilitate that integration. And the earlier we do it, the better, so that the next generation of apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers and pastors can take the theological lens to look at what we do and why we do it. If we don't, the next generation will remain polarised. It doesn't have to be big numbers: 10 people in the next generation who are

interested in making this thing happen with CMS, just facilitating and amplifying their voices. That's what I'm looking for – a model of what is possible. But it needs to be created intentionally. We should seek to recruit people who will shape things and are concerned enough to make a difference.

So three aspects. Representation, narratives and the next generation. And then maybe we can look at the literature. The book selection needs to expand. I'm not just talking about CMS, I'm talking about the curriculum of universities and theological colleges. There are some very good literary contributions from the BAME community, and they need to be allowed to have a space.

JAMES

Thank you; these are really important challenges. As you say, we have been working on diversifying our teaching and reading lists on the pioneer training at CMS, but there is much more that we need to do. You were talking about racial fault lines and polarisation; perhaps you could say something about the fact that we tend to have white churches and black churches and fewer mixed and diverse churches. What's your feeling about the way forward there? And have you seen any ways that steps can be made forward in those kind of conversations?

DUPE

I think it is important that it is a natural process. There are some initiatives that are bringing us together. Love Oxford is a very vibrant gathering of Christians that's been taking place for some time now. It has been championed by St Aldates. And the pictures are colourful – it's what the church should be. That just tells us how rich the kingdom of God is. How rich the kingdom of God is! This is richness that we need to begin to build upon.

There's a difference in the music, but I believe that some people are finding common ground now. In the black churches we can preach for 40 minutes while in the white church 10 to 15 minutes is considered OK. In the black church we can typically stay in church for two hours or more. Two hours is modest! Three hours, four hours... White churches don't see the reason for such long services. So we need to challenge ourselves. Where is the balance? Is there a way that would not just satisfy us but will also please God? Then there are different beliefs about the manifestation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Some will say it's OK to speak in tongues. Some will say no, speaking in tongues is for private, for edification. There are real issues about the theology.

I believe both sides need to be praying. We should be dependent on God, the owner of the vineyard to help

us to see our excesses and our inadequacies on both sides. We need to own up to the fact that neither is perfect and we need to begin to hear God together. There must be something that God wants to say to us that will bind us together with a cord of love that is not easily broken. I don't think it is something we can force feed or make happen. But we need to be prophetic in our conversations. Not condemning or undermining but trusting God that there is a gift from the white church that the black church needs and there are gifts from the black church that the white church needs. It is pictured in Rev. 7. We are the multitude from different nations, with different languages, and I think it's time we begin to rehearse that picture. We hope and pray for the unity of the faith as Jesus desired.

JAMES

Dupe, thank you. Thank you for sharing so honestly and openly. You said when I first contacted you that you hadn't experienced much racism, but I find it a little shocking to hear all your stories and what you have experienced. They may not be extreme examples, but they are really painful to hear and I recognise my own guilt as you speak. I think what you have shared helps us to open our eyes to the suffering and discrimination around us every day. And thank you for reminding us of the hope-filled vision of God's Kingdom, of every nation praising God together.

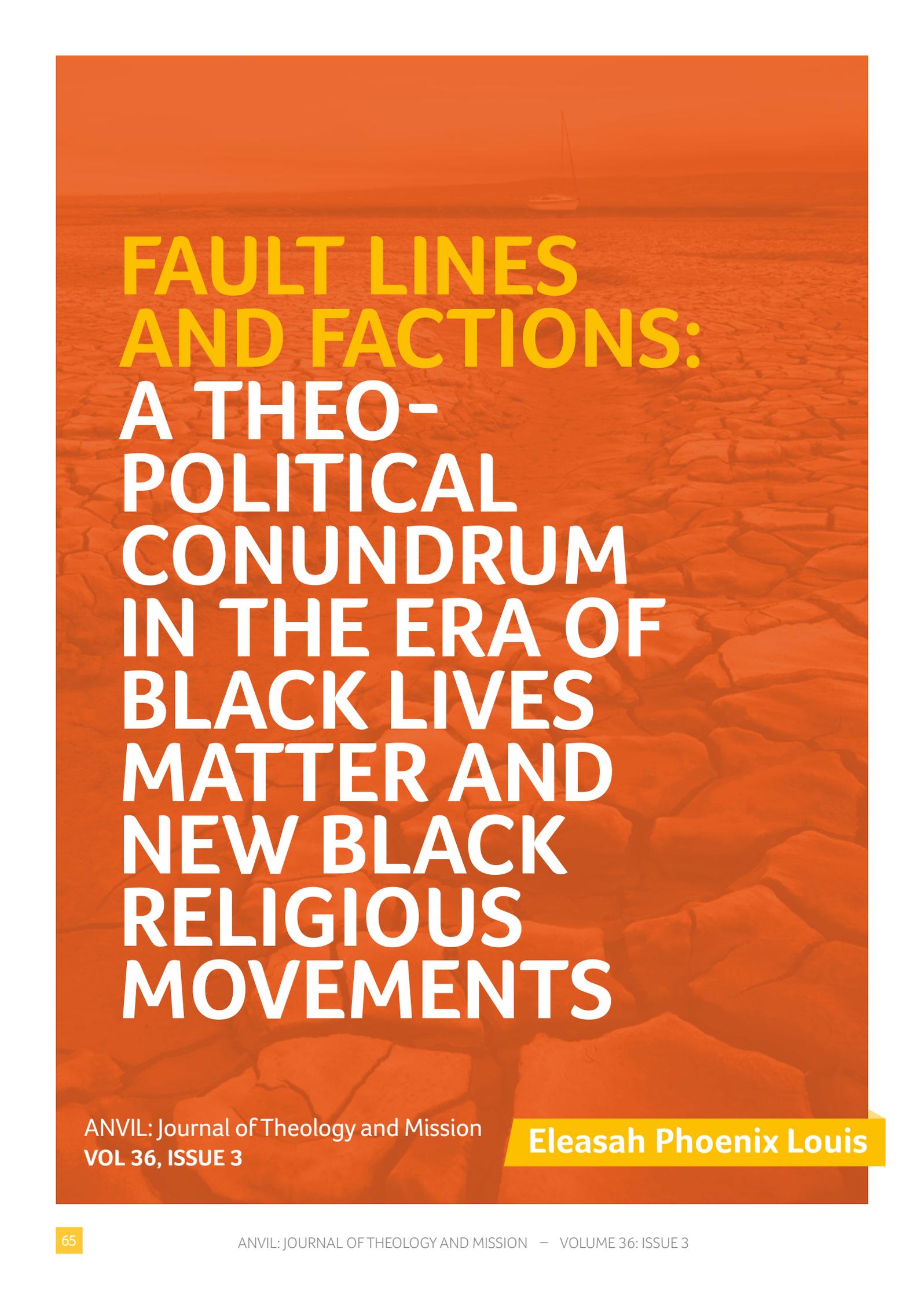
DUPE

Thank you. I believe the more we talk, the better we heal and the better we become – because someone has said it is not what we're going through, it is what we're becoming that really matters. I pray that the conversation will be redemptive. And that's something I say to my children. How can we allow the redemptive grace of God to help us in this journey?

I want to thank the *Anvil* team for holding this conversation and I look forward to reading what others are saying. God bless.

Pastor Dupe Adefala is a wife to Bode Adefala and a mother of three biological children. She stewards a church called Word Foundation Christian Ministries, based in Oxford, where God has called them to raise a people of inheritance (matured sons of God). She is also the current president of International Ministers Fellowship (UK chapter), a non-denominational, living and living network of ministers of the gospel. She is the managing chaplain at a UK prison, where she leads a multifaith team of staff and volunteers, and is the author of the book *The Mysteries of Marriage*. She is a lover of God and of his people.





**FAULT LINES
AND FACTIONS:
A THEO-
POLITICAL
CONUNDRUM
IN THE ERA OF
BLACK LIVES
MATTER AND
NEW BLACK
RELIGIOUS
MOVEMENTS**

ANVIL: Journal of Theology and Mission
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Eleasah Phoenix Louis

INTRODUCTION

The last few years have been illuminating and theologically challenging for me as a young researcher and developing practitioner. My research seeks to understand why waves of young black people in Britain are leaving their churches and engaging with new black religious movements and to support this exploration by developing a theological framework that helps us best understand and *learn from* this phenomenon. This reflection begins with my own story, which has led to this research, and how struggles for justice in the twenty-first century have challenged my Christian walk. While the battle for racial equality in Britain and the wider church has been an ongoing challenge, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement has energised and grounded liberal politics for the younger generations of black people. In many ways their protest is crucial to the uphill challenge towards anti-racism but has created a theo-political conundrum for me. I am a pro-black, Bible-believing Christian with politically and socially conservative/evangelical values. I reflect on this publicly because I know I am not alone. Movements like BLM and theological traditions like black liberation theology resist and oppose evangelical conservatism as a product of colonialism and yet I have found that new black religious movements have carved out ways of holding Bible-centred evangelical principles and liberal radicalisation in the balance towards liberation from colonial missionary trauma.

A PERSONAL WITNESS

A church-grown black British millennial, the Christian traditions and congregations that I belonged to failed to provide the space to identify, reflect and respond to the ways in which colonial mission impacted my theological imagination and how I perceive God, the Bible and the world. In fact, critical theological reflection for the most part in all traditions historically has only ever been afforded to those who dwell in intellectual theological spheres – mainly academics and formally trained ministers. My own formal education in theology was the beginning of a new era in my Christian walk. I had grown up in Word of Faith, evangelical and African Pentecostal congregations as a child and then settled as a teen into adulthood in a white-led, black-majority Baptist church (now pastored by a Nigerian minister). I was an enthusiastic participant in church, engaging with community work, music and teaching and felt that theological education would be a great way to grow in my faith. I soon came to realise this would not be two years spent proving how much I read my Bible! What I imagined to be an exciting, spiritual and knowledge-building experience (reflecting what I understood to be the typical Christian goals within my church traditions) turned out to be a difficult, frustrating yet transformative wade through murky waters.

