



Tell the Children the Truth

Romans 2:24

Sunday 1 June 2025

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NIV Ezekiel 34: 1-3, 11-16 NIV Romans 12: 2-3

My life's journey is defined by a series of Bs. I was born in the Bahamas, grew up in Barbados, I am now British, I had a long career as a Banker, I have been Black all my life, and am now bearded and balding!

I currently work for the Church Commissioners, the 320-year-old in-perpetuity endowment fund which supports the mission of the Church of England in England.

With that background, how can I possibly have anything meaningful to contribute on Romans 2:24 and the whole issue of blaspheming God's name?

Perhaps a bit more than we would think.

Any journey – whether individual or national – that has been intertwined with the Caribbean, at any stage over the last four centuries provides distinct insights about how Romans 2:24 has played out and still plays out with considerable force in our church and our world today. In Romans 2:24, Paul is speaking to us in 2025.

In Romans 2:24 - Paul was admonishing the Jews in the church in Rome for their deep hypocrisy. They preached fidelity but committed adultery. They condemned theft while filling their own pockets. They proclaimed God's holiness while living unholy lives.

The result? God's name became blasphemed among the gentiles.

The Caribbean, for these last four hundred years, has been the crucible of some of the deepest of hypocrisies that caused God's name to be blasphemed. Our beloved Anglican Church, sadly, has played a material role in it. The Church - in the Caribbean and in this country - is still suffering the consequences.

The awareness of this travesty came in the 1940s, 50s, 60s and 70s. It was not the theologians who understood this. If God's prophets do not speak his truth, He will find others to do so. So, it was leading Caribbean historians, academics, writers, and economists such as Eric Williams, CLR James, Frantz Fanon, Aime Cesaire, and the

Nobel prize winners of the Caribbean - V S Naipaul, Derek Walcott, and Arthur Lewis – who grappled with the nature and legacies of Empire, colonialism and Transatlantic Chattel Enslavement and what it represented: the systemic diminishing of the value of human life.

People started to see their island homes differently – not as carefree islands in the sun, but as the scene of mass kidnapping, torture, mutilation, rape, and murder on an industrial¹ scale. Sugar plantations, some owned by the Anglican Church², were concentration camps with palm trees.

The Anglican Church was intimately intertwined with the unholy trinity – of Empire, colonialism and Transatlantic Enslavement – the antithesis of Imago Dei. It was, and still is, blasphemy.

We had the shocking abomination of the “Slave Bible”, or to give it its full title - “Select Parts of the Holy Bible, for the Use of the Negro Slaves, in the British West-India Islands”. These so-called “bibles”, produced in 1807 coincident with the abolition of the Slave Trade, were used by the Church Missionary Society to “convert” the enslaved populations in the Caribbean. Heavily redacted, material parts of the Old and New Testaments were removed. All references to agency, freedom, escape from bondage and equality. Messages encouraging obedience and submission were emphasised.

Lambeth Palace Library has one of the very few remaining copies in the world.

We might check to see whether they left in Romans 2:24!

The Anglican Church’s complicity in this great crime against humanity broke every one of the commandments. Caribbean people understood very clearly how our Church preached a theology that misrepresented God.

It preached a god that was violent, capricious, hegemonistic, and racist. A god who was unjust, a god who blessed the rich and powerful, and despised the poor and the oppressed.

Why, they asked, would anyone have anything to do with such a god? Why would anyone, anywhere follow such a god?

As Bob Marley captured in one of his songs - the Church was part of the “Babylon System”. Its pastors were “vampires for the Empire - sucking the blood of the sufferers.”

Having inherited such a legacy of blasphemy – how do we address it? The great thing about our Christian faith is that redemption is possible. Paul is challenging us to move away from dishonouring God’s name. How do we do that?

¹ The Problem of Slave Labor Supply at the Codrington Plantations, J. Harry Bennett, Jr., *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Apr., 1952), pp. 115-141 (27 pages)

² Beatings, brandings, suicides: life on plantations owned by Church of England missionary arm | Slavery | *The Guardian*

By seeking and telling the truth. This profound blasphemy had never been acknowledged by the Anglican church for centuries. There had never been any real truth telling. No repentance. No commitment to doing better in the future.

