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Too woke or not woke enough? Racial awareness in the Church of England

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Abstract

The Church of England has recently engaged again with issues of racism by setting up the Anti-Racism Taskforce in 2020 followed by the Archbishops' Commission for Racial Justice in 2021. Both groups stressed the lack of progress in tackling racism in the Church and the need to raise awareness of racial injustice at all levels. This paper reports on the measurement of racial awareness among 3,167 clergy and lay people who took part in the *Church 2024* survey. Eight items in the survey were used to create the Racial Awareness Scale (RAS). Results suggested a mixed picture with majority awareness that racial inequality is an important issue that needs to be addressed, majority rejection of the idea that there may be local or institutionally embedded racism, and enthusiasm for diversifying leadership but not for taking specific actions relating to historic slavery. Multiple regression analysis showed racial awareness was shaped by a complex mixture of individual, contextual and religious factors.

Keywords: Church of England, conservatism, liberalism, psychological type, racism, Racial Awareness Scale

Introduction

Race and the Church of England

Racism in the Church of England has been shaped by the role of Britain as a colonial power, the work of missionaries in British colonies, and Britain's postwar history of encouraging migrant workers from former British colonies to settle in the UK (Solomos, 2022). This complex history links the Church of England to the racial attitudes of the society of which it is part and raises issues for an organisation that has both benefited from colonisation (including the slave trade) and which has been seen as the 'Mother Church' for thousands of Christians who became part of the Anglican Church in former colonies. The tensions and disappointments this has produced for immigrants are perhaps nowhere more clearly seen than in the experiences of black West Indians who arrived in 1948 on the SS Windrush and those that followed (Patterson, 1963; Wardle & Obermuller, 2019; Wills, 2018). The failure of local communities to welcome them was matched only by their bewilderment at being rejected by the very Church that had nurtured their faith in the first place (Hill, 1963; Root, 1992; Wilkinson et al., 1985).

The bewilderment of these descendants of former slaves was perhaps made worse because the many of those who fought for the abolition of slavery in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were Anglican Evangelicals (Coffey, 2007). Although the motivations of these Evangelicals have been questioned by some historians (Brown, 2012), part of the particular link with evangelicalism arose from religious understandings of the equal worth of all people, the need to respond to the grace of forgiveness, and the evil of any form of enslavement (Anstey, 1975). Despite these deep roots opposing racism, it seems that the postwar encounter of Black Caribbeans with the Church of England exposed the underlying racist attitudes of some congregations. Racial and ethnic prejudice in Britain takes many forms, but within the Church of England it has largely been shaped by attitudes towards those of Black Caribbean or Black African descent.

Although the Church of England was aware of incipient racism from relatively early on (for a summary, see Gordon-Carter, 2003), it was the *Faith in the City* report in the 1980s (Church of England, 1985) that marked a crucial moment when the Church recognised it needed to address the problem. Recognising a problem and addressing it are not the same thing. Glynne Gordon-Carter (2003) describes how the recommendation from *Faith in the City* for the creation of a permanent *Commission* on Black African Concerns was relegated to a *Committee* of Black African Concerns (CBAC), the only one of the report's 63

recommendations to be rejected. A subsequent proposal for a minimum of 24 Black African members of the General Synod (which had 600 members) also failed to get the necessary support. Over a decade later, in a forward to Gordon-Carter's account, Bishop Wilfred Wood, the first Black bishop in the Church of England and chair of CBAC, wrote:

I found that in reading [Glynne Gordon-Carter's] account I was reliving all the pain I felt at the time – the rejection by people who professed to respect and even admire me, but [who] clearly believed that more people like me constituted a threat to them and theirs. The pain has not diminished over the years. (Gordon-Carter, 2003, p. xi)

The Committee organised a survey in 1988 to enquire of dioceses how they perceived racism in their regions and what they were doing to overcome it. The results showed a mixed picture, with some dioceses having policies on equal opportunities, some indicating they were not likely to take any action, and some arguing that it was not a problem because there were no minority ethnic people in their diocese (Gordon-Carter, 2003, p. 40). The report of the survey was entitled 'Seeds of Hope' which, in the light the following decades, seems a little over optimistic.

The report into the racially-motivated murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993 (MacPherson, 1999) argued that the Metropolitan Police force was 'institutionally racist' and this was, perhaps, the first time that racism in Britain was explicitly shown to be more than the sum of individual attitudes. It was a wakeup call to many other organisations, including the Church of England. Although Bishop John Sentamu was on the advisory panel of the inquiry and was chair of the Church of England's Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns (CMEAC, a successor to CBAC), it was not immediately obvious that Synod would debate a response to the report. This did eventually happen, and led to a flurry of initiatives after Sentamu called for the Church to 'put our own house in order' (Gordon-Carter, 2003, p. 132).

The title of Gordon-Carter's 2003 account of the history of CBAC and CMEAC, '*An Amazing Journey*', seems to reflect a sense that the Church had come a long way since *Faith in the City*. That may be so, but the Church of England has not dealt well with racial issues over the last quarter century and there continues to be trenchant and persistent complaints of complacency and slow progress (France-Williams, 2020; Isiorho, 2002; Mapfumo, 2024; Perera, 2023; Thatcher, 2023). The most recent initiative was the setting up of the Anti-Racism Taskforce (ART) in 2020. This was intended to set the agenda for the Archbishops' Commission for Racial Justice (ACRJ), which began work in the following year (Archbishops' Commission for Racial Justice, 2022). The taskforce's report *From Lament to Action* (Anti-Racism Taskforce, 2021) identified five priority areas (participation, education, training and mentoring, young people, and structures and governance), each of which had a list of recommendations for immediate actions. Alongside these 47 'actions' the report also suggested seven workstreams covering areas for further work for the ACRJ: theology, slavery (including monuments), history and memory, culture and liturgy, complaints handling, participation,

and patronage. This set the tone for the work of the ACRJ, which was a mixture of broad ideological and theological investigation coupled with overseeing the implementation of specific actions.