The first challenge was coming to grips with how theologically illiterate I had been; although I had dedicated most of my time to Bible reading, prayer meetings and church activity, I had very little understanding about the work in the background that goes into shaping my theological imagination. All I thought I knew about God and the Bible I put down to special spiritual insight, the conferences and “worship experiences” and efforts to study deeply my King James and Amplified Bibles. Never had I imagined that my theological perspectives were being masterfully formulated/discussed and edited by ancient, slightly less ancient and contemporary theologians and even worse – theological politicians! While I had grown up with evangelical theological roots, being of the poor working class in Brixton (London) meant that I was also influenced by the black diasporic cultures I encountered in my family, on my council estate and in school. Without full understanding, I had formed a “bun Babylon” rhetoric (anti-establishment) that meshed well with the spiritualised, politically passive traditions that only registered political developments in order to relate it to the “end times”. My Christianity had been for the now and not yet; any past reflection was anchored in the biblical past, not the works of church fathers and mothers, European powers and sidelined global Christian perspectives. It became apparent very quickly I was one of the few sistas at college that did not get the fancy-dress memo; ill-prepared for critical theological thinking, I waded.

The second challenge was about my social identity—our home was a spiritual home that did not intentionally nurture our ethnic cultural particularities, nor political ideals. My Northern Irish mother and British-born Jamaican father protected us from the influences of secular cultures and they themselves were active members and leaders within our church congregations. My father’s family typically blended Jamaican and black British cultures, so I had some cultural rooting but it was not the primary resource for identity formation – that, of course, was the job of the Bible (a fundamentalist–literalist reading, no less!). During the time of my theological education, in my personal life and friendship circles, Christianity as I knew it had come under fire. Religious and secular factions within the black consciousness movement had resurfaced and re-energised a new assault on the “white man’s religion”. I’ll summarise some of the key arguments here:

- 1 Christianity is a religious vehicle that enslaves the minds of black people and deliberately distorts religious truth.
- 2 Christianity endorses slavery and teaches us to serve without question.
- 3 Christianity has whitewashed and repackaged ancient African religions – with specific reference

to the religions of ancient Kemet (Egypt).

- 4 The Bible has been edited to suit the philosophies and capitalist ambitions of elite European powers.
- 5 The true Hebrew scriptures tell the history of black people (the various ethnic groups that inhabit biblical Afro-Asiatic lands) and their God/black messiah.

This “woke” perspective demonstrated the ways in which pockets of black people in poorer demographics were blending their political and religious world views and further asserting that the “white man’s religion” was more politics than religion. This produced two immediate results: 1) having lived with a colour-blind theology. I discovered I was considered socially black (previously “Christian female” was the sum total of my self-identification) and 2) despite subscribing to a colour-blind theology, my Christian expression, thought and ritual practice was a product of black and under-resourced cultures and contexts. Considering these new challenges, I began to make sense of why I did not feel settled among my college peers. There were so many instances where I felt that I was talking about a different God, a different Bible and a different Christianity and I could not make the cultural connection. I thought the failure to connect reflected my theological, philosophical and political illiteracy, but the black consciousness movement helped me to see that Christian theological understanding was a social, political and cultural battlefield.

BACKGROUND

To clarify terms, the black conscious community I refer to here is the intentional social, cultural, religious and political effort of a person or people to explore and embody “blackness” in all its diversity, evolution and complexity. This black consciousness is in direct response to the identity crisis within black diasporic and native African peoples that is a result of enslavement, colonisation and reprogramming through educational and religious efforts. It is both connecting with the past (pre-enslavement/colonisation) and carving out the future for healthy black identities across the black Atlantic with the hope that this process will contribute to the betterment of black life in all spheres of life. The communities I refer to specifically in this text operate at grass-roots level, not in the academic spheres – they are the efforts of everyday people who create ways of realising liberation: black Saturday schools, black book stalls in markets, black business for black people, community meetings about black issues, black family initiatives, protests, marches and the like. This community also has a heavy social media presence, which helps to formulate and casually systematise “pan-African”, “Afrocentric” and “pro-black” ideas and actions for the lay person. More specifically for this

reflection, I consider the development of its religious arms – communities that seek to reconstruct the precolonial traditional religions of their ancestors. This is a form of decolonisation; the aim here is to break ties with the religions inherited by “the white man” through enslavement and colonisation. These communities have had a strong influence on those on the margins of our black British church communities for decades. In my own experience those with the heaviest influence have been the religious movements that have remained centred around the biblical texts but developed their own hermeneutic at which black people (after Christ) are the centralised figures. Be it a mythical connection to the Israelites or a genetic claim to Israelite ancestry, Bible-based new black religious movements are decades deep in decolonising their theology. While many can argue this is a more relativist, racialised methodology, I am keen to highlight what could be considered conservative/evangelical principles at work. These are religious movements and they value *religious authority*, distinctive from the black humanist arms of the black consciousness tradition. They seek a life that is connected to God and understood through the scriptures and ritual. While all biblical interpretation is contextual (considering political, social and cultural realities), they consider the Bible specifically *authoritative* on religious understanding. And finally, birthed from a literalist-leaning reading of the texts, these movements are generally conservative in their social perspectives – pro-life, pro traditional family structures and nationalist.

Rastafari, Nation of Islam, (black) Hebrew Israelites and other black religious movements were birthed out of the struggle for racial equality; anchored in the emancipatory Ethiopianist hermeneutic, these religions resisted the colonial legacy of Christianity and carved out new paths for black Bible-reading religious folk to engage with their experience and ancestral identity. The implication of this new direction was that they were separating themselves from mainstream Christendom – a quest I found difficult to condemn yet also difficult to join. While these religious efforts provided the space to be both Bible-centred and pro-black, they created theological/doctrinal conundrums that I could not readily embrace – particularly their approaches to Christology. Instead of conversion, I have chosen to look at these movements as key indicators of colonial missionary trauma, their sharp, bold and dynamic critique of the church clearly marking out the ways in which an inherited faith through Christianisation has impacted the theological imagination of mainstream black British Christians. It is my hope that at the end of this reflection, one can consider these religious movements as resources for understanding, reflection and as prophetic – despite interpretive differences.

REJECTING CHRISTIANISATION

Many of us in the African diaspora who descended from enslaved or colonised communities have come to see our Christian journey beginning with the experience of oppression. Although they were not initially thought to be worthy of Christianity, eventually missionary evangelism was entangled with the process of civilising African peoples. This Christianising process brought about new moral bases, new social ideals, western philosophies and a colonial hermeneutic in which racial supremacy would be theologically justified. During the centuries of Christianising, the African diaspora has been all but totally distanced from its ancestral philosophies and religions. We do see remnants of traditional ancestral religious beliefs among some of the poorer African–Caribbean and African–American communities,

often merged with Christianity, but I am a witness to a disconnection from my ancestral heritage. The inherited-by-force Christianity stands in the way of knowing what it would have looked like if Yeshua himself had walked among my ancestors (whoever they are) and transformed our religious, political and social systems.

New black religious movements reject this Christianising process and instead have developed a new understanding of Scripture, which means that they read the Bible as a continuation of their ancestral history interrupted by “Christendom”. In these readings, those of the African diaspora are the chosen children of God, the God of the Ethiopians, of Israelites whom he will rescue, redeem and recover to glory. Though they have their differences, some believe themselves to literally be “true” Hebrews and/or descendants of African Jews, and others form more mythical connections between the biblical accounts and their own experiences; the point here is that black people have a significant part to play in the unfolding plans of God. According to these emancipatory readings, we are not a product of colonialism, children of the empire or a heathen people; the revelation is that we are the children of God – a prophetic voice in the wilderness. Realising this revelation through separation from the mainstream church has been the beginning of the decolonisation process – standing upon a hermeneutic that affirms

“The inherited-by-force Christianity stands in the way of knowing what it would have looked like if Yeshua himself had walked among my ancestors (whoever they are) and transformed our religious, political and social systems.”

our humanity and agency. This might ring some literary bells for those who are familiar with black liberation and womanist theologies, which in many ways work as an academic counterpart – themes of liberation, suffering and a hermeneutic inspired and fuelled by the lived experiences of black people in the diaspora.

On the flip side, the political effort to affirm black humanity and agency is currently most notably represented by the BLM movement. The conundrum that BLM creates for me is that it has successfully revived the “race” conversation, policies are being made in the work place, people are re-evaluating their perspectives and their actions, and they are joining the demonstrations; while that brings its own set of complexities, things are happening. Black people are all over the news, TV shows, adverts – in many

ways there has been a visible response to their challenge and protest. However, the BLM movement in all its glory is causing a crisis for the church because it has some very compelling arguments, yet their methods and hope for the future are unorthodox and contrary to the central tenets of many mainstream orthodox churches: new visions for big government, nuclear family structure, LGBTQI+ normativity, feminist narratives and another wave of pluralist

approaches to religion.

Much like many postmodern movements, BLM is driven by the lived experience, particularly of black people – the experiences are the measuring stick and authority, which again presents issues for many churches who claim to submit to the authority of Scripture above our feelings and lived experience. For many years now black theology has bridged this gap, helping us to see how decolonising our approach to an interpretation of Scripture helps us to biblically engage with the lived experiences of black people – yet still over the years it also suffers the internal Scripture-experience power struggle.

And so, my research and reflection turn towards these Bible-centred new black religious movements who have made efforts to submit to the authority of Scripture yet remain inspired by and in tune with the experiences of black people. Undeniably the moral of my reflective process is that one’s political stances and cultures

are embedded into our theological reflection, and so this is not to set these movements above mainstream Christian perspectives but as especially significant to its development. My research so far demonstrates that those on the fringes of the church seek answers to difficult questions, social empowerment and to engage with a deeper biblical landscape. For me the strength of these movements does not lie in their tendencies towards black supremacy or returning to living according to Hebrew religio-cultural markers as outlined in the Scripture (dress, dietary requirements and ritual) but in their hermeneutical approach to resistance and ethnicity; they do not shy away from the biblical reality of justice and ethnic diversity, which ultimately subverts the colour-blind theology that has undergirded the theological imagination of many Christians. The framework with which they work highlights the African-Asian presence, the ethnic diversity, and the cultural difference without apology – there is no call to cultural homogeneity. They have a theological imagination that aims to be free from colonial colour blindness (whitewashing) and have injected the colour and vibrance that I believe God intended for the holy scriptures. I have engaged with Christians who acknowledge the painful past of the church but consider the church to have moved on, beyond racism and a colonial legacy to a Christianity that doesn't see colour. This theological movement, influenced by post-racial social ideals to break the barriers of race in society, failed to see that differences among peoples are natural, biblical and God-given. I often use this passage from the book of Revelation as a point of reference:

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and

worshipped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen."

