Global Missiology

## Current Issue

**Vol. 22 No. 4 (2025): October - Diaspora Communities: Relationships, Identities, Challenges, and Opportunities**

This issue of Global Missiology - English examines an array of topics related to diaspora communities. The important roles played by diaspora peoples in Christian mission are recognized today more than ever. Much study of diaspora phenomena has been conducted, but more is needed in specific relation to communities of people living in diaspora. For example, relations between diaspora churches and local indigenous churches and communities is a topic ripe for further research. Diaspora communities face challenges with respect to their changing identities, including those associated with language and generational differences. Many diaspora communities have experienced stirring revivals and desire further theological and leadership training. Using case studies in particular, the articles in this issue take up these kinds of topics and more.

**Published:** 2025-10-06

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**Guest Editorial**

# Mission on the Move

Sam George

Published in *Global Missiology*, www.missiology.org, October 2025

People on the Move (aka diasporas, migrants, international students, refugees, transnationals, displaced, hybrids, etc.) have become a defining reality of our contemporary world. More people are living somewhere other than their birthplaces than at any other time in human history. We can all trace our ancestry to places other than where we currently make home. Human movements are currently at an all-time high due to global social unrest, economic upheavals, geopolitical conflicts, demographic shifts, ecological crises, etc. In the years ahead, more is anticipated.

This is nothing new. Migration is the throughline of the human story. Every civilization has always been reshaped by human movements in the past and will continue to be so in the future. We are all migrants or descendants of migrants. Without human displacements, it is difficult to envision the development, growth, and transformation of human societies, as well as the making of nations, economies, politics, and religions. Human beings are a migratory species. Not all need to be displaced. Emerging realities for everyone are often shaped by a select few who venture out, whether it be across the street or around the world. As it was for our ancestors, the tale of displacement is deeply woven into our very being and will continue to be so for our descendants.

While terms such as migration, refugees, displaced, or transnational do not appear in the Bible, the notion of displacement appears on every page. In humanity's planetary existence, the contemporary ideas of nation-state, border controls, passports, visas, etc., are relatively new and should not be mistaken for being absent in the Biblical narratives or extraneous to salvation history or the mission of God in the world. On the other hand, diaspora is a biblical word and a central theme in the history of redemption. It first appeared in the Greek translation of the Old Testament and was later used in the New Testament to refer to dispersed peoples.

## People Movements in the Bible

Nearly all biblical writings are diasporic at their core, meaning they are written by, to, for, and about migrants and their descendants. They were originally composed, edited, preserved, read, interpreted, and distributed in the context of some form of displacement. Their original authors, readers, and carriers were migrants or their progenies who lived as minorities in foreign lands. Nearly all characters, narratives, plots, settings, and books of the Bible are shaped by diverse kinds of displacements. Geocultural movement is an overarching theme of the Bible, and one may argue that diaspora is a metanarrative of the Bible.

The need to translate the Hebrew scriptures into another language emerged in Alexandria, Egypt, among the Jewish diaspora—not in Jerusalem, the nerve center of the religious order. This need was primarily on account of the second and third generation descendants losing linguistic competency in Hebrew and becoming Greek-dominant in their Hellenistic context. All the New Testament was written in Koine Greek, the lingua franca of the Hellenized peoples, which was foreign to both Jesus and his disciples. Jewish dispersion, Hellenized culture, the Roman Empire, and human mobility played a strategic role in the spread and transformation of the Christian faith in its first few centuries.

The diasporic lens is essential to grasp the Bible and its innate missional thrust that is entwined throughout. All hermeneutical tasks require a certain distance to read and understand any given biblical text, and the diasporic contexts naturally provide such a space. The diasporic sensibility of uprooted people draws them to biblical characters and stories, while its message deeply resonates with their own contemporary wanderings. They find comfort and new hope in immigrant churches as faith provides new wind behind their sails, and their presence transforms the religious landscape in their adopted foreign lands.

**God on the Move (*Motus Dei*)**

Not only are people on the move, but God is on the move. In fact, people on the move see God not as static, stationary, or stagnant, but as a divine being who is moving. Static gods are idols and remain immovable, lifeless, parochial, territorial, and oppressive. The living God is a moving being, and that trait makes the God of the Bible an exceptional missionary God. Mission is not merely something that we engage in or is limited to a set of activities or accomplishments. All Christian mission is God's mission (*missio Dei*), and God accomplishes much by moving and by moving people around, much more than all our cleverly devised mission strategies and activities. God is sovereign over human dispersions and determines the place and time of our earthly dwellings (Acts 17:26).

The God of the Bible is a missionary God because God is always on the move. God is on the move because God is a living being. God cannot be confined in space or time yet is sovereign over spatial and chronological domains. The divine attributes of aseity, immutability, and impassibility should not lead us in the direction of viewing God as rigid, static, immovable, or sedentary. After closely examining the history of Israel sketched in the sermon of the first Christian martyr, Stephen (Acts 7:2-53), John Stott concluded that "God of the Old Testament was the living God, a God on the move and on the march, who was always calling his people out to fresh adventures, and always accompanying and directing them as they went" (Stott 1994, 131).

Human beings are created to move. I move, therefore I am (*moveo ergo sum*). We are created in the image of a moving God. Christians are more likely to travel beyond the places of their birth since they are not bound to any locale, and their peripatetic encounter with foreign cultures and languages leads to new endeavors in translating the tenets of their faith and practices into new contexts. Contrarily, Hinduism is considered a geographically imprisoned religion with its scriptural prohibition to traverse large expanses of water (*Kala Pani)* and thus remains largely bound within a particular land and culture. Hindus are expected to live and die in places close to where they were born, and most remain largely bound within specific lands and cultures. The only way they can escape Karmic fatalism is by migrating out of the territorial boundaries of such provincial gods and changing their allegiance to a more benevolent and universal God. Likewise, Islam is also a rooted religion on account of its pilgrimages, prayers uttered while facing a particular place, and untranslatable scriptures which have primarily spread through conquests, reproduction, religious imposition, and violence. Islam maintains an immovable geographical and linguistic center. Jesus, in contrast, came as a universal Savior, and the first Christian Pentecost abandoned the notion of divine territoriality (Acts 2:1-11).

**Changing World of World Missions**

The shifting of the center of gravity of Christianity from the global West and North to the Global South and East is fundamentally changing the world of Christian mission as well. Many peoples

of Africa, Asia, and Latin America that were mission fields in the past have now emerged as strong mission sending forces, while former mission sending nations have become mission fields. This reversal of center and margin is far beyond who goes where, but the very means, perception, and nature of the missionary engagements are undergoing dramatic transformations.

Christian mission is no longer an exclusive prerogative of a select few of the Western churches and well-resourced agencies. Mission is not solely from "the West to the Rest" but from anywhere to everywhere. Since we live in some extraordinary times in the entire history of the Christian faith, with Christians in every country of the world and many of whom have read or heard the mission challenge to go to the ends of the earth, anyone could be involved in missions to and with anyone anywhere in the world. Christians are bolder to venture out, knowing that there is in all likelihood a church no matter where they end up. Not only is every nation a potential mission sending nation, but everywhere is a mission field as well, requiring Christians from other parts of the world. Christians need not be surprised that others from across the globe are coming near to them on missions. Some may argue that the West is in desperate need of Christians from the East and South, more than the other way around. There is no 'reverse' mission or need to call what Westerners do as mission and what non-Westerners do as reverse mission. All mission is a 'forward' mission, from God to the world through God's people wherever they may be found.

Christian migrants are a larger force for God's work in the world than all the organized efforts of missions, as they have always been in history. Just as all missionaries are cross-cultural migrants, one may consider all Christian migrants as cross-cultural missionaries, even though they are not officially sent by a mission agency or engage in mission activities regularly. With over two-thirds of migrants globally being Christians—who are quick to establish fellowships and churches in their host nations, with their distinctive cultural and linguistic expressions—they may be God's largest missionary force in the world. The migrant Christians embody a spirit of missionhood, just as the Protestant Reformers talked about the priesthood of all believers.

**Overview of this Issue**

Since its very inception as a journal in 2003, *Global Missiology* has been a leading prophetic voice to cry out in the wilderness about the changing world of mission. Being an open-access and widely read scholarly journal, many quarterly issues focused on diaspora communities have played a critical role in disseminating the concept of diaspora missions globally. I have drawn much inspiration from the journal's past issues that have introduced many ideas and scholars in mission studies globally. I am honored to be invited to write this editorial, and I sincerely acknowledge the pioneering spirit of the *Global Missiology* founders, editorial team, and contributors over the last two decades.

In this issue, we feature another set of exceptional articles on diaspora missions from a select set of seminary students, academicians, practitioners, and pastors from many different regions of the world. The articles deal with Ghanaian, Kenyan, Korean, Ugandan, Chinese, Indian, and other diasporas in Africa, Asia, Europe, and North American contexts. Together, these accounts continue to enrich the story of God's work in the world today through some unlikely migrant missionaries, whose contribution to the spread of the faith is likely to accelerate, as it has been throughout the history of Christianity.

In the first article, **Ebenezer Obeng** and **Hansung Kim** explore how Ghanaian immigrant pastors in the United States adapt to the needs of the Americanized second generation using case

studies of three pastors of the Church of Pentecost. The study brings out challenges of cross-cultural and generational gaps in ministry in this growing community. In the next article, **Peter Brassington**, a SIL missionary in the UK, deals with the issue of language in relation to new migrants in neighborhoods and the practice of linguistic hospitality to celebrate linguistic diversity in multiethnic contexts by offering Bible resources.

The third article, written by **David Hirome**, investigates the hybrid missional identities of Kenyan Anglican clergy in the United States, including cases of both the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of North America. Hirome examines lived realities in inhospitable settings, vocational flexibility, and transnational ecclesial negotiation that immigrant clergies engage in to present diaspora, not as a marginal state but as a site for theological and missiological creativity and reimagination. Subsequently, **Esther Okiror**, a Ugandan Presbyterian youth pastor in Korea, examines the use of social media by Ugandan Christian students in South Korea, not only to communicate and stay in touch, but also how social media—TikTok in particular—has emerged as a vital space of negotiation in regard to migrant identity, culture, and faith. Okiror's study deals with the growing interest in transnational digital diasporas, digital mission, and virtual belongings.

The fifth article, by **D. Chadwick Parker**, analyzes diasporic identities in relation to multiethnic churches in the wake of growing diversity in many parts of the world, dynamics that could result in either inter-ethnic social cohesion or fracture. Parker deliberates briefly on issues such as racial abuse and power dynamics (and could have included economic injustices and former colonial oppression from where immigrants are coming from) to introduce his recent doctoral thesis on embodied cohesion in a local church context (Parker 2024). The next article is written by **Tianji Ma**, who is a lecturer at Lutheran Seminary in Taiwan and a researcher at the Institute for Evangelical Missiology in Giessen, Germany. Ma's research presents findings of her fieldwork on language, worship style, family dynamics, belonging, etc., using a lens of bicultural hybrid identity of second-generation Chinese German Christians.

**Benjamin Isola Akano**, a missionary with a Nigerian mission agency and board of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, besides lecturing at a seminary in Ogbomoso, explores the issues of internal migration within his country and shares missiological implications by studying Hausa-speaking migrants from Muslim-majority northern regions living in the southern parts of Nigeria. Akano employs the mission concepts of centrifugal and centripetal flows for voluntary and involuntary migrants to advocate for intentional engagements with northerners wherever they are by viewing mission as philoxenia instead of xenophobia. Finally, **Jose Philip**, an Asbury doctoral student of an Indian background with ministry experiences in Singapore and the Middle East, takes up methodological issues related to studying diaspora mission and Christianity, and proposes a reflexive and integrated approach that includes both social sciences and theology. Philip advocates for the embodied, communal, and public nature of Christian truth, which, when combined with humility and contextual awareness, produces lasting missional impact of the growing diasporas locally and globally.

All in all, what a rich collection of essays on the diaspora mission from diverse contexts and vantage points! What is evident from this plethora of reflections and insights is that God is behind human movements, and the kingdom of God is advancing powerfully through and among today's migrants. It is time for churches and agencies to reimagine Christian mission entirely by developing a wider canvas and including new players who may not fit into existing mission categories or models. God is at work in calling people everywhere to himself and charging them

to go from where they are to everywhere else in the world. The migration of Christians has always expanded and transformed Christianity throughout its history and will continue to do so. May the new breed of diaspora missionaries multiply and flourish everywhere.