The ACRJ's final report (Archbishops' Commission for Racial Justice, 2024a) summarises the work done over a two-year period. Part of this work was to explore actions that the Church might take to redress its past associations with the slave trade, including removing monuments that eulogise former slavers, and making reparations for damage done. The report recommended the establishment of a Racial Justice Board, a Racial Justice Panel, and a Lead Bishop for racial justice. In summarising 'Where we are now' it highlights two observations (p.78):

Racial Justice in the Church of England is the classic curate's egg – but 'good in parts' is not good enough for the Kingdom of God.

A sustained effort of learning together and spiritual growth will be required to make even a minimal level of racial justice a reality across a complex national institution which has a presence in every community.

The ACRJ reports recognise that racism is not uniquely or solely a problem for the Church of England, and that there are places where diversity is evident, promoted, and celebrated. However, the fact that the Church of England is still having to address racial issues and is still setting up bodies who then set up more bodies to make progress suggests that it has not yet changed the culture of the institution nor, perhaps, the Church at large. In the fourth report, the Chair of the Commission, Lord Boateng, lamented the slow progress the Church was making in trying to effect change. This was seen to be partly due to a lack of data on problems and progress at parish or diocesan levels and partly because racial justice is being relegated behind issues of theological stance and church tradition when it comes to senior ecclesiastical appointments. (Archbishops' Commission for Racial Justice, 2024b).

Most of the initiatives have come from the hierarchy, yet it is the experience of people at the grassroots that has so often pointed to the problems and been the driving force for change. Almost invariably this involves listening to the individual experiences of people from ethnic minorities in the Church, which must be the primary focus. Nonetheless, if change is to be deep-rooted it must also to involve the majority of the Church of England, who are White British and based in parishes. Raising their racial awareness is a first step to helping them address racial justice. Understanding the levels of awareness, and how these vary across the Church may be one way in which research can promote the impact that the Church needs to make in this area. This study reports on responses to racial justice items from the *Church 2024* survey, a wide-ranging online survey of the Church of England which was conducted independently as the final report of the ACRJ was being prepared. The intention was not to assess the complex issues associated with 'racism' in the Church, nor to monitor what was being done to counter it. Instead, the more modest aim was to include some items in the survey that might make an initial assessment of the levels of racial awareness among clergy and lay people in the Church of England. This is a novel approach in this area, so before presenting the results it is necessary to explore how racism and racial awareness might be manifest in this particular context.

Racism and racial awareness

Racism occurs in many forms, and it is difficult to embrace those forms in a single definition. Racial prejudice is linked to, but distinct from, ethnic prejudice. Nonetheless, the two are often associated, and certainly have been in the discourse on racism in the Church of England. Gordon-Carter (2003, p. xx) gives a general definition: "... conduct, words or practices which disadvantage or advantage people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin.' She goes on to point out that 'In its more subtle forms it is as damaging as in its overt form.' Although, sadly, the possibility of overt and blatant racism in the Church of England today cannot be ruled out, it is these subtle forms that are most likely to pervade this particular sub-culture. One form identified in the *Seeds of Hope* survey were dioceses that were adamant that there was no racism in their bailiwick because there were no ethnic minorities living in the diocese. Another even more subtle form of racism is what has been described by sociologists in the USA as 'color blindness' (Bonilla-Silva, 2006), which is a rather high-minded attitude that imagines that treating everyone equally without any regard to their colour somehow makes racial injustice disappear and that it is wrong to persist in recognising difference. This has the effect of 'normalising' the status quo. It is similar to the idea of 'silent racism' (Trepagnier, 2017), which refers to the way in which the shared ideology of the dominant racial group creates images and assumptions that subtly reinforce racism among those who would not consider themselves to be at all racist.

Part of the problem lies not so much in individuals, but in organisations. This is the thrust of *From Lament to Action*, which firmly points the finger for lack of action by the Church over the past decades at institutional racism:

In considering why so little progress has been made in many areas of church life after more than 40 years of reports, debates, study courses, discussions, motions and resolutions, the Taskforce supports the Archbishop of Canterbury's contention that there is institutional racism in the church's practices and structures. This can be seen clearly in a number of areas of church life, most strikingly in the areas of participation and representation as well as in areas of structures and governance. (Anti-Racism Taskforce, 2021, p. 11)

It is the way in which an organisation can be both shaped by the attitudes of its members and maintain a corporate culture that in turn shapes the attitudes of members, that makes institutional racism difficult to pin down or eradicate. Gordon-Carter (2003, p. xx) defines it as:

... the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviours which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racial stereotyping...

In these circumstances a first step for overcoming subtle racism in the Church of England might be to recognise the reality of institutional racism and racial injustice, and the need to take actions to overcome them.

Racial awareness is a widely used concept in education, where it is seen as something that should be encouraged to develop in children and college students. Diggles (2014, p. 32) offers a succinct definition:

To be racially aware is to acknowledge the fact that real life is not always just or that society does not always offer merit-based rewards to people of all races Those with racial awareness can begin to address issues of racism because they have a cognitive understanding of the continued existence of race-based privilege and oppression.

