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*Harvey C. Kwiyani*

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# EDITORIAL

Mission is the mother of theology. These Martin Kähler's words should never be forgotten. Without mission, there is no theology. Andrew Walls has often reminded us that theology emerges out of the encounters between gospel and culture – in the context of mission. The developments currently occurring in African Christianity – e.g., the rapid growth of Africa's Christian population, the rising influence of spirit-centred prophetic ministries, growing sense of failure to engage effectively with politics, and the multiplying numbers of prosperity preachers, among many – make Kähler's words very relevant for African theology today. What kind of theology is producing and *being produced* by the type of church that we have seen explode in Africa in the past five decades? The experience of Africa's Christianity in the diaspora makes such questions as this more pertinent. How are Africans in Europe and North America engaging in mission among Westerners?

Mission is also the *telos* of theology. There is no knowing of God apart from knowing God as a missionary God. Any attempt to understand God must lead to the missionary heart of God. Thus, theology must lead us back to mission. We can not afford to lose sight of mission in our theological endeavours, for once we do that, we can easily come up with images of God that are not true. Again, Africa's diaspora Christianity is revealing; how much of our ecclesiology is shaped by God's missionary heart?

Missio Africanus Journal is a platform for missiological conversations around African Christianity. The journal takes its name from its parent organisation, Missio Africanus (following a wordplay on *missio Dei* to think about the sending (*missio*) of the Africans (*Africanus*). This journal anticipates the growing field of missiology within African Christianity. It also anticipates a missiology that is shaped by the African context through the work of both African and non-African agents. Such a missiology must reflect the African understanding of God, mission, and the world. It will also be shaped by theological issues emerging in the context of political instability, corruption, poverty, diseases, and migration, that characterise the African life today. It seeks to explore how the missionary God responds to the struggles of the African peoples. As such, it must engage other disciplines in its quest to understand the *missio Dei* among Africans such as philosophy, leadership, history, sociology, anthropology, and others.

## EDITORIAL

The journal will create space for and facilitate conversations that have to do with *missio Dei* among the African peoples. It hopes to do this in two ways: (1) by engaging the voices and perspectives of Africans involved in mission both in Africa and in the African Diaspora and (2) by listening to and learning from the many non-Africans who do their missionary work among Africans, and this too, both in Africa and in the African Diaspora.

I am delighted to bring you Issue 2 of the first volume of our journal. You will find in this issue four fresh essays, two great presentation papers from the Missio Africanus conference that took place on June 26 in Oxford. You will also find two book reviews.

This issue has been published with help from ForMission College, Church Mission Society, and the SPCK. The journal is currently based at Birmingham Christian College.

Enjoy.

Harvey C. Kwiyani, Editor



# MULTICULTURAL BONES: THE TESTIMONY OF THE ROMAN CATACOMBS

*Martin Robinson\**

The world of archaeology has been hugely enriched in recent years by the availability of the science surrounding DNA. Bones in the ground can now reveal much more about the origins of the people whose lives they once represented. The Vatican has permitted research into the origins of the many corpses from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> century, buried in the catacombs in Rome. This research demonstrates conclusively that the saints from these centuries came from many parts of the ancient world – a veritable multi-cultural community of bones!

Other recent research conducted on a smaller scale on skeletons from the time of Roman London reveals a similar pattern. London seems to have been composed of a majority of citizens from lands other than Britain. In one sense this is not too surprising. Empires draw from the inhabitants of the lands that are conquered, as soldiers, slaves, business people, traders and administrators. Indeed Empire makes travel both desirable and possible. This is the way to get on in the world. Capital cities act as magnets to attract those who are trying to improve their lot in life.

The Christian community in Rome rightly reflected the diversity of the wider society in which it was located. This research acts as a timely reminder that a multi-cultural experience of the faith was located at the very origins of Christianity in terms of both time and place. Rome's status as an early centre of the faith meant that it reflected early Christian life and experience more broadly. The faith at that time was primarily located in cities more than in rural areas and cities were usually diverse in terms of their population mix.

We don't know exactly what kinds of tensions and differing perspectives existed because of the diversity of racial, linguistic and cultural experiences. However we can gain a glimpse of some of the class tensions that were

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present in the Corinthian church, especially in relation to Chloe's people. But even though we cannot be part of their conversations and congregational life it is good to be reminded that a multi-cultural reality was present in the origins of the church.

What might we learn from this reminder? In our present time, migration is occurring around the world on a huge scale. Some of that migration brings people from the continents of Asian, Africa and South America to the West in a whole variety of guises. Some are refugees, others economic migrants, still others are sought for their skills and finance, while a good many arrive self consciously as missionaries.

Overall, the church in the West is now composed of people from almost every nation on earth. It is an astonishing mosaic! However, if in a thousand year's time someone were to excavate the bones of our present church members they might be surprised to discover that these bones did not exist in multicultural communion. Although there are some notable exceptions, for the most part our local churches do not reflect the overall diversity of the church so much as the divided nature of our society.

This reality leaves us with at least three key challenges.

1. Benefitting from the wealth of our diverse Christian experiences. The Christian community contains the seeds of a creative conversation that might illuminate our understanding of God, the church, the mission of God and our relationship with the world in which we live. The question is how we might unlock those seeds and help them to grow and flourish. Christian leaders can and must take the initiative in building relationships of trust from which creativity can flow. Those who have tried this route will know that it is not easy and that our first efforts might be rebuffed, misunderstood and even abused. That is not a reason to stop trying! This is a new language that we are called to learn and as with all language learning the first steps will almost certainly mean the making of mistakes, embarrassment and miscommunication.
2. Addressing the needs of our children and grandchildren. Our children are nearly all living in the midst of a new set of encounters with people of other races and cultures. Out of this is being shaped a set of values, norms and familiarities that it is difficult for those of us who are new to this world to grapple with or understand. This reality represents another kind of cultural language, one that we might learn as a second language but which we do not currently comprehend. What we attempt as the speakers of a second language, our children might do much better as native speakers of the new language of a multi-cultural reality.
3. Constructing a prophetic community that can help shape the future of the western societies and communities in which we find ourselves located. Division, suspicion, isolation and fear are some of the features of our bitterly divided cities and towns where whole cultures rarely meet

or communicate significantly with others outside of their own culture or sub-culture. Speaking negatively, this is a recipe for conflict, but perhaps even more tragically it misses the amazing gift that cultural diversity accompanied by the divine gift of love can bring to a whole society.

The Christian community has an opportunity to model what this might look like. Islam offers a mono-cultural model for bringing different racial groups together – in essence all are called to adopt an essentially Arab culture. The Christian church does not have a single dominating culture and theological speaking should not have. All cultural expressions of the gospel are legitimate provided they do not undermine the gospel itself. That represents a wonderful contribution to the question as to how we might live together in this new world of many identities.

# EXPLORING ADAPTIVE CHALLENGES FACED BY AFRICAN MISSIONARIES IN BRITAIN: THE CASE OF THE CHURCH OF PENTECOST

*William Doe Kugbeadjor\* and  
Harvey Kwiyani\*\**

## **Abstract**

This essay discusses adaptive challenges that face African Christians in their mission efforts in Britain. It focuses on the issues of cultural adaptation, racial prejudice, and government policy on immigration as the three significant challenges that African immigrant churches need to learn to negotiate in order to be effective in mission in Britain and to establish churches that will outlive the first generation immigrants.

**Keywords: adaptive challenges, cultural transformation, mission, African churches in Britain.**

## **Introduction**

This essay explores some of the adaptive challenges that are experienced by African Christians, ministers, and missionaries attempting to be effective in their work in Europe. The essay focuses on the experiences of some ministers of the Church of Pentecost (CoP) in Britain. Using a phenomenological approach, it explores the issues of life and mission among Ghanaian Christians of the Church of Pentecost in Britain. Among many issues, it focuses on

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three that appear to be of greater significance to the authors, and these are: culture, immigration politics, and discrimination. The essay finishes with a brief discussion on how Ghanaian Christians can best respond to these challenges.

### **Double Explosion: Christianity and Migration**

Any twentieth-century history of Africa has to highlight two great phenomena that occurred in Africa in the last quarter of the century. The first is the explosion of Christianity both on the continent and, consequently, in Africa's diasporas around the world. The second is the increasing tide of African migration to the West and the rest of the world.

Regarding Africa's Christian explosion; in 1900 Africa had a population of 133 million people, and only 9 million of these were Christians (6 per cent of the population). Fast forward to 2015, and Africa has no less than 525 million Christians out of 1100 million (1.1 billion) people.<sup>1</sup> Thus, over 50 per cent of Africa's population is Christian, at least in a nominal sense. This kind of growth was unexpected and is unprecedented in church history. When the World Mission Conference took place in Edinburgh in 1910 there was no expectation that Christianity would grow on African soil. The future of Christianity in Africa looked so bleak that it warranted neither a careful and focused conversation nor the presence and participation of Africans.<sup>2</sup> Delegates representing Africa included expatriate *Western* missionaries and eight white South Africans only.<sup>3</sup> When Africa was discussed at the conference, it was with a pessimistic tone – the leaders in world mission in those days believed that Africa would become a Muslim continent.<sup>4</sup> Of course, consequently, they dedicated most of their energy to other parts of the world. However, God had another plan.

Only God could imagine transforming the continent and adding over 500 million new Christians to the African church in slightly over 100 years. For the first half of the century, Christianity continued to grow at a steady pace. There were around 100 million Christians in Africa in 1960. It was not until the end of the political colonisation of Africa in the 1960s that a miraculous explosion started to happen. By 1970, when all but a few of the formerly colonised lands had gained their independence, Christianity had

1 The Pew Research Centre produced a report entitled "The Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population in 2010 suggesting that 62.7 per cent of sub-Saharan Africa's population is Christian, <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2011/12/Christianity-fullreport-web.pdf>.

2 Harvey C. Kwiyani, *Sent Forth: African Missionary Work in the West*, American Society of Missiology Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014), 7.

3 Kwiyani, *Sent Forth*, 7.

4 Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 15.

close to 150 million followers and adherents in Africa.<sup>5</sup> After 1970, everything changed; African evangelists, pastors, and prophets started to aggressively preach the gospel to fellow Africans, propagating a type of Christianity that was more relatable to the African mind; in addition to the many African Independent Churches that had emerged earlier, another African type of Christianity emerged within the “missionary churches” that sought to do away with the robes of the colonisers and Western missionaries. Since then, the Lord has added an average of 10 million new Christians to the African church every year. The impact of that sudden explosion of Christianity in Africa is only now beginning to show and, we believe, will be felt all around the world for generations to come. The statistical centre of gravity of Christianity is now located in Africa, and this will shape the religious landscape of the world for a long time.<sup>6</sup> One major factor in this will be the spread of African Christians around the world and the ensuing *diasporisation* of African Christianity.

The explosion of African *migration*, both within the continent and to many other parts of the world, will only be discussed in passing here.<sup>7</sup> This essay is only interested in the *effect* of the migrations in the dispersing Africa’s Christianity to other continents. Africans have always travelled outside the continent, even before enslaved Africans were taken to the Americas. However, when the political colonisation of the continent came to an end in the 1960s, a highway started to emerge, making it possible for Africans to migrate, first to the countries that colonised them, but later to any other country that allowed them the opportunity. That migration which started as a trickle in the 1950s has now become a mighty river. Every year, thousands of sons and daughters of Africa risk everything to leave the continent to gain entry into China, Europe and North America. Many thousands will cross the seas for further education or better jobs, while others are escaping the hopelessness that seems to characterise the continent. Every African country on the continent has a good portion of its population living in the diaspora.

As Christianity continues to grow on the continent, most of these African immigrants dispersing around the world are Christians. When they move, they carry their Christianity along with them and form African immigrant congregations wherever they go. These two factors, (1) the growth of African

5 For a more detailed study of the development of African Christianity in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, see Adrian Hastings, *A History of African Christianity, 1950–1975*, African Studies Series 26 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). Also, see Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa: 1450–1950*, The Oxford History of the Christian Church (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

6 Todd M. Johnson, Kenneth R. Ross, and Sandra S. K. Lee, *Atlas of Global Christianity 1910–2010* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

7 For detailed attention to the subject of African Christian migration, see Jehu Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration, and the Transformation of the West* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008).

Christianity and (2) the growth of African migration, have made possible the emergence of African Christianity in the diaspora. Most immigrant Christians have the desire to reach their new neighbours for Christ, but they soon realise that “what worked in Africa does not work here.” They have to adapt their ministries to their new contexts, but that is the most difficult thing to do. Let us look at how the Ghanaian denomination of the Church of Pentecost is coping with the adaptive challenges they face in trying to minister to the British.

### **The Church of Pentecost: a Brief History**

Kwiyani, one of the authors of this essay, has often described the Church of Pentecost as one of Ghana’s best-kept secrets. It is the largest Protestant church in Ghana with about 3 million members scattered around the world. It is registered in 92 countries and the list continues to grow every year. However, despite its global presence, the church is little known outside West Africa. The CoP originates from Ghana, but has its roots in the Welsh Pentecostal tradition. It was founded by an Irish missionary of the Apostolic Church of Great Britain, Reverend James McKeown.<sup>8</sup> He was sent to the Gold Coast from the Apostolic Church of Bradford in 1937 at the invitation of a local Pentecostal leader by the name Peter Anim. The Church of Pentecost seceded from the Apostolic Church of Great Britain in 1953, and has since grown to over two million members in Ghana alone.<sup>9</sup> In Britain, the CoP currently has about 15 000 members in 130 congregations. A great majority of the members are from Ghana. However, the CoP has become very intentional about reaching non-Ghanaians with the gospel in order to internationalise the church. Thus, as an immigrant denomination in Britain, the CoP is currently wrestling with the adaptive challenges facing every such movement, trying to be missionally relevant to the British context.

### **Adaptive challenges Faced by African Immigrant Churches**

Adaptive challenges occur when an organisation’s survival strategies – the values and practices that have made it possible for the organisation to succeed and thrive – can no longer match its context. This can happen when a powerful competitor emerges, or when a sickness attacks that demands a lifestyle change, or even when a congregation’s neighbourhood changes; or, as is the case in this essay, when a Ghanaian church finds itself in Britain.

8 Christine Leonard, *A Giant in Ghana* (Chichester, West Sussex: New Wine Ministries, 1989).

9 For the history of the CoP, see Emmanuel Kingsley Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity*, Studies in African Pentecostal Christianity 1 (Accra, Ghana: Centre for Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies, 2001).

At that point, the organisation's deeply held beliefs are challenged, forcing it to rethink its goals and to transform its strategy to fit its current circumstances. Responding to adaptive challenges always involves changing people's beliefs, values, or traditions to move them towards a desired end. Mark Lau Branson and Juan Martinez define adaptive challenge as something that will require the church to move towards a future that it cannot yet see, to become something different, to learn things it does not yet know, and to innovate beyond its current imagination.<sup>10</sup>

The other type of challenge is a *technical challenge*. These are generally simpler to deal with as they can be resolved without the 'lifestyle' or 'cultural' changes required as in the case of adaptive challenges. Technical challenges can be dealt with using quick fixes. For instance, a congregation can start a second service if their church hall is getting too small. However, adaptive challenges take longer to fix, and can only be effectively fixed if congregations make some changes in the way they do church. For instance, we have observed that most immigrant congregations have problems keeping their children engaged in church after they finish high school. In our opinion, this is an adaptive challenge that requires an adaptive solution. However, we have noticed that many congregations approach it as a technical problem, and their responses include starting a youth church that simply repeats what the older congregation does, only with a younger membership.

Approaching this problem as an adaptive challenge will involve a different methodology. Churches may have to begin to embrace youth culture, different music, and appoint younger members to leadership positions. They may begin to do discipleship differently to equip their younger members for ministry (and not just youth ministry). Whatever they do, they realize that applying technical solutions to adaptive challenges never really works. It is like applying a sticking plaster to a fractured bone.

We will now turn to three major adaptive challenges that we believe African immigrant churches must negotiate in order to be effective in mission in Britain; these include: (1) culture; (2) government policy on migration; (3) discrimination. These three were identified after extensive conversations with African pastors in the Birmingham area. All three challenges were mentioned by almost all of the twenty pastors whom we interviewed.

### Culture

A majority of African immigrant Christians experience a massive culture shock upon their arrival in Britain. In many ways, British culture is very different from what they were used to in Africa. It is usually different from what they

10 Mark Lau Branson and Juan Francisco Martinez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 222.



expected it to be when they started their journey. Talcott Parsons and Edwards Shils point out that culture is “the patterned and interconnected system of ideas and beliefs, symbols and feelings and values.”<sup>11</sup> Clyde Kluckhohn observes that, “Culture is a way of thinking, feeling, and believing.”<sup>12</sup> The ideas, beliefs, symbols, feelings and values in Britain are very strange to many newly arrived Africans even after all the cross-cultural preparation they undergo before leaving Africa – if at all they get any. Emmanuel Yartekwei Lartey points out that, “No amount of intellectual preparation or visiting can fully prepare one for living in a different culture.”<sup>13</sup>

Most African Christians in Britain experience culture shock on their arrival because being a foreigner requires people to explore new ways of making meaning in society as the old cultural landmarks are no longer helpful. Andy Hardy and Dan Yarnell suggest that, “The significant differences that exist between Western secular culture and non-Western ones do not make it easier for non-Western Christians who have come to live in the West.”<sup>14</sup> Learning a new language (or the nuances of British English), getting used to British food, and negotiating power dynamics and interpersonal skills in Britain present a daunting task. Kwiyani observes that since African culture is generally communal, Africans are “relationship-oriented in their approach to life, ministry, and mission. [Western] individualism does not make sense to many Africans.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, Africans find it very difficult on their arrival in the UK to adjust to life in Britain. The differences in their worldviews make cross-cultural communication difficult. In addition, it is often a great shock to the African immigrant Christian that most nations that brought the gospel to Africa no longer hold on to its Christian values. For instance, secularisation has overcome religion in many European countries that were once very Christian in culture. The Christian nation they perceived Britain to be is not what they find when they land.

### Government Policy on Migration

Many African Christians have migrated to the West for better living conditions, and as they migrate, they “bring their faith along.”<sup>16</sup> For instance, members of the Church of Pentecost in Ghana who migrated to the UK for political asylum, higher education, or professional enhancement in the 1980s, brought their Christianity along with them. They later invited the leadership

11 Branson and Martinez, *Churches*, 79.

12 Clyde Kluckhohn, *Mirror for Man* (New York: Whittlesey, 1949), 23.

13 Emmanuel Yartekwei Lartey, *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World* (Peterborough England: Epworth, 2006), 8.

14 Andy Hardy and Dan Yarnell, *Forming Multicultural Partnership: Church Planting in a Divided Society* (Watford: Instant Apostle, 2015), 82.

15 Kwiyani, *Sent Forth*, 164.

16 Kwiyani, *Sent Forth*, 12.

in Ghana to plant churches in the communities in which they settled. That is how the CoP started in Britain. Because of this, African Christianity is no longer just an African phenomenon today. It is a global phenomenon as it has spread to all the continents in the world.<sup>17</sup> This has helped curb the rapid decline of Christianity in the West. Timothy Tennent observes that, “Immigration represents the most important hope not only for the on-going viability of our society but also for the reevangelization of the West.”<sup>18</sup> In 2014, Peter Brierley’s research concluded that African Christians have helped stem the decline in congregation numbers in UK.<sup>19</sup> In the report, Brierley points out that the emergence of a large number of black immigrant churches has helped to curb the decline in British Christianity. However, it is becoming increasingly difficult for Africans to migrate to the UK due to the tighter immigration laws that the UK government is implementing. Kwiyani mentions the possibility that some Africans in the immigrant churches are living in the UK as illegal immigrants because they have overstayed their legal status.<sup>20</sup> Random police checks, deportations and the rising anti-immigrant sentiments make life difficult even for immigrant Africans living in the UK legally. There was a major outcry in July 2013 when Home Office vans drove through racially diverse boroughs in London, displaying a picture of handcuffs with the message: “In the UK illegally? Go home or face arrest.” Since 2002, immigration has been one of the top five political issues in every election campaign.<sup>21</sup> This has become a major challenge for many African immigrant churches whose members do not have legal residency permits in the UK.

### **Racial and Cultural Prejudice and Discrimination**

The subject of race is usually the ‘elephant in the room’ in intercultural conversation within the church. It is a delicate subject that does not need to be delicate at all; the more we can talk openly about it, the better for all involved in mission in Britain. Racial prejudice and discrimination exist in the church just as much as in the secular world. Most African immigrant churches are unable to reach out to the indigenes in the UK. Kwiyani observes that usually, “You have to be of the right colour, subscribe to the right

17 Kwiyani, *Sent Forth*, 25.

18 Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2010), 44.

19 Ruth Gledhill, Church Attendance has been propped up by immigrants, says study <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/03/church-attendance-propped-immigrants-study> (3rd June 2014) Between 2005 and 2012, 400 out of the 700 mostly Pentecostal new churches which began in London were black majority churches (BMCs).

20 Kwiyani, *Sent Forth*, 183–184.

21 Farouk Chothia, “How Welcome Are Africans in the UK?” BBC, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-25111177> (accessed 17/07/2015).

theology, wear the right clothes, speak with the right accent, have graduated from the right school and know the right people before you can be considered for inclusion.”<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, a typical black African Christian working in Britain can never qualify. To many Westerners, nothing good can come out of Africa. Many still believe that Africa has nothing good to offer the world. The African Christian in Britain is therefore seen as inferior, greeted with suspicion, and perceived as a potential criminal, refugee, or a beggar, even before the word “Hello” is said. Discrimination is the African immigrant minister’s daily bread.<sup>23</sup> Talking about African priests in the Roman Catholic church, Dean Hoge and Aniedi Okure suggest that, “Even after naturalisation or incardination, non-Western ministers of darker skins are regarded as strange, ‘international’ and ‘foreign’ by the mainline churches.”<sup>24</sup> This situation has led to many African ministers and members leaving the mainline churches to either form their own churches or join other African churches. When Kugbeadjor was in ministerial training in Birmingham he visited a local congregation of the Church of England in Birmingham with a colleague. After the service, they told the priest how glad they were to be part of the service, stating that they would visit again. However, the priest who was nice to them still mentioned – probably with good intentions – that they could go to a Pentecostal church down the street if they did not feel comfortable. This made them feel unaccepted and unwelcomed, and of course, they never visited again.

### Adapting to the Challenges

It is rather easy for African immigrant churches to freeze in the face of these and other challenges they face. For instance, to insulate themselves from the cross-cultural challenges, most African churches first reached out to their diasporic community on their arrival in the UK. The hope was that they would attempt to reach others later. In the case of the CoP, the current International Chairman, Opoku Onyinah, points out that by first reaching out to the Ghanaian diasporic community, the Church of Pentecost intends to use its congregation as “a springboard to contribute to the Christianisation of the world through evangelism.”<sup>25</sup> However, like all other African immigrant churches, the challenge to do cross-cultural mission to reach the British remains too difficult, even for the CoP after existing in Britain for 26 years. Kwiyani observes that the longer an immigrant congregation exists, the more ‘foreign’ it becomes. It is therefore not a surprise that African churches in

22 Kwiyani, *Sent Forth*, 175.

23 Kwiyani, *Sent Forth*, 175–176.

24 Dean R. Hoge and Aniedi Okure, *International Priests in America: Challenges and Opportunities* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2006), 135.

25 Onyinah Opoku, “Pentecostalism and the African Diaspora: An Examination of the Missions Activities of the Church of Pentecost,” *PNEUMA: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 26, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 218.

the UK are filled predominantly with Africans from the countries where these churches originated.

Most African immigrant churches conduct their services in English. Jehu Hanciles points out that this “removes a major barrier to cross-cultural ministry or missionary engagement.”<sup>26</sup> However, the services are conducted in ‘African-English’ where English is spoken but filled with African nuances, partly because most of the leaders have not taken time to learn how to effectively communicate cross-culturally. Many of these churches have over-emphasised their home culture in the expression of the Christian faith instead of adapting to their new environment. A lack of understanding of the dynamics of the indigenes’ cultures by immigrant churches has meant that they have become irrelevant and will remain ‘aliens’ in their host communities for a long time.

