

Theological training programmes for migrant churches/among ethnic minorities

There can be no mistaking, as we reach the first decade of the 21st Century the cultural and ethnic landscape of Britain has radically changed. A new wave of migration has hit the British shores. People from many parts of the globe (in particular Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe) in search of educational and economical betterment have chosen Britain as the country to pursue this goal. However, this advancement is not just based on educational and economical grounds. For those who profess the Christian faith, significant numbers of such persons have specifically come to Britain in order to evangelise the nation believing that although it is officially declared a Christian State, in practice, in the everyday busyness of life and living, its inhabitants can no longer be said to actively adhere to the principles and tenets of Christianity. A new wave of migration has brought a new wave of Christianity, one that is vibrant and purpose-driven to effect spiritual and social change. Almost in a kind of role reversal, this missional activity is seen by those who offer it as a gift to Britain and the world.¹ As a case in point, statistics from the last Church Census in England show that the growth in Black Pentecostal Churches partly account for the slow in rate of decline in churchgoing. Black people now account for 10% of all churchgoers in England and in inner London alone, 44% of churchgoers are now black.² With many of such Black Pentecostal Churches achieving mega-church status, the implications for impacting the theological training of those who are called into some form of lay or ordained ministry are particularly significant.³

The enthusiasm and vigour with which these migrant churches bring to their faith is fertile ground for theological reflection, mission formation and leadership development. Many of whom have set up their own Bible institutes to provide a level of training for the burgeoning congregations who desire to know more about God and become actively involved in ministry. However, such training only goes so far and requires those theological colleges that have been long established in Britain holding appropriate course validation from Certificate level right through to PhD to work in partnership with migrant churches and ethnic minorities as a means of resourcing their theological education and training. The importance of theological institutions across Britain positioning themselves to accommodate this factor cannot be overstated. Not only is it important for the new growing migrant churches but is especially crucial for those denominations particularly from the Caribbean who have a much longer history of establishment in Britain from the mid 20th century and are now assessing their priorities for relevance in the 21st Century. This includes the training of leaders to be

¹ According to the findings of the last church census of 2005, churches started by ethnic minority groups across a whole variety of languages have included those sent as missionaries from Africa or the Caribbean or Asia to help evangelise the “mother country which gave them the gospel a century or so ago. See Peter Brierley, *Pulling out of the Nosedive: A Contemporary Picture of Churchgoing – What the 2005 English Church Census Reveals*, (London: Christian Research, 2006), 8-9.

² For this and further statistical details on growth of churches in England, please see Brierley, *Pulling out of the Nosedive*.

³ Pastor Mathew Ashimowolo is Founder and Senior Pastor of Kingsway International Christian Centre (KICC) the largest Black Majority Church in Britain with an average attendance of 12,000 people. Other large churches include Ruach Ministries with an average attendance of 5000. See “Britain’s Largest Black Churches,” in *The Voice*, March 21, 2005, 14. The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) is currently one of Britain’s largest and fastest Black denominations with 313 branches across Britain and Ireland. They organise Britain’s largest regular prayer gathering called the Festival of Life attracting over 20,000 Christians from across the UK. See “Historic visit by the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall to one of London’s largest black majority churches, Jesus House” in *Keep the Faith* Issue 35.

suitably qualified to engage with society that has changed considerably and continues to be on the move.⁴ The kind of training required then is one that develops their leadership craft, provides them with practical tools for mission and ministry within diverse cultural and religious contexts. Space should also be provided for them to critically reflect on the practice of ministry that takes into account their specific cultural heritage. Herein lies the case for theological education that embraces intercultural teaching and learning. Courses and programmes with an emphasis on contextual theology need to be developed along with the teaching of liberation theologies such as Black and Asian Theology. At the time of writing, as the leading institution in Britain and Europe for teaching Black Theology, it is mandatory for all students (preparing for ordained and/or authorised ministry) of The Queen’s Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education in Birmingham, UK, where I am currently a tutor, to sit the modules in Black and Asian Theology and Bible and Liberation. It is worth pointing out the observations of Black British theologian Anthony Reddie who identifies Oxford Brookes University outside of The Queen’s Foundation and The University of Birmingham, as probably the only other institution that offers a taught course in Black Theology in the UK.⁵ This is clearly not enough. For equity and justice in the curriculum development of theological education and for the equipping of leaders within migrant churches whom will engender a bold and radical outlook, the stark call is for other institutions to take up the challenge to embrace this new and exciting direction.

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News Article

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⁴ A case in point are denominations like the Church of God of Prophecy (CoGoP) and New Testament Church of God (NTCoG) whom have established links and partnerships with the Centre for Black Ministries and Leadership at the Queen’s Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education, identifying The Queen’s Foundation as a viable institution to send their key leaders and serving clergy to advance their theological training.

⁵ See Anthony G. Reddie, “Exploring the Workings of Black Theology in Britain: Issues of Theological Method and Epistemological Construction,” *Black Theology: An International Journal*, Vol 7 No.1 (April 2009), footnote 26.