

A WINDRUSH DAY REFLECTION

Football, Faith, and our Future

*A reflection on identity, belonging, and the call
to love one another*

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England fans — St George's cross painted on their faces — celebrate their team. For some, the same emblem carries an uneasy charge.

SPORT & IDENTITY

The Beautiful Game and Its Discontents

Whether a football enthusiast, casual observer, or *Ted Lasso* convert, it is hard to avoid the FIFA World Cup. Pelé's *jogo bonito* — the "beautiful game" — is more than the pre-eminent sporting event. By giving teams from every continent the chance to compete regardless of size, economic power, or political standing, football remains a powerful tool for breaking down cultural barriers and building peace and understanding.

In the 60th anniversary year of England's World Cup victory, I hold high hopes for the national team. Yet I confess a deep ambivalence when I see people adorning themselves, their homes, and their streets with St George's cross colours. While these emblems serve as symbols of our nation, it is naïve to ignore how far-right groups have hijacked them — and how that hijacking makes many in Black, Asian, and other minoritised communities feel unsafe.

Football, once regarded as an apolitical space, seems unable to escape the prevailing culture wars. The songbook of England's traditional chants now includes: "Stop the boats, stop the boats." Six years after the murder of George Floyd — a moment many called a turning point — racism and other forms of exclusion are becoming normalised as those on the far right sow new seeds of division, fear, and intolerance.



St George's cross and Union flags line a British street.
For some, symbols of pride; for others, of anxiety.

"When Paul Ince became England's first Black captain in 1993, many of us hoped sport would serve as the gateway to an inclusive English identity."

That historic milestone notwithstanding, the ongoing struggle is evidenced by the racist abuse aimed at Marcus Rashford, Bukayo Saka, and Jadon Sancho after the Euro 2020 final defeat by Italy; by Jess Carter's stated relief when her white teammates joined Lauren James in missing penalties in the Euro 2025 shootout against Sweden; and by the raucous outbursts at Elland Road during a brief pause in play to allow players observing Ramadan to break their fast.^{1, 2}

The racial animus directed at my parents and other first-generation migrants — epitomised in the signs reading "No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs" — seems to have taken root once more. Kenneth Wolstenholme's famous 1966 World Cup Final commentary, "They think it's all over. It is now!", remains an aspiration in the struggle against racism.



The HMT Empire Windrush docked at Tilbury, 1948 — the ship that gave a generation, and a scandal, its name.

IDENTITY & BELONGING

On Being English

The debate on Englishness can be traced to the early 18th century, when Daniel Defoe — author of *Robinson Crusoe* — in his satirical poem *The True-Born Englishman*, defended Dutch-born King William III against xenophobic political attacks. Regrettably, it has still not been resolved.

Being London-born, I should be English — but because I am not white, I am deemed "British."³ As a civic identity, Britishness is more inclusive than Englishness. Nativists and those on the right define "Englishness" as rooted in ancestry — an unspoken definition that is institutionalised. In the 2021 Census, the options to identify as English, Welsh, Scottish, or Northern Irish appeared exclusively under the 'White' ethnic category.⁴

"Black people have been present in England since the Roman era. It is time we commit to redefining what it means to be English."

As I have travelled the Kingdom, I have met many Black and Asian Irish, Scots, and Welsh people. There is another England — a wonderfully rich and diverse one, epitomised in Benjamin Zephaniah's poem *The British* — hiding in plain sight.

The challenge, Paul Gilroy argues, is that "Postcolonial Melancholia" obstructs many people's ability to recognise the intrinsic value of our multiculturalism. I was disheartened that the HMT Empire Windrush — the symbol of our multiculturalism — was not included in the *A Very English Chat* campaign to collect 50 objects that sum up Englishness.

THE QUESTION OF OTHERING

When People Become Nameless Scapegoats

1 John 4:16 — God is love, and those who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.



Bishop Lusa speaking at the *Standing Strong: Extinguish Antisemitism* rally, Parliament Square — a reminder that all forms of hatred must be confronted.

I know firsthand what it means to be "othered" — and, like refugees and asylum seekers, to experience displacement and resettlement, albeit of a very different nature. At the *Standing Strong: Extinguish Antisemitism* rally in London, Bishop Lusa Nsenga-Ngoy affirmed that "antisemitism is evil, and it must be confronted wherever it appears... every form of hatred must be challenged."

Racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, and other forms of bigotry are often rooted in ignorance or fear — and in a need to feel superior to others, or to hold them responsible for one's own difficulties, or to maintain the status quo.

