

**AFFIRMING OUR
COMMON HUMANITY**

A theological statement by the House of Bishops

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Preface by the Bishop of Ripon and Leeds

In the light of the resolutions of General Synod concerning 'race equality' (February 2009) and the incompatibility of Christian discipleship with support for 'political organisations whose policies engender racism' (July 2007) the House of Bishops has resolved to publish a document concerning the Church's teaching on racial equality and its abhorrence of all forms of racism.

This document seeks to relate the Church's teaching concerning the nature of humanity, and the responsibilities of Christian ministry, to the needs of our Churches and communities. As Christians we are called to seek the justice of the kingdom of God. As well as opposing the hatred of racism, we must be aware of the causes of injustice and resentment in all communities which may be exploited by those promoting racist and divisive agendas.

Those who exercise a public ministry in the Church must seek to be exemplary in their lifestyles and witness to the saving love of God in Christ Jesus accessible to all. This House of Bishops document arises from the concern that complicity in the sin of racism and other forms of prejudice weakens the Church as a sign of reconciliation and peace for all people.

On behalf of the House of Bishops I commend this document for study and as a basis for teaching in our parishes.

+John Ripon and Leeds

6th January 2011

AFFIRMING OUR COMMON HUMANITY A THEOLOGICAL STATEMENT BY THE HOUSE OF BISHOPS

A common humanity

1 Christians should celebrate the diversity found in the human family. We acknowledge the universal bond that human beings are all made in the image of God, equal in dignity, sharing a common humanity in which God shows no partiality or favouritism. This is the foundation for our pursuit of human flourishing for all, and our relationship with our neighbours, not least those of other faith communities.

Genesis 1-2
Psalm 8.4-5
Acts 10.34-35

2 According to Scripture the existence of the different nations of the world is part of God's providential ordering of human history and the nations will enjoy and contribute the riches of their diversities to the life of God's eternal kingdom. However, this biblical teaching does not support the idea that any nation is superior to any other, or a notion of separate development involving the segregation of people belonging to different tribes, nations or religions.

Acts 17:26-27
Rev 21:24-26

A common salvation

3 Humanity finds its created origins and salvation in Christ. In the incarnation, God in Christ shares our common humanity. In the cross of Christ the diverse human family is offered reconciliation within itself and with God. Peace is possible through the grace of God activated by faith. The old divisions of distance and enmity are demolished as people of difference stand together within the body of Christ.

John 1.1-5
Hebrews 2.14
Article II of Religion
John 12.32
Ephesians 2.14-17
Ephesians 2.18

4 The coming of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost overcomes the separation of the nations as barriers of culture and language are overwhelmed by the unbound offer of salvation to all.

Acts 2.39

5 For St Paul, the new humanity found in Christ disrupts human notions of status assigned by birth. 'There is no such thing as Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female; for you are all one person in Christ Jesus.'

Galatians 3.28

One body

6 Difference of ethnicity, sex or social standing cannot offer status in the Church, as the body of Christ, it is first and foremost a community 'born of God' through baptism and the Spirit, which cannot attribute its constitution to human ties. Human diversity will, however, be a reality in the Church and should be acknowledged, as people bring their different experiences, gifts and cultures into the body of Christ, and those who are most vulnerable are included, supported and treasured.

John 1.12-13
1 Corinthians 12.4-16
1 Corinthians 12. 22-26

One in worship and sacrament

7 In its worship, sacramental life and prophetic witness the Church seeks to express the life of a redeemed humanity in society. At baptism the

- newly baptised are reminded of their calling to ‘persevere in resisting evil’ and to ‘seek and serve Christ in all people’. In responding to our encounter with Christ in the Holy Communion we commit ourselves to be collaborators in the liberty into which God calls all people.
- CW Holy Baptism 359
CW Holy Communion 182
- 8 In the actions of Jesus we find a declaration of the inclusion of all people in the worship of God; echoing the call of the prophets for a new inclusivism, when they condemn national and religious exclusivism as denying the call of God’s people to be light for all people. It is the Church’s calling to witness to and anticipate the unity of all peoples that will be found in Christ at the end of time. True worship connects us with the hope and vision of heavenly worship among those from every tribe, language, people, and nation.
- Mark 11.17
Isaiah 56.7
Isaiah 49.6
Revelation 7.9
Revelation 21.24-27
- The church in diversity*
- 9 The Church of England rejoices in the diversity found in its parishes, schools and congregations, as well as its fellowship with Christians throughout the world. As with other public and private bodies, our cultural and ethnic diversity strengthens us.
- 10 There is a missional call to resist the racism and prejudice that often prevents the gospel from being heard or practised. In mission the Church of England is committed to share the gospel and the life of the kingdom across cultures and ethnicities. Our witness, our worship, the nurturing of our congregations, our care for the world and our service of our parish communities are all better in themselves and more fully reflect God’s glory for being led and undertaken by men and women of diverse backgrounds. The gospel is good news of transformation for all.
- 11 The Church must be constantly vigilant regarding racism and all forms of prejudice in its common life and structures. There is a theological imperative that equality must be practiced and taught by the Church, and racism condemned as ‘a blatant denial of the Christian faith’.
- Resolution 16
Lambeth Conference 1968
WCC Uppsala 1968
- Ministry*
- 12 Those who exercise a public ministry in the Church must seek to be exemplary in their lifestyles and witness to the saving love of God in Christ Jesus that is accessible to all. Priests and bishops are urged to fashion their own lives and that of their families ‘according to the way of Christ’, that they may be a pattern and example to Christ’s people’.
- BCP Ordering of Priests & Consecration of Bishops
- 13 Licensed Readers are charged ‘to promote peace and unity, and to conduct [themselves] as becomes a worker for Christ, for the good of his Church, and for the spiritual welfare of all people’. Deacons are called to seek out ‘the poor and weak ... and those who are oppressed and powerless’ so that ‘the love of God may be made visible’.
- CW Admission and Licensing of Readers
CW The Ordination of Deacons

