



Racial Justice Agenda for Change

Introduction

The Catholic Association for Racial Justice (CARJ) is an independent charity, established in 1984, working to support people from diverse backgrounds. CARJ works for the support and empowerment of black and minority ethnic Catholics to give them an effective voice in the Church and in wider society, and it supports people from diverse backgrounds in the struggle for a more just and cohesive society, in which all of God's children can truly belong and be sisters and brothers in Christ.

In 2023, CARJ organised a series of seminars in the lead-up to its 40th anniversary, and this resulted in a decision to issue and campaign around a 'Racial Justice Agenda for Change'. This Agenda, building on our experiences over the last 40 years, is intended to guide the efforts of CARJ, and all those of goodwill, to promote greater equality and to create a more racially just society.

Setting the context for this Agenda for Change

CARJ believes that racism and racial injustice exist still, both in society in general and in the Church. Moreover, we believe that the nature and form of racism may vary from age to age and country to country. On 21 March 2023 (the UN's International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination), Pope Francis denounced racism, likening it to "a virus that quickly mutates and, instead of disappearing, goes into hiding, and lurks in waiting". Racial justice is a matter of human rights, and legal safeguards, but it is also an intensely moral issue. As Catholics, we are called actively to work for the dream of the Kingdom of Heaven, in which people of every nation and language belong. This means that all of us must accompany those who experience racism in their struggles to address and overcome it, and that, as Christians, we are obliged by our faith to acknowledge our own racism when it occurs and call out that of others.

Accordingly, CARJ sets out the following Agenda for Change

To assist in remembering this agenda, we have ordered it under four headings with the first letters of each heading spelling out the word, "BIAS" (Belonging, Information, Accompaniment, and Strategy).

1. Belonging

Pope Francis in Fratelli Tutti suggests that "there is no worse form of alienation than to feel uprooted, belonging to no-one" (Fratelli tutti, par. 53). Dina Nayeri, in her 2019 book, "The ungrateful Refugee" stated: "...a common complaint among refugees: the future brings anxiety because you don't belong and can't move forward. The past brings depression because you can't go home, your memories fade and everything you know is gone." (TUR p.220). "They need the dignity of becoming an essential part of a society...what they most urgently need is to be useful. To belong to a place." (TUR p.338). This "...requires reciprocation. It is mutual and humble and intertwined with multiculturalism, never at odds with it. **It is about allowing newcomers to affect you on**

your native soil, to change you." (TUR p.342 – emphasis added).

While these remarks may seem to refer primarily to refugees, 'belonging' is so important too for those of 'Global Majority Heritage' (UK Black and minority ethnic people) who were born in this country. '*The Real McCoy*' was a BBC Television sketch comedy show that ran from 1991 to 1996 featuring an array of black and Asian comedy stars. This was felt to have been a real success, but it was never re-run, with, according to the Guardian Newspaper (29th July 2020), one of the performers being told that the tapes had been lost. But then the whole series was put on BBC iPlayer in 2020, perhaps because of the killing of George Floyd and the emergence of 'Black lives matter'. The Guardian used this story at the time to raise questions about the BBC's commitment to diversity. But we need to listen too to the message being given by the choice of title for the show.

Elijah McCoy was a Black Canadian-born engineer who, in the second half of the 19th century, invented an automatic lubricator for oiling the steam engines of trains and ships, Such was the quality of this lubricator that it became the 'must have' for steam engines. It is said that this is how the phrase, "Is it the real McCoy?" was coined. The sense of pride on the part of the Black performer-writers of the show is obvious. This is about knowing that someone, who looks like you, has achieved and you can do likewise. It's about knowing that you belong.

For a Church organisation, to enable this sense of belonging is not about the much criticised 'identity politics' but about each person finding his or her identity in Christ. The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church says: "Every person, family and intermediate group has something original to offer to the community" (p.187 C.S.D.of C). It then continues to argue for inculturation (par. 532), which is enabling people to find themselves, whatever their background, in Christ, and to hear the Gospel proclaimed through the medium of different cultures.

