REVERSE MISSION IN POST-CHRISTENDOM EUROPE

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In this article, I explore the potential within post-Christendom Europe of "reverse mission" (a contested but evocative term coined by missiologists in the 1960s and 1970s). Less attention has been paid to this phenomenon than it deserves, perhaps because of the Eurocentrism that continues to characterize European missiologists.

Although the demise of the Christendom era is happening at different speeds and exhibiting different features across Western culture, and within nations, the notion and terminology of "post-Christendom" have become increasingly familiar. I have written extensively on the missional and ecclesial consequences of this cultural transition and have taught on this in many nations and denominations during the past twenty-five years.[1] More recently, I have been invited to reflect on "post-post-Christendom": what might characterize Western societies once this transition is complete or further advanced?

On the occasions when I have accepted these invitations, I have acknowledged that I cannot offer a definitive answer to this question. There are many possibilities and various factors involved, and what emerges might be different in different contexts. All we can do at this stage, as we journey beyond the Christendom era, is identify some feasible scenarios, always keeping in mind that the center of gravity of global Christianity is no longer in the North Atlantic but in the Majority World. What might eventuate in Europe will be deeply impacted by developments beyond the borders of historic Christendom.

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1. These writings include Murray, *Post-Christendom*, Murray, *Church after Christendom*, and Murray, *A Vast Minority*.

One scenario, long predicted by sociologists, is that Western societies will become thoroughly secular.[2] Not that religion and spirituality will be absent, but these aspects of society will be marginal, privatized, and inconsequential in relation to public policy, social values, and cultural developments. The prevalence of the terms "post-secular" and "de-secularization" in recent literature,[3] suggests that there are countertrends and that the validation of the famous "secularization thesis" is not assured. But some European nations are already deeply secularized and, especially in education and the media, secular assumptions are highly influential. A secularized society may not yet be thinkable in the United States, but it is a feasible scenario in Europe.

A second scenario, also more credible in certain nations than others, is an Islamic future. The growth of Muslim communities in some European nations is not only the result of immigration and relatively high birth rates; significant numbers of converts are being recorded in some places. Antipathy towards Muslims and concern about their growing influence are widespread, often out of all proportion to reality, and fear of "the other" combines with racism and xenophobia to make this a dog-whistle issue for unscrupulous national and local politicians. An Islamic society is not yet conceivable in any European nation, but with mosque attendees predicted to outnumber church attendees by 2050, Islam might become the dominant religion in some nations, with unknown consequences.

A third scenario is a post-modern culture, in which multiple secular and religious elements are present without any becoming dominant—a kaleidoscopic culture with frequently shifting ideas, philosophies, visions, and priorities. Tolerance becomes the watchword and social cohesion is achieved by cultural and even legal restrictions on challenging or critiquing others' views and values. Whether it will be possible for any society to thrive, or even survive, without a shaping narrative and shared values is moot, and the illiberal form of tolerance espoused is unattractive

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2.   Examples include Brown, *Death* and Bruce, *God*.
3.   Examples include Berger, ed., *Desecularization* and Habermas, *Awareness*.

and would demean all perspectives and curtail all meaningful conversations. Such a culture would likely occlude the powerful forces that would dominate it whilst disclaiming such influence (not unlike our own societies).

A fourth scenario, usually associated with doomsayers but far from inconceivable in light of the climate emergency, pandemics, economic collapse, food shortages, fuel restrictions, massive waves of migration, authoritarian politicians, escalation of local conflicts, and other factors, is civilizational collapse and a new "Dark Age" in Europe.

Is a fifth scenario conceivable? Might the twenty-first century witness renewal and growth in the Christian community in Europe, resulting in churches that are free from the shackles and pretensions of the Christendom era, confident but humble, living out the gospel they proclaim, and offering fresh resources for cultural, political, social, and economic renewal? Are there any signs of such a future? What would be needed for this to become a reality?

Some would point to prayer as the foundation for any such renewal. Others advocate new approaches to evangelism. Church planting and so-called "fresh expressions of church" are promoted by others. Some regard "post-secular" elements as hopeful signs and note that in times of crisis many people still turn to the churches. Others are less sanguine, recognizing that the well-publicized surge of interest in the Bible, prayer, and online church gatherings in the early weeks of the coronavirus pandemic seems to have dissipated. Recent research indicates significant reductions in church attendance and the anticipated closure of hundreds of churches.[4] I have received several invitations to speak about "post-pandemic church" and I have responded in the same way as when addressing "post-post-Christendom." We need to reflect on what is happening and consider possible outcomes, but there is great uncertainty at this stage, so any conclusions must be provisional.