- 14 Bishops and priests are called ‘with all faithful diligence, to banish and drive away from the Church all erroneous and strange doctrines contrary to God's Word’ and elsewhere, priests are also directed to ‘strive to be an instrument of God’s peace in the Church and in the world’. Moreover Bishops are called to ‘refute error’ as well as ‘proclaim the gospel boldly, confront injustice and work for righteousness and peace in all the world’.
- BCP Ordering of Priests & Consecration of Bishops
CW The Ordination of Priests
CW The Ordination and Consecration of a Bishop
- Confronting racism*
- 15 Racism and prejudice in regard to ethnicity are sins that have an injurious impact on many others in society and undermine the proclamation and practice of God’s kingdom. Christians should ‘nurture a loathing of the sin of racism’. Such sins are apparent in assumptions concerning those who are perceived as different, expressed in casual humour as much as in decisions about job applicants or participation in public life.
- General Synod Resolution February 2004
WCC Uppsala 1968
- 16 Discrimination happens when racism and prejudice become embedded in action and relationships. Christians must consider carefully the question of membership, association with or support of any group where prejudice becomes codified in policies, constitutions or statements in public (the public sphere including, of course, media such as the world wide web). Such groups set themselves up as distinctive moral communities based on erroneous assumptions concerning ethnicity, religion or the spurious constructs of ‘race’.
- 17 In our society, we are aware of groups making political claims on Christian identity through the rhetoric of nationalism and race. We acknowledge and affirm the Christian heritage of institutions and values within the life of our nation, but that inheritance can never be considered coterminous with the community of faith, or exclusive of those of other communities of faith. The worship of false gods (idolatry) includes the erroneous ascription of eminence and reverence to religious identity or nationality. It is in the compulsion to proclaim the good news that we find redeemed notions of identity and nationhood.
- 1 Peter 2.9
- 18 Racism and related forms of prejudice are evils that Christians are called to struggle against as they seek the renewal of hearts and minds, as well as the transformation of our society. This is the witness and example we offer, not least to all who would engage in public life, particularly those who seek election in local councils, national or European parliaments.

REFERENCES BY PARAGRAPH

1. **Genesis 1.27**

God created human beings in his own image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. REV

Psalms 8. 5

Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honour. NRSV

Acts 10.34-5

‘I now understand how true it is that God has no favourites., but that in every nation those who are god-fearing and do what is right are acceptable to him.’ REV

Hebrews 2.14

Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things... NRSV

2. **Acts 17.26-27**

[God] created from one stock every nation of men to inhabit the whole earth’s surface. He determined their eras in history and the limits of territory. They were to seek God in the hope that groping after him, they might find him... REV

Revelation 21.24-26

The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations. NRSV

3. **John 1.1-5**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. NRSV

Hebrews 2.14

Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death... NRSV

Article II – Book of Common Prayer Articles of Religion

Of the Word, or Son of God, which was made very man.

The Son, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father, took man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin, of her substance: so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and manhood, were joined together in one person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God and very man...

John 12.32

And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. NRSV

Ephesians 2.14-18

For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. NRSV

4. **Acts 2.39**

For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him. NRSV

5. **Galatians 3.28**

There is no such thing as Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female; for you are all one person in Christ Jesus. REV

6. **John 1.12-13**

But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. NRSV

1 Corinthians 12. 12-13

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. NRSV

1 Corinthians 12. 22-26

On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it. NRSV

7. **Common Worship Holy Baptism 359**

Will you persevere in resisting evil,
and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?
With the help of God, I will.

Will you proclaim by word and example
the good news of God in Christ?
With the help of God, I will.

Will you seek and serve Christ in all people,
loving your neighbour as yourself?
With the help of God, I will.

Common Worship Holy Communion 182

Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us,
so we and all your children shall be free,
and the whole earth live to praise your name;
through Christ our Lord.

8. **Mark 11.17**

Then he began to teach them, and said, 'Does not scripture say, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations"?' REB

Isaiah 56.7

...these I will bring to my holy mountain,
and make them joyful in my house of prayer;
their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar;
for my house shall be called a house of prayer
for all peoples. NRSV

Isaiah 49.6

‘It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to restore the survivors of Israel;
I will give you as a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.’ NRSV

Revelation 7.9

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. NRSV

Revelation 21.24-27

The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations. But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practises abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life. NRSV

11. The **1968 Lambeth Conference** called on the Churches of the Anglican Communion:

‘to re-examine their life and structures in order to give expression to the demands of the Gospel
(a) by the inclusiveness of their worship,
(b) by the creation of a climate of acceptance in their common life, and
(c) by their justice in placing and appointment.’ (Resolution 16)

World Council of Churches, *The Uppsala 68 Report 1968*, p. 65

Racism is a blatant denial of the Christian faith (1) It denies the effectiveness of the reconciling work of Jesus Christ, through whose love all human diversities lose their divisive significance; (2) it denies our common humanity in creation and our belief that all men are made in God's image; (3) it falsely asserts that we find our significance in terms of racial identity rather than in Jesus Christ.

- 12.-15. *Book of Common Prayer, Common Worship* and General Synod references are quoted in the text.

17. **1 Peter 2.9:**

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. NRSV

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