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# THE LEGACY OF DANIELS EKARTE

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE URBAN AND PUBLIC MISSION OF  
AFRICAN CHURCHES IN THE UK

*Israel Olofinjana*

URBAN TRACTS



**The Legacy of Daniels Ekarte:  
Implications for the Urban and  
Public Mission of African  
Churches in the UK**

**Israel Olofinjana**

*Urban Tracts, Book 4*

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# Editors' Introduction

*Urban Tracts* is a series of papers on urban mission and ministry commissioned in the lead up to the 40th anniversary of the *Faith in the City* report.

The Brixton disturbances of April 1981 prompted, among other things, Archbishop Robert Runcie to set up the Archbishop's Commission on Urban Priority Areas. This led to the publication of the *Faith in the City* report in December 1985 with its recommendations for church and nation, which proved a great stimulus for urban ministry across the whole UK church. In 2021 the issues of social inequality, racial justice and the failure of the Church to flourish and grow in urban settings have not gone away—although the enthusiasm for urban ministry of the late 1980s seems to have waned.

To mark the anniversary, the William Temple Foundation is commissioning and publishing (electronically) a new Temple Tract series on urban mission and ministry. Our aim is to produce three or four tracts each year in the lead up to the 40-year anniversary of *Faith in The City* in December 2025.

The tracts are aimed at practitioners and church leaders, offering reflection and experience from authors who have been involved in urban mission and ministry. We aim to highlight resources and lessons that are relevant for Christians in urban areas today and renew the challenge to the churches.

In seeking an appropriate style for the urban church there will be plenty of photos and links to writings, websites and videos to explore if you wish to delve deeper or check out sources.

**Greg Smith**, Series Editor

**Chris Baker**, Assistant Editor

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# Introduction

This paper examines the urban ministry and leadership of Daniels Ekarte in Liverpool and draws out its implications for the urban ministry praxis of African Churches in Britain today.

The limited literature on Black Majority Churches and in particular African Churches seems to suggest that these churches are lacking in terms of social and political engagement; therefore, this essay challenges that assumption by considering the social and political activism of Daniels Ekarte (1890s-1964), one of the pioneer leaders of African and Caribbean Churches in the UK. It examines three implications of Ekarte's ministry for the social and political activism of African Churches. These are: contextual theology, political advocacy and social activism. I also propose four factors that can help African Churches better engage in systemic and structural issues. These four factors are the development of transformational theologies, prophetic witness, training and development of professional laity and intercultural ecumenical partnerships. What lessons can the current African Churches in Britain learn from Ekarte's public contextual ministry in terms of urban ministry praxis?

To begin to unpack this it is important to consider the British urban context as it relates to Britishness, migration, and multiculturalism. This is a useful backdrop in exploring the emergence of Black Majority Pentecostal churches and their relationship with British historic churches.

## Clarification of Terms

I have used some terms in this essay that need clarifying from the start.

- **Black Majority Churches** (BMC hereafter) are churches that have emerged from within the African and Caribbean Diaspora community.

- **African Churches** refers to all the different types and varieties of African Churches in the UK. This will include African Initiated Churches (AICs hereafter), African Newer Pentecostal Churches (ANPCs hereafter) and African congregations within Historic Churches.
- **AICs** are African Independent Churches founded by Africans for Africans and were independent theologically, financially, and organisationally from mission churches. African Independent Churches as they were initially termed were later called African Indigenous Churches and more recently African Instituted Churches, or African Initiated Churches (Hayward, 1963; Turner, 1967; Anderson, 2001)
- **ANPCs** are independent Pentecostal and Charismatic churches that developed during the charismatic renewal around the 1960s in Africa.
- **Historic Churches** refers to churches with a longer history in comparison to independent Pentecostal BMC. These are traditional churches whose history can be traced back to the Reformation, directly or indirectly (Church of England, Baptists, Methodists, United Reformed Church and some Congregational churches), as well as churches beyond the Reformation whose identity is rooted in the Apostolic tradition and succession – for example, the Catholic Church (Olofinjana, 2015).

## Short Biographical Note: Location and Context

This is a paper on Practical Theology therefore it is important to locate myself within the study and my context of ministry. Joe Aldred in his book *Respect: Understanding Caribbean British Christianity* (2005), declared that, “he was a male Caribbean British Christian, a bishop in a Black-led Pentecostal church who currently works in the field of intercultural ecumenism and as a local pastor” (2005, p.28). Joe made this declaration because of his understanding that we cannot divorce theology and the practice of ministry from our cultural background and experiences. In similar fashion, let me declare here that I am a Yoruba man from south-western Nigeria and will describe myself as an African Christian who came to Britain as a missionary, now living and ministering as a Baptist minister and occupying a senior national role of

working for the Evangelical Alliance as the Director of the One People Commission. To locate myself and understand my ministry context, I will briefly share my journey as an African reverse missionary.

I left the shores of my country on 1st October 2004. It was Nigerian Independence Day and yet here I was travelling to ‘the Mother Country’. The purpose of my journey was twofold: first, it was to do a postgraduate degree in theology, and second it was to start a Pentecostal church/ministry in the UK. My church back in Nigeria can be described as an African Newer Pentecostal Church founded in 1992. I became a member of this church in December 1995 when I gave my heart to the Lord at the watchnight service organised by the church. Since arriving in the UK, I have had the privilege of engaging in different forms of ministry including leading three different churches in south-east London, youth ministry, school ministry, Street pastors, engaging in theological education and research, serving as trustees of different Christian organisations and founding a centre to train and equip reverse missionaries.



**Figure 1:** Woolwich Central Baptist Church. Image from Israel Olofinjana.

These experiences as an African reverse missionary who has engaged in different forms of ministry in Britain have exposed me to some of the challenges and opportunities of urban ministry that many African Churches face in various inner cities in Britain.

