

# MISSIO AFRICANUS

JOURNAL OF AFRICAN MISSIOLOGY

VOLUME 1 | ISSUE 1  
APRIL 2015



ISSN 2059-173X



9 772059 173004 >

**MISSION FROM AFRICA: A CALL  
TO RE-IMAGINE MISSION IN  
AFRICAN-LED PENTECOSTAL  
CHURCHES IN BRITAIN**

**LEADERSHIP TRAITS  
AND PRACTICES:  
INSIGHTS FROM  
AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGIES**

**LOVING THE BRITISH FOR  
THE SAKE OF MISSION**

**CELEBRATING THE  
LIFE AND LEGACY OF  
BISHOP AJAYI CROWTHER**

**MISSIO DEI:  
AN AFRICAN APPROPRIATION**

**EDITOR: HARVEY C. KWIYANI**

# *Loving the British for the Sake of Mission*

## Nigel Rooms

*Nigel Rooms is the Director of Ministry and Mission in the Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham in the Church of England. He is also the facilitator of the Partnership for Missional Church – UK.*

*Email: [nigel.rooms@southwell.anglican.org](mailto:nigel.rooms@southwell.anglican.org)*

### **Abstract**

This article addresses a question raised by the phenomenon of what might be termed ‘mono-ethnic’ or even ‘mono-linguistic’ Christian congregations in Britain desiring to undertake mission beyond their own boundaries. Such congregations are formed by immigrants to Britain from, first of all, Commonwealth nations once ruled by the British, and also now other countries without those same historical ties. Most of these congregations are finding it difficult to reach British people, and this is partly because they have not fully figured out how to do cross-cultural mission in the context of Britain. This essay intends to begin to explore, for the sake of such immigrant congregations, what it means to be British.

**Keywords:** *missio Dei*, British-ness, culture, evangelization.

### **Introduction**

There is a plethora of churches attracting Christian immigrants from many African, South Asian and Far Eastern nations. The phenomenon of such ‘diaspora’ churches, particularly those from Africa, has been well described by Chike<sup>1</sup>, an Anglican, and Adedibu<sup>2</sup>, a member of a Pentecostal diaspora denomination and describes their development within the overall category of ‘black majority’ churches which have been present in Britain for at least a century; and Adogame,<sup>3</sup> who researches from within the academy. It is well documented that we now live in the so-called ‘global village.’ An event on one side of the world can immediately have implications in another country thousands of miles away. Cultures and peoples are now in ‘flow’ around the world. The missiologist

---

<sup>1</sup> Chigor Chike, *African Christianity in Britain: Diaspora, Doctrines and Dialogue*, (Milton Keynes: AuthorHouse, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Babatunde Adedibu, *Coat of Many Colours: The Origin, Growth, Distinctiveness and Contributions of Black Majority Churches to British Christianity* (London: Wisdom Summit, 2012)

<sup>3</sup> Afe Adogame, *The African Christian Diaspora*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013)

and church historian Andrew Walls<sup>4</sup> is on record as saying that migration of peoples is the phenomenon that the Christian church will need to deal with in the next fifty years or so, as he does not see the flow of people abating in any way, despite the occasional efforts of governments to prevent it.

The question is how these immigrant congregations, formed as they are around a people group and sometimes using a language of worship other than English, can begin to take their new 'mission field' seriously and engage with the indigenous population. Curiously enough, the question resonates highly with congregations in the indigenous population amongst the 'mainstream' denominations; these also face a cultural dislocation from the rapidly changing scene that now surrounds them, as will be seen later in the article. These congregations find it difficult to engage in a meaningful way with those who are 'other' in order to form a vibrant and growing Christian community. Thus this question is apposite to every section of the British church.