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# The Cross-cultural Experience of Ghanaian Pastors Ministering to Second-Generation Ghanaian-Americans in the US

Ebenezer A. Obeng and Hansung Kim

Published in *Global Missiology*, www.globalmissiology.org, October 2025

## Abstract

This study investigates how Ghanaian immigrant pastors in the Church of Pentecost in the U.S. adjust while ministering to second-generation Ghanaian-Americans. A cultural and generational gap exists between the pastors and the American-born youth. Through interviews with three pastors, the study identifies two key strategies for bridging this gap: education and contextualization. Education ensures both pastors and congregants understand each other's cultures, while contextualization allows pastors to adapt their ministry to the cultural context of the younger generation.

**Key Words:** adjusting, Church of Pentecost, contextualization, education, Ghanaian immigrant pastors, second-generation Ghanaian-Americans

## Introduction

The Church of Pentecost (COP) was established in Ghana in 1962 under the leadership of an Irish missionary couple, James and Sophia McKeon (Markin, 2015, p. 45). They believed in indigenous empowerment and leadership. From the onset, the McKeons "wanted COP to be indigenous with Ghanaian culture, ministry, and finance" (Onyinah, 2004, p. 221). They thought that "it would be difficult to grow an 'English Oak' in Ghana. A local species at home in its culture, should grow, reproduce and spread: a church with foreign roots was more likely to struggle" (Leonard, 1989, p. 65). The McKeons ensured that local Ghanaian members would take up the leadership of COP whiles they were still alive: "They brought in a Ghanaian Executive Council to lead the church and administer its affairs. They would sit down in meetings and make contributions to the discussions when they thought their decision went against Scripture" (Onyinah, 2004, p. 223).

Over the past six decades, COP has become a global Pentecostal church. Onyinah asserts that "the Church of Pentecost has moved from beyond the shores of Ghana to become a worldwide Christian denomination" (Onyinah, 2016, p. 15). Similarly, Ojo reports that "the Church of Pentecost, an indigenous church that had a background in the Apostolic Church, which is British, has made much progress in foreign missions" (Ojo, 1997, p. 552). As of 2023 December, COP has been established in 169 countries with a total membership of 4,534,644. This membership includes branches in Ghana and outside Ghana. According to the COP 2023 annual report, the membership in Ghana is 3,864,555, while the membership outside Ghana stands at 670,289 (The Church of Pentecost, 2023).COP in the US has 12 regions and 82 districts; five Spanish-speaking churches, four French-speaking churches, and one Swahili-speaking church; one South Asian church; and, five churches on military bases (The Church of Pentecost, USA, 2023).

The local churches of COP in the US are mainly led by Ghanaian pastors. They are Ghanaian immigrants who migrated to the US some years ago. Markin shares that the COP has established branch churches in various states and raised Ghanaian pastors from those congregations to oversee them (Markin, 2015). The COP in the US "has benefited from young people through the immigration inflow of young people already members of the mother church in Ghana" (Asirifi, 2021, p. 96). As of December 2023 the COP in the US had 115 pastors, and

110 of them were Ghanaian immigrants (The Church of Pentecost, USA, 2023). This means almost every Church of Pentecost in the US is pastored by a Ghanaian immigrant pastor.

How do Ghanaian immigrant pastors minister to the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans? In the COP in the US, pastors are from Ghana and the younger generation in the church were born and raised in the US. This younger generation is more accustomed to the US-American culture and context than their parents' Ghanaian culture. This study seeks to understand the cross-cultural experience of the Ghanaian pastors ministering to the second generation Ghanaian-Americans in the US.

## Literature Review

### *Ministering to Next-Generation Immigrants*

Ministry among the second-generation of the worldwide diaspora is important and essential for the future of global Christianity. Missions to diaspora children is Bible-based and therefore could not and should not be taken for granted. In addition, ministering to the children in the diaspora is a great opportunity for churches to seize and be deliberate about. Olana also shares that "ministry to second-generation immigrants is an opportunity that God has provided to the Church in the Western world" (Olana, 2022, p. 173). Similarly, Tesema points out that ministering to second-generation immigrants is important because it would not only bring about the revitalizing of Christianity in the West but would also help in developing multicultural congregations in that context (Tesema, 2022).

Ministering to second-generation African immigrants in western lands like the US can sometimes be challenging. One factor that has contributed this challenge is the inability of second generations to assimilate in African immigrant churches. Because most second-generation African immigrants choose to identify themselves as US-Americans over their African heritage, they do not feel a sense of belonging in African churches (Norton & Nyanni, 2023, pp. 216-217).

Second-generation immigrants struggle with cultural identity and adjustment. Arthur states that, "with the continued constitution of the African diaspora in global domains, questions arise as to the nature and forms of identities manifested by the second generation of immigrant youths" (Arthur, 2010, p. 161). Although there may be some differences among second-generation youth, "they often share the common experience of being bicultural by holding both heritage and mainstream cultural identities" (Gigue`re, Lalonde, & Lou 2010, p. 14). Kwak explains that "when a family immigrates to a new country for the purpose of long-term settlement, its members live in two cultures: their ethnic-heritage culture prior to migration, and the new culture of the society in which they currently reside." Kwak further asserts that sometimes second-generation immigrants easily and quickly adjust into the host culture while their parents find it difficult to adjust to the host culture. This often leads to misunderstanding and disagreements between the second-generation youth and their immigrant parents (Kwak, 2003, p. 116).

### *The Ministry of COP and the Second-Generation Ghanaian Immigrants in the US*

Asamoah-Gyadu mentions that one strategy the COP in the US employs to reach the second-generation and youth is the Pentecost International Worship (PIWC) approach (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2011, p. 92). The PIWC strategy has been employed mainly to attract second-generation Ghanaian-Americans, other nationals, and the highly educated. The PIWC also gives the youth in the church the freedom to worship in their own style. Additionally, Asamoah-

Gyadu highlights that the PIWC services are held in English in order to bridge the language gap that may exist because of the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans and other non-Ghanaians in the church who don't speak one of the Akan languages, particularly Twi, familiar to most first-generation Ghanaian COP members (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2011).

The fact that the COP has established the PIWC to attract second-generation Ghanaian-Americans, other nationals, and the youth of the church shows that the COP is culturally sensitive to the different cultures they encounter in the US. However, Asamoah-Gyadu does not discuss the different ways the PIWC strategy addresses the needs of the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans. As mentioned by Norton and Nyanni, the second-generation immigrants in the US are usually more accustomed to the US-American cultural context than to the cultures of their Ghanaian parents (Norton & Nyanni, 2023).

Asirifi discusses the ministry of the COP in the US in relation to why second-generation Ghanaian-Americans have not been willing to accept a call into full-time pastoral ministry in the COP. Asirifi points out that the majority of pastors in the COP in the US are Ghanaian immigrants, including younger immigrants in the US. Asirifi further notes that the COP in the US is currently "facing the urgent need to attract young American adults into its leadership succession strategic plan." In addition, Asirifi argues that this has become a challenge for two reasons. First, the young Ghanaian immigrants who have become full-time pastors of the COP in the US grew up in Ghana and are well accustomed to Ghanaian culture rather than the US—thus limiting their effectiveness in ministry to the church's youth, the majority of whom are second-generation Ghanaian-Americans. Second, unlike the Ghanaian immigrants, the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans have student loan debt, which may hinder answering the call into full-time pastoral ministry. Asirifi concludes that, because some of the Ghanaian immigrants serving the COP in the US may not have a good understanding of US-American cultural realities, "it calls for a new breed of young pastors who understand and share generational and cultural views of the church's youth and children for better discipleship and shepherding" (Asirifi, 2021, pp. 96-97).

## Research Method

To investigate concretely the themes discussed above, we used a case study, qualitative research method. Case studies research examples within real-life, contemporary contexts or settings (Yin, 2014). We interviewed three Ghanaian immigrant pastors who have served the COP in the US. The main research question for this study is this: How do Ghanaian pastors experience their cross-cultural ministry to second-generation Ghanaian-Americans in the US? The sub questions concern the challenges they encounter while they minister to the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans and how they respond to these challenges.

## Case Studies

### *Pastor Matthew*

Pastor Matthew migrated from Ghana to the US in 2002, which means he has been in the US for 22 years (as of the time of our research in 2024). Within those 22 years, Pastor Matthew has served the COP as a full-time pastor for 14 years. He has been the COP's Youth Ministry director for eight years and ministered a great deal among university students.

In an interview on how he is adjusting to the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans, Pastor Matthew reported that because of his work among the youth and next generation, his eyes have been opened to the cultural war and tension that come between the second-generation

Ghanaian-Americans who have acculturated themselves more into the US-American context and their Ghanaian immigrant parents (Pastor Matthew, 2024). According to Pastor Matthew, while the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans are interested in US cultural matters and what happens in America, their Ghanaian immigrant parents have zero such interest, which often becomes a point of conflict and disagreement in the home. With these differences in interest, Pastor Matthew shared a story that happened between a second-generation Ghanaian-American and her Ghanaian immigrant mother:

> There is a Ghanaian immigrant woman in my church who was very strict on raising her Ghanaian-American daughter from a Ghanaian cultural perspective. She was strict on how her daughter should dress, carry herself around, and perform house chores. Her daughter on the other hand was not willing or comfortable to comply because it was foreign to the American culture where she was born and had grown up. With this conflict, one day the woman found out in her daughter's wardrobe the inscription "If I die today, my mother will be very happy" (Pastor Matthew, 2024).

With this story, Pastor Matthew pointed out that he realized the Ghanaian immigrant woman did not know how to manage her daughter culturally (Pastor Matthew 2024). He further demonstrated that as a pastor he needed to be more knowledgeable and understand US cultural realities in order to resolve some of these issues as he ministers to second-generation Ghanaian-Americans. For Pastor Matthew, acquiring enough knowledge should enable him to understand the US context well enough to educate both the Ghanaian immigrant parents and the second-generation Ghanaian–Americans in his church to understand each other's culture and live peacefully at home.

*Pastor Kofi*

Pastor Kofi immigrated from Ghana to the US in 2012 through the American Diversity Immigrant Visa Program (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, n.d.). Before immigrating to the US, Pastor Kofi worshiped and served as an elder in the Church of Pentecost in Ghana where he learned about the doctrines and theology of the Church. When he arrived in US, he was called to be an elder in one of the COP branch churches and later accepted a call to full-time pastoral ministry in 2017. Pastor Kofi has served the COP in the US as a full-time pastor for eleven years. During these eleven years, Pastor Kofi served as a regional youth leader for five years.

In his interview, Pastor Kofi shared that because he had a background in intercultural studies and counselling, he already knew that ministering to second-generation Ghanaian-Americans would be challenging because they are bicultural. They live with their parents' culture at home while exposed to and living in US cultural realities outside the home (Pastor Kofi, 2024). According to Pastor Kofi, because of these differences in cultural contexts he noticed a communication gap between the Ghanaian immigrant parents and the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans. Pastor Kofi further shared that because of this knowledge and information, he needed to be proactive to learn and understand the different cultural dynamics and be intentional about teaching the Ghanaian immigrant parents how to navigate through the different cultural elements (Pastor Kofi, 2024).

Pastor Kofi highlighted that since the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans understand and are more inclined to living in the US, he needs to educate the Ghanaian immigrant parents to have a good understand of US cultural realities in order to communicate with their children accordingly (Pastor Kofi, 2024). Furthermore, Pastor Kofi shared that he allows the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans in his church to freely express themselves as US-Americans

while he ensures that they are doctrinally sound. He takes that approach because he believes they understand the US better (than Ghana), speak the language with a native US accent, and will be able to do share the gospel more effectively within US-American communities (Pastor Kofi, 2024).

*Pastor Kwame*

Pastor Kwame has been in the US since 2013, also having immigrated through the American Diversity Immigrant Visa Program. Pastor Kwame became a full-time pastor in the COP in the US in 2020. He has served three COP branch churches in the Midwestern US. Pastor Kwame served as the overseer for the entire youth ministry in the Texas region before his transfer to another state (Pastor Kwame, 2024).

