

Reverse Mission: African Presence and Mission within Baptists Together¹ in the United Kingdom

Israel Oluwole Olofinjana

This research paper explores the missiological implications of the migration of African Christians to Britain. It particularly focuses on the mission of African Christians within the historic church context in the UK by considering the history and presence of African Christians within Baptists Together as a case study. Why do we have many African Christians within historic churches, what are their struggles, and most importantly, what are their mission contributions? In this article I review key literature in the study of reverse mission, situating it within the discourse of African theology. I then narrow my investigation by looking at various examples of mission carried out by African migrants within Baptists Together. I am writing as an African missionary and a Baptist minister in Britain, employing an insider's perspective using an historical-theological approach.

Keywords

Reverse mission; migration; African Christianity; diaspora missiology; historic churches; Baptist theology

Introduction

This article is an investigation into the missiological implications of African Christianity in Britain. It explores the phenomenon of reverse mission, that is, the idea that people from former mission fields are now contributing to mission in Europe and North America.

It appears that the majority of studies on reverse mission tend to focus on independent Pentecostal and Charismatic churches from Africa. These churches with humble beginnings have emerged over time to be some of the largest and fastest-growing churches in Britain. For example, the Redeemed Christian Church of God started in the UK in 1988 and now boasts of having about 864 church plants within the British Isles.² While African Pentecostal churches are growing and scholarly and public attention is drawn to them, what is obscured is the fact that there is now a concentration and growing

¹ The term 'Baptists Together' (used since 2013) emerged during conversations about restructuring the national resource offices at Didcot and future processes of the Baptist Union of Great Britain. The term describes the movement of local churches supported by regional associations, colleges, and specialist teams also known as the Baptist Union of Great Britain.

² Peter Brierley, *UK Church Statistics No. 3: 2018 Edition* (Tonbridge, UK: ADBC, 2017).

presence of Africans within historic churches.³ For example, the number of black Anglicans in Britain more than doubled between 1992 and 1998, from 27,000 to 58,200 attendees.⁴ In addition, the largest black church concentration in the year 2000 was found in the Roman Catholic church with 61,000, set against a total Pentecostal population of 70,000.⁵

This article is an attempt to document the mission contributions and struggles of African Christians within Baptists Together. It highlights with biographical case studies the different approaches to mission used by African migrants, such as church planting, evangelism, social action, and racial justice concerns.

Literature Review: African Christianity and Black Majority Churches

As this article is investigating African Christian migrants in Britain, it is important to locate it within the study of African Christianity, namely African theology. Studies on African Christianity exist primarily through the contextualisation work of African theologians, but also through a host of historical and anthropological treatments. As African countries began gaining independence, with Ghana in 1957, African theologians started to look at the relationship between Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR). African theology's main pre-occupation, as articulated in West and East Africa or Anglophone African countries, was the inculturation of Christianity into African worldviews. The particular concern of this discourse considered the nature of ATRs and their relationship of continuity rather than discontinuity with the Christian faith. Part of the argument was that just as the Jewish religion was a *Praeparatio Evangelica* (Preparation of the gospel) – that is, Judaism prepared the way for the gospel to be received – so did ATRs prepare Africans for the reception of the gospel in the African context.⁶

This makes Christianity a continuation rather than a discontinuation of ATR. While various African theologians articulated this point of view, nevertheless their voices were far from identical. The exponents of this new

³ Historic churches in this context refers to Catholic, Church of England, Baptist, Methodist, and United Reformed Churches.

⁴ Joe Aldred, 'The Black Church in Britain and Their Relations with the Ecumenical Movement, with Particular Reference to Black Pentecostalism', in Christoph Dahling-Sander, Kai M. Funkschmidt and Vera Mielke (eds.), *Beiheft zur Okumenischen Rundschau: Pfingstkirchen und Okumene in Bewegung* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Otto Lembeck, 2001), p. 184.

⁵ Peter Brierley, *The Tide is Running Out: What the English Church Attendance Survey Reveals* (London: Christian Research, 2000).

⁶ Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 1992), pp. 315-316.

contextual theology, who were pioneers of their time, are: Bolaji Idowu (1913-1993), whose works explored the relationship between Christianity and Yoruba religion and spirituality arguing for an indigenous church;⁷ Christian Baeta (1908-1994), whose work looked at some spiritual churches in the context of Ghana;⁸ Harry Sawyerr (1909-1987) from Sierra Leone, who was in the process of developing a strong mission theology for the African context⁹ before his death; the late John S. Mbiti (1931-2019), possibly the best known of all modern African theologians, developed a systematic study of ATRs.¹⁰ Lastly, Kwesi Dickson (1929-2005) discussed the theoretical basis for the working out of Christian theology by African Christians in respect of the rise of third world theologies.¹¹

While the task of relating Christianity to ATRs and culture pre-occupied the beginnings of African theology, by the early 1970s it began to consider mission as the liberation of Africans in terms of socio-economic development and political emancipation.¹² This was very true in the apartheid situation in South Africa where a South African black theology of liberation was developed by, for example, Basil Moore, a South African Methodist theologian,¹³ Steve Biko, a lawyer and an activist who died campaigning for the freedom of black people in South Africa, and later Desmond Tutu. In other parts of Africa there developed an African theology of liberation, which began to articulate for the political and economic freedom of Africans. The main task here was to free Africans not just from neo-colonialism and effects of globalisation, but also from the many African dictators who plagued the continent. One of the African scholars and churchmen who was articulating an African political theology was the Liberian theologian Burgess Carr (1936-2012), former General Secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC).

