

The General Synod voted today to apologise for racism experienced by black and minority ethnic people in the Church of England since the arrival of the Windrush generation.

Members unanimously backed a motion 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.

The Archbishop of Canterbury spoke in response to the motion, which was moved by the Revd Andrew Moughtin-Mumby, Rector of St Peter's, Walworth, in Southwark Diocese.

Read the Archbishop's remarks as delivered:

I have a speech prepared but it's less eloquent than Andrew's, and with apologies to my colleagues who have worked so hard on it, I'm going to ditch it.

I am almost beyond words. Personally, I am sorry and ashamed. I'm ashamed of our history and I'm ashamed of our failure. I'm ashamed of our lack of witness to Christ. I'm ashamed of my lack of urgent voice to the Church, to use Andrew's phrase. It's shaming as well as shocking. It is shocking, but it's profoundly shaming.

Most of us in here, almost all of us, the vast majority of us – well over 85 percent; and remember 15 percent is roughly the BAME in this country, so if we were representative it would be 15 percent – but well over 85 percent, over 90 percent, are white.

I have white advantage. Educational advantage. Straight advantage. Male advantage. None of these... all the things that enable us to go through life without the kind of experiences that Andrew spoke of in his wonderful paper, and Doreen knows so well.

I'm not ashamed of those advantages; I'm ashamed of not knowing I had them. And I think that's where we probably need to start.

I'll just take one phrase from the speech which was that we had a hostile environment – what an extraordinary phrase, a terrible phrase. But we have transform it into a hospitable, welcoming one.

I can see that hostile environment coming back when other groups appear who we don't quite like, or we don't know how to deal with, or we don't appeal to the voters sufficiently, and the Church doesn't speak up for justice.

I've often wondered how the German Church in the thirties managed to ignore what happened to the Jews. I think they just didn't really notice. They just took it that this was normal, and perhaps what we've done in the way we've behaved since Windrush with so many of our fellow British citizens, who we treated as something less... as something less important.

And there is no doubt when we look at our own Church that we are still deeply institutionally racist. Let's just be clear about that. I said it to the College of Bishops a couple of years ago and it's true.

I get loads of lists to approve. I get shortlists and longlists and lists of panels for interviews. We've just about got past the point in the last two or three years where they're not all male. But they very, very seldom have minority ethnic people on them – either in applications for lay or clergy posts, senior clergy posts.

I've been trying to play nice. I send them back with a more or less polite note saying I'm not absolutely sure this is what we want. But we cannot go on playing nice – really, can we, I don't think?

I will bring this back to Synod in due course but I think we need some basic rules – like, an appointment panel doesn't work if it has no minority ethnic representation, or other discriminated against minorities. It just doesn't work.

It doesn't work on the CNC [Crown Nominations Commission]. It doesn't work at any level at all in our Church.

It doesn't work when long lists are simply one colour. It does not work.

Injustice. 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've damaged the Church. We've damaged the image of God. Most of all, we've damaged those we victimised, unconsciously very often.

And in this incoherent speech I want to emphasise my agreement with everything that Andrew said and end where I began: I am personally sorry to those who are here who have been affected, and those around the country, those where I could have done better. To CMEAC [the Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns] and others turning up the volume. And I am ashamed and I will, I hope with all of you, seek to do better.

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