To overcome these challenges, African immigrant churches must adapt their ministries in the UK in order to be contextually relevant. Although the achievements of the African immigrant churches should be applauded, they cannot reach out to their neighbours in their host communities if the gospel is not properly contextualised in their new environment. Just as “a fully-fledged denominational church with all its associated Western-style liturgies, symbolic system, and worldview in the middle of Africa is a distortion of the incarnational principle of mission,”<sup>27</sup> so is the reverse in the West. African immigrant churches must be missional-incarnational churches open to innovation, experimentation, and creativity. A missional church “is careful not to abandon the truth of the gospel nor water down its implications.” This process is called *critical contextualisation*.<sup>28</sup>

The emphasis of African immigrant churches should be on cultural adaptation, but without losing their focus on the eternal goal of conforming to the image of Christ. Contextualisation stresses the importance of “formulating, presenting and practising the Christian faith in such a way that it is relevant to the cultural context of the target group in terms of conceptualisation, expression and application; yet maintaining theological coherence, biblical integrity and theoretical consistency.”<sup>29</sup> Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch highlight that “the seemingly steadfast refusal or resistance by the church to seriously contextualise the gospel is one of its greatest mistakes and will sadly hasten its declining influence on Western society.”<sup>30</sup> African immigrant churches must first examine their host cultures they are trying to reach and contextualise their mission to engage it.

26 Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom*, 366.

27 Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 57.

28 Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping*, 106.

29 Enoch Wan in Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 347.

30 Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping*, 107.

There is also a need for African church leaders and their colleagues in the West to work closely together in cross-cultural partnerships. This will enable them to recognise the cultural differences that make it difficult to understand each other's perspective.<sup>31</sup> Tom Jones observes that, "As culture rapidly changes, the wineskins of yesterday become brittle and unable to hold the new wine of the gospel. We must learn to communicate the gospel in accurate and culturally relevant ways. The methods of the '50s were not sufficient for the '90s, nor are the models that communicated to modernity sufficient for a postmodern context."<sup>32</sup>

In addition, the changing immigration laws in Britain mean that African immigrant churches in the UK will have to find new ways of doing church. The time of "growth-by-migration" have gone. For their churches to continue to exist and grow, African immigrant Christians must connect with the British to effectively share the gospel with them. They have to evangelise the locals. To do this, African churches will have to adapt their messages, worship and preaching styles, mission and evangelism strategies in order to be relevant to Britain. They must find new ways of training up indigenous British leaders to work alongside their African leaders.<sup>33</sup> When planting new churches, they must learn to plant 'local species' in order to produce indigenous churches in the UK. This will enable them to overcome the immigration challenge and avoid extinction.

Samuel Escobar observes that, "On almost every continent, migration movements have brought to cities, and industrial or commercial centres, legions of mission minded lay people from Third World churches."<sup>34</sup> This is an opportunity for partnership in mission. Hardy and Yarnell suggest that the sharp decline in Christianity in the West indicates that the indigenous churches cannot help their own churches thrive.<sup>35</sup> They will need the assistance of the vibrant African immigrant churches, and many other non-Western churches found in Britain today.

In order to overcome the challenge of discrimination, Western Christian leaders must accept that mission is God's invitation to all Christians everywhere to play a role in God's redemptive plan on earth; they must understand that all human beings are foreigners and exiles on earth (1 Peter 2:11). Many

31 Hardy and Yarnell, *Forming*, 82.

32 Tom Jones, "Why Plant Churches?" in *Church Planting from the Ground Up* ed. Tom Jones (Joplin, Mo: College Press Pub. Co., 2004), 98.

33 H. Richard Burgess, "African Pentecostals in Britain: The Case of the Redeemed Christian Church of God," in *African Christian Presence in the West : New Immigrant Congregations and Transnational Networks in North America and Europe*, ed. Frieder Ludwig and J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2011), 268.

34 Samuel Escobar, "Mission from Everywhere to Everyone: The Home Base in a New Century," in *Edinburgh 2010 : Mission Then and Now*, ed. David A. Kerr and Kenneth R. Ross (Oxford: Regnum/Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, 2009), 194.

35 Hardy and Yarnell, *Forming*, 82.

must humble themselves to accept that help is required from their non-Western Christian brothers and sisters to reach out to the unsaved. African church leaders and their Western colleagues need to start speaking boldly about discrimination in their churches. Of course, it will be difficult for many British Christians to accept Africans as missionaries in Britain just as the Africans accepted British missionaries in Africa long ago. However, this is the only way forward.

### Conclusion

This essay has explored three significant adaptive challenges faced by African immigrant churches in their work in the UK. It has also suggested ways in which the churches can become missional and be effective in mission in Britain. The study identified culture, racial prejudice and discrimination, and government policy on migration as the three adaptive challenges that African churches need to wrestle with. To overcome these challenges and avoid extinction, African immigrant churches must revise their mission practices by adapting to their new environment. One could easily argue that the risk involved in breaking down the culture and discrimination barriers are enormous. However, a better understanding of God's mission in our world by both the indigenous people and the African immigrant churches will be helpful. The church must understand that its witnessing to the nations is the very means through which Christ Jesus will bring His light and salvation to the ends of the earth. The issue of discrimination in Western Christianity must be addressed by both the Western and African church leaders. This will enable healthy multicultural relationships and partnerships to be built for mission. The current culturally and ethnically diverse societies demand unity among Western and non-Western churches in mission to curb the rapid decline in Christianity in the West.

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# BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD: MULTICULTURAL CHURCH AS ESCHATOLOGICAL ANTICIPATION<sup>1</sup>

*Roger Standing\**

## **Abstract**

Written out of personal experience from a perspective rooted in the indigenous British church, this paper suggests that intentional working towards a truly multicultural church most closely represents God's intention for His people. In our thinking, experience, and manner of gospel working, we are presented with challenges that need to be addressed and overcome to make this happen. But then, no-one said it would be easy to strive for God's best.

## **My Story**

I grew up in rural Norfolk in a market town with a population of 4000. It was the largest place for over 100 square miles and served a community peppered with small farming villages and hamlets that were much smaller. All the pupils at my Secondary School were white British. For the town as a whole the only people who were ethnically different were those with a strange twang in their voice and unusual customs who arrived from an exotic location in the South, London. Either retiring or seeking a rural lifestyle in which to bring up their children, they were buying houses on the new private estates that were being built in the 1960s and 70s.

The only international exposure I got was at church. The large Methodist Church my family attended was fully committed to overseas missions. An

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1 This is a revised version of a paper originally presented at the 'Partnership in Mission conference' organised by the Centre for Missionaries from the Majority World at Spurgeon's College, London in September 2014.



influential minister while I was in my teens had been a missionary in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), participating in the pro-independence movement and arguing for racial integration. Indeed, as a young teenager I invested my pocket money in supporting one of our older young people who went to the South Pacific for a year on a missionary placement. The church's commitment was engaged and informed, if a little paternalistic. The church Sunday School was well over a hundred strong, and among them were three black children: two were African foster children, living with two spinster sisters; the other was the son of a West Indian RAF Sergeant from the local air base. Kurt was a year younger than me, and my friend. When I started preaching at 16, I studied with his Dad, Wally, who was also experiencing God's call to preach. Together we sat and listened to an LP recording of Dr Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream' speech in our minister's study – a powerful moment.

Why do I share this story? Context is everything and to properly understand and interpret what I say later, you need to know where I have come from. My background in rural England – my home, my school, my church – never led me to conclude anything other than it was completely natural and normal to have a friend who was black and to study alongside a fellow preacher who was black.

Roll the clock forward and in 1990 I became the Senior Minister at West Croydon Baptist Church. One of the things that really excited me about this pastorate was that, depending upon how you counted its community, between a quarter and a third of the congregation were non-white. Shortly after I arrived, in talking with Peter Brierley of the Christian Research Association,<sup>2</sup> he observed that it was one of the most integrated multicultural churches he knew of in the country. Its story is also worth recounting to add to the background of my observations. In the late 1950s and early 1960s it had bucked the trend of church decline, gathering a large translocal congregation centred on biblical preaching. When the time for a pastoral change came in the mid 1960s, conscious of the growing inward migration from the West Indies, the church sought to call a black minister for this predominantly white 500-member church. Being unsuccessful in their search they ultimately called an ex-missionary who had served in Jamaica to be their pastor. The church was intentional in wanting to welcome those who were settling in South London and made strategic decisions to further that intent.

When I arrived in 1990 there was a strong tradition of inclusion in every aspect of the church's life. Three years in we called a minister of Trinidadian heritage to join us and the integration continued to grow as the multicultural life of the congregation was further enhanced by a new wave of African immigration and, indeed, by people from all over the world. For almost a

2 Peter Brierley was responsible for the English Churches Census from 1989–2005, initially with MARC Europe, then, latterly, with the Christian Research Association.

quarter of a century this colleague has proven a close and trusted friend. When I left after eleven years we had in excess of 35 nationalities represented and the congregation was around 40% non-white. But that's to jump ahead of the story.

I want to tell you about Florence. She was a Windrush Generation Jamaican in her sixties. Back home she was a Baptist, but when she arrived in Britain, while she sent her children to church, she didn't really come herself. On reaching retirement age, facing her own mortality, she reconnected with the church she had sent her children to years before, was converted and sought believers' baptism. In this she wasn't unusual; rather she was one of many over the years. She sticks in my mind because on the morning of her baptism, as she shook hands with me at the door, with a beaming smile across her face, she thanked me for what had been a very special service and said, "Roger, this used to be a white church and now it's a black church!" Now that really got me thinking, not least because the church was still 60% white. Clearly what she was saying was something other than a numerical observation – actually I think it was about ethos and culture and belonging. Compared to the formal Baptist hymn/prayer sandwich and long expository sermons of the 1960s, however genuine the welcome was, now the upbeat Spring Harvest style worship, charismatic spirituality and contemporary informality had unconsciously repositioned the church to be much more culturally aligned to those of Caribbean or African heritage. Actually, contemporary Western culture is heavily influenced and shaped by black culture, but that's a digression into cultural hermeneutics rather than an exploration of the vision of a multicultural church.

The other thing to share at this point comes out of the controversial Asylum and Immigration Act of July 1996 which threatened to remove state benefits from most asylum seekers. A Churches Together in Croydon forum was called to address the anticipated avalanche of need. Recognising that the Home Office's national office of immigration, Lunar House, was only three hundred yards away from our church, we thought we might open a drop-in centre. A relatively recent arrival in the church's worshipping congregation had a background in leading community provision through the Co-operative Movement, and she agreed to head up the initiative.

Over the next two years, a clothing store, food bank and access to electrical goods were established alongside links with health, housing and advice services to make the Day Centre a one stop shop. In 1998 there were 1588 new registrations and the Centre had effectively become too big for one local congregation to service. First the other churches of the borough started providing willing helpers and then other local volunteer organisations became involved. It was one of the first such ministries to be established in Britain during the asylum crisis of the late 1990s, and was often held up as a model of good practice for those seeking to establish similar provision elsewhere. The Refugee Day Centre, West Croydon, became a charity in its own right,

with key individuals joining its list of patrons, including the Mayor of Croydon, Cllr Shafi Khan, and the Chairman of the Council of Mosques and Imams in Great Britain, the late Dr Zaki Badawi.

While the Day Centre grew to be an independent body in its own right, it was birthed out of a particular local congregation which already understood and was comfortable in its own internationalism and multicultural nature. That the other churches were ready to step up to the plate and support it when additional help was needed, – and indeed, the churches were by far and away the main providers of support for asylum seekers in the voluntary sector throughout the country – is indicative of the global perspective that abounds in Christian communities.

From Croydon I moved to take on the oversight of 175 Baptist churches centred in Oxon, Berks, Hants and Dorset. This was a wholly different experience. Most of the churches were almost entirely white, even in the urban areas of Oxford, Reading, Southampton, Portsmouth and Bournemouth. Where we did have significant diversity among us was with two mono-ethnic congregations, one Korean and the other South Asian. The latter was a well-established community of first-generation immigrants that had begun to struggle. While I was not closely involved with this fellowship, in hindsight it is clear to me that they had reached the key transitional moment where their rising generation of British-born children were increasingly dissatisfied with an inherited model of church that reflected more closely the culture of the sub-continent rather than their native culture in contemporary Britain.

In 2007 I moved to Spurgeon’s College to lead the teaching of mission and evangelism. Since the turn of the century the College has experienced a significant transition. A generation ago the College mostly only trained Baptist ministers; now Baptist ministerial students are a minority, albeit a significant minority, of the students who are on campus week by week. A large proportion of the student body, Baptist and non-Baptist, are of immigrant background rather than the white British heritage of former years. The College has consciously sought to be inclusive in its worship life, curriculum and overall ethos, typified by my predecessor, Principal Dr Nigel Wright, who liked to acknowledge the College as ‘Bapti-costal’. While this is a journey that the College is still on, we are not the ‘staid, stuffy traditional Baptists’ that the Senior Pastor from a large Pentecostal church who studied with us recently was delighted to discover.

The reflections that follow flow out of this experience where these formative influences and episodes have shaped my life, my understanding of the gospel and my perception of the vision of the Kingdom that is ours in Christ. My testimony is located within a white, Anglo, indigenous narrative of the last half-century that has witnessed the burgeoning of an expression of Christianity in the UK that has its roots in the global South. It is a testimony to an expression of church life that has tended to be more internationalist

in its perspective, more inclusive in its day-to-day life and, if leaning towards a benevolent paternalism rooted in empire, was much more well-meaning, egalitarian and committed to social justice than has been the case in wider British society.

Along the way a growing comprehension of the multicultural aspects of the biblical narrative has both confirmed and focused this direction in my ministry. As the pastor of a multicultural congregation I saw biblical stories in a new light.<sup>3</sup> God called Abraham to be a blessing to the nations (Gen 12:1–3); Moses' second marriage was to a black Cushite woman (Num 12:1); and how could I have missed the place of Africa in the expansion of the Christian community in Acts indicated by the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–39)? Then, of course, there is the heavenly vision of New Jerusalem, where there was

... a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:

‘Salvation belongs to our God,  
who sits on the throne,  
and to the Lamb.

(Rev 5:9, 7:9)

In what follows, my objective is simple and straightforward, in the light of the heavenly vision; understanding the place at which we find ourselves, what should the church of Jesus Christ in the UK do next?

### **Taken for granted**

While there are so many things that could be said, so many worthy and interesting avenues that could be explored, with the limited space available I need to take a number of things for granted. First, I want to take as foundational a *pentecost-shaped eschatological* vision of God's affirmation of our ethnic diversity. It sits in the very nature of the 'good news' itself which is '*panta ta ethne*' (for every people group); it affirms the heart of cultural distinctiveness in the miracle of mother-tongue at the coming of the Spirit (hence Pentecostal); and it is at the heart of the heavenly city where the river of life brings healing to the brokenness, pain and dysfunctionality of all ethnicity rather than washing it away (and is therefore eschatological because of its end times vision).

<sup>3</sup> A more comprehensive account can be found in Malcolm Patten, 'Multicultural Dimensions of the Bible', in *Evangelical Quarterly* 85.3 (2013), 195–210.

Second, it is without question that contextualisation, or inculturation, is a key concept both missiologically and ecclesiologically, and that it is directly relevant here. That is, the need for the gospel to inhabit the culture of those receiving the good news. Several years ago I knew a black pastor who was leading a Pentecostal church plant in South London, which, after ten years, had grown to number 500 members. Their aim was to reach the whole of their community for Christ and the pastor was exercised by the fact that the vast majority of the congregation were 20- and 30-somethings of African and Caribbean heritage. When he discovered contextualisation it was as though scales fell from his eyes and he instantly understood his challenge as they were particularly attuned to young black culture.

Third, that the experience of multiculturalism is predominantly an urban phenomenon. The contemporary sociological commentator, Zygmunt Bauman, highlights a division in society between what he terms mixophilia and mixophobia – those who love multicultural Britain and revel in it, and those who fear it and hate it – observing that the former tend to gravitate towards life in our cities.<sup>4</sup>

Fourth, the identification by Philip Jenkins of the impact of Christianity from the global South on the churches of the North as one of the key issues of the next half century, with the coming together of economic migration, political upheaval and reverse mission.<sup>5</sup>

And finally, David Goodhew's observation in his recent edited volume, *Church Growth in Britain*, that the growing migrant churches are beginning to move out of the cities and into towns along key travel corridors like the A1 and East Coast mainline, following the expansion of lively entrepreneurial business development.<sup>6</sup>

### **A vision of the New Jerusalem**

That said, what inspires me, what I work for, and what challenges me is the vision of the New Jerusalem, of the worshippers of the Lamb, ethnically healed and before the throne, worshipping and serving God together, rich in their diversity but one functional and functioning community. If we are to work for the Kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven, this is God's vision for us. In our generation migration and globalisation make this more of a possibility than perhaps at any other time in history, but at this particular moment in time we are far from the realisation of God's best for us.

So, let me name the glaringly obvious implication of this, my 'elephant in the room'; mono-ethnic churches are much less than God's best. I do think

4 Zygmunt Bauman, *On Education: Conversations with Riccardo Mazzeo* (London: Polity, 2013), 1–6.

5 Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, 3rd edition (Oxford: OUP, 2011), 201–236.

6 David Goodhew, ed., *Church Growth in Britain* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 8.

that they are understandable and comprehensible. They are understandable for expatriate communities because as ‘aliens in a foreign land’ it is always about our roots and our identity in shared culture, a common first language and a familiar worldview; it is about solidarity, strength in numbers and the opportunity to organise when you are a marginalised and discriminated-against minority. If I were living in another country that was wholly different from the UK, I can see the powerful attraction of an expatriate congregation. This is completely intelligible because it is human nature. We appreciate being among people like us – PLUs as a friend of mine calls them.

If this is our natural default position it may seem that the heavenly vision is just that; only realisable in glory; but that would be a counsel of defeat and a rejection of a godly pursuit of a holy vision that actually is realisable through the powerful enabling of the Holy Spirit.

### **Rising to the challenges**

I am convinced that local congregations are the fundamental building blocks of the Kingdom, and are far more influential catalysts of the Kingdom than denominational hierarchies, summits of leaders or national initiatives. So, in exploring the challenges that are presently before us, I will unashamedly do so from the perspective of a local congregation pursuing this heavenly vision of a multicultural church. In doing this we will discover challenges in our thinking, in our experience and in our action.

### *In our thinking . . .*

With regard to our thinking I have two things to be rejected and two things to be embraced. First, we need to reject overly simplistic narratives of why mono-ethnic churches exist in contemporary Britain. Rather than being prima facie evidence of either institutional racism or an unwillingness to integrate, they are the fruit of a complex interplay of a variety of legitimate cultural, social, geographical, theological and practical issues rooted in difference. However, that there is evidence of racism and exclusion on the part of the indigenous Christian community is not in dispute, and that there is a separateness on the part of migrant churches who, even though they use the buildings of an established indigenous church, appear to be very unwilling to share Christian fellowship at any depth with their host, is also without question. Where the reasons for separation are misdiagnosed, inappropriate responses to the presenting symptoms are inevitable.

Of course, mono-ethnic congregations thrive as they do because a mono-ethnic approach has a proven track record of success. This is entry-level Church Growth theory from the 1970s, “the Homogeneous Unit Principle,” an ecclesiological strategy based on the common insight that “birds of a feather flock together.” This is the second thing that needs to be rejected.

Widely discredited, we need to continue to resist it too because its fruit, for all its success, does not bear scrutiny against the vision of the heavenly city. Indeed, it will actively keep us apart and work against God's best for us. It panders to our human nature, to join with the PLUs, and as seductive as it is to see success as a sign of God's blessing, success is no arbiter of either spiritual or ethical fidelity, which is why Jeremiah exclaims, "Why does the way of the wicked prosper?"

The "Homogeneous Unit Principle" is insidious though; even an apparently mixed congregation can be seduced into the multicultural compromise that owns a common denominator, single culture – whether reductionist or aspirational – rather than a celebration and affirmation of diversity. It is our differences in understanding that are the first part of our thinking that we need to embrace. Our cultural and theological worldviews are different. African honouring of ancestors and Muslim openness to the spirituality of dreams have much to contribute to a Western Christian spirituality steeped in rationalism. But then, it is possible to love the Lord our God with all our mind too, and to study for a PhD in a confessional context and remain faithful to Christ. Such differences easily keep us apart; therefore we need those skilled in helping us interpret ourselves to each other and to learn to integrate our respective insights.

We also need to acknowledge and own that the rising generation does not mirror either the understanding or the experience of their parents. In a society that is committed to multiculturalism, mono-ethnic churches will increasingly seem anachronistic and out-of-step with everyday life and experience. Vulnerable to being perceived as backward-looking and out of touch, such churches run the risk of alienating young people with a different experience of contemporary Britain.

Of course, there is an opposite trajectory in play too. British-born youth in migrant communities can, in a quest to discover their roots and identity, fall prey to radicalising influences that take them in a wholly different direction. While, to date, this has only emerged within the Muslim community as some of their young people have espoused *jihad*, what if a similar call came from so-called Christian internet preachers for recruits to join a Christian army to fight a holy war against Islamists who were murdering Christians and committing sacrilegious atrocities? Jenkins has already speculated about 'the next crusade' and explored the possibilities of religious conflict over the coming half-century, especially in those countries with large numbers of Christians and Muslims like Nigeria.<sup>7</sup> From a UK perspective, the possibility seems a lot closer in 2015 than it did in 2002 when the first edition of his book was published.

It is sobering to note the observations of those who have reflected on the tragedy of the Tutsi and Hutu atrocities in Rwanda and Burundi in 1994. How could this have happened in the wake of the much-celebrated East African

7 Jenkins, *Next Christendom*, 201–36.

Revival of the late 1920s–1930s? Maggy Barankitse, founder of Maison Shalom in Burundi, observed that Christianity had accommodated itself to the primacy of ethnic identity, leaving the African values of community and solidarity vulnerable to subversion by the forces of hatred and revenge. The challenge she identifies is one of raising children beyond the story of ethnicity, where they embrace a bigger vision, and their identity is rooted in a Christian understanding of love.<sup>8</sup> For Rice, the 1994 genocide testifies to the inability of both Western missionary institutions and indigenous church leaders to see beyond superficial understandings of church growth, and the failure to be a prophetic presence in the midst of, “. . . tit-for-tat violence, colonial power, . . . social privilege, and the *tribalization* of the church.”<sup>9</sup>

Genuinely multicultural churches affirm the cultural tradition of all who are part of their community, while, at the same time, present a biblical vision that resists the demonising of others on the basis of ethnicity, and they value all people of all nations as they are valued by God and are the focus of God love and concern. Nationalistic convictions within the indigenous community also come under the scrutiny of gospel inspired multiculturalism. Those who seek to enlist the historic faith of these islands as some kind of theological bulwark against immigrants in general and people of colour in particular, will find the throne of grace an uncomfortable location before which to appear. There is no room for the sentiments of “little Englanders” where the gathering includes those “. . . from every nation, tribe, people and language.” Once again, a truly multicultural church affirms our ethnic identity, but places it within an inclusive, diverse and affirming vision of God’s eternal plan for humanity.

*In our experience . . .*

To these challenges to our thinking must be added challenges that confront our experience. While I want to reject the narrative that paints all indigenous churches as relationally and institutionally racist, the experience of discrimination, abuse and rejection is both real and painful. This can neither be ignored nor glossed over. Like brambles in a garden, if it is not rooted out it will continue to choke growth and inflict further pain and injury. God’s genius is that the “good news” of the Kingdom provides the way to freedom. Sin requires repentance, that complete change of thinking and reorientation to the truth that is liberating. And forgiveness itself liberates those who have

8 Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 174–76. See also, Emmanuel Z. Kopwe, “Mediation Between Ethnic Groups: The Rwanda and Burundi Experience,” in *Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation*, eds. Robert Schreiter and Knud Jorgensen (Oxford: Regnum, 2013), 184–90.

