



## **AD CLERUM Update 17**

**9<sup>th</sup> July 2020**

Dear Colleagues,

Sunday marked another stage in the journey out of lockdown with the re-opening of many of our buildings for worship. Weddings have been celebrated, not yet with the sound of church bells and singing, though from this weekend we anticipate that appropriately socially distanced ringing of bells will be permitted. For further details, please see the website of the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers. Where it has been possible, the people of God have gathered to hear the Word of God and to celebrate the Eucharist. For all these things, we give thanks to God.

In the custom of the Church of England, and as required by Canon Law, Morning and Evening Prayer and a celebration of Holy Communion should normally be held in at least one church in each benefice on all Sundays and on certain holy days. Although it will not be appropriate for all to hold these regular services immediately, particularly in some of our multi-parish rural benefices, I hope that the vast majority of benefices across the Diocese will soon be able to open at least one of their churches each week for worship. That said, incumbents and churchwardens should not feel under pressure to open a church for worship if it would, in the light of Government guidance, be unsafe to do so. Going forward, where it is not possible to meet the requirement to hold services in at least one church in your benefice, you will need to be in touch with your Archdeacon and I will then issue a temporary dispensation.

We are all feeling our way in this and discovering how to be Church post lockdown. I have no idea what the new normal will be any more than retailers know what the new normal will be for our High Streets. In Exeter, the House of Fraser, Café Rouge, Kath Kidston and Carluccio's have all gone under. Debenham's has been reprieved but the sword of Damocles is hanging over John Lewis. Meanwhile the Agricultural Bill is wending its way through Parliament which, following our departure from the European Union, will have a massive impact on farming in our county. So much is changing: so much is unknown. We walk by faith, one step at a time.

### **Covid-19 and its legacy**

Two features of the social landscape have come under the spotlight in recent weeks: class and race. Glaring disparities in how the burden of Covid-19 has affected different sections of the British population have emerged. Black, Asian and other

ethnic minority communities (BAME) in the UK have suffered disproportionately in the pandemic with more infections, worse outcomes and more deaths.

Meanwhile graphic scenes of the murder of George Floyd in the United States have intensified the voice and visibility of the Black Lives Matter movement. In combination, this has opened up every institution and community to scrutiny, including the Church of England. When it comes to discussing racism, events have revealed the impossibility of so doing without discussing colonialism and the legacy of slavery.

### **Slavery and its legacy**

The anger felt by some is understandably directed towards what they see as the glorification of those who were involved in or profited from the transatlantic slave trade. The violent removal of the statue of the slave trader Edward Colston in Bristol last month shattered the complacency with which this subject has often been regarded.

For centuries slavery was a part of life for many British people, including here in Devon. I am referring not just to those who managed plantations in the Caribbean or who were absentee landlords or 'owners' of enslaved people, but also to those involved in the economic web of which slavery was a part, either making items for export, building or manning slave ships, or benefiting from the local purchasing power of the riches produced on the plantations.

Given the many vested interests tied up in slave trade, it is amazing that Olaudah Equiano, William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson (who are jointly commemorated in the Anglican Calendar on 30<sup>th</sup> July) should have succeeded in their campaign to abolish slavery, at least here in Britain. To achieve political agreement in favour of abolition, the British Government had to provide £20 million (equivalent to almost £2 billion today) in compensation, to be shared out among British slave-owners. In good Civil Service tradition, copious records were kept of those who applied for compensation, whether successful or not. To compound injustice, the enslaved themselves received no compensation for their stolen labour and suffering.

The Government did not have the £20 million required to fund the compensation package and had to borrow £15 million from bankers. This loan was only finally paid off in 2015. British taxpayers, including (to our shame) members of the Windrush Generation, who were descendants of the enslaved and whose degrading treatment we are only now beginning to acknowledge, have been paying interest on that loan all these years.

### **Auditing our monuments**

The present crisis is seeing several intertwined strands of long-standing pain, anger and fear interact and merge in ways that may change British society in unexpected ways. Historical monuments, including those in our churches and cathedrals, are likely to provide a focus of interest and/or anger. Damaging, removing without permission or applying graffiti to church monuments is illegal and wrong, and paradoxically may not in the long run help people in general to recognise and

challenge racism. However, the stories behind the monuments can offer opportunities to educate ourselves and the many tourists and schoolchildren who visit our churches.

Many parishes have printed guides describing the architecture of their church and the significance of its various monuments, perhaps drawing attention to an important individual buried in the churchyard. 'The evil that men do lives after them, the good is oft interred with their bones,' says Shakespeare in *Julius Caesar*. Could a member of the congregation, perhaps working in partnership with a local historian, research your monuments and inscriptions, and where there is racism or a cultural legacy to be confronted, use it as an educational tool to understand better our nation's story?

### **Tackling slavery and racism today**

For many people, slavery is in the past or something that happens elsewhere. Sadly, slavery is a present reality. Nationally, the Clewer Initiative works to help support victims of modern slavery. Closer to home, Chris Forster and Transforming Plymouth Together have put together resources to help identify the signs of exploitation whether overseas agricultural workers, women trafficked for sex, or those working at a local car wash. Modern slavery is driven by the demand of consumers for cheap, personalised goods and services. The focus is on the benefit to the purchaser, with little attention paid to the plight of the providers. The Fairtrade Movement aims to correct this focus. In a culture of indifference the criminal exploitation of vulnerable people flourishes.

St Paul tells us that, 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, but all are one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3.28). Do we believe this to be true or is it merely an aspiration? In response to the systemic discrimination faced by members of BAME communities in Britain, the Archbishops have set up a Racism Action Commission, tasked with identifying and dismantling institutional barriers to racial injustice, equality and inclusion in the Church. It is vital that we address issues around equality, fairness and exploitation honestly and transparently.

In the Diocese, we are looking at ways we can improve diversity across our churches and play our part in making British society more equal. Tanya Hockley-Still, Priest-in-Charge of St Mark's, Exeter and our Diocesan BAME Adviser works in partnership with the Vocations Team not only to help grow vocations to the ordained ministry, but to raise the profile of people in the Diocese from every background and encourage their involvement in all aspects of church life and governance.

Racial stereotyping is part of the problem in England and from the autumn **unconscious bias training** will be mandatory for every licensed clergy person and reader in the Diocese. Mindful of how important lay representatives are in appointment processes and how female candidates can also be easily disadvantaged, we are giving strong encouragement to parish reps to undertake such training too.

The goal of life is to draw all humanity into the life of God. So as we journey on together in faith and love, let us entrust the past to God's mercy, the present to his grace, and the future to his providence.

With my thanks for our partnership in the Gospel,

+ Robert Exon