In response to how he adjusts to the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans, Pastor Kwame revealed that he noticed a generational gap within his church and not only in families. He explained that the older generation in his church, who typically are Ghanaian immigrants, seem not to understand the younger generation while the younger generation also seem not to understand the older generation. This mutual misunderstanding is because both generations have different cultural orientations (Pastor Kwame, 2024). For instance, in the typical Church of Pentecost in Ghana, the elders and the pastors sit on a platform and face the congregation during worship service, which the older generation in his church in the US want to replicate. On the other hand, Pastor Kwame stated the younger generation prefers to have an LED screen in front for projection and presentation of sermon slides and song lyrics because it is more modern and civilized. According to Pastor Kwame, this generational gap and cultural differences have led to some of the younger generation leaving his church for other churches where they feel comfortable and that they belong, while others patronize virtual churches (Pastor Kwame, 2024).

In response to this challenge of generational misunderstanding, Pastor Kwame shared that he had to build a common ground for both the older generation and younger generation through education and teaching. He cited a typical example where one of his elders said to him that the way the younger generation are doing things in church will destroy the church. In response he explained to the elder that the younger generation will not destroy the church but have something unique they bring to the church and need to be supported. In addition, Pastor Kwame mentioned that he always comes to the level of the younger generation and learns their context in order to minister to them, and he encourages the Ghanaian immigrants and parents in his church to do same (Pastor Kwame, 2024).

## Discussion

Two themes that emerged from the three case studies are education and contextualization. In the following paragraphs, we discuss how these two themes relate to the ways COP Ghanaian pastors adjust to second-generation Ghanaian-Americans.

*Education*

Education in this study points to two perspectives. First, there is a need for COP Ghanaian pastors to learn and understand cultural dynamics in the US. Second, COP Ghanaian pastors need to educate the older Ghanaian immigrants and parents to understand the cultural makeup of second-generation Ghanaian-Americans. On the reverse, there is a need for pastors to educate the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans in their churches on the culture of the older Ghanaian immigrants and parents.

Education for the Ghanaian pastors to understand the culture of the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans will make them competent to adjust and minister to second-generation Ghanaian-Americans effectively. One of the emphases of Edinburgh 1910 was the training of gospel communicators like pastors and missionaries to be well educated about the host culture in order to adjust and minister to the people effectively (World Missionary Conference, 1910, p. 170). This effectiveness will include "success in cultural adaptation and language acquisition, interpersonal relationships and communication skills, conflict resolution, and the transference of gifting and ministry skills into the new cultural context" (Brynjolfson, 2006, p. 32). In addition, education of the Ghanaian pastors is necessary for "knowing, being, and doing" (Whiteman, 2008, p. 10) in their ministry to second-generation Ghanaian-Americans.

Education for both the older Ghanaian immigrants and second-generation Ghanaian-Americans by COP Ghanaian pastors is necessary for bridging the generational and communication gaps that exist between the two parties. Educating both parties will help them to "find common grounds of coexistence by seeing things from each other's perspective" (Portuphy & Adom-Portuphy, 2020, p. 164). In addition, educating the older Ghanaian immigrants and parents on the second-generation Ghanaian American's cultural preferences will help them to know that they—not only the pastors—have a role to play in God's mission to the younger generation (Olana, 2022, p. 174).

*Contextualization*

Contextualization is also necessary for COP Ghanaian pastors to adjust to second-generation Ghanaian-Americans, as well as help bridge the communication gap described earlier. Contextualization in this context refers to communicating the gospel in terms that makes sense to the worldview and culture of the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans while remaining faithful to its core truth (Newbigin, 1986). Hiebert points out that "contextualization is an important and valuable process, necessary to the communication of the gospel" (Hiebert, 2009, p. 26). Contextualization will ensure that the Ghanaian immigrant pastors understand the US context and are communicating the gospel through US cultural elements.

Coming to the level of the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans and allowing them to freely express themselves in US cultural ways (Whiteman, 1997, p. 6), as one of the pastors mentioned, will assure them of a sense of belonging and that the pastors are interested in them and are willing to identify with them in their culture and context. This approach will in turn encourage second-generation Ghanaian-Americans to fully open their hearts to the ministry of the Ghanaian immigrant pastors. In addition, it will help the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans in the COP to become faithful Christians while staying true to their American cultural heritage (Whiteman, 1997).

Finally, contextualization will ensure that the Ghanaian immigrant pastors are not imposing their Ghanaian culture on the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans. Since the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans are already dealing with cultural identity conflict at home, employing contextualization will to some extent ensure that they don't deal with the same thing when they go to church. Additionally, through contextualization the Ghanaian immigrant pastors will be more sensitive to the culture of the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans rather than their Ghanaian culture while they minister to them.

## Conclusion

This case study has looked at the cross-cultural experience of Ghanaian immigrant pastors ministering to second-generation Ghanaian-Americans. We discovered that while COP

Ghanaian pastors are ministering to second-generation Ghanaian-Americans they encounter communication and generational gaps.

In responding to these challenges, COP Ghanaian pastors may need to consider education and contextualization to adjust to second-generation Ghanaian-Americans. With regards to education, COP Ghanaian pastors believe they need to learn to understand the culture of the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans in order to minister to their needs and bridge the communication gap. Moreover, they also should consider educating the Ghanaian immigrant parents to understand the cultural makeup of the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans to bridge the generational gap that exists in their churches. With regards to contextualization, COP Ghanaian pastors should adjust to the level of the second-generation Ghanaian-Americans and identify with them in their culture in order to minister to them effectively.

This study is limited as it only examines the perspective of COP Ghanaian pastors in the US. Future studies may explore from the perspective of second-generation Ghanaian-Americans in the US on how they are receiving and adjusting to the ministry of the Ghanaian immigrant pastors in their churches. In addition, further studies may explore how Church of Pentecost Ghanaian pastors in Europe are ministering and adjusting to the second-generation Ghanaian-Europeans in their churches.

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# Multilingual Ministry: Identifying Languages and Finding Bible and Other Resources

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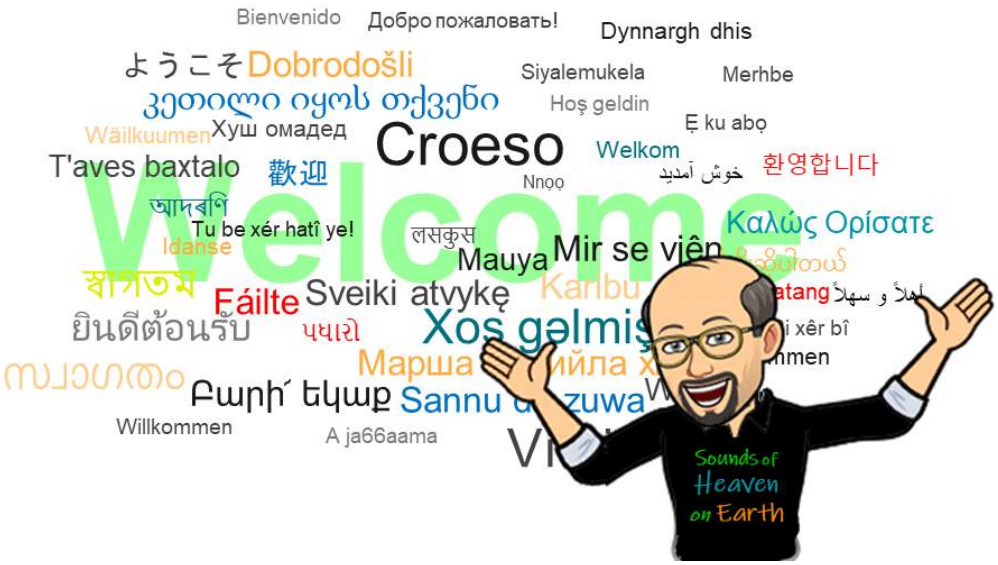
Published in *Global Missiology*, globalmissiology.org, October 2025

**Abstract**

Linguistic hospitality and a multilingual approach to both integration and discipleship have many benefits. However, language difference is all too often seen purely as a barrier rather than as a bridge to deeper connection. One challenge that many local churches face in building such bridges of connection is that of finding and using Bibles and other resources in newly arrived people's languages. This study thus seeks to help answer the following questions:

- How do you find what languages are spoken by people in your church and community?
- Why is that such a complex question?
- How can they find Bibles and other resources both online and, if desired, as printed books?

**Key Words:** multilingualism, intercultural church, Bible translation, Scripture engagement, language identification




Linguistic hospitality, in which recently arrived people and their languages are made welcome, has many benefits, but language is all too often seen purely as a barrier rather than as a bridge to deeper connection. One barrier for churches is the not so simple challenge of finding materials. Another barrier is that it often does not occur to church leaders that exercising linguistic hospitality could be a good idea. This article explores the 'simple' challenge of identifying diaspora languages and finding resources ...with a bit more background on why those tasks are not so simple.

## The Complexity of Multilingualism in a World of New Neighbours

Knowledge that there are over 7000 languages in the world can mask the fact that almost 90% of the world's population speak the top 200 of those as their first language. Even speakers of those top 200 can feel marginalised and unwelcome outside of their home country. Some develop their own diaspora maintaining their home language and familiar styles of worship,

developing an oasis in which they can fully be themselves—while the next generation navigates identity in a bicultural space, not always feeling fully welcome in either space.

Although the detailed reports in past US censuses uncovered over 1,300 different named languages and dialects, smaller communities do not appear in public statistics, relegated to various categories of "other language." Even so, these hidden languages are present and spoken in both major cities and smaller communities around the world.

When asked where I'm from, I might name the country, the region, or the precise town. My answer depends on who I am talking to. Having now lived in many places, I might mention ones that I think will provide a connection to the speaker. My place of origin is part of my identity, as is my language. I am not aware that I use many dialect words particular to my place of birth—my parents and school were keen to encourage me to use standard English—but there are a few pronunciations in my accent that give me away. There are also times when I, like many other people, change how I speak depending on who I am speaking to.

As part of an introduction to SIL's Multilingual Assessment Tool, Sociolinguist Maik Gibson (2023) uses the image of both different tools and different types of clothes to explain how people use different languages as deemed useful and appropriate in different situations.

If talking to someone outside their local community, speakers of minority languages will switch to another language, but they may also switch within the community to show respect. A Kenyan colleague once mentioned how he (as an adult) had offended a school headmaster by speaking to him in a local language they both spoke, when the head clearly felt that his status and their location demanded they use English.

There can be prejudices about languages, dialects, and accents. These can lead people to mask their origins and opt for using what is perceived as a more prestigious language. This same tactic can also apply to the language people think is appropriate for using with God, even when they do not understand the "holier" language as clearly as the one they speak with friends and family.

Multilingualism is the norm for many people around the world, especially if their first language is not one of the most dominant ones used in government, trade, media, and education. In countries where monolingualism is considered the norm (at least by the dominant majority), the use of other languages is not significantly on the agenda of most churches—even in major cities. A British pastor I spoke to confided that his Nigerian elder spoke better English than he did. He had been surprised to learn that this elder often used another language at home and even when reading the Bible, in addition to reading in English.

How many languages are spoken by people in your church and community? There may be more than you think. How can people, if they wish, find Bibles and other resources in all the languages they use? Are there spaces where they can they pray and worship using both their heritage language and musical styles?

**Language and the Church: Embracing Diversity**

When it comes to migration and multiculturalism, language can be divisive—both in terms of how issues are rhetorically framed and discussed as well as in the linguistic sense of which vernacular is used to do so.

'Foreign' languages are frequently used by both established communities in a country and by new migrants. The current rise in nationalism in a number of countries is often accompanied by increasing hostility towards migrants. Those migrants' use of their own languages can be

seen as a refusal to fully embrace and assimilate into their host culture. Linguistic prejudice is high, and addressing it involves more than a passing mention in a sermon.

A "more multilingual church" might start by acknowledging that there are multiple languages used by members of the church and by encouraging them to be used more in both personal and corporate settings. Where people feel marginalized, one step in validating their identity and experience can be through validating languages and cultures.

