

God's Bias for the Victims of Injustice

Truro Voice, 16th June 2020

Recent weeks have seen an extraordinary response to the appalling killing of George Floyd in America. People expressing their outrage against racism is, of course, nothing new, and nor – tragically – is the death of yet another black man in police custody. But this incident, more than any other in recent times, has captured the public imagination, and rightly so.

While the Black Lives Matter has its own distinct identity, it carries echoes of the Civil Rights Movement of the 20th Century. The leaders of that movement recognised the relevance of the Bible in addressing issues of structural injustice, and racism in particular. They saw that there's a bias in God's heart towards the oppressed and marginalised. And he's on their side precisely because he's on the side of justice.

The issue of race dominated the affairs of the early Church. The first Christians came to the startling conclusion that, through Jesus, the God of Israel is revealed as the God of the whole world. This means that no race or culture has any grounds for considering themselves superior to any other. God shows no favouritism.

The outworking of this insight happened in the Church. First century Roman society was deeply divided. Yet, following Jesus' death and resurrection, communities of believers – made up of people from different races and cultures – began to sprout up across the Roman world. What every local church is called to embody is a fragment of what human society looks like when it conforms to God's ideal.

The early Christians understood something else. That ideal isn't something that can be realised apart from God's work of renewal in our lives. Racism is deeply embedded in human society precisely because it's deeply entrenched in the human heart. It's not just the result of muddled thinking, as if better education could fix the problem (although that is important), nor is it just the result of unjust structures in society, as if better politics could fix the problem (although that is important too): the problem runs much, much deeper than that.

The leaders of the Civil Rights Movement were right. What we need, above all, is spiritual renewal. This is the unique contribution that the Christian faith has to make.

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