# Chapter 1

## Britishness, Migrants and Multiculturalism

In this section I want to reflect on three themes as it relates to the immigration and settlement of African and Caribbeans in British cities. This is important in situating and understanding the black community and the rise of Black Majority Churches. A key question that connects these three themes is what does it mean to be British in a modern multicultural society and how do we define Britishness in relation to migrants who have come to Britain to settle thus adding to the diversity of Britain as multicultural society?

Modern multicultural Britain (that is, since around the 1940s) has given rise to two main political discourses. The first belongs to those on the right wing of British politics, whose contention is that cultural diversity is a threat to national identity and security. They have argued that an over-tolerance of multiculturalism has allowed immigrants to segregate rather than integrate. They therefore call for assimilation – the absorption and conformity of all other cultures into British culture, identity and values. Extreme versions of this ideology would be the National Front and the BNP.

The second political discourse is that of the liberals and those on the centre-left who advocate for cultural diversity. The kind of multiculturalism they have historically fought for can be summed up in former Home Secretary Roy Jenkins' famous 1966 definition of integration as 'equal opportunity accompanied by cultural diversity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance' (Kundnani, 2007, p.27). They have consciously fought against assimilation in favour of such a model of integration.

However, this type of ‘integration’ is changing, giving way to a new integration paradigm that, while still campaigning for equal opportunities, in fact has assimilation as its objective. Among the reasons for this change were the events of 11th September 2001 in New York, the later 7th July 2005 bombings in London by home-grown perpetrators, and the racialised disturbances that took place in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in 2001. Finally, the brutal murder of Lee Rigby on the afternoon of 22nd May 2013 in Woolwich by two black Islamist extremist British men has also highlighted the notion of home-grown perpetrators, forcing questions of integration, race and religion back to the fore of public discourse.

From around that period, liberals, and those on the centre-left advocated community cohesion as a form of integration. Community cohesion is hereby defined as the government’s attempt to bring togetherness into a given community through funding local projects that will bond people of different ethnicities, religions, and cultures. Therefore, those on the right now have allies from the liberals and centre-left who all agree that multiculturalism must be ‘managed’.

One extension of this is the argument that managed migration is needed at our borders as a way of combating terrorism, leading to measures such as the increased use of surveillance technologies, immigration caps, visa restrictions, deportations and detentions, undermining fundamental human rights. The rhetoric of fighting terrorism comes under the guise of the ‘war on terror’, and this has led to the mistreatment and stigmatisation of immigrants coming from Islamic countries and cultures. The language of ‘illegal’ or ‘bogus’ immigrants generally seem to apply only to non-white immigrants – white Australians, South Africans and New Zealanders being exempt – and this appears to be one of the new expressions of institutional racism. The British cry is that immigrants are not integrating; therefore the multicultural agenda has failed. However, the question is, why are immigrants not mixing?

Using immigrants as scapegoats for the failure of multiculturalism or accusing them of not integrating is just one side of the story; the other side is to recognise and deal with the issues of institutional, cultural and personal racism that evidently still exists in British society today. Britain likes to think of itself as post-racial, that it has wrestled with racism and expunged it. However, recent events such as the Windrush scandal of 2017 and the disproportional impact of the pandemic on people of colour due to the kind of jobs they do and where they live points to the fact that racism still exists in our society. Perhaps most revealing is the leaked home office

report titled *The Historic Roots of the Windrush Scandal* which states that British immigration system and law between 1950-1981 were [designed to control coloured migration](#).

A further quest in defining what it means to be British is perhaps revealed in the Brexit vote of 2016. Whilst it cannot be argued that everyone that voted to leave the European Union is against immigration, the Brexit vote has revealed dissatisfaction and a struggle with what it means to be British in a European economic system. A further British wrestling with national identity and the closing of borders is the passing of the Nationality and Borders Bill which is seeking to tackle illegal migration and homegrown terrorism. But migration to these shores and how it has constantly defined what it means to be British is an integral part of its history.

There is a general assumption, both in public and political rhetoric, that Britain became multicultural with the arrival of Caribbean immigrants in the 1940s. In political discourse, this is perpetuated by the myth that pure white Britishness needs to be preserved in the face of immigration. The National Front was formed in 1967 with one of its chief aims to prevent people migrating to Britain, especially people of colour. They embraced an ideology of nationalism that was rooted in the pseudo-science of 'racial purity'. The British National Party (BNP) was founded in 1982, and though less aggressive and overt in their policies, they continued the campaign to protect white Britishness. From 2001, New Labour campaigned for a national story of Britishness and its values in their efforts to tackle terrorism and reduce immigration. This Britishness was couched in the language of integration. The coalition government of 2010, appeared to have continued in Labour's footsteps, pronouncing an end to state multiculturalism. This was evident in comments made by the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Mr Eric Pickles, who [pledged to end the era of multiculturalism](#), arguing that Britain needs community cohesion around British values and identity.

Therefore, while the National Front and BNP wanted to preserve white Britishness, the Labour and Conservative parties are also promoting the preservation of a British national identity based around a commitment to so-called British values. In order to have a British national identity into which migrants can be integrated, it is considered necessary to have a national story based on British history and values of tolerance, fairness, respect, rule of law, democracy and individual liberty.

How, then, is Britishness perceived by the general public? There is a normative idea among some sectors of the population that to be British, or particularly to be English, is to be white. This is demonstrated through many white British attitudes that do not accept any non-white people as British. Therefore, if your ethnicity is Asian British or Black British, you are rejected as not being British. An example of this attitude was revealed during the Channel Four Documentary *Make Bradford British*, a Channel 4 documentary aired in 2012 in which an Asian British woman was criticised by white British people in a pub. The criticism, which reduced her to tears, centred on questioning her identity as a British Pakistani Muslim. The white British people simply told her that she was not British because she was a Muslim from a Pakistani background. If the current political language on integration is centred on a British national identity and story, and the public understanding of Britishness and in particular Englishness means whiteness, the question is, what is this Britishness? Or to put it another way, is Britishness monocultural or multicultural?

