



MOYA CHRONICLES

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Mission and Migration Series (Part 2)

THE JAPA SYNDROME AND NEW OPPORTUNITY FOR FOREIGN MISSION

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Introduction

Over the last decade, citizens from Sub-Saharan African countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, and others have migrated to Western countries in quest of better opportunities. Nigeria merits significant consideration in this regard because it has the most African immigrants. For instance, the UK issued 210% more skilled worker and study visas to Nigerians between 2019 and 2021, reaching a record high of 59,000 from 19,000. Canada also witnessed over 35,000 Nigerians relocating between 2015 and 2019. Similar trends are seen in immigration data to the US, Australia, and other Western nations. This mass movement is commonly referred to as "Japa," meaning to escape intensely. Nigerians are fleeing due to issues like poor leadership, economic instability, insecurity, inflation, high living costs, power shortages, and lack of basic amenities.

While most migrants aim for better living conditions abroad, this paper argues that Nigerian Christians as well as other African Christians, who are part of the "Japa" phenomenon can use this opportunity to advance the gospel in foreign lands. The paper discusses the decline of Christianity in the West, explores the connection between mission and migration, and suggests practical ways for Christian migrants to contribute to mission efforts and the expansion of Christianity in their new locations.

The Decline of Christianity in the West

Christianity in the West is in sharp decline, as recent statistics reveal. In the United States, Pew Research Center surveys from 2018 and 2019 show a 12% drop in self-identified Christians over the past decade, with the religiously unaffiliated population increasing from 17% to

26%. In Canada, projections suggest that the Anglican Church may run out of members by 2040. Europe, especially the UK, faces a more severe situation. Church membership in the UK has fallen from 10.6 million in 1930 to 5.4 million in 2013. Evangelical Focus reported the closure, demolition, or sale of approximately 2,000 church buildings in the UK over the last decade. Many historic cathedrals have been repurposed for various uses. These trends label Europe and America as mission fields and post-Christian societies, emphasising the need for re-evangelization, spiritual renewal and awakening.

Mission and Migration: The Biblical and Prophetic Basis

Throughout Christian history, biblical scholars, theologians, and missiologists have recognised the close link between migration and Christian missions, viewing it as a means through which God accomplishes His purpose of reconciling the world. This idea of migration as a tool for mission expansion finds support in both biblical and prophetic contexts.

Examining the Bible, we see that the Judeo-Christian faith has a rich history of God's people moving from one place to another to fulfil His promises. Figures like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and the nation of Israel all journeyed in alignment with God's plan. In the New Testament, the early church's persecution forced Jewish Christians to seek refuge in neighbouring regions like Samaria and later Asia Minor, spreading the gospel wherever they went (Acts 8:1-5). Thus, the biblical narrative establishes migration as a catalyst for gospel dissemination.

Furthermore, the contemporary increase in migration from non-western countries to the rest of the world aligns with prophetic insights. In the 1790s, Protestant missionaries foresaw a time when Christians from "unevangelized" regions such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America would invigorate Western Christianity, known as the "Blessed Reflex." Today, migrant Christians from non-Western continents are fulfilling this centuries-old prophecy by revitalising and sustaining Christianity in the West.

Maximising Migration as an Opportunity for Foreign Mission

As earlier noted, the pursuit of most migrants is to live comfortably and prosper economically in their new lands. However, migration offers tremendous opportunities for engaging in missions. In fact, Christian migrants can be aptly described as missionaries in their new host countries. Jehu Hanciles, Professor of World Christianity at Emory Candler School of Theology attests to this when he says that "phenomenal migrations from Christianity's new heartlands in Africa, Latin America, and Asia have galvanised a massive non-Western missionary movement" (Hanciles, 8). Christian migrants must therefore maximise their opportunity of relocation for foreign missions. To do this, I will offer the following practical suggestions.

1. Through Collaboration with Existing Churches in their new Locations

Migrant Christians can collaborate with local churches in their new environment. These churches offer opportunities for continuous fellowship with God and other believers. Existing churches are also places where migrant Christians can deploy their spiritual and ministry gifts in the service of the Lord. In the West, the opportunity to make money abounds every day of the week, including Sundays. As a result, many African Christians, who relocated with strong spiritual zeal have lost their passion for God in pursuit of dollars, euros, and pounds. Christian migrants must resist the temptation to see themselves as mainly economic migrants and prioritise the mission of God in whatever they do.

2. Through Planting of New Churches

In a situation where there are no churches around, migrant Christians can start fellowships in their neighbourhood and the fellowships can later be metamorphosed into churches over time. For example, the RCCG, one of the leading African Pentecostal movements, has over 1000 parishes of the church in the UK. Many of these churches are planted by the church's ordinary members who migrated to the United Kingdom for various purposes. Recently, some members of Ikoyi Baptist Church Lagos, Nigeria who now reside in the city of London came together to plant a new church. The

church is called LightPoint Church. This is an initiative worthy of emulation by other African churches back home.

3. Through Engaging in Cross-Cultural Missions

Christian migrants must develop an interest in cross-cultural missions and be intentional in breaking cultural barriers if they are going to make an impact in their host communities. Oftentimes, when Christians from Nigeria and other African countries move to the West, they are mainly attracted to their African, black-led churches in order to feel at home. However, most ethnic-based and monocultural churches have not been able to penetrate their host communities with the gospel because of cultural impediments. While migrant Christians have brought their values, perceptions, and ways of serving God from their contexts, they must be sensitive to the needs of their new environment. They cannot continue to serve God and do church the same way they are used to back home. They must cultivate an open-ended capacity to adapt and learn fresh ways of reaching out to people in their new locations.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that migration serves as a means for Christian expansion, as God utilises people's movements to advance His global agenda. Christian migrants should seize the opportunity to engage in foreign missions, particularly in regions where Christianity is declining. They can accomplish this by collaborating with existing churches, establishing new ones, and participating in cross-cultural missions. Christian migrants should view themselves as missionaries and evangelists, contributing to the mission of God, rather than solely as economic migrants. By embracing this perspective, they can further the Great Commission, bringing more souls to Christ in anticipation of His glorious return. Shalom.



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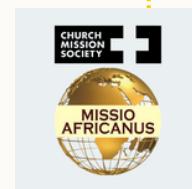
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A COW THAT HAS NO TAIL:
A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY
Joseph Olu

MA/Undergraduate Certificate in Theology, Ministry and Mission (African Christianity)

In partnership with CMS Oxford, we launched this program in 2021 to assist the church in filling the knowledge gap that many Christians have about the African church and its influence on faith, particularly in the UK and the Western world.



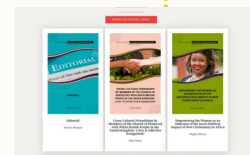
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