Are there any other factors that we should be considering? If we are to move beyond cultural analysis and scenario forecasting to engaging with the urgent missional and ecclesial challenges we

4.   See, for example, a report commissioned by the UK Evangelical Alliance, "Changing Church," published in late 2021.

face, in what do we invest our energies and remaining resources? While not dismissing the foundational importance of prayer or devaluing the creativity and courage involved in reimagining modes of church and evangelism, I wonder whether we appreciate the potential of "reverse mission" and the increasing diversity of the Christian movement in Europe. Perhaps Harvey Kwiyani is correct when he suggests that the impact of Christian diversity will be greater than post-Christendom or post-modernity.[5]

Reverse Mission and the Demise of Christendom

One of the most obvious indicators of post-Christendom is the explosive growth of Christianity in the Majority World (Africa, Asia, and Latin America) and, as mentioned earlier, the shift of gravity of the global church from the North Atlantic to Africa. The boundaries of Europe are no longer coterminous with Christendom, nor are other Western nations to which Christianity was spread from Europe the locations of the most populous Christian communities. Christianity is now a worldwide faith and in most contexts is thriving without the Christendom scaffolding that supported it for centuries in Europe. Although some suggest that new forms of Christendom might emerge in the Majority World,[6] others resist the imposition of this Western notion on Christian communities elsewhere.[7]

The phenomenon of "reverse mission" is further evidence of the anachronistic nature of any suggestion that Christendom remains an appropriate description of Europe. In previous generations, Africa was (unhelpfully) described as "the dark continent," but today African Christian leaders apply this term to Europe. Previously, missionaries were sent from Europe to Africa, Asia, and Latin America; today, missionaries are being sent from these continents to Europe. Many of them express gratitude for those who brought the gospel to their forebears and a sense of indebtedness

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5.   Kwiyani, *Multicultural Kingdom*, 14.
6.   See Jenkins, *Next Christendom*.
7.   See Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom*.

that motivates their ministries. For instance, the pastor of the Pentecost Revival Church in the Netherlands insists:

> Our main aim is for the native. Because we want to bring revival into the nation back. We are grateful the Western countries came to Africa and gave us the gospel, but we are realizing that the Western land, countries, are now being a dark continent, let me use it, in terms of the gospel.[8]

Other terms sometimes encountered are "dead continent" or "prodigal nation." Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu writes: "For many African Christians in the diaspora, the recession of Christianity among westerners is a call to evangelism and the re-establishment of kingdom values in the lands of nineteenth-century missionaries. Mission is in reverse."[9]

Missionaries are by no means the only arrivals from the Majority World. Many others come to study, join family, work, or escape poverty, war, and persecution. And behind the personal reasons are the macro-factors of globalization, economic migration, and de-colonization.[10] Not all, of course, are Christians, but many are and, whatever their initial motivation for coming to Europe, many become involved in local congregations and missional activities. Some join existing churches; others help to plant new churches. And some of these new churches are very effective in reaching others from the same ethnic backgrounds who were not Christians when they arrived in Europe.

The scale of this migration and its impact on the European church scene is huge and represents a transformation of European Christianity. Some have even suggested that African diaspora churches represent the future of Christianity in Europe.[11] In a summary article, Harvey Kwiyani presents some telling statistics and examples. First, between one and two in every five churchgoing Christians in the UK are Black. Second, the Redeemed

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8. Quoted in Koning, "New Dynamics," 350–51.
9. Asamoah-Gyadu, "African-led Christianity."
10. Tira and Yamamori, eds., *Scattered* contains extensive information about migration and diaspora trends, together with biblical resources and missiological reflections.
11. See Tira and Yamamori, *Scattered*, 379.

Christian Church of God, a Nigerian Pentecostal church, that was registered in the UK in 1989, had almost 200,000 members in 1000 congregations across the UK in 2020. They aim to plant 50 new churches every year. Third, in addition to European languages, Christ is preached in Yoruba, Twi, Swahili, and Shona, as well as in Mandarin, Cantonese, Creole, Gujarati, Farsi, and many other languages in Europe. Fourth, a sample of church music sung on a typical Sunday across a European city will include genres from Nigeria, Congo, South Korea, China, Brazil, Jamaica, and many other countries in the world. Kwiyani concludes:

> It is beyond dispute that Christians from around the world, of various ethnicities and theological traditions are, by the thousands, possibly millions, living in Europe today, and that their presence in many European cities is changing Christianity's appearance, beliefs, practices, and hopefully, its self-understanding.[12]

There are various reasons why many Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans (and Caribbean Christians in a previous generation) have not joined existing churches but have planted new churches, many of them by design or default mono-ethnic. Some arrivals found European churches moribund and spiritually arid. Others experienced overt racism or at least a distinct absence of welcome. Some wanted to belong to a church in relationship with the denomination to which they belonged in their country of origin. Others wanted to create a community that would enable them to worship in their own language and support others from their own ethnic community. Several Majority World missionaries intended to plant a multi-ethnic church but ended up leading a mono-ethnic church, or at least a church that did not attract indigenous Europeans.

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12.   Kwiyani, "World Christians," 1–5. Although most have arrived in the past 50 years, there are intriguing stories of earlier arrivals and their missional and church planting activities, such as Thomas Kwame Brem-Wilson, Daniels Ekarte, and John Jea.