## 1.1 British Multicultural History

The place we know today as Britain has its foundations in mixed cultures, therefore cultural diversity is nothing new here. While little is known about the first people who inhabited these islands, we do know that the Celts (people originally descended from dwellers on the Russian steppes) arrived at these shores around the first millennium BC (Roots of the Future, 1997). The people spoke the Celtic dialect which is still used today in some parts of Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. They had a sophisticated culture and economy and merged with the original population.

In the first century AD, Celtic Britain, south of Hadrian's Wall, was ruled by the Roman Empire. The Roman invasion and subsequent conquest began with Julius Caesar's visit around 55 BC. The Romans ruled Britannia for a total of 400 years, after which its Empire declined due to the Barbarians' invasion. At this time, in the fifth century AD, new Germanic tribes from northern Europe invaded Britain. These warring tribes came from what is known today as northern Germany, southern Denmark and the northern part of the Netherlands, and were the Angles, Saxons, Jutes and Frisians. Venerable Bede, in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (2008, pp.26-27), recorded how the Angles, Saxons and Jutes were invited by the

British people to come and fight the Romans on their behalf, but they ended up conquering Britain itself. Their conquest of Britain led to a synthesis of culture and language known as Anglo-Saxon.

Since this period there have been continuous and successive waves of immigration to these shores, all of which have shaped and contributed to the idea of Britishness: Vikings; Normans; Jews from France in the Norman period; refugees from the European religious wars after the Reformation including French, Germans and Italians - all of whom brought artisanal skills and enterprise.

The eighteenth century witnessed the rise of the black population in Britain. This was due to the evil and inhumane trade known as the trans-Atlantic slave trade, or triangular trade, which had begun in the fifteenth century. This trade was well established by the eighteenth century and resulted in a population of about 15,000 Africans in the major port cities of Britain by the year 1700 (Killingray and Edwards, 2007, pp.17-21).

The 20th century saw German skilled workers coming to settle in Britain. By 1914, the German population in Britain had risen to about 40,000, to be joined later by Russians and Polish workers fleeing mass unemployment after the Great Depression of 1929. Finally, the post-war years saw Caribbean people and those from European countries coming to Britain in response to invitations to come and rebuild the country after the devastation of the Second World War. Workers were also recruited from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The independence of some African countries from colonial rule also witnessed a great number of African diplomats and students coming to settle in Britain from the 1960s. Ghana became independent in 1957 followed by Nigeria and several other African countries in 1960.

This quick survey demonstrates that what we know today as Britain has been multicultural since its origins and that therefore the idea of Britishness has always been enriched by successive migrations. It is within the migration of African Caribbeans and Africans and against the social consciousness around a British national identity that we have the rise of BMCs.

## Chapter 2

# The Emergence of Black Majority Churches

The rise of BMC in the UK is phenomenal because within a short period these churches have grown from being obscure to having great influence. Their historical development is rich and diverse in nature, which makes the generic term ‘Black Majority Churches’ problematic as it does not address the diversity that exists within these churches. Arlington Trotman’s question two decades ago about black or black-led churches is very relevant here: he argued that the term ‘black-led’ or ‘black church’ was an imposition by outsiders and that the terminology does not satisfactorily describe these churches (1992, pp.18-34). How outsiders have defined the Black Church over the years has not given sufficient room to explain its diversity and has led to stereotypes and misrepresentations. Here I present five types of BMCs and the fifth type illustrate relations between African congregations and Historic churches.



**Figure 2.1:** Picture of attendees at the launch of my book *Turning the Tables on Mission* in 2013. Image from Israel Olofinjana.

## 2.1 Caribbean Pentecostal Churches (1940-1960)

The 1940s and 1950s saw the influx of Caribbean families into the UK due to the invitation of the British government to come and help rebuild the country after the devastation of the Second World War. Many people from the Caribbean islands responded to this call but to their surprise and dismay, they were not accepted by society and the church. This period is usually referred to as the Windrush generation, as the ship, SS Empire Windrush, brought 493 people from the Caribbean on 22 June 1948 to Tilbury, London. The majority of the people from the Caribbean, due to colonial ties, saw and regarded themselves as British citizens. An expression of that is being part of the Commonwealth, and the British Nationality Act of 1948 which encouraged migration from the West Indies (see below Table of Black Majority Churches). Therefore, Caribbeans expected to be treated as respected British citizens instead, they were faced with posters saying, ‘No Irish, No Blacks and No Dogs.’ They soon realised that the idea of a commonwealth was an illusion; the wealth

was not common and they were treated as second-class citizens. The church was no different when it comes to hospitality and welcome as Walter Hollenweger, in an introduction to a seminal book on the black church in Britain written by Roswith Gerloff, commented that, ‘Christians in Britain prayed for many years for revival, and when it came, they did not recognise it because it was black.’ (Gerloff, 2010). This rejection, coupled with other factors, such as loyalty to church brands in the Caribbean and the strangeness of the formality of British Christianity to Caribbean Pentecostal Christians, led to the formation of Caribbean Pentecostal and Holiness churches, although it must be clarified that some of these churches even though founded in Britain, still had their headquarter churches in North America. This is because some of these churches were affiliated to North American classic Pentecostal churches. The first Caribbean Pentecostal church founded in the UK was the Calvary Church of God in Christ, which started in London in 1948. The church became affiliated with the Church of God in Christ in the United States in 1952. Others soon followed, such as the New Testament Church of God (1953); the Church of God of Prophecy (1953); the Wesleyan Holiness Church (1958); and the New Testament Assembly (1961).

