A WHITE ZULU, CRICKET AND THE CHURCH

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Some thoughts about the church inspired by a great musician and a wonderful (if lucky) cricket team.
Category: Observations

I was saddened this week to hear of the death of the extraordinary South African musician Johnny Clegg. He doesn't seem to be that well known in the UK, but his mixture of modern rock and South African indigenous styles of music is remarkable.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Ca2uVZuiY0

However, there is more to Johnny Clegg than simply being a wonderful singer-songwriter. He was an anthropologist who taught at the University of the Wittwatersrand and he played in a multiracial band, melding European and Zulu styles at the height of apartheid. He deserves to be remembered.

On one level, there is something odd about a lad who was born in Bacup in Lancashire beind dubbed "the white Zulu". Zulus aren't white!

Who says?

A better bit of news this week (at least from where I'm writing) is that the England men's cricket team finally won the world cup. Well, I say the England men's team, but the captain was Irish and other squad members were born in Barbados, New Zealand and South Africa, while two others have Pakistani heritage. Hang about; Irishmen, Kiwis and the rest aren't English!

Who says?

The thing with Johnny Clegg is that he grew up around Zulus, he spoke, wrote and sung in their language, spoke up for them at great personal risk and was accepted by the Zulu community. Likewise, all of the people who played for England had ties to this country and chose to play for it. Identity is a lot more complex than simply where you are born or the colour of your skin. Johnny Clegg and the England cricket team demonstrate some of the complexities of identity, but they also show great things and great strength can emerge from diversity.

Now, much though I'm glad of the opportunity to talk about Johnny Clegg and the England cricket team, there is a nore serious point to this post. The church is far more multicultural, multinational and multicoloured than the England cricket team or than any of Johnny Clegg's bands. However, just as some people rebel against the idea of Zulus being white, or having Kiwis playing cricket for England, many of us find it hard to grasp that the church is truly multicultural. However, we serve a Middle-Eastern saviour who never set foot in Europe and the majority of Christians in the world are African and Asian. We need to get used to the idea of being in a multicultural, multilingual community, otherwise we are going to struggle with heaven!

OK, multicultural community isn't easy. People have to make sacrifices and accomodations so that we can rub along together despite our differences. The fact that Moheen Ali and Adil Rashid had to scoot off the podium so as to avoid being sprayed by champagne is a great demonstration of how difficult these issues can be. In a church context, Steve Kneale gives a great example of some of the struggles involved in bringing different groups together. However, whether we like it or not, the

church is multicultural and it is stronger for that. Each culture and language brings something new, something of value that helps to complete what is lacking in others. We need to learn to embrace and accept Christians from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and we must avoid trying to force them into our cultural mould. Pentecost is about a multiplying of languages, not a boring homogenisation.