Studies in the United States have examined levels of racial awareness over time by asking people how far they recognise specific race-related inequalities in health care (Benz et al., 2011). These are well documented disparities, so measuring awareness in these sorts of studies involves asking about knowledge of evidence of racism. Other studies with an educational goal have used programmes to teach about racism and then measured how far that increases knowledge and hence awareness (Katz, 2003). The approach used in this study is to explore the attitudes of individuals towards propositions about racial injustice in the Church to see if they accept that there are issues that require specific actions. In a specific sense, this might be said to be measuring how ‘woke’ people are.

The term ‘woke’ derives from ‘awake’ and began to be used figuratively to refer to an awareness of racial or social discrimination among the African American community from the 1920s (OED, 2023). Its rapid spread in recent years has been associated with the ‘culture wars’ in the United States (and increasingly in the UK and elsewhere), and it is now used as both a positive term denoting awareness, and a negative term denoting an excessive and doctrinaire preoccupation with progressive or left-wing attitudes (OED, 2024). The ACRJ was aware of how raising issues of racial justice in the Church of England would inevitably meet accusations of ‘wokerism’:

This sense that Global Majority Heritage or UK Minoritised Ethnic persons are somehow ‘the other’ and represent a threat to the identity of the Church of England fuels the belief in some quarters that a focus on racial justice in the Church of England is misplaced and little more than ‘wokery’.
(Archbishops’ Commission for Racial Justice, 2024b, p. 6)

This suggests that those who are aware of racial injustice in the Church will accept the existence of institutional racism, lament the inaction, and accept the need for restorative justice, while those who lack awareness are likely to reject these ideas. This is the basis on which a novel measure of racial awareness, specific to the context of the Church of England, was developed in this study.

Factors predicting racial awareness and racism

If racial awareness reduces racism, then it is likely that the same factors may predict both.

Sociologists and psychologists have long known that it is difficult to measure racism directly in surveys, not least because of social pressures to conform to a non-racist ideal. Studies that have examined which groups or individuals are most prone to racism have tended to look at the wider construct of ‘outgroup prejudice’ and sought to understand what factors promote or reduce it. This is a large and complex field of study and was not the main purpose of the *Church 2024* survey. What is worth noting is that various studies have shown outgroup prejudice can be related to individual differences, contextual factors, and broad ideological perspectives.

Differences at the individual level are shown in a tendency for men have higher outgroup prejudice than women (Navarrete et al., 2010), and in relationships between personality and prejudice (Sibley & Duckitt, 2008). The latter is evidenced in the relationships between prejudice and personality traits such as authoritarianism (Adorno et al., 1950; Altemeyer, 1981) and social dominance orientation (Pratto et al., 1994). Studies using measures of more fundamental psychological dispositions such as the Big Five model of personality have suggested that prejudice is lower among those who score high on ‘openness to experience’ and/or ‘agreeableness’ (Akrami & Ekehammar, 2006; Duckitt et al., 2002).

Sociologists have stressed the way in which racial attitudes are shaped by social experience, sometimes from very early in life. One such example is the long-established ‘outgroup contact hypothesis’ (Allport, 1954; Dovidio et al., 2003), which argues that prejudice is reduced where there is contact between groups. More recently, ‘silent racism’ is said to be shaped by powerfully by social context (Trepagnier, 2017).

Related to both individual differences and context are an individual’s broader ideological and political stances, which, in the current climate in the UK and Europe, tend to be conceived as the difference between left-wing liberalism and right-wing conservatism (Caprara & Vecchione, 2018). The ‘culture wars’ of our time is a complex idea that is not directly related to the purpose of this study, but what research does point to is the likelihood that racial awareness may be related to more generally held liberal or conservative views on a range of topics. In broad terms, liberalism tends to be associated with more racially aware and less racist views than does conservatism (Eyerman, 2023; Wallace, 1999).

Predicting racial awareness in the Church of England

The approach taken in this paper to understanding the forces shaping racial awareness in the Church of England draws on previous work in the field of empirical theology, especially within the UK tradition (Francis & Village, 2015). In this tradition, attitudes and beliefs are thought to be shaped by a complex mixture of individual differences, social and individual context, ecclesial context, and theological stances. These factors are not independent of one another. For example, the different

wings of the Church of England tend to be associated with particular attitudes towards moral or theological issues (Randall, 2005; Village, 2012). Anglo-Catholicism tends to be more liberal on issues such as sexuality and some matters of doctrine, but more traditional in attitudes towards the role of women or liturgical worship. Evangelicalism tends to be more conservative when it comes to matters of doctrine or moral issues but is more accepting of the role of women in leadership and less traditional in worship. Outside these two wings, the ‘Broad Church’ tends to lie between these two positions, being more liberal on some issues such as the role of women, but more traditional in others, such as worship.

There are a growing number of studies that have examined beliefs and attitudes among churchgoers and clergy by using multivariate analyses that combine individual, contextual, ecclesial, and theological factors (Village, 2011, 2025; Village & Francis, 2021). The underlying concept is that many attitudes are shaped most immediately by a person’s general liberal or conservative stance in areas of doctrine and/or morality. This in turn may be created or reinforced by the church tradition to which they belong. Behind both these factors lie the context and experience of each individual (e.g. education, ordination, where they live etc.) and their underlying psychological dispositions. Several studies have shown how these different factors predict levels of particular attitudes or behaviours. In a study of attitudes towards the environment, Village (2020) showed that psychological factors could predict levels of environmental concern both directly and indirectly because of their influence on theological attitudes such as dominion over creation and stewardship. The usual approach in these multivariate studies is to build up statistical models by starting with individual factors and then adding successively contextual, ecclesial, and theological factors, on the assumption that broad theological stances are likely to be the closest predictors of specific beliefs or attitudes, but more general factors may have some role as well.

