



Professor Anthony Reddie

reflection questions & episode transcript

In a typical year, Corrymeela's meeting rooms — and dining and welcome areas — are filled with people discussing matters of politics, history and religion that have separated them. During this time of Covid, we are providing you with a transcript of each podcast episode, along with some discussion questions, to aid your consideration of the themes which emerge. You may wish to discuss these questions with friends, family, a group you establish on zoom, or use them for your own writing and consideration.

In group discussions at Corrymeela, we seek to locate political and religious points of view within the story of the person speaking. If you're gathering as a group, consider how to create a sense of connectedness within the group. It might help to choose one of the [Very Short Story Questions](#). As with any group process, if you are talking about this episode with others, make sure to check that people feel safe enough, that the time is right for them, and make it easy for anyone who wishes to keep their considerations to themselves, or for anyone who doesn't wish to join such a conversation.

1. Anthony Reddie speaks about politics through the lenses of his identity, his family, the city he grew up in, and the time he grew up in. How have your identity, family, location and age influenced your outlook on politics? What would you say are the major influences in your political outlook?
2. Anthony Reddie shares how the congregation he grew up in was more comfortable acknowledging the class political struggle than racism. What are the current stories about racism in your community that you feel are important to tell? What do you think explains some congregations' resistance to name racism?
3. For Anthony Reddie, Brexit gave voice and legitimacy to wider issues about the nature of Britishness and what it means to belong. What, in your view, are some of those issues? How do you see them being addressed in political, religious and cultural life?
4. Addressing whiteness, Anthony Reddie says: 'if that then imbues you with certain advantages, then how do you become an advocate?' What are some ways you'd go about responding to his question?

Copies of Prof Anthony Reddie's book *Theologising Brexit* are available in paperback from March 31, 2021. [More information from the publisher, Routledge, here.](#) A link to Anthony's [academic pages at Oxford](#) is [here](#).

The Corrymeela Podcast. Interview with Prof. Anthony Reddie. Transcript.

Hello and welcome to The Corrymeela Podcast. My name is Pádraig Ó Tuama.

In the first year of Brexit, and a century after the partition of Ireland, I'll be in conversation with insightful guests exploring contemporary Britishness and Irishness through the lenses of history, politics, art and theology.

In this week's episode, I'll be talking with Professor Anthony Reddie, an author, theologian and academic who has written extensively on national identity, race and Brexit. *'We were one of only two black families in the whole church.... And because it was also I think a church that was steeped in a certain type of colonialism, the elephant in the room really was race'... 'someone from the Brexit party literally got up and said: "let's just get Brexit done- we've beat the Germans twice before". I mean, literally, he said that, and people clapped. And I thought: really? I mean, that's what passes now for political science here'.*

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

My name is Pádraig Ó Tuama, and you're listening to The Corrymeela Podcast. With me today is theologian and Director of the Oxford Centre for Religion and Culture, Dr. Anthony Reddie. Anthony, thanks very much for joining us.

Professor Anthony Reddie:

It's a pleasure to be with you this morning.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Anthony, where are you talking to us from today?

Professor Anthony Reddie:

I'm speaking to you from my flat in Birmingham, in South Birmingham. In Moseley.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Oh, lovely! We haven't met in person, Anthony, but a few years ago I was teaching a course in a college in England, and your book *Theologising Brexit* was about to come out, and no joke, they had cardboard cutouts of you on every floor in this college I was teaching at- and I was teaching on the third floor. So I got to the stage where I'd say hello to the cutout of you every time I'd come through a different floor, so it's nice to be able to talk to you and have you talk back- that's a great joy. I'd gotten used to just talking to myself. We'll talk about your book *Theologising Brexit* in a while. But first, I was curious to start off with a little bit of your background. You were born and brought up in Bradford in West Yorkshire, of Jamaican parents who were part of the Windrush generation. Is that right? Did I get my research right?

Professor Anthony Reddie:

It was yeah, absolutely. Yeah.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

And your parents were political- supporting Labour and the trade union movement. And is it right that you were- you're named Anthony after the Labour politician Tony Benn?

Professor Anthony Reddie:

I am indeed, yes. That's one of my proudest facts of my upbringing. I mean, actually, I didn't know that until about five/six years ago. I mean, my father is 87 now- he and my mother, they both retired to Jamaica back in 1991. And as sort of tends to be the case I think the older one's parents get, particularly my father - he was very taciturn when he was young - is positively sort of loquacious now and just kind of 'spill the beans' like to any question you ask him. And so I said - so one day we're on the verandah where he lives in Jamaica - and we were talking and I just mentioned in passing that I know that my middle name, George, comes from my great great grandfather. He was the first former enslaved African person in Jamaica to learn to read and to buy land.

And when he bought land, he then sort of built a church on it; so built a Baptist church on it that still stands to this day, it's called Bellcastle Baptist Church. And when I was growing up, I knew a lot about my great great grandfather called George Marriott and how brilliant he was, and how much he was someone who fought against colonialism and fought for the rights of black people at a time when that was not the norm. I knew very little about why I was called Anthony and then just suddenly out of the blue like my dad says: "Oh, well. I named you after my hero, Tony Benn". I thought, oh, wow. Okay, I'll take that!