Reverse Mission and Diaspora Mission

Missiologists often differentiate between "reverse mission" and "diaspora mission." The latter describes the process of reaching and gathering people from the same ethnic group as the missionary or founding members of a church. The former refers to efforts to reach others, especially indigenous Europeans, and to develop multi-ethnic churches. This is a heuristic differentiation but there is an overlap between these approaches and their outcomes:

- Majority World Christians who join existing churches may not only infuse these with fresh energy and spirituality but may be effective in drawing into these congregations others who might be less inclined to join a White church but are attracted by a more diverse community.
- New churches that start as mono-ethnic may become increasingly diverse, albeit most often by reaching others who share certain characteristics, such as language, skin color, or origin on the same continent. What Europeans may perceive as a "Black church" might include members from twenty or more African nations, as in a church planted by a Ghanaian former student of mine. Another church I know well was started by Brazilians but has attracted Portuguese speakers from Angola, Mozambique, and Portugal.
- Churches that begin as "diaspora mission" initiatives may in time embrace the challenge of reaching others beyond their initial constituency and aspire to be multi-ethnic communities. I am currently working with a group of Zimbabwean churches that are embarking on this journey.
- Missionaries who are sent to engage in "reverse mission" and are passionate about reaching Europeans and planting multi-ethnic churches often struggle to achieve this and find themselves instead leading mono-ethnic churches. Shared networks, culture, and language, common socio-economic needs, and the desire to preserve ethnic identity frustrate the development of multi-ethnic churches. I recall a conversation with a Nigerian student in London who

declared his intention of planting a church that would welcome everyone in his very mixed neighborhood. Five years on, he was leading a successful Nigerian congregation.

Israel Olofinjana defines these terms in a more integrated way: "the language of reverse mission is limited while that of diaspora seems more overarching . . . reverse mission is a significant example of diaspora mission." Insisting that "reverse mission should be rightly situated and understood within the context of reverse migration," he affirms the definition offered by the Lausanne Diaspora Leadership Team: "Diaspora missions includes missions to the diaspora, missions through the diaspora, and missions by and beyond the diaspora."[13] He also encourages us to broaden our perspective in light of the diversity of Europeans who might be impacted: "Reverse mission is not only happening when an African pastor is leading a white British church, but it is also happening when an African pastor is leading a church full of African British, Caribbean British, and Asian British."[14]

Not all Majority World missionaries appreciate the term "reverse mission." To some, this represents a Eurocentric perspective that fails to recognize the contribution of African theologians, churches, and missionaries in the early church era, when North Africa was a thriving center of Christianity. "Reverse mission" is actually reversing an earlier reversal! Others are wary of the term carrying patronizing connotations of inferiority and dependence. Respondents from the Church Mission Society in Rebecca Catto's project on "reverse mission" regarded this term as representing an "oversimplification of the historical spread and contemporary dynamics of Christianity across the world, reinforcing Western

13.   Olofinjana, "Reverse Mission," 57–58. "Diaspora missiology" is an increasingly popular area of research. See, especially, https://www.westernseminary.edu/outreach/center-diaspora-relational-research, and Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*.

14.   Olofinjana, "Reverse Mission," 11. Arguably, this does not qualify as "reverse mission" in that African, Caribbean, and Asian British were not involved in mission to Africa, but this is an encouraging development.

bias." Some claimed that it "simultaneously reflects and distorts reality." Others protested that it carries "connotations involving ministry, proselytization, and an inversion of previous relations." Some preferred the popular phrase "mission from everywhere to everywhere" (but this does not identify the change of direction that is such a notable feature of recent developments). Catto recognizes that "from everywhere to everywhere" is attractive because it avoids the power imbalance implicit in "reverse mission," but she concludes that "reverse mission" has merit, despite the baggage it carries, and "should be applied critically with caution."[15]

Daniëlle Koning proposes an alternative to this terminology in her study of immigrant churches in the Netherlands: "the practice of immigrant mission can be divided into two types of cross-boundary transactions: intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic."[16] These terms roughly equate to "diaspora mission" and "reverse mission," but they focus on the priorities and activities of Majority World missionaries and churches rather than their origins. Tim Herbert presents a more trenchant critique of "reverse mission" as derogatory and advocates "inward mission" as a more neutral term, although this fails to capture the dynamics and motivations.[17] Perhaps intentionality is an essential feature of "reverse mission." S. Hun Kim, in a study of diaspora mission from a Korean perspective, suggests yet another term as an equivalent to "reverse mission" that does not involve western rhetoric: "receiving mission."[18] He also designates as "non-diasporic missionaries" those who focus on mission among local people outside their migrant communities.[19] And Kwiyani advocates "blessed reflex" on the basis that this term was used by the early European missionaries to express their hope that one day African, Asian, and Latin American Christians would come as missionaries to Europe.

15. All previous quotations in this paragraph are from Catto, "Church Mission Society," 82, 90, and 93. See further, Catto, "Reverse mission."

16. Koning, "New Dynamics," 342.

17. Herbert, "Reverse Mission."

18. Kim and Wonsuk, eds., *Korean Diaspora*, 147.

19. Kim, "Reflection," 76.

He explains that the word "reflex" implies a natural response, rather than anything organized or pressurized.[20]

But whatever terms we use, the arrival in recent decades of hundreds of thousands of Caribbean, African, Asian, and Latin American Christians, the planting of thousands of new churches, the renewal of existing churches, and numerous expressions of mission through social, economic, political, and cultural initiatives are changing the face of Christianity in Europe. It might also represent one of the most significant missiological developments of the twenty-first century and a crucial element in how the church in Europe can respond to the challenges and opportunities of post-Christendom.