## **2.2 African Initiated Churches (AICs) in Britain (1960-1980)**

The second phase in the historical development of BMCs and a different type of church are the African Initiated Churches from Africa. The independence of African countries, starting with Ghana in 1957, led to African diplomats, students and tourists coming to Britain and other European countries. Many of these students and workers relocating to Britain came with their religion but discovered, like the Caribbean migrants before them, that they were not accepted by the British churches and public at large. Combined with a missionary intent, this rejection led to the formation of AICs in London. Examples are the Church of the Lord Aladura planted in London in 1964, Cherubim and Seraphim Church in 1965, The Celestial Church of Christ in 1967, Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) Mount Bethel in 1974 and Musama Disco Christo Church (MDCC) in 1980 (Olofinjana, 2015).

## **2.3 African Newer Pentecostal Churches in Britain (1980-2000)**

In the 1980s and 1990s there emerged a new type of African church across British cities. These churches are termed African New Pentecostal Churches (ANPC hereafter) to differentiate them from classic Pentecostals and AICs. Some of these churches have become mega churches in Britain. Others have embarked on church planting strategies that ensures there is a church plant in every major city in Britain

For example, the Church of Pentecost started in Ghana around 1937 through the efforts of one of the Apostolic Church missionaries, James McKeown (1900-1989). It began in London in collaboration with Elim Pentecostal Churches around 1988. Today it has around 150 branch churches in the major cities in the UK such as London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Nottingham, Cardiff, Leicester, Sheffield, Leeds and Glasgow.

## **2.4 New Generation Caribbean Pentecostal Churches (1990-present)**

Since the 1990s, a new generation of Caribbean Pentecostal churches have emerged in Britain. These churches have a wider appeal to Caribbean British Christians who are second- and third-generation descendants of the Windrush generation discussed above. Many of the leaders are second- or third-generation Caribbean British Christians. These churches are Pentecostal and as such have dynamic worship and worship teams; they make use of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and have creative preaching styles. These churches are very proactive in terms of community and social engagement, providing services such as food banks, debt counselling, soup kitchens, prison ministries, homeless shelters and many more. Examples of these churches are Ruach City Church Ministries founded in 1994 by John Francis; Rhema Christian Ministries formerly known as Croydon Rhema Fellowship founded in 1990 by Mark Goodridge but now led by Marva Scott; Christian Life City founded in 1996 by Wayne Malcolm; Micah Christian Ministries founded by Denis Wade in 1998; The Tabernacle Church (formerly called The Bible Way Church of the Lord Jesus Christ Apostolic) led by Pastor Michael W. White; Greater Faith Ministries led Lennox Hamilton, as well as a host of other churches (Olofinjana, 2015).

Church	Period	Description	Immigration Laws	Race Acts
Caribbean Pentecostal and Holiness Churches	Windrush Generation (1940s-1960s)	Pentecostal churches planted in Britain during the Windrush period	British Nationality Act of 1948 which encouraged immigration from the West Indies	The Race Relations Act 1965 was the first legislation in the United Kingdom to address racial discrimination
African Independent Churches (AICs)	1960s-1980s	These are African independent churches that reacted against colonial Christianity. They are churches created by Africans for Africans	The Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962 restricted the entry of commonwealth citizens	The Race Relations Act 1968 makes it illegal to discriminate on grounds of race, ethnicity or nationality
African Newer Pentecostal Churches (ANPCs)	1980s-2000	These are African Pentecostal and Charismatic churches that emerged from the charismatic renewal in Africa from around the 1960s	British Nationality Act 1981 which further tightened control and citizenship criteria	The Race Relations Act 1976 amended the previous Race Acts of 1968
New Generation Caribbean Pentecostal Churches	1990s-present	These are churches founded and led by second and third generation Caribbean Christians	Asylum and Immigration Act 1993. This Act was an attempt to produce a better system for making asylum decisions	The Race Relations Amendment Act of 2000 was introduced as a result of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry

**Table 2.1:** Table of Black Majority Churches.

## 2.5 African Congregations and British Churches

While the four types of BMCs I have presented operate from outside British churches, it is important to point out that there are African majority congregations within several historic denominations/churches. It is also important to mention that through various initiatives BMCs and British churches do engage with each other. Some

of these engagements happen through ecumenical organisations or unity movements such as Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), Churches Together in England (CTE) and the Evangelical Alliance. One of the major developments within the ecumenical scene in Britain is that Churches Together in England have created an additional presidential portfolio in recognition of Black Majority Pentecostal churches. Churches Together in England now has a Pentecostal president in addition to a Catholic, Anglican, Free church, and Orthodox presidents. This demonstrates an on-going engagement between BMCs and British churches. The Evangelical Alliance have also had to respond to the change in the demographic landscape of British Christianity by creating the One People Commission which works with national church leaders drawn from BMC, South Asian churches, South Korean churches, Latin American churches, and Chinese churches.

At the local level in several cities across Britain, engagement between BMCs and British churches is happening through sharing church buildings. This has been going on since the 1970s and there are good examples of practices of where sharing of building has led to better engagement and collaboration. The sharing of church building facilitates engagement on three levels:

1. Sharing of resources, such as church buildings and administrative skills.
2. Joint services and fellowship, house groups and prayer meetings.
3. Joint mission initiatives such as youth clubs, Street Pastors, food banks, immigration services and welfare for asylum seekers (Olofinjana, 2015).

But there are also cases where these engagements have not gone well; for example, due to a power dynamics of landlord/tenant relationships between the host church and the renting church. Other problems encountered I have observed are:

1. A superior attitude, where one thinks he or she is better than the other.
2. Suspicion and lack of trust.
3. Doctrinal and theological divides, such as Prosperity Gospel as articulated by some BMC, and the concern about the perceived lack of the centrality of Scripture of some historic churches by BMC.
4. Ecclesiological divides: for example, Apostolic/ Pentecostal styles of leadership as opposed to a congregational/ democratic style of leadership. Some BMCs have strong leadership models which can at times lead to the abuse of power, while the democratic or consensus style of leadership favoured by

Historic churches can mean that the church takes forever to make decisions. Sometimes everything the leader or leadership team does is questioned to the extent that it betrays a lack of trust.