Since the mid-1980s we have also seen the explosion of African womanist theology through independent scholars such as the Ghanaian Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Musimbi Kanyoro, and Isabel Phiri. Other avenues for the expression of African womanist theology are women's theological events, women's organisations, and publications. The main concern of this theology is the liberation of African women from African patriarchal

⁷ E. B. Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (Lagos, Nigeria: Longman Nigeria, 1962); Bolaji Idowu, *Towards an Indigenous Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).

⁸ Christian Baeta, *Prophetism in Ghana: A Study of Some Spiritual Churches* (London: SCM, 1962).

⁹ Harry Sawyerr, *Creative Evangelism: Towards a New Christian Encounter with Africa* (London: Lutterworth Publishers, 1968).

¹⁰ J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969).

¹¹ Kwesi Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984).

¹² John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African theology Today* (Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), p. 137.

¹³ Basil Moore (ed.), *Black Theology: The South African Voice* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1973).

heritage that most of the time oppresses women.¹⁴ An example of one of the issues that still confronts African women is female genital mutilation as practised by some cultures within the African context. Other matters include domestic violence, abuse, and rape.

The current state of African theology is that, while in the past there was a distinction between African theologies of inculturation and African political theologies, this is no longer the case, as a result of various socio-economic and political changes taking place across the continent.¹⁵ In addition to this is the fact that African Charismatics and Pentecostals have dominated the Christian scene on the continent in the last forty years. This has given rise to a distinctive African Pentecostal theology.¹⁶ In my view one of the pioneers of modern African theology was Byang Kato (1936-1975), who advocated against all his peers a distinct African evangelical theology. His theology is one that would sit well with many African Charismatics and Pentecostals. Byang was one of the few voices who argued for a discontinuity between ATRs and Christianity.¹⁷ While discussions are still ongoing about the nature and scope of theological contributions of African Pentecostals and Charismatics in regards to mission, church history, and theology within the discourse of African theology, they are now accepted as a significant contributor to global Pentecostalism¹⁸ and world Christianity.¹⁹

The explosive growth of African Charismatics and Pentecostals amongst other expressions of African Christianity have taken the lead in what is known as reverse mission. They are among the numerous Christians from the majority world who are planting churches and doing mission in Europe and North America. A notable African theologian, whose research work examines the explosive growth of African Charismatics, as a background to understanding African Christianity in the diaspora, is Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu.²⁰ I have also provided an introductory background in understanding reverse mission of Nigerian Christianity in

¹⁴ Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity*.

¹⁵ Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, 'Half a Century of African Christian Theologies: Elements of the Emerging Agenda for the Twenty-First Century', in Ogbu Kalu (ed.) *African Christianity: An African Story* (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2007), p. 418.

¹⁶ Clifton Clarke (ed.), *Pentecostal Theology in Africa* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), p. 1.

¹⁷ Byang Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* (Kisumu, Kenya: Evangelical Publishing House, 1975).

¹⁸ A. H. Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹⁹ A. F. Walls, *Crossing Cultural Frontiers: Studies in the History of World Christianity* (New York: Orbis, 2017).

²⁰ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2005) and *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Context* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013).

Britain by looking at Nigerian Pentecostal history through twenty of its pioneers.²¹

In the British context, African churches are regarded as part of what is known as Black Majority Churches (BMC). Studies on BMC started in the 1970s with the British Council of Churches commissioning a research work to better understand these churches. This was Clifford Hill's short piece, *Black Churches: West Indian and African Sects in Britain*.²² This was an early survey of black churches in Britain from around the 1950s to the 1970s. This work is now limited because the history of BMC has developed since the 1970s. In addition, this was around the time when black churches were considered as sects by the British Council of Churches.