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

That's brilliant! How would you say that the place of Bradford in West Yorkshire and the politics of your parents informed you as a youth? Were you aware of location, and the politics of that- was that like bread and butter in your household?

Professor Anthony Reddie:

It was, yeah. In a very implicit way. So what I think was interesting was that my parents were not overtly political, although clearly my dad was a trade unionist. He was very much... he was a trade union representative: The General and Municipal Workers' Union. So I was very clear that we were kind of on the Left. And Bradford - certainly the place I grew up in - was very ... It was the birthplace of the Independent Labour Party. And so it was a place where I think nonconformist, sort of dissenting Christianity - so mainly kind of Methodist, Baptist, (independent Methodist/Baptist) congregationalists - and Labour party politics very much went together. And those two things like [were] seen really almost as a synergy. So I still remember going to Birmingham University and meeting Anglicans who were Tories. And not understanding how they could even call themselves Christians because in the world I came from that was an oxymoron- you know. I mean, like to be a Tory and a Christian was just simply to... to put sort of ying and yang together, and that just didn't work. And so I think looking back now I can see I was formed in a very particular social and cultural milieu.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Yeah. I'll be interested later on to talk a little bit about that, and what it was that you needed to learn about in terms of coming in contact with other folks from some of the more established traditions. You mentioned that - you know - your folks retired back to Jamaica and you visited Jamaica yourself at the age of 17. What was that experience of going to the homeland that you hadn't... that hadn't been your home, but had nonetheless been your identity? What was that like for you? And what's that been like as your family have moved back to Jamaica, having moved to England?

Professor Anthony Reddie:

Yeah, so that first trip was really quite traumatic. And for a long time I struggled to process it, because at one level, I've never really felt English. I think for me - and again, I think this is part of... is very much part of the book *Theologising*

Brexit - but English to me is still synonymous with whiteness. And clearly I'm not white. And therefore, I've never felt English in any quintessential way. So when I was growing up with my parents talking about 'back home', I assumed that that home was also my home as well, in a very sort of familial sense through my parents.

Anyway, so I go to Jamaica, and I'm 17. And at that point, I realise just how English I am, in terms of my mannerisms. And so there's something quite jarring about being in the village where my mum was from (so I was staying with my grandma). And everybody knew I was English, even though I'm in a village full of black people, and there's no white people around at all and people said: 'Englishman, Englishman' and I'm feeling quite annoyed at being called English (even though I am English). And, I think (because it was kind of rural Jamaica, and I'm a metropolitan city boy) this was just a clash of values that I just struggled [with] so those six weeks went very slowly. And the truth is, at the time, I really couldn't wait to get back to England. Which was confusing, because when I get back to England, and now facing all the sense of racism and being an outsider that I'd felt for years that had made me want to feel like Jamaica was home. And so for a while there was this sense of not quite sure where you belong. Now course I - in terms of postcolonial stuff - I understand it in terms of liminality. But at the time, I didn't know such language and concepts.

I think subsequently, for my parents going back, I think they faced all the same things. And I think within the first two years they could easily have come back to Britain and given up. And that has certainly been the case I think, for many of that generation- the Windrush generation. A lot have stayed here in Britain, because they've been away for so long that Britain has become home. And that sense of exile for the Windrush generation- I think for a lot of them, they face those same tensions that what they remember is an upbringing, pre-independence in countries that... that that facet of life no longer exists. And so they feel stuck between being British in a sense, but not recognised or respected as being British (and like the present Windrush scandal shows us that manifestly, on the one hand) and yet, going back home and not feeling that they belong. I think, for my parents, I think they persevered long enough for them to be able to get over that. So now my father is ensconced in the village. I mean, he couldn't imagine going anywhere else. And that is a place where he will die. But I think it was very much an initial struggle for the first- probably, let's say, two years or so.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Yeah, going home can be a really complicated thing- because of having left, all the changes that happened seem to be quite abrupt when you go back having been away for 25 or 30 years. The Christian upbringing you describe where politics and the workers' movement and the nonconformist traditions of religion all seem to really have conversations with each other. You did say that even within that context, race was the elephant in the room. Could you tell us a little bit about that?

Professor Anthony Reddie:

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. So in the church I went to- it was a Wesleyan Church, in the Methodist tradition, and was very much a place of social improvement.. a form of social mobility really. So I think most people who were the most important people in the church, two generations previously they would be very working class, but through education, through hard work, through thrift; inspired by a particular brand of Wesleyan Christianity, they had kind of improved. So it was a church with a very acute class consciousness about it. However, we were one of only two black families in the whole church. And because it was also I think, a church that was also steeped in a certain type of colonialism, that the elephant in the room really was race.

