# BOOKS I HAVE READ: TURNING THE TABLES ON MISSION

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What could have just been an excellent book of stories, turns into an extended reflection on the nature and importance of multicultural churches.
**Category:** Church: World

I read a lot of books, fiction and non-fiction, but there is one style of literature that has had more of an impact on my life than just about anything else; missionary biographies. I think I can safely say that if I hadn't read, Through Gates of Splendour, Give me This Mountain, By Searching and such like, my life would have taken a very different turn and I'd probably have a proper job.

With this in mind, I thoroughly enjoyedÂ Turning the Tables on Mission, which is a book of short autobiographies by a group of missionaries. The book has all of the elements that you expect to find in these sorts of stories. There are dramatic conversions, decisions to leave lucrative careers for an uncertain future, the dramatic last-minute provision of funds, families despairing of their offspring going off to foreignÂ countries and the difficulty of fitting in with natives who speak a strange language and have odd customs.

Where this book differs from the biographies of my teenage years is in the fact that these stories are all about people who have come to the UK as missionaries. Here we have accounts of people from Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Caribbean coming to the UK to share the Gospel with the British people and these stories are every bit as heroic and engaging as those that shaped my life all those years ago.

It is true that there are some differences, two of which stand out to me. These missionaries to the UK were coming to somewhere with a long established church tradition; a tradition that is not always willing to admit that it needs help from outside. Secondly, Western missionaries are very often respected because they come from rich and politically powerful societies; they go from rich to poor. It is exactly the opposite for those in this book and some of the stories of racism and prejudice that the missionaries faced (from Christians) are shameful to read.




However, the book is more than just a series of inspiring stories. Each chapter ends with a short pieceÂ by the editor, Israel Olofinjana, who reflects onÂ the issues that have been raised in the chapter. These reflections along with opening and closing chapters tie the book together into a coherent whole. What could have just been an excellent book of stories, turns into an extended reflection on the nature and importance of multicultural churches.

The book is a large format paperback, about 240 pages long and will set you back around ten pounds on Amazon. I think that anyone who is serious about considering the future of the church in the UK would do well to read this book. However, if you are involved in leading a church and the ethnic mix of your congregation and (especially) your leadership does not match the community around you, then you MUST read it. No ifs, no buts, no excuses!

I'll close with a challenging quote from Tayo Arikawe, a Nigerian missionary to Bristol:

> *"The United Kingdom is a very needy mission field and desperately in need of spiritual help. Churches in the UK must adopt the posture of humility to receive help from their African and Asian brothers and sisters. God is no sending missionaries from other nations to this country. If our British brothers and sisters fail to orient to this reality, this would be a clear refusal to see God's handwriting clearly written on the wall. Therefore, the only respectable response from the British church is to offer a hand of fellowship out of a heart of love to missionaries that God is sending to this nation. I was very shocked when a well-known evangelical white British preacher said to me and some other African friends that he couldn't see any need for the presence of African pastors in the UK."*