What qualifies me to write on this subject? At the heart of the question is the ability to cross cultures. Certain people could be classed as 'trans-cultural mediators'; that is, they are able to mediate between cultures, are able to interpret each side to the other, to stand perhaps with a foot in each camp. My vocation and experience has been in crossing cultures as I have worked in the Christian church both in Tanzania and Britain and reflected deeply on the challenges of the gospel in both places. I spent seven years in Tanzania, learning the national language, *Kiswahili*, fluently in order to be effective in my work of theological education there. While never becoming wholly Tanzanian, I was able to speak the language well enough to communicate 'heart to heart' in emotional terms as well as in thinking 'head to head.' Language and culture are intimately related, and I believe knowledge of the language embedded the culture of Tanzania deeply within me.

While there I often found myself trying to interpret ways of being and living which were appropriate to westerners who came on shorter or longer term visits, often to help or support local Christians in some way. After a while I noticed that even moving from Kenya to Tanzania and using the same language could cause cross-cultural confusion. In Kenyan Swahili it was normal to 'want' something when requesting an item in a shop, but to Tanzanians this came across as incredibly blunt and rude, where the preference was to 'request' an item. However, in Kenya, this Tanzanian word had overtones of begging, and therefore implying that the person wanted it free of charge! Both sides were liable to be

---

<sup>4</sup> Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-cultural Process in Christian History*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002)

thrown out of a shop in their neighbouring country for a cross-cultural *faux-pas*. Becoming aware of such delicate nuances of language and culture is the domain of the trans-cultural mediator.

On returning to the UK, I began to study mission in Britain and to think about the phenomenon of the end of Christendom. The simplest way to think about this is by following George Lings, a researcher in mission for the Church Army. He states that the church in Christendom is like having a congregation at the bottom of a deep cultural valley. People naturally roll down the sides of the cultural valley into the church. To put it in more academic sociological terms, the prevailing 'plausibility structure' of the society and culture enables people to access what is available to them in church. Since the post-Christendom era, however, the situation is entirely reversed. The church is now at the top of a cultural hill, and the cultural gravity caused by the hill drags people away from church. Continuing to wait for people to come into the church will not work. The boundaries of the church have to be breached and people found again where they are in order to start a new work amongst them.

Christendom prevailed in Britain for something over a thousand years. Britain was in fact largely evangelised under the aegis of the then Christian 'holy Roman Empire'.<sup>5</sup> Thus the power of the state allied with the church enabled Christianity to become the national religion of the whole of society. Only in the past fifty years or so has this settlement broken down, as Britain now enters a completely new period of experimentation with a largely secular society. It is true that the Church of England remains established, but the establishment is a 'weak' establishment<sup>6</sup> and it has now only vestigial power to influence major decisions; sometimes it is able to exert influence, while at other times it is ignored.

So for over a thousand years there has been an assumption that to be British is to be Christian; the two have been entirely synonymous. But this is no longer the case. My research in this area questioned the relationship between faith and culture in England.<sup>7</sup> Given the breakdown, or, as some people put it, the 'twilight,' of Christendom, as it fades from us, what is the proper relationship between English Christians and their culture? This is a vital, even a life and death question; it is the question of what theologians and missiologists call *inculturation*. I came to realise that it was a neglected question and one

---

<sup>5</sup> A reading of Malcolm Lambert (2010) shows that St. Patrick's evangelisation of Ireland in the fifth century was probably the last time any converting mission was undertaken in our islands without the power of the state behind the initiative in some way.

<sup>6</sup> Grace Davie, 'Debate' in, *Praying for England: Priestly Presence in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Samuel Wells and Sarah Coakley (London: Continuum, 2008), 147 -169.

<sup>7</sup> Nigel Rooms, *The Faith of the English: Integrating Christ and Culture*, (London: SPCK, 2011)

which we ignore at our peril, not least because not answering the question can leave a gap which right-wing nationalists and racists can easily jump in to fill. Unless we can be clear about British culture and values, such notions can be appropriated by those who want to exclude the 'other' in a dangerous game of exclusivity.

This is not the place to rehearse fully the arguments of my book *The Faith of the English*<sup>8</sup> but I do need to summarise some of the material. Readers who wish to delve deeper into the subject would benefit further by reading the full text of the book.