9 Chris Rice, “Cape Town 2010: Reconciliation, Discipleship, Mission, and the Renewal of the Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”, in *Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation*, eds. Robert Schreiter and Knud Jorgensen (Oxford: Regnum, 2013), 5.



been sinned against, releasing them from living in the present under the shadow of the past with its debilitating and undermining influence.

Then, just to further raise the bar, it is hardly surprising that the experience of our congregations is also likely to mirror that of our wider society. From ingrained and deep-seated attitudes that have been inculturated from birth, to contemporary political commentary, prejudice needs exposure to the gospel and truth to bring transformation. Similarly, the temptation to make premature and stereotyped judgements needs to be resisted. The white elderly lady not well-versed in expressing her ideas in the language of racial equality may appear racist when there is not a discriminatory bone in her body. Or the Iranian living in B&B accommodation with his family may not be a benefit scrounger at all; rather, he may be an asylum seeker whose English is not at the required level of competence and is not yet allowed to practise as a doctor even with his years of experience.

*In our action . . .*

Challenges in our thinking, challenges in our experience; there are challenges to how we act too. The first one is perhaps the most significant, and it has to do with intentionality. Being in partnership and working for a multicultural expression of faith is not easy; it is hard work. The default position is to stick with what we know, to remain where we are comfortable, to live and move and breathe within our own networks. There is never enough time to do everything that we want. There are never enough resources to facilitate every opportunity, so it is always easier for things to remain as they are. Only concerted and intentional action will overcome this challenge. A colleague who pastored a multicultural church for twenty years reflects that you cannot minimise how difficult working to this end is. It is disturbing because it takes everyone out of their comfort zone, and to be genuinely multicultural partners requires self-sacrifice from everyone; self-sacrifice because whenever another voice is heard, mine has to be silent; self-sacrifice because, if not, what results is not integration but assimilation of one by the other.

With our active partnering too there needs to be recognition that existing organisational and institutional infrastructures always best reflect a previous reality and therefore, as a matter of course, advantages the insider over the outsider. As a nonconformist working ecumenically alongside Anglicans, I have been on the wrong side of such disadvantage on many occasions. Working systems are always on catch-up; this is not a reason to write them off, just to recognise that they always need vigilant attention from those living inside them to ensure that they remain inclusive and responsive to change and therefore “fit for purpose.”

So, if these are some of the key challenges before us, how do local churches go about building partnerships and become a genuine expression of a truly multicultural church? While those with more translocal roles have the

responsibility to help shape thinking, encourage activity, and release resources, it is the local congregations where the real and important action is.

Theorists might call the next step “dialogical activism.” The Victorians, more practically, called it “the fellowship of activity.” It is how the ecumenical movement made unprecedented advances in the life of local churches during the twentieth century in the UK. That is, we engage in conversation, build relationships and establish partnerships by doing things together. For a local congregation it almost certainly means joining their local Churches Together group, or participating in initiatives like Street Pastors, food banks and debt counselling initiatives. For groups and networks of churches it means not doing separately what we can do together, thus modelling leadership that embodies the Kingdom values that we are committed to and to which we aspire.

So, in my own area of work this means looking to see how we can provide shared training for mission and ministry. Given the journey the Lord has taken us on over the last decade we have already revised our curriculum as a confessional college and how we talk about what we do and how we do it. There is conscious self-sacrifice here; Spurgeon’s College is not as “Baptist” as it was, but it is a much richer learning and discipling environment as a consequence.

In other areas we could talk about collaborative church planting; hospital, prison, and commercial chaplaincy; a combined approach to community prayer cover and a whole raft of other possibilities. Rather than just hiring the premises of established Anglo congregations, why should an African church not look to a closer partnership and cooperation? What about shared intern or gap-year initiatives that have added value through being collaborative? Or projects working towards community empowerment and social transformation that have much greater credibility from a broader community base? In this way, maybe an interim stage in the development of our partnership in the gospel can develop by this mutuality of action. The vision of the heavenly city can therefore be embedded not only in our thinking, but in our experience and action; a commitment to Kingdom building rather than empire building, however sincerely construed the latter might be.

### **Conclusion**

If the vision of the people of God worshipping before the throne of God is our eschatological destiny, we have a God-given responsibility to seek for God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. I have argued above from my own experience and observation that this has challenges for our thinking, our experience and our action.

In our thinking we need to reject simplistic accounts of mono-ethnic churches – i.e. racist attitudes or unwillingness to integrate – and the seductive lure of filling our churches with “people like us.” By contrast, in embracing the insights of those who have a different cultural and theological worldview

to our own, we enrich our discipleship and deepen our spirituality. Recognising that the rising generation lives in a different world from that which formed us also enables us to meet them where they are, as well as helping to protect them from those who would use “faith speak” as a means for their own political or ideological ends.

In our experience we need to recognise and deal with racism, discrimination, abuse and rejection at the cross of Christ. Repentance and forgiveness bring new life. We also need to constantly take account of how our wider social context impacts the experience and understanding of our congregations and the temptation to make premature and stereotyped judgements must be resisted. We need men and women who can interpret our differences to each other.

In our action, building multicultural expressions of church will always be the harder path, and, of necessity, therefore needs a high degree of intentionality and perseverance. It will require self-sacrifice, but is best built incrementally through “the fellowship of activity,” rolling up our sleeves and doing things together.

David Shosanya likes to talk about the British church scene as a central heating system, and how the boiler house heat of “Majority World” churches is disconnected from the pipes and radiators of the indigenous church that are installed around the country. “Our challenge”, he says, “is to hook them up so that the whole house can be heated.”<sup>10</sup> I agree, and it starts by catching a vision of the heavenly city and then being intentional in making our local churches an anticipation of heaven on earth.

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<sup>10</sup> Roger Standing, *As A Fire By Burning: Mission as the Life of the Local Congregation* (London: SCM, 2013), 70.

# MISSION IN A STRANGE LAND

*Cathy Ross\**

## **Introduction**

In this paper I am indebted to Professor Mbiti whose work was invaluable to me as a preparation to living and working in Rwanda, Congo and Uganda.

Preparing this paper has caused me to reflect on issues of home, identity, migration, hospitality, strangeness, otherness, and Christianity in a strange land. This contribution will be a personal one – I am not an expert on the issues of African diaspora. I have lived in Africa in the countries mentioned above and I have enjoyed reading books and articles by Harvey Kwiyani, Babatunde Adedibu, Chigor Chike, Afe Adegame and others on this subject and I commend them to you. Clearly, I cannot write as a person of the African diaspora and I hesitate to comment on the experiences, joys and challenges in that respect. But I will offer some thoughts and reflections (and many questions) from my perspective and try to make some connections; others may of course make completely different connections and meanings from what I offer.

Firstly I would like to reflect on identity as a migrant. I myself am a migrant; from my accent, most people assume I am from Australia. I am not! I am from Aotearoa, New Zealand. Why does that annoy and upset me so much that people make that common mistake? Sometimes I actually feel quite enraged by it. Why? Does it matter?

I suspect others may have had similar experiences; perhaps it is assumed that a person is simply from Africa without differentiating all the different African countries and therefore both the person and the whole continent is homogenised!

I now have dual nationality; I have both UK and Kiwi passports. I sat the citizenship test and used to know such things as how many hours 12 year olds are allowed to work on Sundays, when Hogmanay is celebrated, and that the UK football team is not important to the people of the UK because

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there is no such thing as the UK football team! This was a trick question! My two most intimidating and literally sweat-inducing experiences were my two visits to the Home Office in Lunar House in Croydon to extend my visa. Eventually, four years ago, after living here for six years, I was grateful to receive my UK passport – no more dealings with the Home Office. I am now a citizen of the UK. Is this now home? Well . . . yes. Where is home? Home is where my family is. Where are my family? My children are here, my extended family (parents, in-laws, cousins, aunts, uncles, etc.) are in New Zealand. So where exactly is home?

Recently, an Englishman told me that he thought if I had become a citizen of the UK and really wanted to be at home here and belong to this country, then I should give up my NZ citizenship, to which I immediately replied that if I had had to do that, then I would not have taken on British nationality. Later, as I reflected on this uncomfortable encounter and challenge, I asked myself why it so important that I am and remain a New Zealander and that I insist on that, while at the same time wanting to adopt British nationality? Surely my identity lies in being a child of God and ultimately it does not really matter whether I am British or Kiwi.

I think it does matter. God, in wisdom and goodness, has created us British, Kiwi, Kenyan, Nigerian, Ghanaian, Ugandan, Malawian, etc. For good or for ill, our homeland, or native country, is important. It has shaped and formed us, nurtured us or possibly scarred us. It may be a place we remember with yearning and longing or it may be a place we were glad to leave behind, but it has shaped us.

So our particularity does matter. The incarnation is a testimony to this. God became a human being at a particular time and place, in a particular culture. Migration is a good way to understand the incarnation as Jesus crossed borders to be incarnate among us. God enters the human condition – that broken and sinful territory – in order to help us find our way home to God, our ultimate home. One of the paradoxes of the incarnation is that while human migration may tend towards upward mobility (although not always; there are millions of forced migrants and displaced peoples), divine migration was about downward mobility (Phil: 2: 5–11).

“Scripture depicts the movement of a people toward a promised land, but God’s movement is just the opposite; it is an immersion into those territories of human life that are deprived of life and prosperity.”<sup>1</sup> And so the incarnation challenges much of the current rhetoric around migration because the incarnation and the cross are a challenge and are offensive to many contemporary values in society. Groody reminds us, “It [the incarnation] offends precisely because it brings into question the disordered values of a society that has lost its sense of *imago Dei* . . . The incarnation moves people beyond

1 Daniel Groody, “Crossing the Divide: Foundations of a Theology of Migration and Refugees,” Crowther Centre Monograph, March 2010, 17.

a narrow, self-serving identity into a greater identification with those considered ‘other’ in society . . .”<sup>2</sup>

Whatever one’s nationality status, whether a permanent resident, on a temporary visa, with adopted citizenship, or British-born, many people are migrants of one sort or another; and of course all are pilgrims, as this earth is not our final destination. The pilgrim-migrant spectrum is an interesting one to reflect on as all are somewhere on that spectrum.

The problem with national identity arises if we elevate it above our relationship with God in Christ and with one another as pilgrims. A central dimension of Jesus’ mission is that of reconciliation, which challenges our tendencies to idolise state, nationality, religion or a particular ideology. All these can be used as forces to exclude or alienate, and of course, ultimately we are citizens of another Kingdom which has already begun here and now. We are sojourners and pilgrims, new creations in Jesus Christ, and whose citizenship is in heaven. This understanding is a challenge to move beyond an identity based on narrow national or geographical definitions and holds out the possibilities of more expansive, spiritual understandings and definitions. It is also a challenge to let go of any forms of ideological, political, social or religious provincialism and invites us to live in a world shaped by God’s mission.

But what does all this mean in the meantime? We live in the meantime – in the already but not yet – the Kingdom of God is here but not yet in its fullness. How do we live as migrants, pilgrims and foreigners in this strange land? What gifts do we bring? I would like to consider a few polarities here: insider/outsider or resident alien; guest/host; single/multiethnic. I would like to look at this positively; that as migrants and citizens we can bring gifts and offer something positive to the country in which we currently live.

### **Insider/outsider**

Whether guests, exiles, migrants, sojourners or citizens, this is where God has placed us to live for God’s glory at this time and place. Those at this conference are uniquely placed in this regard; for most here know that we are outsiders; this is not our native country and context; even those born in Britain have been exposed to cultures and contexts, longings and aspirations, that come from other lands. However, many, including myself, who have been here for some time, may consider themselves both insiders and outsiders at the same time and that gives a particular location and perspective to the culture and context.

Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, in an excellent essay entitled “Letting Go and Speaking Out: Prophetic Dialogue and the Spirituality of Inculturation,” remind us that “the outsider has to practice a particular form

2 Groody, “Crossing the Divide,” 19.

of spirituality that revolves around the asceticism of ‘letting go’<sup>3</sup> so that we, as outsiders, do not hinder the expression of a genuinely contextualised expression of the faith. This will mean really listening and being attentive so that we can begin to understand this culture and context. Listening and attentiveness are hard work. Good listening requires humility, vulnerability, availability, receptivity and patience. Being a good listener means being attentive. Attention and attentiveness are absolutely necessary for outsiders.

Attentiveness to context also requires the gift of sight. Bevans and Schroeder quote a Ghanaian proverb, “the stranger has eyes like saucers, but doesn’t see anything!” We also need the gift of sight. This is a gift of the Holy Spirit, as John Taylor reminds us.<sup>4</sup> The Holy Spirit is the ‘Go-Between God’ who opens our inward eyes and makes us aware of the other. “The Holy Spirit is that power which opens eyes that are closed, hearts that are unaware and minds that shrink from too much reality.”<sup>5</sup> An example is the Good Samaritan who refused to pass by or pretend that he had not *seen* the wounded man. His compassionate actions crossed ethnic boundaries, caused him personal cost and inconvenience and saved a life. When we see the other person, we see the image of God, as well as our common humanity, which establishes a fundamental dignity, respect and common bond. And of course, it is interesting for us to note that the Good Samaritan was the outsider in that story – he was not a member of the native culture.

Bevans and Schroeder offer a further challenge:

Outsiders need to let go of their certainties regarding the content of the gospel. They need to let go of cherished ideas and practices that have nourished and sustained them in their own journeys toward Christian maturity. They need to let go of the symbols that anchor them in their human and Christian identity and let go of the order that makes them comfortable.<sup>6</sup>

Bevans and Schroeder are North Americans, writing from a particular location in the world normally associated with power, status and affluence. In writing this, they probably had in mind mission from the West to the Rest. The dynamics are different here in the UK – sometimes known as mission in reverse (an expression with colonial overtones) or “The Empire Bites Back.” Different power dynamics are at work when Africans who come to live in the UK engage in mission; it is very different from the days of the British Empire; there is not the complicated and ambiguous relationship with

3 Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue, Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2011), 91.

4 John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God, The Holy Spirit and Christian Mission* (London: SCM, 1975), 19

5 Taylor, *The Go-Between God*, 19.

6 Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 92.

colonial authorities, the territorial and one-directional approach to mission, the support of parachurch structures, the perceived attitudes of cultural superiority. Africans offer a focus on spiritual power, a strong belief in the supernatural, a moral and ethical conservatism, a clear belief in the authority of the Scriptures, a sensibility towards injustice and a communal apprehension and realisation of the Christian faith. These may be gifts and fresh insights that can help us to reimagine not only the Christian faith in Britain, but also the place of Britain within world Christianity.

However, letting go is a challenge for those who are not native to this culture and context. What understandings and practices of the faith have we brought with us that we might need to let go for the sake of spreading and embedding the gospel in this context? What exactly are our sacred cows? Each one will be able to think of things from his or her own particular culture and context; but here I will quote some of Harvey Kwiyani's ideas. He states that many African Christians find it hard to make their church cultures open to Westerners:

While there is great passion and fervour in the way most Africans pray and minister, the impact can also be lost in translation. For instance, most Africans are used to worship services that take two to three hours. For many Westerners who are used to shorter worship services, this is a huge barrier [ . . . ]. Many African immigrant ministers preach their long sermons in a very African style – spiced with vernacular jokes and delivered with shouting and sweating. Most Westerners who appreciate shorter, well-prepared sermons delivered in a talk/presentation style find these African tendencies offputting. Africans end up raising barriers to their own effectiveness – barriers that separate insiders from outsiders.<sup>7</sup>

Bevans and Schroeder then go on to challenge insiders in a particular culture to listen and speak out from their own cultural context.

Even more than outsiders, insiders need to develop the skills of really seeing and listening to the culture. What is needed is to develop a kind of 'x-ray vision' by which they can begin to see the ways that God is present and active in their situation, and the values in their culture or context that might even add to the entire church's understanding of the gospel.<sup>8</sup>

So what might British insiders claim are gospel values found in this culture? And what might we, as semi-insiders, want to offer to the culture? One idea

7 Harvey C. Kwiyani, *Sent Forth, African Missionary Work in the West* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2014), 151.

8 Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 96.



that strikes me is the longing for community. African cultures are well known for the concept of *ubuntu*: I am because we are. How does that mesh with a British understanding of community? What sort of fusion could we create there?

Another way of looking at this might be to think of ourselves as ‘resident-alien’, a term that is picked up in 1 Peter. Being a resident-alien can allow for insider and outsider status simultaneously and can offer both dialogical and prophetic approaches. It may also be a more inclusive way of considering this. Emma Wild-Wood writes, “Exploring the idea that we are strangers together in the world, however short or long we may have lived in a particular nation, may allow us to think beyond the categories of migrant, native, guest, host with which we often live.”<sup>9</sup> I believe that a resident-alien spirituality does require that outsiders’ experiences and practices of the Christian faith are heard and appreciated and, where possible, find a place in the life of the church. Being a resident-alien may not always be comfortable but it will be a reminder of our pilgrim status. Perhaps a resident-alien spirituality will be a more attractive and winsome approach to mission if it can model humble listening and attentiveness to culture and context, reconciliation, compassion, and openness to difference.

### Guest/host

The whole guest/host conundrum is a fascinating study for Christian mission. Who is the guest and who is the host? This very question is demonstrated and incarnated in the life of Jesus.

Jesus is portrayed as a gracious host, welcoming children, tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners into his presence, and therefore offending those who would prefer such guests not be at his gatherings. But Jesus is also portrayed as a vulnerable guest and a needy stranger who came to his own but his own did not receive him (Jn. 1:11). Pohl comments that this “intermingling of guest and host roles in the person of Jesus is part of what makes the story of hospitality so compelling for Christians.”<sup>10</sup> Think of Jesus on the Emmaus Road as a travelling pilgrim and stranger, recognised as host and who he was in the breaking of bread during a meal involving an act of hospitality. Or think of the Peter and Cornelius story (interestingly, another story involving varieties of food) – who is the host and who is the guest? Who is the insider and who is the outsider? Both offer and receive; both listen and learn; both are challenged and changed by the hospitality of the other. So we can see the importance not only of the ambiguity but also the fluidity and reciprocity/mutuality of the host/guest conundrum. We offer and receive as

9 Emma Wild-Wood, “Mission, Ecclesiology and Migration,” in *Mission on the Road to Emmaus, Constants, Context and Prophetic Dialogue*, eds., Stephen Bevans and Cathy Ross (London: SCM, 2015), 64.

10 Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Eedrmans: Grand Rapids, 1999), 17.

both guest or stranger and host. In fact, strangers may actually enhance our well-being rather than diminish it. The three major festivals of the church – Christmas, Easter and Pentecost – all have to do with the advent of a divine stranger. In each case this stranger – a baby, a resurrected Christ and the wind of the Holy Spirit – meets us as a mysterious or strange visitor or guest, breaking into our world, challenging our worldviews and systems, and welcoming us to new worlds.<sup>11</sup>

Quaker scholar and educationalist, Parker Palmer, provides a reminder of the importance of the stranger in his intriguing book, *The Company of Strangers: Christians and the Renewal of America's Public Life*. Our spiritual pilgrimage is a quest, a venture into the unknown, away from safety and security into strange places for if we remain where we are, we have no need of faith. The visitors to Abraham and Sarah and the stranger on the Emmaus Road brought new truths to their lives. According to Palmer, we need the stranger. In his view, “the stranger is not simply one who needs us. We need the stranger. We need the stranger if we are to know Christ and serve God, in truth and in love.”<sup>12</sup> For him hospitality is:

inviting the stranger into our private space, whether that be the space of our own home or the space of our personal awareness and concern. And when we do, some important transformations occur. Our private space is suddenly enlarged; no longer tight, cramped, restricted, but open and expansive and free. And our space may also be illumined . . . Hospitality to the stranger gives us a chance to see our own lives afresh, through different eyes.<sup>13</sup>

So the stranger, the other, becomes a person of promise. The stranger may be unsettling; the stranger may challenge or provoke us; the stranger may provide a wider perspective. Remember the injunction from the book of Hebrews, “Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it” (Heb. 13:2). Strangers save us from cosy domesticity and force us out of our comfort zones. Strangers may transform and challenge us. “Hospitality to the stranger gives us a chance to see our own lives afresh, through different eyes.”<sup>14</sup>

This is where the idea of hospitality as a metaphor for mission is so powerful. Israel experienced God as a God of Hospitality. Stories of hospitality are foundational to their very existence and identity. These stories of

11 See John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality, Partnership with Strangers as Promise of Mission* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 5.

12 Parker Palmer, *The Company of Strangers: Christians and the Renewal of America's Public Life* (NY: Crossroad, 1986), 131.

13 Palmer, *The Company of Strangers*, 132.

14 Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 6.

hospitality contain themes and tensions which resonate through the centuries – stories of hospitality received and hospitality abused. The well-known story of Abraham and Sarah welcoming three strangers brought them good news and bad in the context of their hospitality. The guests confirmed they would have a son in their old age but they also warned Abraham of the impending destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Hospitality was considered an important duty and often we see the hosts becoming beneficiaries of their guests and strangers. So Abraham and Sarah entertained angels in Gen 18; the widow of Zarephath benefited from Elijah’s visit (I Kings 17); and Rahab and her family were saved from death by welcoming Joshua’s spies (Josh 2). Pohl remarks in her superb book on hospitality, *Making Room, Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, “The first formative story of the biblical tradition on hospitality is unambiguously positive about welcoming strangers.”<sup>15</sup>

So what does this mean for us? Are we guest or host? Are we strangers to be welcomed or hosts offering hospitality? And of course, this is where hospitality as a metaphor for mission becomes so intriguing and compelling:

Hospitality questions one’s way of thinking about oneself and the other as belonging to different spheres; it breaks down categories that isolate. It challenges and confuses margins and centre. Hospitality involves a way of thinking without the presumption of knowing beforehand what is in the mind of the other; dialogue with the other is essential . . . To welcome the other means the willingness to enter the world of the other . . .<sup>16</sup>

Of course this is the magic of mission and the challenge of the gospel; when we encounter the other as guest or host; insider or outsider (like Peter and Cornelius); when we engage in deep listening; then we too are transformed and changed. We learn new things about ourselves and about the gospel; the whole guest/host idea begins to break down and becomes much more fluid and blurry as we learn from and relate to one another in mutual exchange and reciprocity. A good example of this was when the first Church Mission Society missionaries arrived in Aotearoa, New Zealand 200 years ago. One Māori bishop recently reminded us that the first missionaries ‘were hopelessly outnumbered, and utterly dependent on the gracious hospitality that was being extended to them by Māori.’<sup>17</sup>

One final thought on this concerns food and the meal table; it is a great way of learning and relating. Eating together is a great leveller; it is something that we all must do so it has a profoundly egalitarian dimension. Jean Vanier,

15 Pohl, *Making Room*, 24.

16 Lucien Richard, *Living the Hospitality of God* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000), 12.

17 Archbishop Brown Turie, <http://www.anglicantaonga.org.nz/Features/Extra/Reflection>.

of l'Arche community, writes about when he started to share meals with those with serious mental disabilities: 'Sitting down at the same table meant becoming friends with them, creating a family. It was a way of life absolutely opposed to the values of a competitive, hierarchical society in which the weak are pushed aside.'<sup>18</sup> When we eat together, as we let down our guard and share stories, we begin to create relationships and this is at the heart of mission – our relationship with God and neighbour. In a unique moment in the book of Ephesians we see Jews and Gentiles, insiders and outsiders, hosts and guests, coming together. The test of their coming together in the church, in the household of God, was the meal table; the institution that once symbolised ethnic and cultural division now became a symbol of Christian living. It is this experience that was reproduced at Antioch, Jerusalem, and other places as 'one of the most noticeable features of life in the Jesus community,' for 'the followers of Jesus took every opportunity to eat together.'<sup>19</sup> Imagine how we could celebrate with all the marvellous foods and traditional dishes from our various countries – what a fusion and feast of food and relationships could be had around the table.

### Single culture/multiethnic

These terms are slippery. What might look like a single culture congregation to an outsider may in fact have many different cultures within it. What is our vision for the Kingdom of God and human flourishing? I think we gain a glimpse of this in Rev. 7:9: "a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people and language standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb."

