**Appeal to the heart for a possible day of gratitude**

**“He that urges gratitude pleads the cause both of God and men, for without it we can never be sociable nor religious” Seneca**

**“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” Jam 3:17-18**

We are currently witnessing a flourishing of networking among the Christian leaders from diverse backgrounds, denominations, and ethnicities throughout Britain. Broadly speaking, the intention of these networks is primarily to build relationship so as to collaborate for mission. Maybe, the desire for building the networks intensified due to the recognition of the fragmented community, divided by culture, ethnicity, and religion and the problem that it has caused. The recent Brexit phenomenon didn’t help the already troublesome community relations. In this kind of context, forming any kind of common objective for good is tricky, and this makes the work of mission difficult. Therefore, displaying true *unity in diversity* and demonstrating the alternative way of living together as a diverse people group is the responsibility of the church of Jesus Christ. Since, only a truly united church can become an instrument of healing for a fragmented society.

The challenge, however, is the journey to building *true unity in diversity* in these networks – a true unity between leaders from different denominations, ethnicities, and cultures. Such a unity requires great humility, openness, forgiveness, gratitude, sacrifice, compromise and a willingness to make our theological identity a determining factor. Our memories or what comes to mind when we see a person of other ethnicity or colour carries with it some level of historical baggage, which then influences the way we relate to each other. To build true unity, therefore, demands the messy work of bringing those concealed issues on to the surface through dialogue and reflection. The common chosen path in the networks I witnessed is to ignore the issues, consequently making our unity superficial, by focusing on temporary events or activities. It will not take much for the observing community to discern the shallowness of our unity, making all our efforts to demonstrate the possibility of unity in diversity in Christ ineffective.

As a diaspora church leader, I ask myself, what would be the contribution of the diaspora Christians to the journey of building true unity between Christian leaders so as to be an instrument of God’s healing to the fragmented society of Britain. What is the right course of action or right frame of mind we should take to help us reach the people of the host nation? It is my conviction that a voice of gratitude from the diaspora community about Britain to God and to the British people could be a starting point in our contribution to the journey of building true unity in diversity. I have four fundamental reasons why I choose a voice of gratitude as diaspora Christian’s contribution/approach.

Firstly, we diaspora Christians should express our gratitude for Britain’s contribution of spreading the gospel to the many continents of the world, to Africa, Latin America and Asia in particular. We know the sacrifices and labour of British missionaries in those continents. There is no doubt that during that time manipulation and exploitation occurred in the name of Christianity by many nations including Britain. However, it shouldn’t completely overshadow the works and sacrifices of those who genuinely lived and died in trying to reach out to the people of the mentioned continents with the love of Christ. In that respect we are the fruit of their labour and as such should be grateful to God and to the country which gave them up for us.

Secondly, I believe that many will agree with me that as an immigrant who received and benefitted from the generosity and compassion of Britain, expressing gratitude is an appropriate response before God as well as before men. On several occasions I heard diaspora people discuss the qualities we witness and the benefits we received from Britain. The discussion goes to detail when we have visitors among us from one of the European countries. They help us to observe the unique characteristics of Britain, the equal opportunities they witness, the culture of courtesy, the overarching humane consciousness expressed in different interactions, the pragmatic approach to life and the culture of respect for the law etc. Therefore, being vocal in our appreciation of the good we see and experience is not only an appropriate response as the beneficiaries but also help us bring positive perspective to the journey of building true unity and healing to the society.

When the word “migration” is mentioned in the media, it is portrayed as some sort of invasion that comes to destroy the British economy and to make the life of the British people a misery. However, objective reflection on the presence and contribution of migrants in the UK might draw a more positive picture. In any case, there has never been a media platform created to inform the British people what their generosity and compassion has done in the life of tens of thousands of people they welcomed to their country. There is no platform facilitated for the migrants to express their gratitude and hence change the negative narrative about migration as well as Britain.