Limited Impact of Reverse Mission

It might. But at present, the progress of "reverse mission," or whatever term we use, has been patchy. With few exceptions, mono-ethnic churches struggle to become multi-ethnic, let alone multicultural (terms we will explore further in due course). Despite their undoubted evangelistic fervor, few Majority World missionaries are making any impact on secularized Europeans. Although some White-majority congregations have become more multi-ethnic as a result of African, Asian, or Latin American Christians joining them, others have become Black churches as White members have left to join other congregations or moved away (the phenomenon known as "white flight"). And very few White Christians or new converts join Black-majority churches. Richard Burgess notes: "an important component of the reverse mission discourse is the ambition to win converts from the host society. Yet this is seldom the reality, as researchers in different contexts have found."[21] Critics have suggested that the rhetoric of "reverse mission" does not reflect the reality on the ground. Catto acknowledges that "reverse mission" only exists in "attention-

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20.   Kwiyani, *Multicultural Kingdom*, 18. See further, Ross, "Blessed Reflex," 162–68.

21.   Burgess, "Bringing back the gospel," 441.

grabbing pockets," concluding that it remains largely a discourse rather than a statistically demonstrable phenomenon.[22]

The picture improves considerably if we take into account the range of economic, political, and social initiatives taken by missionaries and churches with their roots in the Majority World. These initiatives have proliferated in recent years as the scope of mission has been understood in a more holistic way. Although many initiatives primarily equip, serve, or engage with particular ethnic groups, others are making a wider impact. Olofinjana lists an impressive range of initiatives in his study of the missional impact of Africans in Britain. These include migration services; community projects that tackle gun and knife crime, poverty and illiteracy; initiatives challenging racial injustice; and the Street Pastors movement that has spread across Britain and beyond.[23] He encourages increasing engagement by Black-majority churches with structural and systemic issues, such as fighting institutional racism, tackling unemployment, under-achievement in education, inequalities in the health system, and so on. These issues affect not only migrants and ethnic minority communities but also White working-class communities.[24] Olofinjana comments: "While the majority of these churches have few white British indigenes in their churches, their social and community services are having a wider impact on British society and they are also attracting British Africans."[25]

It remains to be seen whether these initiatives will have an evangelistic impact and result in the growth of multi-ethnic churches. But struggling together for justice across ethnic boundaries offers opportunities for increased mutual understanding, friendship, and sharing faith. Furthermore, in a context in which European churches are declining in number, size, and influence, the simple presence of Majority World churches and Christians in

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22.   Quoted in Burgess, "Bringing back the gospel," 433.

23.   Olofinjana, *Reverse in Ministry*, 49–52. For more detailed information about one of the most significant of these initiatives, see https: //www.streetpastors.org.

24.   Olofinjana, *Partnership*, 62.

25.   Olofinjana, "Reverse Mission," 60.

Europe is significant. Asamoah-Gyadu insists: "Although African churches in Western Europe do not attract many Europeans, there is such a thing as the 'witness of presence' in mission studies . . . through these immigrants, God may be preserving the life of his Church."[26] Kwiyani agrees: "while we acknowledge that non-Western missionary work among Westerners is yet to blossom, we must celebrate that non-Western Christians are strengthening the presence of Christianity in Europe . . . their presence in Europe brings with it gifts that, in many ways, invigorate both European culture and Christianity."[27]

Despite these initiatives, ambitions, and supportive presence, the impact of "reverse mission" has so far been more limited than many anticipated. Several factors may be involved, most of them identified by Majority World missionaries themselves. First, inadequate understanding of European culture. Just as European mission work in Africa, Asia, and Latin America was severely hindered by a limited understanding of the diverse cultures in these regions, so "reverse mission" today suffers from similar limitations. Majority World missionaries do not display the arrogance of some (though not all) European missionaries from Christendom, who not only evinced little understanding of other societies but assumed that their own culture was superior; but they need time to listen, learn, and adjust. Many Majority World missionaries will not have previously encountered the level of unbelief, antipathy towards religion, and hostility towards the church that confronts them in Europe. Nor are they necessarily familiar with religious nominality. Kim comments: "An encounter with religious nominals is a relatively new experience to Korean missionaries," and he explores how Korean missionaries are reflecting on this and learning to avoid a binary Christian/non-Christian analysis.[28] Not only is there a need to understand this culture but also to engage sympathetically with it: Some Majority World missionaries and church leaders can be quite scathing about secularized European culture, ethics, and practices.

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26.   Asamoah-Gyadu, "African-led Christianity," para 8.
27.   Kwiyani, "World Christians," 4.
28.   Kim, "Reflection," 87.