The recent WCC Statement, *Together Towards Life*, affirms the following:

More than ever before, local congregations today can play a key role in emphasizing the crossing of cultural and racial boundaries and affirming cultural difference as a gift of the Spirit. Rather than being perceived as a problem, migration can be seen as offering new possibilities for churches to re-discover themselves afresh. It inspires opportunities for the creation of intercultural and multicultural churches at the local level. All churches can create space for different cultural communities to come together and embrace exciting opportunities for contextual expressions of intercultural mission in our time.<sup>20</sup>

18 Pohl, *Making Room*, 74.

19 Emanuel Katangole, "Mission and the Ephesian Moment of World Christianity: Pilgrimages of Pain and Hope and the Economics of Eating Together," *Mission Studies*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2012, 189.

20 *Together Towards Life*, 75.

<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/mission-and-evangelism/together-towards-life-mission-and-evangelism-in-changing-landscapes>.

“Intercultural and multicultural churches” – this sounds like the vision in Revelation, but is that what we see around us? I think we see a variety of approaches and models when it comes to churches with diaspora Christians. We see single culture churches, churches with different cultures, or different cultural congregations meeting in the same building or venue at different times.

It may well be that a single or similar culture church is helpful and appropriate. It can offer support and understanding for those newly arrived who are struggling to settle into a new context. Emma Wild-Wood writes sympathetically and with great insight on this:

Single/similar culture congregations often act as a refuge from a hostile or bewildering environment, providing a place to be oneself, to learn news from home, or send remittances to family members. Gender and generational expectations, which may be inverted by new work patterns, can resume a familiar pattern in the church. Members can give and receive advice on the destination culture: for those migrating from the global south to the north this might include how to deal with an individualistic ethos when one is accustomed to family- or community-centred ethics, how to use technological advancements, or adapt to a market economy, or comprehend the competing claims of freedoms and rights.<sup>21</sup>

This may be a necessary stage and a place of healing and wholeness for those who are experiencing dislocation. These churches can offer a place of love and support while enabling adaptation to the new environment. This may all be legitimate if the aim is to offer welcome, a safe haven and pastoral care. This is especially important for first generation migrants but it becomes more complex for the second and especially third generations.

Multicultural congregations can also take a variety of forms. Some may have one or two cultures, such as Methodist churches in London which have white British members and members who originate from Ghana or Zimbabwe. These African members may organise themselves into fellowship groups along linguistic lines. Others may have a majority from one country with smaller numbers from a variety of other countries. The WCC statement affirms, “All churches can create space for different cultural communities to come together and embrace exciting opportunities for contextual expressions of intercultural mission in our time.”

Multiethnic congregations do have the potential to offer a prophetic role model to our society; but the place of culture and the variety of the migrant experience varies enormously. Some congregations may emphasise Gal 3:28 as a plea to ignore and overlook difference. However, this then can become a way to favour the majority, silence the ethnic minorities and perpetuate

21 Wild-Wood, *Mission*, 58.

power imbalances and injustice. And yet how can one be so inclusive as not to be chaotic? Assimilation may be practised and welcomed . . . or it may not. Assimilation can be both positive and negative. It may in fact be easier and more comfortable to celebrate the plurality of cultures rather than address tensions that can arise from difference and dislocation. This is where hospitality becomes important, but again cultural expectations around this may need careful negotiation and explanation.

### Conclusion

Going back to Rev 7, this is a wonderful vision of all the ethnic groups around the throne; all different cultures, languages, ways of speaking; different ethnic origins. And who exactly are these people in this passage? According to Rev 7:14, “they have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” This must have been such an encouraging vision for those early persecuted Christians – a vision to give them a future and a hope. These early Christians, who had been scattered, persecuted and had struggled, many of them of course from different parts of the Roman Empire, were given this glimpse of a future reality. And it was not only a future reality but also a partial reality even then. This song was sung out of suffering and tribulation; the references to ‘no more hunger’, ‘no more thirst’ and ‘no more tears’ bear testimony to that. The vision is one of glorious diversity and difference, a vision that does indeed acknowledge our differences and particularities, as well as acknowledging the suffering that may have been endured. We know that for many Christians in our world, suffering is part of their daily existence, whether through forced migration, poverty, systemic injustice or persecution. We also know that ultimately, our citizenship is in heaven, our identity is in Christ, and we can rejoice in the gifts that our particular ethnic identities can offer.

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# MISSIONAL STRATEGIES FROM ANTIOCH: LESSONS FOR AFRICAN MISSIONARIES IN BRITAIN

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to critically evaluate church planting strategies of African missionaries in Britain in the light of the first-century model church in Antioch. This paper will consider in depth four fundamental missional questions about the Antioch multiethnic church planting strategy from its inception: (1) Who planted the Antioch church? (2) Who was it for? (3) Who were their partners? (4) What was the church plant for? These same questions will be considered in the context of African missionaries grappling with *missio Dei* and the anthropological reality of liminality in the diaspora. A trinitarian missiological framework will be used to examine African missionaries' practice of ministry in their contexts. The missiological implications of the ministry practice will also be explored.

**Key words:** Diaspora, Antioch, African missionaries, multiethnic, monocultural, strategies.

## **Introduction**

The Acts 11 narrative of the Antioch church carries significant implications for church planters of all generations. The story that begins in Acts 11:19 is a direct continuation of the narration of the scattering of Christians from Jerusalem following Stephen's martyrdom – a scattering that spread the seeds for Christian mission to the Gentiles in the first century (Acts 8:4). The Antioch mission is significant because it marks the breaching of the geographic,

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cultural, and ethnic barriers by the spreading of the good news about the Lord Jesus to the ends of the earth. A similar biblical missional model of articulating the Christian faith in the twenty-first century is necessary in a plethora of cultures in post Christendom Europe. The same God who revealed himself and his *missio Dei* in unexpected ways to the Antioch missionaries can encounter diasporic missionaries in the midst of the complexity and diversity of Britain today.

### God's Missional Agenda

The theme of witness in the New Testament, particularly in the Gospel of John, is closely linked to the concept of 'sending' and 'being sent'. The Father is the sender (John 3:17; 5:36; 6:57; Gal. 4:6; 1 John 4:9); the Son is "sent by the Father to testify about the Father and to do his work"<sup>1</sup> (Matt. 10:40; John 4:34; 20:21); the Holy Spirit, according to Timothy Tennent, is the empowering presence of the *missio Dei*<sup>2</sup> (Acts 1:8; 13:1–2); and "the mission of the church flows from the mission of God and the fulfilment of God's mandate."<sup>3</sup> It is this inextricable connection between the Trinity and mission through the church that frames God's redemptive missional agenda. The expression of the missional movement of Acts comes from a missionary God. However, the template of reproduction – *missional discipleship* – was already spelt out in Matthew 28:16–20. Of course, at the beginning of the Acts narrative, when the Christian movement was operating within the ethnic and religious confines of the Jewish people, the inclusive and transcultural dimensions of the gospel were not apparent.<sup>4</sup> The extremely complex ethnic world of the first century is demonstrated by the multiplicity of nations gathered in Jerusalem for the Jewish Feast of Pentecost in Acts 2.

Luke, the Gentile physician (Col. 4:14), narrates the irresistible force by which the gospel spread throughout the Roman Empire from its exclusively rural Jewish beginnings to an inclusively significant Gentile movement reaching across geographic, theological, and ethnic barriers. The Acts 11 paradigmatic account reveals a successful cross-cultural mission of the Hellenistic Jews, who crossed boundaries to preach to the Gentiles in

- 1 Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*. The Bible Speaks Today Series, ed. Derek Tidball (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 84.
- 2 Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-First Century*. Invitation to Theological Studies Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2010), 402.
- 3 Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 67.
- 4 Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 30–31.

Antioch, and serves as a basis for a twenty-first-century multiethnic church-planting model in the diaspora.

### **Church Planting Strategies of African Missionaries in Britain**

Postmodern Britain has experienced a mushrooming of African immigrant churches whose presence is arguably beginning to translate into a positive although marginal influence in society in general.<sup>5</sup> Most of these daring African church planters in Britain remain unknown in literature reviews and public forums. In his article, *The Rise of Black Churches*, published in David Goodhew's *Church Growth in Britain*, Hugh Osgood identified five church planting strategies that shape the Black church's multiethnicity or lack thereof.<sup>6</sup> He categorises the church planting strategies as follows: (1) *constrained to plant* – commonly used by the West African church planters, predominantly students, planting churches to meet the spiritual, social, and cultural needs of their nationals in the diaspora; (2) *sent to plant* – this strategy is a pragmatic response of the African church to diasporic missional opportunities in Britain by sending their missionaries to provide culturally relevant pastoral care to their members; (3) *transferred to plant* – this strategy refers to African missionaries initially *sent to plant* but later breaking away from their original denominational allegiances to plant independent ministries on their own; (4) *trained to plant* – this strategy is a missiological shift in that African missionaries enrol for theological training in Britain in order to prepare themselves solely for church planting in the diaspora; (5) *called to plant* – this final strategy refers to African missionaries who have stepped out in faith in response to the call of God without any mandate from denominational headquarters or in some cases even without training in ministry.

Having explored the various strategies used by Africans to plant churches intentionally or spontaneously and recognising the phenomenal increase of diaspora churches in Britain despite the racial, cultural and social barriers, we will now scrutinise four fundamental questions about the church planting strategies of the Antioch church with a view to informing the African missionaries who are known for their “strong church-planting mind-set.”<sup>7</sup>

5 See Harvey C. Kwiyani, *Sent Forth: African Missionary Work in the West*, American Society of Missiology Series, (Maryknoll, Orbis, 2014). Also see Roswith Gerloff, “The African diaspora and the shaping of Christianity in Africa: Perspectives on religion, migration, identity and collaboration,” *Missionalia* 38, no. 2 (2010): 311–312.

6 Hugh Osgood, “The Rise of Black Churches,” in *Church Growth in Britain: 1980 to the Present*. Ashgate Contemporary Ecclesiology Series, ed. David Goodhew (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), 110.

7 Osgood, *The Rise*, 124.

## Four Fundamental Questions about the Antioch Church Planting Strategy

### 1. *Who Planted the Antioch Church?*

The church in Antioch was planted by a group of immigrants from North Africa and South Eastern Europe (Acts 11:19–20). One of the major characteristics of these immigrants was that they had had a significant *spiritual experience* from a city-shaking revival in Jerusalem. Peskett and Ramachandra contend that the Antioch mission “was not a result of some grand missionary strategy on the part of the Jerusalem church.”<sup>8</sup> These unnamed men were running for their lives after Stephen’s martyrdom sparked a persecution of the followers of Christ.

The Antioch church planters were *ordinary unknown believers* with no professional church planting experience or certification. They were only followers of Christ coming from a church that was theologically enlightened in the apostles’ doctrine, prayer, fellowship and the breaking of bread. The two key attributes that these accidental church planters had from the Jerusalem experience was a passion for Jesus and the fire of evangelism – missional zeal! They did not start a church and then follow it with mission. They started with *mission* and then founded a *church* in the process.

Charles K. Barrett<sup>9</sup> and John Stott<sup>10</sup> are of the view that the term *hellenistas* (Hellenists) in Acts 11:20 contextually refers to Gentiles, in contrast to the *Jews* in Acts 11:19. The dispersed Jews understood the Greek language and culture. Hence they became known as *Hellenistic* (meaning Greek-cultured or Greek-speaking) Jews.<sup>11</sup> According to Ben Witherington III, *hellenistas* are Greek-speaking Gentiles.<sup>12</sup> In Antioch, there was an ethnic as well as a linguistic adjustment to the message preached by the church planters. The *messiah* (a title that the Jews would have understood) became the *kyrios* (meaning ‘Lord’, a title applicable to Caesar); thus, the message was delivered in a way more suitable and comprehensible to the Greek-speaking audience. The bicultural Hellenistic Christians from Cyprus and Cyrene were used by God to proclaim the good news about the Lord Jesus to the Gentiles in Antioch. Paul M. Kisau<sup>13</sup> is of the view that “[T]he Lord approved of their

8 Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 77.

9 Charles Kingsley Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Shorter Commentary* (London: Clark, 2002), 173.

10 John Stott, *The Message of Acts*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Nottingham: InterVarsity, 1991), 202.

11 Martin Hengel, *Earliest Christianity: Containing Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity and Property and Riches in the Early Church* (London, SCM, 1986), 71.

12 Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Social-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 369.

13 Paul Mumo Kisau, “Acts of the Apostles,” in *Africa Bible Commentary*, ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Nairobi: WordAlive, 2006), 1321.

mission – and a large number of Greeks believed and turned to God” because “the hand of the Lord was with them” (Acts 11:21). The scale of the evangelisation of Gentiles in Antioch was something markedly new in the missionary enterprise of the early church thus far, and news of this instant success reached the Jerusalem church.

As African missionaries in the West, it is important that attention be directed at the kind of church planters undertaking the task of planting a church. A sombre reflection on what they bring into Europe by way of spiritual intensity and maturity, theological grounding and cultural competence in terms of adaptability and relevance of practices of ministry is necessary. Competence in budgets and administration is good, but it is not enough. Missionaries must also carry the presence of God and God’s *missional heartbeat* for the nations. The Lukan narrative in Acts 11 on how the Antioch church began points to the fact that God can use anyone who is available and willing to take a risk with God’s assignment.

## 2. *Who was the Antioch Church for?*

The unnamed ordinary laymen, scattered as a result of the persecution in Jerusalem, travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, but their missionary activity was exclusively limited to the Jews in dispersion.<sup>14</sup> It was at Antioch where the new Christian community was formed. The *location* of this new church plant was very strategic. Antioch was an important commercial and religious centre of the Roman province of Syria, located on the Mediterranean coast with an estimated population of half a million people.<sup>15</sup> It was the third largest city of the Roman Empire, cosmopolitan and a commercial hub for the entire region.<sup>16</sup> Both Charles Barrett<sup>17</sup> and F. F. Bruce<sup>18</sup> cite Josephus in stating that the largest concentration of Jewish people living in Syria congregated in Antioch.

‘Antioch the Beautiful’ was known as such, with its theatres and sports stadiums built under Augustus and Herod.<sup>19</sup> With such facilities Antioch could have hosted the Olympic Games. However, Antioch also had its dark side. It was known for its immorality. The city matched Corinth as a hub

14 Paul Pierson, *The Dynamics of Christian Mission: History through a Missiological Perspective* (Pasadena, CA: WCIUP, 2009), 26.

15 Howard I. Marshall, and David Peterson, eds. *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 201.

16 Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 366.

17 Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 173.

18 F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*. New London Commentaries (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1977), 224.

19 Roger S. Greenway and Timothy M. Monsma, *Cities: The Missions’ New Frontier* (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker, 2000), 54.

for degeneracy.<sup>20</sup> It had political prestige. The Roman poet Juvenal wrote about Antioch at the end of the first century, accusing the city of being one of the sources of corruption in Rome.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, in spite of its moral bankruptcy, God had other plans for the city of Antioch. If God had a city church in mind, then he had to break the racial, cultural, ethnic, and class barriers in order to reach all kinds of people resident in or visiting Antioch.

Initially, the Antioch church planters' evangelism strategy was what Peter Wagner<sup>22</sup> calls 'monocultural evangelism', also referred to as 'selective witness' by Kisau,<sup>23</sup> in that they preached the good news to Jews only. They did not go outside the insular view of the religiously Judaistic Jerusalem church. Similarly, many African churches in Britain have used this strategy. For instance, the West African church planting in the 1980s was spearheaded by students who, on completion of their studies in Britain, felt constrained to plant a church. Their initial vision and mission strategy was to intentionally evangelise the first generation diaspora in their own language, liturgy, and cultural mannerisms.<sup>24</sup> However the *constrained-to-plant* model that was used tends to function from an 'external authority structure.'<sup>25</sup> Most of those churches had their leadership managed from Africa where their headquarters were, and this leadership style has proven to be difficult and generally unsuccessful when it comes to engaging in mission in Britain.

### 3. *Who were the partners of the Antioch Church?*

The church in Jerusalem was very important at the time in the development of the Antioch church. It provided apostolic authority, foundational doctrine and ecclesiastical catholicity. Barnabas was sent from the Jerusalem church to assess the Antioch mission (Acts 11: 22–24). The choice of Barnabas is also significant. It communicates the depth and insight of the Jerusalem church as well as the role of the Holy Spirit in the development of the Antioch story. The arrival of a man of Barnabas' stature in character and spiritual authority was instrumental in bringing a great number of people to the Lord

20 Norman E. Thomas, "The Church at Antioch," in *Mission in Acts: Ancient Narratives in Contemporary Context*. The American Society of Missiology Series, eds. Robert L. Gallagher and Paul Hertig (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 146.

21 Thomas, "The Church at Antioch," 146.

22 C. Peter Wagner, *Acts of the Holy Spirit: A Modern Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Ventura: Regal, 2000), 243.

23 Kisau, "Acts of the Apostles," 1321.

24 Anderson Moyo, *The Audacity of Diaspora Missions* (Saarbrücken: LAP LAMBERT, 2015), 85.

25 An external authority structure has to do with denominational control of a local church by a related but external governing structure. Also, Michael O. Emerson and Karen Chai Kim, "Multiracial Congregations: An Analysis of Their Development and a Typology," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42, no. 2 (2003): 222.

and shaping the mixed church in Antioch. Barnabas, “a good man full of the Holy Spirit and faith,” was bicultural and therefore culturally competent. He probably knew some of these church planters from his home country of Cyprus.<sup>26</sup>

This aspect of the first-century mission narrative in Acts can be compared to twenty-first-century African church planting strategies in Britain. JoAnn McGregor, writing about the associational links that Zimbabweans in the diaspora still maintain with their homeland, observed that the Roman Catholic Church of Zimbabwe and Zimbabwe Methodist Church send senior church ministers to give spiritual leadership and pastoral care to their branches in Britain and thereby strengthen their presence in the diaspora community.<sup>27</sup> Using Osgood’s categorisations, the senior ministers could be considered as *sent-to-plant*.<sup>28</sup> This category has some similarities to the sending of Barnabas to Antioch to give spiritual leadership to the new church plant. However, the Zimbabwean partnership of the Roman Catholic and Methodist churches maintained *monoethnic evangelism* strategies that have confined them to exclusively reaching Zimbabweans in the diaspora. Herein marks a departure from the Antioch model of church planting in the diaspora.

The rapid growth of the church in Antioch was such that Barnabas needed extra help in teaching the new converts about their newly found faith and life in the Lord Jesus. Barnabas needed the right kind of person for this level of responsibility, suitable for the ethos and vision of the fledgling multiethnic *ekklēsia* in a major strategic Graeco-Roman city.<sup>29</sup> He was presumably given authority to bring in partners of his own to Antioch based on his assessment, and he chose Saul of Tarsus, who is later called Paul.<sup>30</sup> Like Barnabas, Paul was a bicultural Hellenistic Jew, a Roman citizen highly schooled in Judaistic theology and Greek philosophy, and most importantly, spiritually regenerated and a devout follower of Jesus Christ. Paul already understood multiethnicity because of his upbringing in Tarsus. He brought a gift mix of teaching, pastoring and discipleship to partner Barnabas in pastoring this new fledgling church.

26 Barnabas was a Cypriote Jewish Christian (Acts 4:36) as was Mnason (Acts 21:15) who was one of the early disciples, and Paul travelled to Cyprus in his missional journeys (Acts 21:3 and 27:4). Cyprus was a Mediterranean island in Asia Minor located between the coasts of Cilicia and Syria. Mal Couch, ed. *A Bible Handbook to the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1998), 289.

27 JoAnn McGregor, “Associational Links with Home among Zimbabweans in the UK: Reflections on Long Distance Nationalisms,” *Global Networks* 9, no. 2 (2009): 201.

28 Osgood, “The Rise,” 110.

29 Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 240.

30 The dramatic conversion of Saul on his way to Damascus, and God’s call on his life to be an apostle to the Gentiles, was known to Barnabas, as narrated in the ninth chapter of the book of Acts.

Barnabas and Paul received a ministry team from Jerusalem which included prophets, mentioned in Acts 11:27 for the first time in the New Testament. This mention of prophets in connection with the church of Antioch is significant; the Antioch church welcomed the prophetic ministry of inspiration and foretelling the future.<sup>31</sup> Prophetic words were acted upon and served to build closer ties between the homogeneous Jerusalem church and the multiethnic Antioch church; this was a demonstration of partnership. John Stott's comment on the reference to saints in Jerusalem as 'brothers' (11:27) is that it signified the family of God as a fellowship of Jews and Gentile believers and a practical demonstration of Antioch's Christian commitment.<sup>32</sup> These types of partnership shaped the church in Antioch – the church that impacted the city and the world through the missionary work of Barnabas, Paul, and their companions, planting ethnically diverse churches and reflecting the trinitarian movement of diversity-in-unity and unity-in-diversity of mission.

### Strategic Partnerships

The potential positive outcomes of partnership between African diaspora churches in Britain and British churches are grossly underrated. In order to become cross-culturally appealing, the diaspora church in the Western world needs to develop strategic partnerships without the colonial paternalistic tendencies of the traditional mission models. Enoch Wan defines strategic partnerships as a unique opportunity to work with the triune God in partnerships between various types of Christian organisations, host churches and diaspora churches; these partnerships are employed to supplement traditional missions as a mission strategy for ministering through and beyond the diaspora.<sup>33</sup> The building of strategic partnerships with churches and networks in the host land serves as a channel for adapting worship styles, leadership composition, and even theology, to match their new cultural contexts.

Strategic partnerships between the African diaspora churches and both the sending churches from Africa and the receiving churches in the West could be a progressive development for the global church movement. Opoku Onyinah, commenting on Ghanaian diaspora churches, argued that over-centralised administration, imposition of external forms of worship, and traditional training models of missionaries has a negative impact on diaspora church growth because 'the mother church does not allow each overseas

31 The exercise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit was an accepted feature in the apostolic church and is widely recognised in the Pauline letters (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:10, 28; 14:29; Eph. 4:11).

32 John Stott, *The Message of Acts*. 206.

33 Enoch Wan, ed. *Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice* (Portland: Institute of Diaspora Studies, 2011), 153.

branch to develop along its own local cultural context and milieu.<sup>34</sup> Steven Ybarrola points out a further complication for those diaspora churches that maintain a strong identification with, and are hugely influenced by, the home church. These strong ties inadvertently keep the diaspora mission effort less effective, and less adaptable because of the perception of ‘foreignness’ in the new diaspora context.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, strategic partnerships built on a *relational paradigm* (meaning emphasis on relationships)<sup>36</sup> with the local British churches will benefit the African diaspora churches in understanding their new context. The white majority churches can tap into the missional zeal and vision conveyed by the African missionaries who echo a *strong church-planting mind-set* that needs to be reoriented towards planting multiethnic churches using the Antioch church planting strategy.

#### 4. What is the Antioch Church Plant for?

The entire mission to the Jews and Gentiles alike in Acts was predominantly instigated, directed, and motivated by the Holy Spirit (Acts 11: 21, 23, 24, 26, 28). God’s fingerprints are prodigiously evident in the new multiethnic church plant in Antioch. David Bosch makes a valid point in stating that the same Spirit who empowered Jesus (Luke 25:49; Acts 1:8) was upon the disciples and thrust them into mission.<sup>37</sup> Darrell Guder points out that from the outset God gave the Spirit to empower the apostolic community gathered in Jerusalem and to contextualise the gospel into particular cultures as they formed missional communities across the known world.<sup>38</sup> The implication for diaspora faith communities is to realise that the Spirit of God is a missionary Spirit, active not only in the eschatological *ekklēsia* but also in

34 Opoku Onyinah, “Pentecostalism and the African Diaspora: An Examination of the Missions Activities of the Church of Pentecost,” *PNEUMA* 26, No. 2 (2004): 239.

35 Steven Ybarrola, “Anthropology, Diasporas, and Mission,” *Mission Studies* 29, no. 1 (2012): 87.

36 “Relational paradigm” is a term used by Enoch Wan anchored on the fact that humans were created in the image of God and human existence (ontologically) is solely dependent on God at all times (Gen, 1:26–27; Rom 11:36; Heb 1:3). The ability to know (epistemologically) and the undertaking of missions (*missio Dei*) are all dependent on God. In Western society today, a lack of ‘relational reality’ resulting from a plethora of factors, such as dysfunctional families, has made it extremely necessary to rediscover ‘relationality’ (love your neighbor) in Christian faith and practice. See Enoch Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*, 143–144.