This approach does not have to be complicated. One very simple idea proposed by Josh Davis of Proskuneo ministries is simply including a word or two in another language: "You know the word holy in Spanish is Santo? Could you say that with me" (Davis, 2012).

Over the last 25 years those working with Proskuneo have also learned another truth: we each have things to learn from another! Beginning to open the door to more multilingual worship has opened the door for more conversations about culture and to fresh insights both about one another and about the God who loves us.

Does your church have a clearly articulated theology of language? Probably not, but people come with various assumptions, often including the idea that "for the sake of unity" people should all speak the same language when they come to church. But are you supposed to leave your language and culture at the door when you enter a church building?

Here is another insight from Proskuneo: "A lot of people believe that unity means that we all have to think the same way, want the same things, dress the same, talk the same, act the same. But unity and diversity are not opposites. They actually coexist beautifully in God and can also coexist beautifully in us as humans" (Davis, 2025).

Jesus did not say, "And I have other sheep that are not of this fold, and I must lead them. They shall hear my voice, and there shall be several sheepfolds…." Jesus rather speaks of one sheepfold and one shepherd (John 10:16). There are several reasons why we humans, including we Christians, like to stick in our own groups, and there are several reasons why that is sometimes helpful. However, there are also reasons why "we" need to get better at being more welcoming to "sheep from other folds." And that is true whether you are from one of the larger groups in your town or city or whether you are part of a minoritised group.

**Theological and Historical Perspectives on Linguistic Diversity**

Since the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), the Church has struggled with how churches and their leaders recognise and reconcile differences in culture. Where Christian communities coexist, there are a range of models including segregation, assimilation, or various forms of intercultural church. Historically attitudes to other languages in both wider society and the Church have favoured segregation, sometimes under the name of homogenous units (McGavran, 1970) or assimilation (critiqued by Sanneh, 2003), seeking to maintain cultural and linguistic standards.

One often unchecked assumption is that linguistic diversity is purely the result of the fallenness of humanity and a punishment explained in the Babel story (Genesis 11:1-9). Within this view, the multiplicity of languages might be expected to be a temporary inconvenience, with restoration of a single language in heaven (or a new earth). Others see linguistic diversity as one more example of God's love of variety, evidenced throughout creation, with an expectation that the fatal flaws present in each person and society will be addressed but that variety and a level of individual and cultural identity will be maintained without the prejudice and barriers that exist here and now.

Prior to Babel, God had told the sons of Noah to fill the earth (Genesis 9), and they did just

that, as listed by "their clans and languages, in their territories and nations" (Genesis 10). However, at some point in the interim, while intending to spread out over all the earth serving and praising God, people stopped, distracted by an exciting new technology, known as the brick, and decided to make a name for themselves (Genesis 11:1-4).

God confused their language and "scattered them over the face of the earth" (Genesis 11:8), as per the original plan. Unsurprisingly there are different interpretations of Babel and different ideas about language.

Some have argued that Pentecost did not reverse Babel but instead underlines it. That view asserts that Christians have a message and a purpose, namely to go to everyone, everywhere, equal before God. That view further explains that others do not have to be like Christian groups culturally to be loved by God and that unity is not about uniformity.

In support of that viewpoint on unity-in-diversity is how Revelation 7:9 speaks of every tribe, tongue, and nation worshiping together. Language is about both communication and connection.

My own organisation, SIL, had helped translate Revelation, and the rest of at least the New Testament, into a thousand languages before embarking on a series of internal conversations on missiology leading to a symposium, and now a book, *Language and the Mission of God* (Greed, 2025). The book features chapters by over 20 authors from multiple countries, citing works from 400 other authors that had pondered aspects of this missiological topic concerning language before. It is not a light read, but it is often a gripping one.

**Welcoming the Stranger**

I am starting to ask monocultural churches the following questions:

- When you encounter people from another country, or even another part of this one, do you see them as a threat? …or as someone who might want to know about Jesus? …or as someone who might have some experience and insights that could help you?
- When you hear another language being spoken, does it spark your interest or raise your suspicions?
- When you meet someone from another church, do you see them as a brother or sister in Christ, or some distant cousin, who's somehow part of the family but you're not so sure about them?

When I get to preach, especially at Pentecost, I often talk about languages and different cultural expressions of church. I build on a growing list of resources (Brassington 2025) and do not always ask if my hearers know how many languages are spoken on earth today, or exactly how many, or how many they think will, or should be, spoken in heaven.

Differences can make us uncomfortable. Back in the 1970's Donald McGavran stated that people "like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers" (McGavran, 1970, 198). This observation may be true to a certain extent, e.g., sociologically. The first Jewish Christians were certainly uncomfortable with the idea of Gentiles in the Church, and (reading in Acts 6) there were even tensions between Grecian Jews and Hebraic Jews—a situation that led to the appointment of the first deacons and structures to address inequality (Acts 6:1-6).

At a pragmatic level, there is much to be said for forming churches of groups of people who are similar to one another in many ways, especially when it comes to matters of language. This is particularly true when those people all live in the same place and form a church that

looks and feels like a redeemed expression of their own culture. The challenge, however, is when the community is more diverse than "homogenous"; in such a setting, monocultural churches can also lead to segregation.

The ideas set out by McGavran and others in the "Church Growth School" in the 1960's and 1970's were not universally applauded and led to a consultation of different leading thinkers as part of the Lausanne Movement, resulting in the first Lausanne Occasional Paper. The paper affirmed that highlighting the importance of culture was both pragmatic ("churches grow fastest that way") and biblical ("God desires it that way"). Whether that meant separate "homogeneous unit churches" or something else, participants were united in "celebrating the colorful mosaic of the human race that God has created," opposing cultural imperialism, and stating that "colorless uniformity is a denial of the Creator and an affront to his creation. The preservation of cultural diversity honors God, respects man, enriches life, and promotes evangelization. Each church, if it is to be truly indigenous, should be rooted in the soil of its local culture" (Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1978)

**Bible Translation, Availability, and Impact**

In the second half of 2025 a new milestone in global Bible translation was reached. There are now over 4,000 languages in which some Scripture or a Scripture-based product—including Jesus Films and story sets where there is no corresponding printed Scripture—has been made available and almost 1,700 in which translation work has begun but nothing is yet published (See Table 1 below). Initial translation of Scripture has increased at a dramatic rate in recent years, but not everything that exists is available, not everything that is available is accessible to everyone, and not everything that is available is known about or effectively used.

**Table 1: Completed Scripture and Work in Progress, Oct 2025**

| | **No Scripture** | **Stories** | **Selections** | **New Testament** | **Bible** | **Total** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Work In Progress | 1,642 | 171 | 922 | 1,204 | 508 | 4,447 |
| No Work in Progress | 1,691 | 65 | 315 | 600 | 273 | 2,944 |
| Totals | 3,333 | 236 | 1,237 | 1,804 | 781 | 7,391 |

(ProgressBible, 2025)

I work with a Bible translation organisation, and I am 100% convinced that everyone on the planet should have access to a Bible in a language and form that makes sense to them, and 100% convinced that translation alone is not enough. Bible translation is not just about *translation into languages*: it is *translation for and with people*, and the process needs to look beyond purely linguistic barriers.

For ten years I was responsible for explaining the publicly available figures on the progress of Bible translation. More recently I have been looking at availability, impact, and the challenges of finding Bibles.

The last challenge is partially addressed by apps, websites, and the search engines that trawl them. Even where the internet is not available and thus unable to bridge the whole distance, it brings Scriptures closer to those who can take it the last few miles or the last few hundred.

Two major Bible apps are YouVersion (Life.Church, 2025) and Bible.is (Faith Comes By Hearing, 2025).

YouVersion recently celebrated the incredible milestone of one billion downloads for their app which hosts over 3,500 Bible versions in over 2,300 languages. Bible.is provides access to Scripture in over 2,200 languages. Many of these Bible translations are on both platforms in text and audio. The platforms also including the Jesus Film in over 2000 languages, and one or more of the four gospels from the LUMO Project (LUMO Project Films, 2024) in over 1500 languages. LUMO has also produced a summary of the Old Testament, the Covenant, and a film of the gospel of Acts, all of which will be dubbed into hundreds of languages.

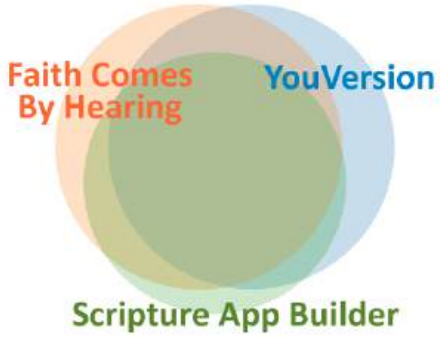
In addition to new translations, many older versions have been digitised and made available, with many more still to be added.

As mentioned, however, the internet is still not available everywhere on earth. The need for digital Scriptures that would work offline, and which could even be shared phone to phone, led to the development of Scripture App Builder by SIL, which allows for the production of customisable Bible apps (citation). Scripture apps are reported in over 1,740 languages using this software (Find.bible) but because it is available for anyone to use, there may be many unreported.

The conglomerate number of digitized Scripture available through YouVersion, Faith Comes By Hearing, and Scripture App Builder is depicted below (Table 2):

**Table 2: Number of Languages with Digitally Available Scripture, October 2025**

| | |
|---|---|
| YouVersion | 2,349 |
| Faith Comes By Hearing | 2,400+ |
| Scripture App Builder | 2,000+ |
| Total | 2,863 |




(Brassington, 2025)

Behind the scenes, two major platforms exist to make Scripture available to developers of apps and websites. These are The Digital Bible Library (American Bible Society, 2025) and Bible Brain (Faith Come By Hearing, 2025).

Not every product in every translation is on every platform, so it is useful to have sites that exist just to help ordinary people find Scripture in the languages they are looking for. One of the lesser-known pioneering websites in digital Scripture availability is ScriptureEarth (ScriptureEarth.org, n.d.), created in 2009 by a small team including SIL's Bill Dyck:

> I was working in the administrative office in the city of Lima, Peru. Two men from a village in a remote area of the Peruvian jungle came to my office one day. They were believers and had heard that we had made a translation of their Scriptures. They wanted

> their own copy of their New Testament. I felt bad that I had to tell them that there were no more copies available in Lima. We had shipped them all to their village. But they were now living in Lima and were not planning to take that long trip back to their village any time soon. The men left disappointed and empty handed. … How would you feel if Bibles in your language were no longer available? This incident gave me the vision to make Scripture available on the web.

From simple beginnings the site expanded beyond providing Scripture in the languages of the Americas to being a repository for Scriptures and linking to digitally available Scriptures on other platforms in (almost) every language known to exist (Doejaaren, 2017).

Another site with a similar goal and approach is Find.Bible, originally launched by the Forum of Bible Agencies International in 2006, and since 2013, managed on their behalf by the Digital Bible Society (Find.Bible, n,d.a).

While ScriptureEarth is aimed primarily at people looking for Scripture in their own language, Find.Bible is aimed slightly more at those looking for Bibles for other people. Clearly both sites are used for both purposes, and over the years the cooperation between the two enterprises has increased.

ScriptureEarth committed to keeping their website as simple as possible, aimed at users whose first language is not English and who may be in places with limited or expensive internet. Find.Bible seeks to aggregate additional information for its users by drawing in additional information about countries and languages from a variety of sources.

Both sites also include some links to sources of printed Bibles, but print availability can be harder to track globally. A newer site with a smaller scope is New Neighbour Bible (2025). This site is gradually expanding its list of print suppliers of minority language Bibles in Europe and North America and exploring new tools and techniques to aid in the identification and discovery of resources.

Each site sketched above does a difficult task well, but even in places with good internet access each faces challenges for example:

- Speakers of the languages offered (and others serving them) often do not know these sites exist.
- While on the sites, identifying the language one is looking for can be difficult.
- It can be difficult to decide which Bible version to use when there is more than one available.

In the case of the largest languages there can be a bewildering number of choices, e.g., 243 listings for Scripture on Find.Bible for English, 46 for Mandarin Chinese or French, 36 for German, 33 for Spanish (Find.Bible, n.d.b). For most minority language speakers there is often only one version in their language, or perhaps an old translation and a revision.