5. Different views and understanding of mission: some BMC emphasise street evangelism as opposed to social and community engagement. This is changing, however, and now many BMCs engage in both proclamation of the gospel and community and social action.
6. Cultural divide: the use of indigenous languages by some BMCs during services can exclude others who cannot speak that language. Other examples of cultural divides include Harvest Festivals as practised by some Historic churches which some other cultures cannot relate to or understand because it is perceived as some form of nature worship. Another cultural divide is the dress code for church on Sundays (the often-formal dress code of some black Christians and informal dress code of some white Christians). This is obviously a stereotype as there are white pastors and Christians who like to dress formally to go to church and there are, equally, black Christians who like to dress in a more casual way (Olofinjana, 2015).
7. Historic local churches who are struggling financially only see rental of church property to anybody as a 'cash cow' and don't want to or don't have capacity to engage with the communities who are using that space.

Another way BMCs have engaged with British churches has been through the growth of African congregations within Historic churches. African Christians within Historic churches have an advantage in reaching beyond African diaspora communities in their mission engagement because they are serving within a multicultural church context. While this multicultural context serves as an advantage it also presents some challenges in terms of otherness and lack of representation both at the local congregation and national governing structures. One of the advantages however is that it provides a platform for African migrant pastors to fully realise the notion of reverse mission by leading multicultural churches and white majority churches. This is the case of some of the African Baptist pastors in London. My own story serves an example in this respect. Since migrating to the UK in 2004, I have served within Baptists Together, leading two multicultural churches and a white majority church in London. I now lead the One People Commission of the Evangelical Alliance seeking to build bridges between the different church communities through unity, integration and justice.

## Chapter 3

# Daniels Ekarte and African Churches Mission

I now want to consider the story of Daniels Ekarte as a case study in understanding the mission contributions and challenges of African churches. His official biographer suggests that Daniels was probably born in Calabar Nigeria in the 1890s (Sherwood, 1994). As a boy Daniels was influenced by the Scottish missionary Mary Slessor (1848-1915) who worked amongst the Calabar people in Nigeria. Mary inspired young Daniels as a result of her taking time to understand his culture and customs. This process of understanding Daniel's culture also helped Mary to stop the killing of twins among the Okoyong people of Calabar. (This is because having twins was a taboo in that part of Nigeria in those days). Ekarté later became a seaman and migrated to Liverpool around 1915. He started African Churches Mission (ACM hereafter) in Toxteth, Liverpool in 1931. Liverpool's prosperity in the mid-nineteenth century depended largely on the slave economy. The Black population increased during and after the First World War in cities such as Liverpool, Bristol and London. The impacts of the war in Liverpool were the increase in unemployment and poor living conditions. This was also coupled with racial discrimination that was prevalent at the time. For example, inter-marriages between black men and white women were a major tension in Liverpool and the children of such marriages were termed 'half-caste' children (today known as mixed-race or of dual heritage) and were rejected by many people in the society. These children were actually labelled as 'mongrels'(Sherwood). This was the socio-economic milieu into which ACM was born (Adogame, 2007).

Ekarté began to organise services in the slums, private rooms and open-air fields for the black and Asian citizens in Liverpool and through anonymous donations and with help from the Foreign Missions Committee of the Church of Scotland he later rented two knocked-together houses on 122-124 Hill Street Toxteth, Liverpool. Ekarte's church became a community centre for both black and white poor people in the community. He also visited people in prisons, hospitals and gave free meals to the poor. In addition, the church had a Mothers Union, Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, Brownies and musical activities (Killingray and Edwards, 2007). Ekarté also started a music school because many black children were not getting into secondary education or technical schools. He became a voice for the oppressed and marginalised in society by defending them in his sermons and publicly speaking against racial injustice. Ekarte also believed and fought for racial equality. For example, he campaigned for equal payment for black seamen because their white counterparts were receiving higher wages. This brought him in direct opposition with the local government and had negative effects on the ACM.

Post-Second World War brought about an increase in the birth-rate of half-caste children resulting from the union between African American soldiers and English women, and who were therefore rejected by the society. Ekarté decided to transform the ACM into an orphanage home to cater for these children and a rehabilitation centre for some of the disillusioned mothers. He achieved this, but later this urban community project was ordered to close in 1949 and the children transferred to the city's children home. Ekarté was barred from any further contact with the children. The local authorities did this partly because they could not tolerate an African campaigning for racial equality and openly rebuking the British government for plundering the resources of Africa through colonialism. In addition, the National Health Service (NHS) started in 1948 and ACM also suffered from financial constraints. After this event the life of the Mission continued but it struggled to survive. Finally, in 1964 the local authorities demolished the building housing the Mission. The blow of the Mission closing was too much for Ekarté and not long after he died in 1964. Ekarté was and remained a hero in the sight of Africans and other marginalised people for advocating on their behalf in Liverpool but was also a controversial figure in the eyes of others.

Before considering the implications of Ekarté's urban ministry for the current African Churches, below is the vision and mission statement of ACM as a way of better understanding its ministry.

### 3.1 Aims and Objectives of African Churches Missions

- To promote and extend the adoption of the Mission principles among the Negroes and their children in the City and its environs.
- To improve the general condition and protection in the interest of all members.
- To provide funds for the relief of members when in distress.
- To provide a special heartiest voluntary work among the children and the interest in self-respect among the struggling, oppressed, scattered and dispersed Negroes in the World.
- To provide funds for the training of the children to the highest education. This is the medium by which people are prepared for the creation of their own particular civilisation, advancement and glory of their own race.
- To provide funds for the training of the children in commercial, agricultural, and other industries.
- To maintain a placement bureau through which qualified members in any particular industry can obtain a post to Africa, Fatherland.
- To endeavour to obtain reasonable hours of duty and fair wages for seafaring workers, and to use every legitimate effort to provide for their safety.
- To abide in the determination to propagate the doctrine of Jesus Christ, this is based on the principles of Peace, the Brotherhood of man and the Fatherhood of God, and to prove abundantly the blessing which will result from its practical observance “Go ye therefore. . . .” Matthew 28: 19-20, Mark 16: 15-20 (Sherwood, p.117).