37 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 113.

38 Darrell Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 231.



the world today, including what Israel Olofinjana and others refer to as the ‘dark continent’ of Europe.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, diasporic church planting mission is inadequate and ineffective without the ministry of the Holy Spirit. As the followers of Jesus moved out in cross-cultural witness, following persecution in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit worked in and through them to promote God’s redemptive purpose beyond Jerusalem. The preeminent role of the Holy Spirit in the planting of the church in Antioch was noticeable and God’s intentions were unmistakable – God was breaking cultural, social, and theological barriers in order to establish a multiethnic missionary model church free from domineering control by the Jerusalem church. God’s purpose for the Antioch church was to reach the city of Antioch in all its diversity and socio-economic strata.

### External Authority Structures in Diasporic Missions

The emergence of African churches in the Global North is unprecedented in its magnitude and missionary zeal. Nonetheless, the mission of God cannot be taken for granted given that Europe is a fast-growing ‘mission field’.<sup>40</sup> The churches planted by African Christians must reflect that demographic reality and missiological imperative of reaching people who are without Christ, regardless of their race, background or culture. The issue of an external authority structure is typically common in denominational churches and can be distinctly overbearing in African diaspora churches planted as *branches* of the homeland ministry. However, there are positive merits of linkages with the African-based denominational headquarters, such as vivacity and dynamism in the global *spiritual marketplace*.<sup>41</sup>

Consequently, the tenacious challenge for most African diaspora churches that are denominationally submitted to an external authority structure in Africa is negotiating the degree of independence in making decisions for a local context in the diaspora that may or may not be fully grasped by their authorities elsewhere. This challenge is common in Osgood’s *constrained-to-plant* category where African churches in the diaspora are enthusiastically supported by a denominational structure located in the homeland.<sup>42</sup> In such cases, the church plant is essentially expected to maintain a homogeneous denominational membership that has migrated to the diaspora. The initial

39 Israel Olofinjana, *Reverse in Ministry and Missions: Africans in the Dark Continent of Europe* (Milton Keynes: Author House, 2010), 2.

40 Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-First Century*, Invitation to Theological Studies Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2010), 321.

41 Afe Adogame, “The Quest for Space in the Global Spiritual Marketplace: African Religions in Europe,” *International Review of Missions* 89, no. 354 (2000), 400.

42 Osgood, *The Rise*, 110.

vision and mission strategy in terms of language, liturgy, and culture is intentionally targeting the first generation migrants. Churches of this nature have served an important role for the African diaspora community by conveying a sense of belonging but are not relevant to the cultural context of the host community that is predominantly British. Therefore the fundamental question of who the church plant is intended to reach has a significant bearing on the identity and composition of African diaspora churches.

*The Antioch Church Leadership Mix*

For the Antioch church, the ethnic mix of the leadership team was a reflection of who the church was meant to serve (Acts 13:1–3). The Antioch church leadership team was made up of prophets and teachers from the diaspora: Barnabas (a Jew from Cyprus); Simeon called *Niger*<sup>43</sup> (the black African from northern Africa); Lucius from Cyrene<sup>44</sup> (a North African); Manaen<sup>45</sup> (an Asian from Palestine who may have been brought up with Antipas, Herod the tetrarch, implying he was economically stable); and Paul (a Jew from Tarsus, Asia Minor) (Acts 13:1). Writing on Antioch’s connection to Africa, Tokunboh Adeyemo noted that “the church in Antioch had two black men in its leadership”, referring to Simeon and Lucius.<sup>46</sup> This five-man leadership team, according to John Stott, ‘symbolized the ethnic and cultural diversity of Antioch’ and was vital to unity and the effective functioning of the church serving in a multiethnic context.<sup>47</sup>

*The Need to Self-theologise*

The above four mission-questions must be used to generate answers for the church, and not vice-versa. If the church is meant to grow, then the ‘three-self’ principles must apply in the medium to long term: *self-propagating*, *self-financing*, and *self-governing*. In the postmodern era, because of the complexity of the societies we live in and the diversity of churches, we need to add the fourth one; *self-theologising*. Paul Hiebert defined self-theologising as ‘critical contextualization’ (seeing the gospel as outside culture, but from God to all people in all cultures).<sup>48</sup> The need to self-theologise came historically from the rise in anthropology as an accompanying subject to

43 Witherington, *The Acts*, 392.

44 Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 260.

45 Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 216.

46 Tokunboh Adeyemo, *Is Africa Cursed? A Vision for the Radical Transformation of an Ailing Continent* (Nairobi: WordAlive Publishers, 2009), 27.

47 Paul G. Hiebert, *The Message of Acts*, 216.

48 Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 64.

missiology, as well as from the growing awareness of the impact of culture on theology. This is particularly essential to cross-cultural church planting.

This concept of self-theologising has major implications for diaspora missions, particularly for leaders *transferred to plant, trained to plant, and called to plant*. Some of the implications relate to the pressure of missional relevance to the contextual framework of postmodern Europe, particularly in the face of such pressing issues as gay rights, euthanasia, care for the aged, drug and substance abuse, child discipline, race relations, and in some cases, women's ordination. Newly arriving African missionaries find secularised Western society daunting. Making matters worse, their mother churches in Africa are unable to fully comprehend the context, and thus the need to give their diaspora branches room for self-theologising and ministry practice. As Lesslie Newbigin argues, the question of biblical authority is at the very heart of the African missionaries' gospel in contemporary Western culture.<sup>49</sup> However, the interpretation of the Bible in the diaspora is often out of context.

Although the Antioch church maintained an apostolic relationship with the Jerusalem church, it was a Holy Spirit-filled *self-theologising* community on local and translocal issues that had wider missional and theological implications, such as the inclusion of Gentiles into God's eschatological community by grace alone (Acts 15). In the significant Acts 15 narrative, Luke records the early church practising contextual theology on the issue of Gentile-inclusion anchored on the progress of the Gentile mission.<sup>50</sup> The Antioch church sent Paul, Barnabas, and others to Jerusalem to resolve the issue (15:2). Outstanding, in my opinion, is the role of the key players in the process of contextual theological reflection and discerning God's will for the situation by leadership teams from both Jerusalem and Antioch. Flemming notes that the outcome of the Acts 15 theological process 'is a beautiful picture of a unified body marked by mutual respect . . . the mother church in Jerusalem shows remarkable pastoral concern for the Gentile believers.'<sup>51</sup> The issue in Acts 15 was not merely about governance as portrayed by an external authority structure, but was about resolving a contextual theological crisis that required a broader ecclesial consultation for the sake of fellowship and diversity, in order that God's mission may advance to all nations. African missionaries can frame their own mission questions and contribute to global mission by planting multiethnic churches firmly grounded on a theological framework that reflects the social, religious and economic realities they live with as migrants. Diasporic missiology is therefore much more than planting a church while ignoring the contextual particularities and global complexities of the twenty-first-century mission field.

49 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK, 1991), 95.

50 Flemming, *Contextualization*, 43.

51 Flemming, *Contextualization*, 52.

**Framework for understanding diasporic missions**

The four fundamental strategic questions discussed above can be contextually understood by examining a diasporic missional framework for the practice of ministry. Enoch Wan and Sadiri J. Tira describe diasporic missiology as a twenty-first century missional framework for understanding and participating in *missio Dei* among people dispersed from their original homeland.<sup>52</sup> Mission scholars propose this emerging paradigm as an alternative to traditional missiology that is territorially unidirectional when it comes to the sending and receiving of missionaries.<sup>53</sup> Generally speaking, diasporic missiology emphasises holistic mission in a multidimensional approach that contextually assimilates evangelism and social concern. For example, a local diaspora church I am a part of in Sheffield had a heart to reach the marginalised in society such as asylum seekers and refugees. Our outreach strategy started with meeting the physical needs of this particular marginalised community and then sharing the good news with those willing to hear and appropriate it.

Wan’s framework for diasporic missions (which I have adapted for this essay) is useful and applicable to the practice of ministry for African missionaries seeking to have an impact on British society and beyond as summarised in figure 1 below.

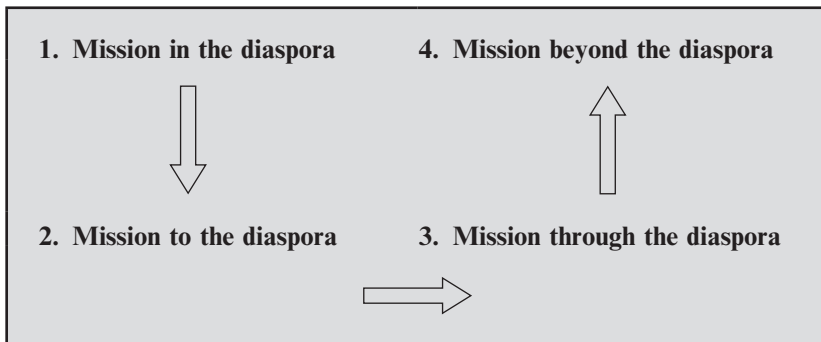


Figure 1 The four-dimensional framework for diasporic missions.

Enoch Wan’s original framework for understanding diasporic missions has three dimensions.<sup>54</sup> However, when I carried out some research among Zimbabwean diasporic churches in Britain, I came up with a fourth one, which I inserted at the beginning of the other three dimensions of Wan’s

52 Enoch Wan and Sadiri J. Tira, “Diaspora Missiology and Missions in the Context of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” *Torch Trinity Journal* 13, no. 1 (2010): 46–47.

53 Wan and Tira, “Diaspora Missiology,” 148–149.

54 Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*, 138–139.

framework.<sup>55</sup> The first dimension in the framework in figure 1 is *mission in the diaspora*. The starting point of an African missionary in the diaspora is to build a social network of mainly other immigrants from the homeland and to begin meeting in a house as a small group. This approach is characteristic of the *constrained to plant* category discussed earlier. Many African diaspora churches started in this manner. Churches in this dimension are modelled by the monoethnic Jerusalem church in Acts 2 in the sense that it was predominantly Jewish in composition. The authority structure of a new church plant in the first category functions from a ministry head-office based in Africa. An example of a church headquartered in Africa with branches in Britain include Forward in Faith Ministries International led by Archbishop Ezekiel H. Guti in Zimbabwe.<sup>56</sup> Other popular examples include the Lighthouse Chapel International founded by Bishop Dag Heward-Mills in Ghana, and the Living Waters Global Churches presided over by Bishop Bernard Nwaka in Zambia.

The second dimension is *mission to the diaspora*. This dimension has a clearly defined homogeneous church strategy for planting churches, and the church planted is an end in itself. Homogeneous churches start primarily for cultural reasons because of social and cultural realities in the diaspora that influence the first-generation migrants.<sup>57</sup> Theological and missiological impulses only come in later, if they do at all. When planting churches, this model depends extensively on a minister sent from the homeland church to minister to members in the diaspora. Denominations like the Zimbabwe Methodist Fellowship UK, the Zimbabwe United Methodist Church UK and the Zimbabwe Roman Catholic Church UK, received ministers from Zimbabwe to offer pastoral care and ministerial services for their membership in the diaspora.<sup>58</sup>

The third dimension is *mission through the diaspora*. This group of diaspora churches have extensive mission statements based on a theological understanding of an inclusive missional framework. The diaspora faith community is prepared and mobilised through discipleship to reach out to other racial and ethnic groups, as was the case in the Antioch church. The mission strategies of such diaspora churches include social engagement as an avenue

55 Anderson Moyo, *The Audacity of Diaspora Missions: The Antioch Multiethnic Church-Planting Model for African Reverse Missionaries in Post-Christendom Britain* (Saarbruken, Germany: LAP LAMBERT Publishing, 2015), 125.

56 Forward in Faith Ministries International (FIFMI) is the largest and oldest Pentecostal denomination in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe Assemblies Of God Africa (Zimbabwe's local FIFMI brand) is one of the largest Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe and FIFMI (its international brand) claims to be well established in over 104 countries, including the UK, USA, Australia, Ukraine, Malaysia and China as well as several African countries. <http://www.fifmi.org> [accessed March 2013].

57 Moyo, *The Audacity*, 155.

58 McGregor, "Associational Links," 201.

of building channels to the host community. This is an effective strategy for building social bridges to evangelise host communities. In his research on the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Richard Burgess observed a correlation between churches involved in social action and their capacity to overcome structural and institutional barriers of racism compared to those that kept to their homogeneous settings and remained segregated.<sup>59</sup> Engagement with society is one of the major strategies which could significantly change the practice of ministry for African missionaries in Britain.

The final dimension is mission *beyond the diaspora* characterised by a multi-ethnic leadership mix that is pragmatically mobilising for a global impact. While in the previous dimension, the multiethnic model is at its formative stage, in this fourth dimension it has matured and is articulated using a global vision through the mobilisation of the diaspora church modelled in Acts 11 and 13 by the Antioch church. The disciple-making process is inclusive of different ethnicities and contextually adaptable at a global scale. A global diaspora ministry such as The Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for All Nations in Kiev, Ukraine, led by Pastor Sunday Adelaja, is arguably operating in this fourth dimension.<sup>60</sup>

For African churches in the diaspora, mobilisation of the first, second, and third generations may be the strategic shift that needs urgent attention and pragmatic action. Generally, the missional response of African ministers in Britain has resulted in the establishment of mainly two church types characterised by homogeneity and multiethnicity. Homogeneity (comparable to the monocultural Jewish Jerusalem congregation) corresponds with the first and second dimensions of the diaspora mission framework discussed above. Multiethnicity (comparable to the multiethnic Antioch congregation) corresponds with the third and fourth dimensions.

The implication of this framework for church-planting strategies in Britain is that African missionaries have made remarkable progress in *ministering to* the African diaspora. This may be because of liminality since they are living in between cultures and are thus often marginalised by the receiving country.<sup>61</sup> However, the missiological issue is whether ministry to African immigrants is practised as a means to a goal of motivating and mobilising them (*ministering through and beyond*) to be multiethnic and multiracial or as an end in itself as an African homogeneous unit (*ministering to them*). Disciple-making is one of the key elements for consideration in changing the

59 Richard Burgess, "African Pentecostal Spirituality and Civic Engagement: The Case of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Britain," *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 30, no. 3 (2009): 264.

60 Asamoah-Gyadu, J. Kwabena, "African Initiated Christianity in Eastern Europe: Church of the Embassy of God in Ukraine," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 30, no. 2 (2006): 73.

61 Ybarrola, "Anthropology" 84.

practice of diaspora ministry because it is effective in mobilising boundary-crossers for missional impact in multiethnic Britain.

It is highly likely that the Antioch church leadership considered these four (and others) fundamental missional questions in depth. Barnabas was the bridge by which the Jerusalem church validated the Antioch church plant, helping it produce some of the most prolific church planters the world has ever seen – like Paul. The watershed moment of the Gentile missionary enterprise happened at the Jerusalem Council of apostles and teachers from Jerusalem and Antioch where the outcome had far-reaching theological and missiological implications (Acts 15).

One of the implications of the outcome of the Jerusalem Council was that the gospel advanced incrementally from its Jewish heritage in Jerusalem to a multiethnic inclusivism modelled first in Antioch.<sup>62</sup> “The missiological breakthrough in Antioch,” writes Timothy Tennent, “shows that it is not merely a geographic progression that the [Great Commission] envisions but an ethnic, cross-cultural progression.”<sup>63</sup> In essence, he is arguing that mission is not about a *place* but fundamentally about *peoples*. Henceforth, the centre of missionary activity in Luke’s narrative shifted from the Jerusalem church to the *multiethnic* Antioch church that was predominantly Gentile in composition. Barnabas and Paul were sent out as missionaries from this church (Acts 13:1).

### **The Relevance of the Trinitarian Framework to Missiology**

The theology of the triune God of mission is coherent with the Bible that upholds diversity and celebrates multiple human cultures while preserving the non-negotiable and transcultural core of the Christ-centred gospel. The Acts 11 narrative on the expansion of the church to the Gentiles in Antioch is a biblical basis for cross-cultural mission anchored on the trinitarian understanding of a missionary God whose eschatological family is portrayed as a tapestry of multiethnic faith communities in fulfilment of God’s original plan (Rev. 5:9, 7:9, 10:11, 11:9, 13:7, 14:6, 17:15). The inextricable link between the trinitarian doctrine of unity-in-diversity and the theology of multiethnic churches manifests itself in the plurality of the body of Christ. Antioch was the experimenting ground for Paul’s teaching and application of foundational Christology (the person and work of Jesus), which determined his Spirit-led missiology (*missio Dei* – the purpose of God and God’s people) and therefore was able to engage in fruitful ecclesiology (form and function of the church). Christ is the foundation for any church plant. Our theology has to be right here because the key question is not primarily what kind of

62 Flemming, *Contextualization*, 31, 34.

63 Tennent, *An Invitation*, 150.

church are we planting, but what ‘seed’ are we planting? From this seed the life-giving gospel is preached, resulting in a God-centred mission-shaped church that is led by mission-minded leaders.

In his response to the *Mission-Shaped Church*, John Hull makes a valid point about the church deriving its very existence from *missio Dei*, and its inextricable link to the trinitarian framework which essentially models diversity-in-unity and unity-in-diversity.<sup>64</sup> Creation reveals God’s affirmation of diversity and therefore mission to a diverse world justifiably necessitates a diverse church. Thus African missionaries migrating to Europe need to respond to a missional opportunity to plant new churches that are noticeably different but spiritually refreshing and firmly grounded in *missio Dei*. The possibility of a resurgence of Christianity in Europe and North America depends on models of multiethnic congregations that are living examples of authentic reconciling faith communities. The *ekklēsia* is where the theological implications of the biblical truth of the cross of Christ demolishing all barriers between God and people of all ethnicities, reconciling them to the triune God and to each other, becomes a reality in the power of the Holy Spirit. The picture of the end time church is that depicted by the Antioch church-planting model that defied exclusivity of worship and stratified status-conscious society by becoming a thriving multiethnic witnessing faith community.

### Conclusion

As African diaspora churches emerge in the West, they need to embody the convergence of a triad of theology, mission, and anthropology as an ideal phenomenon that needs to be undergirded by a sound biblical worldview.<sup>65</sup> The twenty-first-century demographic reality of a growing migrant population represents the most important new wave of future missionaries to the Global North – Christians from the Majority World crossing cultural and religious boundaries with the gospel.<sup>66</sup> It is in this light that the response of African diasporic churches to the four fundamental questions of strategic church planting can contribute significantly to developing the first-century multiethnic Antioch church model for effective diasporic mission in the twenty-first century in Britain.

64 John M. Hull, *Mission-Shaped Church: A Theological Response* (London: SCM, 2006), 20.

65 Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflection*, 11.

66 Rebecca Catto, “Accurate Diagnosis? Exploring Convergence and Divergence in Non-Western Missionary and Sociological Master Narratives of Christian Decline in Western Europe,” *Transformation* 30, no. 1 (2013): 32.



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# HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF BLACK PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES IN BRITAIN: A CASE STUDY OF APOSTOLIC PASTORAL CONGRESS (APC)

*Israel Olofinjana\**

## **Introduction**

One of the relatively new phenomena in European Christianity and on the religious landscape is the emergence and development of black Pentecostal Churches. A century ago the face of European Christianity could have been labelled as white in terms of colour, but now it is increasingly becoming multi-coloured, if one can call it that. This change in European Christianity is part of a larger shift taking place in world Christianity. Europe used to be the centre of world Christianity and as such was sending missionaries to Africa, Asia, South America and other parts of the world. Part of the current trend in global mission is that these former mission fields have developed their Christianities to the extent that they now see Europe as a mission field. In response to this new thinking, Africa, Asia and South America are now sending pastors and missionaries to Europe. An example is the 2014 South Korean mission to Britain, which saw the Kwangmyung Presbyterian Church in Korea sending about 450 South Korean missionaries on a one-week short term mission to Britain. This intentional sending was in recognition of and gratitude for the fact that South Korea traces its

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Christian roots to the ministry of a Welsh missionary, Robert Jermain Thomas (1839–1866). The one-week mission saw the 450 South Koreans participating in ministry, prayer-walking and praying for revival in the UK at 30 different locations all over Britain.<sup>1</sup>

Pentecostal Christianity is currently one of the fastest growing expressions of Christianity in the world. David Barrett estimates that Pentecostalism is likely to rise to 1, 140 million or 44% of the total number of Christians by 2025.<sup>2</sup> Alan Anderson, a Pentecostal historian and theologian, adds that Pentecostalism is fast becoming the dominant expression of Christianity and one of the most extraordinary religious phenomena in the world today.<sup>3</sup>

Pentecostalism as a global movement has large numbers of adherents in the Majority World. It is the expression of Christianity that is growing fastest in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It is Pentecostal missionaries and pastors from the Majority World who are taking the lead in planting churches in Europe. The continent of Europe, which used to have white Classic Pentecostals and, later, the Charismatic Movements of the 1960s as the major players within that expression, now have black Pentecostals adding to the diversity, to the extent that the history of European Pentecostals will not be complete without paying attention to the emerging black Pentecostals. How then did black Pentecostalism in Europe begin? Is black Pentecostalism a homogeneous group? What contributions do they make? These are some of the questions this essay seeks to address, profiling the history and work of the Apostolic Pastoral Congress (APC here after) as a case study. There has been a considerable amount of research and attention given to black Pentecostals in Britain, such as the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG)<sup>4</sup> and

- 1 The church that I pastor, Woolwich Central Baptist Church, and 12 other churches in south-east London, hosted 20 South Koreans.
- 2 David Barrett, Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission 1997, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 21.1, 1997, 24–25.
- 3 Alan Anderson and Walter Hollenweger, eds., *Pentecostals After a Century: Global Perspectives on a Movement in Transition* (Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 19.
- 4 See Richard Burgess, “African Pentecostal Growth: The Redeemed Christian Church of God in Britain,” in *Church Growth in Britain. From 1980 to the Present*, ed. David Goodhew (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012), 127–44; Richard Burgess, “African Pentecostal Churches in Britain: The Case of the Redeemed Christian Church of God,” in *The African Christian Presence in the West. New Immigrant Congregations and Transnational Networks in North America and Europe*, eds. Frieder Ludwig and Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (Trenton: African World Press, 2011), 253–72; Richard Burgess, Kim Knibbe & Anna Quaas, “Nigerian-initiated Pentecostal Churches as a Social Force in Europe: The Case of the Redeemed Christian Church of God,” *PentecoStudies*, April, vol. 9, 2010, 97–121; and Richard Burgess, “African Pentecostal Spirituality and Civic Engagement: The Case of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Britain,” Special Issue of *Journal of Beliefs and Values on Global Pentecostalism*, vol. 30, no. 3, December, 2009, 255–73.

Kingsway International Christian Centre (KICC).<sup>5</sup> While this is good, it is important to begin to document the stories of other black Pentecostals and draw attention to their contributions.

In proceeding with this task, some clarification of terms is needed. What is meant by Pentecostals? There is no general agreement among Pentecostal theologians as to a universal definition of Pentecostals because it depends on who is defining the word and what their theological persuasions are. For example, as an African who was born and raised in an African Initiated Church (AIC), I define some of the AICs as Pentecostals because of their emphasis on prayers, use of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, prophetic visions, healing, miracles, Spirit-led experiences and Spirit-filled experiences.<sup>6</sup> However, I am equally aware of the scholarly debate that questions whether AICs can be regarded as Pentecostals, as some of them are regarded as syncretistic – making them appear more as a cult than a church.<sup>7</sup> In this essay, I have classified AICs as Pentecostals. For the purposes of a working definition, I have defined Pentecostals in this paper as an expression of Christianity that has its origin in Acts 2:1–13 when the disciples of our Lord were filled with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. It is a modern church movement that is characterised by *glossolalia* (speaking in tongues), use of the gifts of the Spirit, Spirit-filled experiences, belief in miracles and healing and free and ecstatic worship.