The first of the three challenges listed above might seem to matter less as long as search engines and now AI searches can find the information on the site (or reliable information elsewhere), but search engines can only find what someone has already carefully indexed and posted. It is still possible to find that a particular Scripture version exists without being able to get hold of it, or to not find it and conclude that it does not exist.

**Languages: Many Names, Duplicated Names**

¿Hablas español? Parlez-vous français? What a language is called by its own speakers is often different to the name(s) given to it by outsiders. There may be additional differences in how the various names are spelled, especially when using different alphabets and orthographies.

In addition to multiple names for each language there are often multiple languages that go by the same name, as well as complexities of dialects and groups of languages known as macro languages.

Keeping track of languages and their names is complicated. The Ethnologue demonstrates such complexities. Since 1951 the Ethnologue has grown from a hand-typed list of minority languages to the most comprehensive directory of all the known languages in the world and still seeks new contributors to aid with its annual updates (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2025).

ScriptureEarth includes a number of alternate names to help with searching, but it is not always easy to know from the name alone which language is which. The site also includes maps showing the main location a language is reported to be spoken in.

**Ask**

Whether one is a majority language speaker seeking to help others secure a Scripture in their own language or a minority language speaker in a new environment, the following advice is helpful: "Keep searching. It might be available under a different name or with a different spelling," or it may not be online yet (SIL Global Diaspora Services, 2025). One can reach out to the various sites or translation agencies mentioned in this article and ask if they know more. Also, the Lord of the Harvest is ready to be asked for guidance. More Bibles, and more workers, are needed everywhere around the world, including amongst the diaspora in everyone's neighbourhood.

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# Hustler-Ecclesial Missionaries: Hybrid Identities of Kenyan Anglican Clergy in the U.S.

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Published in *Global Missiology*, www.globalmissiology.org, October 2025

**Abstract**

This article explores the lived experiences of East African Anglican clergy serving in the United States, with a particular focus on factors that influence and shape their identities during cross-cultural ministry within U.S.-American congregations. Drawing on qualitative interviews with Kenyan clergy, the study identifies a recurring theme of "hustling" as a framework through which these ministers adapt to their host context. The article introduces the concept of *hustler-ecclesial identity*, a hybrid missional identity shaped by struggle and adaptability in ministry. Unlike traditional missionary paradigms, these clergy are not institutionally sent but emerge organically as missional agents within unfamiliar and often inhospitable contexts. The article argues that these *hustler-ecclesial missionaries* represent a non-traditional form of mission rooted in lived struggle, vocational flexibility, and transnational ecclesial negotiation. Recognizing this form of mission has important implications for understanding mission as shaped from the margins rather than from traditional centers of ecclesial power and theological production. Ultimately, this study could enrich scholarship on African diasporic identity and cross-cultural mission in the United States.

**Key Words:** Hustler-ecclesial identity, African migrant clergy, Diaspora Missiology, bi-vocational ministry, ecclesial hybridity

## Introduction

The United States has traditionally ranked as a principal destination country for migrants from Africa (Hanciles, 2009, p. 223). The majority of African immigrants in the US are from West Africa, but the East African diaspora also constitute a significant share, and Kenyans are the fourth biggest African immigrant group in the country (Lorenzi & Batalova, 2022). The Kenyan diaspora have settled mainly in metropolitan areas such as New York, Washington D.C., and Dallas, where some have gone on to engage in ministry. These clergy either pastor Kenyan diaspora churches or U.S.-American congregations. The latter category includes Kenyan Anglican clergy serving American Anglican churches as a "process of reverse mission" (Ward, 2016, p. 637). And yet their missional success may be linked to their ability to construct and negotiate hybrid identities suitable for the American social and ecclesial fabric.

New African diaspora scholarship has often raised the issue of identity as multifaceted and characterized by a sense of uncertainty. For instance, Simon Aihiokhai noted that African migrants in the United States "are continuously negotiating their identities either as Americans or as Africans with a renewed sense of self (Aihiokhai, 2021, p. 296). This kind of experience implies a struggle to reconcile the American cultural context and their African upbringing. In face of such a struggle, Fenggang Yang argues that "instead of choosing either American or ethnic identities, immigrants may construct adhesive identities that integrate both together (Yang, 1999, p. 17). This means that African immigrants need to continuously consider the American context if they are to incarnate in the host society and thus be better placed to reach white Americans. In this regard, Afe Adogame notes that African immigrants to the West need to pay attention to "the specific religious, political, sociocultural circumstances and contextual factors in the host contexts," since such factors are key in shaping their identity (Adogame, 2014, p. 22).

These are the kind of factors that this paper seeks to examine, drawing on the diasporic life experiences and adaptation to cross-cultural ministry of four Kenyan Anglican diaspora clergy ministering in different U.S.-American congregations. The questions that this paper asks include, how does the societal context shape the clergy's ability to reach the white American population? In what way does the Anglican ecclesial context in the US, impact the clergy's cross-cultural mission efforts towards white host communities? This article argues that the missional success of African Anglican clergy ministering in the US is linked to their ability develop and negotiate hybrid identities during their period of ministry in the country. While the missional experiences of West African ministers, especially Pentecostals, in the US, have been frequently documented, it is significant that those of East Africans, especially from mainline churches, are also brought to table. One such early study focussed on the work of Roman Catholic priests and nuns (Healey, 2003). A more recent attempt concerned the experiences of Kenyan Anglican clergy, albeit with emphasis on their leadership of Kenyan diaspora congregations (Kiarie, 2024).

## Methodology

This article is based on a data from a qualitative case study that engaged four Kenyan Anglican diaspora clergy ministering in different U.S.-American congregations in the U.S. southern Midwest. Three clergy served congregations of the Episcopal Church (TEC), while the other served an Anglican Church of North America (ACNA) congregation. The particular churches and states are not mentioned since participants were guaranteed anonymity.

The interviews were conducted online through Zoom and in some cases by telephone. Interviews were in-depth and semi-structured, lasting for one hour on average. The respondents included three males and one female. Their ages ranged between 35 and 55 years. Three entered the US for study, while the other came on a family visa. Three were in the roles of associate clergy, the other was a supply clergy. To gain deeper insight in their activities, I followed their online church services and social media publications, and I consulted their church websites and related online publications. The participants freely volunteered to take part, and the initial contact was made through an Anglican diaspora contact in the US; thereafter snowball sampling was used to find participants most suitable for this study.

A challenge with the interviews was time zone difference between Asia (my location) and North America, which meant that it was difficult to find a convenient time in their busy schedule, and interviews had to be rescheduled on some occasions.

My positionality as an East African Anglican clergy living as a diaspora in Asia was important in making a connection with the respondents. The respondents felt more at ease communicating to one who hailed from the same African region and had a similar denominational status. It also appeared that respondents were relaxed to share some aspects of their ministry with one who was not presently resident in East Africa. On the other hand, the fact the I did not come from the same country as the respondents meant that it was challenging to establish the initial contact and rapport. Furthermore, most of the respondents desired anonymity in order to share their experiences; as such, pseudonyms are used throughout this article.

## Reverse Mission in the Anglican Communion

In the twenty-first century, Christianity's center of gravity has decisively shifted to the Global South. The shift has perhaps been more explicit in the world-wide Anglican Communion. In this regard, Hanciles notes that "by virtue of numerical preponderance and spiritual dynamism, the younger churches in Africa and Asia represent the Communion's new center of gravity

(Hanciles, 2009, p. 387). A remarkable consequence of this shift is the emergence of reverse mission, where clergy from Africa, Asia, and Latin America evangelize the post-Christian West.

Reverse mission is especially evident within the Anglican Communion (Ward, 2016, p. 637). The examples of the African-born John Sentamu from Uganda and Karowei Dorgu from Nigeria, who both rose to bishops in the Church of England, the former eventually to archbishop, are plain examples of a reversed missional thrust within the Anglican communion. Aside from these prominent cases, several lower-ranking Anglican clergy of African origin are increasing present and influential in Western nations, challenging prevailing assumptions about mission and ecclesiology within the global Anglican Communion.

The concept of reverse mission often hinges on "claims to divine commission to 'spread the gospel'; the perceived secularization of the West; the abysmal fall in church attendance and dwindling membership; desacralization of church buildings; liberalization; and on issues of moral decadence" (Adogame, 2013, p. 169). But this notion has not been without contestation. A key argument points to the fact that "God's mission is God's mission, no matter where it originates or where it flows. Migration trends have reversed, but there is no such thing as reverse mission" (Kwiyani, 2023, p. 97).

In any case, it is important to recognize that this phenomenon should not be construed as a simple reversal of the historical pattern in which Western missionaries were sent to Africa, Asia, and South America. Rather, reverse mission entails at least two distinct dimensions. The first concerns the absence of formal recruitment and sending structures. Many Africans and other Christians from the Global South migrate independently to the West and, over time, find opportunities to engage in mission work within their new contexts. This process is not institutionally managed but emerges organically through patterns of global migration.

The second dimension involves a reexamination of the term "missionary." While reverse mission may evoke traditional notions of missionaries—formally commissioned agents from the West sent to evangelize non-Western societies—those engaged in reverse mission often do not fit this conventional mold. Instead, they belong to a non-traditional category of mission workers who, as Samuel Escobar observes, "do not appear in the records of missionary activity or the databanks of specialists" (Escobar, 2003, p. 17). Taken together, these dynamics suggest that "reverse mission" represents a complex and ongoing reconfiguration of global Christian witness, rather than a mere inversion of past missionary paradigms. Within this reconfiguration, several Kenyan Anglican clergy enter the United States on non-religious visas and eventually engage in mission work within U.S.-American congregations "where their presence or ministry often impacts the life and vitality of the congregation in innumerable ways" (Hanciles, 2009, pp. 350-351). However, their missional success may depend on their ability to forge identities that resonate with the American social and ecclesial context.

**The United States Mission Field**

The ministry engagement of diaspora African clergy in Western societies is significantly shaped by cultural and theological negotiation. Kwiyani notes that "the western mission field is uniquely difficult in many aspects. Africans entering the West encounter distinct challenges that make it harder for them to connect with Westerners," including societal and ecclesial challenges (Kwiyani, 2014, p. 175). This complex situation means that diaspora African clergy must navigate the challenges of ministering in multicultural and often secular environments, where they must adapt their theological perspectives, worship practices, and leadership approaches to effectively serve their congregations and engage with the host society.

With respect to the Anglican Communion, Paul Avis notes that "Anglican ecclesiology today must take into account the various ways that Anglican identity is perceived and understood in diverse global contexts and the degree of inculturation (which is encouraged, especially in worship matters) therein" (Avis, 2018, p. 39). Such inculturated Anglicanism calls for a nuanced understanding of the American Anglican ecclesial structure by diaspora African clergy ministering in U.S.-American Anglican congregations. The following sections discuss this study's findings concerning how, during their ministry to white communities, the diaspora Kenyan Anglican clergy perceived and navigated both the societal context and the Anglican ecclesial context.

*Societal Context*

The participants reported an awareness of the host context, often highlighting differences compared to their home context. The two key issues they encountered during their time of ministry in the U.S. were the high cost of living and racism. For example, Stella described costs such as housing as being "extremely expensive" (Stella, 2024). Tito, who is a father, complained about babysitting expenses. He stated that he could not leave his kids alone and whenever he gets a babysitter, he has "to pay them. It's expensive" (Tito, 2024). Justus emphasized, "It is expensive to live in the United States. That I cannot help but tell you, it is expensive" (Justus, 2024). The participants, therefore, viewed the U.S. as an economically demanding environment in which sufficient financial resources were necessary to function effectively. Such a difficult economic situation often suggests that these Africans may be perceived as less effective in missional partnership with the host church leaders due to their economic disadvantage (Hanciles, 2013, p. 77).

Regarding racism, participants noted that it was more common to encounter racial discrimination in the Southern United States. When I asked Tito about his experiences with racism, he first compared the South to his former residence in the Midwest: "When I got here, I realized in the South, of course, it is warmer. So many Africans prefer it. But there was more racism in the South" (Tito, 2024). Similarly, Alex described the cold reception he received in his predominantly white neighborhood, which he believed might be related to his race. He explained, "People are not very friendly. So, you can just walk on the road and out of courtesy, you just smile to someone or say hi to someone, and nobody is interested" (Alex, 2024).