A more mature seminal text on BMC was found in the research and scholarship of the German Roswith Gerloff. Her robust scholarship and research spanned 1972-2013, when she passed away. Her core text on black theology was *A Plea for British Black Theologies* (2010).²³ This book could be credited as the foundational and pioneering text on Black British Theology. However, it must be mentioned that this text focused more on Caribbean Pentecostal churches by exploring in-depth Apostolic Pentecostal churches and the Sabbatarian church movements. Nevertheless, her extensive writing and research on black Pentecostalism in Britain has produced some influential work on the social, cultural, and missiological significance of the African Caribbean diaspora contribution to the Christian faith. Roy Kerridge's book *The Storm is Passing Over: A Look at Black Churches in Britain* examines the beliefs and practices of BMC such as funeral practices, wedding ceremonies, and the use of traditional music.²⁴ This book did not, however, consider the idea of reverse mission. In the late 1990s, Robert Beckford, building on the scholarship of Roswith Gerloff, pushed the boundaries by developing a political theology for African and Caribbean Pentecostal churches using the Rastafari ideology of liberation. His articulation of what can be termed a black political Pentecostal theology

²¹ Israel Olofinjana, *20 Pentecostal Pioneers in Nigeria: Their Lives, Their Legacies* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corporation, 2011).

²² Clifford Hill, *Black Churches: West Indian and African Sects in Britain* (London: Community and Race Relations Unit of the British Council of Churches, 1971).

²³ Roswith Gerloff, *A Plea for British Black Theologies: The Black Church Movement in Britain in its Transatlantic Cultural and Theological Interaction with Oneness (Apostolic) and Sabbatarian Movements*, vol. 1 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010).

²⁴ Roy Kerridge, *The Storm is Passing Over: A Look at Black Churches in Britain* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995).

or the 'Dread thesis' as it is now known,²⁵ can be found in Beckford's first two books.²⁶

If Beckford's work was considered a work of liberation theology and too radical for BMC, Joel Edwards' theology can be considered evangelical with an integral mission perspective, as he served among British evangelicals. He worked through the ranks to become the first Caribbean and black General Director of the Evangelical Alliance in 1997 since its formation in 1846. In a book edited by Edwards,²⁷ one of the contributors, Arlington Trotman, explored the identity of the so-called black or black-led churches, arguing that the term 'black-led' or 'black church' was an imposition by outsiders and that the terminology does not satisfactorily describe these churches.²⁸ Trotman critiqued these terms sociologically and theologically, arguing that they were not adequate in describing African and Caribbean churches. Here we see an insider's articulation of how African and Caribbean churches perceive themselves. Other contributions in the book explored liturgy, such as the nature of worship and preaching within African and Caribbean Pentecostalism.

A gap created in the literature explored so far on BMC is their history and efforts at reverse mission. To fill the former gap was the book by Mark Sturge, *Look what the Lord has done: An Exploration of Black Christian Faith in Britain*.²⁹ A similar book published in the same year is Joe Aldred's *Respect: Understanding Caribbean British Christianity*,³⁰ which explored intercultural ecumenism from a Caribbean British perspective. While these two works have contributed to our understanding of the history of black Christianity in Britain, they both did this through the lens of Caribbean British Christianity. This means that African Christianity in Britain was not given prominence. To complete that task was the pioneering research of Chigor Chike in 2007 to mark 200 years since the abolition of the slave trade.³¹ Chike's book surveyed the doctrines and practices of African Christians in Britain, but nothing much was said about their history and neither was reverse mission considered. That same year, and to

²⁵ David Muir, 'Theology and the Black Church', in Joe Aldred and Keno Ogbo (eds.), *The Black Church in the 21st Century* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2010), pp. 8-27.

²⁶ Robert Beckford, *Jesus is Dread: Black Theology and Black Culture in Britain* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1998); Robert Beckford, *Dread and Pentecostalism: A Political Theology for the Black Church in Britain* (London: SPCK, 2000).

²⁷ Joel Edwards (ed.), *Let's Praise Him Again: An African-Caribbean Perspective on Worship* (Eastbourne, UK: Kingsway, 1992).

²⁸ Arlington Trotman, 'Black, Black-led or What?' in Joel Edwards (ed.), *Let's Praise Him Again*, pp. 18-24.

²⁹ Mark Sturge, *Look What the Lord has Done: An Exploration of Black Christian Faith in Britain* (Milton Keynes: Scripture Union, 2005).

³⁰ Joe Aldred, *Respect: Understanding Caribbean British Christianity* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2005).

³¹ Chigor Chike, *African Christianity in Britain* (Milton Keynes: Author House, 2007).

commemorate the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade, was *Black Theology in Britain*, edited by two well-known black theologians, Michael Jagessar and Anthony Reddie.³² The book surveyed the current state of black British theology by considering the works of some of its exponents, such as Robert Beckford. However, this work did not explore reverse mission as such.

Perhaps a more robust African scholarship that has considered the implications of migration and globalisation on the diaspora mission of African churches in Britain is the research work of Afe Adogame.³³ Adogame is possibly one of the best-known African scholars, not only in Britain but also in Europe, North America, and Africa. He has written, contributed to, and edited more books and articles than any other African scholar I am aware of in Britain. Adogame's work explored reverse mission from a sociological perspective and not from an ecclesiastical or theological one. Writing from within the Pentecostal and Charismatic tradition was Hugh Osgood, whose PhD thesis explored African Christianity in Britain by looking at the sending of African pastors to Britain from 1980-2005.³⁴ Richard Burgess' work also addresses the mission of African churches in Britain, using the Redeemed Christian Church of God as a case study.³⁵ While Osgood and Burgess' works are important contributions, it should be noted that they are not writing as African reverse missionaries.

