



UTU NEWS

A Conversation with Dr Anthony Reddie



Dr. Anthony Reddie is the Director of the Oxford Centre for Religion and Culture in Regent's Park College, in the University of Oxford and author of *Is God Colour Blind?* In the following excerpt from a podcast with Rev. Dr Rob Hoch (28 March 2023), Anthony describes how Black liberation theology combined with educational exercises can support White people to achieve what he calls "complex subjectivity" as human beings created in the image of God.

The following has been edited for length and clarity.

Rob: *Why is this thing, being White, a difficult conversation to have with White people?*

Anthony: I think one of the key difficulties is that for the most part, people who are racialised as White don't talk about whiteness, don't think about it. It's not something that is ever a part of their consciousness. But it should be — that's something that we need to wrestle with, to rethink, to deconstruct.

I'm always at pains to say there's a difference between thinking about White people and whiteness. Whiteness gives rise to a system of practices, of structures, and ways of being that impact upon all of us, but clearly also gives a subtext to what it is to be a White person. The objection — Why are you making me think about something that I've never had to think about? — is answered by the fact that if you don't have to think about whiteness then it is actually one of the entitlements that you have as a White person.

So, the fact that you go about your life and say, I'm just a human being, which actually is what all of us want to be. All of us want to be loved, affirmed and supported. Yet here's the thing: Black people must think about what it is to be Black as a form of resistance to whiteness. But White people can't see this thing about whiteness when they don't think about whiteness — it's not a part of their consciousness.

continued on p. 3



Announcing the 23-24 Certificate in Theology & Discipleship for Mission

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How long are sessions? We meet by Zoom about twice a month between October and July. Sessions last for 3-hours and include a mid-session break.

What's the style? Classes are highly relational, with brief presentations from guests/course leader, but dialogue based.

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What is the work load? Fortnightly assignments (about 1 or 2 pages of A4, double spaced).

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(cont'd from p. 1)

Rob: *There's a quote that I like: We don't know who discovered water, but we can be pretty sure it wasn't a fish. Could you say a little bit more about that?*

Anthony: Yeah, sure. So, one of the key things I honestly believe as a Christian theologian is that the construct of race does exist. . . . And what black theology tries to do is to say how complex it is to be Black. Whatever the stereotypes, there is a complexity to what it is to be a Black human being. Yet for the most part being White remains at the level of myth, a fairy tale. So, for instance, think of the presumption that a White person has to be better than everybody else of colour.

[Editor's Note: A culture of whiteness includes myths of superiority, including the idea that the White race created civilization, invented representative democracy, serves the moral leader of the world, saves the vulnerable, especially people of colour, all the while being ethnically invisible, not seen as White.]

Think of all the emotional, psychological energy it takes to believe that you have to be superior to someone else, not just equal, not to cohabit, not to share, but to believe oneself to be superior. That's huge. But also think at a micro level. Think of all the distortions that leads to the point that you cannot be honest with yourself because you can't stare whiteness in the face.

"Black theology has been about trying to get White people to face whiteness. And to face the dangers of White supremacy and to deconstruct it — not to stop White people from being White."

Rob: *Are you saying that in effect Black liberation theology is a theology of healing?*

Anthony: Yeah, absolutely. James Baldwin is one of my heroes and he has this great quote: "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced." Black theology has been about trying to get White people to face whiteness. And to face the dangers of white supremacy and deconstruct it — not to stop White people from being White, because obviously a White person can be no less White than I could be any less Black. But to say, how do we then hold on to the best of and discard the worst of, its false narratives of superiority and so on?

10am—1pm
Saturday
8th July
2023

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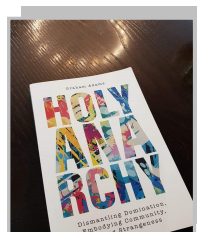


An opportunity to explore:

- Why may the Kingdom of God be like 'holy anarchy'?
- How could this help us to see the world differently—and seek to change it?
- What does this mean for the church, our worship and other things?

*The event will also be livestreamed—
let us know if you would like the link*

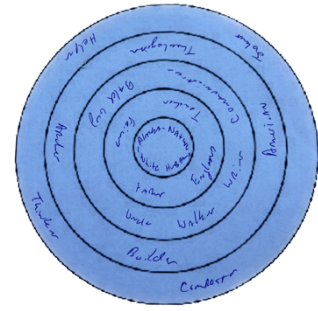
Graham is a Congregational minister and
Tutor in Mission at Northern College, part of
Luther King Centre for Theology and Ministry.