So basically, it was a church that I think was more comfortable... wrestling with class politics, but actually, when it came to thinking about its relationship to Empire, and to missionary work out there, they never quite understood what to do with this Reddie family; which was like, this family - probably courtesy of my mother - were very devout

churchgoers. We were there every week. So basically, if we weren't at church, we were either ill, or my parents had sort of gone back to the Caribbean to bury their parents or relatives. So essentially, we were at church every single Sunday. And the church- as I said, it never quite understood what to do with us. So at one level I was... it was a great place for formation: I owe them a great deal in terms of the values I have maintained, you know, even into my mid-50s. On the other hand, it was a place that was racist. It was a very kind of genteel, middle class kind of racism.

So meaning that no one ever said anything outright in any particular way to you that was really egregious. It was just a set of assumptions around you being not as good as other people. And certainly, in terms of how we interpreted the gospel, it was very Eurocentric. So I tell the story about encountering a white Jesus when I was about 13 years old. And this Jesus on the far wall of the parlour- this is where the seniors in the Sunday school met. And I've said in other places that like, this Jesus looked more like Björn Borg than Björn Borg looks like Björn Borg. I mean... never have eyes been so blue and hair so blonde. And clearly there was a Remington beard trimmer in first century Judea, 'cause obviously Jesus had this perfectly coiffured beard that was just... this is a beautiful man, that like, you could stare into his eyes and fall in love with him kind of thing. And I would remember just staring at this picture and thinking to myself: so if Jesus is the son of God - God incarnate: this is the visible representation or what we think God is - then who the hell am I? And I remember asking the teacher that and she just said: 'I don't know. It doesn't matter Anthony. You know, I mean... God loves you'. And I thought: well, I don't doubt that God loves me. But, if I don't look like God, but everyone else in this church does - particularly people who have authority and power in it - can I really believe that God loves me as much as God loves everyone else in this church?

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Yeah. I mean, given all that Anthony, it's kind of surprising that you've gone on to devote your life's work to theology- you know? I'm sure I'm not the first person to say that. What led you to that? If you can kind of pinpoint anything?

Professor Anthony Reddie:

So yeah, I mean, a couple of things, really. So I did church history rather than theology because I didn't have the confidence- I didn't have the confidence to tell my elders in the church that I was going to do this subject that they'd spent so much time frowning upon, so I did history instead. But then chose all the religious aspects of history (which was mainly church history at Birmingham). And two things happened really, two things happened. Firstly, I was taught - not that I understood it at the time - but I was taught by some great left wing academics. So particularly E. P. Thompson and his wife, Dorothy Thompson, who are both very, very strong Marxist historians. I mean, they were both quite old at the time and they were kind of like Emeritus and still teaching around Birmingham, I think, as much like to keep their hands in really. And so I fell under their spell.

So I remember doing a course looking at the social and political significance of Christianity in terms of the Chartists movements; in terms of the Tolpuddle martyrs, which is important as a Methodist in terms of their role in helping to found the early emergence of the Labour Party. I still remember even writing an essay as to whether the construction of the Labour Party owed more to Marx or Methodism. (It's definitely Marx, although Methodism would like to claim credit! It is Marx- it's Marx not Methodism!) Anyway, so that's one of the essays I did. And at the same time I fell under the spell of the SCM- the Student Christian Movement. And what that did to me was it gave me this strong sense of connection, because I think when I was growing up, because the church was relatively conservative (although there were some people in the church who were clearly interested in social justice and interested in social issues) for the most part, the church tended to be rather neutral about that. It tended to want to say: 'well, okay, like we can see the social implications of the faith but we don't want to stress it too much, because it looks too political if we talk about that. So therefore, let's be much more pietistic and largely, try to stay aloof of social issues' (even though in Bradford, you can't dodge them).

I think going to university, those two things connected. Suddenly I was amongst people for whom social justice and the gospel were one and the same thing: you couldn't separate them. Actually, if you weren't doing social justice then like, you weren't doing the gospel properly... I was a community worker then in the late 80s/early 90s. And that's where I discovered Black Theology. So then Black Theology came alongside the social gospel emphases that I had come across earlier. And yeah, and that's where I think the desire then to want to become a theologian then really emerged in the early to mid-90s.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

So Anthony, I want to go on to talk about the book *Theologising Brexit*, which was published in 2019 in response to the Brexit referendum. Could you tell us why you chose to use Brexit as a way of writing this kind of theology: Liberationist and Postcolonial and Black?

Professor Anthony Reddie:

Yeah, I mean, I think what really inspired it really was a conversation I remember having with a colleague when I was working for the Methodist Church, probably about 2015- so in the year before the referendum when obviously we knew that that was coming up, and there was all the discussion around it. And I remember, this person was a white woman - and I talk about it in the book I think, in the introduction - and she was gonna vote Leave. And she was very clear, and she spoke passionately about sovereignty and about the EU encroaching and the various other things. And I remember that what was also implicit in the conversation - although we were having what has turned out to be one of many vociferous conversations that turned into arguments around this - was all the stuff that wasn't being said.