Building on the earlier scholarship of Adogame, Osgood, and Burgess was my own first publication in 2010.³⁶ This was an introduction to the subject of reverse mission by looking at the history of European missions in Africa and then African missions in Europe through the prism of reverse mission. The contribution of this book lies in the fact that it was the first monograph on the subject of reverse mission in the UK. In addition, here was a theological reflection on reverse mission written by a reverse

³² Michael Jagessar and Anthony Reddie (eds.), *Black Theology in Britain* (London: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2007).

³³ Afe Adogame, 'African Christian Communities in the Diaspora', in Ogbu Kalu (ed.), *African Christianity: An African Story* (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2007), pp. 431-45; Adogame, *The African Christian Diaspora: New Currents and Emerging Trends in World Christianity* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

³⁴ Hugh Osgood, *African Neo-Pentecostal Churches and British Evangelicalism 1985-2005: Balancing Principles and Practicalities* (unpublished PhD thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2006), pp.95-98.

³⁵ Richard Burgess, 'African Pentecostal Spirituality and Civic Engagement: The Case of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Britain', Special Issue of *Journal of Beliefs and Values on Global Pentecostalism*, vol. 30, no. 3 (2009), pp.255-73; Richard Burgess, K. Knibbe, and A. Quaas, 'Nigerian-initiated Pentecostal Churches as a Social Force in Europe: The Case of the Redeemed Christian Church of God', *PentecoStudies*, vol. 9 (April 2010), pp. 97-121; Richard Burgess, 'Bringing Back the Gospel: Reverse Mission among Nigerian Pentecostals in Britain', *Journal of Religion in Europe*, 4 (3) (2011), pp. 429-449.

³⁶ Israel Olofinjana, *Reverse in Ministry and Mission: Africans in the Dark Continent of Europe* (Milton Keynes: Author house, 2010).

missionary who serves within a British church denomination. My own story is that I came as a missionary from Nigeria in 2004 to plant a Nigerian church, but on reflection left that idea and decided to join an existing British church. Since then, I have had the privilege of leading three multicultural churches in London. Therefore, the book argued that reverse mission is taking place by surveying the various mission approaches used by African pastors and leaders. However, this work is limited because BMC were considered through the lens of African Christianity in Britain and, since its publication, there is now more information available. A fuller treatment addressing the history and mission of BMC is Babatunde Adedibu's *Coat of Many Colours: The Origin, Growth, Distinctiveness and Contributions of Black Majority Churches to British Christianity*.³⁷ While Adedibu's book is a ground-breaking research work on the history and diverse theologies of BMC in the UK, he did not consider in depth the idea of reverse mission. A recent book, also written by an African reverse missionary serving within the Fellowship of Churches of Christ in the UK, is Hirpo Kumbi's book, *Mission and Movement*.³⁸ This book addresses reverse mission through charting the missional history of Ethiopian and Eritrean evangelical churches in the UK. While this is a pioneering work, because it documents for the first time Ethiopian and Eritrean evangelical churches, it is however narrow as it fails to situate these churches within the context of BMC.

Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) Presence within British Historic Churches

From this brief survey of studies on African Christianity and BMC, it appears that there is a gap in exploring the mission practices of African Christian migrants within historic churches in Britain. Rebecca Catto's PhD thesis in 2008 was the first in Britain to explore the subject of reverse mission, considering various case studies of missionaries from the Global South serving in what she described as mainline churches.³⁹ The case studies she considered consisted mainly of short-term missionaries serving in Anglican and Methodist churches. Within the Catholic church in Britain, reverse mission appears to be taking place, with a shortage of priests leading to invitations being sent to priests in Africa, Latin America, and Asia.⁴⁰

³⁷ Babatunde Adedibu, *Coat of Many Colours: The Origin, Growth, Distinctiveness and Contributions of Black Majority Churches to British Christianity* (London: Wisdom Summit, 2012).

³⁸ Hirpo Kumbi, *Mission and Movement: A Study of Ethiopian and Eritrean Evangelical Churches in the UK* (Watford: Instant Apostle, 2018).

³⁹ Rebecca Catto, 'Reverse Mission: From the Global South to Mainline Churches', in D. Goodhew (ed.), *Church Growth in Britain* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012), pp. 91-103.

⁴⁰ Harvey Kwiyani, *Sent forth: African Missionary Work in the West* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), pp. 123-128.