Participants also observed that they experienced less racism within TEC compared to ACNA. For instance, Tito, who serves an ACNA congregation, said that the "ACNA is conservative. So, in the issues of sexuality, they are great, issues of race, they are not great" (Tito, 2024).

Overall, participants reported experiencing discrimination based on their identity as Africans, facing prejudice from both American neighbors and church colleagues. These accounts align with Kwiyani's (2014, pp. 175-185) observations on the significant challenges African pastors face when adjusting to ministry in American society, particularly concerning racism and systemic disadvantages.

*Navigating the Societal Context*

Participants reported the strategies of bi-vocationalism and diaspora networks in navigating the challenging social context of the U.S. All four participants had jobs alongside their ministry roles. While they emphasized that their primary calling was to preach the gospel, they also took on secondary vocations to meet the high cost of living in the United States. Notably, bi-vocationalism has long been practiced in Western contexts as a means of financial sustainability for pastors (Bentley, 2022, p. 113). This practice is also consistent with experience of other

African missionaries in the West who take on other professions alongside their ministry (Kwiyani, 2014, p. 183). These similar approaches suggest that bi-vocationalism can serve as a valid approach to overcoming economic constraints among diaspora African clergies in the US, provided that ministry remains the primary focus.

Navigating experiences of racism was, to some extent, mediated through regular connections with fellow members of the Kenyan diaspora. Participants reported opportunities to network with other Kenyan immigrants in various social spaces, including meetings at clubs, weddings, and funerals. For example, Stella shared that in her city there was a "club where Kenyans meet mostly on Sundays. You just meet to drink or chat" (Stella, 2024). These communal ties functioned as informal support systems, allowing participants to process their racialized experiences in a more affirming and culturally familiar environment.

From the perspective of diaspora studies, such gatherings exemplify what Adogame (2013, p. 124) terms "contextual factors," which function as dynamic spaces of cultural negotiation rather than fixed identities. Within these diasporic networks, participants were not only finding solace but also actively engaging in processes of cultural translation and identity reconstruction. These networks provided early arenas in which participants could begin to reinterpret and integrate their Kenyan identities within the broader American context, navigating a complex duality of belonging.

In summary, while participants viewed the American context as challenging, especially in relation to economic pressures and racial discrimination, they actively sought ways to navigate those difficulties. Through bi-vocationalism and diasporic solidarity, they forged new hybrid identities, blending professional roles with reaffirmed ethnic and cultural belonging. This process reflects Hall's (1990, p. 222) notion of identity as a "production," always developing and shaped through ongoing engagement with both home and host cultures.

*Ecclesial context*

The key issue in the ecclesial context was the diversity of Anglicanism in the United States. Participants reported encountering a wide range of Anglican traditions. While the Anglican Church in Kenya is predominantly evangelical, the U.S. context presented a more complex and pluralistic landscape. Brittain and McKinnon (2018, pp. 12-13) note that within the Anglican Communion there are diverse traditions, each characterized by "particular emphases, which distinguish it from the others: Anglo-Catholics emphasize the church's traditions; Evangelicals prioritize scripture and the Reformation; Liberals tend to emphasize reason and adaptation to modern society." This diversity was particularly evident in the coexistence of The Episcopal Church (TEC), the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA), and other Anglican bodies in the U.S.

Participants generally described the ACNA as conservative, whereas TEC was understood as liberal but internally divided. Stella described this complexity by noting, "Conservative dioceses can have progressive churches and a progressive diocese can also have churches that are very conservative. So, it's a very complicated thing" (Stella, 2024). This complexity reflects what ecclesiologists have described as ecclesial hybridity, the coexistence of multiple, sometimes conflicting, theological paradigms within a single denominational structure (Avis, 1989, pp. 18-20; Muñoz, 2018, p. 101). As noted previously, three of the participants were serving in TEC whose theological tradition differs from that in Kenya which entailed adaptation. Thus, migrant clergy arriving from more theologically cohesive contexts must negotiate this hybridity as part of their ministerial adaptation (Hock, 2008, p. 244).

*Navigating the Ecclesial Context*

Within migration theology, faith leaders may be seen as both bearers of tradition and agents of contextual adaptation (Adogame, 2013, p. 86). This dual role was evident in how participants navigated the U.S. ecclesial context. In order to minister effectively, they often found themselves modifying or reinterpreting their theological commitments. This adjustment was especially true for those working with TEC, whose theological orientation differs from the more conservative stance of the Anglican Church of Kenya.

For example, Stella recalled a warning from her bishop prior to departure: "When you get to U.S., remember, we only associate with the Anglican Church of North America" (Stella, 2024). Initially placed in an ACNA church upon arrival, Stella was later compelled to transition to TEC after that ACNA congregation indicated it did not accommodate ordained women in ministry roles. This decision illustrates not merely pragmatic adjustment but also theological negotiation, a hallmark of what Ekué (2009, p. 398) describes as the "ability to use religious resources creatively to cope with adversity challenges," wherein African migrant Christians resourcefully respond to new sociocultural and ecclesial environments.

In essence, by accepting ministry roles in more theologically liberal settings, participants transitioned from the conservative frameworks of their home churches to more pluralistic and, at times, progressive expressions in the host context. Such transitions underscore the dynamic nature of migrant identity formation and ministerial vocation, shaped by both attention to tradition and responsiveness to context.

**Hustler-Ecclesial Identity**

In this section, the study explores how a hustler-ecclesial identity emerges in response to the challenging societal and ecclesial context of the United States. The term "hustler-ecclesial" as used here signifies a fusion of two distinct but interrelated concepts. The term "hustler" commonly refers to someone who works tirelessly, is entrepreneurial, and employs creative or unconventional methods to achieve success. In migratory contexts, "hustling extends to wider acts of navigating precarious urban environments, invoking light-footed, quick-minded, ever-adaptive rhythms of urban life" (Hall, 2021, p. 89).

The term "ecclesial" pertains to the church, particularly the institutional, communal, and spiritual dimensions of Christian worship and ministry. As ordained ministers, the participants projected an ecclesial identity particularly in their status and work within the Anglican institution. In this context, the "hustler-ecclesial" concept refers not merely to socioeconomic striving but to a broader existential and ministerial struggle experienced by the participants during their time in the U.S.

The theme of "hustle" was an underlying narrative in all the interviews. But the concept is also culturally resonant in Kenya, where it denotes a mode of resilience and striving amid socio-economic uncertainty (Thieme, 2017, p. 6). When carried over to the migratory context of the West, this interpretation aligns with Adogame's (2013, p. 99) observation that "the immigrant is not concerned primarily with adaptation and integration but with economic, social, cultural and psychological survival."

Accordingly, the participants' experiences, grappling with the high cost of living, encounters with racism, and navigating Anglican expressions can be framed as a struggle for survival, or "hustle" expressed through bi-vocational ministry, the reaffirmation of ethnic identity, and theological adaptation. In doing so, they forged a "hustler-ecclesial identity" shaped by their engagement with the complex realities of American society and church life.

**Implications**

This study reveals significant missiological implications arising from the experiences of Kenyan Anglican clergy ministering in the United States. These implications challenge traditional paradigms of mission, ecclesial identity, and theological engagement, offering new insights into how mission is practiced and embodied in migratory contexts.

*Mission as Adaptive and Contextual*

The participants demonstrate that mission is not a fixed enterprise but a dynamic and adaptive process. Their responses to economic hardship, theological diversity, and ecclesial exclusion reveal that mission is locally negotiated and shaped by lived realities. Rather than following a single theological blueprint, these ministers engage in what Stephen Bevans (2002, pp. 71–79) calls a "contextual theology," wherein theology is shaped through interaction with a specific sociocultural context. Their bi-vocational practices, ecclesial realignments, and theological adjustments embody a missiology rooted in praxis, improvisation, and embodied reflection.

*Diaspora as a Space of Theological Production*

The study confirms the diaspora as a vital locus of theological innovation. In navigating host ecclesial contexts and cultural dislocation, African clergy do not merely preserve inherited theology but reinterpret it in light of new social and ecclesial challenges. This reinterpretation supports Kwiyani's (2020, pp. 109–124) notion of "multicultural ecclesiology," where migrant pastors serve as agents of mission and theological reimagination in their host societies. Diaspora, in this sense, is not merely a condition of marginality but a site for theological creativity and ecclesial transformation.

*Bi-vocational Ministry as Missional Modality*

The widespread adoption of bi-vocationalism among participants reflects more than economic necessity: it constitutes a strategic missional model. This dual engagement with secular employment and church ministry mirrors the tentmaking approach of early Christian missionaries. By embedding themselves in both church and society, clergy foster incarnational ministry while also sustaining themselves materially. This dual involvement aligns with emerging missiological thought that affirms bi-vocationalism as an effective approach to mission in economically constrained and culturally complex environments (Bentley, 2022, p. 2).

*Race and Power as Missiological Realities*

The participants' encounters with racism in American society and within church structures underscore the need to place issues of race and power at the heart of missiological reflection. The marginalization of African clergy within predominantly white ecclesial contexts—particularly in conservative Anglican expressions—reveals ongoing asymmetries in church leadership and inclusion. This situation supports Adogame's (2013, p. 86) argument that African migrants must often navigate structural and symbolic exclusions. A robust missiology must therefore engage questions of racial justice, ecclesial equity, and the deconstruction of whiteness in mission.

*Rethinking Ecclesial Belonging*

The diversity within American Anglicanism, spanning ACNA, TEC, and other expressions, compelled participants to make difficult ecclesial choices. Gender inclusion, theological liberalism, and ecclesial polity became points of discernment. These experiences challenge static notions of denominational belonging and demand a flexible ecclesiology capable of navigating pluralism. African clergy, often formed in more conservative ecclesial settings, must

recalibrate their theological frameworks to engage meaningfully within host traditions. This need to adapt reaffirms that ecclesiology, like mission, is relational, negotiated, and lived (Muñoz, 2018, p. 101).

## Conclusion

This study's research had set out to understand how the societal and Anglican ecclesial context affected the diaspora Kenyan Anglican clergy in their efforts to reach the white American society. The case of four clergy serving white congregations reveals a shift in global missional paradigms. Their ministry is marked by struggle, resilience, and innovation, what might be fittingly termed a "hustler-ecclesial missiology." These clergy emerge as "hustler-ecclesial missionaries," a non-traditional type of missionary birthed in the ministry experiences of contemporary African migrant clergy in the West.

Unlike classical missionary models shaped by institutional sending and theological stability, these missionaries are self-propelled, contextually adaptive, and engaged in both economic survival and spiritual service. Their witness is forged in the crucible of economic inequality, ecclesial complexity, and racialized social landscapes. As such, these clergy exemplify a form of mission that is both incarnational and improvisational, embodying the gospel through fluid identities, hybrid ecclesiology, and bi-vocational commitment. This tapestry calls for a missiology that recognizes hybridity, economic hardship, racial injustice, and theological fluidity not as threats, but as realities through which mission takes new and contextual forms.

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# Navigating the Lived Experiences of Ugandan Christian TikTok Consumers in South Korea

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Published in *Global Missiology*, www.globalmissiology.org, October 2025

## Abstract

This study explores how Ugandan Christians in South Korea use TikTok to navigate their diasporic experiences, focusing on identity construction, community engagement, and cultural negotiation. While existing research highlights social media's role in diasporic cultural preservation, few studies examine TikTok's impact on African diaspora communities, particularly in Asian contexts. Through qualitative analysis of TikTok content and user interviews, this research reveals that the platform enables religious expression, cultural adaptation, and cultural connectivity. Findings show TikTok serves as a tool for sustaining Ugandan Christian identity while fostering integration in South Korea. The study underscores TikTok's significance in diasporic digital practices, offering insights into religion, migration, and digital media's evolving role.

