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‘We have made real progress, but it is important to see it as part of the whole’

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Andrew Mumby’s Synod private member’s motion prompted the C of E to undertake extensive work to tackle racial injustice. To mark Windrush Day, *Sophia Jones* spoke to him about what has changed

BRUNEL JAMES

ON 11 FEBRUARY 2020, the [General Synod](#) backed a private member’s motion, introduced by the Revd Andrew Mumby, from the [diocese of Southwark](#), to “lament” and apologise for conscious and unconscious racism encountered by “countless” Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Anglicans arriving in Britain from 1948 and in subsequent years, when seeking to find a home in the Church of England ([News, 11 February 2020](#)).



In response to Fr Mumby’s speech, the [Archbishop of Canterbury](#) said that he was “sorry and ashamed”. He told the Synod that there was “no doubt” that the Church of England was still “deeply institutionally racist”.

He said: “We did not do justice in the past, we do not do justice now, and, unless we are radical and decisive in this area in the future, we will still be having this conversation in 20 years’ time and still doing injustice — the few of us that remain, deservedly. We have damaged the Church, we have damaged the image of God, and, most of all, we have damaged those we victimised, unconsciously very often.”

FOUR years on from this catalytic moment, as we approached Windrush Day on 22 June, I asked Andrew for his reflections on how far the Church of England had come. How would he describe the journey to date?

“We need to acknowledge everything that has gone on before, because there were nearly 40 reports to the General Synod,” he said. “I think that we have made real progress, but it

is important to see it as part of the whole. The timing was also critical, because this was February 2020: just before the murder of George Floyd and lockdown. It galvanised people in a particular way.”

He recalled how the then Racial Justice Adviser, Dr Elizabeth Henry, advised and helped him to shape the motion. The Revd Brunel James, then a parish priest and now research project and secretariat manager at the Archbishops’ Racial Justice Unit, gave him vital feedback and support.

“He rang me up and said that he wanted to support this, but also said that we need to get the money behind it for the resources for proper research,” Fr Mumby said. “Brunel’s amendments really strengthened it, to say what is going to change and where is the money.” The Revd Lusa Nsenga-Ngoy, then BAME mission enabler for the diocese of Leicester, who is now the Bishop of Willesden, also advised and joined Andrew on the platform for support.

Fr Mumby remembered “a fantastic speech from a synod member called David Ashton, who is a lay member, who is a very quiet but long and faithful member of General Synod; and, when we got on to the question of resourcing this work, he stood up — and he rarely speaks — and he said: ‘This is really important work and, even as a Yorkshire man, can I say that it is worth the brass. We need to put the brass behind it.’ And then he sat down. There was strong applause. I think that is one of the things that came out of it: that there needs to be work done, and there need to be resources behind it.”

IT WAS after the motion, and during the time of the explosion of consciousness around Black Lives Matter, that the Archbishops’ Anti-racism Taskforce’s report, *From Lament to Action*, was published ([News, 23 April 2021](#)).

“It was about actions, and everything was time-bound with who was responsible for what,” Fr Mumby said. “The Archbishops’ Anti-Racism Task Force did an incredible job in building on what had gone on before, and committing the Church to specific actions.”

Fr Mumby, Bishop Nsenga-Ngoy, Dr Henry, and Mr James were joined by the Revd Dr Sharon Prentis, who is now the deputy-director of the C of E’s Racial Justice Unit. They wanted to keep meeting, and called themselves “the *Windrush* Group”.

“It is a totally informal working group, and the best way to describe it is, we are a group of five who decided that we needed to keep an eye on the progress of what Synod resolved. The other thing that we have done is advocacy for individuals who have found themselves

struggling as GMH [Global Majority Heritage] people within the Church of England. Again, just on an informal basis, in our own right.”

In the summer after George Floyd was murdered ([News, 1 June 2020](#), [23 April 2021](#)), the group held two confidential meetings (webinars) for bishops and their senior leadership teams.

“We said, ‘This is an opportunity.’ We have things that we want to say, and this is an opportunity for you to ask any questions about racial justice, to ask any question without judgement,” Fr Mumby said.

“They were very well attended, from the most senior bishops to the most junior. A lot of bishops were in listening mode. Many rose to our challenge, which was, ‘No, we are not going to do the work for you; we are not going to teach you everything; we are telling you that you need to do the work.’

“There were bishops who had clearly already begun that. I remember one bishop holding up his copy of [the book] *Me and White Supremacy* [by Layla Saad], and I thought, that is great, you are already doing that, and that was for everybody to see. I think that there was also still resistance and fragility from some bishops.”

Fr Mumby noticed some resistance at the meeting to the idea of racism in the Church falling under safeguarding. “I’m seeing adverts now calling on people to share their experiences of racial abuse in the Church. So, something has changed, and this shift is a positive thing,” he said.

ANOTHER positive initiative that has happened since the Synod motion is the Anti-Racism Network, led by the Revd Rachel Webbley. “The Racial Justice Commission held a fringe meeting at General Synod in July 2022, and out of that sprang the Anti-Racism Network. Rachel asked: ‘What can we do as white people?’ She said: ‘We need to stand up. We need to be actively anti-racist,’” Fr Mumby said.

In February this year, Fr Mumby, Ms Webbley, and the Revd Folli Olokose collaborated with the Racial Justice Unit on a member-led General Synod Fringe on Racial Justice, the first in recent memory. Fr Mumby recalled: “It was packed full of white people, black people, and had a number of key people from the NCIs from the Church Commissioners, CMEAC [Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns].”

He also celebrated the co-option of GMH members on to the Synod, to bring better representation, despite some opposition. “Having those co-optees has been a concrete

step,” he said. “It has helped build confidence among those of us who were already there, because there are more of us.”

After meeting together, they created an informal WhatsApp group. “It is for any GMH member of Synod, and not in any way lobbying on other issues; but is about saying ‘How do we build our confidence? Who can answer the questions I’ve got, so that I can feel more a part of things?’ It is a safe and empowering space that has been really encouraging.”

SO, WHAT of the future? Where does he hope to see the Church in 50 years’ time?

“A diverse lay and ordained leadership in the Church. A diverse House of Bishops. A Church where we are still talking about belonging, and justice, but where we are no longer in firefighting mode; where there are more positives to celebrate, and the conversation is smaller because we have achieved so much. I would also hope that we have a Church where we are leading the conversation in society rather than following on from behind,” he said.

“I hope, in 50 years’ time, the Church Commissioners’ work on addressing the historic legacy of benefiting from the trafficking of enslaved people is a world- leading initiative, and has led governments and institutions to say, ‘Actually, we need to make reparations for the past.’”

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