While the discussion above presents recent mapping of missionary activities of African migrant Christians in the West, it is important to mention that since around the 1940s, with the arrival of large Caribbean migration with the Empire Windrush to Britain, there has been some African and Caribbean presence within historic churches. The general assumption is that, when British historic churches rejected black Christians from around the 1940s, they left to start their own churches, hence the founding of BMC. A similar assumption is that all African and Caribbean people were rejected by these churches. These assumptions are not accurate; there were other reasons, such as mission to Britain and loyalty to Pentecostal denominations back home in the Caribbean or Africa, that led to the founding of some of these churches. In addition, some African and Caribbean Christians, due to their church affiliations back home, decided to stay within historic churches. It is the stories of those who stayed within the historic churches that are easily forgotten and lost today in the midst of the successes of BMC. Take, for example, the story of Sybil Phoenix (MBE), who came from Guyana to London in 1956. Despite much racial discrimination she experienced within and outside the church and personal tragedy, she remained part of the Methodist church. Sybil did not start her own church or join a BMC but worked within the Methodist church structures, creating independent agencies such as foster homes, youth clubs, and community projects to cater for the needs of black young people. It was in recognition of her work in the community in south-east London that she was awarded an MBE in 1972.⁴¹

The question is: why did Black Asian and other Ethnic Minority (BAME) people stay within British historic churches? There are several reasons for this as mentioned above, but an important reason is the fact that not all Africans, Asians, Caribbeans, or Latin Americans like independent Pentecostal churches (either white or black Pentecostals). Some African and Caribbean Christians within historic churches cannot even bear the fact that some of these churches exist, because they consider some of their teachings unbiblical – such as the Pentecostal doctrine of speaking in tongues, viewed by some as leading to confusion. Another reason accounting for the presence of African and Caribbean people in historic churches is that they want their children to attend church schools because of the standard of education within these schools. In order for their children to gain admission into these schools the parents have to at least attend these churches, if only to be recognised by the priest or vicar. We now have a situation where some people belong to two churches, attending Catholic mass in the morning and going to a Pentecostal church in the evening. One of the effects of this is that second- and third-generation Africans and Caribbeans are growing up in historic churches.

⁴¹ J. Newbury, *Living in Harmony: The Story of Sybil Phoenix* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1985), pp. 14-15.

The presence of Africans and Caribbeans within British historic churches has not been an easy journey, as there have been issues around race and ethnicity. An example, which will be considered in detail later, is the Baptist Apology for the legacy of the transatlantic enslavement of Africans and ongoing racism. But to remedy the issue of racism within these churches, racial justice ministries or agencies were founded. These ministries were set up to care pastorally for BAME Christians and to tackle racism within the historic churches. These agencies have also help facilitate conversations on the challenges of participating in multicultural, multi-ethnic churches. In the Church of England this led to the founding of the Committee for Black Anglican Concerns, later renamed the Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns; in the Baptist Union of Great Britain (Baptists Together), the ministry is known as the Racial Justice Group; in the United Reformed Church (URC) it is known as the Committee for Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministries; in the Methodist Church, it is the Committee for Racial Justice; and in the Catholic church the Catholic Association for Racial Justice.

Examples of African Presence and Mission within Baptists Together

In this section, I offer various examples of African Christians and their mission approaches and practices to illustrate how reverse mission is taking place within the Baptist denomination in Britain. The ministry of African Christians within the Baptist denomination in England started with an African American, Peter Standford (1860-1909). Peter was born a slave in Virginia and became an ordained Baptist minister in 1878 in Hartford, Connecticut, USA. He came to England in 1882 and was invited to be the minister of Hope Street Baptist Chapel, Highgate, Birmingham in 1889 – making him the first black Baptist minister in Britain.⁴² Other black Baptist ministers who were contemporaries of Peter Standford are the Jamaican-born Joseph Jackson Fuller (1825-1908), who served as a Baptist Missionary Society missionary to West Africa, and African American, Thomas L. Johnson (1836-1931), a Baptist minister who trained at Spurgeon’s College in London and served the Baptist Missionary Society in West Africa as well.⁴³ Peter’s story is significant as it offers us an earlier example of reverse

⁴² See Paul Walker, *The Revd Thomas Peter Standford (1860-1909): Birmingham Coloured Preacher* (unpublished PhD Thesis, Manchester University, 2004); David Killingray and Joel Edwards (eds.), *Black Voices: The Shaping of our Christian Experience* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2007).

⁴³ Sturge, *Look what the Lord has done*, p. 69; Black Baptists: Joseph Jackson Fuller (1825-1908) <<http://israelolofinjana.wordpress.com/2014/02/06/black-baptist-joseph-jackson-fuller-1825-1908/>> [accessed 14 November 2014]

Black Baptists: Thomas Lewis Johnson (1836-1921) <<http://israelolofinjana.wordpress.com/2014/02/18/black-baptists-thomas-lewis-johnson-1836-1921/>>

mission, with the fact that he was invited to be a pastor of a white British church. The stories of his other contemporaries also serve to illustrate that the modern missionary movement was not an entirely European affair, because African Americans and Caribbeans were equally involved.