**Key Words:** African migrants, digital diaspora, digital practices, religious expression

## Introduction

In a media-wired world, diasporic communities are turning to social media not just for communication but as vital spaces where identity, culture, and faith are negotiated. Scholars of religion, media, and diaspora such as Campbell and Golan (2011, p. 712) and Zaid et al. (2022) acknowledge that faith is not merely communicated through digital platforms: rather, it is also reshaped by them. Digital religion as a field of study has shifted its focus from traditional institutional settings like churches and mosques to the decentralized, relational, and often digitalized ways religious life is practiced through screens, networks, and digital devices (Evolvi, 2021, p. 4). For their part, diaspora studies have started to examine how migrant communities utilize digital media to sustain identity construction, community engagement, and cultural negotiation that span across borders (Bava, 2011, 22; Evolvi, 2017, p. 221). While research on African Christian diasporas in Western contexts is expanding, little attention has been given to African communities in Asia, particularly regarding religion and digital media. Studies show how African Christian migrants use digital tools for cultural preservation, advocacy, and religious life, but mostly in North American and European contexts, often overlooking the lived experiences of east Asian migrant communities like South Korea (Nyamnjoh, 2021, p. 15; Adogame, 2013, p. 45; Brinkerhoff, 2009, p. 33; Dekker et al., 2018, p. 5; Amaefula, 2024, p. 8).

While Ugandan Christians in South Korea may also use platforms like WhatsApp, YouTube, KakaoTalk, and Facebook, this study examines how Ugandan Christian migrants in South Korea use TikTok to sustain their identity, build community, and sustain their spirituality outside traditional church buildings. South Korea is a largely homogenous society unfamiliar with African traditions, beliefs, and customs. Religion, particularly Christianity, plays a central role in the identity and social life of many African diaspora communities (Rocha & Openshaw, 2024, p. 206) and this applies to Ugandan migrants as well. As such, digital media becomes vital for asserting presence, resisting marginalization, and sustaining cultural and religious identity. African Christian migrants often use digital platforms to continue participating in worship, share spiritual reflections, follow religious leaders from home, and connect with

fellow believers globally. Scholar Ardila Putri (2025, p. 51) notes the growing importance of digital religion in diasporic contexts, where platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and increasingly TikTok become "digital sanctuaries" where religious practice is adapted, performed, and reimagined.

This article examines select TikTok practices of Ugandan Christians in South Korea, including daily devotional shorts, virtual choir challenges, Pastor TikTok live, cultural Bible memes in Luganda—all of which are complementary to traditional religious authority and are mutually developed through everyday interactions and digital creativity (Evolvi, 2023, p. 89). Through digital interviews engagement, the study investigates how Ugandan Christians navigate and sustain identity construction, community engagement, and cultural negotiation that span borders. In this way the article contributes to the scholarly discourse in both digital religion and diaspora studies in Asia by explaining how migrants create new ways to sustain and promote identity construction, community engagement, and cultural negotiation in places where they are underrepresented, understudied, and often face cultural invisibility and racial exclusion.

**Context: Ugandan Christians in South Korea**

It has been nearly two decades since South Korea and Uganda encouraged their bilateral cooperation in economic development, particularly in agriculture, infrastructure, and human resources. They also collaborate on health initiatives, technology transfer, and education exchange (Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Uganda). South Korea is slowly becoming an important destination for Ugandan students under the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), with a growing of Korean universities offering scholarships or private sponsorship for Ugandan students. According to the Ugandan Community in South Korea there are about 600 Ugandans (mostly students) living in South Korea as of 2023 (Kirabo, 2024), although there are not specific statistics on Ugandan Christians or other religious affiliations. Due to various challenges faced by Ugandans, such as cultural differences, racial discrimination, and language barriers, many turn to social media like TikTok for identity construction, community engagement, cultural negotiation, and a sense of belonging in a context where they often feel marginalized.

For Ugandan Christians living in South Korea, navigating religious life involves a complex set of challenges shaped by cultural, racial, linguistic, and structural differences within the Korean Christian landscape. Although Christianity is widely practiced in South Korea, with approximately 30% of the population identifying as Christian (Lesage et al., 2024, p. 23), churches often fail to accommodate the liturgical practices, theological emphases, familiar seasonal observances and communal needs of African migrant communities. In response to these exclusions, many have turned to digital platforms like TikTok—not merely for entertainment, but as vital spaces for religious expression, education, virtual fellowship, and community support. This shift illustrates how marginalized religious groups creatively use digital media to construct and sustain faith, identity, and belonging in diasporic contexts where they are often underrepresented and overlooked.

In the absence of consistent access to physical worship spaces, Ugandan Christian migrants in South Korea have constructed robust digital networks that transcend geographic limitations, enabling both transnational and intra-national religious connections. While platforms like Facebook and YouTube facilitate livestreamed services, virtual prayer meetings, and recorded sermons that replicate communal worship in digital form, TikTok has emerged as a uniquely vital space for religious expression, education, and virtual fellowship. Its short-form,

algorithm-driven format aligns with the fast-paced lifestyle of South Korea, allowing migrants to engage in bite-sized theological discussions, share testimonies, and participate in collaborative worship through features like duets and stitches. Meanwhile, applications such as WhatsApp serve as critical organizational tools, enabling dispersed members to circulate announcements, coordinate prayer requests, and mobilize financial support through donation appeals. Informal religious collectives—such as the Anglican Community in South Korea—operate without formal institutional recognition, relying instead on these layered digital infrastructures to sustain liturgical practices, organize events, and reinforce a collective identity that merges Ugandan Christian traditions with diasporic adaptation strategies (Okechukwu, 2023, pp. 118–122).

This empirical context of Ugandan Christians in South Korea illustrates how digital religion functions within migrant communities, particularly in host societies where formal religious institutions fail to accommodate ethnic and theological diversity. TikTok, in particular, addresses gaps left by conventional platforms: its accessibility and virality make it a key site for religious education (e.g., Scripture summaries in Luganda or English), community support (e.g., hashtag-driven advocacy), and the preservation of cultural-specific worship practices (e.g., Ugandan hymns). By analyzing these self-structured digital networks, Ugandan Christians can interrogate broader questions of belonging, hybrid religiosity, and the negotiation of faith in diasporic spaces not originally designed to include pluralistic expressions of worship. The use of TikTok highlights how communities influence platform-specific affordances to counteract exclusion, blending spiritual resilience in a technologically saturated society like South Korea.

**Literature Review: Digital Diaspora, Religious Expression, and African Migrants in Asia**

The proliferation of digital platforms has fundamentally transformed how diasporic communities negotiate identity, belonging, and religious practice across transnational contexts (Brinkerhoff, 2009, p. 42; Diminescu, 2008, p. 567). Ugandan Christians in South Korea present a compelling case study of how marginalized migrant groups utilize TikTok—a platform characterized by short-form, algorithmically-curated content—to assert cultural agency within an ethnically homogeneous host society (Hall, 2015, p. 396). While existing research has established the significance of digital diasporas (Bernal, 2014, pp. 80-85) and transnational religious networks critical gaps persist regarding how African Christian communities in Asia employ emerging social media platforms for identity work. This review synthesizes three interconnected bodies of literature: (1) digital diaspora studies, (2) religion and social media, and (3) African migration to Asia, positing that TikTok functions as both an empowering and constraining space for performative identity construction, religious community-building, and cultural negotiation.

Contemporary scholarship underscores social media's dual function in sustaining homeland connections while facilitating host society adaptation (Bernal 2014, p. 82; Diminescu, 2008, p. 570). For Ugandan migrants in South Korea who navigate racial marginalization and cultural isolation, TikTok's visual storytelling affordances and algorithmic discoverability enable innovative hybrid identity performances (Hall, 2015, p. 398). However, this optimistic narrative demands critical examination. As Green et al. (2022, p. 12) illustrate, TikTok's commercial logic and attention economy frequently prioritize sensational content over nuanced cultural expression, potentially reducing complex diasporic experiences to reductive stereotypes. This tension reflects broader debates in digital diaspora studies, where platforms simultaneously amplify migrant voices while subjecting them to novel forms of algorithmic governance (Román-Velázquez & Retis, 2021, p. 75). The Ugandan case thus reveals both the

emancipatory potential and regulatory challenges of identity work within platformized digital environments.

Digital religion scholarship has increasingly focused on how religious communities adapt to social media platforms' affordances and constraints (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020, p. 8). For Ugandan Christians in South Korea, TikTok operates as what Hutchings (2017, p. 95) conceptualizes as a "digital sanctuary"—a space for disseminating sermons, gospel music, and testimonies that sustains transnational religious practice. This phenomenon aligns with Asamoah-Gyadu's (2021, p. 125) findings regarding African Pentecostal media cultures, where digital platforms facilitate the extension of religious authority beyond geographical boundaries. Nevertheless, the Ugandan context reveals distinctive tensions. Unlike the bounded digital enclaves identified by Campbell and Golan (2011, p. 715), TikTok's algorithmic curation persistently exposes religious content to unanticipated audiences, generating both evangelistic opportunities and risks of cultural appropriation. Comparative research on Indonesian Muslim migrants in South Korea (Ardila Putri, 2025, p. 58) indicates these dynamics may be especially pronounced for religious minorities in East Asian contexts, where platform governance frequently mirrors local cultural and political norms.

Emerging literature on African diasporas in Asia (Bodomo, 2012, p. 210) has yet to comprehensively address social media's role in mediating migrant experiences. Ugandan TikTokers in South Korea leverage the platform's creative tools to challenge racial stereotypes and foster solidarity—strategies analogous to those documented by Zaid et al. (2022) among Muslim digital influencers. However, as Rocha and Openshaw's (2024, p. 215) research on African diasporas in Australia warns, digital platforms cannot entirely overcome structural integration barriers. The Ugandan case prompts crucial questions regarding how platform design—particularly TikTok's recommendation algorithms—may unintentionally perpetuate the marginalization of African content in Asian digital spaces. Ko et al.'s (2025, p. 907) examination of migrant workers' linguistic difficulties suggests these platform dynamics intersect with broader exclusion patterns in South Korean society.

Current digital diaspora research exhibits three primary limitations: first, a Western-centric orientation that overlooks African-Asian migration (Mandaville, 2011, p. 15); second, excessive reliance on content analysis at the expense of lived experiences perspectives (Evolvi, 2021, p. 225); and third, inadequate attention to platform impact on diasporic expression. Future investigations should employ decolonized frameworks to prioritize Ugandan migrants' lived experiences of algorithmic visibility and suppression. Ethnographic methodologies combining platform walkthroughs (Light et al., 2018, p. 430) with creator interviews could elucidate how religious communities navigate TikTok's commercial imperatives. Comparative studies across African diasporas in Asia (e.g., Bodomo, 2012, p. 215) might reveal platform-specific cultural resistance patterns.

## Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the lived experiences of Ugandan Christians using TikTok in South Korea. Two primary methods were employed: (1) content analysis of TikTok videos and (2) oral interviews with users. The research was conducted between January and June 2023, focusing on Ugandan Christian migrants in Korea. A total of ten Ugandans Christians were contacted. Of the ten, two accepted for be part of the interviews but later changed their minds and never participated. Five never responded to a request to be interviewed. Only three accepted to interviewed. Another two interviewees were obtained through recommendation. The interviews were mostly conducted in Luganda, a dialect spoken

in central Uganda. The interviews were about 30 minutes each, and all interviews had to be manually translated and transcribed.

**Results and Discussion**

The analysis of the interviews revealed three primary ways Ugandan Christians use TikTok: supportive interaction, cultural connection, and spiritual engagement among diasporic communities. These results align with existing literature on TikTok's capacity to sustain identity construction, community engagement, and cultural negotiation, while also highlighting TikTok's unique affordances in facilitating real-time, interactive, and culturally resonant communication.

*Supportive Interaction*

TikTok has enabled Ugandans in diaspora—including in South Korea—to connect with Ugandans at home. Content analysis showed that 60% of videos posted by diaspora Ugandans received comments from Uganda-based users, fostering a sense of community. Consumers used TikTok's duet and stitch features to collaborate with Ugandan creators, reinforcing homeland ties. Mary, a 25-year-old consumer noted, "This message was meant for me! Thank you for sharing such inspiring content. I needed to hear this today." Another consumer, Kizito, expressed appreciation explaining that "TikTok helps him communicate with friends and be in touch with people back home" (personal communication, May 2024).

TikTok's interactive features, such as comments, direct messaging, and live streaming, facilitate real-time engagement with both content creators and fellow viewers, fostering a sense of community and immediacy. This interaction allows users to share their thoughts, ask questions, and offer support, creating a network of mutual encouragement and solidarity. These interactions align with Boyd's (2014) observations on social media's capacity to build networked publics, where users form communities of mutual support. For Ugandan Christians in South Korea, TikTok serves as a digital space to contest against isolation, share experiences, and foster solidarity, reinforcing a sense of belonging despite physical distance from their homeland.