Inculturation addresses the proper relationship of faith (or gospel) and culture. Theologically, inculturation follows the narrative of the 'paschal mystery', or the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of the God-man, Jesus Christ. The incarnation of the Christ as a human being in a particular place and time, and therefore culture, blesses all place, time and culture, such that 'we can never be sure where Christ is not.' The first movement of God is to be found within a culture; only as that culture rejects the Christ and kills him is it judged and converted through the cross and the resurrection. This is therefore the correct sequence for any cross-cultural mission; an incarnational entering into the culture before the right to transform and critique it is earned and taken up. Inculturation then is always a dynamic double movement of both indwelling culture and transforming it for the better at the same time.

Thus the gospel never exists or lives apart from culture; there is no isolatable *acultural* gospel that can be neatly packaged and inserted into any culture. Andrew Walls is the best exponent of this position in his seminal article which describes the indigenising and pilgrim principles of true inculturation.<sup>9</sup> Along the way he explains how the continuity in Christianity across the ages consists of a minimal number of foundational elements: '... continuity of thought about the final significance of Jesus, continuity of a certain consciousness about history, continuity in the use of the scriptures, of bread, of wine, of water'.<sup>10</sup>

Due to its foundation in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, Christianity has no culturally fixed element. This has important implications for the way in which faith grows and expands, as Walls shows in a later book, claiming that the future of Christianity is always dependent on

---

<sup>8</sup> Rooms, *The Faith of the English*.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew F. Walls, 'The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture' in *New Directions in Mission and Evangelization 3: Faith and Culture*, eds. James A Scherer and Stephen B Bevens, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999), 17 - 28.

<sup>10</sup> Walls, 'The Gospel as Prisoner,' 21.

its ability to faithfully inhabit and transform the culture in which it finds itself. In contrast, then, with Islam, which is based on the untranslatable fixed text of the Quran, Christianity can die in places where it has lived: <sup>11</sup>

If the acts of cultural translation by which the Christians of any community make their faith substantial within that community cease – the Word ceases to be made flesh within that community – the Christian group within that community is likely to lose, not just its effectiveness, but its powers of resistance.

So Walls articulates both the dilemma for the mainstream churches and the diaspora congregations in Britain today – how to be ‘made flesh’ within their whole communities. The negative trajectory offered here is not unfamiliar in Britain since the children of immigrants acculturate at a faster pace than their parents through their schooling; and therefore if the host community is unable to work cross-culturally they quickly lose the following generation to the prevailing culture.

The inculturation question is acute in Africa, where Christianity arrived as a western religion and had to be rediscovered in its non-western nature by Africans returning to study its roots in the first centuries of the church, for example, Bediako.<sup>12</sup> How can I be African and Christian when the Christianity as I receive it comes clothed in western thought forms and patterns? Perhaps as a reader of this article you are originally from Africa and it might be helpful at this point to pause and ask yourself where are the ‘pinch points’ for you around faith and culture? How well do you recognise these dilemmas and the sharp questions they raise for what is or is not acceptable for Christians living within a culture?

Just as important now, post-Christendom, is the question of how one can be English or British and also Christian. If Walls is right, this is a vital question for the future of the church in Britain.

One outstanding issue to be considered at this point concerns the question of England and the English and Britain and the British. I have also addressed this in my book <sup>13</sup> and summarise it here. Britain is a political construct which enables the four countries of the United Kingdom to live and work together. As I write this, unity is being brought into question with the forthcoming Scottish referendum on Independence. However, what is

---

<sup>11</sup> Walls, 13

<sup>12</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a non-Western Religion* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995)

<sup>13</sup> Rooms, *The Faith*, 38-40

clear is that the concept of being British is vital for the self-understanding of immigrants and taps into something deeply multi-cultural in the origins of Britain, formed as it was through multiple invasions from Europe. As the left leaning singer-songwriter, Billy Bragg, claims, we are the 'people of the hyphen'<sup>14</sup> – the Anglo-Saxons, a cultural melting pot from the beginning.