Probably one of the first Africans to be ordained as a Baptist minister in the 1960s was William Fransch, who came from Zimbabwe in 1968 in what was known then as Northern Rhodesia. William studied at Cliff College (1968-1969) and then at Bristol Baptist College (1970-1973). While studying at Bristol, he became the student minister at Stapleton Baptist Church in 1973. His other pastorates were Frithelstock Baptist church (this was a group of Baptist churches) in north Devon (1977-1982), Spurgeon Memorial Baptist Church in Guernsey (1982-1998), and finally Brockley Baptist Church in south-east London from 1998 to 2011, when he retired. Fransch did something quite significant in 1977: he walked with the cross with his wife Celia and their two children from Aberdeen, Scotland to Land's End (the south-western tip of England). This gave him and Celia the opportunity to share the gospel with many people along the way. The walk across the country took twenty-three days. Again in 1980, inspired by the story of Abram walking the length and breadth of the land God promised (Genesis 13.14-17), William walked across the breadth of the country (from Hartland Point in Devon to Margate in the east) with some people from Frithelstock Baptist Church. The walk, which took nine days, afforded Fransch and members of his church the opportunity to share the gospel with people along the way. Fransch's approach to mission through evangelism by applying the story of Abram as a migrant serve as an example of a missionary migrant, thus challenging the notion that most migrants are economic migrants. Missionary migrants are those who have migrated to other countries for the purposes of mission. Fransch came to Britain to pursue ministerial training and opportunities. As a missionary migrant he understood his mission primarily as evangelism and pastoral work.

The 1980s witnessed the beginning of the story of Kingsley Appiagyei, Senior Pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in London. Kingsley's story is of particular interest because of his immense contributions to Baptists Together through church planting and also because he considers himself to be a reverse missionary.⁴⁴ He came to England in 1985 to study biblical Hebrew, with the intention of going back to Ghana to teach in a seminary. While he was studying for a degree programme at Spurgeon's College, he felt called to stay in the UK. After completing his studies, he started Trinity Baptist Church in his house in South Norwood. In 1994 they

[accessed 4 November 2014]

⁴⁴ Trinity Baptist Church documentary video about their history and vision (2017). This video documentary was shown at the opening of their new premises in Croydon on 16 April 2017.

moved to their current building on Thornlaw Road in South Norwood. Trinity Baptist Church, under the leadership of Appiagyei, has planted around seventeen churches in Europe and an orphanage home in Ghana called Trinity Hope Centre. Two of these churches are in Italy, one in Denmark, another in the Netherlands, and a further one in Ghana.⁴⁵ There are about twelve Trinity Baptist church plants in the UK. Apart from the extensive church planting strategy of Kingsley, he also became the first African man to become the president of the Baptist Union in 2009-2010. Appiagyei's ministry and leadership have raised many emerging ministers who have gone to train for the Baptist ministry either through Spurgeon's College in London or alternative routes.

On 16 April 2017 (Easter Sunday), Trinity Baptist Church opened and dedicated its new premises called Oasis House in Croydon. The event was quite significant and heralded a new chapter in the history of the church. In attendance were local politicians in Croydon as well as national politicians. The occasion also included many high-profile church leaders from within the British evangelical church and BMC in the UK.

The new church building with a seating capacity of 3000 people was dedicated by the general overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Enoch Adeboye. One significant feature of the new premises was its vision for the second-generation members of the church, who were not only actively involved at the opening ceremony but are also involved in the shaping of the vision and mission of the church. Many of the second-generation members who were born and dedicated in the church since its inception in 1987 spoke of how they have grown in the church and have been given space to follow God in their own way. As a result, the young people have their own choir and there are many other opportunities to engage in the life and mission of the church through sports, music, and social and community action projects. The engagement with second-generation Africans is quite impressive, considering that many African churches are struggling to engage this generation in Britain. Appiagyei's story illustrates that of a reverse missionary whose mission approach and strategy is primarily through church planting, church growth, and training emerging leaders.

One of the significant leaders to have emerged from Kingsley's leadership is Francis Sarpong. In 1995, Francis Sarpong founded Calvary Charismatic Baptist Church in East London, which today is recognised as one of the largest Baptist churches within Baptists Together. Calvary Charismatic Baptist Church has also embarked on extensive church plants, planting about twenty church congregations all over the world. They have around fifty pastors and Sarpong is the president of the Progressive National

⁴⁵ Olofinjana, *Reverse in Ministry*, p. 46.

Baptist Convention – an international regional association of Baptist ministers and churches. Sarpong’s ministry serves as an example of an African pastor and missionary involved in church growth. This becomes significant in the climate that sees churches declining and closing.

An important African pastor whose leadership emerged within the 1980s is Kofi Manful, Senior Pastor of Faith Baptist Church in London. He has been involved in various conversations and committees among Baptists in London regarding racial justice issues. He, with other African and Caribbean ministers, formed the Black Ministers’ Forum in London in the mid-1990s to respond to the loneliness and isolation felt by black ministers in the London region.⁴⁶ Kofi Manful’s ministry approach combines racial justice and leadership development, as he has also supported pastorally and trained emerging leaders.