### Origins of the Pentecostal Movement in Britain

The year 1906 is very significant in modern Pentecostal history, as it was the year that the Pentecostal revival of Azusa Street in Los Angeles started, led by William J. Seymour. Some scholars and commentators see this event as the beginning of the Pentecostal Movement, while others will argue that it was in 1900/1901 at Topeka, Kansas with Charles Parham that modern Pentecostalism originated.<sup>8</sup> A further debate associated with the history of Pentecostalism is whether Charles Parham (1873–1929) or William J. Seymour (1870–1922) is the founder of the movement. Those who prefer Parham do so on the basis that he formulated the Pentecostal theology of

5 Israel Olofinjana, *Reverse in Ministry and Mission: Africans in the Dark Continent of Europe* (Milton Keynes, UK, Author House, 2010) and Hugh Osgood, *African Neo-Pentecostal Churches and British Evangelicalism 1985–2005: Balancing Principles and Practicalities* (PhD diss., School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London), 2006.

6 Israel Olofinjana, *20 Pentecostal Pioneers in Nigeria* (Milton Keynes, Xlibris Publishers, 2011).

7 See Mark Sturge, *Look What the Lord has done: An Exploration of Black Christian Faith in Britain* (England, Scripture Union Publishing, 2005), 57–58. Also Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008), 68–69.

8 Anderson and Hollenweger, *Pentecostals*, 41–42.

speaking in tongues as the initial evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. However, others prefer Seymour on the understanding that the Pentecostal missionary movement and ecumenical vision which transcends race started with Seymour's movement in Azusa Street in 1906.

It is a historical error to assume that modern Pentecostalism originated in the United States with the events of 1906. The Azusa Street revival is very significant in the history of modern Pentecostalism partly because it later gave birth to Classic Pentecostal churches such as the Church of God in Christ (COGIC); the Church of God Cleveland, TN; Apostolic Faith Church; the Pentecostal Holiness Church; the Assemblies of God; the Foursquare Gospel Church, and many more.<sup>9</sup> However, there were other streams of Pentecostals that emerged separately in other parts of the world, such as the Jamaican Revival of 1860–1861; the Mukti Mission in India from 1905–1907; the Korean renewal movement from 1903 (Pyongyang 1907); and the AICs at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup> However, the origins of Pentecostalism in Britain are closely linked to the event in Azusa Street.

The Welsh Revival, led by Evan Roberts in 1904, was the catalyst for the Pentecostal Movement in Britain as it sowed the seeds and laid the foundation for the emergence of Classic Pentecostal churches in Britain, such as the Elim Pentecostal Church, The Apostolic Church of Great Britain and the Assemblies of God Great Britain. The Welsh revival also inspired what later followed at Azusa Street revival, as Frank Bartleman, the official historian of the Los Angeles revival, corresponded with Evan Roberts inquiring about the principles of revival and also asked Roberts to pray for revival in California.<sup>11</sup> However, it was the influence of the Azusa Street revival on T. B. Barratt from Norway, Cecil Polhill, Alexander A. Boddy, and others like them that led to the start of Pentecostalism in Britain. Boddy and Polhill were the founders of the first Pentecostal missionary movement in Britain known as the Pentecostal Missionary Union.

Alexander Boddy (1854–1930), an Anglican priest at All Saints in Monkwearmouth, Sunderland, is considered the father of Pentecostalism in Britain because his church was a meeting point where different people came to

- 9 Some of these churches started before 1906 but the events of the revival shaped their theology, ecclesiology and mission.
- 10 Some of the AICs developed as a result of praying for healing during the influenza that took place after the First World War and as a reaction against the Colonial Christianity that the Mission Churches introduced into Africa. See Roswith Gerloff, "Churches of the Spirit: The Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement and Africa's Contribution to Renewal of Christianity," in *Christianity in Africa and the African Diaspora*, eds. A. Adogame, R. Gerloff and K. Hock (London, Continuum, 2008), 209.
- 11 Frank Bartleman, *Azusa Street: The Roots of Modern Day Pentecost* (Plainfield, NJ, Logos International, 1980), 13–15 and Robert Liardon, *God's General* (California, Roberts Liardon Publishing, 1998), 89–93.

experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit beginning in 1907.<sup>12</sup> One of the people who was baptised in the Spirit through Boddy's ministry was Smith Wigglesworth (1859–1947), a true pioneer of the faith.<sup>13</sup> Another person who was baptised in the Spirit at one of the revival meetings in Sunderland was Rev. Kwame Brem-Wilson, a Ghanaian businessman and schoolmaster.<sup>14</sup> Brem-Wilson was born in Dixcove, Ghana in 1855 and came to Britain in 1901. In 1906, Brem-Wilson started Sumner Road Chapel in Peckham, South East London. As a result of his attendance and contribution at the revival meetings in Sunderland in 1907, Brem-Wilson developed relationships with the founders of the Apostolic Church of Great Britain, D. P. Williams and W. J. Williams, as he hosted an Apostolic Church conference in London in 1923. These interracial relationships were very important at that time when it was generally not socially acceptable among white Christians to associate with black people. It reveals the Pentecostal significance of breaking down church traditions and racial barriers. In addition, it also demonstrates the ecumenical inclinations of early Pentecostalism in Britain. For instance, I find the relationship between Alexander Boddy, an Anglican minister, and Kwame Brem-Wilson, a black Pentecostal, notable. This early relationship is quite significant and foreshadows some of the Anglican-Pentecostal relationships that are currently emerging; for example, that between Jesus House and Holy Trinity Brompton; the Anglican-Pentecostal Theological consultations; the instalment of Bishop Eric Brown of the New Testament Church of God (NTGC) as the first Pentecostal president of Churches Together in England (CTE); and the partnership that exists between the Church of England and the APC. The latter example will be considered later under the ecumenical contributions of the APC.

### **Origins and Diversity of Black Pentecostals in Britain**

Kwame Brem-Wilson may be regarded as a pioneer of black Pentecostalism in Britain, but the development of the full movement did not occur until the arrival of the Caribbean migrants after 1948. In tracing the next phase in the development of black Pentecostal churches in Britain, it is worth highlighting that black Pentecostalism in Britain is not a homogeneous movement but is rather heterogeneous in culture, ethnicity, ecclesiology, mission and theology. For example, some of these churches are unitarian (Oneness Pentecostals) while others are trinitarian;<sup>15</sup> some have embraced Black Liberation Theology while others preach a Prosperity Gospel; some have

12 Peter Hocken, *Streams of Renewal: The Origins and Early Development of the Charismatic Movement in Great Britain* (Australia, Paternoster Press, 1986), 145.

13 Lester Sumrall, *Pioneers of Faith* (Sumrall Publishing, 1995), 171.

14 Babatunde Adedibu, *Coat of Many Colours* (London, Wisdom Summit, 2012), 26.

15 This is becoming less of a problem now.

grown to become church denominations, such as the New Testament Church of God, the Church of God of Prophecy, the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) and the Church of Pentecost; while others are still independent churches, such as the New Wine Church in Woolwich, the Tabernacle Church in Lewisham, the Christian Life City and Ruach Ministries. Some are church plants from their denominational churches back in the Caribbean or Africa, such as the Victory Bible International Church, the Church of the Lord *Aladura*, the International Central Gospel Church and Forward in Faith Ministries International; others are churches that have started here in Britain and have planted churches in other parts of the world, such as Kingsway International Christian Centre (KICC), Christ Faith Tabernacle and the Jubilee International Churches. It is within this latter group that we can locate and situate the history of the APC, although the APC is a Congress of churches that broadly retain their independence and distinctiveness while adhering to the wider ethical, ecclesiological and theological framework of the Congress.

The second thing to note is that black Pentecostal churches in Britain are part of what is usually regarded as Black Majority Churches (BMCs), a term of which many black church leaders are growing wary. BMCs are independent Pentecostal and Charismatic churches that have originated within the black community and have a black majority congregation and leadership. These are churches that have emerged from the African and Caribbean diaspora.<sup>16</sup> When used in this sense, BMCs do not include those congregations that have emerged within historic churches such as Catholics, Baptists, Anglicans, and Methodists. Two problems arise with this definition: (1) not all BMCs or black Pentecostal churches can be described as such since group identities are usually too complex to generalise; (2) many BMCs or black Pentecostal churches are actually increasingly multicultural, multi-ethnic and intergenerational churches, so that while they appear black to an outsider, to an insider they are truly many nations!

### **Caribbean Pentecostal Churches**

The 1940s and 1950s saw the influx of Caribbean families into the UK due to the invitation of the British government to come and help rebuild the country after the devastation of the Second World War. Many people from the Caribbean responded to this call but to their surprise and dismay they were rejected by society and the Church. This period is usually referred to

16 Israel Olofinjana, "Nigerian Pentecostals in Britain: Towards Prosperity or Consumerism?" in *The Public Face of African New Religious Movements in Diaspora*, ed. Afe Adogame, (England, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014), 234.



as the Windrush generation, as the ship, SS Empire Windrush, brought about 493 people from the Caribbean on the 22 June 1948 to Tilbury, London. The majority of the people from the Caribbean saw and regarded themselves as British citizens, being part of the Commonwealth, and therefore expected to be treated as such. Instead, they were faced with posters saying, “No Irish, No Blacks and No Dogs.” They soon realised that the idea of a commonwealth was an illusion; the wealth was not common and they were second-class citizens. Walter Hollenweger, in an introduction to a seminal book on the black church in Britain written by Roswith Gerloff, comments that, “Christians in Britain prayed for many years for revival, and when it came they did not recognise it because it was black.”<sup>17</sup> This rejection, coupled with other factors, such as loyalty to church brands and the formality of British Christianity, led to the formation of Caribbean Pentecostal and Holiness Churches. The first Caribbean Pentecostal church founded in the UK was Calvary Church of God in Christ, which started in London in 1948. The church became affiliated with the Church of God in Christ, USA in 1952, and they now have about 21 congregations in the UK. Others soon followed, such as the New Testament Church of God (1953); the Church of God of Prophecy (1953); Wesleyan Holiness Church (1958); and the New Testament Assembly (1961), now with about 18 congregations in Britain.<sup>18</sup>

Since the 1990s, new generation Caribbean Pentecostal churches have emerged in Britain. These churches have a wider appeal to Caribbean British Christians who are second- and third-generation descendants of the original immigrants. Many of the leaders are second- or third-generation Caribbean British Christians as well. These churches are Pentecostal and as such have dynamic worship and worship teams; they make use of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and have creative preaching styles. These churches are very proactive in terms of community and social engagement, providing services such as food banks, debt counselling, soup kitchens, prison ministries and many more. Examples of these churches are Ruach City Church Ministries, led by Bishop John Francis (1994); Rhema Christian Ministries (1996), formerly known as Croydon Rhema Fellowship (1990), founded by Pastor Mark Goodridge and now led by Marva Scott; Christian Life City (1996) led by Bishop Wayne Malcolm; Micah Christian Ministries (1998) led by Pastor Denis Wade; The Tabernacle Church (formerly called The Bible Way Church of the Lord Jesus Christ Apostolic) led by Pastor Michael W. White; Greater Faith Ministries led by Bishop Lennox Hamilton, and host of other churches.<sup>19</sup>

17 Roswith Gerloff, *A Plea for British Black Theology*, vol. 1, (Eugene, OR, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010).

18 <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/religion-in-london/resource-guides/black-majority-church.htm>.

19 Olofinjana, *Reverse in Mission*, 41.

### **African Pentecostal Churches**

The independence of sub-Saharan African countries from 1957 onwards led to increasing numbers of African diplomats, students and tourists coming to Britain. When they discovered, as had the Caribbeans before them, that they were rejected by the British churches and society at large, this led to the founding of African Instituted Churches (AICs) in London. The first of these churches to be planted was the Church of the Lord (Aladura), planted in 1964 by the late Apostle Oluwole Adejobi in South London. This church has its headquarters in Nigeria. Others soon followed, such as the Cherubim and Seraphim Church in 1965; the Celestial Church of Christ in 1967; and Aladura International Church in 1970. Others include Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) Mount Bethel founded by Apostle Ayo Omideyi in 1974; Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) of Great Britain in 1976; and Born Again Christ Healing Church founded by Bishop Fidelia Onyuku-Opukiri in 1979. All these churches were led from their headquarters in Nigeria. The first of the Ghanaian churches to arrive in England was the Musama Disco Christo Church (MDCC) in London in 1980.<sup>20</sup>

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed the rise of New Pentecostal Churches (NPC) from West African. For example, one of the largest churches in Western Europe is Kingsway International Christian Centre (KICC) founded in 1992 by Matthew Ashimolowo (a Nigerian). Another of the fastest-growing churches in the UK is The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), which was started in Nigeria in 1952 by the prophet Josiah Akindayomi. This church began in the UK in 1988/89 through the efforts of David Okunade and Ade Okerende and they now have about 700 churches in the UK. They also have churches in Germany, Norway, Spain, Holland, Italy, France, Belgium, Switzerland, Poland, Austria, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Greece, Portugal, Luxemburg and the Czech Republic. The current General Overseer is Pastor Enoch Adeboye, and the UK National Overseer is Pastor Agu Irukwu of Jesus House in North London. Jesus House is one of the largest black churches in the UK with a membership of 2,500.<sup>21</sup> RCCG London also organises a Christian Festival called 'Festival of Life' at the Docklands Excel Centre which attracts around 40,000 people every year.<sup>22</sup>

### **Apostolic Pastoral Congress**

The historical development of the APC starts with its presiding bishop, Doye Teido Agama. Bishop Agama was born in 1956 to Anglican Nigerian parents in Shirley in Southampton, England. His parents came to England in 1953

20 Olofinjana, *Reverse in Mission*, 37.

21 *Christianity*, August 2006, p. 15.

22 *Keep the Faith*, Issue 47, 2009, 12.

for further studies.<sup>23</sup> Agama was, however, fostered by a white family as a baby for some time to allow his parents time to complete their studies. This was fairly common in those days due to the lack of an African diaspora community to provide support to such student families. He later joined his biological parents in Nigeria in the 1960s. Agama became a Christian in 1968 at a Scripture Union event in Nigeria. In 1973, while still in Nigeria, Agama started work as a teaching assistant and from around 1975 was involved in community development projects as part of the efforts led by the Council of Churches to repair the damage of the Nigerian Civil War.

Agama had a spiritual experience in 1991 that transformed his life. He became a pastoral assistant in the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), serving later as the Regional Secretary for Evangelism in the East of Nigeria under Pastor Dave Okunade in 1992. He left to start an independent work, Strongtower Christian Ministries, in 1994, which later became the Christian Way of Life Churches. He also served in Elim Churches International and later joined the Apostolic Congress of Great Britain, led then by Bishop Henry Kontor. As a result of these roles, he became further involved in oversight and mentoring of other Christian ministers from around 1992. He was ordained in 1994 by the Apostolic Congress and was consecrated a bishop ten years later in 2004.

Bishop Agama began to wrestle with the issue of *limitation* in emerging black Pentecostal churches. He saw part of this limitation as churches being confined to the four walls of their building and therefore having little or no recognition or relevance in the wider community. He also felt that there was a gap in ministerial training, representation, and ecumenical relations of the BMCs. This led to a period of praying and seeking God for vision and direction. What became the APC began in an informal process of mentoring a number of church leaders to discover the areas of challenge in their ministry and to find adequate solutions. Most of these early mentees were members of the Upper Room Christian Leaders Forum in Manchester. There was also an earlier attempt to form a Black and Minority Ethnic Christian Association (BMECA), which, like many other groupings, did not last long. This vision and passion to reach the wider community beyond the walls of the church led to the formal beginnings of the APC in 2007 with the cooperation and encouragement of the Greater Manchester Churches Together and the Minority Ethnic Christian Affairs section of Churches Together in England. The vision of the APC is to help close the gap in the provision of personal and professional development for independent (mainly black Pentecostal)

23 His father was a prince who later became His Royal Highness Chief Frederick Abiye Agama, the Ogbotom Edede of the Epie-Atissa Clan in Bayelsa State of Nigeria. His maternal grandfather, Chief Nelson Kemeninabokide Porbeni, was the Etonkepua of Kabowei Kingdom, and the Ododomedo of Asideni in the Delta State of Nigeria. Bishop Agama's mother was Her Royal Highness Chief Beatrice Agama (nee Porbeni).

church ministers by encouraging and providing access to pathways for continuous improvement. This is through training and providing members with forms of certification, recognition and accountability. Part of the APC's vision is also to enable networking among these ministers and also to assist them in networking with leaders of other churches and civic and community leaders. In addition, the APC also provides a measure of advocacy and representation on behalf of members at several levels. The APC also works to close the gap between the Pentecostals and the established denominations. In addition to being Pentecostal, the APC understands itself to be episcopal, historic, liturgical and sacramental. They have a general rule that sacraments should be accompanied by some liturgical form and function, but all other meetings and aspects of church can be freely Pentecostal.<sup>24</sup> This fusion of historic church liturgy and Pentecostal elements such as *glossolia* (speaking in tongues) is one of the unique features of the APC. However the APC is rather unique in seeking and finding a measure of acceptance among the Church of England and other established historic churches, including some Orthodox.

Today, the APC have roughly about 100 members representing congregations and community projects in 20 towns and cities across England, with a very small number of other affiliates. They also have members in the Americas, the Caribbean, Africa and India. In England, APC churches are engaged with the community in a variety of ways, from prison chaplaincy to enhancing trans-generational community cohesion through cottage industry skills in Manchester. The level of community engagement by member churches varies from one church to another. One of the differences between the APC and other black Pentecostal churches or denominations is that they are not based in London; the APC is based in Manchester. This was a deliberate move as Bishop Agama saw the need for BME Christian Leadership outside London and the South-East of England, and a need to then link with existing southern leadership for more national leverage. He also intended to reach beyond mono-ethnic church lines in areas outside the South-East with its large BME populations. It must, however, be mentioned that the APC is not the only black Pentecostal church or denomination outside London. Other examples are the New Testament Church of God, the Church of God of Prophecy and the Wesleyan Holiness Church, all of which have their headquarter churches in the Midlands. Nevertheless, this vision to intentionally not reside in London is commendable; it points to the important changes in the self-understanding of some black Pentecostal churches' identity and mission. In terms of identity, the APC argues that they are not an African organisation

24 I had the privilege of observing a combination of Pentecostal dynamics with historic church liturgy at one of the APCs ordination services where there was the sacrament of the Eucharist, as bishops and priests were ordained into ministry accomplished by speaking in tongues. I attended an Apostolic Pastoral Congress ordination service at Manchester Cathedral as a participant observer.

but a grouping of British churches.<sup>25</sup> One can understand this argument, given the fact that bishop Agama was born in the UK. Thus, he identifies with both black British and African. This self-understanding reveals that we should not always look for clear-cut blanket solutions to the issues of identity. The APC Training Courses also place a great emphasis on cross-cultural missions and contextualisation of ministry. As such, they strive to enable Christian ministers born outside the European or Western context to re-orient their ministry focus into the new environment.

This intentionality to do church in northern England also has implications for mission. The APC has a vision to be a church where black and Asian British feel welcomed and are reached. In an interview with Bishop Agama, he said, “The church [APC] is geared toward the needs of mainly black and Asian British Christians, but also some white and other mixed heritage church leaders who are committed to going beyond the existing stereotypes of ethnicity in expressions of church, both in terms of worship, but also in engaging with community.”<sup>26</sup> The articulation of this vision for ethnic minorities who are British is, in my estimation, very significant, as it recognises that there are second- and third-generation migrants who were born in this country and who would firmly identify themselves as British. Many immigrant churches are struggling to reach these British born Africans, Caribbeans or Asians.

Another area to which the APC is contributing in mission is through the professional ministerial training that takes place at their St Hadrian’s College. This college offers internal certificate courses to ministers who seek to translate their experience of ministry in the southern hemisphere into a European urban setting. St Hadrian’s offers Pentecostal ministers training, accreditation and licensing. The training at St Hadrian’s College also enables African Pentecostal ministers to play a better role in community cohesion and development both in the West and in their nations of origin. In addition, the College equips BME Christian leaders to play a better part in the wider community, and also to enable their congregations to do so. The college encourages all the above in the context of sound biblical management and leadership principles, as well as supporting healthy homes and married life.

Another area in which the APC is contributing is through the development of ecumenical relationships between black Pentecostal churches and historic churches. The APC is working towards increasing the unity of the global church by educating emerging Pentecostal leaders about aspects of the historic church and vice versa. In addition, the APC is also working to increase the unity between different branches of the BME Christian diaspora. This ecumenical vision is being achieved through the relationships Bishop Agama has built with the Church of England, the Coptic Church, the Greek Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. He is also actively involved in

25 Questionnaire Interview with Bishop Doye Agama.

26 Interview with Bishop Agama.

the ecumenical scene through his involvement in Churches Together in England; he is one of the directors, trustees and moderators of Churches Together in England. In Manchester, he is the co-president of Greater Manchester Churches Together. The APC have done very well in their partnership with the Church of England and, in spite of some fundamental differences, they have continued to use their Cathedrals for ordinations and consecrations of Pentecostal ministers.

### Conclusion

To conclude, this essay has traced the historical development of black Pentecostals in Britain by looking at the various phases in their formation at different periods. It has shown that black Pentecostalism in Britain has its roots in the beginning of the Pentecostal movement in Britain and did not develop later as an offshoot of this. This significant beginning is important as it broke down the barriers of race and racism that were prevalent at the time. Black Pentecostalism in Britain is also far from being a homogeneous movement, but is rather a movement that encompasses different theologies, ecclesiologies, mission and cultural diversity. This leads to caution regarding terms such as BMCs, which do not necessarily demonstrate the diversity that exists. Black Pentecostals are contributing to the church scene in Britain and this was argued by looking at the APC as a case study. The APC as one of the black Pentecostal church groups situated in Manchester identifies itself as a British church and therefore sees part of its mission and identity as reaching out to black and Asian British people. The APC also contributes through the professional and ministerial development of Pentecostal ministers; this is done through their College, St Hadrian's. Lastly, through Bishop Agama's relationship with the historic churches and leaders of other black Pentecostal churches, the APC is able to negotiate the terrain of ecumenical relationships.

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# MAIN FEATURES OF TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA

*John Mbiti\**

## **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

As background to this paper I want to paint a brief portrait of contemporary Christianity in Africa. By the beginning of the twenty-first century the religious landscape in Africa had changed radically from what it had been hitherto. Geographically, the southern two-thirds of Africa can be defined as 'Christian Africa'. The northern third remains predominantly Muslim. Demographically, about half of Africa's population is Christian, and the number of Christians is steadily growing through conversion at a higher rate than the demographic increase. The question of Christian survival or demise raised in the second half of the twentieth century has now become outmoded. Instead, it is as if the Christian faith has fallen in love with Africa and Africa has fallen in love with the Christian faith. At least for some generations to come, the two have now been destined to walk side by side, hand in hand, and step by step.

All this poses many questions, such as: What is Christianity doing in and with Africa? What is Africa doing with the Christian faith, which has no monopoly over any generation, land, system, island, or continent? What kind of Christianity is defining and shaping Christian Africa?

**1. Africa has continued to contribute its share of martyrs.** From the very early Church to this day, the blood of the martyrs has never ceased to flow on African soil. For example, the government of Sudan imprisoned a pregnant woman, Meriam Ibrahim, for being a Christian, and "sentenced her to death

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Mbiti delivered this essay as a keynote speech at the *Missio Africanus* conference on June 26, 2015, at Church Mission Society in Oxford.



for refusing to renounce Christianity”.<sup>2</sup> She gave birth in prison where, with her first child, she had been confined. Only after world pressure did the Sudanese government lift the death sentence and allow her, with her husband and their two children, to leave the country. They fled to the United States.

The *BBC World News* reported respectively on 2 December 2014 and 8 April 2015 that militants of Al Shabaab from Somalia had crossed into Kenya and killed many Christians. Thus: On 2 December 2014 they killed at least 36 quarry workers in Northern Kenya, after separating the Muslims and then killing the Christians. On 2 April 2015, Al Shabaab militants killed 148 students (and 2 employees) at Garissa University in Kenya. They separated the Muslims from the Christians, and then killed the Christians, some of whom had gathered for prayer in the early morning (during Holy Week).