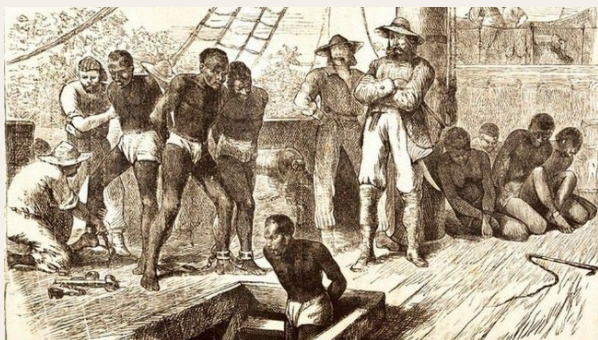
As it is harder to degrade a single person you can see and relate to individually, power elites and those who seek to divide society often stigmatise entire groups. When you dehumanise a group, you dehumanise everyone within it.

Whether it was enslaved Africans in the Americas, dispossessed Catholics in Ireland, Holocaust Jews in Europe, Dalits in India, multi-generationally excluded Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, Native and Indigenous peoples, refugees or asylum seekers — all are reduced to an undifferentiated mass of nameless, faceless scapegoats, no longer perceived as human beings deserving empathy, but as objects of derision over whom structural power and social control must be exerted.

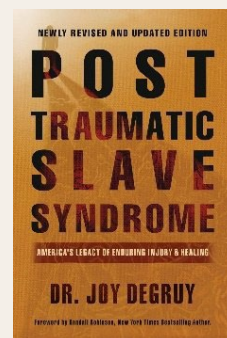
In *Strength to Love*, Martin Luther King Jr. reminds us: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

HISTORY & TRAUMA

White-on-White Violence and the Roots of Racism



A 19th-century engraving depicting enslaved Africans — a history whose trauma Joy DeGruy argues persists in the bodies of many Black people today.



Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome by Dr Joy DeGruy — a pivotal text on intergenerational trauma.

With multiple heritages, I am acutely aware that racism is not simply a binary phenomenon between coloniser and colonised. Racial prejudice also occurs across minoritised ethnic groups.

In *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, Joy DeGruy chronicles the trauma that now inhabits the bodies of many Black people — transmitted through intergenerational enslavement and compounded by persistent institutionalised racism and continued oppression.

Up to the 19th century, "races" were distinguished by class as much as by colour. The peasantry and working class were on the margins of white identity and suffered similar oppression — different only in that they held legal protection as human beings. We must therefore consider to what extent modern-day racism may have its genesis in the brutality inflicted on white bodies by other white bodies.

EXTREMISM & DIVISION

A Descent Towards Extremism

John 13:34 — A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.



The Unite the Kingdom march, September 2025. The 110,000 who gathered at Trafalgar Square included people whose principal grievance was economic despair and feeling unheard.

The Unite the Kingdom September 2025 event reignited deep anxieties among members of minoritised groups. The 110,000 people who gathered at Trafalgar Square heard a platform delivering what felt to many like collective hostility towards Muslims and immigrants, raising fears that extremism was embedding itself in mainstream politics.

Yet beyond the stage, the diversity of those attending made the label "far-right" seem, in part, too simple. For many, the motivation appeared less about racism and more about despair over the material deterioration of their lives and their sense of voicelessness. If one phrase resonated across the march, it was: "No one listens to us."

"The UTK protest underscored a shared sense of doom, victimhood, and decline — an intersection between the discontent of a beleaguered majority and the ruthlessness of far-right activism that now shapes much of global politics."

The World Inequality Report 2026 highlighted that in nearly every region, the wealthiest 1% now holds more wealth than the bottom 90% combined. Due to austerity, where institutions once fostered a sense of identity, community, and belonging, all that remains is uncertainty, anger, and disaffection.

The past 15 years have been the worst for UK income earners in generations. Add to this the decline of manufacturing and other key sectors, reduced social protection, eroding trust in institutions, unsustainable pension provisions, under-resourced healthcare, and growing social isolation.



Boarded-up shops in a post-industrial British town — the visible face of economic decline leaving many communities feeling abandoned.



A child plays football alone in a deprived estate. The "generational fault line" rendered concrete.

The report *Two Nations: The State of Poverty in the UK* warns of a return to the Victorian two-nation divide. The Alan Milburn *Young People and Work: Interim Report* speaks of a "generational fault line" — the first generation at risk of faring worse financially than their parents.

The Church of England's 1985 report *Faith in the City* challenged the neoliberal emphasis on individual responsibility, warning that "too much emphasis is being given to individualism and not enough to collective obligation." That warning correctly foresaw the polarisation and division we now face.