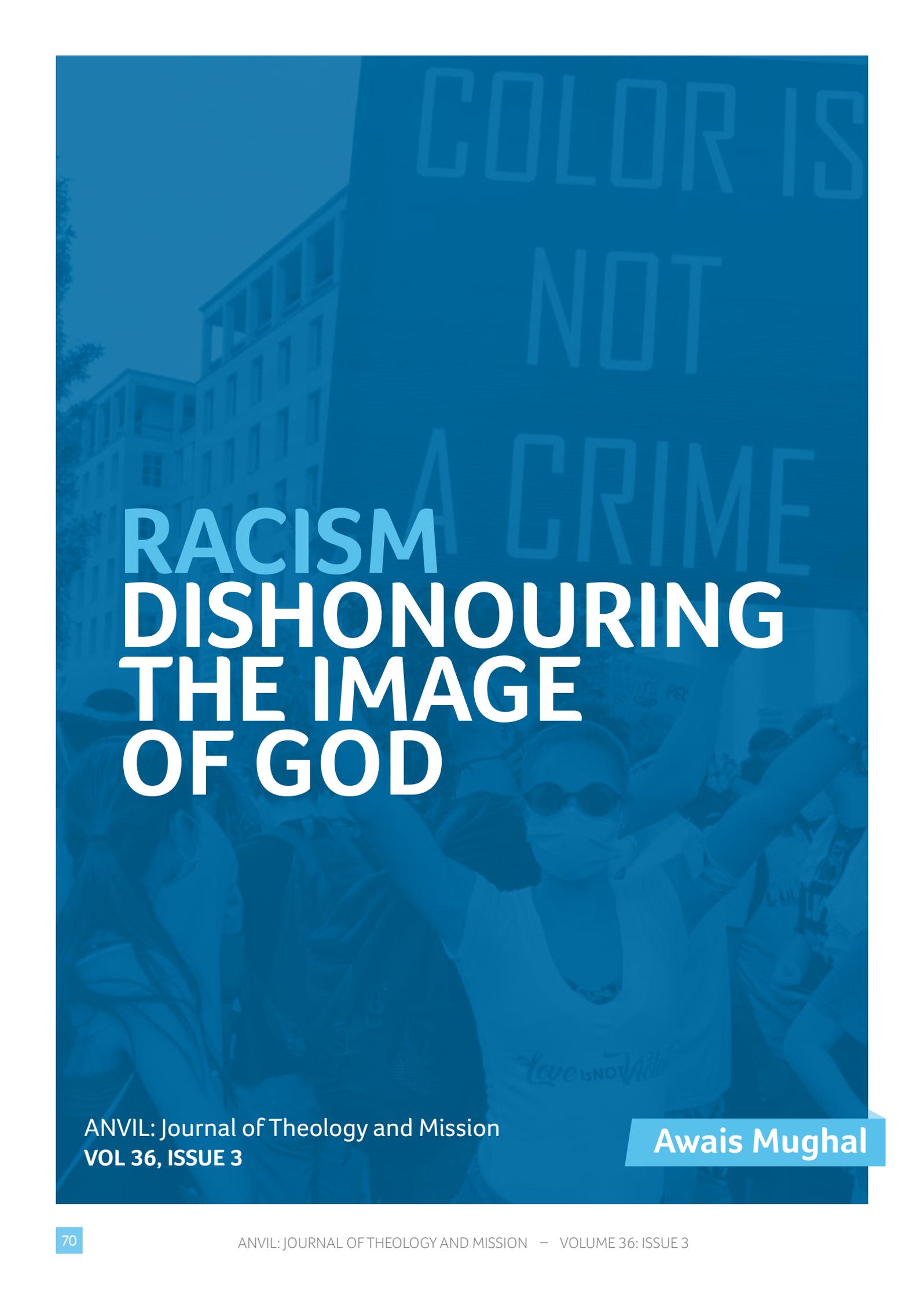
Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:9-14 (ESV)).

If you permit my literalist reading – even in life after death the redeemed are diverse and distinctive.

For this context, this time and this era, I feel that it is important that we engage with the grass roots religious movements that are developing in response to unresolved colonial missionary trauma – cannibalisation and rejection of their ancestral heritage, persistent theo-political illiteracy, dependence on the institution for theological understanding and their lack of agency in developing their own contextualised Christian realities. New black religious movements demonstrate the desire to maintain a sacred religiosity that is responsive to their lived experiences and are thus an essential resource for our ongoing battle against the legacy of colonial mission in theological spaces.

Eleasah Phoenix Louis is a doctoral research student at Canterbury Christ Church University; her research is focused on the influence of new black religious movements in Britain on the black British "de-churched". Eleasah is also the founder of Black Consciousness and Christian Faith, a programme that responds to the challenges of racism, miseducation and the marginalisation of black people in British churches and which incorporates open discussion forums, reasoning and apologetics-style teaching.





RACISM DISHONOURING THE IMAGE OF GOD

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Awais Mughal

The complexity of racism in its current state is difficult to summarise in a few words; however, in this article I aim to provide a personal reflection on the topic from a Pakistani Christian perspective. Racism elicits strong sentiments of anger, pain and even guilt from our varying viewpoints, and therefore, in this article I will draw on a variety of voices and perspectives both from the UK and from Pakistan to focus on the sociocultural and historical factors that maintain the structural racism within our society and institutions.

FIGHTING THE DAILY RACISM WE ENCOUNTER

The recent tragic incidence of George Floyd's death has once again flared up, on the global platform, the everyday battle of black communities who are victims of racism. Across the cities in the US and the UK many people came out on the streets. Their anger and rage was shown on the media and the backlash from this incident angered and upset some British citizens as well. This is not the first time a racist act of this nature has taken place; however,

it did, once again, raise many questions about our responsibility and the role we can play, individually and collectively, to fight the systemic racism within our communities. Many have taken an introspective approach by analysing our own privilege, our role in maintaining the racist society and how we benefit from our privilege.

I was recently reminded of the 2013 film *12 Years A Slave*, an adaption of the 1853 slave memoir.¹ For those who may not have seen it, it is heart wrenching story of a free man who was kidnapped and tortured for 12 years. The film portrayed a Sunday service for the black slaves on a cotton plantation, where the oppressive slave owner used Luke 12:47 for his own advantage. The words read, "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes" (KJV).

The slave owner deviously used the verse to justify the whipping of the slaves who picked the least cotton each day. In this way, powerful people repressed the good news from the slaves. For example, the slave owner chose to ignore the words, "A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34, NIV). We can find many beautiful and inspiring examples in Rom. 12:10 and John 13:35 about love being the foundation of Christian faith.

As present mission partners for CMS, we are in a privileged position to influence and play a role in the fight against racism. As people of faith, we believe that God has created this beautiful cosmopolitan world in his own image (an image of love) to empower humankind, to preserve his creation and to encourage us to celebrate our relationship with God and with each other. The co-occurrence of this belief as theological doctrine is acknowledged in Judaism, Christianity and Sufism, making it more relevant to understand the purpose of God in creation of this world. Being made

in the image of God also connects to humanity's reflection of God that illustrates compassion, rationality, love, anger and fellowship. In Heb. 12.14, our relationship with God and others is described as a holy living: "Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord" (NIV). Racism shatters the beauty of God's creation, dividing the image of God

"As people of faith, we believe that God has created this beautiful cosmopolitan world in his own image (an image of love) to empower humankind, to preserve his creation and to encourage us to celebrate our relationship with God and with each other."

through physical appearance. It is based on a false assumption of the superiority of one race over another. Those who have perpetuated these ideas have sown seeds of hatred, division and intolerance, resulting in disrespecting and dishonouring the imago Dei.

Many of us still encounter people who are still using the excuses of their ancestors and still misusing quotes from the Bible. Within our arsenal to fight and counter this racism we need to keep the following verse in mind:

¹ Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave* (Auburn, NY: Derby & Miller, 1853).

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27, ESV). The Bible teaches us to keep respect and balance in our relationships, which, when disregarded, dishonours the image of God.

RACE AND RACISM

The seeds of racism were sown by the theories of many scientists in the nineteenth century who subscribed to the belief that the human population can be divided into races.² Early race theorists generally held the view that some races were inferior to others and therefore should be classified into races with differential abilities and dispositions. Race theorists have divided people into races rather than treating them as human beings. Interestingly, this theory has been contradicted by other scientific research that posits that around 1.2 million to 1.8 million years ago, early *Homo sapiens* evolved dark pigmentation as a protective evolutionary measure.³

Britain and other European countries created among themselves a hierarchy with white Europeans at the top and Africans and Asians at the bottom. Racism against black and Asian people grew after the 1860s based on the theories of scientific racism that, it was claimed, proved that because of brain size, black and Asian people are inferior intellectually to Europeans and can only be humanised and civilised by Europeans.

Many researchers and professionals working to eliminate racism maintain that race is a political construction to execute structures of power, culture, education and identity.⁴ The slave trade is an example of such a structure used to justify that black people were inferior. While many maintain that modern issues of racism are a US-based issue, we need to acknowledge that the aftermath of colonialism continues to affect the lives of millions. Britain was one of the richest slave-trading nations in the world, with large numbers of slaves being transported from African and Asian colonies to Europe and America.

