

SST Theology and Race Initiative: 2019-20 update

This short report covers actions following up on the SST Theology and Race Report and the developments reported to the AGM over the last couple of years. The aim, as in previous years, is address the marginalisation of theologians identifying as BAME in UK academic theology, within the scope of the life of the Society, following the recommendations in the Society's [Theology and Race Report](#). The report and previous updates are available on the website under 'Initiatives' > [Theology and Race](#).

This year's activity has focused mainly around a combination of:

1. Continuing conference initiatives from last year
2. Introducing the BAME bursary
3. Introducing the role of BAME reps

Much of this action was directed, of course, toward the 2020 conference, now postponed to April 2021, and our hope and intention is to carry these activities forward to that date.

Conference initiatives include:

- The plenary panel on Anthony Reddie's *Theologising Brexit*, for which we sold out a limited paperback edition.
- The Black theology stream
- The theology and popular culture stream
- The introduction of more co-chairs for seminar streams to diversify chairing
- Aiming for diversity in chairs and respondents for plenary papers
- Encouraging plenary speakers to model engagement with the diversity of scholarship on their topic
- Encouraging publishers to display a diverse range of authors and topics
- A workshop on diversifying the curriculum
- A conference day rate.

The BAME bursary scheme

This was a major focus of activity, aimed at facilitating wider participation in the SST's annual conference from scholars and students identifying as BAME. We developed a joint scheme with BIAPT, and secured funding from the Susanna Wesley Foundation whereby we would be able to offer initially 5 bursaries of £200 for the 2020 conference. Nine organisations signed up as named partners, offering top-ups of £100 to their members who were awarded bursaries. These were:

- The Common Awards partnership (University of Durham)

- The Diocese of Birmingham (Church of England)
- The Diocese of Coventry (Church of England)
- The Diocese of Lichfield (Church of England)
- Sarum College, Salisbury
- The Methodist Church
- The Queen's Foundation, Birmingham
- The University of Chester (Department of Theology and Religion)
- The University of Exeter (Department of Theology and Religion)

We were very encouraged to see that applications for the bursary greatly exceeded the five funded numbers, with over 30 applications (we were able to offer a conference bursary to the extra applicants this year).

The current situation means, of course, that Churches, Dioceses, Colleges and Universities are all having to reassess their finances. Nevertheless, SWF hopes to be able to continue funding the scheme and most of the named partners have indicated they either will or hope to continue their commitments for the 2021 conference, funds allowing. We have confirmed we will offer to carry over BAME bursaries awarded to 2021, and we hope to raise funds to allow us to make more of these bursaries available to new applicants for next year.

Do please get in touch if either you can help with that funding challenge, or your organisation might be interested in joining the scheme as a named partner. You can find out more about the scheme and the role of named partners on the website: <https://www.theologysociety.org.uk/initiatives/theology-and-race/bame-bursary/>

BAME Reps

BAME Reps are an item on the agenda for approval in the constitution and election to the Executive Committee. The aim here is to formalise the role of colleagues identifying as BAME on the Executive Committee. It develops and strengthens the Society's action on the Theology and Race report's second recommendation, to 'explore ways to introduce BAME colleagues into its membership' as a form of structural change.

Other actions:

The Executive Committee met for the second time with its Advisory Board in July 2019 to discuss progress and future plans. This was a very useful conversation, and we are very grateful for their time and expertise.

Members of the Executive Committee continued to attend and reflect on learning from conferences and lectures focused on theology in, from and for BAME Christians, and in particular:

- 'The State of the Diaspora Mission in the UK', 6 Sept 2019
- The Sam Sharpe Lecture, Birmingham, 24 October 2019

Looking forward

- We aim to take forward initiatives planned for this year's conference into next year, and further plenary panels in future.
- We hope to continue to grow the BAME bursary scheme in terms of funding and named partners.
- We hope to work with colleagues and other organisations to put on events engaging issues live in BAME Christian networks and communities.
- We also hope to be involved in participating in and promoting events pursuing reflexive engagement with issues of whiteness in UK academic and ecclesial theology.
- We hope to develop engagement with BAME colleagues and others involved in related work in other organisations to learn and to explore possibilities for cooperation.

Finally, I want to record my thanks to everyone who has been involved with and supportive of this initiative in these first few years, to the officers and members of the Executive Committee (not least the members of its Subgroup on Theology and Race), the Society and beyond, to our Advisory Board members, and especially to Dulcie McKenzie and Carlton Turner.

Ben Fulford, Assistant Secretary (Theology and Race) 27.4.20