

## Theses from BAME Residential Consultation 2017

### Preamble

In this 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the Reformation in Europe, a gathering of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic members of the United Reformed Church felt led to reflect on the dominant ideologies and practices evident in our Church and world in 2017 which we feel need urgent reforming today.

Reflecting together, we recognised that we live in an age where dominant narratives are encouraging people to become increasingly inward-looking to hold on to what they perceive as "mine", to quickly scapegoat those they see as encroaching on, or taking over, "their" space and are largely neglectful of minority voices.

To this end, we recognised that the sentiments of fear in pre-and post-referendum Britain are linked to situations of real and perceived injustices in Britain, Europe and around the globe. We further recognise the paradox in which many different groups feel that they are "the oppressed", and frequently respond by internalising and displaying the habits of the 'oppressor'.

Drawing on scriptural sources, we specifically considered the following issues, and sought to offer some inter-related theses to bring about a new reformation for our time:

- The roles of, and regard for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic members in the Reformed and Reforming Church
- The re-emergence and normalising of racism and extremism in Britain, both before and since the Brexit referendum
- Terrorist atrocities, supposedly carried out in the name of religion, and the demonising of faith and cultural communities
- An economic system which creates 'the poor', and keeps people in this role.

### Thesis 1

Racial discrimination continues to be perpetuated across all levels of institutional Church and society, as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups, women, children and youth, remain at the bottom of the systemic ladder, are under-represented and disenfranchised. We believe that ethnic minorities should be involved in the decision-making processes of the URC at every level, and the URC should be intentional about living out the intercultural habit that we confess.

### Thesis 2

The way of God in Christ stipulates the inclusion and participation of all God's people in the URC. Yet the systems in which we operate continue to exclude people based upon their class and gender. As such we believe that to truly live out God's call to offer the fullness of life to all, a conscious effort shaped by policy and practice must be made in order to enable true progress within the praxis of the Church.

### Thesis 3

We live in a world that is fragmented into nations, faiths, and core-values which tend to oppose and contradict one another, giving rise to the observed emergence and re-emergence of extreme

behaviours and attitudes against each other. As followers of Christ, we cry against oppression meted by all groups, pointing to the Gospel imperatives to love your neighbour (Matt 5:43-48), and call on people of faith to speak into and inform our Foreign, Domestic, Economic, Social and Political policies and attitudes in order that God's justice might be felt as a reality by all.

#### **Thesis 4**

Ideologies of fear, hatred and intolerance have enabled narratives of abhorrence of the 'other' to dominate societal discourse, resulting in the marginalisation and stigmatisation of religions, religious communities and cultural practices. We hold that there is only one God - the God of love, and peace, and justice; the God who commands 'Thou shalt not kill' (Exodus 20:13). The good news of abundant life for all (John 10:10), further demands an end to any demonising of people or groups of people and certainly the equal distribution of resources for all for the good of the whole of creation.

#### **Thesis 5**

We believe that the structural failings of our current socio-economic system have created increasing levels of poverty, greater divisions of wealth and served to stigmatise and disadvantage those experiencing poverty. This system of production and distribution of wealth is based on an inhuman approach in which people are regarded as simply part of the process, so that some are overlooked or omitted. This is scandalous and opposes the will of God. We believe that all we have, comes from God, and is intended for the flourishing of all God's people. As such we call for the redistribution of wealth, an end to the systemic greed that has forced billions into poverty and led to the catastrophic destruction of the earth's resources.

#### **Thesis 6**

Violent wars continue to be fought around the world forcing people from their homes, in search of safety and protection from violence and intimidation. Many have become refugees in search of freedom, yet are faced with further racial discrimination and similar problems caused by lack of acceptance. Our Scriptures encourage us to help all who are in need, including widows, orphans, foreigners and the homeless [Isaiah 1, Jeremiah 22 and Acts 2:44-46. James 2:16]. We point to the call for justice seen throughout the Gospel, summed up in Amos 5:24 and Micah 6:8. On this, with this, by this and for this, we stand. We can do no otherwise.

June 12-13, 2017

Highleigh Conference Centre

[compiled and edited by Karen Campbell, Michael Jagessar and Eve Parker]