So although notionally, we were both talking about the EU and talking about sovereignty and talking about being part of Europe or being separate from Europe, there was also this subterranean conversation around what it meant to be English in particular, but British in more general terms. And for her: she was very much looking back. So her thing was that Britain was not the same place as it was in the years when she was growing up- she was slightly older than I am. So I'm born '64; I think she was born '59. And she was brought up I think in the East End of London, and said: 'well, you know, in those days...' and she never used 'white' once. And yet, it was very clear that what she was talking about was how the community that she'd grown up in, that was very much a white working class East End culture being replaced by these other ethnic groups and now when she went back, she didn't recognise her old neighbourhood. But yet never once mentioned race, never once talked, spoke about why, even though clearly, those were the things that were driving a lot of her concern that really had very little to do with the EU.

So actually, when I personally said: 'so give me one specific example of how the EU is stopping us from doing the things that we want to do, really', and she couldn't really say anything specific. And so for me, it seemed to me that there was something about Brexit that was allowing a certain type of conversation to happen without having to name it. And therefore, without having to name it, allowed a certain kind of ease for the likes of Farage and various other people to engage in a kind of discourse that would have been wholly impossible to do in the years following Enoch Powell. Because we saw what happened to Enoch Powell you know- Enoch Powell did his *Rivers of Blood* speech and that made him a pariah to the point whereby his political career never recovered. Therefore, I was wondering, how then you go from that to conversations that are not dissimilar, but are now so mainstream, that actually no one's a pariah- if anything, people are now held up as heroes? So how do you go from the pariah of the sixties to someone who's now a hero? And it seemed to me that Brexit was a synonym for lots of things that were not being stated. So I wanted to try and state them.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Yeah... When you describe these anecdotes in your books and in your talks and papers, while you're critical of some of the thinking around the Brexit debate, you're very careful not to stereotype people who voted in different ways. And you're, you actually- you go out of your way to highlight that there are valid arguments for folks who voted in different ways. Why is it so important for you: a) to be strong about your opinion but b) not to turn that into a castigation of folks who voted differently? That seems to be an ethic in the way you write about Brexit.

Professor Anthony Reddie:

Yeah, I mean, I think there's two things really [that] I'm sort of trying to achieve in that. I think, firstly, if I think about the world I came from, which was specifically in Bradford, East Bowling- so it's BD4, so it's one of the largest wards in Bradford and one of the poorest ones. I think, if I went back to that, and within that, I would include my youngest brother- so Chris... I've got three brothers so I'm the eldest and two brothers who followed me and then my sister Sandra, she's the youngest. I think Chris voted to leave- virtually everyone in the whole of East Bowling actually would have voted to leave. I think it would be easier to find the people who voted to remain; that might be one or two individuals, but virtually everyone voted to leave. And I understand the reasons why they do it; I think they're misguided. I think they were conned. I think that this was a classic form of misdirection.

So basically, the likes of Boris Johnson or Farage: privates, privately educated, privileged, white English men, were propagating a form of English nationalism that then takes in people who are the left behind; people who are the marginalised, people who that- however we think about the gains of Britain in terms of economic growth (over let's say, the last 15/20 years, or 30 years) they have not benefited from that at all. And that alienated [them] from Westminster politics. I know these people well, because I grew up amongst them. It's really but for the grace of God that I got my A Levels and went to university and escaped that. But there are many people who have not done that and because that is still part of my identity, I still identify with that. So even though realistically, I'm not a working class Bradfordion anymore, my heart is still located in those places in terms of my identification, and my solidarity with them.

So therefore, I wanted to find a way of writing that would not castigate them as being idiots or being bigots or being backward or being stupid or being ignorant. They're none of those things- they are truly the ones who have been oppressed. And the tragedy is that I think that they've been used to the point whereby what should have been a natural set of coalition politics between people who share a particular experience of marginalisation; rather than that, there was a classic divide and rule that then got particularly poorer white working class communities to identify with richer white people (who have never cared about them, by the way) and to see immigrants as being their enemy rather than actually, this is your class allegiance to people who feel exactly how you feel and feel exactly alienated in the same way you do. So that's the first thing.

I think secondly, I think for me, as a Liberation Theologian, I've always been clear that God's preferential option for the marginalised and the oppressed and those who are left behind is because God is righteous, not because those individuals are necessarily any better in terms of their moral standing than other people. And so what I've always tried to do is try not to be too tribalistic in terms of assuming that there's righteousness imbued in any particular group of people. It's simply to say that a God of justice and righteousness and who propagates the values of an upside down kingdom will side with those who are on the margins rather than those who are powerful. And so my job, I think, is to try to be an advocate for justice without falling into the worst types of tribal politics that then end up pointing the finger at individuals and castigating them as if somehow there's truth only on one side, in one particular perspective.

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These remotely recorded podcasts come from our kitchen table to yours because we can't be together in the same room talking about these important topics in this important year.