A couple of instances from the 1990s that I have sometimes used to illustrate the need for contextual sensitivity indicate the difficulties encountered by the first wave of African missionaries to Britain. Towards the end of the 1990s, a consultation was held in London, organized by a group of Baptist ministers. They had witnessed the emergence, impressive growth, and multiplication of Baptist churches in their city and were eager to learn from the leaders of these new churches. All of the leaders of these growing churches were Africans—mostly Nigerian or Ghanaian—as were almost all the members of their congregations. What was the secret of their success? What were they doing that might be replicable? Was there any single factor that the African leaders themselves thought was most significant? The conversation ranged over various topics, including prayer and fasting, vibrant worship, bold evangelism, and openness to the Holy Spirit. But when asked if they could identify a feature common across their churches, which British Baptist churches might adopt, to the bemusement of the organizers there was widespread agreement among the African pastors that "robed choirs" were essential to attract new members.

A couple of years earlier, I had a conversation with a Nigerian student who had enrolled in a church planting course I was teaching in London. He was a passionate evangelist who has gone on to plant churches in Britain and beyond. He reflected on his first experience of Britain. Arriving at Heathrow Airport, he had caught a bus into the center of London. Realizing he had a captive audience for an hour or more, he did what he would have done in his own nation—he stood up and preached the gospel. He was taken aback by the lack of response, convinced that in Nigeria this approach would have resulted in conversions and perhaps the core group for a new church. Neither of these scenarios is representative of the situation today, although some new arrivals are still taken aback by various aspects of European culture, and those who responded to Catto's research spoke of feeling "under-trained."[29] Lack of training before arriving in Europe is a particular concern. However, there are now various resources, not least the accumulated wisdom of the first generation of missionaries from the Ma-

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29. Catto, "Church Mission Society," 92.

jority World, to assist those who arrive in Europe to gain insights into their new cultural context. The Centre for Missionaries from the Majority World in Britain, for example, is dedicated to equipping them and encouraging them to build partnerships with indigenous British Christians.[30] Understanding and engaging sensitively and effectively with another culture is an ongoing challenge for all cross-cultural missionaries.

Second, there is the issue of flawed evangelistic and church planting strategies. Practices that are both appropriate and effecttive in some Majority World societies may not be in Europe—and may actually be counter-productive. Although street preaching is not restricted to Majority World evangelists, this practice is more likely to alienate than attract people. Planting churches that prioritize worship services and busy programs, rather than engagement with the wider community, and that are founded on the expectation that their gatherings will be attractive to strangers, is an approach eschewed today by most (though not all) European church planters. The problems with this attractional methodology are often exacerbated by Majority World congregations meeting in buildings situated in neighborhoods in which few, if any, of their members live. However, embracing a more holistic understanding of mission and engaging in social action has opened the way for a more incarnational approach to church planting. Long journeys to attend church meetings may be necessary in "diaspora mission" contexts if members are geographically distant from each other and from a congenial congregation, but "reverse mission" will require churches that are more embedded in neighborhoods.[31]

Furthermore, church planting by Majority Church missionaries has often taken on a competitive edge, with a frequent division of resources and accusations of empire-building. This has not only diverted attention and energy from efforts to engage with indigenous Europeans but has also resulted in the proliferation of mono-ethnic churches since "diaspora mission" usually facilitates faster numerical growth.

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30.   See https://cmmw.org.uk.
31.   See further Adedibu, "Reverse Mission," 405–23.

Related to this is a lack of coordination. Olofinjana points out that "unlike the Western missionary movement that had mission societies and agencies sending people collectively and in a coordinated way, African Christians and churches are coming as individuals responding spontaneously to migratory pressures." He instances five or six African churches congregating in one industrial unit and comments: "This raises the question whether this is mission or competition."[32]

Third, there is the challenge of Europeans' attitudes towards Majority World Christians. Reflecting on the struggles encountered by African missionaries, Olofinjana writes:

> African Christians face a double challenge in evangelising Europe. The first is the European worldview that no longer believes in God or institutional religion. The second is how African Christians are viewed by Europeans. In order to minister to the first challenge, we have to build a good reputation that can confront the second challenge.[33]

Engaging in holistic mission activities, especially in partnership with others, and making friends across cultures are essential, but there are challenges also in relation to practices associated with some Majority World churches. Asamoah-Gyadu expresses concern that several leaders "have been accused of using the enterprise for personal and material gain. Others blatantly abuse their position by playing on and exploiting the fears and insecurities of people whose lives are full of uncertainties."[34] Afe Adogame acknowledges that "Nigeria's global reputation for corruption and criminal activity, and the perception of African churches by white Europeans as institutions obsessed with money and the activities of evil spirits are barriers to the formation of cosmopolitan congergations."[35] Although the "prosperity gospel" was imported into Africa and elsewhere from North America, in Europe, it is associated especially with African churches.