"Holy Anarchy is a refreshingly honest and insightful vision for a journey that is compelling, joyous and inclusive, one in which all persons are supported and loved and no one is considered inconsequential or irrelevant to the community of fellow travellers."

- Prof. Anthony Reddie

Rob: This is really zeroing in on this, the tension between what you call fixed identities and achieving the complex subjectivity of human experience. How can we get to a complex sense of who we are?



Anthony: We are more than any simple descriptor that anyone could use to say who we are. I think of how complex God is! We're created in the image of a complex God so we are also complex. All that is to say that we are more than any stereotype.

I have an exercise where I get people to think of themselves as starting in the middle of a series of concentric circles. What might I write in my circles? I am a male. I am Black. I'm a socialist, I'm a Methodist. All of those things that we are, these float around us, in orbit, in those circles. Every time you meet another human being, they have as many circles and elements of their identities as you do. To be human is to be a complex constellation of subjects.

I think of how complex God is! We're created in the image of a complex God so we are also complex . . . Every time you meet another human being, they have as many circles and elements of their identities as you do. To be human is to be a complex constellation of subjects.

This is how I interpret Scripture: The command to love your neighbour as yourself is the call to give to your neighbour all the attributes of what it is to be complex that you want to believe about yourself.

Congratulations to the Rev'd Dr.
Paul Fitzpatrick in the
completion of his PhD degree. The
title of his thesis is, 'QUIET
DEFIANCE', 'RIGHTFUL
PRESENCE' AND 'SHAKEN
WELCOME':
TOWARDS A CONTEXTUAL
THEOLOGY OF THE SOLIDARITY
OF OTHERS IN AN ASYLUM
DISPERSAL AREA EMERGING
FROM
DONCASTER CONVERSATION
CLUB IN BALBY FOR REFUGEES
AND ASYLUM SEEKERS
Well done Paul!

Rob: Why don't we just read a book? why is the circle exercise important?

Anthony: If you read a book, and you say, "That's great. I agree with that book!" Good so far as it goes. But I think there's a challenge when the idea being challenged becomes internalised — it may be something that you object to and even reject, but if it has been internalised, it has become part of who you are.

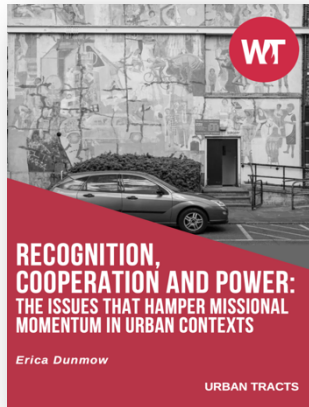
It's not just something that you could recognise with your brains; it's something that has an impact upon the whole of your being. Something about that circle exercise gives us a way of digging into ourselves, but also an insight into the interior of other people's lives. I have seen it to be hugely powerful in terms of how we that build empathy, because I think that's the key of what I'm trying to do with the work is not to make us adversaries, but to make us into disciple makers, people who are committed to each other through our shared connection with God.

For the complete podcast, go to
<https://www.buzzsprout.com/2038362/episodes/12547538>

Recognition, Cooperation and Power: The Issues that Hamper Missional Momentum in Urban Contexts (2023)

Erica Dunmow

Erica Dunmow, Chair of the UTU Board, reflects on her experience and learning as a national urban mission networker, in particular on overcoming the barriers to constructive mission relationships between mainstream denominations and Black-led and Black majority churches.



"Unconscious bias is operating at all levels which means that there is a lack of recognition for BAME people . . . and people from working class backgrounds . . . Until we get that right, the body of Christ that is gathered around the urban mission table is damaged and incomplete." — Erica Dunmow

To download the full report, go to
<https://williamtemplefoundation.org.uk/temple-tracts/>

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For further information, please contact Jill Wagg, Office Administrator at office@utusheffield.org.uk or by calling 0114 2709907. You can also visit our website at utusheffield.org.uk.



Dear Editor,

I am writing in response to Rev. Dr Ian Duffield's book review of **How to be an Antiracist** by Ibram X. Kendi, in the Autumn 2023 edition of the UTU newsletter. I've read a few books on anti-racism, and I found Kendi's work to be straightforward, informative and inspiring.

