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BOOK REVIEW

Christian mission in a diverse British urban context: Crossing the racial barrier to reach communities

Afrane-Twum, J.A. (Langham Publishing, 2024),
213 pages, ISBN: 978-1-83973-875-3

The book is the publication of the author's research on the relationship between African immigrant churches and White-majority churches in Britain. Afrane-Thum (2024:16) writes within the field of Missiology, which he describes as "an analysis and synthesis of the theological, sociological, anthropological, historical, and practical processes that God uses to bring all peoples to himself". He invites readers from all walks of life, who engage with evangelism and mission in the context of the local church in multicultural settings, to become part of this journey with the mission of God (*missio Dei*).

As one of the reviewers writes, Dr Afrane-Thum contributes through this work to the robust scholarship by African Christians to critique and provide insights into African mission (Olifinjana, I.O.). In this instance, it provides research on how the church, both locally and institutionally, engages across cultural and ethnic boundaries (Rooms, N.), and on a model of mission theology that transforms life, especially through the partnership and collaboration between African migrant churches and White-minority churches in the British context.

The book engages specifically the theme of “reverse mission”, described by Afrane-Thum (2024:17) as the term commonly used to mean “the conscious missionary strategy by mother churches in Africa to evangelize the diaspora”, considering the different waves of immigration to Britain (the host country) by people from, among others, the Caribbean and African (home) countries. The book focuses particularly on African immigrant churches that originated during the last century, giving a broad background to the concept of “reverse mission”, what he calls a “misnomer”. Afrane-Twum (2024:23, 198) explains that, in the past, mission was done from the West (Western Europe and North America) to Africa. However, due to different factors, mission is shifting from the Global South to the Global North. This requires a reconceptualisation of the type of Christianity African immigrants bring to those contexts (Britain and the West). In a sense, Britain has become a “mission field” and migration has become a God-given opportunity to spread the gospel. The influx of migrant Christians “is a providential means” to reach out to post-Christian countries such as Britain.

Afrane-Twum (2024) chooses the British context as a case in point to illustrate that there are abundant reasons why African immigrant churches started in Britain. The inhospitable experiences of African Christians when they visited White- (mono-ethnic) majority churches sometimes bordered on racism. They experienced an alienation from their African cultures, worship, and identity. They were Africans on Sunday and British citizens during the week (co-exist with the culture). The result is that, in their gatherings as African immigrant churches, they found some affirmation of their African identity and had a sense of belonging.

In the relational being of God as Trinity, Afrane-Twum (2024:129) finds the essence of missional theology, namely relationships. In order to have this kind of relationship, the *missio Dei* calls on each group to redefine, in their local contexts, where they work, play and live. The mission field and crossing cultural and ethnic barriers is important for the Great Commission. This also means for African immigrants to leave the comfort zone of their home contexts. They should start viewing migration as the will of God, that all people are equal and have a right to respect (Afrane-Twum, 2024:134).

Afrane-Twum (2024) presents the findings of his research on four churches, namely two White-majority churches and two African immigrant churches. Following the participant-observation methodology, such a movement that is focused on preserving a particular culture and mission is not biblically justified. Building on the *missio Dei* as a biblical and theological framework, Afrane-Twum (2024) finds, in the relational basis of the Trinity, a foundation and model for the missional future of African immigrant churches and White-majority

churches. These two groups should first align their vision, mission, and strategic plans for their churches with the relational Trinity that allows unity in diversity, rather than create room for a multicultural church that removes the cultural barriers that prevent the churches to be truthful witnesses in society.

The book presents not only what is wrong in the ecclesiological landscape of Britain, but also provides examples of good practice where the different (five-fold) ministries are recognised and allowed to function; the leading and working of the Holy Spirit is not suffused or regarded as seceded, but as actively working through the lives of ordinary members and leaders, creating a model of servant leadership and making room for new movements of the Spirit that have an impact on church and society. Afrane-Twum identifies the need for a Spirit-led theological framework that can pave the way for genuine partnership between African immigrant churches and White-minority churches, although they differ on how they view and experience it.

The book suggests but does not explicitly address the push-and-pull factors that are the main reasons for poor, less fortunate, politically, economically, and social unstable people to migrate to other contexts. Informed about the critique on these factors, Afrane-Twum (2024:136) concurs that, although reverse mission is a major shift, it might not be a motivation for immigration because, in some instances, it is more self-serving and focused on personal survival within a culturally and ethnically diverse context. A positive contribution of the book is the opportunity that immigration provides for the gospel to be ministered as good news to people from closed countries such as Eritrea, Saudi-Arabia, Libya, and North Korea, where its ministry and mission are not allowed (Afrane-Thum, 2024:140). It provides possibilities for these churches to demonstrate, equip, and empower these members to be missionaries within their own contexts.

The book finds it difficult to throw off the thesis mould in which it is written and tends to inhibit the flow of arguments from chapter to chapter amidst a clear phase-by-phase thesis structure. The last chapter provides a succinct and informative summary of the whole book and offers some interesting suggestions for further research on the topic of “reverse mission” and “reverse evangelism”. The book is a valuable contribution to the glocal conversation about migration and offers a helpful model for mutual acceptance and continuing dialogue between host countries and immigrants. It also suggests creative ways as to how host countries can remain involved, without determining the agenda in a different context. The book offers a model of Christian mission that inspires and transforms lives from diverse contexts, a mission rooted in God’s divine initiative, with caring servant leadership, viewing the wider community as another stage of mission – a mission field.

The book, *Christian mission*, is a well-researched and -argued addition to the almost popular interest in the shift of Christianity, from the historical West to the rest of the world, from everywhere to everywhere. Afrane-Twum succeeds in his endeavour to stir further debate and attempt to find collective solutions in a world that is becoming increasingly more polarised culturally and ethnically.