Research questions

In the light of the above, this paper addresses three main questions:

1. What is extent of racial awareness among churchgoers and clergy in the Church of England?
2. How does opinion vary by demography, ordination status, and church tradition?
3. What individual, contextual, ecclesial, and theological factors predict racial awareness in the Church of England?

Method

Procedure and participants

The *Church 2024* survey was an online survey delivered using the Qualtrics platform which ran from March to November 2024 (for details, see Village, 2025). It was not designed solely or primarily to assess racial awareness, but some items on the subject were included in sections measuring attitudes and beliefs. The final sample used here consisted of 3,167 Anglicans who lived in England and who

had no missing values for variables used in this analysis (Table 1). The sample was mostly elderly (53% in their 60s or older), overwhelmingly White (95%), and with university-level education (82%). Comparisons with the most recent official Church of England diversity audit (Church of England, 2015) suggest that this is a similar profile to congregations at large in terms of sex ratio, age and ethnicity (Village, 2025). For example, in the 2014 Church diversity audit, 6% were minority ethnic, compared with 5% for this study. In the diversity audit, 36% were in rural areas, compared with 32% for this study.

- insert Table 1 about here -

The Racial Awareness Scale (RAS)

The *Church 2024* survey included eight Likert items (Likert, 1932) referring to racial awareness in the Church of England, each with a five-point response scale (Table 2). These were based on general statements about perceptions of racism in the local or national church, the priority that should be given to addressing racial issues, and specific issues related to race such as racial diversity in leadership and the legacy of the slave trade. To construct the RAS, the eight items were subject to factor analysis (principal components extraction with varimax rotation), which identified a single component accounting for 58% of the total variance. One item was reverse coded so that a high score on the RAS indicated a high level of racial awareness. Alpha reliability for the scale (Cronbach, 1951) was .90, suggesting the scale had good internal consistency reliability and could function as a measure of racial awareness.

- insert Table 2 about here -

Predictor variables

Based on previous studies (Village, 2025; Village & Francis, 2009, 2021), predictor variables were grouped into a hierarchy which ran from personal factors to theological factors:

Personal factors

The survey asked about biological sex and responses were coded female = 1, male = 0. Age was coded as 18-19 (1), 20s (2), 30s (3), 40s (4), 50s (5), 60s (6), 70s (7), and 80s+ (8). The low numbers of minority ethnic participants (reflective of the Church of England generally) meant that it was not possible to use detailed categories for analysis, so a dummy variable ‘White British’ (= 1, ethnic minority = 0) was used instead.

Psychological factors

Psychological variables were assessed using the revised shortened version of the Francis Psychological Type and Emotional Temperament Scales (FPTETS) (Village & Francis, 2023a, 2023b, 2024). This is a 30-item instrument comprising four sets of six forced-choice items related to each of the four components of psychological type theory: orientation (extraversion, E, or introversion, I), perceiving process (sensing, S, or intuition, N), judging process (thinking, T, or feeling, F), and attitude toward the outer world (judging, J, or perceiving, P), and six items related to emotional

temperament (calm or volatile) (Village & Francis, 2022). Previous studies have demonstrated that the parent instrument (which contains just the four psychological type scales) functions well as a measure of psychological type preferences in a range of church-related contexts (for example, see Francis et al., 2021; Francis et al., 2011; Village, 2016). In this sample, the alpha reliabilities were .82 for the EI scale, .68 for the SN scale, .79 for the TF scale, .78 for the JP scale, and .82 for the emotional temperament scale.

Contextual factors

Highest level of education was coded: no school qualifications (1), school-level (2), university certificate or diploma (3), undergraduate degree (4), masters degree (5), or doctoral degree (6).

Marital status was used to create dummy variables single (= 1, other = 0) and partnered (= 1, other = 0). Location was used to create dummy variables of rural (= 1, other = 0) and inner city (= 1, other = 0).

Ecclesial factors

Participants were asked to indicate the size of their usual Sunday congregation on a scale ranging from 'less than 10' to 'over 300'. Initial analyses suggested lower RAS scores in people from small congregations but little difference between people in congregations over 25, so a dummy variable 'small congregation' (<25 = 1, larger = 0) was used in the final analysis. Church tradition was assessed using a seven-point bipolar scale labelled 'Anglo-Catholic' at one end and 'Evangelical' at the other. It is a good indicator of differences in belief and practice in the Church of England (Randall, 2005; Village, 2012) and was used to identify Anglo-Catholic (scoring 1-2), Broad Church (3-5) and Evangelical (6-7) respondents. Anglo-Catholic and Evangelical were used as dummy predictor variables with Broad Church as the reference category. Status in the Church was measured by a series of dummy variables: parochial clergy (which included stipendiary, self-supporting, and those with permission to officiate = 1, others = 0), extra-parochial clergy (= 1, others = 0), and lay ministers (= 1, others = 0). These allowed comparison with the reference category of non-ministering lay people (which included a few retired clergy who were no longer ministering).

Theological factors

The survey included two seven-point bipolar scales used in other studies of the Church of England measuring the extent conservative (versus liberal) stance on doctrine and on moral issues (Village & Francis, 2021). These two scales were used instead of the more general liberal-conservative (LIBCON) scale because they distinguish two related but somewhat independent aspects of liberal versus conservative belief (Village, 2018b).

Analysis

Analysis was in three stages:

The first stage examined the levels of agreement for the eight items in the RAS for the whole sample. This was in order to show how support varied for different components of an attitude related to racial awareness.

The second stage examined levels of agreement with a core item ‘The Church is acting too slowly to address racial injustice’ between men and women, young and old, White British and ethnic minorities, by location, education, marital status, congregation size, church tradition, and church status. This quantified the extent to which opinion varied across the sample. Responses were recoded into ‘agree’ (= agree or strongly agree) and ‘not agree’ (= not certain, disagree, or strongly disagree). Differences between groups were tested with contingency tests.