European attitudes to Majority World churches may be affected by less seemingly sinister factors. Olofinjana gives as an exam-

32. Olofinjana, "Reverse Mission," 59.
33. Olofinjana, "Reverse Mission," 58.
34. Asamoah-Gyadu, "African-led Christianity," para 26.
35. Quoted in Burgess, "Bringing Back," 443.

ple an African church in south-east London that disturbs its neighbors with loud music and takes up lots of residents' parking on the streets. He concludes:

> This sort of difficulty fuels the already perception that African Christians are not here for us but for themselves. This is because, if the narrative already suggests that Africans are here only as economic migrants living on benefits, disturbing the neighbours through what is considered noise pollution, albeit understood as praise and worship to God by the church is not going to help the reputation or mission of African churches.[36]

Underlying some of these attitudes, or sometimes on the surface, is racism. Majority World respondents reported to Catto their experiences and concerns about personal safety.[37] Racism is also frequently given as the reason why most Majority World churches struggle to attract White Europeans. Koning's research in the Netherlands uncovered experiences of racism and revealed that "blackness" was a factor in inclusion or exclusion. African churches that were unsuccessful in reaching Dutch people were attracting Surinamese and Antilleans.[38] And Kwiyani writes:

> Most African pastors in Europe and North America mention race as the most difficult issue facing their ministries . . . I am convinced that race will be a central issue in mission this century as the numbers of non-Western missionaries continue to rise and Christianity becomes increasingly darker in complexion.[39]

Fourth, we should not underestimate the pressures on many migrants, whether they perceive themselves as missionaries or not. Many Majority World church leaders I know are working long hours, often in poorly paid jobs, to support their families at the same time as planting or leading churches. These financial and time constraints are significant and not often ameliorated by support from their sending churches, unlike the experience of most

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36. Olofinjana, "Reverse Mission," 58.
37. Catto, "Church Mission Society," 92.
38. Koning, "New Dynamics," 354–55.
39. Kwiyani, *Multicultural Kingdom*, 136.

European missionaries to the Majority World. Catto explains the consequences:

> there is a danger that Latin Americans who have migrated to conduct mission in Britain become nothing more than economic migrants. As they are obliged to work very hard to support themselves in such an expensive country, they become despondent with their lack of success.[40]

Some also experience hostility towards migrants of all kinds that is common in many neighborhoods.

Fifth, and perhaps less often recognized, is the pervasive influence of Christendom assumptions, theology, expectations, and structures in Majority World churches in Europe. This is entirely understandable as missionaries to Europe bring with them the Christianity exported from Europe in previous generations. Missionaries who preached the gospel in Africa, Asia, and Latin America also exported their culture. And this culture was imbued with the theology, politics, philosophy, economics, architecture, ambitions, and ecclesiology of Christendom. Although Majority World theologians have made significant progress in recent years in developing indigenous theologies and contextualized expressions of Christianity, many Majority World missionaries seem unaware of this conversation. The Christendom legacy remains influential and this has been imported back into Europe. This is a serious hindrance: Imported Christendom dogma, structures, and strategies are inappropriate and ineffective in post-Christendom Western Europe.

Examples of imported Christendom features are not hard to find. Most obvious are the structural elements: Hierarchical and often patriarchal leadership; front-facing congregations and front-led services; multiple committees and church meetings; the dominance of monologue sermons; and so on. Many congregations meet in church buildings they either rent or have bought from denominations that no longer need them; some have obtained other buildings and adapted them for their use; but most have adopted a

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40.   Catto, "Reverse mission," 97.

traditional approach to the ambience and layout of these buildings, along with an attractional approach to mission.

The gospel proclaimed by many Majority World churches in Europe majors on sin and guilt as the existential issues to be addressed, atonement as penal substitution, eternal conscious suffering, the inerrancy of Scripture, a patriarchal view of God, a moralizing approach to discipleship, reluctance to question inherited ethical stances, and a non-negotiable view of eschatology. Although these features are common in conservative churches in Europe, other churches are increasingly aware that they are deeply rooted in European rationalism and the culture of Christendom and need to be reviewed in light of the opportunity post-Christendom offers to differentiate biblical and cultural elements and recover a broader and richer understanding of the gospel.

The Christendom legacy also influences the approach of many churches planted by Majority World missionaries to issues of economics and politics. The language and practice of tithing are prevalent, assumed to be biblical, and strongly encouraged, with no awareness of the malign history of this practice throughout the Christendom era. The aspiration to achieve social and political influence and the notion of a "Christian nation" are apparent in some churches as they seek to recover ground abandoned by most European churches in light of post-Christendom realities. Examples of this perspective can be found in Wale Babatunde's books, *Great Britain Has Fallen* and *Awake! Great Britain*.

According to Burgess, "concern over the conversion of church buildings into secular or non-Christian spaces and a desire to reverse this trend is a popular theme in Nigerian Pentecostal discourse." He continues: "Nigerian Pentecostals in Britain often understand their mission . . . to include any activity that will transform society, and regard their movement as a significant social force capable of reversing the secularizing tendencies of British society."[41] His article includes a testimony from an African pastor who has been in Britain since the early 1990s:

41.   Burgess, "Bringing Back," 436–37.

> You brought the gospel to us; now we're bringing back the gospel. There's something wrong because you have left your foundation. . . . All the structures in this country, if you check them, are Christian structures. You take good care of foreigners, the NHS, your Parliament, the coronation oath that was taken. It's because of the Christian principles you imbibed and the Christian foundation that this nation has. So, we need to get back there. . . . I want to see God glorified in this country. I want to see our streets change. I want to see Christian leaders. I want to see education changed. I want to see the church taking its rightful place in the nation.[42]

Burgess comments: "This narrative introduces a social and political dimension to the reverse mission paradigm. Pastor David's ambition is to see Britain return to its Christian foundations and for the church again to become an influential social force in the nation."[43] The restoration of Christendom is seen by some (although by no means all) as the end game.

