
Book Review

SENT FORTH: AFRICAN MISSIONARY WORK IN THE WEST

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SENT FORTH: AFRICAN MISSIONARY WORK IN THE WEST

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The church's centre of gravity is shifting into the Southern hemisphere. As early as 1976, Andrew Walls pointed out that within the previous three centuries Christianity has undergone a remarkable shift from being a sort of "tribal religion of the Caucasian people" to truly global religion. Along with such development, Christians from the Global South are also migrating to the Western world in large numbers and starting congregations. This new development has attracted scholars from various disciplines, particularly in the United States, to study the missional impact of immigrant congregations on the social, economic, political, and religious life of the West.

The author of this book, Harvey Kwiyani, is an African scholar interested in the study of immigrant congregations in America. The book is the product of his experience as a missionary serving in Europe for seven years, and his exposure to immigrant congregations when he was doing his postgraduate study in Saint Paul, Minnesota. This is his first published book, which started life as a doctoral dissertation and was then broadened and amended for publication. Kwiyani deserves praise for taking the initiative to study the complexity and diversity within the immigrant congregations in America, a group that is too often overlooked in scholarly circles. The study is a timely, thorough, and thoughtful exploration of the experience of immigrant congregations in Minnesota and makes

a valuable contribution to the growing literature on the African diaspora, thus filling a void and providing a fuller understanding of African immigrants.

The book focuses on immigrant congregations in the USA, their struggle for identity, their adaptive strategies, and the challenges and opportunities they present to American Christianity and society. The principal argument of the book is clearly defined and well-argued as follows: In the postmodern world, where Western Christianity is faced with a significant amount of diversity (cultural, racial, and theological), there needs to be negotiation between the diverse cultures within Christianity itself for the churches to effectively engage in mission. Taking the issue of migration as the centre of his argument, he attempts to show the link between migration, mission, and the missional engagement of congregations in a pluralistic world.

The book is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview of Christianity in Africa and the involvement of African Christians in global mission. Kwiyani makes the link between the two by describing how migration has become the cause for the emergence of African congregations in the West. Chapter 2 traces the history of missions in Africa and Africa's place in global mission history. Focusing on African indigenous missionaries as main contributors to the development of Christianity in the continent, he critically evaluates the role of Western mission organisations in Christian history and Africa's involvement in world mission movements.

Chapter 3 describes the historical development that has resulted in academic awareness of the African missionary movement. Here, he critically engages with European and American conversations on the implications of African Christianity for global mission. Chapter 4 is about the presence and active participation of African denominations in the postcolonial West. Focusing on Pentecostals, mainline denominations, Roman Catholics, and African Initiated Churches in the West, he demonstrates how significant it is for the Western Christian churches to embrace such denominations and to try to look for ways in which they can partner with these denominations in God's mission. What these congregations do is to rehabilitate Africa's rich cultural heritage and religious consciousness, but in a self-consciously Christian and theologically active manner. As such, they seek to demonstrate the character of African Christian identity.

Chapter 5 deals with the central question of his thesis: “How is the rising African missionary movement to the West changing the religious landscape of Europe and North America?” (135). Mission history is dominated by stories and adventures about Western missions crossing borders to spread Christianity. Therefore, mission was understood as the responsibility of the Westerners (the “civilised”) towards others (the “uncivilised”). However, with the increase of migrants from the non-Western world every year, and with the growth of migrant congregations, a new phenomenon has emerged—the dynamics of mission has shifted in such a way that Europe and America are also considered “mission fields.”

Chapter 6 underlines the need for a “multicultural missionary movement as God’s preferred future for mission” (171). He describes the social, cultural, and theological challenges that non-Western Christians face in their missionary endeavours: discrimination, differences in theology, politics of migration, and identity crisis. He contends that “the entire Christian church needs to develop a new theological language that looks at faith, race, and mission in healthy ways that encourage cross-racial missional partnerships” (192).

Chapter 7 concludes with a reflection on the nature of non-Western congregations in Europe and America in the light of faithfulness to the *Missio Dei*—God’s mission. He describes how immigrant congregations, particularly African-based congregations, find it difficult to engage in mission in the Western world. Remarking that Christianity is all about welcoming strangers, he contends that “the entire Christian body in the West will need to work together to overcome these challenges in order to make it possible for Christians from different parts of the world to work together for God’s mission in the world” (204). The text concludes with an extensive bibliography and index.

For scholars interested in immigration, African Christianity, African immigrant congregations, and African diaspora studies, this is an indispensable resource and a must read.