The final stage was to explore the factors that predicted scores on the RAS and thus overall levels of racial awareness. The aim was to identify the contribution of personal, psychological, contextual, ecclesial, and theological factors to a person’s overall level of racial awareness. Bivariate correlations among the predictor variables showed that some were themselves correlated, so hierarchical multiple regression was used to identify the independent effects of predictor variables on the RAS. Predictors were added successively to the model in the following order: Model 1: personal factors (sex, age, ethnicity), Model 2: psychological factors (sensing, thinking, and emotional volatility), Model 3: contextual factors (rural, single, and education), Model 4: ecclesial factors (congregation size, church tradition, and church status), and Model 5: theological factors (doctrinal conservatism and moral conservatism).¹ This order was based on the assumption that personal and psychological factors operate prior to the more ‘downstream’ factors such as general liberal or conservative attitudes.

Results

Overall responses

Responses to the eight items in the RAS suggested opinion was somewhat divided on racism in the Church and how it should be addressed (Table 2). A majority (58%) agreed or strongly agreed that racial justice should be one of the highest priorities and 54% disagreed or strongly disagreed that the Church was giving too much attention to racial issues. Fewer (33%), however, agreed that the Church is acting too slowly on this matter. A minority (22%) felt the church was institutionally racist, and only 14% reported seeing racial inequality in their place of worship. When it comes to affirmative action, there was stronger support for diversifying leadership (61%) than for removing historic memorials to slavers or slave owners (24%) or paying reparations (23%). Levels of uncertainty were not unduly high, suggesting most people had opinions and attitudes in relation to this topic. As might

¹ Following an exploratory analysis, variables which showed no correlation with the RAS in any model were removed from the analysis. They were extraversion, judging, inner city, and partnered.

be expected, uncertainty was lowest for issues closer to home such as racial inequality in my place of worship (17%), and highest for issues related to the wider Church such as the speed of action (33%) or institutional racism (33%).

The overall picture is of majority awareness that racial inequality is an important issue that needs to be addressed, majority rejection of the idea that there may be local or institutionally embedded racism, and enthusiasm for diversifying leadership but not for taking specific actions relating to historic slavery. Opinion was evenly divided on whether the church is acting too slowly on racial injustice, with 33% agreeing, 33% uncertain, and 35% disagreeing, making this a useful bellwether item for assessing variations in racial awareness across this sample.

Variations in opinion across the sample

Responses to the core item ‘The Church is acting too slowly to address racial injustice’ were used to assess how opinion varied according to demographic and ecclesial factors (Table 3). For personal and contextual factors, there were differences between men and women (27% versus 38% agreement respectively), with age (35% agreement for under 50s versus 28% for those 70 or older), between White British and minority ethnicities (32% versus 42% agreement respectively), with location (28% agreement in rural areas versus 37% for those living in inner city areas), and with education (27% agreement for those with no degree versus 36% for those with postgraduate degrees). For ecclesial factors, those in congregations of fewer than 25 recorded lower agreement (27%) than those from larger congregations (34%). Evangelicals recorded lower agreement (25%) than either Broad Church (35%) or Anglo-Catholics (37%). There was a marked difference between leadership and grassroots, with 67% of extra-parochial clergy agreeing the Church is moving too slowly compared to only 29% of non-ministering lay people. The extra-parochial sample was rather small but may point to the anxiety of those working at diocesan level or in theological education that this is a pressing issue that needs faster action. This may not be the perception of those in the pews.

- insert Table 3 about here -

Factors predicting RAS scores

Regression analysis of the RAS was used to examine more rigorously the factors that might shape levels of racial awareness. Bivariate correlation analysis of the RAS (Table 4, first row) confirmed the trends observed in the single core item. There were positive correlations (greater racial awareness) associated with female, education, parochial clergy, and extra-parochial clergy. There were negative correlations (lower racial awareness) associated with age, White British, rural, single, small congregation size, and Evangelical. This analysis included additional, continuous predictors and there were statistically significant negative correlations with doctrinal conservatism, moral conservatism, thinking, and sensing, and a significant positive correlation with emotional volatility.

- insert Table 4 about here -

In a cross-sectional sample such as this, some of these correlations may have arisen because some of the predictor variables were themselves correlated. For example, compared with men in this sample, women were slightly older on average, had lower thinking (higher feeling scores), higher emotional volatility, slightly lower levels of education, were less likely to be either Anglo-Catholic or Evangelical (more likely to be Broad Church), less likely to be ordained, and had and were generally more liberal in terms of doctrine and morality. Age was also correlated with most of the other predictor variables because, for example, older people were more likely to be living in rural areas than elsewhere, were less likely to be single, had lower levels of education on average, and tended to more doctrinally and morally liberal. Age was also associated with church tradition because Evangelicals tended to be younger and Anglo-Catholics older than those who assigned themselves and Broad Church. These correlations might lead to indirect correlations with the RAS. For example, Evangelicals tended to have lower RAS scores, but they were also more conservative than the other traditions and conservatism was strongly associated with lower RAS scores. So, were Evangelicals less racially aware because they tended to be more doctrinally and morally conservative, or because they were Evangelicals?

Hierarchical multiple regression isolated the effects of individual predictors after controlling for others in the model (Table 5). Most of the predictors had consistent effects even after controlling for other factors, though the effects changed in size in some cases. For example, women had higher RAS scores than men, but the beta weight reduced from .27 to .20 when psychological variables were added in Model 2, and from .21 to .16 when doctrinal and moral conservatism were added in Model 5. The correlation between female and RAS was still statistically significant in Model 5 suggesting that although some of the difference between men and women in racial awareness may have been because a different psychological profile or a tendency for women to be more liberal than men, this did not entirely explain the sex difference.