So, if you want to take this conversation further, we've got some discussion and reflection questions for you- and a full transcription too. You can find those on our website- corrymeela.org/podcast or linked in our shownotes.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

You're listening to The Corrymeela Podcast and I'm Pádraig Ó Tuama, former leader of Corrymeela. With me today is Anthony Reddie, specialist in Black Liberation Theology, and author of *Theologising Brexit: A Liberationist and Postcolonial Critique*.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

In your book, you've described missional Christianity - by which I think you mean, you know, a Christianity that has a missionary endeavour to make converts - you've described missional Christianity as the spiritual and theological underpinning for Brexit. Could you unpack that a bit?

Professor Anthony Reddie:

Indeed yeah. So I clearly see Brexit as linked to a form of nostalgia. So it's linked to a type of manifest destiny. So the days when the British (particularly the English) felt themselves to be superior and to have a special place in God's economy. This comes out of empire, and empire is imbued and is propagated by mission Christianity. So in the book I cite the words of David Livingstone who - I think in 1857, in a talk in Oxford, which is ironic, because obviously that's where I work now, in Oxford - said that the basis of the British empire was the three Cs: Commerce, Civilization and Christianity. So commerce: empires are always about making money. They're always about taking money from the colonies, from the places that have been colonised; taking it back to [the] metropolitan centre, and enriching themselves: commerce. Civilization: the 'White Man's Burden'- it's about trying to recreate people into your own image, and the imposition of language and culture and various values that are quintessentially white and British - but again, particularly English values - [and] imposing them upon other people. And Christianity then becomes [in] a sense, the theological/philosophical underscoring of all of this. And therefore, I say that, although it's not - as I said - it's not manifested in the uppermost of people's consciousness, there's a way in which a certain view of Christianity that underpins empire and underpins white exceptionalism, actually becomes the theological narrative - albeit a subterranean one - that informs Brexit.

So for example, in the book, I cite the research of Greg Smith and Linda Woodhead, who show for example that Anglicans.... I think about that. So the Church of England - which is the Church of English nationalism - Anglicans, more than any other group voted to leave. And particularly Anglicans in the white suburbs and rural areas; so the places that were very much defined by whiteness - in which there is very little, I guess, cultural and ethnic plurality - were even more likely then to vote leave. I think, actually, I think as high as 70% of... And so within that I make an interesting critique...

If I was writing the book again (which is the case for everyone; you'd do it differently). So if I was doing it again, I- in the book I just make a quick aside between *The Vicar of Dibley* and *Rev*. And say that *Rev* is the manifestation of the Church of England that votes to remain and *The Vicar of Dibley* is the one that votes to leave, and which one is the

more popular and the more iconic image of the Church of England? It's *The Vicar of Dibley* in which a person of colour never turns up in any of the series that has been broadcast. And that's because that fits into a certain - I guess - a certain sort of rural nostalgia... of a particular picture of Englishness in which people like myself are wholly absent.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Huh, so there's once again the question, you know- if that's what England is, who the hell am I, in the same way that you're talking about: if that's what God is, who the hell am I?

Professor Anthony Reddie:

Absolutely, yeah. And this particular- what I would say is a cultural construct of English Christianity. So, it's not predicated upon people necessarily going to church or believing in a God who is incarnated into the body of a Palestinian Jew; I mean, that's certainly not what they have in mind. It is very much an artefact of a certain type of pastoral view of Englishness that has been I think resonant in the country, I think ever since the original, sort of Elizabethan era, which is where it really began actually under Elizabeth I in terms of English nationalism. And, yeah, and that has never included... it's never included black and minority ethnic people as part of that construct.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

What part do you think that World War Two plays in the imagination of nationhood and in the public imagination of nationhood in England or maybe broader than that- in Britain?

Anthony Reddie:

Oh, huge. Absolutely huge. And again, if I were writing the book again, there was probably more I could theorise around that. I mean, I think the significance of World War Two is: it's a last hurrah for a certain type of English/British [mind]set of manifest destiny. And it is the hubris around empire. So obviously, so we win the war. And when I give popular talks, I usually have a quick aside that says: well, actually, it's really the Soviet Union, actually, that wins the war 'cause ... thirty million Russians die. So the truth is that they do all the heavy lifting, followed by the Americans and the Brits, you know- not to downplay the sacrifice of Britain. But in numerical terms, it compares nothing to the privations that Russians went through, for example. But anyway, we win the war.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

And what does that do for kind of a national consciousness? I have heard kind of- from the Irish side, when I hear public conversations about Britain and the European Union, and the UK and the European Union, I do hear people saying: 'well, we won the war, so therefore, we'll survive this' or 'we'll beat the Germans against this'. What's happening in that? D'you know, because I want to believe that something important is being communicated. But I don't know what the layers of importance are in that.