In our churches, in our places of work and leisure, and in all our day-to-day social interactions, we urge all people of good faith to examine 'who is not at the table'. Perhaps through established practice ("we have always done things this way"), by accident, or quite unconsciously, we have excluded certain individuals or groups of individuals from our communities, our activities, and our deliberations? For example, in our church communities, we need to ask various questions:

- a. What is the make-up of the congregation in comparison to that of the local area? Of those who attend church, do the ministries tend to be exercised by a particular group almost to the exclusion of others? Do the parish activities engage people of every background? Are people of different backgrounds involved in the making of parish decisions?
- b. In the choice of artwork decorating our churches or schools, are different cultural expressions represented and are there positive images of people of different ethnicities that do not negatively stereotype them? In the choice of music for use during liturgies and church celebrations, are different cultural expressions represented that reflect the makeup of the congregation?
- c. In our parochial schools, does the school curriculum, the composition of the teaching staff, its leadership, and its governance nurture all the various identities represented, but particularly those with identities that are often stigmatised, and do Catholic schools provide a model for racial inclusion for the wider community?

2. Information:

A Racial Justice Agenda for Change can only start to take effect if it is based on the rock-bed of good information. In particular, the people who exercise the different ministries or positions of responsibility in our churches and schools need to understand racism, how it is experienced by different people and groups, and how it mutates. Catholics in general, and priests and teachers in particular, should be helped to understand the race debates of our age. In the last fifteen

years, there seems to have been a resiling from multiculturalism in the political sphere and a greater leaning to what is called 'integrationism', in which newcomers to the UK are required to accept 'British values.' But what are the dynamics involved in these decisions and have the multicultural approaches definitely and correctly been rejected?

There have also been different terms introduced into the racial debate without people necessarily understanding them. Lord Macpherson, in the Stephen Lawrence Enquiry of 1999, introduced a definition and an explanation of 'Institutional racism' but much of that explanation has been forgotten, or not even seen, by many, and the concept rejected by some without, perhaps, a good understanding of it.

Tony Sewell, in his report for the Commission on Race and ethnic disparities (March 2020) writes, "Put simply, we no longer see a Britain where the system is deliberately rigged against ethnic minorities." He goes on to write, "The term (Institutional Racism) is now being liberally used, and often to describe any circumstances in which differences in outcomes between racial and ethnic groups exist in an institution, without evidence to support such claims." But we might question if his understanding of 'Institutional racism' includes the three examples of it given by Lord Macpherson, namely, "Colour blind", "Stereotypical" and "Established groups in the exercise of power." He makes no mention of these in the report. It is possible that he has severely restricted the definition of IR before coming to his conclusion, especially when some of the data he provides in the report seems rather to support the presence of Institutional racism.

Sewell criticises too the concept of 'structural racism', which, he says, has "roots in a critique of capitalism, which states that racism is inextricably linked to capitalism" (cf. also Tomiwa Owolade on Kwame Ture and Derrick Bell referred to later in this section). Sewell's report was significantly criticised by many, but its recommendations were accepted by the Government. Subsequently, politicians like Kemi Badenoch and Suella Braverman have condemned 'critical race

theory' suggesting that it should not be taught in schools. But what is 'critical race theory' and is the condemnation by some politicians of this theory valid, or merely one political stance?

Similar criticisms are made of so-called 'wokeism' and 'identity politics' (cf. Suella Braverman, on 18th October 2022, in the House of Commons, blamed the disruption caused by 'Just stop oil' protesters on 'Guardian-reading, tofu-eating, wokerati', and cf. "Not so Black and White: a history of race from white supremacy to Identity politics", Kenan Malik, 2023 which criticises 'identity politics'). These criticisms can lead to confusion and inaction in the struggle for racial justice. **We need to help people to be aware of the different influences involved and, hopefully, to emerge from the fog of confusion.**