- insert Table 5 about here -

Some psychological factors were correlated with RAS scores, which were lower among those who preferred sensing over intuition, thinking over feeling, and who were more emotionally stable. These relationships persisted even after controlling for other factors that may have partially explained the relationship, such as the difference between men and women in thinking-feeling preference, the tendency for clergy to be less sensing than lay people, and the correlation of all three psychological variables with doctrinal and moral conservatism. Psychological dispositions may have had some more

direct influence on how individuals viewed racial awareness over and above the way they are associated with different groups in the Church of England.

Contextual factors consistently predicted RAS scores after controlling for other variables, with those in rural areas having lower racial awareness scores than those living elsewhere, single people having lower scores than others, and those with higher levels of education having higher RAS scores. Much (but not all) of the education relationship could be explained by higher levels of education among clergy and the tendency for those with higher education to be more liberal on moral issues.

Ecclesial factors suggested less racial awareness among people who worshipped in congregations of less than 25. These tended to be in rural areas, but the effect persisted after controlling for this, so it may be that smaller congregations were less likely to be racially diverse, though this was not tested in the survey. In the final model, controlling for all other factors, all three categories of ministers, but especially clergy, had higher RAS scores than lay people who were not in licensed or authorised ministry.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was the two measures of conservative doctrine and morality that had the strongest negative effects racial awareness scores. Conversely, this suggests that people who held liberal theological views were those most likely to be aware of racial issues in the Church. Adding these two variables into Model 5 had an unexpected effect on the relationship of church tradition to RAS scores. Until that point, Anglo-Catholics showed no difference from Broad Church (the reference group), but Evangelicals had significantly lower racial awareness scores, on average, than these other two traditions (Model 4). Controlling for doctrinal and moral conservatism (Model 5), however, reversed this relationship, such that Evangelicals scored significantly *higher*, and Anglo-Catholics significantly *lower*, on racial awareness than those in the Broad Church. The reason for this becomes apparent in Figure 1, which shows RAS scores against the moral conservatism scale for each of the three church traditions. In all three traditions, higher moral conservatism was strongly associated with lower racial awareness. Evangelicals tend to be more morally conservative, which explains why they scored lower on RAS than other traditions overall. However, at any given level of conservatism, apart from the most liberal, Evangelicals tended to be more racially aware, and Anglo-Catholics less racially aware than those in the Broad Church. This suggests that although general doctrinal or moral stance is a good predictor of levels of racial awareness in the Church of England, it masks the fact that there is something about conservative Evangelicals that makes them generally more racially aware than conservative Anglo-Catholics.

Discussion

To our knowledge, this was the first major survey of racial awareness in the Church of England and came at a time when the Archbishops' Commission on Racial Justice was

preparing its final report after three years of careful deliberation. The very existence of the Commission points to a level of awareness of racial issues in the Church, at least among the hierarchy. This survey of 3,167 clergy and lay people was drawn mostly from the grassroots located in parishes across England. The results therefore offer an important insight into levels of awareness and how awareness is distributed across the Church. This was not a measure of racism: being aware of racial issues and looking for change does not guarantee a person is not racially prejudiced, nor does having low awareness of the issues necessarily stem from being racist. Nonetheless, a first step in tackling racism in any organisation is to ensure that its members accept that there is an issue to be addressed. The findings lead to several important insights:

First, the overall picture is mixed. On the one hand there was recognition among a majority (58%) that tackling racial injustice should be a high priority for the Church, less than a third (27%) felt there was too much attention paid to the issue, and there was strong support for racially diversifying leadership (67%). On the other hand, relatively few people thought the Church was institutionally (22%) or locally (14%) racist. Some might argue this is deliberate blindness, but it may be because people in many parishes (on this evidence, especially small, rural congregations) rarely encounter people who are not White British. They are not aware that racism might exist, and that may be the problem. There was little appetite for affirmative action in relation to the Church's links to slavery, with less than a quarter of the sample wanting the national Church to make financial reparations or local churches to remove memorials to slavers. Opinion was evenly divided on whether the Church is moving quickly enough on racial injustice, with roughly a third saying it was, a third saying it was not, and a third being undecided.

This mixed picture suggests that there is a resistance in the Church of England to accepting the arguments of those who have consistently pointed to the deep-seated racism that they claim exists in the institution. It is perhaps easier to champion the cause of fighting racial injustice in general than it is to look at one's own racial prejudices. It is easier to argue for the general principle of diversifying leadership than to have cherished and familiar memorials in your church building removed, or see national assets spent elsewhere than on the needs of local parishes. For some parishioners and parish clergy in the Church of England, racism may be seen as something that is an issue for others because they worship in a wholly White congregations. That, some would argue, is the crux of the problem. The Church of England has a presence in all parts of England and is therefore almost by definition

a diverse organisation. As a consequence, racial awareness varies across the Church, so it is important to understand the nature of this variation.

The second important insight comes from exploring how responses to the item on the speed of tackling racial injustice varied across the sample. This indicated differences by sex, age, ethnicity, location, education, congregation size, church tradition and status in the Church. The sample of minority ethnic people was relatively small, reflecting the reality on the ground in the Church of England. It is perhaps not surprising that a higher proportion (42%) felt the church was moving too slowly on racial justice when compared with White British respondents (32%). This was still a minority, however, so racial awareness is not simply a matter of ethnicity. The difference by location, with lower awareness in rural than in inner city areas, reflects the historical geography of race in multi-cultural Britain, with immigrant settlement being focused on our larger cities. This is gradually changing (Scott & Brindley, 2012), and this may raise awareness in parishes that have previously not seen racism because they have seen only one race.