Professor Anthony Reddie:

Yeah, so what it is, I think, is that because there has always been this sense of manifest destiny I think, within the British and that is very much linked to empire. So one of the things I did in terms of looking at the whole theology and the literature that comes out of mission Christianity (in terms of this going out and propagating the gospel in various parts of the world) is that... it gives the British this huge sense of self-importance. Basically, what often people say is: 'well, okay, people have had empires before, but no one's had an empire as big as ours'. At its peak, 24% of the world - so a quarter of the world - is controlled by and run by and owned by a small island that's only 44,000 square miles in circumference. Therefore what that does is, it gives this huge sense of self-importance that says that essentially, to the

British, to the rest of the world, and particularly in this context, to the continent of Europe: we are different from and better than you. We're different from and better than you.

Therefore what World War Two communicates... is that then reinscribes that sense of superiority. So against all the odds, against the might of Germany that has conquered most of Europe... the plucky Brits still prevail. It's why Churchill still remains such a huge icon. So even though he has this very problematic backstory in terms of someone who supports empire, someone who flirts with eugenics; this is someone who is on the wrong side of many arguments and values in terms of world history. However, he is the leader who leads Britain to their finest hour and probably to that last hurrah of being a great world imperial power. So that thing then becomes imbued into the British psyche that then gets invoked...

I sat during a hustings for the last European elections. And last in both senses, you know- last as in it was the last time we did it, and probably like the last time we will do it (because obviously when we're out of Europe we won't have these elections anymore) and someone from the Brexit Party literally got up and said: 'let's just get Brexit done- we've beat the Germans twice before'. I mean, literally, he said that, and people clapped. And I thought: really? I mean, that's what passes now like for political science here... and the fact that so many people clapped is because they tapped into this set of - I think - unreconstructed ideas that are buried deep into many people's psyche that we're just not the same as...

And part of why I think I have to, to self-critique myself within that is that in the context of growing up in Yorkshire, I never once said I was European. I never once identified with anything that was beyond Europe, and even something as simple as... 'cause again, actually one of the things that came out of the research from Greg Smith and Linda Woodhead was: people who only spoke one language - English - were more likely to vote Leave than people who spoke more than one language. Therefore, for someone like myself, who- I remember being taught French first time I was at nine, and I did it from nine through til 16. And that to date is still my worst ever exam. I think I got an unclassified....

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Congratulations!

Professor Anthony Reddie:

Thank you! I'm not proud of it; the truth is, I just couldn't be bothered. It's like: so why do I need to learn French when everybody should speak - obviously - God's own language, which is clearly English? And clearly, that sense of manifest destiny says that... the world revolves around us. And we therefore should have a special place in the world. And you can't have a special place if you're stuck within a common community with a common set of rules, where we (i.e. the British) are not in charge. I mean, I'm pretty sure that Europe would look very differently if the Germans and the French only had the good sense to turn round and say: okay, I'll tell you what...we'll let you come back. But you can be in charge. If they let the Brits be in charge, I'm sure the Brits would think very differently about Europe.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Yeah. What was your experience of learning about Ireland through the lens of theology or history? And then thinking about that in the context of Brexit?

Professor Anthony Reddie:

I think one of the things that really shaped my formation growing up was a neighbour of ours, she was called... what was she called now? She was called... Oh good Lord her name's just escaped me! Well anyway, we had an Irish neighbour...

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Molly O'Sullivan!

Professor Anthony Reddie:

Yeah- that's the one! Actually not... *[laughs]* and she came from County Mayo. And she had left Ireland in the 19... Well, just before- '30s. So she would've been an old woman actually when I was growing up in the '70s ('70s and '80s) so really, she was probably born about 1910/1920; came to Britain from a very unhappy rural Irish background and had married an Englishman and had lived in Bradford ever since. So what was interesting was that when we were growing up, she was a closest friend to our family, particularly my mum. And she hated the English. I mean, she was just viscerally anti-English and very poor Irish and had a strong sense of Irish history, in terms of being oppressed by England, even though she'd never gone back to Ireland. I think she'd maybe gone back only twice: I think once for her father's funeral, and once for her sister's wedding. And again, it was a classic exilic experience. She had a particular view of Ireland that like... she didn't want to experience it in any contemporary sense, but she was very clear she wasn't English and she didn't like the English and so she would come round to our house (or sometimes we'd go to her house) and particularly she and my mum were very close friends, and they would talk in very sort of conspiratorial terms around white English men and why the English were such hypocrites, and what I took from her was this common sense of colonisation. So she would also say: 'well, you know, Mrs. Reddie I know what it's like to have my land colonised'.

And so again, I think long before I knew what postcolonial was... there was a sense in which my dad's closest friends who worked in a factory were always people who came from other places. So he had a close friend who was Polish. He had two very, very strong Welsh friends. He had a number of Scottish friends; not many white English men as friends. I mean, he had a few, but not many. And so there was a natural - I think - a natural kind of sense of all of us being outsiders. All of us being underdogs. And so long before I began to study Ireland... and then one of the significant things that we did was 17th century studies, particularly under the Stewarts and then reading about the activities of Oliver Cromwell, for example, in Ireland. And reading that, and juxtaposing that with the history of slavery and colonisation of the Caribbean, I saw natural links. And so one of the things I remember actually, when I was growing up in my teenage years was that when it came to the Five Nations (as it was then) I will support everyone except England. So I was always on the side of the Welsh, the Scottish and the Irish, and the French, against an invariably all white English team, because I just never identified with the English team at all.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Anthony Reddie, you're an educator, as well as a historian and theologian, and earlier this year you published an article where you talk about moving from racism awareness training to deconstructing whiteness. Could you tell us about the importance of this distinction for you?