It is difficult though to ascribe a cultural identity to Britishness, as it is first and foremost a political construct. I believe we have to approach culture from the standpoint of the values, customs, myths, sayings and proverbs of a people. To lump the British together for a project of this nature seems unfair and this is precisely the reason the anthropologist Kate Fox gives for studying the cultural behaviour of the English, in order to uncover their 'cultural genome' or the cultural characteristics of this people.<sup>15</sup> No doubt she could have continued her studies in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland and may have discovered that the underlying traits of these peoples were much the same as the English. I suspect they are at the very least connected and similar, but the research has not been done to develop the evidence for such a claim. For the purposes of this article, then, we have the results of a long-term research project (over three years) delving into the depths of English culture. It is the results of this work that will show us the culture in which the gospel has to live in England and, with a bit of extrapolation and inference, Britain as well.

Fox finds the number one characteristic of the English is 'social dis-ease.' The English find it very difficult to interact socially, face-to-face, which is why alcohol as a social lubricant is often so important in creating the circumstances where people can make good conversation. There are then three sets of 'reflexes, values and outlooks' that are all related in making up the 'cultural genome' of the English.<sup>16</sup>

The reflexes are humour, moderation and hypocrisy; the values are fair play, courtesy and modesty; the outlooks are empiricism, eeyorishness (moaning in a humorous and mocking way about everything, termed after a character in the children's book *Winnie the Pooh*) and class-consciousness.

In my research, working from this starting point as a definition of English culture, I have studied these ideas and their associated proverbs and sayings in order to put English culture as described here in dialogue with the Christian gospel. What fits and what does not? Not everyone will come up with the same answers but it is in the dialogue that effective

---

<sup>14</sup> Billy Bragg, *The Progressive Patriot: A Search for Belonging* (London: Bantam Press, 2006)

<sup>15</sup> Fox, *Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> See Fox, *Watching the English*, 410.

inculturation can take place. My point in this article however is a slightly different one.

The first rule of cross-cultural working is this: “they” won’t change; you have to!” Culture shock is the phenomenon of entering a new culture and being initially enthralled by it in the first few weeks; then appalled, as the vast differences impress themselves upon us as we get to know more of it; and then some accommodations are made and things settle down and learning can take place. However the newcomer has to learn that however much they try they will not be able to impact the culture until they have come to understand it, live with it and become part of it.

The Christian missionary has to go one step further. We are all very familiar with John 3:16; ‘for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son ...’ Somehow God loved humans enough to become one of them, like them in every way. This is despite what was to happen to Jesus, which was rejection, condemnation and death at the hands of humanity. Here is the challenge for the diaspora churches in Britain. Can they love the British? Can they love the British, characterised as they are by social dis-ease, hypocrisy and class-consciousness? Maybe admitting they actually might be quite difficult to love (or even like!) would be a good starting point for the potential missionary in their prayer. The prayer might then be to ask God for the gift of love for these people. I know one such parish priest who was sent to work in a tough working-class area and an even tougher church that had treated the previous priest very badly. He openly says that God gave him the gift of love for the people in his parish and he has stuck with them through thick and thin.

This article can only be an introduction to the issues of doing mission in Britain today from the perspective of African diaspora churches. There are several other issues that I wish to point up here which are worthy of further exploration by readers and possibly further articles in the future.

As well as understanding the underlying inherited culture of the British, which has been developing for centuries and can be described from anthropological research, there is another movement which was alluded to earlier in this article and which has driven a wedge between the prevailing culture and the culture of the church. This is what is known by some as the move from modernity to late modernity or post-modernity or, as Patrick Keifert puts it more positively, the new missional era.<sup>17</sup> The church as we find it today in the

---

<sup>17</sup> Keifert, Patrick R. *We Are Here Now: A New Missional Era*. (Eagle, ID: Allelon Publishing, 2006).

West has been formed in modernity, which removed the possibility of the presence of God in the *here and now* of the everyday experience of believers. Of course this is what diaspora churches bring to the table in abundance – a belief in the power and presence of God in the present moment. Working together in what has become known as the missional church movement, I can see tremendous possibilities for collaboration in mission if we can together follow the process of becoming missional in all that we are as church. Keifert describes this in his book *We are Here Now* as a three stage, three-year process of: a) listening to God, the congregation, its community and culture (the incarnational move we have been explaining); b) experimenting in forming Christian community in mission around adaptive challenges we set ourselves which will change us and those around us; c) creating a vision for the local church that we can embody and live in our everyday lives, at home in private, at work, and in public in the community.