**2. African Christianity is very busy** constructing thousands upon thousands of churches and places of worship, of every size and shape, where countless people congregate to worship on Saturday nights, Sundays, and other days. Worship also takes place in the open or under trees, in market places, and on public grounds in cities and towns. The dynamic worship includes: shouting to the Lord; dancing to the Lord; speaking in tongues; healing the sick; driving out unwanted spirits; preaching; conversions; Bible readings and sermons; cleansing the defiled; soliciting success (in business, family life, examinations, politics, good rains and crops); and requesting protection against unwelcome forces. These unwelcome forces include: bad dreams; bad luck; curses; family disintegration; dwindling love; the evil eye; misfortune; possession by unwanted spirits; sickness; sinful intentions; unclean thoughts and words; unresponsive love; witchcraft; etc. Worship sessions involve taking collections (of money and goods); laying on of hands to bless; baptizing; burying the dead; commemorating the departed; celebrating happy events (like birthdays, marriages, passing examinations, reunions, success in elections, ordinations, Holy Communion (Eucharist), cure of barrenness and sickness, reconciliation, finding lost and stolen items, return of a family member); and even pronouncing curses.

**3. It is a very creative Christianity** involving men, women, and youth. It is being heard (sometimes very loudly), felt, seen, and propagated (expanded) through innumerable channels, various activities, and persons. These include: art; Bible translations; bill boards; books; recordings; catechists; choirs; Christian education; Christian colleges and universities; the founding of independent churches, of which there are at least fifteen thousand; church media; and a host of church personnel (both ordained and lay, employed and voluntary, expatriate and indigenous); computers and the Internet; drama; health centres; indigenous songs and hymns; inherited or their own

2 As reported in *foxnews.com* of 14 September 2014.

created liturgies; market preachers; memorisation of Bible verses; music; mass media; publications; research; sculptures; etc.

**4. African Christianity is linked to global Christianity** through ecumenical ties, historical ties, institutional ties, financial ties, personnel, educational ties, theological ties, ecclesiastical ties, publications, and being in constant touch through modern mass media and the Internet. It is sending ecumenical co-workers (missionaries) from African countries to other African countries and to overseas countries and churches. African Christians are establishing churches and congregations in foreign countries in North and South America, Europe, the Middle East, India, Japan, Korea, Australia, and presumably China (already or soon).

**5. The Bible is the foundation of African Christianity.**

Bible translation into African languages accelerated in the second half of the twentieth century. By the beginning of this year, 2015, there were nearly 800 translations of the full Bible, the New Testament or portions (of one or more books) out of Africa's 2,000 languages and about 3,000 dialects. African people are hearing the Word of God spoken in their own languages, like at the first Pentecost (Acts 2:1–13). These translations are powerful and crucial tools for the work of evangelisation, mission, building the church (Body of Christ), and the evolution of African theology, especially in indigenous languages. African theologians have been writing in European languages, and Bible translations are carried out largely from European languages.

Indeed, oral African theology in African languages is thriving, beginning from the moment the gospel is proclaimed in a given language area. It is articulated informally in conversations, singing with or without instruments, including improvised ones such as calabashes, whistles, clapping, drums, tins, and rattles with metal and plastic pieces, etc. Africa openly shows its happiness in being Christian, in formal and informal ways, in written and mainly unwritten ways. African Christianity dances, sings, shouts, prays, heals, expels unwanted spirits, witnesses, and variously praises the Lord through oral, symbolic, and practical theology. The Bible gives guidance, inspiration, and support to this vibrant Christianity, and in the nurture of the Christian faith on the African mind, heart, and spirit.

In connection with the Bible in Africa, let me add a big 'footnote' on two growing concerns. One concern addresses the fact that it is largely (if not exclusively) from European languages, English, French, German, Italian, etc. that translations into African languages are made. There is now an increasing call for translations to be done directly from the biblical languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek into African languages.

The second concern is that, starting from the nineteenth century, it has been the missionaries, 'foreign speakers' of African languages, who have made the translations. In every case, Africans have helped these missionary

translators. In rare cases, Africans alone have recently begun to do some translations, but under the 'supervision' and 'guidelines' of missionaries and scholars in Europe and America. The growing wish now is that competent African scholars will make translations directly from the biblical languages into their own languages.

Nevertheless, scholars and churches express deep appreciation and gratitude for the translations that both foreign and indigenous translators have accomplished. This appreciation also goes to the various World Bible Societies that finance, publish, and distribute the Bibles in African and other languages. Without making the Bible available in that way, there would be no modern African Christianity. African scholars are designating these as the first or the colonial phase of African Bible translations, which started in the colonial era and were made mainly from colonial languages.

Today scholars, together with more and more other readers of the vernacular Bibles, are calling for a new phase where capable African scholars translate the Bible directly from its original languages into their own respective languages. This second phase can be called indigenous Bible translation. However, translations from both phases should not be seen or set up as being in conflict with each other. On the contrary, both would serve African Christianity side by side, and enhance people's understanding of the Scriptures.

In this connection, I mention that I have ventured to translate the Greek New Testament into Kiikamba, my mother tongue in Kenya, spoken by about five million people in eastern Africa, of whom over 85% are Christians of various church traditions. The Kenya Literature Bureau published it in 2014, and is also distributing it free of charge to primary schools in Ukambani where Kiikamba is spoken. The cost of printing and distributing the first 3,000 copies is a gift from Christians and churches in Switzerland and a few in the United States of America. The people, churches and primary schools in Ukambani are very grateful for this sponsorship. However, we still need much more funding so that the publisher can print sufficient copies to supply about 30 copies to each of the 3,000 primary schools and some local churches. Finding the necessary money is extremely difficult. The book will not be sold.

I am told that I became the first African to translate the Bible single-handedly from the original languages into an African language, and that this achievement is a landmark in the history of the Church and Christianity in Africa. The translation has raised a lot of excitement in Kenya and beyond, and has been greeted with a lot of enthusiasm. I put into the translation all my skills - academic, mental, physical, and spiritual. I spent eight months on the first draft, working between two and fifteen hours a day, over a period of two years, while attending to other obligations, travel, and the family in Kenya and Switzerland. It was very hard work to do the translation but I enjoyed it, and it enriched my academic and spiritual life. Translating the New Testament, the book about Jesus Christ, brought me very close to him, so that I found him afresh, as my Friend and Saviour.

Knowing that African Christians are very keen to read and hear the Bible read, I paid particular attention to several features in the work. These included, for example: making a revised orthography whereby I departed from much of the old and foreign orthography. It was the missionaries who introduced reading and writing in Ukambani in the last century, among other good services. So they also had determined the orthography for writing Kiiikamba, which naturally accorded with their foreign understanding and included speaking it with a foreign accent. My revised orthography eliminates the foreign accent, and sticks closely to the way we Akamba speak our language without accent.

The Akamba population is over 85% Christian, and many older people cannot read. Because most people only get to know the Bible when it is read in churches, at schools, at market places, and in Christian homes if any are available, I paid close attention to the oral readability. I made the sentences generally short, and I integrated into the text the literary flow of the language and its natural rhythm. Translation involves bringing two or more cultures into play. I addressed the biblical culture to make it understandable in and by the Akamba (African) cultural and religious world. I gave particular attention to gender considerations, making the Scriptures address all genders where relevant. I eliminated anti-Semitism. I reintroduced the use of the original Kiiikamba word *Mulungu* for God, since for millennia the Akamba, like other African peoples, have known and related to God, for whom there is a word in every African language. This is the same God as described in the Bible.

I paid close attention to the original Greek text, word for word, verse for verse, chapter for chapter and book for book. I also made full use of the critical apparatus, which handles the Greek and other variants from the early and extant texts of the New Testament. I consulted some twenty New Testament versions in nine African and European languages. For some biblical concepts and words there are no direct equivalents in Kiiikamba. In such cases, I had to create Kiiikamba words, or make roundabout diversions to reach meaningful renderings. Kiiikamba is rich in creating words from their roots, which makes them understandable in the context in which they are used. In some cases, I incorporated Greek and Hebrew terms that have already been *kiiikambacised* in the course of the past century, as Christianity has deepened its roots in the country.

In course of the translation and revisions, I regularly consulted Akamba people, from the youngest school children to the oldest persons in their communities. This was to check on the vocabulary, readability, flow of the translation, and its clarity. I gave and read texts among the people in order to get their reactions, and make adjustments to the translation. Each time, the people were very interested in and excited about this exercise. Altogether, I made up to eight revisions, until I felt completely satisfied with this translation of the Word of God. Those who have now seen it in print are keen to read the book. When I was in Kenya in April 2015, a young man who had

gotten a copy of this Kiikamba Bible (NT), came up to me and put questions to me, and told me with much joy that he had immediately started to read the whole Bible (NT).

#### **6. African Christianity is active in practical ways**

One of the ways in which African Christianity is active is in Christian hospitals and medical centres that are often reputed to offer better medical care for the sick and (expectant) mothers and babies, than many other hospitals. It is also working for inter-ethnic reconciliation in conflict areas, and in inter-religious dialogue especially with Islam. African Christianity is sending church workers to other ethnic groups and other countries of Africa, Europe, America and Asia. There are many thriving African-founded churches and congregations in America, Europe, the Middle East and Asia. It also receives and welcomes expatriate workers from the overseas countries of America, Asia, Europe and Oceania. Some of these serve in the local churches as pastors, priests, doctors, nurses, social workers, teachers, technicians, organisers and specialists in development projects and in educational institutions, in the media, in communications, and in publication.

#### **7. Faced or Characterised by Positive, Negative, and Neutral Paradoxes and Dilemmas**

On the African scene, this dynamic Christianity exists within the paradoxes and dilemmas of African life. Many of these seem to belong to the very nature of African life (physical, cultural, worldviews, and traditions); others are self-inflicted, and some have their roots from within and without. Christianity is not screened from these realities of African life. On the contrary, it is enveloped in them, it is entwined within them, and it is part of them. By its very nature, Christianity is a collection of human entities which contain these paradoxes and dilemmas. It is both actor and spectator, giving and receiving, and being engaged and challenged.

On the *'negative side'* one can name: conflicts (economic, historical, ideological, political, and religious); endemic corruption; ethnicism; exploitation; fraud; greed for money and power; health (severe) concerns; disregard of human rights; material inequalities; injury to nature and environment; injustices; oppression (social, cultural, political, and religious); poverty; money scams; and being victims of the mass media. These *'negative'* happenings are carried out by elements in the total population, which includes those who constitute African Christianity.

On the *'positive side'* African Christianity has many opportunities and facilities that foster and support it. These include: art; Bible translations; bill boards; recordings; catechists; choirs; Christian education; church institutions; church organisations; church personnel; clergy; communication facilities; computers and the Internet; dance and drama activities; DVDs; evangelistic campaigns; evangelists; films; financial support; health centres;

hymns and indigenous songs; vast and increasing human knowledge and skills; interaction with one another in the global village; lay preachers; leaflets; liturgies; magazines; market preachers; mass media; ministers; missionaries; music; newspapers; oral theology; pastors; periodicals; photographs; planes and flying services; poetry (written and sung); prayers by the laity and clergy; priests; publications; radio; research; science and technology; Scriptures; sculptures; SMSs; songs; story telling; street preachers; teachers; telephone; television; thousands of students; tracts; travel; videos; voluntary workers; youth; etc.

These negative and positive features capture the new African Christianity almost at its infancy. Nevertheless, they point to a healthy growth as part of global Christianity, confessing one Lord, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and to the glory of God the Almighty and Creator of all things, visible and invisible. We thank the Lord for making us witness the unfolding of this rainbow Christianity of the twenty-first century on the African scene – a blessed and exciting privilege.

### **8. A Pilgrim Christianity**

An African proverb states that: “Cattle are born with ears; their horns grow later.” This promising and exuberant African Christianity exists in a state of pilgrimage; it is born with ears but is in the process of growing its horns. That accords with what both our Lord Jesus Christ and his servant the Apostle Paul told us. At his Ascension, our Lord divulged to us that: “It is not for you to know the times (*chronos*) or the seasons (*kairos*) which the Father has placed under his own authority (*exousia*). But you will receive power (*dunamis*) when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses (*martures*) in Jerusalem, together with all Judea and Samaria, and up to the extreme end (*eschatos*) of the age (*aioonos*) (Acts 1:7, 8).” These are powerful words, and two thousand years later their power has not been exhausted.

St. Paul put this divine pilgrimage within his vision: “But we all, who have an unveiled face, gazing like in a mirror at the glory (*doxas*) of the Lord, are in the process of being changed into the same image (*eikona*), from glory (*doxas*) to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” (2 Cor. 3:18).

African Christianity is a truly pilgrim Christianity. It will go no further than its eschatological completion (perfection) set in the Lord himself, as the Scriptures say: “When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to him, so that God may be all in all (*panta en pasin*)” (1 Corinthians 15:28).

### **Factors contributing to the rapid expansion of Christianity in Africa**

The Christian faith in Africa has continued to expand rapidly due to a number of factors. We can only mention some briefly.

1. The *missionary factor* is fundamental, since in modern times it was initially the missionaries from Europe and America who brought the gospel anew to Africa. Many were very devoted to this task, and some died in Africa spreading the gospel and rendering practical services like medical care, education, and producing written materials.

2. The *fading of colonial rule* gave Africans the freedom to reject the Christian faith or take it up seriously on our own terms. The majority chose to keep it, to embrace it afresh, and to expand it. This was in spite of the fact that (Western) Christianity which had largely mediated the faith since the nineteenth century was largely foreign on African soil (culture, worldview, life style, and multiplicity of languages).

3. A profound (and quiet) factor facilitating the planting and expansion of the Christian faith is the *traditional African Religion and Religiosity*. Almost by nature, Africans are deeply religious. However, hitherto early missionaries and their converts wrongly regarded African religion and treated it as 'demonic', 'heathen', and antagonistic to the Christian faith. But beneath the surface of this expression of ignorance and falsification, the two religious systems were quietly interacting positively. This was particularly accelerated by the fact that African religion revolves around the monotheistic belief in one God, the Almighty, and Creator of all things. From time immemorial African religion has been integrated into the whole of life. It had no founders. Its practical expressions and ideas evolved in different ways and places, such as the names of the one God (which we find in every language and people or 'tribe'), praying to God, and making offerings and sacrifices to God variously from place to place and time to time. People also acknowledge other spiritual realities, created by God and subject to him. Some are personifications of natural phenomena and objects, and others are said to be remnants of human (and animal) beings after death. Personifications help people to relate to the puzzles, mysteries, and questions of nature. It is this traditional knowledge of and belief in God which has greatly facilitated the spread of the Christian faith in Africa. The Akamba and other African peoples have spontaneously taken the message of Jesus as coming from the same God in whom they have trusted since time immemorial.

African religion acknowledges **the same God** who is depicted (similarly and differently) in the Bible. The attributes of God in the Bible have many parallels in African concepts of God. Adherents of African religion do not find stumbling blocks to continuing their belief in God as presented in the Scriptures. They take *the Word of God in the Bible as the Word of the same God* they know through African religion. This is a complex phenomenon, taking place at profoundly spiritual, religious, mental, emotional, personal, and community levels. It is both personal and public. Traditional African belief in God is a communal and integral identity that no individual can counteract

or contradict. It is part of the total religious baggage, with which African Christianity has entered the twenty-first century.

**4. A fourth factor is the work of African Christians,** who both informally (mainly) and formally spread news about the Christian faith. This happens more or less the way people share regular and ordinary news. Formal contributors are male and female, trained and untrained, literate and illiterate: catechists, evangelists, pastors, priests, and church workers. They use tools and methods, including the Bible, teaching materials, radio, symbols, television, films, recordings, and engage in conversations, discussions and rallies, etc. Personal witness is very effective, whereby individuals or groups tell of their conversion and the joy of being Christian. This often leads to further conversions and the expansion of Christian knowledge and practice. Informal spreading of the gospel takes place all the time, in family circles and communities. This is the *New* and *Good News*, and because it was previously unknown, people normally pay attention to it sooner or later. They embrace the gospel, consciously or unconsciously, feeling that it enhances their religiosity.

The work of Africans in spreading Christianity goes beyond the continent of Africa to other continents. African Christians (as students, immigrants, refugees, workers, with or without families, from home or locally established where they live) in America, Europe, Russia, the Middle East, Australia, and Asian Countries, form their congregations that are organised and whose services may parallel or be quite different from those of the local Western type of congregations. Here, they promote parishes and congregations that cater primarily to immigrants from outside the Western regions and cultural traditions. They integrate African cultural and social traditions in the new (foreign) environment. Some relate to various local denominations (Methodists, Baptists, Episcopalians, Reformed, Protestant, Catholic, etc.), or relate to Independent churches in Africa, or become Independent churches of their own. In Britain they founded the Birmingham Christian College in 2014, sponsored by the African Pentecostal churches. They are carrying out lively missionary work in Europe, for example. They are open to members from other intercultural, interethnic, interdenominational backgrounds and even other religions.<sup>3</sup>

**5. A fifth factor is the translation and distribution of the Bible into African languages.**

By the end of 2014 the full Bible, New Testament, or portions were available in close to 800 African languages. The Bible has had a tremendous impact

<sup>3</sup> See, among other writings, Harvey Kwiyaní's splendid description of African Christianity in the West, *Sent Forth*, with a comprehensive bibliography. Harvey C. Kwiyaní, *Sent Forth: African Missionary Work in the West* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014).



upon the spreading and shaping of the Christian faith and in building the Church in Africa. Through the Bible the people hear the gospel ‘in our own languages’. That makes it ‘our Bible’. People read and hear the Bible as describing comprehensively African life – religious, cultural, social, political, economic, family life, spiritual realities, religious aspirations, worldviews, historical journeys, etc. The Bible places the Christian message right into the totality of African reality, making it really ‘our Bible’ and ‘our message’.

**6. *The Central and Decisive Factor is the name and fact of Jesus Christ.*** The portrait of Jesus and his life and ministry among the people of his time rings loud bells in African life. This is seen in his healing the sick, chasing out unwanted spirits, feeding the hungry, receiving people both within and on the edge of society (foreign rulers, women, children, the lepers, the blind), and preaching peace and love. Africans have fallen in love with Jesus Christ and are formulating hundreds of Christological titles to describe him and their relationship with him. It is their (our) answer to his question to the disciples: “Whom do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15; Mark 8:27; Luke 9:20) The titles speak of people’s personal relationship with Jesus and their hope in him. These can be summarised in a poster I once saw in 2013, on the back of a bus in Kenya, which read: “Who God bless no man curse: It’s no secret I love Jesus.”<sup>4</sup> We shall look more closely at this Jesus, whom African Christianity claims to **love** openly.

**7. *Jesus has many faces in African Christianity***

Who then is Jesus Christ today, in whose name some Christians have suffered or died? Jesus Christ is a new, precious, mysterious, fascinating Name at the centre of African Christianity. Millions of Christians in Africa proclaim the Name of Jesus in one or more Christological titles. By and through these titles, they have a two-way access to him and they recognise him. Who then do African Christians say Jesus is? How are they answering the question that Jesus posed to his followers two thousand years ago: Who do you say that I am? In answer, they proclaim Jesus in hundreds of titles, as listed in my collection, plus others not included. Jesus Christ has many faces and many titles.

***Jesus Christ, as the Living Focus of Belief and Trust***

A crucial element has entered the African world through the Christian faith. And that is the person, life, and work of Jesus Christ. He is not named in African religion as such, but some of his activities and teachings are present in or can be read into the setting of African life and religiosity. Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels is very ‘visible’ on the African scene: intermingling

4 See Appendix.

with the people, walking in the countryside, healing the sick, exorcising the unclean and unwanted spirits, teaching in parables drawn from family and community life (sowing, harvesting, weeds, sheep, children, women, love, peace, and other values). All these descriptions about the life, person and work of Jesus find a ready application in African life, both traditional and modern. In this respect, Jesus is not an invisible Stranger: African people respond to him with endearment, respect, welcome, and love, as if they have been “walking with him” already. As with the two disciples walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus on the day of the resurrection (Luke 24:13–16) has Jesus been walking with the African people but with their eyes being held (closed), without recognising him, until the gospel came to them? Christianity in Africa is built upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. If the Christian message had been to tell people only about God that would have been superfluous, since the traditional religion is grounded in belief in God, and they knew God before missionaries came. But Jesus is the magnet who now draws all people to himself.

African Christianity has put Jesus at both the centre and the peripherals of life. It has embraced classical and traditional Christology, giving African colour to the interpretation of Christological titles such as King, Priest, Lord, Saviour, and so on. But in addition it is also generating its own peculiar aspects of Christology, to the relevance and enrichment of African Christianity. As well as interpreting traditional Christological concepts afresh, Africans are generating concepts by which they endeavour to understand Jesus more clearly, by which they can embrace him more firmly and by which they can adore him more devoutly. So, we find a Christology that combines historical titles with local or contextual titles. And these titles are strongly coloured by African religion, for it is in the context of African religiosity that the name of Jesus Christ has been pronounced, and it is in same context that people respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup>

Africans embrace the Christian faith because of Jesus Christ who is the new element that has come into their religious experience. It is the message about Jesus Christ that has captured their attention. And it is precisely the person of Jesus Christ in that message who has won their allegiance and devotion and who has become the ultimate point of hope in their lives.

Most of what Africans say and think about Jesus Christ is not written down or publicly proclaimed. It is expressed orally. Some of it is found in Christian (and popular ‘secular’) songs and hymns. A lot is articulated in

5 We note in passing, that some historical and traditional concepts in Christology are difficult to translate into African languages and worldviews. That difficulty makes their meaning obscure. An example is part of the Nicene Creed expressing belief in one Lord Jesus Christ, as being “Begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father . . .”

sermons, catechumen teaching and free prayers, especially in families, and pastoral ministry. Some African theologians also research, write, and publish on Christology; and, in recent decades, this has become (one of) the most popular subjects of theological publications.

Without going into details, we take the list of Christological titles that people are using in African Christianity. We can say that they are in response to the question that Jesus put to His disciples: “Who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15; Mark 8:27; Luke 9:20) Some titles are universal, but others are ‘typically African’. Many are still ‘raw’ in that they have not undergone a process of being theologically scrutinised and used widely. People use these Christological titles and answers as support in identifying and relating to Jesus Christ. They apply them in conversations and prayers, in sermons and counselling, in hymns and songs, in writing and mass media.

Many are metaphorical, symbolic, and figurative titles, reflecting the strong feature of the oral tradition in Africa. Some are suggested by biblical stories and passages. Others arise out of experiences of African daily lives. For the most part, lay people articulate them as they talk about the faith. These individuals are also the ones who produce oral theology. Thus, this can be described or considered as mass Christology; oral Christology; a Christology in the field; a Christology in songs and hymns; a Christology where people are, whether in church services, prayer meetings, Christian camps for young people, meetings of Mothers’ Unions, travelling in buses, or walking on foot. It is a Christology of the people by the people, who encounter Jesus or experience him in different circumstances of their lives. So they respond to him in ways that are personally meaningful to them. They ‘name’ Jesus, and through any or several of the Christological titles, they establish a personal relationship with him. The titles are personal (private) confessions of faith; they are like creeds spontaneously articulated without theological controversies. These titles attach Jesus to the people, and the people to Jesus. They are the oral emblems of endearment to Jesus. Jesus has many faces and titles in African Christianity, and the number of them is endless, as people continue to encounter him, relate to him, get new visions of him, and verbalise new titles. These are the fruit of quiet dialogue, or encounter, or meeting between the Christian faith and African religiosity.

### **About the Christological Titles of Jesus Christ in African Christianity<sup>6</sup>**

1. The titles come from the Bible, early Church, historical Christological titles, missionary teaching, evangelism, experiences, and reflections of Christians in Africa. Thus, some are both local and global, some are ecumenical and contemporary. The Bible (in full and in part) is translated

6 See Appendix.

into nearly 800 African languages. So Africa is cultivating biblical Christianity in almost one thousand African languages – our own languages. Hence, this beautiful proliferation of Christological titles of Jesus is the naming of Jesus Christ in our own languages as related to our traditional and contemporary lives.

