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Review

Ayokunle, AraOluwa Paul, *Church Growth in African Diaspora Communities: Yoruba Shaped Ecclesiology and Mission*, Langham Academic, Carlisle: 2025, ISBN: 9781839739712, xx, 291 pp.

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In *Church Growth in African Diaspora Communities: Yoruba Shaped Ecclesiology and Mission*, AraOluwa Paul Ayokunle, PhD (Liverpool Hope University), a UK-based Nigerian Baptist minister, aims to identify the dynamics surrounding migration among African Diaspora Congregations (ADCs). Ayokunle argues that meaningful church growth among Africans in the UK must pay attention to these dynamics. He is particularly concerned that little attention has been paid to identity change as a factor in church growth among Africans in the UK. He ably demonstrates that contextual realities affect people's identity and their response to church operation.

In the first three chapters, Ayokunle provides the background of his concern and surveys present literature on African diaspora Christianity in Europe. The next three chapters leverage missiological ideas to investigate church growth among ADCs in Liverpool. Discussion of research findings centres on three dominant themes: ecclesiological dispositions and praxis, contextual realities of the UK, and leadership. The final four chapters argue for "the need for ADCs to reimagine their way of being church in the UK" (151). Engaging adaptive leadership strategy, Ayokunle proposes *Omoluabi*-shaped ecclesiology as a viable tool for fostering cross-cultural missions. *Omoluabi* is a Yoruba philosophical and cultural concept depicting the peak of personhood in African thought. Apart from helping ADCs present the holistic nature of salvation, it will help them "to be meaningful to the 2GM [second generation migrants]

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population of ADCs and their Western host” (220). Ayokunle also emphasises the need for ADCs to collaborate with the UK churches and Christians.

There are four missiological imports in *Church Growth in African Diaspora Communities*. The first is the fact that the theme of contextualisation runs through the book, culminating in its engagement of adaptive leadership and the proposal of *Omoluabi*-shaped ecclesiology for engaging migrants and their hosts. The second is its identification of the centrality of the Great Commission as the root and aim of any lasting ecclesiology, irrespective of contexts. The third is that missional impacts are better made through collaboration. The author notes that African Christian leaders in the UK are now more cordial in perspective, approach, and engagements with their host partners. The fourth is the convergence of migration and *missio Dei* in light of the biblical witness that affirms that Christian mission should be both centrifugal and centripetal. Mission mechanism, whether attractive or expansive, should be determined by the location of the target people.

Ayokunle emphasises the primary attributes of *Omoluabi*, which is about the character that summarises all virtues desired in personhood. This authenticates the point that *Omoluabi*-shaped ecclesiology is a viable tool for fostering cross-cultural missions. Africans see the formation of such character as enculturation and a communal task, as may be seen in many African proverbs. The author did not need to engage nuances of meaning that would demolish what he is building for the purpose of contextualisation. For instance, rendering *Omoluabi* as “a child that [biblical] Noah birthed” (156), as Ayokunle does, assumes that the Yoruba people did not have a sense of moral identity until their exposure to the Noah in the Biblical narrative Bible. Instead, Ayokunle should have leveraged the spiritual nature of things among Yoruba people. Thus, *Omoluabi* would be one birthed by ‘the Master of character’ (156), whom the Yoruba often consider a spiritual personality.

For a book on ecclesiology and mission, as its subtitle indicates, there is a noticeable deviation from the current scholarship in studying the church and its mission; namely, church health and the missional dimension of the church. Instead, Ayokunle focuses too much on church growth, and thus relies so much on dated sources (primarily from 1981-1993). Where he refers to relatively recent sources, such as Stetzer (2006), his discussion does not reflect an

awareness of the transition from an emphasis on church growth to an emphasis on church health and the missional dimension of the church. Consequently, Ayokunle's proposed definition for church growth does not reflect the current *missio Dei* perspective of the field. Additionally, in trying to expand the scope of church growth to include the missional essence of the church, Ayokunle treats expansion, extension, and bridging growths as “other typologies” (98). This approach may lead to a tendency to view the local church as inward focused, pushing community impact and world missions to the margin. This is a departure from the purpose-identity nature that defines the church as missional.

There are a few areas in *Church Growth in African Diaspora Communities* that warrant further attention in future editions. The expression “. . . people occasionally exhibit their cultural stereotypes, traditions and biases as they go through life” does not specify who may be victimised by these stereotypes. More importantly, the misuse of missiological terms, such as erroneously equating indigenisation with contextualisation, and the incorrect use of the term “missional” without reflecting the missional paradigm of the church as may be found in current scholarship may mislead some readers. Finally, though the book is commended for its practicality, its academic structure — following the format of Ayokunle’s PhD dissertation — renders it less accessible to non-academics. Reworking the structure and format of the will enhance its readability for a more popular audience.

Given the increasing rate of migration from Africa to the West, Ayokunle’s focus on healthy growth of ADCs in the UK is of great missiological importance. Justifiably, he has established that most of these congregations are finding it difficult to engage the African migrants, especially the second generation, because of their unique identity resulting from a blend of their home and diaspora contextual realities. Ayokunle proposes an ecclesiology which, when pursued with its adaptive structure, will result in missional churches that will be healthy and growing. The book is valuable for ecclesiological and missiological studies. It is recommended for theological educators, church leaders, policy makers and other stakeholders of missions, including host faith communities who have an interest in ministry among migrants, living in their communities.