

Book Review of “Multicultural Kingdom:
Ethnic Diversity, Mission and the Church”
by Harvey Kwiyani

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Kwiyani, Harvey *Multicultural Kingdom: Ethnic Diversity, Mission and the Church* London: SCM Press, 2020. £21.99, (156p).

The United Kingdom represents one of the most multicultural societies in the twenty-first century world. People from different racial, ethnic and migrant backgrounds have been representative faces in the different sectors of the British Society.¹ However, the Church in Britain has not been able to maximise the opportunities presented by the cultural diversity of its society as British Christianity remains highly segregated. Harvey Kwiyani, Liverpool Hope University’s Mission and African Christianity scholar from Malawi in his book *Multicultural Kingdom: Ethnic Diversity, Mission and the Church*² addresses the problem of segregation in both the British Christian context and among African Christians in Europe and North America by arguing strongly that the kingdom of God is a kingdom of many cultures. The author contends that “there is no other way to conceive the *ekklesia* apart from it being a multicultural community of followers of Christ worshipping and serving God wherever they have been scattered around the world” (p. 3). This evokes the eschatological vision of Apostle John in Revelation 7:9 where a multi-racial, multi-

lingual and uncountable throng of people, known as the church triumphant congregated to worship God. Cultural diversity, the book argues, has come to stay in the church of the West and it is the way forward.

Kwiyani argued persuasively that cultural diversity in contemporary British Christianity which is attributed to migration of thousands of Africans, Asians, and Latin American Christians to the country in the past 70 years, is the *new normal* and will have greater impact on the Western religious and cultural landscape in the 21st century. The book narrated how African Christian migrants (such as Bankole from Nigeria and Kweku from Ghana), the Windrush generation from West Indies, Latin American missionaries and other Asian Christians (particularly from South Korea) have all come to Britain with their version of Christianity which he called 'their faith and gifts,' giving rise to a more diverse British Christianity. These variegated foreign expressions of faith co-existing in the country makes Britain 'the centre of World Christianity.' According to missiologists, these migrations and proliferations of Christians from the third world in the West are a fulfilment of a hope earlier expressed by protestant missionary movement in the 1790s. In a concept termed 'blessed reflex,' defined as 'the rising presence of non-Western Christians in Europe,' Western missionaries had hoped and spoken of a day in the future when Christians from unevangelized lands (Africa, Asia and Latin America) would come to help invigorate Western Christianity. Today, the author concludes, "the blessed reflex is finally here" (p. 20).

In deepening his argument that multicultural kingdom is here to stay, Kwiyani submits that as the world is constantly changing, so should the church. Like the 'sharp penknife' of a guest which represents a new wisdom and understanding in his native Malawian proverb, the cultural diversity in British Christianity, he asserts, is a gift from God (p. 77). The book offers some biblical and historical basis for a multicultural and diverse Christian congregation. Examples include: Jesus commanding his disciples at the eve of his departure to replace the limited commission (Matt. 10:5-6) with the great commission (Matt. 28:19), the dispersion of the Jews from Palestine to

various cities in the Greco-Roman empire, the multicultural nature of the Roman empire in the first century, the multicultural beginning and leadership mix of the first Christian communities, and through the preaching and epistles of Apostle Paul which challenges ethnic and religious distinction between Jews and Greeks. Just like Paul advocated that the body has many members with different gifts and functions (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:4), British Christianity will be enriched with the gifts brought to the table by migrant Christians.

In the concluding chapters, Kwiyani touched on some other germane issues such as multicultural ecclesiology, the different models of multicultural congregations, tribalism in the church, and how to make multiculturalism work. He argues for a multicultural ecclesiology since ecclesiologies are significantly shaped by cultures and these cultures will be expressed differently in worship. Hence, multicultural congregations must learn to manage the tension between their *congregational culture* and the many subcultures of their members, learn from one another in humility, be willing to adapt their worship services, music styles, food, greetings, and many other things that will encourage new members with different cultures to feel welcome in their congregation. Certainly, multicultural congregations are the way forward in the West as people of different cultures (races, classes and nationalities) live together. Monocultural churches, especially in the contexts of cultural diversity is unbiblical and it is foolishness to continue to justify segregating churches.

This important book is strong on many fronts. Kwiyani's writing style is engaging, clear and concise. The book is faithful to its main thrust: global churches and Christians in Britain should embrace multiculturalism. This appeal cuts across both British white congregations and African monocultural congregations like the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) and Church of Pentecost (CoP), the Living Waters Church, Calvary Family Church and many other tribal African congregations mushrooming in different parts of the country. Yet, the book serves many other useful purposes: Readers have many things to learn about colonialism, migration, Pentecostalism, history

of missions and African philosophy and wisdom. Although, the book has some emphasis that were not resolved, like the all-important subject of racism. Since racism plays a big role in why many churches have refused to embrace diversity, the author would have done well to unpack it the more. A recent book, *Ghost Ship: Institutional Racism and the Church of England* by a black priest in the church of England, Fr. A.D.A France-Williams is one revealing book which explores the problem of institutional racism in the Church of England.³ Within American Evangelical context, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* by Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith highlights the deep-seated problem of racism in the church.⁴ Kwiyani's book is nevertheless a compelling and thought-provoking read. It brings a paradigm shift in the ecclesiology, praxis and practices of churches in a multicultural British context and in the church of the West at large.

As one of the church leaders in a predominantly monocultural Nigerian church in the UK, who has been convinced all along that something is not right in the way my church and some other African monocultural congregations in the UK are constituted, this book has stirred a burning desire in my heart to see homogenous Churches in the UK open her frontiers to other cultures and ethnic nationalities. This noble contribution by Kwiyani, undoubtedly provides the needed clarity, theological and missiological grounding for missiologists, church leaders, scholars, and anyone who envisions multicultural congregations. It is highly recommended.

Bibliography

- Emerson, Michael O, and Christian Smith. *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- France-Williams, A.D.A. *Ghost Ship: Institutional Racism and the Church of England*. London: SCM, 2020.

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1. The likes of Mo Farah (Marathon Sport), Idris Elba (Acting), John Boyega (Acting), Eniola Aluko (Female Football), Anthony Joshua (Boxing), Amir Khan (Boxer) and many others are examples of people from migrant backgrounds or minority ethnic groups that are representative faces of Britain in their various fields.
2. Harvey Kwiyani, *Multicultural Kingdom: Ethnic Diversity, Mission and the Church* (London: SCM Press, 2020).
3. A.D.A. France-Williams, *Ghost Ship: Institutional Racism and the Church of England* (London: SCM, 2020).
4. Michael O Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).