Each chapter starts with a definition of terms used. Duffield found these 'overly neat'; I found them refreshingly accessible. As an example, Kendi defines being racist as 'supporting a racist policy through their actions or inaction or expressing a racist idea'. Being antiracist is simply 'supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea.' That's helpfully clear to me. One of Kendi's arguments is the idea that being 'not racist' is not (as the youth would put it) "a thing". This doesn't feel too hard to grasp if we have already had this realisation for example about feminism and the power of patriarchy. Duffield suggested that while it's important that some people explore anti-racism, 'it's another thing to lay this burden on everyone as if there are no other battles to fight after the everyday business of surviving and living'; it also said that Kendi was requiring everyone to become an anti-racism activist. That's the thing about racism though: like patriarchy, or militarism, they are the air we breathe. If we don't understand them, or even see them, then we are perpetuating them. There's a neat placard I've seen which read 'If you're tired of hearing about racism imagine how tired people are of experiencing it'.

The review referred to Kendi's theory of antiracism as 'polarising'. I'm afraid that yes, it is: because we live in a racist society, to speak of the opposite — attempting to build a world that is liberated for all — is controversial.

The review contained 'ad hominem' attacks — that is, attacks on the person rather than a critique of their work. Most prominently, the reviewer calls the author by another name — which I won't repeat here, because it's not his name — saying that he refers to himself as Ibram X. Kendi 'affectatiously' — which I think is just rude! In the book, Ibram describes the family name Kendi as the name he and his wife chose for themselves when they married. Ibram is the author's birth name, and X (Xolani) is movingly explained in the book as chosen since it's the Xhosa and Zulu word for peace. But I don't need to be explaining this: when someone tells you their name, you use it. It's disrespectful not to. I hope no one would refuse to use my married name when I give it.

The review referred to Kendi's theory of antiracism as 'polarising'. I'm afraid that yes, it is: because we live in a racist society, to speak of the opposite — attempting to build a world that is liberated for all — is controversial. Here's the thing: I didn't love everything about this book, either. I found Kendi's definition of an activist as one who has 'a record of power or policy change' a bit disheartening, as someone who's spent about two decades trying to push back against militarism in this country with what can often feel like little concrete success! But that doesn't mean I get to disrespect the author, or disregard anti-racism as a whole because of it. And I think this book has more to offer us than the review found. Go ahead, read it for yourself, and see what you think!

— Hannah Brock Womack (Sheffield)

Book Review

The Dynamics of Political Order

Francis Fukuyama is (in)famous for supposedly declaring ‘the end of history’ in 1992 after the Soviet Union and its Empire collapsed. This is unfair, because Fukuyama’s use of the word ‘end’ was ambiguous and could be interpreted as the ‘goal’ or ‘aim’ of history. Recent events alone have demonstrated that history as such hasn’t ended with the invasion of Ukraine and the unmistakable rise of Russian imperialism. Reckoning that a sophisticated and knowledgeable political philosopher as Fukuyama was predicting the end of history not only misjudges him, but also deflects from the enormous contribution of this Japanese-American political scientist to the historical and philosophical study of political order, not least his magisterial, magnum opus that will rank alongside all the other major political philosophers that preceded him such as Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. Fukuyama’s two volumes, *The Origins of Political Order* (2012) and *Political Order and Political Decay* (2014/15) trace how humans have organised themselves from pre-human times to the present, within different contexts, and analyses what works and what doesn’t.



Reckoning that a sophisticated and knowledgeable political philosopher as Fukuyama was predicting the end of history not only misjudges him, but also deflects from the enormous contribution of this Japanese-American political scientist to the historical and philosophical study of political order. . .

In these volumes, he demonstrates that political order requires: the state, the rule of law, and accountable government. However, he knows that these have not been, and are not, easily achieved. Indeed, he indicates how a “complex concatenation of circumstances” [I: 326] is involved, noting that “social outcomes are inherently multi-causal” (I: 452). In doing this, he profiles and contrasts different nations and their fortunes, e.g. Ghana with its strong state and India with its strong society [I: 188]; the different political choices made by Costa Rica and Argentina [II: Ch. 18]; and the differing ways oil rich developing countries, such as Indonesia and Nigeria, have fared (II: Ch. 15). More importantly, perhaps, he notes: (a) certain regularities, e.g. powerful states without checks become dictatorships; whereas weak states checked by multifarious forces become unstable [II: 35]; (b) important principles, e.g. “The principle of effective government is meritocracy, the principle of democracy is popular participation” [II: 202]; and (c) social defaults, such as “reliance on friends and family, even in democracies (II: 209). Francis Fukuyama deserves to be recognised for his giant contribution to the understanding of politics and its dynamics in different times and places.

— Ian K Duffield & Robin Pagan

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