By the mid-eighteenth century, London had the largest black population in Britain, made up of free and enslaved people as well as many who had fought very hard to escape. The total number by 1914 may have been about 10,000, which trebled during the

First World War.⁵ As time passed, tensions between the white community and different ethnic minorities developed. During the Seaport Riots of 1919, in which white workers attacked black workers and their families, five people died and there was widespread vandalism of property; 120 black workers were sacked in Liverpool after whites refused to work with them. Many of these people were forced to beg due to the lack of jobs and racial discrimination. A study by Jacqueline Jenkinson provides an example of the deep embedded institutionalised racism found within the law enforcement. She reports that during the 1919 riots police officers arrested nearly twice as many black citizens (155) than white (89). This was made worse by the judicial system which convicted half of the black arrestees while acquitting majority of the white workers.⁶

According to Historic England, the increase of immigration in the 1960s and the resulting discriminatory behaviour experienced led to the formation of defence organisations such as the League of Coloured Peoples and the Indian Workers' Association, both of which were established in the 1930s, and the Black People's Alliance in the 1970s.⁷ However, their fight continues within the contemporary world.

COLONIALISM AND ITS IMPACT ON PAKISTAN

By the first half of the nineteenth century, the region of India was fully colonised by the East India Company. At that time Pakistan did not exist as a country. British rule ended with the creation of East and West Pakistan in 1947. When the British left the subcontinent after 90 years of direct rule, the aftermath of their political decisions led to one of the largest migrations in history, as many moved from India to Pakistan and vice versa. It displaced 15 million people and more than one million were killed. The relationship between India and Pakistan remained sour throughout that time. Simultaneously, the decision to create East and West Pakistan with India sandwiched in the middle led to several governance and identity issues. The division of land ultimately led to East Pakistan seeking independence from West Pakistan. The creation of Bangladesh (East Pakistan) in

² Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800–1960* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1982).

³ Nina G. Jablonski and George Chaplin, “The colours of humanity: the evolution of pigmentation in the human lineage,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B* 372, no. 1724 (5 July 2017).

⁴ Racial Equity Tools, <https://www.racialequitytools.org/home>.

⁵ Stephen Bourne, *Black Poppies: Britain's Black Community and the Great War* (Cheltenham: The History Press, 2014).

⁶ Jacqueline Jenkinson, *Black 1919: Riots, Racism, and Resistance in Imperial Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009).

⁷ <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/inclusive-heritage/another-england/a-brief-history/racism-and-resistance>

1971 and the war of independence resulted in the death of 500,000 people.⁸

AFTERMATH OF COLONIALISM

The negative impact of colonial legacies can still be felt today in the shape of interventionism, imperialism, neocolonialism and institutional racism. The continuing intervention of the West has led to serious problems between Pakistan and India that provoke tensions in the form of religious hatred and prejudices. The unresolved issue of Kashmir continues to raise tensions. Colonialism was followed by imperialism. Instead of taking physical control of another, imperialism is exercised by political and monetary dominance, both formally and informally. Some of imperial tools used to overpower people in developing or former colonised countries are the imposition and presumptive superiority of imperial culture, language and education.

The pandemic effects of the power of hierarchy are seen in all colonised countries, including Pakistan. We have witnessed unrest, bloody wars, revenge and destruction everywhere. British military and noblemen built segregated institutions for themselves including hospitals, clubs, and educational establishments to exclude the locals. Unfortunately, the people who came into power after decolonisation maintained these laws and cultural norms to empower themselves and to control the weak and oppressed. The rich had the right of judgement, which still dominates the Pakistan judicial system.

Ironically, those who struggled and protested for their equal rights and freedom during colonialism promoted and followed the same culture of superiority and inferiority when they came into power. This happened in both secular and religious leadership. So much so that some religious people use references from their holy books to suppress the weak, such as the aforementioned verse from Luke 12:47. It has been my observation that religious references have been used to oppress the marginalised (minorities), especially women. It is a shame that political and religious leadership have failed to inculcate values of justice and equality for all. Tragically, the majority of people never dare to speak out against these injustices and have accepted this as their fate.

SOCIAL PREJUDICES

Some of the social constructs that are deeply rooted in Pakistani culture are colourism, superiority of languages, fashion, social status and religious

discrimination. It is important to acknowledge that subtle examples of western superiority are ingrained within the mentality of Pakistani and European people. For example, young people prefer western food, fashion and music and look down on their local culture. At the same time, while the British nation voted “curry” as its favourite takeaway, the generic term “curry” that is used to describe all form of all Asian food is perceived by some to be culturally inappropriate. In some Pakistani churches, food politics was manifested in racism when white clergy were not allowed to eat on the same table as the local catechists. Some clergy would have them sit on the floor instead of using the same furniture as them.

Regarding colourism, young girls are mostly the victims of this discriminatory judgement. In Pakistan, the culture of arranged marriages is still dominant. Every family wants to have a fair (white) bride for their sons, following a western concept of beauty. Most of the time young girls are rejected because of their dark complexion no matter how educated or qualified they are. Young girls often experiment with different bleach creams or homemade remedies/herbal mixtures to change their complexion. You can find countless varieties of bleach creams in the everyday shops and supermarkets. There are many cultural jokes and sayings that make fun of girls’ dark complexion. Similarly, black skin is taken to be associated with sorrow, suffering, as an insult or to depict the image of the devil.

There is also a hierarchy of language in Pakistan. English is superior over Urdu and Urdu is superior over Punjabi and other dialects of Pakistan. Those who cannot speak English are deprived of executive jobs and are less respected in upper-class society. The standard of education in private or English-medium schools is measured by the perceived quality of English language instruction and high tuition fees, depriving common people from getting admission in these schools.

Pakistani minorities face racism outside the country while internally they face extreme religious discrimination. The ill-treatment of minorities in Pakistan goes against some of the teachings of Quran. To disrespect another religion is explicitly condemned in the Quran: “Do not abuse those whom they worship besides Allah” (6:109). If a person claims to be Muslim, he is not allowed to insult or disrespect another religion. This is forbidden according to the Quran. Even to engage in arguments with non-Muslims in a disrespectful manner is prohibited: “And argue not with the people of the Scripture [Jews and Christians],

⁸Christian Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies: Mass Violence in the Twentieth-Century World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

unless it be in [a way] that is better [with good words and in good manner], except with such of them as do wrong, and say [to them]: ‘We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you; our God and your God is One, and to Him we have submitted [as Muslims’”(29:46).

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES AND A WAY FORWARD

As I reflect on how we can challenge racism and racist structures, I offer some things I have seen and heard as a way forward. Getting rid of the evil practices that dishonour the image of God requires cohesive acts to change the external and internal prejudices connected with institutional racism and social constructs. God is working in a miraculous way in people’s lives, guiding them to find hope in him; despite the antagonistic effects of colonialism, some weak and marginalised people in colonised countries look at its positive side as well. The introduction of Christianity offered more religious mission opportunities to transform people’s lives. CMS is an organisation that plays a significant role in transforming people’s lives all over the world. At this point I must acknowledge that my great-grandparents came to Christ because of the good news shared by missionaries in Pakistan and I am proud of their strong faith in Christ, which enables us to live the positive values of our faith.

A recent statement from Church House is a reconfirmation that the Church of England is committed to taking this issue seriously. The statement reads:

For the Church to be credible voice in calling for change across the world, we must now ensure that apologies and lament are accompanied by swift actions leading to real change.⁹

It is our collective responsibility to help eradicate negative behaviours towards the BAME community across the world. A worldwide 2015 survey by Pew Research Center found that of the 84 per cent of people who identified themselves with a religious group, 31.2 per cent were Christian, 24.1 per cent were Muslim and 15.1 per cent were Hindu; 16 per cent of the world’s population were secular or atheist.¹⁰ Looking at the

promising percentage of believers, we can see our potential to take an active role in combating racism by raising understanding of racial issues and its dreadful effects that dishonour different images of God and our churches.

The most widely accepted definition of racial discrimination is found in the European law produced during the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Article 6 states:

The State has prime responsibility for ensuring human rights and fundamental freedoms on an entirely equal footing in dignity and rights for all individuals and all groups.... The State should take all appropriate steps, *inter alia* by legislation, particularly in the spheres of education, culture and communication, to prevent, prohibit and eradicate racism, racist propaganda, racial segregation and apartheid and to encourage the dissemination of knowledge and the findings of appropriate research in natural and social sciences on the causes and prevention of racial prejudice and racist attitudes.¹¹

The charity HOPE not hate surveyed about 1,000 adults in Britain in August 2020 in the aftermath of George Floyd’s death in the US and anti-racism protests in the UK. According to the report, 64 per cent of ethnic minorities in total agreed that the police as a whole were good.¹² Black communities were slightly lower on 58 per cent, but still a majority. Most of them agreed that it is down to a few individual officers. More than half of the BAME respondents also expressed that they had witnessed or experienced racist comments being made in public or on social media in the past 12 months. Almost three-quarters said they supported the recent Black Lives Matter protests, but there were fears that they might prompt a backlash from sections of the white population.

There have been some positive signs. Chief constables from forces across the country, the chair of the National Police Chiefs’ Council, the chief executive of the College of Policing and the president of the Police Superintendents’ Association have spoken following the death of George Floyd and the events that have followed in the United States. “We stand alongside all

⁹ Maddy Fry, “Bishops pledge swift action to combat racism in the Church of England,” *Church Times*, 3 July 2020, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2020/3-july/news/uk/bishops-pledge-swift-action-to-combat-racism-in-the-church-of-england>.

¹⁰ Harriet Sherwood, “Religion: why faith is becoming more and more popular,” *The Guardian*, 27 August 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/aug/27/religion-why-is-faith-growing-and-what-happens-next>.

¹¹ Natan Lerner, *The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 238–239.

¹² “Minority communities in the time of COVID and protest: a study of BAME opinion,” *HOPE not hate*, 19 August 2020, <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2020/08/19/minority-communities-time-covid-protest-study-bame-opinion/>.

those across the globe who are appalled and horrified by the way George Floyd lost his life. Justice and accountability should follow.”¹³

Together we can honour God’s image by respecting cultural and racial differences, and avoiding racial comments and the use of humour, words or jokes to intimidate or harass others. We can also use our influence to develop and support strategies that ban racist expressions and organisations. Part of the problem is that international law has not fully been decolonised. We need to work collectively to restore the dignity of those individuals who have been suffering from racism, fight for justice and seek guidance from Paul’s message from 1 Cor. 12:7–11:

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines (NIV).