2. The titles place Jesus squarely and absolutely in the entire African setting: communication (media and transport), culture, education, health care, family, geography, history, languages, political institutions, social institutions, religions, and spirituality.
3. Most of the titles are concrete, tangible, and pictorial. As Africa had no alphabet (except in Egypt and Ethiopia), it had an oral culture with symbols, proverbs, metaphors, stories, etc. So it is largely through the oral tradition that the aspirations of African people capture and experience Jesus in their mind, heart, and spirit. Hardly any of the titles are abstract. They are formulated originally in African languages that people understand and use, but are listed in translation into English. They are found in sermons, songs, hymns, conversations, pastoral counselling, Christian education, the giving of advice, discussion of the Christian faith and in the Scriptures. Thus, most of the titles originate largely from informal oral theological output (even if some are eventually written down), and much less from written theology. They come from the laity and clergy. They are articulated by literate and illiterate Christian women, men, and youth, the old and the young, living in their (mainly rural) places of origin, or in towns, or as migrants in their countries or overseas.
4. These titles depict a spirit of endearment and loving attachment to Jesus. Through them, the people rightly claim him and put a seal on him, as belonging to everyone in Africa. The titles show Africans feeling at home with Jesus. Many have family and social attachments. The people imagine that he also is at home with them.
5. Traditionally, Africans give people names that have meanings, and at any age of the persons concerned: babies, children, young people, older people, according to character, position, or occupation, etc. The names often mark the character, the circumstances at birth, or later (family, geographical, historical, social, weather, etc.). With these many symbolic, metaphorical, and literal titles of Jesus, African Christians aspire to claim and maintain Jesus Christ as one of them, as being in the middle of their lives, activities, experiences, joys, fears, and hopes. In feeling that he belongs to them, they feel that they also belong to him. With these titles, everyone has a 'share' of Jesus, a 'claim' on Jesus, knows Jesus, names Jesus with a title and relates to Jesus as a known person. The specific titles, by which people name Jesus, make no room to doubt him, to deny him, or to betray him. They are not dealing with doctrines or disciplines of the church, or with theological dogmas and controversies, or a fictitious character. People are happy and confident to proclaim his

Name, to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ whom they know by various titles. The slogan or poster on the back of a public bus in Nairobi, which I saw in 2013, summarises the core of African Christianity. It was written in red and read: “It’s no secret I love Jesus”.

6. This Jesus has many faces, and the people **know** him and **love** him by one or more of his faces. Jesus is the core, and wonder, and admiration of African Christianity. Everyone has access to Jesus through any or several of these titles, for they exclude nobody. They are so comprehensive that they embrace everyone. With these titles, no person is or would feel excluded from belonging to the ‘people of Jesus’, or from the ‘flock of Jesus.’ On his part, he calls everyone and every sheep by name (John 10:3 “He calls his own sheep by name”, and “they know his voice”, the voice of One with hundreds of titles). That is fantastic. Nowhere else and at no other time in history, has Jesus been decorated with so many titles. Praise the Lord!
7. For those who formulate or use these titles, Jesus is very real, almost tangible. He is not a controversial or fictitious figure. Jesus is present with them and in them. The social, cultural, political, and religious setting in the Gospels, in which Jesus lived and worked, translates readily to many of the African settings in which the gospel has come to us. For example, Jesus healing the sick; Jesus driving out demons and unwanted spirits; Jesus feeding the hungry; Jesus breaking down prejudices against women; Jesus mixing with all classes and groups of people; Jesus performing miracles (like turning water into wine, raising the dead, and calming the storm on the Lake of Galilee). The society in which he lived and with which he interacted included: the poor and the rich; lepers; prostitutes; children; women; people at the brink of society; the secular authorities and rulers; fishers; farmers and workers on the land; keepers of sheep; religious elite; Roman rulers; traders; builders; temple workers and religious authorities; his critics and followers; families; etc. Traditional African society, in which Christianity is set, has many similarities to the society in which Jesus lived. But of course African society is changing rapidly, and African Christianity is part of that society. However, African Christianity wants to go along, and to keep its Christology along the way. The titles of Jesus depict him with many faces which are also faces in the changing landscape.
8. The titles indicate a clear degree of intimacy between Christians and Jesus. African Christianity is a highly christologised Christianity. This is, however, not an ecclesiastically formulated Christology of any institutional church. It is a spontaneous Christology; a collective Christology; a mass Christology; a lay persons’ Christology; a Christology in the fields; in the streets; in the villages; in Christian homes; in the shops and schools; in the army barracks and police quarters; in the mass media and communication facilities; in the creative arts; in universities and

theological institutions. It is a Christology of the ears, the eyes, the feet, the heart, the mouth, and the tongue. It is a lived and living Christology of African Christianity. It is literally infectious and self-propagating!

We take two examples of the Christological titles and see the setting in which they have arisen, and in which people use or have used them. One comes from Nigeria, which speaks of Jesus as a ‘Bulldozer.’ A Jesuit priest, Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, from Nigeria, who at a time was a teacher and rector of the Hekima College Jesuit School of Theology in Nairobi, Kenya, in his book, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*<sup>7</sup>, uses the name *Jesu Kristi*, and tells of his experience when he presided at the Eucharist in a prison in Benin City, Nigeria. He writes that the prisoners “were charismatic Catholics. For the entrance procession they intoned and passionately sang a song that has never ceased to intrigue me:

Jesus is my bulldozer. Amen! He’s my bulldozer, Amen! Bulldoze my case, O Lord! Amen! He’s my bulldozer, Amen! Bulldoze the lawyer, O Lord! Amen! He’s my bulldozer, Amen! Bulldoze the judge, O Lord! Amen! He’s my bulldozer! Amen! Jesus is my bulldozer, Amen! He’s my bulldozer! Amen!

Father Orobator comments that, “every African Christian . . . faces the challenging task of formulating his or her own answer to the Jesus question . . . The answer will derive from each Christian’s personal encounter of *Jesu Kristi*, rather than from erudite speculations of theologians. Hence, for the imprisoned Christians of Benin City, only a *Jesu Kristi* endowed with the power and force of a bulldozer would do.”

Another example comes from an oral articulation of who Jesus Christ is (was) for a Ghanaian Christian woman, Afua Kuma (1900–1987), (known as Christiana Afua Gyan) who never went to school and could not write. She was a farmer and lived in a forest region of Ghana. She prayed and sang praises to Jesus in the Twi language, which others recorded and transcribed into a small book entitled *Jesus of the Deep Forest*.<sup>8</sup> The natural physical environment was the setting for her Christological songs and praises, and she uses countless images from both her physical and cultural settings. This comes out powerfully from the very beginning of her book, in which she sets out to “praise the name of Jesus Christ” and “announce his many titles”, which she says are both true and suitable.

7 Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot* (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2008), 77.

8 Afua Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest. Prayers and Praises of Afua Kuma*, trans. Jon Kirby (Asempa Publishers, Accra, Ghana 1980), 5.

She experiences Jesus as being ‘All powerful’ (the title given to God in many African ethnic groups). Consequently, his deeds are marvellous. Jesus is the Master who rules over the earth. She likens his power to that of the python, which is the strongest snake in the forests where she farmed and lived. He is not easy to be overcome. Another image is that of the Big Boat that cannot be sunk – so is Jesus for her.

In Afua Kuma’s social situation where there might be poor people, Jesus is their Saviour. He gives them encouragement and assurance so that they can smile and laugh in spite of their poverty. She and other believers are bound up with Jesus and rely on him as their hope, just as the tongue relies on the mouth, she says. So she goes on, piling up images of Jesus, images that enable her to know him more closely, to relate to him, to rely on him – as the Great Rock, Forest Canopy, Big Tree, Magnificent Tree, that cares and provides water and food for the traveller. That way, her (their) life is satisfied, and fulfilled, and “We ride in canoes on the water’s surface / And catch our fish!”

So, Kuma can sing praises to Jesus. She is not an exception. She is one voice out of many such voices in Africa which proclaim who Jesus Christ is for them. Oral theology is rich in Christology, and is among other areas where Christianity (the Bible) and African religion meet. It is an intensely creative encounter and is a witness to the vibrant presence of Christianity in Africa today.

“We are going to praise the name of Jesus Christ.  
 We shall announce his many titles:  
 They are true and they suit him well,  
 So, it is fitting that we do this.

All-powerful Jesus  
 Who engages in marvellous deeds,  
 He is the one called Hero ɔkatakayi!  
 Of all earthly dominions, he is the Master;  
 The Python not overcome with mere sticks,  
 The Big Boat, which cannot be sunk.

Jesus, Saviour of the poor,  
 Who brightens up our faces!  
 Damfo-Adu: the Clever one,  
 We rely on you as the tongue relies on the mouth.

The great Rock we hide behind:  
 The great Forest Canopy that gives cool shade:  
 The Big Tree which lifts its vines  
 To peep at the heavens,  
 The Magnificent Tree whose dripping leaves  
 Encourage the luxuriant growth below.

Wonderworker, you are the one  
Who has carried water in a basket,  
And put it by the roadside  
For the travellers to drink for three days.  
You use the *kono* basket to carry water to the desert,  
Then you throw in your net and bring forth fish!  
You use the net to fetch water and put it into a basket.  
We ride in canoes on the water's surface  
And catch our fish!"

### **Bibliography**

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- Kwiyani, Harvey C. *Sent Forth: African Missionary Work in the West*. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 2014.
- Orobator, Agbonkhanmeghe E. *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2008.



# Appendix

## LIST OF CHRISTOLOGICAL TITLES OF JESUS CHRIST IN AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

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**Sources of the Christological Titles:** A wide variety of articles, books, conference themes, drawings, hymnbooks, Sunday School lessons, names of (Independent) Churches and congregations, placards, sermons, slogans, symbols, and paintings-drawings (books, buses, buildings, churches, leaflets, walls, etc.). A good number come from *Jesus of the Deep Forest, Prayers and Praises of Afua Kuma* (1900–1987), Asempa Publishers, Accra Ghana 1980 (Twi) and 1981 (English translation by Jon Kirby, S.V.D.). Afua Kuma could neither read nor write, yet she composed, sang, and danced these prayers and praises (a beautiful example of African oral theology). Many African Christians are doing the same in their areas and their own languages. Independent churches are rich in these Christological titles. I assemble the titles wherever and whenever I come across them. I welcome and appreciate new ones to add to the list; please and thank you ([mbiti.john@gmail.com](mailto:mbiti.john@gmail.com)).

Abiding (forever), Adored, Advisor, Advocate, All-powerful Jesus, Ancestor, Arbitrator, Beloved, Big Boat which cannot be sunk, Big Brother, Big Ram (of the sheepfold, equipped with courage and strength), Big Tree which lifts its vines to peep at the heavens, Big Tree, Blockades (road of death with wisdom and power), Big Brother, Blessings dispenser / giver, Born of a woman, Bread of Life, Brother, Builder, Bulldozer, Caller, Carer, Carrier of the double-edged sword, Chameleon, Chases Satan away, Chief among chiefs, Chief of all (young people, strong men, old women, rulers). Chief of farmers, Chief of Lawyers, Chief of many small villages, Chief of Police, Chief of the lepers, Chief, Cleanser, Clever One, Comforter, Communicator, Companion, Condoler, Conqueror (of Satan, Sickness, Death), Cornerstone, Counsellor, Cultivator (of souls), Custodian, Deep Well, Defender, Dispenser of Blessings, Diviner, Doctor of the sick, Doctor, Door, Driver, Elder Brother, Elder, Elephant Hunter, Elephant, Elevated above all, Enabler, Encourager, Enduring, Enhancer, Enlightener, Everlasting, Example, Exorcist, Expeller of evil,

Faithful, Family head, Family member, Father, Favourite, Fearless One (Tutugyagu), Feeder, Finder of the lost, Finder of the Way, Fisher, Flame, Food of prisoners, Forgiver, Found everywhere, Founder, Fountain of life, Fountain, Friend to old men and women, Friend, Full Moon, Gate, Giver of (cool) Shade, Giver, Giver of food, Giver of water of life, Grass Hut, Great Chief, Great City (called Soe-di-bi = Put down your load and have something to eat), Great Doctor, Great Forest Canopy, Great Jesus, Great Lion, Great Personality, Great Rock, Greatest Warrior among the soldiers, Grinding stone (for sharpening cutlass), Guardian, Guest, Guest Receiver, Guide of the blind, Guide Post, Guide, Hard working Farmer, Harvester, Head, Healer, Hearer, Helper of the crippled, Helper, Hero, Hiding Place, Holy One, Holy, Hope, Hope Giver, Host, Humble King, Hunter (helps other hunters), Hurricane of the rainy season (Ogyampanturudu), Husband, Ideal Brother, Illuminator, In whom is Safety, Inspirer, Intermediary, Inviter, Iron rod, Jesus at the Well, Joy, Just, Keeper, Keeper of secrets, Key, Kin, Kind, King of Africa, King of Kings, King, Kinsman, Knows all, Lamb, Lamb of God, Lamp, Lantern (brightest), Leader, Leopard (“whose cubs cannot be caught”), Liberator, Life-giver, Life, Lifter, Light, Lighter, Lightning, Lineage head, Linguist (truthful), Lion of grasslands (tears out entrails of enemies of Jesus’ people), Listener (to our cries, joys, praises, prayers and thanksgiving, etc.), Lord of hosts, Lord of Lords, Lord, Loved One, Lover, Magician who walks on the sea, Magnet, Magnificent Tree, Man of God, Master of Initiation, Master of Signs and Wonders, Master of Wisdom, Master, Mediator, Medicine man / woman, Medicine-Giver, Mender of brokenness, Merciful, Messenger, Messiah, Milk, Miracle worker, Mirror of life, Moon of the harvest month which gives us our food, Moon which-rises-from-a-hole-in-the-sea / -ocean, Mother, Muthamaki (Ideal Elder), Never dies, Nurse, Oil, Older Brother, Osagyefo (One who saves in the battle), Our Security, Overseer, Pastor, Path, Patient (in waiting, responding), Peace, Peaceful, Pencil of teachers, Physician, Pillar, Pointer, Powerful Chief (Okokurokohene), Powerful Jesus, Powerful One, Praiseworthy, Preacher, Present everywhere, Priest, Prince, Promisor, Prophet, Protector, Proto-Ancessor, Proto-Elder, Provider, Python not overcome with mere sticks, Quencher of Thirst, Rainbow, Raiser of the fallen or downcast, Reassurer, Receiver of guests, Receiver of Prayers and Praises, Receiver of souls (at death), Reconciler, Redeemer, Refresher (of the pilgrims, the tired, etc.), Refuge, Repairer, Rescuer, Resurrector, Revealer, Reviver, Rewarder, Rich Man, River (of life), Rock, Route, Ruler, Satisfier (with food, water, wisdom, etc.), Saviour of the Nations, Saviour of the Poor, Saviour, Searcher, Seer among prophets, Sent by the Father, Shed, Shelter, Shepherd, Shield, Shining Light, Son of God, Soré Tree, Source of flowing waters, Source-of great-strength (Okuruakwaban), Sovereign (among great chiefs), Sovereign, Sower, Speaker, Spring, Stalwart of persons (stands firm as a rock), Star, Steward of God’s household, Storehouse of wisdom, Strengthener, String of priceless

beads, Strong one, Strong-armed One (Adubasapon), Strong-hearted One (Okokodurufo), Sun, Supplier, Support, Supreme and Objective Source of Knowledge, Sword-carrier (at the battlefield – Word of his Mouth is the weapon), Sympathizer, Tall Mountain, Teacher, The Crucified, Thumb (without which we cannot tie a knot), To Whom you can confide, Torch, Transcending Categories, Transformer, True, Trustworthy, Truth, Truthful, Umbrella, Unique Christ, Untiring Porter, Uplifter, Victor, Vine, Warrior, Watcher (over our lives), Water of life, Way, Welcomer, Winner, Wiper (of sorrows, tears, wounds), Wise, Wonder-worker, Word of God.

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Harvey C. Kwiyani, *Sent Forth: African Missionary Work in the West*, Orbis: Maryknoll NY 2014. 244 pages.**

In the early days of colonial missions Western missionaries looked forward to the time when non-Western Christians would come to Europe and North America to breathe new vitality into the ageing body of Western Christianity. After the decolonization of the Majority World and the current massive migration to the West, this so-called “blessed reflex” is now definitely happening. It is increasingly becoming clear that non-Western Christians in the West are not just there for economic reasons, but they consider themselves as missionaries, with a calling to reinvigorate the cultures of the West. This book by a Malawian theologian living in the United States, documents this missionary movement, concentrating on the African diaspora in North America.

The main argument of Kwiyani’s book can be summarized as follows. The coming of African Christians in the West must be considered as a God-given opportunity for Western and non-Western Christians to work together to revitalize the dying churches of the West. African Christianity has a unique and important contribution to make. However, we are only in the very first stages of finding out what this contribution may be. Many obstacles need to be overcome, deep racism not being the least of these. However, the future of Christianity lies in increasing cooperation of Western and non-Western Christians.

Chapter 1 provides a historical perspective on the role of African Christians in the early days of the Christian Church. It is important to stress that Christianity has deep roots in the African continent, as the Roman Empire covered large stretches of North Africa. However, I wonder to what extent it is helpful to lump everything ‘African’ together, thereby clouding that Christianity is a relative newcomer in sub-Saharan Africa, and that sub-Saharan Christianity (being the main inspiration of African missions) is quite different from Christianity in Egypt and Ethiopia. This chapter also contains worthwhile theological reflections on migration, showing that mission is almost always born out of an experience of exile and diaspora. Chapter 2

maps historical examples of missionary contacts between Africa and the West, and it also provides a map of the three main currents of African Christianity: Mainline, Independent, and Pentecostal. Kwiyani further demonstrates how “the evangelisthood of all believers” is deeply ingrained in all these streams of African Christianity, and he presents helpful discussions on the use of the words “missionary” and “mission” in a post-colonial context. In chapter 3 Kwiyani discusses scholarly literature on the African missionary movement to the West. His focus lies on the scholarly debate in the United States that is only just taking off. That is unfortunate, as the debate in Europe has been going on much longer. Although he discusses some (older) European studies, he ignores important recent contributions by, for example, Claudia Währisch-Oblau (2009), Rebecca Catto (2010), and Daniëlle Koning (2012). Chapter 4 presents a very interesting description of African Christian presence in the West. Kwiyani discusses the three currents that were mentioned in chapter 2, and adds a fourth, Roman Catholicism. Chapter 5 addresses the issue of Christian dialogue in the context of mission. Kwiyani lists some specifics of African Christianity that can contribute to the revitalization of the church in the West. Here Kwiyani opens some very promising doors toward the mobilization of all believers and the revitalization of congregations. He does mention the current lack of missionary success of African Christians in the West, and I believe that the addition of recent European studies would have helped him here to reflect a little more on this. Must we really expect that the second generation of African Christians will see more fruits on their work, or will they be swept away in the forces of secularization? The jury may still be out, but more could have been said about this, as there is a growing amount of data in this respect. Chapter 6 discusses conditions and obstacles for a truly multicultural missionary movement. Again, Kwiyani concentrates on the United States. His own experiences as a church planter in America are prominent in these pages. As for the very serious problem of racism, Kwiyani not only presents us with some shocking examples from his own experience, but he also gives food for thought. For example, he writes about his visit to a Black church where his sense of alienation and rejection was just as strong as in White churches. Racism cannot be the problem here, but what is it? Kwiyani mentions the issue of ‘having an African accent’ which made him stand out. Also, he encountered more explicit racism in Minnesota than in Britain. Is that because Americans are more prone to racism? Or are there other issues hidden under these experiences, issues of power for instance (the proverbial ‘weak’ coming to evangelize *us*)? Chapter 7 continues this discussion with some personal reflections and a look to the future of the missionary movement.

This well-written book is a must-read for everyone who is interested in the future of the missionary movement. Even though it is more about the United States than about Europe, the book is highly informative, and it contains many excellent observations and questions. An added value is that

it is written by an African who has missionary experience ‘on the ground’. Kwiyani’s personal reflections and experiences are skilfully interwoven with his scholarly work, and this prevents the book from becoming too abstract.

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**Chigor Chike, *The Holy Spirit in African Christianity*, Paternoster, Milton Keynes, 2015. 196 pages.**

Chigor Chike is a Nigerian minister in a Church of England congregation in London. He has lived and worked in England since 1992, and thus, is part of the African Christian migration that brought many Africans to Europe in the 1990s. A significant of the migrants are Christian – their migration taking place at a time when Christianity is experiencing tremendous growth in Africa. That is why African Christianity exploded in Europe in the 1990s with African congregations emerging in Western cities in the hundreds. Chike was part of that migration story, though unknowingly and unintentionally (1). He has, since 1992, observed the growing presence of African churches in Britain, and reflected on it in his earlier book, *African Christianity in Britain* (AuthorHouse, Milton Keynes, 2007) in which he explores the doctrines of God, Christ, and salvation among African Christians in Britain.

*The Holy Spirit in African Christianity* is Chike’s second book focusing on African Christianity in the Diaspora. Chike’s focus in this book is *pneumatology* – the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The book comes out Chike’s doctoral thesis—his research having explored the beliefs held by African Christians, especially what they believe about the Holy Spirit (2) with an aim to add to the existing studies of African Christianity (5). The title maybe a little misleading since his research was limited to African Christianity in London, even though Chike is aware of, and often brings into his argument, the scholarly conversations on the Holy Spirit taking place in Africa. Being a doctoral thesis, the book is a brilliant piece of academic work. It achieves both its stated goals; to explore African pneumatology and to extend knowledge of the same in theological disciplines. Even though it is academic in its approach, it is accessible even to those who are not academically inclined. Especially in its conclusions, the book is relevant to the work of pastors and other church leaders.

A greater percentage of the book is dedicated to the research that informed Chike’s doctoral work. The research’s entire methodology is discussed, with the philosophical issues that shaped the methodology explained. Chike opted for a four-part process that included inductive research followed by analysis of the data collected, and this was followed by deductive research and again

an analysis. The inductive part of the research involved Chike being a participant observer in one congregation for over fourteen months (38), followed by interviews where leaders and members of the congregation answered questions posed by the researcher. After analysing the data, and reflecting on it in the light of the works of other theologians in the form of a literature review, Chike conducted further interviews in four other congregations from four denominations (Pentecostal, Methodist, Anglican, and Roman Catholic) to test his theory-patterns (from the first part of the research) out (112). What comes out of this testing of theory-patterns uncovers the complexities behind the research—a congregation’s pneumatology is not determined by its liturgy or denomination.

One of the great contributions that the books makes to the study of the Holy Spirit in African Christianity is in the chapter entitled, “The Anatomy of African Pneumatology.” Here, Chike explores a Trinitarian framework for talking about the Spirit in African theology. He tackles the issue of *subordinationism* where the Spirit, being the third in the Trinity, is believed to less than the Father and the Son (146–150). He, then, explores the five factors that he believes affect a person’s pneumatology, which include; experience, the Bible, African worldview, Africa’s traditional concept of God and Pentecostalism. I found Chike’s discussion of each of these very informative even though I wondered how them maybe used to explain pneumatology in non-African contexts. Indeed, this caused me to seek to understand what Chike meant by *pneumatology*. While it is fairly clear in the book how he sees pneumatology at work in the lives of many Christians, he seems to suggest that it is readily at work in charismatic or Pentecostal churches (where the members’ closeness to the spirit was more visible during his research). He adds that foundational to a believer’s pneumatology is their understanding of the Trinity – which “sets both the framework for their negotiation of pneumatology and the boundaries of what the can accept” (169). This got me thinking, “Do mainline churches also have a pneumatology even though it is expressed differently? If so, how does the Spirit affect their lives and services?” In other words, “Is the Holy Spirit only Pentecostal?” Of course, I wished Chike would explore further the connection between pneumatology, Pentecostalism, and the African worldview. These are understandably questions for future study.

Chike is to be commended for the good book that is definitely a significant contribution to the discipline of African theology. *The Holy Spirit in African Christianity* is a book many students of theology (or pneumatology) will find indispensable. Everyone interested in the study of African Christianity in Britain will do well to know this book.

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