NORMALISATION OF EXTREMISM

Hostility in High Places



A protestor at a far-right rally. Referrals of far-right extremists to Prevent have surged in recent years.



Open Iftar prayers at Trafalgar Square — condemned by some as "intimidating," "un-British," and "an act of domination."

London, with over 300 languages spoken, boasts a rich tapestry of cultures. Yet we are confronted by instances of intolerance that stagger the imagination. The Academy of Medical Royal Colleges has warned that foreign doctors and nurses are shunning our strained NHS because anti-migrant rhetoric and rising racism have created a hostile environment. The Charity Commission has reported a surge in death threats, rape threats, and harassment creating a climate of fear at certain charities.

At the highest levels of decision-making, veiled Muslim women were compared to "letterboxes," while Black people were referred to as "piccaninnies" with "watermelon smiles." Open Iftar prayers at Trafalgar Square in March drew high-profile condemnations, some claiming it was "intimidating," "un-British," and "an act of domination." Relatedly, despite the repudiation of claims of two-tier policing surrounding the horrific murder in Southampton, the incident was deemed 'evidence' that "the rights and privileges of white people matter less than ethnic minorities."

The reluctantly released independent report commissioned by the Home Office on the *Historical Roots of the Windrush Scandal* revealed how the "British Empire depended on racist ideology in order to function," and that "during the period 1950–1981, every single piece of immigration or citizenship legislation was designed at least in part to reduce the number of people with black or brown skin permitted to live and work in the UK."

As Gary Younge argued, the Windrush persecution was "no accident" but "cruelty by design." It was not "a glitch in the system. It is the system. A system cannot fail those it was never meant to protect."



An illustration depicting the Windrush deportations — "cruelty by design", as journalist Gary Younge described it.

FAITH & POLITICS

The Danger of Christo-Nationalism

1 John 2:9 — Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.

As a minister of religion, I am deeply disturbed by the attempt to weaponise faith — confusing identity with belief, and in so doing threatening our unity, our freedom, our democracy, and our faith itself. Christo-Nationalism is not a faith; it is a political ideology. The proliferation of crosses, Bible verses, and prayers at far-right events superimposes a veil of false piety on a nativist message saturated with hostility against our reality of modern, multicultural Britain.

In contradistinction, Christianity is rooted in humility, forgiveness, compassion, and justice. Our faith is radically inclusive — upholding the poor and the marginalised, challenging the powerful, and calling for love of all, even enemies. Arun Arora, the Church of England's co-Lead Bishop for Racial Justice, has cautioned against those who seek "to subvert the faith so that it serves their purposes rather than the other way round."

SOCIETY & COMMUNITY

Overcoming Hyper-Individualism

The 21st century has given birth to an extreme form of individualism. Hyper-individualism, linked to technology and social media, and accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, has deepened social fragmentation, heightened loneliness, undermined shared values, and eroded empathy towards others. It is particularly acute among younger generations, who may more readily regard themselves as autonomous entities rather than members of a wider society — able to discount considerations of the common good and neglect the wellbeing of others. It turns neighbours into competitors and colleagues into adversaries.

To address these consequences, we need to ignite the spirit of *Ubuntu* — the Southern African philosophy often translated as "I am because we are." Rooted in the fundamental belief in the interdependence and interconnectedness of all people, Ubuntu represents a complex concept of community, connectedness, compassion, and cooperation. It is indelibly bound to notions of justice and equality for all.



Many hands, many skin tones — the Ubuntu spirit of interconnectedness made visible.

A THEOLOGY OF UNITY

One in Christ

Galatians 3:28 — There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

The imperative to love one another stems from the *Imago Dei* — of being created in the image of God — affirming the intrinsic worth of every person and the inclusive nature of God's Kingdom. Alongside Christianity, the teachings of Judaism and Islam share the consistent Abrahamic message of welcoming the stranger and loving our neighbour.

Our unity in Christ transcends earthly divisions and societal norms that categorise and separate individuals based on gender, race, socioeconomic status, creed, sexuality, ability, or any other characteristic. The Church's

unity — not uniformity — is a key feature of its communal life and discipleship.

One of the most compelling aspects of Jesus Christ's message and ministry was his radical inclusivity — the way he reached out to those whom society would prefer to marginalise and oppress. As children of God, we are called to see others not through the distorted lenses of "different" and "other," "us and them," but as new creations in Christ. Welcoming the stranger becomes less daunting when we remember that the hospitality we offer is the extension of God's hospitality to our brothers and sisters in Christ — an act of faith, a sign of hope, and a gesture of love.