The much greater levels of awareness among extra-parochial clergy, as compared with clergy and lay people linked to parishes, points to the possibility that racial awareness may be something that preoccupies the hierarchy more than it does the grassroots. This is not to say the grassroots should not be more aware, but points to the need to work out how those in senior leadership position who see and feel the issue most clearly can translate their energy and insight to those whose opinions and actions ultimately shape the nature of the Church. Doing this requires a mature understanding of the forces that act on individuals to shape their likelihood of responding to initiatives to raise racial awareness and act for racial justice.

This points to the third important insight from this study, which is to see how personal, psychological, contextual, ecclesial, and doctrinal factors interact to shape racial awareness in any given individual. Some of the results from this sample, such as differences between men and women, young and old, with education level, or psychological predispositions may reflect wider trends in society as a whole. Although racial awareness is not the same thing as racism, the two may be linked, and it is likely that factors that predict racism in the wider population may also have predicted lower racial awareness scores in this study. Studies in the UK and elsewhere have shown tendencies for greater racism (or lower racial awareness) among men than women (Clark, 2024; Schuman et al., 1997), among old than young (Billig & Cramer, 1990), and among those with lower levels of education (Billig & Cramer, 1990; Hagendoorn & Nekuee, 2018). There have also been a few

studies indicating that personality traits such as agreeableness and openness to new experiences (as conceptualised in the Big Five model of personality) may be linked to lower levels of prejudice (Gallego & Pardos-Prado, 2014; Sibley & Duckitt, 2008). These two traits are equivalent to the psychological type functions of intuition and feeling respectively (Village & Francis, 2022). In this study, higher RAS scores were associated with lower sensing (higher intuition) and lower thinking (higher feeling) scores, suggesting that personality dispositions may be one of several factors that influence the importance ascribed by individuals to issues of racial injustice in the Church.

The strong negative correlations between RAS scores and the two measures of doctrinal and moral conservatism suggests that many individuals align their views on racial issues in the Church with more general views about liberalism or conservatism. This was also true for attitude toward assisted dying as measured in the same survey (Village, 2025), and it is likely that this is another example of the Church of England being divided between progressive liberals and traditional conservatives. This fault line is often seen as parallel to the difference between the Anglo-Catholic and Evangelical wings of the Church, and there is substantial evidence showing that this is often the case for a range of issues (Village, 2012, 2018a). In this case, however, tradition and conservatism were not necessarily working in the same direction. Evangelicals did, on average, have lower racial awareness scores than the rest of the sample, but this was because they were also more conservative when it came to doctrine and morality generally. If we allow for this, it seemed that Evangelicals tended to be more racially aware than others, especially Anglo-Catholics. More detailed work would be needed to understand why this is so, but it may be related to the same factors that placed nineteenth century Evangelicals at the forefront of fighting the slave trade. Evangelicals tend to be conservative when it comes to matters of doctrine and morality, and this may make them inherently suspicious of liberal changes, especially if they are perceived as being associated with a misplaced focus that is “little more than ‘wokery’” (Archbishops’ Commission for Racial Justice, 2024b, p. 6). However, at any given level of conservatism the data we present here exposes their greater awareness than others of racial issues in the Church and the need to deal with them.

Limitations of this study

Although this was a relatively large sample, it was not randomly drawn from those who might affiliate (however loosely) with the Church of England, so the overall figures might not be a true representation of that population. Finding ways of weighting sampling to represent the Church of

England as a whole would be a difficult but perhaps worthwhile task. The items in the RAS scale were drawn up before the final report of the Archbishops' Commission for Racial Justice (2024a) and it might be useful for future work in this area to review the items in the scale and test for content validity as measures of racial awareness in the Church of England. Contact with minority ethnic people could be key factor affecting racial awareness but it was not measured in the *Church 2024* survey, and this would be an important measure to include in future surveys more dedicated to assessing racial awareness in the Church.

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Notes

Ethical approval was granted by the Research Ethics Committee for the School of Humanities, Religion and Philosophy at York St John University (approval code: ETH2324-0130). All participants had to affirm they were 18 or over and give their informed consent by ticking a box that gave access to the rest of the survey.

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Table 1 *Profile of sample*

		%
Sex	Male	48.0
	Female	52.0
Age	< 50	25.4
	50s-60s	46.8
	70+	26.7
Ethnicity	White British	94.2
	Other White	1.1
	Black	0.4
	Mixed race	1.4
	Asian	0.4
	Other	2.6
Location	Rural	32.6
	Town / suburban	23.9
	Inner-city	10.5
Education	None	0.4
	School	4.3
	Certificate/diploma	12.6
	UG degree	41.4
	PG degree	41.3
Marital status	Single	12.4
	Married/Partnered	76.4
	Other	11.2
Congregation size	<25	18.7
	25-49	29.7
	50-99	33.5
	100+	18.0
Church Tradition	Anglo-Catholic	27.9
	Broad church	44.6
	Evangelical	27.4
Church status	Parochial clergy	34.1
	Stipendiary extra-parochial	2.0
	Lay minister	17.4
	Not ministering	46.5

Note: $N = 3167$.