Professor Anthony Reddie:

Indeed, yeah. So in the first iteration, in terms of racism awareness, what that tended to do was to try and look at race as an abstract concept and to try and deconstruct what we mean by race. And to get into the semantics of what is racism or what isn't racism; the difference between racism and prejudice or discrimination, for example. And that was helpful at one level, but I think what it missed really was... the larger way in which this has factored into not just history, but

into the very way in which we construct ideas of being and of truth and of belonging. And so what I wanted to do as I looked at the article was partly to critique my own teaching and pedagogy over the years. Because at a time when I was very much involved in racism awareness, I was very much part of it; I believed in it. And so that was a major part of my teaching in terms of working with different theological institutions.

So one of the things I point to in my book *Is God Colourblind?...* So it's first published in 2009 and it was republished this year, actually, in the wake of George Floyd's murder and the resurgence of Black Lives Matter. So within that book, I think it's the third chapter [that] is called 'Deconstructing Whiteness'. Within that really is an exercise that is just an opportunity, but it's a participative exercise that gets people the opportunity to look at the very different layers that make us up as an individual. All of us are the sum of lots of different experiences, and lots of different ways in which we name ourselves. And the point of that exercise, I think, is to do two things. First is to sensitise white people to the very fact that actually one of the privileges of being white is: a) not having to think about it. So when people say 'well, because, you know, I don't know what you mean, I never thought about being white'. Yeah actually, I understand that 'cause that's one of the gifts of being white.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

That is a very white thing to say is what you're saying!

Professor Anthony Reddie:

It is, absolutely. So the fact that you don't have to think about it is one of the gifts but also, it's this thing: that of all the issues that might hold you back, of all the issues that might be an 'ism' within the context of life in Britain, being white isn't one of them. Being white isn't one of them- there's no context in which you being white becomes a material disadvantage, in terms of your existence in Britain- or indeed, your existence in the world. Therefore part of it is about self-awareness. It's about consciousness-raising. It's about acknowledging: what are the hoops that you don't have to jump through? What are the ways in which barriers are removed simply because you have the good fortune to be born into a particular epidermis that means that you're not racialised in the way other people have to wrestle with these things every single day of their life, whether they choose to or not.

But then secondly - and I think this is the more constructive and progressive element of it - is: in what way then can you use that to be an advocate for other people? So what I'm not asking people to do is apologise for being white. I'm not asking people to apologise for being white. And I'm not even saying that there's something that in and of itself is problematic about being... about people who self-identify, or are part of a particular construction of being white. What I'm saying is: if that then imbues you with certain advantages, then how do you become an advocate? What sometimes - I think in more recent terms - people talk about [is] being 'white allies'. I don't particularly like the term ally- I think I prefer advocate. So [in] what ways then do you become someone who has the ability to acknowledge the advantages that comes and then you then become a supporter of other people?

So one of [the] people I often point to in this (and I name him because he was such an influential person in my life) actually was my history teacher in school, a guy called Richard Wilkinson. And he was white working class and gay. Not that we- he wouldn't have been out at the time, but certainly like the older we got- (because he taught me from when I was 13). So first year of secondary school right through to my A Level. So by the time we got to A Levels and we were kind of 18 and stuff, he was a bit more indiscreet, or a bit more open about his own background. He was very white, Yorkshire, Bradford-born. So in many respects [he] self-identified with all the things I've just spoken up. But what was brilliant about him was, he was an advocate for creating space for everyone in his class to believe that they could transcend the social location to which we were born. And he was the one who said to me 'Anthony, you're clever.

You're one of the best people I've ever taught doing history, you should go to university'. And he was a brilliant advocate for me not because he understood what it meant to be black, but because he understood from his own lived experience of being working class. Also, I think, being gay. All those things, I think, gave an insight into what it meant to be othered, to be pushed slightly to one side or to be seen in negative terms, and therefore when [he] recognised that in other people, his role as a teacher then was to be an advocate; to enable them to thrive.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

What I hear you pointing to is that, you know, as you talk about deconstructing whiteness, you're not talking about being ashamed of an identity or a background or of an economic status that you're born into, but really looking at an ethic and a practice of justice in terms of critiquing power, and making sure that power is shared. Is that the kind of solution you see for places within which there's systemic racism, that those who hold the power would do the work themselves rather than thinking, let's learn about black people? And that will somehow mean that we'll be more diverse and more racially sensitive?