Human beings are not commodities to be judged by brands or labels. Special measures must be taken to ensure equality in dignity and rights for individuals and groups wherever necessary, remembering that “he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26, ESV). As long as people strive for power, then injustice, inequality and hatred will continue to grow. As human beings we share so many things in common to celebrate together such as humility, simplicity, respect for people and family values, hospitality, love for nature, etc. Finally, it is important to put ourselves in the shoes of victims to understand how racism is damaging their lives.

I want to conclude with Nelson Mandela’s message: “No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love.”¹⁴

Awais Mughal is a fourth generation Pakistani Christian working as CMS mission partner in Leeds. In 2013, she began her journey with CMS and after serving almost two years in Pakistan, she moved back to the UK. She currently lives in Seacroft where she teaches language courses designed for asylum seekers and refugees, supports local churches by sharing the gospel and delivers activities that connect women from different cultural and faith backgrounds. In her spare time, she likes to knit, cook and write about human rights issues.



¹³Sam Corbishley, “UK police say they are ‘appalled’ by George Floyd death and call for justice,” *Metro*, 3 June 2020, <https://metro.co.uk/2020/06/03/uk-police-say-are-appalled-george-floyd-death-call-justice-12798761/>.

¹⁴Susan Ratcliffe, *Oxford Essential Quotations 5th ed.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

LET ME BREATHE!

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Natasha Godfrey

Let me breathe,
Let me be who I was meant to be
Created in the image of God
Let me tread freely,
As the spirit leads me
Let me breathe...

My friends, when I approach you emotionally exhausted;
attempting to speak to you of my pain; why do you react as though
YOU are the afflicted one? Why, when I am afforded this small
window of opportunity to express to you the impact, the trauma,
the symbolism of the knee, do you dismiss my story with “Ah yes,
but All Lives Matter, surely?”

Of course, All Lives Matter, but we are in a crisis and I simply want
you to hold the space, see my face and feel this moment. But you
won't let me breathe.

And I know that you're exhausted too...

But
Whilst I have a
Moment
To speak freely...
Let me breathe,

Let me sing my tune and burst forth into song

O afflicted city that I am
Lashed by storms and not comforted
Let me sing, for he has promised to build me up with stones of
turquoise, my foundations with sapphires, my battlements of
rubies, my gates with sparkling jewels.
But you wrestle with your flesh,
Like Jacob fighting with head knowledge
Over a heart issue
As you try to decide whether my life matters,
Whether my presence is a moral or a political issue.
But the issue is that your indecision dehumanises me,
And your default position confirms how much of a stranger I am in
this strange land.

Let me breathe,
Let me shout it out aloud and not hold back
Let me raise my voice like a trumpet and declare to God's people
their rebellion and to the house of Jacob that racism is a sin.
Look!

Do you not perceive that God is doing a new thing?
This is our new normal!
Things will never be the same.
Forget the “good old days”
It was only “good” for some
For when you required a song
Our Windrush pioneers
Invited, yet rejected
Could not sing
In harmony
Because the melody was way off key...
They were put on hold
Told to
Wait for resources
Yet simultaneously
They were pushed out onto the frontlines
With little protection.
Told to fend for themselves
As they endured long hours
For MANY YEARS
70 LONG NHS YEARS of generational exposure
400 years
Of injustice, exploitation, and abuse
And over
Over that time, we dropped like flies
Disproportionately
From this global infection
That is systemic and unjust
A make-believe social construct!

So, in this hour
The Almighty commands that we
Fast our greed and loose the chains
Decolonise the false narrative of white supremacy
And untangle the lie
Untie the cords of the yoke
To set the oppressed free

Of systemic ties
That bind
So that WE can ALL breathe...
THEN our light will break forth like the dawn, says the Lord
And our healing will quickly appear
THEN our righteousness will go before us
And the glory of the Lord will be our rear guard
THEN when we call,
He will answer...
Here am I
Let me breathe so that I might be
Like a well-watered garden,
Like a spring whose waters never fail.
For I too am called to rebuild the ancient ruins
And raise up ancient foundations.
I too redeemed
Am called
To be a Repairer of Walls, a Restorer of Streets with Dwellings...
AND I will not come down until thy kingdom come
But you must let me breathe
Because, dear friend
The truth is
You cannot live without me.

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Natasha Godfrey is an actress, writer, auto-ethnographer, theologian and educator with an MA in theology and transformative practice. She uses her lived experience in a performative context as an educational tool. She also works part-time as coaching and mentoring co-ordinator for Church of England in Birmingham.

“Let Me Breathe” was commissioned for and performed at a “Courageous Conversations” webinar on 10 July 2020 (hosted by the Revd Dr Sharon Prentis and Bishop David Urquhart). This was a step toward meaningful dialogue around racial inequality and injustice, highlighted by the death of George Floyd and subsequent protests globally.





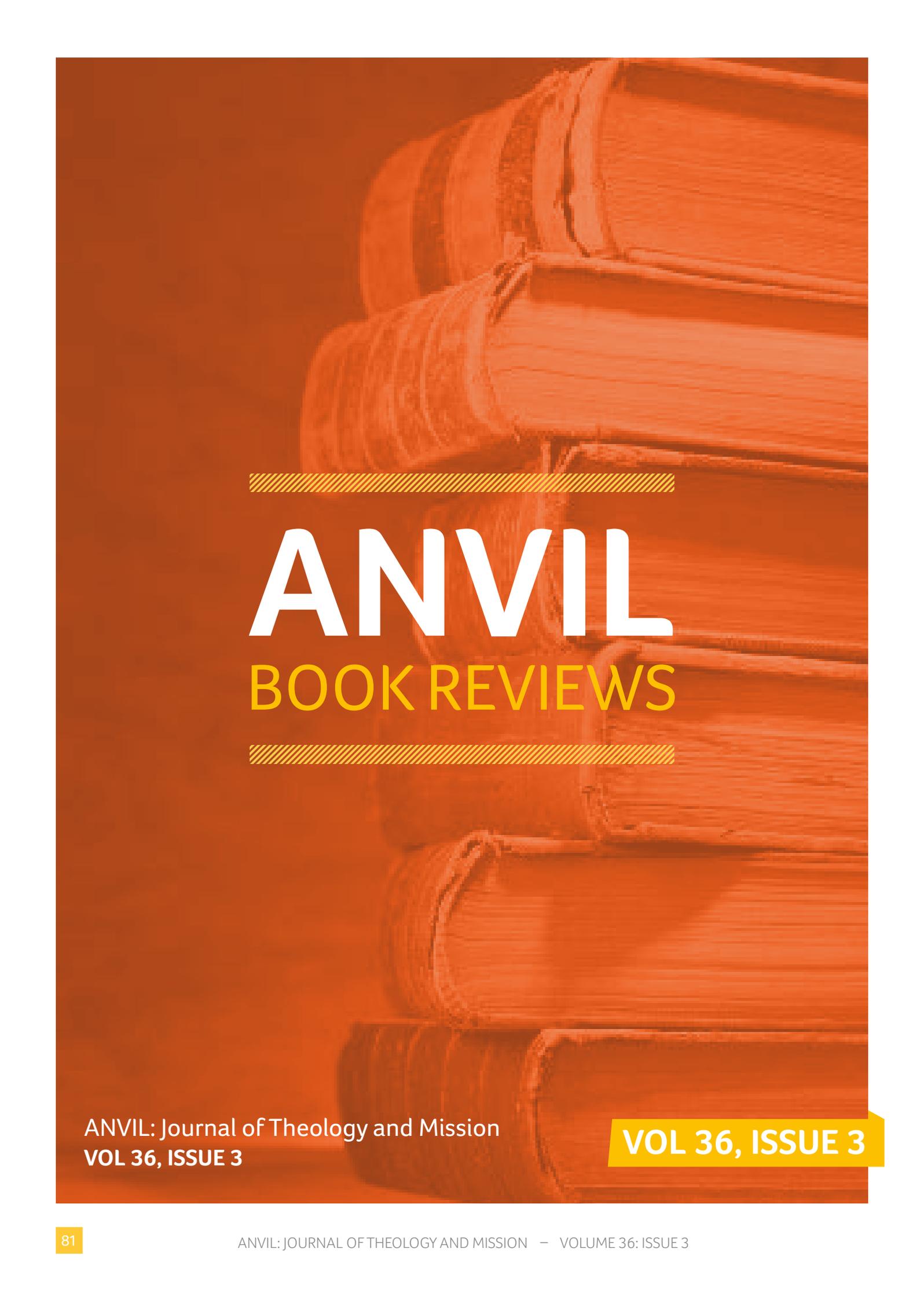
AN AFTERWORD FROM PAUL THAXTER, CMS DIRECTOR OF INTERNATIONAL MISSION

I have been engaged in Christian mission ever since I accepted the call of Jesus to follow him in South East London over 40 years ago.

I was part of a church which had people from multiple cultures and diverse backgrounds. Later in Pakistan I was part of the Diocese of Karachi, Church of Pakistan, as a CMS mission partner. In my work as CMS international mission director I have been granted the huge privilege of meeting brothers and sisters from around the world. In each of these contexts questions, ambivalence and ambiguities about the mission enterprise abound.

Yet it was the death of George Floyd and the actions and messages of the Black Lives Matter movement that was personally revelatory – indicating my own passive complicity with systemic racism and injustice. In the following weeks I read Reni Eddo-Lodge’s book *Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People about Race*, which was brilliantly argued, relentlessly uncompromising and passionately principled. I decided to listen more, understand more, discuss more, lament and repent, and take positive actions in the light of this.