Table 2

Scale properties of the Racial Awareness Scale (RAS)

Item:	Percentage:					CITC
	Disagree strongly	Disagree	Not certain	Agree	Agree strongly	
Racial justice should be one of the highest priorities for the Church of England	7	18	17	39	19	.72
The Church is acting too slowly to address racial injustice	9	26	33	26	7	.76
There is too much attention paid to racial issues by the Church*	15	39	20	17	10	.68
The Church of England is institutionally racist	19	29	30	17	5	.75
I see racial inequality in my place of worship	27	45	13	12	2	.52
The Church should take positive action to increase the racial diversity of its leadership	6	15	19	45	16	.69
Historic memorials to slavers and slave owners should be removed from churches	18	33	25	16	8	.58
The Church should pay substantial reparations that reflect the ways it benefited financially from slavery	27	25	25	18	5	.75

Note: $N = 3,167$. * This item was reverse coded to create the RAS; CITC = Corrected item-total correlation.

Table 3 *Agreement with the 'The Church is acting too slowly to address racial injustice' item*

		NA		AG	<i>df</i>	χ^2
		<i>N</i>	%	%		
Sex	Male	1520	73	27	1	47.4***
	Female	1647	62	38		
Age	<50	805	65	35	2	11.7**
	50-69	1517	66	34		
	70+	845	72	28		
Ethnicity	White British	2983	68	32	1	7.7**
	Minority ethnicity	184	58	42		
Location	Rural	1034	72	28	3	18.0***
	Town	1041	66	34		
	Suburban	759	64	36		
	Inner city	333	63	37		
Marital status	Single	393	69	31	1	0.6
	Others	2774	67	33		
	Partnered	2419	67	33	1	<0.1
	Others	748	67	33		
Education	No degree	546	73	27	2	15.4***
	UG degree	1313	68	32		
	PG degree	1308	64	36		
Congregation	< 25	590	73	27	1	9.6**
	25 or more	2577	66	34		
Church tradition	Anglo-Catholic	885	63	37	2	31.4***
	Broad church	1413	65	35		
	Evangelical	869	75	25		
Ordination status	Parochial clergy	1081	65	35	3	46.0***
	Extra-parochial clergy	63	33	67		
	Lay minister	550	67	33		
	Non-ministering	1473	71	29		

Note: NA = Not agree; AG = Agree. Difference between groups tested with contingency test using chi-squared statistic (χ^2). *df*= degrees of freedom. ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Running head: RACIAL AWARENESS IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

Table 4 *Correlation matrix*

	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2
1 RAS	-.49***	-.43***	.01	.10***	.10***	-.14***	.02	-.08***	.11***	-.05*	-.10***	.17***	-.30***	-.19***	-.05*	-.05**	.27***
2 Female	-.17***	-.22***	.04*	-.02	-.12***	-.09***	-.08***	.02	-.06***	.02	.06**	.18***	-.31***	.02	.03	.05**	
3 Age	-.11***	-.19***	.14***	-.04*	-.08***	-.14***	.09***	.15***	-.09***	-.18***	.17***	-.13***	-.01	.14***	.09***		
4 White British	.01	-.02	.03	.00	-.02	.02	-.04*	.02	-.07***	-.05*	.09***	.04*	-.03	.06**			
5 Sensing	.13***	.09***	.03	-.07***	-.20***	.07***	-.03	.04*	-.22***	.01	.00	-.05**	.22***				
6 Thinking	.24***	.23***	-.03	-.04*	-.10***	.12***	-.04*	.02	.15***	.03	-.04*	-.22***					
7 Volatility	-.14***	-.12***	.03	.00	-.06***	-.09***	.03	.02	-.02	.07***	.01						
8 Rural	-.05*	-.08***	-.01	-.04*	.01	-.10***	.02	.31***	-.05**	-.09***							
9 Single	.03	.05**	-.01	-.01	-.05**	-.03	.03	-.01	-.01								
10 Education	-.11***	-.03	-.06***	.11***	.17***	-.04*	.06***	-.10***									
11 Congregation <25	-.06***	-.09***	.04*	-.02	-.03	-.12***	.04*										
12 Anglo-Catholic	-.28***	-.20***	-.04*	.01	.03	-.38***											
13 Evangelical	.49***	.47***	-.03	-.03	.05**												
14 Parochial clergy	.01	.05**	-.33***	-.10***													
15 Extra-Parochial clergy	-.04*	-.01	-.07***														
16 Lay ministers	-.03	-.05**															
17 Conservative doctrine	.82***																
18 Conservative morality																	

Note. RAS = Racial Awareness Scale. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 5

Hierarchical multiple regression of the Racial Awareness Scale.

	Bivariate	Model				
		1	2	3	4	5
Female	.27***	.27***	.20***	.20***	.21***	.16***
Age	-.05**	-.06***	-.03	-.02	-.03	-.06***
White British	-.05*	-.05**	-.05**	-.04**	-.04*	-.04**
Sensing	-.19***		-.14***	-.11***	-.09***	-.07***
Thinking	-.30***		-.19***	-.22***	-.19***	-.11***
High Emotionality	.17***		.09***	.09***	.09***	.06***
Rural	-.10***			-.11***	-.11***	-.10***
Single	-.05*			-.06***	-.06***	-.04**
Education	.11***			.12***	.08***	.04*
Congregation <25	-.08***				-.05**	-.06***
Anglo-Catholic	.02				-.02	-.07***
Evangelical	-.14***				-.11***	.10***
Parochial clergy	.10***				.10***	.11***
Extra parochial clergy	.10***				.08***	.08***
Lay minister	.01				.04*	.04*
Doctrinal conservatism	-.43***					-.13***
Moral conservatism	-.49***					-.38***
R^2		.08	.16	.19	.21	.37
Change R^2		.08***	.08***	.03***	.02***	.16***

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. Standardised beta coefficients.

Figure 1

Mean Racial Awareness Scale scores by moral conservatism for Evangelical (closed circles), Broad Church (open squares), and Anglo-Catholic (open circles) church traditions