Such an approach I believe will enable us to create the kind of multi-cultural churches that will anticipate the vision of the *panta ta ethne* (all nations) gathered in heaven, so vividly described in the book of Revelation. The best book I have come across which explicates such a vision for the incorporation of ethnicities in a local congregation is Lau Branson and Martinez's *Churches, Cultures and Leadership*.<sup>18</sup> They pick up Keifert's missional church language and their version of the three-fold movement of the missional church is as follows:

1. Interpretive: shapes the interpretive community and meanings needed for praxis
2. Implemental: guides experiments and practices and forms structures, so the gospel is embodied
3. Relational: connects and nourishes church participants and neighbours toward love and synergism

Finally there are other cultures to be aware of and to be crossed in loving the British. We mentioned class consciousness as a characteristic of the British and this is deeply embedded in the culture. Strangely though, money and class do not wholly overlap; some upper class people are not very wealthy and some working class people, such as footballers, can be very rich.

There are different cultures and outlooks in the north and south of England (and also in Scotland), not least because the money and power resides in the south-east of England centred on London. This means that ministers who are effective in the south can find it

---

<sup>18</sup> Mark Lau Branson and Juan F Martinez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities*, (Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2011), 55

difficult to cross cultures to the north and minister effectively there and vice-versa.

It is also possible to move from the deep rural to the inner-city within 10-15 miles of most cities. Such a journey will cross many cultures too; farming rural, 'escape' rural, commuter rural, market town, suburban, urban, inner city etc. While containing all of Kate Fox's characteristics, each of these areas will have its own added peculiarities, which will mean that what works in one place will fall very flat in another.

In conclusion, then, culture and context are everything when considering mission in Britain; we cannot proceed without taking them utterly seriously. Our gospel is based on the One who came to be Emmanuel, God with us, born into first century Palestine, out of the overwhelming love of God for the world. If this good news is to reach the British again then we have to work very hard to break down the walls of our churches, particularly if those walls are built of fear or even dislike of the 'other.' We are invited to love and inhabit the cultures around us, crossing boundaries in mission, discovering God at work beyond the church, and forming new Christian communities in partnership with the God of mission.

### **Bibliography**

Adedibu, Babatunde. *Coat of Many Colours: The Origin, Growth, Distinctiveness and Contributions of Black Majority Churches to British Christianity*. London: Wisdom Summit, 2012

Adogame, Afe. *The African Christian Diaspora*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013

Bediako, Kwame. *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a non-Western Religion*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995

Bragg, Billy. *The Progressive Patriot: A Search for Belonging*. London: Bantam Press, 2006

Chike, Chigor. *African Christianity in Britain: Diaspora, Doctrines and Dialogue*. Milton Keynes: AuthorHouse, 2007

Davie, Grace. 'Debate' in *Praying for England: Priestly Presence in Contemporary Culture*, edited by Samuel Wells and Sarah Coakley, London: Continuum pp147 -169, 2008

Fox, Kate. *Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2004

Keifert, Patrick. *We are Here Now: A New Missional Era*. St. Paul MN: Church Innovations, 2006

Lambert, Malcolm. *Christians and Pagans: The Conversion of Britain from Alban to Bede*. London: Yale U.P., 2010

Lau Branson, Mark and Martinez, Juan F. *Churches, Cultures and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities*. Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2011

Rooms, Nigel. *The Faith of the English: Integrating Christ and Culture*. London: SPCK, 2011

Walls, Andrew F. 'The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture' in *New Directions in Mission and Evangelization 3: Faith and Culture*, edited by James A Scherer and Stephen B Bevens, 17-28. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999

Walls, Andrew F. *The Cross-cultural Process in Christian History*. Orbis: Maryknoll, 2002