## **3.2 Social and Political Activism of African Churches Mission (ACM): A Challenge for Contemporary African Churches in Britain**

The achievements of ACM in the context of urban poverty and deprivation have implications for African Churches in the UK today in providing public leadership that is robust and is engaging with the social-economic needs in our community: The first important point to make is that Ekarte and ACM challenges the notion that African Churches from their inception in Britain lack social and political activism and engagement. The public leadership of Ekarte in combating some of the urban challenges of his time as one of the pioneers of African Churches in Britain challenges this notion and thus sets a precedence to follow.

Ekarté had a theology that shaped and gave direction to the mission of ACM. It must be made clear that while Ekarté did not attend a theological college or a seminary, it appears that he engaged with Scripture, history, Church tradition, experience and culture in a fresh way that aided his understanding of his context and the need for activism. Ekarté reflected theologically and responded in an appropriate way to his mission context. This was why he was active socially and politically. African Churches in Britain are not engaging enough theologically with issues that arise within the postmodern secular context of mission in the UK. Some of our churches have at its best beliefs and practices that have been handed down the ages, but people are not allowed to question them. Bishop Aldred, an eminent black leader in the country commented, “Black Church doctrine tends to rely upon prescriptions agreed upon by people so long enough ago that present day leaders have not had to have to think them through” (Aldred, 2010: 226). Therefore, the obvious question is why are some of these churches disengaged from doing theology or to put the question in another way, why are they not contextualising their theology?

Several answers can be deduced, but sufficient for this tract is the wrong notion and orientation of theology, embracing pneumatic experiences at the expense of theological training and the wide chasm between Black British theology and African Churches.

Until some African Church leaders change their view of academic theology from one that sees it as ‘one of Satan’s tools’ to destroy the church, to one that recognises the importance for mission in the postmodern context, the problem of a lack of contextual

theology will linger on. Some black Christians have come to this conclusion as a result of seeing some students and pastors losing their faith because of studying theology, or ministers becoming too academic so that their views are irrelevant to the existential realities facing their congregation and community. This partly explains why some African pastors are not theologically trained. Some African pastors and in particular some of the Pentecostal ones also have the notion that once called and anointed by the Holy Spirit there is no need for formal theological training. Previous professional experience coupled with the anointing is seen as sufficient for ministry. This notion is however changing, with many African church denominations in the UK now having their own theological institutions to train their ministers as well as those interested in engaging in theological education. Some examples are [Birmingham Christian College](#) which was developed by the Church of Pentecost to train its ministers and others theologically. I am also involved in a new theological initiative called [Christ Theological College](#). The idea behind this initiative is to provide a contextual intercultural theological education and training to African and other Majority World leaders doing ministry in the UK.

The third lesson we can learn from ACM is the fact that Ekarté condemned publicly the inequalities that he witnessed. Ekarté used every public opportunity he had to speak against the ill-treatment of minorities of his time. It is interesting to observe that Ekarte advocated for equal payments of black and white seamen and that he campaigned against institutional racism. In this I want to suggest that he predates the efforts of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s in the United States which campaigned against racial discrimination. This point makes Ekarte a prophetic witness in his generation. The majority of African Church leaders have influence within the black community and as such command a large constituency of power. This influence can be mobilised to advance the fight against injustices, such as some of the government policies and media stereotypes on migration. An example is the recent UK government immigration policy to tackle unlawful entry into the country by flying asylum seekers to Rwanda to be processed.

Some African churches also use mass and social media in their gospel proclamation which is a resource that can be harnessed to speak out against various injustices rather than just emphasizing their various church programmes and activities. Issues that could be addressed in this way include Western government policies on climate finance with regards to poorer countries and indigenous people; the current stigmatization of immigrants and refugees, especially those from North Africa, Afghanistan

and Syria. If these churches begin to speak out openly against these social and political concerns then they will not only be prophetic in the charismatic tradition, which they are already, but also prophetic in the areas of social justice, following the tradition of Old Testament prophets such as Elijah, Amos, Hoshea and Ekarte as a contemporary example.

One reason why some African Church pastors are not embracing political activism is because they do not consider it a matter for the church but something for the government and other agencies to tackle. This is premised on a faulty hermeneutics that claims that Jesus did not engage in politics. But a contextual reading of the gospels reveals that Jesus spoke on behalf of the poor and the oppressed (see Matthew 23:14, 23, John 8:1-11). He also spoke against the ill practices of the religious leaders of his time (see Luke 13:32). Political advocacy is something that African Churches have to embrace. This is beginning to happen, but we need a wider participation and consciousness. An example of an African church leader engaging in political advocacy is Rev Wale Hudson-Roberts who is the Racial Justice enabler of the Baptists Together. In addition to this role, he is also one of the brains behind an initiative called Racial Justice Advocacy Forum (RJAF). This significant group brings together different racial justice officers within the Historic churches and church organisations. A key focus of this group is to empower and equip BMCs so that they can engage in racial justice concerns, but the group also seeks to advocate for the black community by challenging the government.

Lastly, Ekarte did not just advocate for the oppressed; he actually did something to remedy the situation. He used the resources at his disposal to feed the poor and turned ACM into an orphanage home and rehabilitation centre. Ekarté embraced social activism as part of his mission. He understood that ethnic minority communities in his time suffered from racial discrimination, poverty and unemployment and that for these social issues to change, he had to do something about it. He understood that God was and has always been interested in the poor and the oppressed. A concern that cuts across the UK Church is that we are either too middle class or professional to reach the average working classes. It appears we are distant from people's existential realities as we worship in our comfortable mega churches or big Christian festivals and events. The UK Church in its breadth of diversity must surely find ways to connect with the working classes.

