

Book Review of “World Christianity in
Western Europe: Diasporic Identity,
Narrative & Missiology” Edited by Israel
Oluwole Olofinjana

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Olofinjana, Israel Oluwole. Ed. *World Christianity in Western Europe: Diasporic Identity, Narrative & Missiology*: Oxford, Regnum Books International, 2020. £9.60 (285p). Reviewed by Rev Dan Yarnell¹

Christianity has always been at its core a missionary and migratory movement.² Our faith has crossed cultures and continents, challenging ideas and ideologies, expanding and growing as the story of Jesus has been transmitted and translocated around the world. Through intentional missionary endeavours as well as impromptu opportunities, a cacophony of expressions representing much of the world’s tribes, tongues and languages can be found. This is equally true in the nominally Christian domain of Western Europe, where decline is often the popular narrative, but where various expressions of diasporic followers of Jesus are engaging in new missionary endeavours, providing new expressions of our 2000 year-old faith.

This new and vitally important work, edited by Israel Olofinjana, brings some sharp focus on many of the key issues that affect the continuing missionary endeavours of Western Europe.

The important range of voices and reflective practices enrich this

volume, proving a wide range of experiences, underpinned by good missiological and theological reflection.

The work begins with a very helpful framing chapter by Olofinjana, which introduces the reader to the main themes as well as tracing an historical reading of the expansion of Christianity. Some of the key salient points are introduced which will be explored by the various contributors as well. The work is then arranged in three parts which provide a very helpful framing of the key contributions.

Section one focuses on the issue of diasporic identities. Stephen Dye brings some important insights in understanding how this affects the missionary identity within the context of the missionary work in Germany, especially in light of developing multi-ethnic congregations. One of his key insights notes that the most effective church planters and missionaries were those who not only related to various immigrant cultures, but they were adaptable to the host culture. This is later defined as transcultural mediators, those who can be the bridge-builders between differing identities. This is then followed by Tope Bellos' contribution as she reflects as a 2nd generation African Christian in Britain and the challenges/opportunities this has presented her with. She explores how her dual identity was a great personal challenge as she was growing up within two differing cultures and world-views, as well as the unique opportunities this has afforded in ongoing Christian mission. Rosalee Ewell follows this with a Biblical and trinitarian reflection on some key scriptures that inform and transform how engaging with God as trinity (*missio trinitatis*) can empower and shape us in our encounters with others. The final contribution in this section is by Dulcie McKenzie, who provides some important theological and sociological reflection on her own African Caribbean heritage (ACP) and the historical journey of those from the Windrush generation and beyond. Foundational to her reflections is both the issue of identity as Pentecostals who had not found a home within the host culture churches in Britain, as well as the significance of music and congregational worship which reinforced identity as well as empowered them for mission. In her words, it was 'dramatic, performative and transformative.' (p. 83).

This is then followed by a second section entitled missional narratives. Here we engage with four practitioners who reflect on their missionary experiences in four different contexts: Flavio Gurratos and his wife as Brazilians working in Britain; Jim Stewart who conveys the experiences of various majority world Christians in Wales; Nils Malmström and his important reflections on various Pentecostal Immigrant churches and their approaches to mission in Sweden; and finally Claire and Mark Ord, British missionaries who explore their experiences in Italy. All four of these are excellent examples of action-reflection approaches to the work of God and their experiences within the wider Western European context. There is a great deal of personal honesty as well as engagement to the wider theological and missiological settings which have enabled them to posit their viewpoints so helpfully and clearly.

The final section focuses on key missiological insights that help to reflect and inform the continuing missional encounters. The strength of this section is the wider cultural, ethnic and theological insights which each contributor provides. S Kim gives a coherent case study of Korean diaspora experiences, especially within Central Asia. This is well informed with clear engagement in reviewing the differences between traditional and diaspora missiology and the way in which the Lausanne Movement has nurtured this approach. His work underscores the importance of 'practicing truly biblical, evangelical ecumenism...' (p.167). This is followed by Usha Reifsnider's important contribution in exploring the historical and missiological interaction between indigenous British Christians and Gujarati Hindu migrants. Noteworthy is the need to nurture and develop diaspora converts, who become British Gujarati Hindu background insiders who would have a stronger voice and presence than the well-meaning and well-trained Western missionaries. The final contribution is by Israel Olofinjana. In this final chapter, after providing a very clear and helpful historical summary of African mission initiatives in Britain, he begins to posit some contours in developing an African British Theology, part of the wider Black Theology, but more finely tuned around African identity as a contextual, postcolonial expression. This holds in

tension the issues of identity and engagement in the postmodern, secular UK environment. He notes the strength of approaches to reverse mission, but moves the engagement on from merely evangelism, church planting and social engagement, as valuable as these are, to seeking to address the deeper structural issues which would bring about a longer lasting socioeconomic and political change, including racism, which could engender the mission work as fresh expressions of good news, thereby transforming and renewing British culture more in line with Kingdom aspirations.

I highly commend this valuable and timely contribution; for its breath and depth of reflections, the extremely valuable case studies, as well as its robust theological and missiological insights. It has been an important contribution which has informed, challenged, and transformed my own understandings and practices in seeking to continue to participate in the trinitarian mission of the good news of Jesus.

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 2. Walls, A. & Ross, C., eds. (2008) *Mission in the 21st Century*. London: Dartman, Longman & Todd. See especially the afterward by Walls, entitled 'Christian Mission in a Five-Hundred Year Context', pp. 193-204.