Kate Coleman is a significant leader in the unfolding story of Africans within Baptists Together. Born in Ghana, she came to the UK at a young age to join her family. She later became the first accredited and ordained black woman in the Baptist Union in 1991 and the first black woman to be the president of the Baptist Union in 2006-2007. She has served in various national capacities within the wider UK church, such as being the chair of the Evangelical Alliance Council. Kate is one of the foremost thinkers in the area of British womanist theology, as she reflects on what it means to be a black female Christian minister/leader within the Baptist context.⁴⁷ Kate’s ministry illustrates uniquely that of a pioneer and theologian engaged in leadership development and transformation internationally.

Osoba Otagie’s story as a reverse missionary who came from Nigeria to Britain in 2005 illustrates the intentionality in mission and sacrificing a good job in Nigeria to answer God’s call. Osoba recalls saying, “I love London for holidays but not to live permanently.” But he felt God telling him to let go of the mission work he was doing in Nigeria and his business. God assured and encouraged him that he was not going to leave him bored and frustrated in London after the very busy time of mission work and corporate business in Nigeria. This encouragement served as his call to minister in Britain. Osoba had a strong desire to work with the locals to spread the gospel rather than join a Nigerian fellowship. Since moving to live in the UK, Osoba has been involved in pastoring three Baptist churches, working within the local ecumenical scene in London and beyond. He currently works with the

⁴⁶ Sivarkumar Rajagopalan, ‘Racial Justice’, in Faith Bowers, Joe Kapolyo and Israel Olofinjana (eds.), *Encountering London: London Baptists in the 21st Century* (London: London Baptist Association, 2014), p. 256.

⁴⁷ Michele Mahon, *Sisters with Voices: A Study of the Experiences and Challenges faced by Black Women in London Baptist Association Church Ministry Settings* (unpublished MA Dissertation, Oasis College, 2014), p. 7.

Bible Society, serving as a regional director. Osoba's ministry encompasses that of mission strategist and thinker, as he sits on a number of boards of mission agencies or organisations offering missional insights. He is also a qualified and certified cultural intelligence trainer, offering intercultural courses in churches and the corporate world. Osoba is a unique reverse missionary, because he brings an understanding of the church and the business world in his mission approach.

While the above stories illustrate the different mission practices engaged in by African Christians within Baptists Together, it must be highlighted that the significant presence of Africans and African Caribbean people within Baptists Together has contributed immensely to the survival of our churches and also led to important discussions. The London Baptist Association (LBA) recognises that, without the presence of Africans, African Caribbean, and other migrants in the LBA churches, many of its congregations would have declined and closed. In essence, their presence ensures the continued survival of LBA churches. This is an important factor for the continuing mission of Baptist congregations in London. As mentioned briefly above, the presence of Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) in historic churches has led to racial justice conversations within these churches. Among British Baptists this has taken the form of the Apology and the follow up strategy called The Journey. The next section explores this in more detail.

Reflections on the Apology as a Paradigm for Racial Justice

A significant part of the journey of Africans and African Caribbeans within British Baptist history is the pivotal moment in 2007 when the Baptist Union (now known as Baptists Together) decided to offer an Apology for the pernicious legacy of the transatlantic slave trade and ongoing racism. One might ask why the Baptist Union apologised for the slave trade, as it was not even in existence when the horrific trade took place for centuries. The rationale behind the Apology can be gleaned from the following statement:

In a spirit of weakness, humility and vulnerability, we acknowledge that we are only at the start of a journey, but we are agreed that this must not prevent us speaking and acting at a Kairos moment.

Therefore, we acknowledge our share in and benefit from our nation's participation in the transatlantic slave trade.

We acknowledge that we speak as those who have shared in and suffered from the legacy of slavery, and its appalling consequences for God's world.

We offer our apology to God and to our brothers and sisters for all that has created and still perpetuates the hurt which originated from the horror of slavery (Sam Sharpe Project 2014).

The Apology was followed by an initiative described as *The Journey*, which is a vision strategy by the Racial Justice Group of Baptists Together to ensure that our structures change to reflect the diversity that God has given us. It is important to know that many African pastors within the Baptist denomination have different views about the Apology. Some of my colleagues welcomed the Apology, noting that it was a start of a conversation towards racial justice. Other colleagues observed that more work still needs to be done in regard to racial justice within Baptists Together, as the Apology was not enough. One colleague commented that the Apology came rather late as it should have been made ages ago, while another colleague felt the Apology was divisive and not helpful.