CHARTING A WAY FORWARD

Towards Unity in Diversity



Caribbean soldiers of the West Indian Regiment, First World War — less than a century after emancipation, they fought and died for a king they had never seen.

An instructive and inescapable influence on my anti-racism work has been the reality that in the First World War — less than a hundred years after emancipation from enslavement — Black men from the Caribbean volunteered for the West Indian Regiment and fought, and many died, for a king they had never seen, against an enemy they didn't know, in lands upon which they had never before set foot.

The Christmas message by King Charles highlighting the importance of unity in diversity resonated with me. My multiple heritages have made me aware that the quest for racial justice is not a struggle *between* racial

groups, but a search for unity *across* them.

Mahatma Gandhi held that "our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and the test of our civilisation." Those words carry profound urgency today. Our destinies as nations, communities, and individuals are bound in a single garment of destiny together. The suffering of anyone diminishes us all. The flourishing of each one strengthens us all.

Alongside the Church Commissioners' fund for healing, repair, and justice linked to the legacy of African chattel enslavement, I was moved when St Mary Redcliffe church in Bristol removed four stained-glass panels dedicated to slaver Edward Colston. The new panels invite viewers to consider the journey of their neighbours and the importance of compassion and understanding in a diverse community. One panel — a contemporary re-imagining of the flight into Egypt — depicts the Holy Family in a small boat.

Matthew 25:35 — For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.



New stained glass at St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol — the Holy Family in a small boat, welcoming the stranger as an act of faith.

I have high hopes for two projects I am affiliated with through the Church's Racial Justice Fund: *Countering Hate, Cultivating Hope* — a pilot focused on strengthening community cohesion in both ethnically diverse and traditionally white, working-class communities — and *Sanctuary and Racial Justice* — a pilot to build awareness in rural areas of the challenges facing refugees and other minoritised communities, improving their integration through facilitating direct encounter.

I believe the Church of England — a recognised and established institution, the nation's church, operating within the public square for the common good — has a unique and crucial role to play in addressing, alongside other faiths and religious groups, the challenges of intolerance and extremism, by exemplifying in all our works the Kingdom values of peace, justice, inclusivity, and the integrity of creation.

Imagine if we — the body of Christ, made up of every nation, tribe, people, and language — took the lead in showing a hurting, divided world what real love looks like. If we can imagine it, Christ can do it, according to his power at work within us.

John 1:5 — The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

To be people of hope, we must draw on spiritual wells — on the source of divine hope that enables us to persevere. This divine source gives us eyes to see glimpses of light amid the darkness, and even when we see no light at all, to trust that light exists.

I end with a notable exchange from *Winnie the Pooh*. Piglet asks Pooh, "How do you spell 'love'?" and Pooh responds simply yet profoundly: "You don't spell love — you feel it."

It sounds simple, but in a country where too many people feel unseen, unheard, and unloved, perhaps that is exactly where we need to start.



Postscript: After Germany beat Curaçao 7-1 in their World Cup match, players from both teams met on the pitch to pray together. Germany's Felix Nmecha stated, "In the game we are opponents, but after the match we are all Christians and brothers." To God be the glory.



THE REVD CANON GUY HEWITT

Director of Racial Justice

London-born to Barbadian and Indian parents, Canon Hewitt is the Church of England's inaugural Director of Racial Justice. He is an Anglican priest and social development specialist whose work spans racial justice, community cohesion, and wider questions of belonging and inclusion.

He has lived across the Caribbean and worked in the Commonwealth and beyond, bringing a plural heritage to his ministry. A former High Commissioner for Barbados to the United Kingdom, he played a leading role in the Windrush scandal. He defines himself as formed in London, rooted in faith, forged in the West Indies, shaped by the wider Atlantic world, and at home across our global village.

June 2026

ENDNOTES

1. The 2022 *Racism in Cricket* report and the 2023 *Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket* identified a similarly deep-seated issue of racism within that sport.
2. It is important to recognise the yeoman efforts of the late Herman Lord Ouseley — a mentor of mine — in addressing racism in football.
3. I identify with London as my hometown, and my West Indian heritage, having lived in Barbados, Guyana, and Jamaica, is an essential part of my identity. As such, I define myself as Caribbean-British.
4. Importantly, the Welsh census included the categorisations of Black Welsh and Asian Welsh.
5. The marginalisation of the white working class in England is a complex, persistent issue characterised by educational underachievement, economic decline, and political neglect. The 2024 report *Criminal Exploitation: Modern Slavery by Another Name* revealed that 45 per cent of all victims of modern slavery referred to the Home Office were British boys aged under seventeen.