As for CMS, these reflections cut to the heart of our storytelling and mission praxis where we have at times preferenced our anti-slavery and liberating narratives rather than those that show our colonial collusion and culturally-compromised mission ventures. As Harvey Kwiyani writes, “Until racism is totally discredited, God’s mission in the world will depend on colonialism.” In the glare of this light, CMS needs to take the time and make the effort to adjust, reflect, repent and act. We are in the midst of this, and are being helped greatly by our brothers and sisters in Asia-CMS and CMS-Africa as well as our friends from minority backgrounds in the UK. Their voices deserve to be heard and amplified, which is one reason this edition of *Anvil* was produced. I draw hope from Lusa Ngoy’s words in his article “Hope Re-imagined – making the world that ought to be” wherein he says the past can be redeemed today. With our partners from around the world we can not only radically rethink history but as Lusa exhorts us, we can join in “an imaginative effort to build the true, the good, and the beautiful”.



ANVIL
BOOK REVIEWS

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As CMS staff and mission partners have reflected on the death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement, they have been sharing books, articles, podcasts and videos which they have found helpful. Here, a few staff and mission partners have written their reflections as a way of sharing resources and our journeys of learning.

James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2013 reprinted edition)

On 3 June 2020 Chance the Rapper tweeted “Jesus was lynched”. This tweet was liked 63,000 times. He then proceeded to follow it up with some quotes from an article entitled “The Cross and the Lynching Tree”, which is the title of James Cone’s book from 2011. The article was by Steve Holloway and was a review of the book prompted by Cone’s death. I don’t think Chance the Rapper had read James Cone’s book but I suspect that it was the highest profile comment in pop culture about it. I hope the book got some new readers as a result. Of course, the comments were polarised and ridiculous. One accused him of blasphemy, saying Jesus wasn’t lynched he was crucified – which was kind of missing the point! The reason I mention this as a way into a review is that I think my own education about racism and injustice has been in some significant part through black music – soul, reggae, hip hop, Afrobeat to name a few genres. Artists feel the culture and somehow find ways to articulate something of the pain, grief and mood of the times and where appropriate call forth a different vision, a different possibility. In this regard art and prophecy are close friends. The most helpful response for me personally after George Floyd’s death, aside from Al Sharpton’s magnificent eulogy, was actually Gilles Petersen’s selection of music and comments and guests on BBC Radio 6 Music in the two weeks after. I found it a lot more helpful than what I heard in churches – in fact it struck me how few hymns or contemporary songs there are that really spoke into that moment in any concrete or grounded way.

Chapter four of James Cone’s book is about literary artists and the connections they made between the crucifixion and the lynching tree. For me it was the most moving chapter of the book and I followed it up by finding some of the pieces online which also led to finding illustrations of the black Christ identifying with the suffering of those lynched. What is particularly striking about that chapter is that it comes in the wake of a discussion about the absence of the connection between the cross and the lynching tree in the theologies of the best white theologians of the day and the pulpits in white churches. Cone devotes a chapter to Niebuhr and goes to great lengths to reflect on this absence in Niebuhr’s work

because he was probably America’s most influential theologian, commented on social issues and Cone was very influenced by him, following in his footsteps at Union Theological Seminary in New York. As Cone says, it is extraordinary that this connection was not made. He contrasts that with a moving chapter on Martin Luther King who makes those connections and whose life was one shaped by the way of the cross. I don’t know why I say that is a moving chapter because every chapter I mention I will say is moving! A case in point is the chapter on black women’s experience of suffering, their part in activism and black womanist theological perspectives. I was reminded by that of Billie Holliday’s rendition of Strange Fruit, which I listened to several times as a result of the book (Nina Simone’s is powerful too).

The book opened my eyes to how prevalent lynching was. I knew about it but the scale and horror of the experience was really brought home to me by Cone’s book. Between 1880 to 1940 white Christians lynched 5,000 black men and women. These lynchings drew huge crowds and families came out to watch. Photos of the event were turned into postcards that you could buy. Cone references an exhibition that shocked America by touring these postcards – I found some of the images online. It is so hard to believe and fathom the reality of that black experience in America and that white Christians did it – I found it important for me to look at it and try and see it as best I could without averting my gaze.

James Cone is brutally honest about his own struggle – white supremacy tears faith to pieces, he says. If God loves black people, why do they suffer? And yet the heart of the gospel is struggle for freedom and liberation from oppression. The cross is an empowering sign for those who suffer because of God’s loving solidarity with them. It’s also where the powers and principalities are overcome. And it has to be related to our social reality rather than abstracted. So Cone is right to say that Jesus was a lynchee and make that connection. And he says that every time a white mob lynched a black person they lynched Jesus all over again. “The lynching tree is the cross in America.” At the same time he laments that many white theologians’ theology of atonement (which they are very defended about) fails to name or recognise white supremacy as America’s great sin. It is in danger of being sentimental abstract false piety.

In the conclusion he quotes from James Baldwin who says he is proud of the spiritual force and beauty of black people in America. Why? Because “it demands great spiritual resilience not to hate the hater whose foot is on your neck.” I was in pieces at that point.

I love liberation theologies but it was actually as a result of twitter that I read it. It wasn’t Chance’s tweet but Bishop Emma Ineson saying she was going to read it. At that point I was so upset about George Floyd’s murder and wondering what on earth I could or should do, that I

ordered the book and thought I'll at least read that and try and get a bit better educated. It really has done that in a powerful way.

Jonny Baker, CMS

Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (The Women's Press Ltd, 1988)

I first came across this novel several years ago at an event hosted by the African Society at university. At the time I didn't realise it was a classic, winning the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 1988, but I've enjoyed this bold and thought-provoking read and finding out more about Dangarembga, who is from an impressive line of firsts – her mother was the first black woman from Zimbabwe to earn a degree, and *Nervous Conditions* was the first book published in English by a black Zimbabwean woman.

Set in the 1960s, *Nervous Conditions* follows the story of Tambudzai, Tambu for short, a young girl in rural Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia) desperate for an education. Her uncle is the headmaster of the mission school in the nearest town where he takes Tambu's brother for schooling. As a girl, Tambu's education is not a priority for the family, but when her brother dies suddenly, Tambu is able to take his place, and here begins Tambu's journey of "emancipation" from village life.

The title, *Nervous Conditions*, is taken from the preface to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, which says "the state of the native is a nervous condition". It's an insightful framing of the book, prompting you to reflect on how the experience of life under colonial rule, interaction with western modernity, culture and pressures impact upon African individuals.

Nervous Conditions has many key themes – a strong critique of female oppression in a male-dominant culture being one of them. But what stood out to me particularly was the way it shows how Tambu's worldview forms in relation to western culture and ideas of progress.

Set in segregated Rhodesia, it's interesting that Dangarembga does not address this dramatic context of race relations directly (indeed she has said that anything she writes about race more explicitly turns out sounding too absurd to be true). We get to see, then, the reality of these racial disparities as Tambu's world itself gets bigger. We see white people as the source of funds for her first few years of schooling, westerners at the mission treated with great deference, even as deities, given their power to intervene and open opportunities previously unreachable for black families, and their sacrifice in choosing such a life. And Tambu's uncle, Babamukuru, is greatly revered in the family for his having been educated up to postgraduate

level in England. For Tambu, then, progress and the way to a better life is intricately wrapped up in western education and a level of assimilation into Englishness.

And there are the smaller, perhaps more insidious, effects of this on the family homestead – when Tambu's brother used to return to the family village for school holidays, he was reluctant to speak their Shona language, not only because his Shona had become ungrammatical and "strangely accented" but because he wanted to impress his family by speaking English. While father is impressed, Tambu resents that this restricts communication with her brother to mundane, insignificant matters, and their mother has to admit that although she does want her son to be educated, even more than that, she wants to talk to him.

Tambu narrates these instances almost matter-of-factly, there are other more dramatic events that occur in the story, yet it is these depictions that I found powerful and stuck with me since as a white, native-English speaker it rarely crosses my mind to consider the impact and superiority of language.

The sheer difference of western modernity is so overpowering and enchanting to a young girl from the village that it is readily accepted as most surely the way of progress. When Tambu first arrives at the mission and her uncle's house, she can see how her brother was seduced, as the entire house, with its "local interpretations of British interior-décor", whispers a message of ease and comfort, far from the endlessly hard physical labour she sees her mother destined to at home.

While Tambu is throwing herself into her studies at the mission, there are forewarnings of where this path of chasing the opportunities laid out by western education leads. Her cousin, Nyasha, is a wonderfully dynamic character who, having lived for a time in England, is full of alternatives and possibilities that are beyond Tambu's current frame of reference. Nyasha is unwilling to accept things as they currently are without questioning, and so has many struggles with her parents, often challenging traditional culture, yet also wary of the influence western culture has had on her. In the end, Nyasha becomes a symbolic victim of how western influences and exposure to modernity complicates one's sense of self, and alienates oneself from all that you knew and were.

Nervous Conditions is a significant work in African feminist and postcolonial literature. The third book in this trilogy, just published this year, has been longlisted for the Booker Prize and I'm looking forward to reading more of Tsitsi Dangarembga's work. It strikes me that the theme of a dominant culture over another, the dominance of English and Englishness, resonates with prevalent conversations today about the UK church needing greater diversity in our expression of faith, so that experiences in white majority churches are not so

tightly wrapped up in a superior culture but have space to celebrate creatively faith in our God who revealed himself for every nation, tribe, people and language. As an accessible and provocative piece of fiction, *Nervous Conditions* gives insight into the historical and social circumstances that have given rise to this pressing mandate today.

Nicole Stephens, CMS

Sarah Shin, *Beyond Colorblind: Redeeming our Ethnic Journey* (IVP, 2017)

We can't get away from the colour of our own skin, however much we may want to. Sarah Shin tells the story at one point of an Armenian American who "would vigorously scrub his skin in the shower, hoping that it would change his complexion." It is a common experience of shame, and so early waves of the anti-racist movement sometimes pointed towards a denial of ethnic difference – "colourblindness". Shin re-tells the good news (as you would expect under the IVP banner), but with an emphasis on ethnicity. God made us with an ethnic identity, he redeems us with an ethnic identity and he draws us into a multi-ethnic people with a mission to the whole world.