Consequently, many Majority World churches in post-Christendom Europe are ill-equipped to engage with this context because of the influence of Christendom on their beliefs, practices, and expectations. With the exception of the fifth point, these concerns have been raised by Majority World missiologists. This is important in our post-colonial context, in which it is unhelpful for Europeans to criticize others, rather than listening carefully and engaging in mutually respectful conversations. After all, the Christendom legacy is still influential in many European churches, hindering them from impacting an increasingly post-Christendom culture. And, whatever the current limitations of "reverse mission," the challenge of reaching secularized Europeans is not one with which European churches are grappling successfully. This is a tough environment for the Christian mission. None of us are making much progress.

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42.   Burgess, "Bringing Back," 434.
43.   Burgess, "Bringing Back," 434.

Towards Partnership

The inability to make much headway in reaching Europeans and developing multi-ethnic churches is a cause for concern, not only to those whose reason for coming to Europe was to evangelize "the dark continent," but increasingly to churches that had previously focused on their own diaspora. There are two reasons for this. First, restricted immigration into many European nations means that there are fewer new arrivals with whom these churches can engage, either drawing in existing Christians or evangelizing those who are not Christians from their own ethnic background. Once they have exhausted such opportunities, their evangelistic passion needs a new outlet. Second, many mono-ethnic churches are struggling to retain their own younger members, a generation born and brought up in Europe. Many bicultural young adults are uncomfortable in mono-ethnic churches, where the language, traditions, and culture reflect a history they do not share. Some are walking away from faith and church altogether; others are joining large European churches. This is a major pastoral concern and is provoking conversations about changes that might be needed to retain their youngsters and reach others.

From conversations with leaders of these churches, I do not doubt the seriousness of their concerns or their recognition of the need to adapt, but it seems unlikely that most will be able to become multi-ethnic or attract many Europeans. The features that are cultural barriers to others are precious to the founding generation and will not readily be abandoned or changed. Hirpo Kumbi concludes sadly:

> It may be too late for some congregations to change direction because their cultural mindset is fixed, and it would be harder work changing the orientation of the bulk of their older members, whose attitudes are deeply entrenched in maintaining their own culture and their sense of personal identity. This is particularly true for those who did not come to this country with the intention of planting churches but merely wished to find a congenial arena to maintain their faith . . . The desire to retain patterns learned from the home culture are likely to bring stagnation and eventual cultural isolation resulting in congregational death

. . . At the present time, there are few signs of these lessons being learned.[44]

But there are signs of hope and indications of ways forward that might yet lead to "reverse mission" fulfilling its extraordinary potential.

Although most mono-ethnic churches may be unable to diversify, they have within them bicultural young adults who realize that their churches are unlikely to thrive beyond the first or second generation but want to take initiatives that could result in effective "reverse mission" and the emergence of multi-ethnic churches. These could, according to Kwiyani, become the missional bridge for Majority World churches to connect with Western culture.[45] But for this to happen, their church leaders will need to trust and release them, bless their initiatives, even if these are uncongenial, and be patient as lessons are learned.

Church planting will be essential if they are to make progress, offering opportunities to reimagine ecclesiology and missiology. But Olofinjana warns that they "must understand that their mission context demands a rethinking rather than perpetuating and replicating church extension practices." What is needed, he insists, is church planting that engages the local community in which they are situated.[46] Multi-ethnic church planting teams have much greater potential to form multi-ethnic churches than efforts to turn mono-ethnic churches into multi-ethnic ones. I am involved with one such initiative that is at a very early stage but is possible because of the courage and trust exercised by church leaders who have encouraged the small team.

Progress is unlikely to be fast, but this approach offers real hope because bicultural young adults understand European cultures and can better contextualize what they bring from their church background. And what they bring includes spiritual vitality, a commitment to prayer, awareness of spiritual warfare, experience of community, and confidence in biblical revelation. These are significant gifts. Kwiyani suggests: "Spirit-empowered Pente-

44.   Kumbi, *Mission and Movement*, 20–21.
45.   Kwiyani, *Our Children*.
46.   Olofinjana, "Reverse mission," 63.

costal Christianity makes a critique of the Enlightenment-shaped European Christianity . . . It is this new type of Christianity that the Africans bring that may eventually be able to challenge European secularism." However, he recognizes that "the very thing that makes African Christianity strong is what makes it largely unattractive to Europeans" and so "it must contextualize itself and rethink the way it tries to share the gospel with a people for whom pneumatic-Christianity is a stumbling block."[47] This will take time.

Another sign of hope is some emerging partnerships between Majority World and European churches, whether locally or through formal ecumenical arrangements.[48] Kwiyani urges Majority World churches to "make good connections with European churches—the churches that would help them to begin to understand European culture and explore what they need to do in order to contextualize their ministries for mission among Europeans." He concludes: "migrant Christians bring gifts that British churches need to receive, and British churches have gifts that migrant Christians need."[49] Kim lists some of the gifts migrant churches bring, which include experience of vibrant Christian growth and greater familiarity with a religious plurality.[50] At a local level, mono-ethnic congregations within a multi-ethnic church can facilitate healthy diversity and also encourage growing friendship, integration, and missional impact. Such partnerships can also become the seedbeds for multi-ethnic church planting initiatives.

