

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"¹ (Matt. 10:40; John 4:34; 20:21); the Holy Spirit, according to Timothy Tennent, is the empowering presence of the *missio Dei*² (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."³ 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.⁴ 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.⁵ 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.⁶ 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.”⁷

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.”⁸ 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. Barrett⁹ and John Stott¹⁰ 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.¹¹ According to Ben Witherington III, *hellenistas* are Greek-speaking Gentiles.¹² 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. Kisau¹³ 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*. 2nd 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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ It was the third largest city of the Roman Empire, cosmopolitan and a commercial hub for the entire region.¹⁶ Both Charles Barrett¹⁷ and F. F. Bruce¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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.²⁰ 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.²¹ 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 Wagner²² calls 'monocultural evangelism', also referred to as 'selective witness' by Kisau,²³ 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.²⁴ However the *constrained-to-plant* model that was used tends to function from an 'external authority structure.'²⁵ 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.²⁶

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.²⁷ Using Osgood’s categorisations, the senior ministers could be considered as *sent-to-plant*.²⁸ 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.²⁹ 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.³⁰ 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.³¹ 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.³² 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.³³ 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.³⁴ 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.³⁵

Thus, strategic partnerships built on a *relational paradigm* (meaning emphasis on relationships)³⁶ 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.³⁷ 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.³⁸ 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.³⁹

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’.⁴⁰ 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*.⁴¹

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.⁴² 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*⁴³ (the black African from northern Africa); Lucius from Cyrene⁴⁴ (a North African); Manaen⁴⁵ (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.⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷

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).⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹ 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.⁵⁰ 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.'⁵¹ 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.⁵² 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.⁵³ 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.

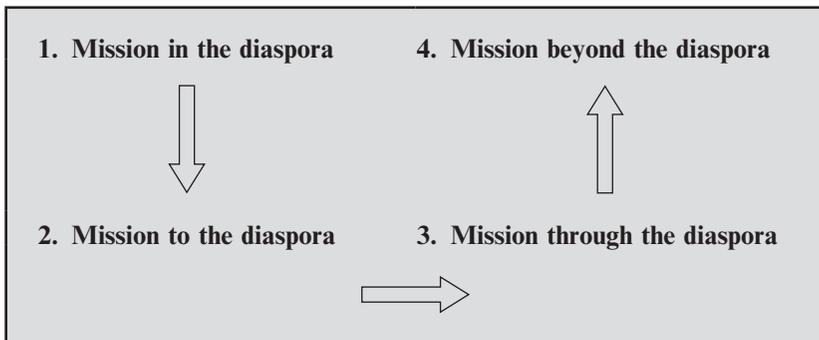


Figure 1 The four-dimensional framework for diasporic missions.

Enoch Wan’s original framework for understanding diasporic missions has three dimensions.⁵⁴ 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 21st 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.⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶ 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.⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸

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.⁵⁹ 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.⁶⁰

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.⁶¹ 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.⁶² “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.”⁶³ 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.⁶⁴ 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.⁶⁵ 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.⁶⁶ 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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