We served for the last several years at a church in Rio de Janeiro that had handed its keys over decades ago to the school it shared a site with. Story after story reached us of differing attitudes at the gate to people visiting the church, depending on the colour of their skin. We had a church weekend away: the light skinned Englishman who came to practise the organ was let in, while the dark skinned Brazilian who came to get the sound equipment ready was turned away. (It was a rather quiet weekend away.) It would not be enough to ask the security guards to ignore skin colour. They have too much experience of the sad correlation between skin colour and criminality, created by the legacy of slavery (only abolished a handful of generations ago) and consequent poverty and marginalisation. African and Afro-Brazilian ethnicities need to be celebrated, their songs need to be sung, their voices need to be heard. So we took on board the white pleas to stop talking about "the problem with the gate" and shared the microphone around.

Now we are in Wales, and Shin's celebration of the God-giveness of each culture strikes a rich chord in this "Old Land of my Fathers". Reading my way into this land has taken me to works such as *Castrating Culture* by Dewi Hughes and *Sacred Place, Chosen People* by Dorian Llywelyn – which together highlight the blindness of many of us English to our own idolatrous imperialism. Sarah Shin teaches me to understand my own ethnic identity (none of us doesn't have one) and to appreciate

the cracks in my own cultural history. She memorably evokes Japanese "Kintsukuroi" pottery, which seeks to bring something beautiful out of broken shards, not hiding but highlighting the cracks – much as Matthew does in his genealogy of Jesus, drawing out the scars of incest, prostitution, exclusion, adultery and murder.

We were somewhat taken aback when we were first greeted on a hike here with "Prynhawn da" (Good afternoon). Am I imperialistic to greet people here in English? Can I sing "Swing low, sweet chariot"? Does Boris Johnson have a point when he warns of "self-recrimination and wetness"? Shin suggests confession, lament and repentance: the gospel always offers hope to the humble, hope of inclusion, hope in diversity, centred in Christ. It's a great handbook for our days.

Mark Simpson, Cardiff

"We Need to Talk about Race" – YouTube discussion featuring Ben Lindsay and Jeanette Burnette at St Barnabas, North London, <https://youtu.be/Z45SDMm5-Tk> (3 May 2020)

I have always been very aware about inequality in our society, having hit a gender career glass ceiling in banking at age 17, then chosen to work in equal opportunities, advocating for equality at British Gas with STEM, BAME, WISE and other initiatives. I witnessed poor selection for redundancy (maternity and mental health) in the city in the early 1990s and chose to run my own HR and training practice to address inequalities. Having experienced racism in my anti-FGM work with 28 Too Many (28toomany.org), sexism in the church and disability discrimination in much of society, #BlackLivesMatter has been a topic close to my heart for over 40 years.

In May, I was lucky enough to watch a YouTube video co-hosted by Jeanette Burnette from my church, St Barnabas, North Finchley, and Ben Lindsay, author of *We Need to Talk about Race*. This covered institutional racism in the church and wider society. This was timely for our church, and in the event of George Floyd's tragic death. In fact, I had to wait for the book to arrive following a massive reprint!

The book discusses the UK church's complicity in the transatlantic slave trade, considers the role of white privilege, and how to address equality for those who do not have it.

In June I also attended a very moving service of lamentation and hope (<https://www.london.anglican.org/articles/we-lament/>) based on Psalm 30 and Matthew 11, with a very moving lament written by

the Rev Sandra McCalla. I was concerned that of the approximately 250 attendees only about 15 were white. If it is our season to listen, why were white ordained and lay leaders not engaging? I subsequently wrote my own lamentation on racism, Covid-19, cancer and isolation – all close to my heart following five months of shielding.

Unlike other books or services, I have reflected on these two pieces of media as I have been rallied to action. I wrote and read my own lament to my writing group and shared with others. I have read and shared my reflections on Ben's book and as I help plant a church led by a pastor of colour in a BAME majority area, we hope to put into practice some of the wisdom gleaned over the past 40 years. As we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before, as Ben puts it, "we hope our glass or racism ceilings will be floors for the next generation."

Ann-Marie Wilson, London

A.D.A. France Williams, *Ghost Ship: Institutional Racism and the Church of England* (London: SCM Press, 2020)

I really loved reading *Ghost Ship* by A.D.A. France Williams. I read through it in just over a day – in other words I didn't put it down a lot! It's addressing institutional racism in the Church of England but it's not quite what you think. A book like that sounds like it's going to make a case, an argument and dare I say be a bit dry and perhaps overly earnest (sorry if that is a thought I shouldn't be having). But it's far from that...

First up I loved the style of writing of the book. It's playful, cheeky, provocative, powerful and has you nodding along and then slaps you round the head. It reminds me a bit of going to poetry gigs where that happens all the time – poets seem to move really fast from one mode to another like no other kind of speech in my experience. Maybe that shouldn't be a surprise because Azariah is a poet and there are several of his poems in the book. There's metaphor, poetry, story, anecdote, vulnerability, theology (that is inside the flow of local, contextual, liberation theology), exegesis, research, history, moving personal testimony with heart on the sleeve writing that is vulnerable and questioning with raw honesty. It's inspiring, challenging and moving. It's a work of practical liberation theology (if that is a genre?!) in that it is very much a conversation between experience/context and the tradition/bible/theology. It's very much theology done from below, through the eyes and experience of the oppressed calling for change, liberation, freedom, an end to the domination system. For me it's the kind of theologising I wish there was a whole lot more of.

One of the stylistic things I particularly loved was the way he sits inside a story or metaphor and sticks with that language and carries it through into a repeating motif almost – it's probably more commonly used in oratory than writing but it really worked for me to the degree that I have made a mental note to try and do it more myself both in writing and speaking. So for example, he tells the story of Samson in the Bible, someone subjugated to a dominant aggressor. He reads it back through a lens of Samson being a black slave and the Philistines being the slaver class. This is a story black theologians in America in particular have often turned to, so Williams locates himself in the trajectory of black theology here. At one point in his telling of the story where Samson sets a riddle, he imagines the Philistine slavers put their drinks down, wipe the froth of their mouth and have him repeat the riddle. Later in the text when he describes discussing his writing with a white area bishop he says, "he put his drink down, wiped the froth off his mouth, looked me in the eye and said..." I loved those kind of moves which are playful in style but so powerful and well done. There are surprises all the way through. He follows up on Samson with a spin on Charlie and the Chocolate Factory – I won't do a plot spoiler but it is a great piece of storytelling and research.

The message, which perhaps I should have led with, is pretty clear and hits you from multiple directions and layers – the Church of England has not done well when it comes to race and, in the case of this book, especially with regard to its ministers, lay and ordained. Black and brown people are not flourishing. Racism is embedded in the systems and culture – in other words it's institutionalised. In case we were unsure about this, those experiences come through time and again through Williams's interviews with people with black and brown skin. That is their experience full stop. He also looks at the last 30 years or so of what has happened since the Faith in the City report. That report was brilliant and I didn't know this but one recommendation was not picked up – all the others were. That was for a commission on black concerns. It's truly extraordinary to read the tale. Williams catalogues occasion after occasion where decisions were deferred to a standing committee ('Ronald and Reggie' as he labels them – the C of E bouncers or gatekeepers) who basically don't do anything. He laments Justin Welby's reimagined Britain and shares his own personal experiences in shiny church, as he calls it (read powerful London evangelical charismatic church), where the only option seemed to be to perform as a puppet for Dagon (back to the Samson story), reduced to the role of entertainer for the show. Anything else was not welcome – and just to be clear, that anything else is the incredible gift of Williams himself with his creative theologising, insights, care, love for the church, prophetic gifts, teaching gifts, the ability to see with black eyes, to write, to be a poet, a friend who cares and

so on and so on – so much is missed.

This was a weird response in me I noticed: I began to wonder what is whiteness and what is entitlement. I am white, heterosexual, educated and male so I have no idea what it is like to experience being invisible or shunned or mistreated or dominated because of skin tone (or sex or gender or sexuality or class and so on) and I like the challenge of interrogating whiteness. But I have always hated entitlement, which is summed up by one passage where Williams describes the public school network reuniting over a game of diocesan cricket as a light bulb moment where he realises he does not have access. To say it another way, I identify with many of the issues around visibility, injustice and exclusion and access and they make me enraged and I suspect quite a lot of pioneers do too because for very different reasons they see differently and what they are saying is invisible to the system. Perhaps it is simply that they hang around on the periphery – that was a kind of weird question for me that I wasn't expecting. But this book is about race and there is simply a different order to the injustice and experience, which is brought home as Williams shares movingly the experience of being heartbroken when his own child is struggling with their own sense of worth, having been subjected to racist comments at school. I felt so upset about that. I know that for me as a parent and for my kids, we will never experience that because of white privilege.

Azariah does some future imagining and makes some suggestions. I thought they were great. I'd love to see a truth and reparations process. There is no reason I can see why there couldn't be some of the church commissioners' money that was set aside to invest in black and brown futures through grants, scholarships, and all sorts of other creative things – I thought that was a brilliant idea.

For me I found the book really helped my awareness, though I need ongoing sensitising and awareness, so I hope through conversations and friends and reading I can continue to do that. But a particular challenge in my area of work is around what texts we use in theological and mission education and what voices contribute in teaching. So I intend to sharpen up that area. We are pretty unusual at CMS I suspect, in that we teach systematic theology as simply being one local (western) theology among many and try and expose students to multiple voices and authors from round the world. I am not a fan of a systematic approach at all really. But we can do better I am sure, so we'll be chatting about that in our team over the months ahead.

Writing a book is such a big effort, especially when you make yourself vulnerable and put yourself on the line. So thank you Azariah for your book and your gift and sharing it and so much of yourself. May we have ears to hear.

Jonny Baker, CMS

Layla F. Saad, *Me and White Supremacy: How to Recognise Your Privilege, Combat Racism and Change the World* (Quercus, 2020)

Criticism can be hard to hear. It can hurt, it might feel unfair or even unfounded. But the true purpose of good criticism is to engage and challenge us, pushing us to improve ourselves and the world around us. *Me and White Supremacy* began as a 28-day Instagram challenge, which then became a free online PDF resource before ultimately being turned into a published book by its creator, Layla F. Saad. Over the course of the "challenge" Saad asks us, the white readers, to engage in a process of self-reflection and criticism that works to break down our internalised prejudices by first exposing then dismantling them.

