BOOKS I HAVE READ: SENT FORTH

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As the West becomes more culturally diverse - moving toward multiculturalism kicking and screaming - so shall Western Christianity. This too is a work of the Spirit of God.
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This is a book that those who are leading churches in major towns and cities in Britain should read. For everyone else, it is optional, but highly recommended.

Sent Forth: African Missionary Work in the West Â by Harvey Kwiyani is not just a good book, it is an important and timely one, too.

It's a normal format paperback of 240 pages, of which 30 are references and index. The book is published in the Orbis American Society of Missiology series, which is an indication that it is a serious piece of work, it's also (unfortunately) an indication that it is fairly costly - you can expect to pay north of Â£20 for it.

The purpose of the book isÂ stimulate thinking about "ways in which Africans and Westerners can actually work together in mission in the West and beyond", which as Kwiyani says "is not an easy exercise". He does, however, make a passionate plea for collaboration in mission while also identifying some of the issues which hinder the collaboration he is calling for.

The first three chapters lay the ground work; giving an overview of the history of Christianity in Africa, mission in Africa and the dialogue between African and Western Christianity over the years. It's always good to be reminded that Christianity is not a recent arrival in Africa and that we owe a huge debt to the North African church.

For me, the book really got into its stride in Chapter Four which is an overview of African Immigrant Christianity in the West. Kwiyani identifies four streams of African Christianity; Pentecostals/Charismatics, African Mainline Christians, Roman Catholics and African Initiated (or Independent) Churches. This is a helpful summary for anyone who is interested in the current religious scene in the UK, especially as it concerns larger cities. However, the real meat of this section lies in some of the observations about the relationship between Western Churches and Christians and their African counterparts. It doesn't always make comfortable reading.

Chapter Five looks at Mission and African Migration and raises some of the challenges faced by African Christians as they seek to be witnesses to Christ in post-Christian Europe. All I can say is that it was far easier for me to work in West Africa than it is for my African brothers and sisters to be missionaries in the UK. However, if the church in the UK is to thrive and grow, we will need to learn how to work with and be blessed by African Christians. Equally, Africans will need to learn the same sort of cross-cultural skills in evangelism that missionaries have developed over the years. Kwiyani does not mention this, but I believe that one of the important roles of traditional mission agencies in the future should be to help diaspora churches to reach out to British society. However, it isn't clear how the connections can be made to allow this to happen.

The real meat of these two chaptersÂ lies in some of the observations about the relationship between Western Churches and Christians and their African counterparts. It doesn't always make comfortable reading.

> *... Segregation within Christianity is alive and well in some places. Many white people do not consider black Christians capable of ministering to them. Of course, white Christians have little understanding of African Christianity, and generally what they do not understand they dismiss. Thus, I have heard many say, "What can the Africans say to us?"*
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> *In the past few years, I have seen several white Western Christians dismiss African Christianity as syncretistic, animistic, and superstitious, while calling African theology immature and backward. They show no efforts at all to see the possibility of God's redemptive work in it. They see African missionaries only as economic refugees. Thus, any African missionary who desires to reach white Americans and other Westerners must be prepared to deal with discrimination from the wider Western culture and segregation within Christianity. (p.138)*

The thrust of Chapter Six is that we should not be focussing onÂ *reverse mission*; Africans coming as missionaries to the West, but that our focus should be on Africans and Westerners working together to reach the whole world. Do I hear an amen?

The book closes with a few final reflections which pick up on themes mentioned earlier.

The book is full of fascinating quotes and anecdotes and there were numerous passages or ideas that I found myself wanting to quote. For example, I was fascinated by the observation that the Roman Catholic Church in the US has done a much better job of integrating Africans into Church life than Protestants, because the Catholics can't simply up-sticks and plant a new church church for themselves, which is, all to often' the Protestant pattern.

> *Christianity will increasingly become a non-Western religion. It is already evident that Western Christianity will become darker in complexion as many Africans, Latin Americans, and Asians practice their Christianity in Western cities such as Atlanta, New York, London, Brussels, Lisbon, Madrid, and Rome. Consequently, as the West becomes more culturally diverse - moving toward multiculturalism kicking and screaming - so shall Western Christianity. This too is a work of the Spirit of God. Cultural diversity is always a great thing for Christianity. It looks risky, and most of the time it does not work out easily, but the freshness of life that it brings is worth the risk.*

Disclaimer: the author provided me with a copy ofÂ Sent ForthÂ free of charge. However, as far as humanly possible, I have not allowed this to influence my review of the book.