African churches must be concerned about people suffering from poverty both locally and globally and must recognize that there are people suffering from oppression and injustice. The pandemic has really exposed some of the inequalities and challenges when it comes to mental health issues, child poverty and racial injustice. One of the implications of the pandemic is that African churches in the UK will need to espouse a new hermeneutic; a hermeneutic that will allow them to consider social political engagement to be as scriptural as evangelism and prayer. The majority of African churches are passionate and actively involved in evangelism, but what is lacking amongst some is that social-political activism. Some of these churches view social action as good works which might not necessarily be God inspired. This is a faulty hermeneutic considering the fact that Jesus anointed by the Spirit fed the poor. Jesus preached and taught the gospel, but he also fed the 5000 with bread and fishes. James, acknowledged as Jesus' brother, also taught that faith without action is useless (James 2:14-26). Therefore, if African Pentecostal churches claim to be people of the book (the Bible), then they must take this teaching very seriously. If they do embrace this hermeneutic, their ministry will become more credible to the wider British society. They will also become agents of transformation and liberation for the hurt being experienced by those around them. The financial power that some of these churches possess through prosperity preaching can be directed to the cause of the poor and the oppressed.

Nevertheless, not all African churches neglect social and political action. Quite a few have recently risen to the task, such as providing services for homeless people, food bank services and some have even managed to begin to run for political office. Also, there are at least a dozen or so Black Majority Church leaders with noteworthy social action ministries and deep commitments to impacting the social context. I shall later highlight these names. Much wider participation among black church leaders is needed however if we are going to move from influence to impact. In the words of the late Joel Edwards: "Impact goes beyond influence. I don't really care where you come from in the missionary enterprise, structural change is part and parcel of that mission, and that is a part of the challenge facing those of us from ethnic minorities. And I think this is about dialogue and partnership." (Edwards, 2013, p.220)

## Chapter 4

# Reflections and Recommendations for African Churches: Towards Systemic Change in Society

African Churches in Britain have come a long way since their inception in the 1960s. They have grown from being rejected migrant sanctuaries to building multicultural and multi-ethnic churches that are engaging with the community. They also appear to be articulating a reverse missiology that now sees the UK as a mission field. While all of these developments are worth celebrating in their right and are commendable, African Churches must develop creative and innovative contextual ministry practices that will move us from just the provision of social services to the transformation of society. We have to address issues of structures that will bring in lasting socio-economic and political change in society. This will mean moving from just providing social services such as food banks, homeless shelters and debt counselling, which we do very well, to bringing changes that affect structures and institutions. Examples of these systemic and structural issues includes fighting institutional racism, tackling unemployment, poverty reduction, tackling under-achievement in education, inequalities in the health system, immigration policies and the asylum system and the over incarceration of black young people in the prison system. These are issues that affect three categories of people in Britain: migrants, deprived ethnic communities and white working classes.

Some leaders from within the BMCs of which African Churches are a part are already engaged with some of these issues through their various agencies. In this respect, it is worth mentioning leaders such as Nims Obunge founder of Peace Alliance, Celia Apeagyei-Collins, founder Rehoboth Foundations, Les Isaac, founder of Street Pastors, Jonathan Oloyede, convener of National Day of Prayer, UK, Dionne Gravesande, Ecumenical Relations and Theology Lead, Christian Aid, Agu Irukwe, Senior Pastor of Jesus House, Joe Aldred, Steering Group of National Church Leader's Forum (NCLF), David Muir, Head of Whitelands College, University of Roehampton, Ade Omooba, director of Christian Concern for our Nation (CCFON), Kate Coleman, director of Next Leadership and Robert Beckford, Professor of Climate and Social Justice, University of Winchester. All these leaders have made a conscious effort to influence change in society. However, as already mentioned, we need a wider participation and consciousness if we are going to move from influence to having impact. The question then is how can African churches work towards structural change in British society?

First, we have to develop or adopt a theology that will have at the heart of its agenda the transformation of society. As articulated above, while Ekarté did not attend a seminary or theological college to formally study theology, his life and the milestones he achieved through ACM reflects a man with profound thought and insight who was capable of developing a contextual political theology which shaped his praxis in ministry. It is worth mentioning that Ekarté was involved in the Pan Africanists and African Nationalists Movements that led to the decolonisation of African states from the late 1950s. He had good relationships with and supported African Nationalists such as Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe from Nigeria, Kwame Nkrumah from Ghana, Dr Hastings Banda from Malawi and Jomo Kenyatta from Kenya. His thinking had five main sources that defined his pragmatism, and they are: Scripture, previous Church experience (Church of Scotland), African Spirituality, Negro Spirituals and black history and experience. Ekarté believed in the Scriptures, but he also reflected on his context and acted on what he believed based on his understanding of scriptural narratives.

Part of the development of a theology seeking to transform society will involve African Churches and in particular African Pentecostal Churches being willing to engage with Black British Theology, African Theology of Liberation, and Post-Colonial Theologies. This will mean more pastors and church leaders doing theological training up to post-graduate degree-level so as to be equipped to think and engage differently. To

develop this theology or adopt these contextual theologies, scholars and practitioners will need to work together. The dichotomy that usually exists between scholars and practitioners of any persuasion will have to be bridged in order to create or adopt a theology that will affect structures. The National Church Leader's Forum (NCLF) appears to be doing this at the moment by bringing together Black British theologians and African Church leaders in order to educate and mobilise Black Majority Churches for political action. This sort of momentum has to continue.

Secondly, African Churches need to develop a prophetic and radical voice similar to that of Ekarté that is able to speak out against unjust structures and advocate on behalf of the poor. We must be like Moses who was able to speak to Pharaoh about the oppression and enslavement of the children of Israel. This will mean it is not enough for pastors to be bold at the pulpit about God's holiness and power on Sunday but not be bold about speaking out against injustice in the public square during the week. We must endeavour to speak truth to power.