The process is by no means an easy one. So often when white people start to engage with racial justice and particularly at the moment when we try to understand movements like Black Lives Matter, we find ourselves becoming defensive. I think I'm a good person. I try hard to treat everyone I meet with respect and dignity, and to afford them with the same opportunities regardless of the colour of their skin. So, it's hard to hear that despite my good intentions I can still be racist, or that I still play a role in perpetuating white supremacy. But just because I don't want to believe it, doesn't mean that it's not true, and it certainly doesn't mean that I can exempt myself from trying to do better.

Me and White Supremacy offers the tools and structure needed to work through that discomfort. When I found it I'd already begun the process of trying to read more and engage with people who were challenging my comfortable status quo. But reading about something is not the same as putting it into practice. The challenge that this book lays out gave me the push I needed into actively working on changing my own thinking, as well as trying to help to change the thinking of the people around me.

Saad offers a mixture of information and journaling prompts, laid out in an easy to follow course. You can take these as quickly or as slowly as you like, you can try tackling the exercise as an individual or in groups and even get creative with it. As I have worked through each step there have been times when I have found the process painful and I've had to take a moment to work past my initial feelings of hurt and shame. There are even times when I know that I've only touched a topic on the surface level but digging any further would have been too raw and overwhelming. But despite the emotional pitfalls of undertaking such an exercise, I find myself emerging from the other side with optimism. Yes,

change is hard, yes, it is demanding, but despite that we *can* change, we *can* make a real difference.

In the opening pages of the book, Saad says the following;

“But if you are a person who believes in love, justice, integrity, and equity for all people, then you know that this work is non-negotiable. If you are a person who wants to become a good ancestor, then you know that this work is some of the most important work that you will be called to do in your lifetime.”

To me that is everything. It is what we should all be striving for. As an individual I may not be able to change the world but I may be able to make a difference to one small part of it. If I can help lay the building blocks for a more equitable and unprejudiced future then I am willing to try doing the right thing rather than the easy one.

Rachel Smith, CMS

Christine Caine and Dr Anita Phillips, Body Language: A Conversation on Race and Restoration in the Body of Christ, <https://youtu.be/W1P6AXjXnXc> (1 June 2020)

This heart-provoking and honest conversation between two champions of our faith, Christine Caine and Dr Anita Phillips will move every listener to wake up and reconsider how we must lay down our individual cultural perspectives in order to tend to the whole body of Christ.

Phillips (a leading African-American mental health and trauma therapist and preacher) explains to Caine (Australian-born Greek, preacher and founder of global anti-trafficking organisation A21) how our own ethnic heritage “shapes the way we do Christ”. This key part of the 90-minute YouTube talk was very impactful, as Phillips went on to detail how our implicit cultural memory informs our worldview, which we as Christians then assume is a Christian worldview. Caine encourages believers to look inward and to assess how our own culture and background may have shaped the beliefs we have in Christ differently, which is vital in understanding race and restoration as the body of Christ. Indeed the notion that we “each wear Christ differently” could be strange to many Christians.

The most eye-opening part of the conversation was when these different views were highlighted in the context of George Floyd’s death. Phillips suggests that to restore the church, it is no longer about calling out those who are explicitly racist. It is deeper than this, as the dehumanization of black people since the era of slavery in America has crept into the American

subconscious, including the American Christian subconscious. I was impressed by Phillips’ boldness to speak on the concept of how our pre-existing worldviews mean we emphasise different elements of scripture when we read it through our own lens. She goes on to share that her white brothers and sisters address issues of race and racism with their worldview of individualism and deep respect for authority, so when they see an act such as the killing of George Floyd, they first ask for the facts to see the individual’s context and do not want to criticise the police until they see the ‘whole picture’. It was almost excruciating, and yet so important for me as a white woman to hear Phillips then add that this white ‘trait’, as it were, wouldn’t be so bad if white people were moved and crying while asking for the facts but, and she says, “I’ve never seen anyone say ‘wait for the facts’ who looked upset.”

Phillips addresses further how this dehumanization is at work in this context and goes on to detail fascinating psychological studies that have been conducted over many years revealing the subconscious attitudes towards black people from seemingly well-meaning and not explicitly racist Americans – all due to these inherited worldviews carried right into the country and right into our churches.

Beautifully, scripture helps us understand that this is about restoration not reconciliation, in the body of the Church. “You cannot reconcile something that was never ‘conciled’”, says Caine. Phillips suggests that reconciliation is a white, western construct as it works along the lines of the individual focus instead of the group or community level (which is more significant in African worldviews). When we look at 1 Corinthians, however, we see that God knew humanity struggles with unity, so much that he warns us through Paul’s words that, “if one part [of the body] suffers, every part suffers with it” (1 Cor. 12:26 NIV).

This helps us to understand why we don’t just want black people to ‘get over it’. “There is a gaping wound that is constantly being opened,” says Phillips, and that is in the same body as our own as we all seek to be Christ’s church on Earth.

This is where Phillips’s professional mental health perspective is so informative in the talk. She advocates that the Church adopts the “trauma-informed approach” used to bring restoration and healing to victims of trauma, suggesting that the white, western church can use this too to bring healing to the wound caused by racism. She is currently developing the trauma-informed approach to be accessed on the group level and is training ministries to more effectively get to the deeper level of addressing group trauma and the wounds of racial injustice in the church.

I felt empowered by the suggestion to consider healing before reconciliation. Caine humbly related to this when

she compared it to her own work with sex-trafficking victims, as her team would not first force victims to face their abusers and encourage them to forgive and seek reconciliation, but rather their first priority is to try to bring them healing for the wounds that have been caused.

We are left considering three key challenges when it comes to our own perspectives and actions: to trust and empower the voice of the wounded before asking the “why did this happen?” question; to create safe spaces and relationships – the ‘doing’ rather than simply the thinking (after all, as Phillips said, “actions is the African people’s love language!”); and to practise cultural humility and lay down my own cultural perspective. In the typical Caine style of preaching, she adds that, “Faith without works is dead and most people’s faith is not working because they don’t put their faith to work!” – something she passionately advocates for around the world, that is perhaps more true than ever in the context of how Christians should consider the Black Lives Matter movement.

I am so grateful to have been able to witness what one could say is a historic conversation between these two ‘greats’ of our generation in the church. Indeed, perhaps the ‘white’ church is finally waking up to speak out against racism and is willing to suffer alongside others in the body of Christ. I trust God that I will live to see the tide turn and witness the church leading the way for healing and acting with a new voice, a new type of ‘body language’ that perhaps the world hasn’t seen yet.

Emily Roux, CMS

Stephen J. Patterson, *The Forgotten Creed: Christianity’s Original Struggle against Bigotry, Slavery, & Sexism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018)

This is a real gem of a book of 176 pages which I enjoyed reading, particularly in the current circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic, where significant inequalities globally and within nations and neighbourhoods have been highlighted.

Furthermore, the Black Lives Matter movement has made our understanding of Galatians 3:26–28 even more urgent.

I remember reading these verses when I first became a Christian, believing that it was an early church mantra about the new humanity and I wanted to be a part of it. Listen to these extraordinary words from Paul the apostle:

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26–28).

Patterson argues that this was a very early Christian creed, if not the first baptismal creed. If so, the implications remain profound today and require us to reinstate this liturgy into our practices again.

This biblical passage speaks into the heart of so many issues today as it did then in the Roman Empire to multiple communities and vested interests. Patterson appeals to us to re-examine this forgotten creed.

He carefully presents his case for claiming this is a creed where he considers v27 to be explanatory and inserted by Paul into the flow of the creed, shown by its text parallelism. Whether it is or not, he argues v27 is about baptism and the author believes that Paul quoted this creed as it would perhaps not be one he would devise himself. Patterson argues that Paul was ardent about neither Jew nor Greek, about which he directed his missionary activity, but with a less pronounced emphasis on the two latter phrases neither slave nor free, nor male and female. Paul is presented as a revolutionary in regard to the first but more reticent and more culturally conforming on the other two dyads. He argues that verses 26 and 28b have an identical structure and were the opening and closing of the credal statement perhaps with the modified Pauline Christ Jesus rather than Jesus Christ. Certainly a Pauline understanding of baptism is affirmed in this text.

If the creed preceded Paul then it would be very early indeed. Paul used older formularies and hymns and other tradition in his letters and in his mission context.

Of course “the oldest cliché” “in the annals of ancient bigotry” is a man in Greek culture who was grateful not to be born a brute (slave), nor a woman nor a barbarian. In the Jewish Tosephta there is a revealing prayer that reflects earlier views and is attributed to Rabbi Judah:

There are three blessings one must pray daily:
Blessed (art thou), who did not make me a Gentile;
Blessed (art thou), who did not make me a woman;
Blessed (art thou), who did not make me uneducated.

The author comments that when this is repeated in the Talmud, the word uneducated becomes slave and attributed to Rabbi Meir.

These are the categories of dividing people into us and them – race, class and gender. They are the other to an educated man – the foreigner, the slave, the woman. Paul contrasts this bigotry with “you are all one in Christ Jesus.” In whatever regard this credal statement

is revolutionary and presages a new humanity who all have one Father, one Saviour and one Spirit and all are children of God.

The author explores the notion of becoming children of God in chapter three and then elaborates on each dyad of verse 28 in three following chapters. All of them are exceptional and fascinating reads into the classical Greek and Roman and Jewish worlds. Careful historical research, selective use of sources, keen insights and densely packed ideas make this book a reference text for me. I learned so much more and it has provoked me to read more on some issues such as gender as perceived in the classical world, so that I can consider Patterson's work more accurately.

Patterson's succinct conclusion says he wrote this on the eve of 2018 when "all over the world race, gender, and class differences are once again exploited to divide and denigrate foreigners, women, and the poor." In the USA "they even elected a president who rode to power on a foul wave of racist, sexist rhetoric" – supported by many conservative Christians who endorsed this resurgent popular bigotry. The book is not replete with contemporary applications but it lays a significant foundation to re-appraising early Christian faith and drawing out from it profound missiological and societal Christian implications that would make the world a far better place – if only Christians would re-discover this forgotten creed.

Paul Thaxter, CMS

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