

We Need to Talk About Race by Ben Lindsay is an edifying and welcomed insight into the black religious UK Church experience in white majority churches. The book was initially read by members of the PCC with a subsequent discussion at the PCC meeting and our parish Zoom social/book group.

Racial Solidarity in the Church – God created the human race, which we recite during worship as, ‘One body’, Lindsay cites this as ‘One body with many parts’. The PCC and Zoom discussion on the subject was at times, an uncomfortable listen. It was evident that most black members of the congregation have had similar experiences over the years as part of our congregation; racism, unconscious racial bias, feelings of invisibility amongst our brothers and sisters in Christ through sermons, illustrations and events, both inside and outside the confines of the building.

Being Black in the UK Church - Lindsay recounts an incident from his childhood when he was the victim of a road rage attack by a white man. The sympathy he received from his congregation was short-lived with no ensuing prayers or mentions. A few weeks later, teenager Stephen Lawrence was murdered in a racist attack not far from the location of the assault on Ben. The heart is there, but white churches struggle to engage in societal issues that impact black members of the congregation. As an intercessor at St Paul’s, there have been numerous occasions, where I have omitted specific cultural prayers, feeling that the majority of the congregation may feel detached if it’s not a war or famine. I’ve discussed this with Christian friends attending other white majority UK churches, and as I feared, am not alone.

Church Leadership – The group discussed the point of absenteeism in senior church leadership within the UK Church. There is a distinct lack of diversity at the top table of the wider UK Church and in our own church spaces, but a desperate need for the church to be able to authentically represent their parishioners. We addressed the ‘white middle-class male’ dominance at the lectern of St Paul’s and discussed ways to open up the floor to different voices and perspectives in our fellowship.

Social Action – The book raises the UK Church’s almost silent response to various social issues affecting black and ethnic worshippers for example, the increase in racism and hate crime post Brexit. Lindsay writes that this lack of engagement from the Church could be a reason why some black people feel invisible in white majority churches. As a result, ethnic churches are on the rise as communities gravitate towards places of worship that address the needs of our communities.

What Next – Lindsay writes that it's impossible to achieve a 'post racial future' until we challenge the fact that 'this is a racial present'. For change to come about, we need to start talking about race. The journey to racial unity is in effect and will continue to be an arduous one. I for one am glad that at St Paul's, that long overdue conversation has started.

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