Statement on Slavery

Introduction

This Statement from the undersigned members of the Trinity College 1965 Year Group, supports the initiatives by the College and Cambridge University to find practical, forward-looking ways of acknowledging historical involvement in slavery, and adds some thoughts and suggestions.

It does not represent the views of the 1965 Year Group as a whole, for the simple reason that the Group does not exist to make statements on any issues whatever, but we acknowledge that the existence of the Group has made it possible for us to come together and share our thoughts.

Background

In September 2022, the University of Cambridge issued a report on its historical connections to slavery, and announced that it was creating a Cambridge Legacies of Enslavement Fund[1] to redress the balance by supporting research, community engagement and partnership activities. In parallel, the Dean of Chapel and Fellow of Trinity College, Revd Dr Michael Banner, led an investigation into the involvement of Trinity College in slavery in the British Empire in the 17th through 19th centuries and wrote a book "Britain's Slavery Debt" on the subject.[2] In response, Trinity College announced that it will continue to investigate the manner of its participation in slavery and to seek redress in a number of measures.[3]

Statement

We appreciate and applaud Trinity College and the University of Cambridge for these endeavours, particularly the new Trinity Caribbean Scholarship Scheme.

However, enslavement has existed throughout the entire history of humankind and still exists today. The British Empire in the 17th through 19th centuries is by no means the only instance of enslavement. Note should be made of measures taken by the British Empire to eliminate slavery and the slave trade by means of naval action in the 19th century. [4]

In any civilised society there should be no place for slavery, yet instances of slavery abound in the modern world. We should be aiming to eliminate it entirely from the face of the Earth. The UK's Modern Slavery Act is a step towards this aim which we applaud in principle, but it appears to be inadequately resourced and some of its terms seem compromised by excessive emphasis on immigration control.

Further, the UK's overseas development aid budget, some of which reflects the country's colonial past, has many positive features to improve the lives of those disadvantaged today. Action is needed, however, to make an early reality of the promise to return its level to the UN's target of 0.7% of GDP, and in parallel to return its focus to the lives of the deprived in poor countries.

In all this there is a need to increase the educational opportunities for all while eliminating the social discrepancies including, at their extreme, enslavement, which deprive many across the globe of these opportunities. The Fourth Industrial Revolution, with its formidable powers in Artificial Intelligence (AI), could worsen such discrepancies, but AI also has the potential to be harnessed in support of these aims. Trinity College and the University of Cambridge can (and should) play an active and positive role.

In conclusion, we believe it is better to focus on the future with our energies than the past with our thoughts.

Richard Ashton	James Bradley	Alasdair Darroch	John Hinch	Nigel Kingsley
Clem McCalla	Mark Menhinick	Tony Seddon	John White	

---

[1]   https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/legacies-of-enslavement-inquiry
[2]   https://global.oup.com/academic/product/britains-slavery-debt-9780198889441?cc=us&lang=en&#
[3]   https://www.trin.cam.ac.uk/news/trinity-college-cambridge-to-investigate-legacies-of-slavery-1-million-to-support-caribbean-scholarships-plus-new-academic-post/ .
[4]   For example, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blockade_of_Africa