Professor Anthony Reddie:

Indeed. Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think one of the things I've become more increasingly critical of, are the type of well-meaning sort of benign liberals that I would have met maybe 15/20 years ago, who were always quick to want to unpack my experience, you know- so tell us about your story Anthony, I want to really get into doing Black Theology. And my thing is okay, read Black Theology in order to learn, but what you need to do is to deconstruct your own privilege, in order that you then become an advocate, and you become someone who is prepared to give away power, to share power, to empower others, in order that we begin to impact upon the social differentials that are not God-given; they're manmade, they're human constructs and just as they are constructs, we can deconstruct and reconstruct them, if there was enough will, and agency and solidarity to do that.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

What do you see in terms of an emergence of a thriving, filled with pride and glorious and flourishing sense of being English? Do you think that's possible? And do you think that that's happening? Just who do you think is leading that conversation in a way that it's a vision for inclusivity? I'm sure it's happening, of course it is; there's so much about England that I admire.

Professor Anthony Reddie:

So one of the stories I sometimes tell is of a white couple on our street- John and Marion Venner, both long gone now. And what they did back in the day was in the days when black and Asian people could not get mortgages- particularly Caribbean people could not get mortgages. But what they would do is that they would take the papers off some of the families, go to banks, take out loans in the name of the families that they were supporting, then going back and then giving the papers to the family and 'okay, like we got you a mortgage because they thought that we were you. So what you then need to do is to pay the mortgage faithfully, establish a real sort of precedent to which you are clearly good for this. Then after about five or six years go in and own up. Now one of two things will happen' they said, 'either like you'll get arrested, in which case then actually you'll probably need to do us in, and we'll get arrested, and all of us actually will be done for fraud. Or, alternatively, what you say to them is: 'well, the only reason our friends had to do this is because you were racist in the first place. But however, if you look at what we have done... we have established the fact that we have always been on time with our repayments. You've never had to chase us and you've never had an issue with us. So your alternative is to acknowledge that you were wrong in the first place. Or maybe we were wrong in fooling you. But now that we are here, actually, you are getting your repayments''.

This family did this for... I mean, it's amazing. This family did this for about a dozen people in Bradford - all black Caribbean people - at risk to themselves. So therefore when I say: okay, I grew up in an era where white people were habitually racist. There were always people who were different, because they just had a different mindset. And what they did was to go to the bank and use their white privilege to say: 'well, actually, we know that we'll get a mortgage, because actually we'll turn up. But if we turn up with your paperwork, this shows how racist and skewed this process is, because what they're not looking at is your... (obviously there's a six and sevenses of full employment). They're not looking at your economic circumstances, they're simply looking at you and judging you on the basis of your race, which is clearly wrong'.

That is an enormous risk that we're taking now- you know I mean I'm not expecting every white person to risk jail time like that... because quite frankly, I probably wouldn't do that. But I do that to say: you know something- there are some remarkably courageous English people who have stood up for justice, who have stood up for fair play, who have given safe haven and homes to people who are refugees and asylum seekers- who have made those contributions. What we need to do is to recover those stories and to deconstruct all the other ones that we often get told in history books, that actually bring embarrassment and shame upon us.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

Anthony Reddie, thanks so much for coming on The Corrymeela Podcast.

Professor Anthony Reddie:

It's been an absolute pleasure. Thank you.

Our thanks to our guest this week, Professor Anthony Reddie. Don't forget to listen right to the very end for when Anthony answers one of our Very Short Story questions.

Thanks for tuning in to The Corrymeela Podcast. I'm Pádraig Ó Tuama and I'll be back with another episode next week.

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The Corrymeela Podcast is a FanFán production. The researcher and producer is Emily Rawling. The podcast was mixed by Fra Sands at Safe Place Studios.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

So Anthony Reddie, could you tell us about a time when one of your national identities felt important to you?

Professor Anthony Reddie:

Yeah, I mean, I think the first time I saw the West Indies cricket team play England. This was 1976. It was when the white English captain was a South African called Tony Gregg, with his very, very strong South African accent and he was going to make the West Indies grovel. And I think it's the first time I saw my dad, really... 'cause I mean, he is a

very emotionally constrained person. But he was just... he and my uncles all congregated around the house, and we all watched it on our small black and white TV, and the sheer sense of unbridled joy watching the West Indies demolish England 3-0. And Viv Richards became one of my enduring - and still to this day remains - one of my all-time heroes.

Pádraig Ó Tuama:

What three people from your culture's present or past would you want to be in a lockdown bubble with, Anthony?

Professor Anthony Reddie:

Okay, I'll probably say Marcus Garvey, who was a black civil rights leader actually before civil rights was invented. So he was of Jamaican birth, but was very much involved in a Black Power movement in the years just following World War One. So he would be certainly one. I think probably Martin Luther King, undoubtedly, for all the reasons that I guess our listeners don't need... any further elaboration on that. And then I think probably third would be a contemporary Jamaican poet - black woman poet - called Jean 'Binta' Breeze- I've seen her several times. Her poetry is amazing. She's a dub poet and a black feminist woman. And she just reminds me so much of the spirit of black Caribbean women who have had a huge impact upon my own identity and formation.