AFRICAN PENTECOSTAL MISSION TO THE UK

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African Pentecostal churches need to learn to step out of their boundaries if they are to reach the UK. Then again, so do conservative British churches.
Category: Observations

Anyone who is interested in mission or missiology needs to be aware of the new open-access Missio Africanus Journal, the first edition of which has recently appeared. I'd thoroughly recommend getting to grips with what this journal has to offer.

That being said, I suspect that some readers of this blog may feel that the journal has little of interest to them. They couldn't be more wrong - if they are in church leadership in the UK, that is. The article Mission from Africa: A Call to Re-imagine Mission In African-led Pentecostal Churches in BritainÂ by Babatunde Adedibu is pretty much a must-read for any church folk in Britain to my way of thinking. Here is the abstract of the article.

> *The Christian landscape in Britain is being transformed by the emergence and continued proliferation of African-led Pentecostal churches. This has further led credence to the role of African Christianities in the shaping of mission in the twenty-first century as Africa is now one of the major missionary-sending continents. Having their origin in Africa, or having been established by Africans in Britain, these churches carry their vision beyond their own sociocultural boundaries with narratives of mission to re-evangelise Britain. However, it seems that their claims of mission to Britain are more a farce than reality, since these churches are yet to rise to the missionary challenges of the British context. This article is written from a missiological perspective with sociological underpinnings to explore and critique the mission narratives of these African immigrant churches as well as to highlight the need for re-imagining both their mission and evangelism strategies.*
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> *p. 39*

I realise that readers from Conservative Evangelical backgrounds might wonder why I would recommend this article. However, it is an undeniable fact that African Churches, particularly those from a Pentecostal background are a growing phenomenon in the UK. If we want to take an interest in what God is doing in this country, we need to engage with this new movement.

> *...in the United Kingdom, the largest single congregation is Kingsway International Christian Centre (KICC) led by Pastor Mathew Ashimolowo with a membership of 12,000 adherents. Other megachurches in London include Jesus House, a parish of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, which has a membership of 3,000 and is led by Pastor Agu Irukwu; Victory Pentecostal Assembly, in Barking, London, led by Pastor Alex Omokudu with a membership of over 3,000; and Mount Zion Christian Ministry International (Freedom Arena) Plumstead,*

> *London, pioneered by Pastor Debo Akande, with a membership of over 2,000.*
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> *P.41*

> *To encounter the richness and diversities of African Christianities in Britain, all you might need is just a day bus pass to Old Kent Road in South East London. In his report entitled Being Built Together, A Story of New Black Majority Churches in the London Borough of Southwark, Rogers states that â€œOld Kent Road has become something of a shop window for their growth, proclaiming the globalisation of Christianityâ€ with over 25 Black Majority churches on a road less than 1.5 miles long.*
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> *P. 42*

While numbers of churches and the size of membership are not the only measure of healthy churches, these groups are clearly doing something that the rest of us could learn from.

However, one of the weaknesses of African Pentecostal churches is their inability to reach out of their own background and to reach the wider population with the Gospel.

> *It has been observed that Pentecostals, inclusive of African Pentecostals in Africa and the diaspora, are notoriously committed to aggressive forms of evangelism which are yet to translate to significant Caucasians being members of these churches.*
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> *p. 42*

> *Nevertheless, the reality is that Britainâ€™s African-led Pentecostal churches need to exercise â€œbold humilityâ€ as their missionary enterprise has not translated to membership from the indigenous Caucasian population, as many are repositories of migrant sanctuaries.*
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> *p. 45*

From this starting position of churches which are growing and thriving, but who are failing to make a significant impact on the British population, Adedibu goes on to consider why this is the case and

considers alternative approaches for mission to the UK.

The article is self-reflective, theologically thoughtful and insightful, breaking many of the stereotypes that others hold about African Pentecostals.

I would commend this article to a wider readership for two reasons. Firstly, in the space of less than fifteen pages it gives a good overview of African Pentecostalism in the UK. If you don't have time to read some of the more detailed works, this will help you get an understanding of what these groups are dealing with. The second reason is that it provides an outsider's perspective on what is needed for the re-evangelisation of the UK. While we may not agree with everything that the author says, it is good to listen to what others say about our situation.

One further thought - do traditional British evangelical churches need to re-examine their approach in the way exemplified in this article?