Tomiwa Owolade, in his 2023 book, "This is not America", suggests that rather than just taking terms used in the race debate in America and applying them here, we should be aware of the influences or 'schools of thought' from which these terms emerge. The two 'schools of thought' he refers to are first that of Martin Luther King Jr and Barak Obama, and second that of Malcolm X and Kwame Ture and others. The first, he says, is more hopeful of the people of the USA. Martin Luther King saw the hand of God in the movement towards greater cohesion and equality. Barak Obama is said to have loved Martin Luther King's quote, "...the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice". On the other hand, Malcolm X and Kwame Ture, are far more pessimistic. Kwame Ture would not even use the term 'African American' because, he argued, "We are Africans in America. There is nothing American about us. Our history has only been a history of struggle in America" (quoted by Owolade p.96) Kwame Ture, according to Owolade saw no hope for Africans in America unless capitalism was overthrown. Owolade places Derrick Bell, who is very much associated with the development of the 'critical race theory' in the tradition of Malcolm X and Kwame Ture. He would also argue that Kimberlé Crenshaw, who is credited with coining the term 'intersectionality' is similarly infected by the same school of thought.

It is clear from the statistics of the 2021 census that there are more than twice as many Africans as African Caribbeans in the UK, giving a very different demographic from that which is found in the USA. This suggests, as Tomiwa Owolade argues in "This is not America" (2023), that the problems, concerning race and ethnicity, and the necessary responses should also be different, but how? **CARJ would like to play its part in helping Catholics and others to answer these questions.**

3. Accompaniment

As a society, and particularly as a Catholic community, we need to accompany those involved in the struggle for greater racial justice. This will often mean attending public meetings in the wider community, when issues arise, to listen to the pain and anger expressed and to try to understand.

Philip Collins, in an article in the New Statesman on 5th August 2022 (The absurdities of Suella Braverman's 'War on woke'), gave some interesting statistics concerning the inequality in this country. He says that the poorest 20% takes only 8% of the income, whereas the richest 20% takes 40% of the income. He then goes on to say that the principal earner in a white British family is nine times more likely to be in the richest 20% than the principal earner from a Black British family and eighteen times more likely than the principal earner in a Bangladeshi family. Presuming these statistics to have been accurate at the time of publication and indeed to reflect the current situation, we cannot be unconcerned by such inequality. Indeed, the picture of serious inequality affecting those of 'Global Majority Heritage' in this country (UK Black and minority ethnic people) is demonstrated again and again in the 2023 book "Racism and ethnic inequality in a time of crisis" (edited by Nissa Finney, James Nazroo, Laia Becares, Dhimi Kapadia and Natalie Shlomo - Policy Press 2023)

Our work for greater justice may also involve accompanying those treated unjustly, always remembering that it is the victims, and not the allies, who must be the principal actors in that struggle.

There are several traditional areas where accompaniment might be requested. Often, the **policing and the criminal justice system** is shown to disadvantage Black and ethnic minority communities. We need to read or at least be aware of documents such as Dame Louise Casey's report on the Metropolitan police, and Sir Ian Livingstone's on Police Scotland. We need to help report on rises in community tension because of any unfair treatment by the police or because of policies that are creating issues. This means people having their ears to the ground and being able regularly to test the temperature within a local community.

In the employment arena we should help people to be aware of the legislation on equality impact assessments. Organisations should be encouraged to be diverse at every level and 'canteen cultures' which impact negatively on particular ethnic or religious groups should be challenged. There will, inevitably, be people who are treated unfairly by the system or by individuals and they will often need support in seeking redress or resolution. There have been some amazing examples of church communities providing Job training projects in areas of high unemployment or of turning some of their empty buildings into managed workspaces to enable economic regeneration within communities.

In the health arena, we've seen many health authorities reaching out to employ medical staff from several other countries. This has many benefits, but the situation needs to be monitored. So many of the staff being employed come from Catholic communities and attend our churches. We need to be attentive to any concerns about injustice and provide what support we can. Do local health and care plans take into account our racially diverse communities? Are there worrying statistics about differential experiences and/or outcomes for different ethnic groups that need to be challenged? Do staffing, training, recruitment and retention policies, leadership roles, service provision leave anything to be desired in ensuring racially just outcomes? How can we accompany those trying actively to challenge inequality and discrimination?