Most people would agree that the negative experiences and encounters we had usually dominate our memories more than the positive ones. Out of the many positive comments we received in our interaction with people, it is the negative comments that stay on our minds and affect our emotions. This is not only true in our individual life but as people group, as communities and even as a nation. It is not the absence of the positive, the constructive, and the good actions which is the problem, but it is the fact that as fallen humanity it is easier for us to remember and focus on the negative to the extent of totally ignoring the positive. Remembering and focusing on the negative without due recognition of the positive however discourages positive progress and transformation and creates animosity and resentment which leads to violence.

One may argue or even get offended by the idea of expressing gratitude to the British people and to God about Britain, since his or her experience of the negative is genuinely stronger by far than the positive. Many may also take it to be letting down of the previous generation who suffered atrocities and exploitations during the colonial era by the British government. Some may even go as far as consider it to be an endorsement of the continuous discrimination and racism which is still present in our society and unashamedly surfaced after the referendum leading them to conclude that, instead of gratitude what we need is justice and a struggle for fairness and equality. Fair enough, pursuing justice and struggling for fairness and equality should be the call of a progressive society. What needs to be remembered is that when we express our gratitude to God about Britain and to the British people, we are also remembering and expressing our gratitude to the first generation of migrants who struggled and paid the price to make these changes possible. My next point might also reinforce why I chose the path of gratitude.

Undoubtedly, expressing gratitude will create a legitimate platform where we can express our criticism of the negatives, the prejudices and the injustice. Gratitude is not similar to pollyannaism, where we give a blind eye to the wrongs around us. Rather it is an act which is theologically informed and a choice to start by appreciating the good before we jump on criticising the bad. Therefore, enhances the call for Justice even more, not contradict it. When the diaspora Christians express gratitude or start the dialogue with true appreciation of the good in Britain in the networks they participate, it could accelerate the journey to build ‘true unity’ by encouraging more openness. Without doubt expressing gratitude demands humility but it by no means implies inferiority. In fact, gratitude exposes pride if there is any in the heart of the recipient inviting a positive response.

Finally, expressing gratitude from the diaspora people will help us remember the past together as the body of Christ. How we remember the past injustice has paramount importance in the journey of building true unity. “For we remember wrong rightly when memory serves reconciliation.” The question we need to wrestle with therefore is that ‘how should we remember the past injustice as a people committed to loving the wrongdoer and overcoming evil with good? If the past is not remembered with the intention to redeem the future it will incubate resentment. The resentment not only passes to the upcoming generation making our young people vulnerable to be manipulated by those who have a radical agenda, but also makes present endeavour to build true unity impossible task. We shouldn’t allow the past to rob us of the present and the future. Rather, we should let the future draw us out of the past and the present into new possibilities and embark on new path. This is a possibility because as Miroslav Volf rightly states “we are a great deal more than our memories, and how memories shape our identity depends not only on the memories themselves but also on what we and others do with these memories.”

Day of gratitude to be held at St Paul’s - suggested components:

* Grass root level involvement - lay members of the diaspora church community leading the way in expressing gratitude.
* Multi-ethnic participation - hundreds of ethnicities to be represented.
* Individual stories - selected stories and personal testimonies of the difference coming to Britain has made in people's lives.
* Clip - professionally created video clips - a compilation of short, ‘Thank you GB’ themed interviews with people from different nations and a short history of "Britain's missionary contribution" in different continents and countries.
* Giant/Life-size "Thank You" card - to be made available for individuals to sign expressing their gratitude and eventually presented to Britain represented by a government official or royal family member.
* Publicity - organise maximum media coverage in the run up, during and after the event.
* Social media - set up a Facebook page and/or twitter account with ‘#thankyouGB’ for the wider public to engage in expressions of gratitude to Britain.
* Annual day of gratitude - a diaspora-initiated campaign for the establishment of an annual day of gratitude to express gratitude to Britain and encourage a culture of gratitude to God and to each other.
* Having the Archbishop of Canterbury, Archbishop of York and Bishop of London present a big bonus.