Black History Month is for everybody!

Richard Reddie, Director of Justice and Inclusion at Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), explains why more churches should get involved in marking Black History Month.

Celebrating Black History Month

October is Black History Month (BHM) in Britain, and I always find it fascinating that we invariably use the word 'celebrate' in connection with the way we acknowledge this month. For most issues connected to Black people's history, we tend to use more sober terms such as 'commemorate', 'remembrance' or 'memorial', or neutral ones like 'mark'. However, I believe that celebrate is the apt expression in this instance because it is all about affirming, rejoicing and elevating a history that has experienced suffering and severing, but, more importantly, survival and success.

Over the last decade and a half, we have seen a movement away from USA or Caribbean history to more of a focus on Black British history, exploring the ongoing and indelible impact that Black Britons have had on this country. A key facet of this story has involved a narrative that shows that Black peoples' relationship with Britain did not begin with the arrival of the SS Empire Windrush ship from Jamaica in 1948, but stretches back millennia.

However, from a Christian perspective, Windrush is important because it arguably signals the birth of Black Christian faith in this country. History reveals that the majority of those Christian women and men who travelled to this country from the Caribbean after the Second World War brought with them a faith that has subsequently revitalised the spiritual climate of this country. These days, most sizeable towns and cities have clusters of Black Majority Churches, many of them Pentecostal, which are thankfully bucking the trend of declining congregations in Britain. Equally, many of the historic Christian denominations such as the Methodist, Church of England, Catholic Churches et al, now have substantial Black or Global Majority Heritage congregations whose presence has enriched them in so many ways. For me, what has taken place over these decades is a movement of God, which means it should be celebrated by all who call themselves Christians. God is doing a 'new thing' in the Church, and Black Christians are at the forefront of this divine movement!

The Black Christian contribution

Having said all of that, it is important to note that there was a time when the people who championed Black History Month rarely mentioned the Christian dimension or contribution to Black British history. What is more lamentable is that Black Christians themselves either lacked the confidence or knowledge to address this glaring oversight. I would argue that an aspect of this Black Christian caution was borne out of a sense of 'why do we need to have "Black history"'? I find the latter a valid point, but my answer is always that BHM gives us all an opportunity to hear the voices of those who have long been silenced or ignored. Over the many years, BHM has brought forms of history in from the margins to the point where those stories are now considered mainstream history. While it is still 'Black history', it now belongs to all the community.

> "God is doing a 'new thing' in the Church, and Black Christians are at the forefront of this divine movement!"

> "BHM is for everyone, irrespective of what you look like and where you live. Why not use this month to start your Black history journey, particularly focusing on the Christian dimension to this history?"

Eve Milner/Flickr.com

Learning about Black Christian heroes

What is more, BHM enables Christians to reclaim those figures whose faith is often sidelined alongside their other accomplishments. A great case in point is the legendary Dr Harold Moody, a London-based GP, and leader of the 'League of Coloured People'. In his day, Dr Moody was regarded as the British answer to Revd Dr Martin Luther King Jr. However, he was also a committed Christian whose faith inspired and informed all the humanitarian work he carried out in this country. Yet, the English Heritage Blue Plaque that is affixed to the house where he once lived never mentions his faith or church work among his other accomplishments.

So, BHM is for everyone, irrespective of what you look like and where you live. Why not use this month to start your Black history journey, particularly focusing on the Christian dimension to this history? For instance, on every Sunday in October you could ask the congregation a question, and see how much information they can find on that topic during the week. They could subsequently feed back on the topic the following Sunday.

I would like to start the ball rolling by focusing on the aforementioned Dr Harold Moody. My questions are: Where was his medical practice in London, and to which Christian denomination did he belong?

For more resources for all ages, see WEB.

Listen to an interview with Richard on the Roots for Churches podcast: **rootsforchurches.podbean.com**