My own reflections about the apology started on 3 June 2008 at the Museum of London, *Sugar and Slavery in Docklands*. It was a Baptists Together meeting to follow up on the conversation about the Apology. Different views about the Apology were presented: one from those who struggled to understand why a whole new generation who have nothing to do with the transatlantic slave trade have to apologise to current descendants of the victims of the slave trade. The other view was from those who felt that, because we still experience the consequences of the slave trade such as racism, prejudice, and neo-colonialism, an Apology is necessary for reconciliation in order to move forward. A question that always arises within these conversations is whether there is any theological or scriptural justification for the Apology. John Cowell, one of the eminent Baptist theologians at the Museum of London, *Sugar and Slavery*, argued that there is, if we consider what Paul said: 'If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it' (I Corinthians 12.26, NIV). In essence, if our brothers and sisters who are from African and Caribbean background are feeling oppressed through the pains of racism and marginalisation, then, as the body of Christ, we should feel that pain too and do something about it. The question remains as to what changes the Apology will effect in the life of Baptists Together?

As explained earlier, *The Journey* is a racial justice strategy to move British Baptists from words to actions in regard to issues of integration, inclusion, and cultural diversity. *The Journey's* vision was to set out practical steps to enable Baptists Together to become fully integrated in ways that reflect their rich cultural diversity and so live out their core values of being a culturally inclusive community.⁴⁸

The Racial Justice Group is working towards ensuring that Baptist churches, colleges, BMS World Mission, regional associations, and other

⁴⁸ Sam Sharpe Project: *The Journey* <<http://www.samsharpeproject.org/about-the-project/the-journey>> [accessed 9 September 2014]

structures within Baptists Together represent and reflect the multicultural, multi-ethnic, intergenerational diversity that exists within our denomination. My reflection and observation since 2010, when I became involved with the processes of The Journey, is that Baptists Together is gradually and slowly shifting towards a fuller representation, but I agree with some of my colleagues that more work still needs to be done. A current concern is the need for our theological colleges to move from teaching only Western theology to including and teaching theologies in recognition of the fact that World Christianity has shifted to the Majority World. Part of this process will be to have tutors and teachers in our theological colleges who are from African, Caribbean, and Asian backgrounds.

The year 2017 marked a decade since the Apology was presented. To reflect on this journey, a book was commissioned and edited by Anthony Reddie, with Wale Hudson-Roberts and Gale Richards.⁴⁹ This publication was the first of its kind, with contributions from Baptist scholars drawn from Jamaica, USA, Britain, and African backgrounds. In addition, other resources to help Baptist churches reflect on issues of cultural diversity and migration were also produced. Finally, a conference was organised at Spurgeon's College in London on 8 April 2017 themed *Justification and Justice: The Two Luthers*. The conference reflected theologically on the Apology by looking at the connection between the theology of Martin Luther (1483-1546), Justification by Faith, and the theology of racial justice of Martin Luther King Junior (1929-1968) through the work of the Civil Rights Movement. The conference speakers stimulated a lot of thought around the issues of racial justice and gender justice as essential categories of mission.

One person who has been involved in the Apology, The Journey, and the ten years' reflection on the Apology is the British-born African Wale Hudson-Roberts, the Racial Justice enabler for Baptists Together. Wale is an African minister who holds one of the most senior positions within Baptists Together. He has personally and officially been involved in facilitating the conversations around the journey of the Apology. As the Racial Justice enabler for Baptists Together, his mission policy and approach has been to see integration, representation, and diversity at every level of our governance and structure. These policies are being implemented through the Racial Justice Group, working in conjunction with various executive teams of the denomination. Wale has been at the forefront of challenging Baptists Together in regard to institutional racism, because he considers issues of racial justice to be an important part of mission. His approach to mission is through the lens of black liberative theological praxis. This approach is very

⁴⁹ Anthony Reddie, Wale Hudson-Roberts and Gale Richards, *Journeying to Justice: Contributions to the Baptist Tradition across the Black Atlantic Studies in Baptist History and Thought* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2017).

different from the other examples considered earlier in that they express mission primarily through discipleship, church planting, and evangelism. These varied mission practices stem from how these leaders understand mission, but one thing that is clear is that Africans within Baptists Together are making significant contribution to mission.

Conclusion

In this article I have explored key literature on the study of African Christianity, especially as it relates to reverse mission in Britain. This served to put into context the missionary activity of African migrant Christians within Baptists Together in Britain. It became clear from this survey that African Pentecostals and Charismatics have dominated the scene, but that there is the need to begin to map and document the increasing numbers of African Christians' activities within historic churches. The article has considered some of the reasons that account for the large presence of Africans within historic churches, arguing that African migrant Christians within Baptists Together are making their own contributions with varied mission practices. Part of their mission contributions include pastoring some of the largest churches within Baptists Together, evangelism, church planting, and championing racial justice matters. This contribution must, however, be put into perspective as we still have mono-cultural churches – African congregations led by Africans.

Israel Oluwole Olofinjana is the founding director of Centre for Missionaries from the Majority World and pastor of Woolwich Central Baptist Church in London. He is an Honorary Research Fellow at The Queen's Foundation in Birmingham.