An example of this worth mentioning is the work of NCLF during the 2015 elections. In order to educate and mobilise the Black Church in Britain politically, it put together a Black Church Political Manifesto. The strategy of the political manifesto was to mobilise the African and Caribbean churches and the wider black community for social and political action. This was through encouraging our churches to actively engage in socio-cultural, political and economic institutions locally and nationally. The role of the NCLF is also to strengthen communities, promote active citizenship and the common good (NCLF, 2014). The political manifesto a first of its kind, addressed nine topics: Policing and criminal justice, prisons, mental health, church and community, voting and political mobilisation, family and marriage, youth and education and media, music, arts and culture and international aid and development. These have now been revised to include environmental concerns.

While the political manifesto was pioneering and a work in progress, an example from my own pastoral context was when I was leading Woolwich Central Baptist Church. We worked alongside a homeless project called WSUP (Weekend Service Users Project) in providing social care such as food, shower, laundry services, solicitor services and personal hygiene for homeless people in the heart of Woolwich. This initiative, while meeting basic human needs, does not necessarily address local policies on homelessness. In engaging local politicians and changing local policies on issues around homelessness, we took a further step by speaking to the local authorities with statistics of how homelessness has increased in the last two years in the

area. This became an ongoing discussion, but that step in speaking at the local town hall on behalf of the homeless to local politicians is an example of what it means to be prophetic by speaking truth to power.

Another aspect in transforming structures is the understanding that pastors acting on their own are not enough to affect change. We also need professionals in our churches such as politicians, doctors, lawyers, health workers, diplomats, bankers, professors, entrepreneurs and so on. We need to encourage and empower more people in our congregations to become professionals. Some African Churches are very good at this through organising success seminars and conferences that teach their members to fulfil their professional dreams and ambitions. In the case where we have these professionals already existing in our churches, pastors and church leaders must encourage them to engage with the socio-political issues affecting immigrants, deprived ethnic communities and white working classes. This is already happening in some African Churches. An example is The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) and New Wine church in Woolwich which already enables some of its members to become leaders in the areas of politics, business and the media through mentoring and entrepreneurship.

Finally, we need to work in partnership with our white brothers and sisters to effect this change and transform society. It is interesting to note that Daniels Ekarté had an ecumenical relationship with other churches such as the Church of England, the Catholic Church and other agencies. In addition, some of the people that worked at the Mission were white people such as one Mrs Roberts and her two daughters. Poor white people also attended the services at ACM and benefitted from the social activities of the Mission. The kind of partnership I am advocating will mean more Christians from the African Church constituency occupying strategic leadership positions within the UK Church structures, theological colleges, mission organisations and Para-church organisations. This is important to level the playing field. Partnerships that are colonial and that still see us as inferiors need to be challenged. This is why we need to engage with institutions within the various Para-church organisations and denominational structures. An example of this partnership is the One People Commission of the Evangelical Alliance created in 2011 as a result of realizing the existing racial and cultural barriers within the UK Church. As noted earlier, the One People Commission brings together national heads of churches drawn from within the African and Caribbean churches, South Asian churches, Latin American churches, South Korean churches and White evangelical churches. While this strategic national

body facilitates conversations nationally in regard to breaking down racial and cultural barriers within the UK Church, it also resources local churches through the various denominations represented by equipping them to engage society through the Evangelical Alliance initiatives such as their Public Leadership programme which seeks to help churches engage their communities social-politically.

Another example of partnership is the Street Pastor's initiative which brings different churches together locally around the UK to tackle urban issues such gun and knife crime. In response to the rise of gun and knife crime and a rereading of the story of the Good Samaritan in the light of urban crisis (Luke 10:25-37), Street Pastors initiative was birthed in 2003 by Les Isaac and David Shosanya. Street Pastors is an attempt to demonstrate the practical love of God on the streets at night by diffusing tensions, alerting the police of issues going on and listening to the public. The uniqueness of Street Pastors is the fact that it brings together Christians from different persuasions and denominations and also allows the church to work together with the police and local authorities. The church's partnership with the police and local government to support each other in order to benefit the community is known in Street Pastor's training as the urban trinity (Isaac and Davies, 2009: 117). For example in the Borough of Greenwich in London, Street Pastors work with the local police and authorities in regards to policing and bringing peace to our streets.

# Conclusion

In conclusion, the public leadership of Daniels Ekarté is found in his reading of the urban ministry context of Liverpool in the 1930s. This combined with his reflection of God as the God who cares for the poor and the oppressed made him engage in social action issues such as using ACM as an orphanage and a place for the destitute. His understanding of God, experience and knowledge of Africa's colonial history propelled him, like the Old Testament prophets, to speak out against inequalities such as institutional racism. In addition to his public denunciation of injustice, he also became an agent of social change through acting on his convictions by starting ACM which became a centre for the marginalised. His ecumenical commitments reveal that he recognized that ACM was limited as a local church therefore partners are needed to fulfill the church's mission. African Churches in Britain must be challenged in the light of ACM's contributions and learn from their predecessor by engaging in systemic and structural issues in society. This will mean developing an authentic theology that can transform society, standing in the prophetic tradition and speaking against injustice, and developing professionals within the congregation. They will also need to recognize the need for partnership in God's kingdom. While African Churches are still on a journey, there are signs such as the Black Church Political Manifesto that point to the right direction and trajectories.

# Questions for further consideration

- What does it mean to be British in contemporary Britain?
- What is your own understanding of the multicultural agenda?
- How has migration shaped our national identity?
- What can we learn from Daniels Ekarte about public leadership in the urban context?
- What do you think is the prophetic role of the African church in Britain?
- In your own context what contextual thinking have you developed in order to engage?
- How are you developing intercultural ecumenical partnerships that can tackle social political issues?
- How are you or your church/ministry fighting racial injustice?

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