It might also involve assisting individuals through the **asylum system** and helping them to integrate into the community.

4. Strategies

A desire to tackle racial justice is not enough - we need to develop specific strategies. This means building up an awareness of the problem, and then developing a vision for the future with very specific measures for implementation, outcomes identified, and evaluation processes written in from the beginning. This will involve:

- a. Initially consulting the people most directly affected - obviously, those currently experiencing or fearing the risk of discrimination and racism, but also those fearing a threat to their situation by an anti-racism stance.
- b. Any effective strategy must begin with an audit or analysis of the problems to be addressed, and exploration of the possible solutions, drawing upon this lived experience.
- c. Then a plan of action can be developed with measurable goals.
- d. The plan of action should have a timescale for reviewing progress.
- e. The action plan should also have an agreed monitoring system to assess progress and agree modifications (in light of the mutations spoken about by Pope Francis).

Some strategies will prioritise areas on which to focus. The Church of England document, "From lament to Action" prioritised, 'Participation', 'Education', 'Training and mentoring', 'Young people' and 'Structures and governance'. But each diocese (for example) might decide on different priorities.

Over time, we must aim to ensure that we mainstream our thinking about racial justice into all aspects of our lives, our work, and our spiritual journeys. Thus, individual Catholics reading this

Racial Justice Agenda for Change may want to question whether their workplaces, social groups, and professional associations all have racial justice strategies in place or could be actively encouraged to do so.

CARJ recommends that seminary formation should consider how to integrate this racial justice agenda for change into its work programme and encourage the kinds of community organising skills that will help new priests develop abilities within the parish's broader leadership teams. Every parish and diocese in the country should consider developing a racial justice strategy and action plan. Similar measures need to be taken by every Catholic organisation.

Some practical ideas regarding implementation

The Racial Justice Agenda for Change is very extensive, and may appear daunting at first glance, but many have already engaged in these efforts to promote racial justice – see some resources listed below. Amongst the many practical ideas you will find there are suggestions about – forming one's examination of conscience; youth Masses with a focus on equality, inclusion and racial justice; children's liturgy celebrations adapted to the diversity of the parish; parish events/bidding prayers/ etc. marking key dates such as Racial Justice Sunday/Black History Month etc; diversifying the church furnishings in the choice of statues or its musical or other traditions; creating a CARJ group in the parish, or integrating racial justice efforts into an already existent justice & peace group.

Some might be interested in:

- Rooting out Racism: <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2021/01/Rooting-Out-Racism.pdf> This initiative started out of a homily at Our Lady of Fatima (White City parish, Westminster diocese) which encouraged parishioners to discuss their day-to-day experiences of racism - sometimes even within the parish - and their proposals for change.
- It is reported that a toolkit for a Racial Justice Strategy is already being

developed in the Southwark Archdiocese

- "From Lament to Action", Church of England strategy (2021)
- "Dwell in my love", Chicago Archdiocese 2001

Concluding Remarks

CARJ wants to emphasise, for the avoidance of doubt, that racial injustice does exist throughout England and Wales. Often people or organisations will claim that it is 'merely' a matter of 'bad apples', but in that case why is the institution concerned not rooting them out and preventing the 'virus' spreading more widely? Some people note that if the institution is not taking the necessary action against its 'bad apples' then it can rightly be accused of 'institutional' racism or 'systemic' racism. Of course, there is much more involved in the concepts of institutional and systemic racism, and there are some who object to the very use of this terminology. Whilst people may want to disagree about specific language, we believe that all must accept that racism both exists on an individual basis, but it exists also structurally and institutionally.

This does not mean that we are reduced to pessimism; we live in a sin-infected world, but we never give up hope of the Kingdom of God and we strive to make it present now. Whilst we all have an individual moral responsibility to counter racism, we must also ensure that our social institutions work for the common good of ALL.

We urge Catholics, and all those of good faith committed to the opening preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which asserts "the inherent dignity...of all members of human family", to reflect and act upon this Racial Justice Agenda for Change.