Redemption from blasphemy, as Bob Marley implores in the song I referenced earlier requires that we “Tell the children the truth”.

In 2019 the Board of the Church Commissioners, prompted by our Audit and Risk Committee, unanimously approved that we embark on our journey of truth telling - an interrogation of our history to ascertain whether we had any links to Transatlantic Chattel Enslavement.

We called this investigation Project Spire.

Forensic accountants Grant Thornton supported by historians with deep relevant expertise were commissioned to do this work. Debits and credits can tell the truth more honestly than human beings. As the Archbishop of Canterbury put it – they represent “theology in numbers”.

We discovered that the wealth accrued by the Church Commissioners was intertwined at its genesis at the start of the 18th century with Transatlantic Chattel Enslavement – through who we invested in, and through who invested in us.

Project Spire forced many in the Church Commissioners and the wider Church of England to face difficult and painful truths – truths many others within the Church of England would rather remain buried.

Prompted by the findings of our work, the 105th Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, was the first leader of any major denomination to declare in a 2024 article³, that Transatlantic Chattel Enslavement was a most profound kind of blasphemy. As he confessed in a powerful and moving sermon⁴ of repentance in Jamaica last year to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Anglican Province of the West Indies, “the shepherds have devoured the sheep”.

The spread of the gospel through whips and guns, the misrepresentation and dehumanisation of people of African descent, and the enduring legacy of these atrocities right up until today, were all actions and out workings of shepherds devouring the sheep.

Project Spire also enabled us to face the most difficult and painful truth of all - that the past is not past. The mindsets and values that underpinned Transatlantic Chattel Enslavement - that commodified, exploited, and destroyed the lives of millions so that a relative few could prosper and flourish - are still with us today.

Whether in the way in which fossil fuel companies have impacted our climate, or the way Big Tech is behaving with regards to AI and the world of digital reality, we see the

³ Archbishop of Canterbury on slavery, healing and justice for all | The Archbishop of Canterbury

⁴ 'Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to His cross I cling' - Archbishop's Sermon in Kingston, Jamaica | The Archbishop of Canterbury

exploitative mindsets and values of Transatlantic Chattel Enslavement still at play in our world today.

There is also, very possibly, a 21st century scramble for Africa afoot, to mimic what we saw in the 17th and 19th centuries – a new scramble for its lithium, cobalt and earth minerals needed to power artificial intelligence and the green economies of the future.

Truth telling allows us to be prophetic and discerning, to defend the vulnerable and oppressed which is the mission Jesus calls us to undertake as a Church.

Project Spire has enabled us to see more clearly what Pope Francis in his autobiography “Hope” expressed “*An economy that kills, that excludes, that starves that concentrates enormous wealth in a few to the detriment of many, that multiplies poverty and grinds down salaries, that pollutes, that produces war, is not an economy...(it) is a perversion of economics itself and of its vocation*”.

Seeking the truth, telling the truth, and then acting on truth, not only counters blasphemy. It fosters hope.

It prompts us to act, to be catalytic to invest in a better, fairer future for us all with special safeguards to ensure that vulnerable communities still damaged by the lasting legacies and mindsets of enslavement benefit appropriately.

Journeys of hope are difficult and challenging. We have faced and continue to face considerable attack and vitriol because of our truth telling.

Truth telling has not been easy. But this truth telling produces fruit. It sets us free. Our journey has started to rebuild dialogue with many in the Caribbean, Africa and right here in the UK. We have had engagements with other denominations, including some powerful conversations with the Catholic Church and the Jesuits. Other institutions have approached us seeking to learn from our journey.

A Church willing to speak the truth is the best way we can seek to protect the vulnerable....and protect God’s name.

Such truth telling will allow us to get to the day we long for as Anglicans and as Christians when it would be said that “God’s name is **honoured** among the Gentiles because of you”.

May God’s love and truth always protect us.

Amen.