Growing relationships between European and Majority World missiologists are also developing, enabling helpful conversations about missiology and ecclesiology. If these conversations are alert to post-colonial sensitivities and are rooted in mutual respect and trust, they could be very fruitful. Arguably, what is needed is not simply "reverse mission" but "reverse missiology"—theological reflection on the challenges and opportunities of our multicultural

47. Kwiyani, *Multicultural Kingdom*, 60.
48. Examples can be found in Olofinjana, *Partnership*, 45–46.
49. Kwiyani, *Multicultural Kingdom*, 61, 90.
50. Kim and Wonsuk, "Korean Diaspora," 149.

context. Olofinjana advocates the development of what he calls "African British Theology" (distinct from Black Theology), and Kwiyani emphasizes the importance of contextual theology and ecclesiology.[51] Of particular importance will be the consideration of the issue of "attractional" versus "incarnational" mission. Most Majority World churches in Europe operate on an attractional model, whereas many European churches are moving towards an incarnational approach—but neither is yet proving especially successful in reaching secularized Europeans. And the legacies of the Christendom era in European societies and in Majority World churches need to be examined carefully in order to create ecclesial communities suited for a post-Christendom culture.

Despite the limited impact of "reverse mission" thus far and the significant challenges that remain, there are encouraging examples of partnership between Majority World and European churches and mission agencies, examples of effective mission, and examples of multi-ethnic churches. The highest profile is Sunday Adelaja's Church of the Blessed Embassy of the Kingdom of God for all Nations in Kiev,[52] which claimed twenty-five thousand members in 2013, including many Europeans. The church has reached former drug addicts, prostitutes, and leaders and members of mafia gangs. However, accusations of moral failure and economic corruption have been levelled at Adelaja.[53] Less prominent but encouraging British examples include:

- Temple of Praise church in Liverpool, led by a Nigerian, is one of the most multicultural churches in Britain.[54]
- Jesus House in East London, with members from Kenya, Zambia, the Congo, Ghana, Jamaica, and Brazil, as well as a few indigenous British, is also led by a Nigerian.[55]

51. Olofinjana, "Reverse," 60; Kwiyani, *Multicultural Kingdom*, 92, 112.
52. See http://godembassy.com.
53. See "Ukraine Evangelicals 'Dissociate' themselves from Sunday Adelaja," n.p.
54. See http://www.templeofpraise.org.uk.
55. See https://jesushouse.org.uk.

- Kwiyani mentions a Brazilian church and a Korean church that are reaching out to British people, and also refers to three churches he has visited that are demonstrating what a multicultural church might look like.[56]
- Kumbi notes emerging missional initiatives by second-generation Ethiopians in London and an Eritrean/Ethiopian church in Birmingham that is partnering with American missionaries to form a multicultural church.[57]
- Kim reports that a large Korean church in London is incubating the birth of other Asian churches, and mentions a joint initiative by Azeri migrants, an English church, and some Korean churches to translate the New Testament into Azeri.[58]
- Burgess mentions a growing relationship between Jesus House and the largest Anglican church in London, Holy Trinity Brompton, and a mission partnership between the (Nigerian) Redeemed Christian Church of God and the Anglican Church Mission Society.[59]
- Chigor Chike mentions a research project that studied eight churches with ethnically diverse leadership teams and congregations.[60]

This is a very short list by comparison with the thousands of examples of "diaspora mission," but it indicates what is possible. Some of these examples also remind us that the impact of "reverse mission" initiatives is not limited to White Europeans. In multicultural Europe, a multicultural mission strategy is required. And this will involve planting and developing truly multicultural churches, not just multi-ethnic churches. Throughout this article, the term "multi-ethnic" has been used to describe churches in which members come from different ethnic backgrounds. There are now many multi-ethnic churches in Europe—some predomi-

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56. Kwiyani, *Multicultural Kingdom*, 11.
57. Kumbi, *Mission*, 22–23. He acknowledges that these are "straws in the wind."
58. Kim, *Korean Diaspora*, 51.
59. Burgess, "Bringing Back," 449.
60. Chike, "Creating Space, 12.

nantly White but welcoming members of other ethnicities, others entirely Black but comprised of members from many different nations. But there are very few "multicultural" churches like Temple of Praise in the list above, in which the gifts of different cultures are valued, blended, and integrated into the community. This is a more demanding challenge but rich in potential and missionally significant in divided societies.

Conclusion

"Diaspora mission" is thriving in Europe and is transforming the face of Christianity in the most secular societies in the world. "Reverse mission" is underway and might yet shape the future of our post-Christendom culture. Intercultural mission partnerships and emerging multicultural churches might hold out the best prospects for the future. Maybe it is in these developments that we should be investing our research, energy, and resources. If the ongoing secularization of Europe and the continuing decline and marginalization of the churches are to be halted and possibly reversed, European missiologists will need to engage with, learn from, encourage, assist, and partner with missiologists and mission practitioners from the Majority World.

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