*Cultural Connection*

TikTok has facilitated cultural connection by enabling users to share, remix, and engage with diverse traditions through creative, interactive content. John, a 28-year-old migrant, explained, "In a highly racist country like this one, TikTok keeps me going. At least I am in-touch with my culture and I forget my misery here" (personal communication, April 2024).

Anna, another TikTok consumer, noted that "Favour flavia Nkibuuka's TikTok videos remind me of the cultural values and traditions we share as Ugandan Christians, even though we're miles away from home in South Korea." John, mentioned above, also explained that "nahumitasarah's TikTok videos make me feel proud of my Ugandan heritage while also embracing the new experiences of living in South Korea."

TikTok's ability to deliver culturally relevant content helps preserve cultural identity and supports diasporic individuals in navigating dual identities in foreign settings (Bhandari and Bimo, 2020, p.2739). It creates a virtual space where users can share and celebrate elements of Ugandan culture such as language, music, and religion, enabling those in the diaspora to remain connected to and engaged with their heritage, even while living abroad.

*Spiritual Engagement*

TikTok has served as a platform for expressing Ugandan Christian identity. Content analysis showed that 70% of videos included religious themes, such as gospel music performances, prayer sessions, and Bible verse recitations. Interviews revealed that participants used TikTok to strengthen their faith, with one participant, Sarah, stating, "In this country everything is fast so TikTok gives me instant motivation and encouragement for the day. So it's convenient for me" (personal communication, March 2024). The desire for spiritual engagement with others was a theme that developed throughout the interviews. However, this theme was experienced in different ways. Sarah further pointed out that "TikTok videos always challenge me to dive deeper into Scripture and reflect on my relationship with God. Thank you for keeping me spiritually grounded." John explained that "I appreciate how your TikTok content not only entertains but also prompts me to pray and seek God's guidance in my life in real time." Kizito agreed when he stated, "TikTok prayers are so heartfelt and sincere. They remind me of the importance of connecting with God daily in a short period of time."

TikTok enhances spiritual engagement for Ugandan Christians in Korea by providing a space for sharing religious content and facilitating virtual worship, aligning with Campbell and Tsuria's findings on digital faith practices. The platform's features support real-time spiritual interactions and community building, helping maintain religious identity in a diasporic context. TikTok clearly holds significance as a platform for spiritual expression and engagement. Users like GraceInKorea use TikTok to share gospel music, prayers, and Bible verses, creating a "digital church" that transcends physical boundaries, as described by interviewee Sarah. This phenomenon aligns with Campbell and Tsuria's (2020) findings on digital platforms facilitating virtual worship and religious identity maintenance. TikTok's interactive features, such as comments and live streaming, enable users to engage in real-time spiritual practices, fostering a sense of community worship. The diversity of spiritual engagement ranging from scripture sharing to prayer demonstrates TikTok's flexibility in supporting varied expressions of faith, which is particularly valuable for diasporic Christians seeking to maintain their religious identity in a new cultural context.

## Implications

This study has several implications for migration and media studies. Theoretically, it contributes to the literature by addressing the understudied intersection of African diaspora, religion, and TikTok in Asian contexts. The study expands on Wang's framework (2022) on TikTok's cultural impact by demonstrating its role in diasporic identity construction. Practically, the findings suggest that digital platforms like TikTok can support migrant integration by fostering cultural exchange and community building. Policymakers and community organizations could leverage TikTok to create programs that promote cultural understanding between African migrants and South Korean locals.

In addition, these findings illustrate TikTok's role as a dynamic platform that not only sustains individual and collective identities but also facilitates integration into a new cultural environment. By enabling supportive interactions, cultural connections, spiritual engagement, and encouragement, TikTok empowers Ugandan Christians in South Korea to navigate the complexities of diaspora life. The platform's real-time, interactive, and visual nature enhances its effectiveness as a tool for community building and identity preservation, aligning with broader theories of digital media's role in transnational migration (Gillespie, 2020; Boyd, 2014). However, the reliance on TikTok also raises questions about accessibility, digital literacy, and the potential for algorithmic biases to shape content visibility, questions that future research

could explore. Future research could also explore other African diaspora groups or platforms to compare TikTok's role across contexts. Additionally, quantitative studies could examine the scale of TikTok's impact on diaspora communities, complementing this study's qualitative insights.

## Conclusion

This study set out to explore how Ugandan Christian migrants in South Korea are using TikTok as a dynamic space to navigate faith, identity, and belonging in a foreign and often unaccommodating cultural landscape. In a national context where churches rarely reflect the liturgical rhythms or communal needs of African Christians, TikTok has emerged as a vital platform for sustaining religious life, fostering community, and affirming cultural identity. Through oral interviews and digital content analysis, this research has illuminated how Ugandan Christians creatively engage with digital media not only to adapt but to reimagine and extend their spiritual practices in diaspora.

This study demonstrates that TikTok serves as a critical socioreligious infrastructure for Ugandan Christians in South Korea, enabling not just cultural preservation but active identity reconstruction within diasporic constraints. Through practices like devotional shorts, virtual choirs, and live Q&A sessions, migrants transform TikTok's algorithmic space into a site of sacred innovation—where networked prayer, crowdsourced worship, and meme-based theology circumvent the exclusions of Korea's homogeneous Christian landscape. The findings reveal that these digital adaptations constitute neither diluted faith nor mere survival strategies, but rather agentive world-making.

Finally, the research reframes digital religion as embodied resilience, challenging narratives of online spirituality as disembodied or diminished. Ugandan TikTok practices—from Luganda Bible memes to stitched testimonies—demonstrate how platformized faith sustains emotional depth and communal bonds while negotiating racial, linguistic, and algorithmic marginalization. Future studies should explore how these digitally native rituals feed back into physical congregations, revealing the increasingly porous boundaries between online and offline religious experience in migration contexts. This work thus advances diaspora media studies by centering African Christian innovation in Asia, while offering policymakers and religious leaders models for supporting digitally mediated migrant communities.

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# Diaspora Identities and Multi-Ethnic Churches

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Published in *Global Missiology*, www.globalmissiology.org, October 2025

## Abstract

Racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse contexts create unique challenges for Christian diaspora peoples at the intersection of their ethnic and Christian identities. This article draws on previous research to describe a strategy available to ethnic minority Christians for navigating this tension in the context of multi-ethnic church communities (Parker, 2024). This strategy derives from a theological analysis of theories of race and ethnicity combined with a missional account of cohesion in racially and ethnically diverse churches.

**Key Words:** race, ethnicity, unity, cohesion, ecclesiology, multi-ethnic church, multi-cultural church

## Introduction

The multi-directional and dynamic movement of peoples around the world is creating an ever-evolving and complex context in which Christians and Christian communities must embody their personal, ecclesial, and missional commitments. Challenges abound for local churches seeking to discern the shape faithfulness to those commitments should take amidst the diversity of the race-ethnic identities of the peoples inhabiting the social and geographic landscapes in which they exist. Likewise, challenges exist for diaspora communities seeking to navigate a tension between their personal race-ethnic identities and commitments to their Christian identities in new ethnically and culturally complex homes. Specifically, to what degree can and should minority diaspora communities hold onto their race-ethnic identities amidst hyper-diverse contexts or alongside majority cultures?

One solution to these challenges is the establishment of mono-cultural churches composed of minority cultures living side-by-side one another and majority culture churches in these diverse contexts. Diaspora churches often exist in varying degrees of cooperation with various other churches in their communities, and these diaspora churches face unique challenges resulting from this approach to navigating their race-ethnic and Christian identities. An alternative solution is the creation of multi-ethnic churches, who also face unique challenges. The emergence of diaspora churches raises relevant and interesting ecclesiological and missiological questions, questions that will not be taken up in this brief article. This article will focus on multi-ethnic churches and the promise they hold for navigating the challenge of diaspora identity and lived Christian faithfulness in globalized contexts.

## Race and Ethnicity Are Social Constructs

### *A Brief History of Race and Ethnicity*

Societies throughout the world are shaped significantly by race-ethnic diversity, sometimes in ways that lead to cohesive communities and often in ways that lead to social fracture and instability. Despite their prevalence and social power, race and ethnicity are frequently misunderstood on a conceptual level. What is race? What is ethnicity? Misconceptions about what race and ethnicity are can lead to faulty assumptions about who "we" and "they" are, and how

"we" are different from "them." These faulty assumptions can impair efforts to foster cohesion amidst race-ethnic difference. Accordingly, it is helpful to describe how and why race and ethnicity exist in the world when attempting to develop social and ecclesial responses to the fracture that often exists in communities around race-ethnic diversity.

Race and ethnicity have related yet distinct conceptual histories (Parker, 2024, pp. 31-82). Those histories converged in the twentieth century as both came to be regarded by social scientists as social constructions. That is, the social significance of race-ethnic identities (Parker, 2024, p. 2) derives from dynamic relationships between groups as social actors distinguish themselves from one another, assigning meaning to differences ranging from phenotype to language and culture, creating "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1991).

*Race, Ethnicity, and Boundary Maintenance*

"Actors" is an apt descriptor, for the dynamic relationships that lead to the social construction of race and ethnicity take the form of embodied social narratives that are continuously negotiated and subject to mediated changes. Groups live into stories of kinship and connections, stories about the differences of the "Other," and they enact concrete rhythms in their lives that materialize the difference. For instance: "We" shop here, and "they" shop there. "We" eat this, and "they" eat that.

These material differences are real, but race and ethnicity come to exist and endure because of the significance attributed to them, as society organizes itself around difference. Indeed, the material factors may change over time. However, where the race-ethnic actors continue to acknowledge social boundaries, the racial and ethnic groups persist. What is most important for the continuance of race and ethnicity is that members of race-ethnic groups maintain and perform the implicit and explicit narrative boundaries in a given social context (Barth, 1998, p. 16).

*Race, Ethnicity, and Diaspora Communities*

This race-ethnic process is important for diaspora communities. With the increasing movement of peoples around the world, racial and ethnic identities are increasingly constructed in an interflow of competing and changing dynamics. While a previous generation of scholars predicted that globalization would lead to the assimilation, or "melting," of racial and ethnic identities, this has largely proven not to be the case (Parker, 2024, pp. 40-45). However, while race-ethnic boundaries frequently persist in today's globalizing world, the boundaries are increasingly complex.

Ethnic boundaries, even for minority groups in globalized spaces, can endure, and even be strengthened. A "group's culture, as well as forms of social organization, may change without removing the ethnic boundary," provided the communities in a given context maintain the embodied narratives of difference (Erikson, 2010, p. 45). However, these changes will frequently result in hybrid identities in the interplay of new contexts and transnational relationships for diaspora communities (Werbner, 1997). Indeed, as Schreiter writes, "When cultures come into contact, they constantly borrow and reconfigure themselves through new knowledge and practices" (Schreiter, 2011, p. 31), resulting in changes to both host culture and diaspora culture identities, without forcing the eradication of either.

## The Embodied Context of Lived Christian Faithfulness

Race-ethnic identities are complex social processes, especially for diaspora communities. Complexities for these communities do not stop with the dynamic negotiation of racial and ethnic

identities over time and across geographic spaces. There is an important and dynamic relationship that exists specifically for *Christian* race-ethnic communities. Namely, Christian identity, Christian community, and Christian practice all exist within racially and ethnically situated lives.

James K. A. Smith argues persuasively that all forms of socially constructed identities entail "liturgical" or "religious" processes (Smith, 2009). Drawing on an anthropology grounded in the Augustinian tradition, Smith describes human persons as fundamentally "lovers." That is, the narrative and embodied structures of socially constructed identities, like race and ethnicity, will always be related to what a community construes as good and worthy of affection and devotion. As a result, race-ethnic imaginations produce performances with specific race-ethnic, identity-affected visions of good, and these performances manifest in morally dense patterns. The construction of race-ethnic identities impacts in specific ways desire and moral character, frequently resulting in patterns of "counter-discipleship" for Christians.

*Race-ethnic Counter-discipleship*

The relationship between identity and desire creates a tension for Christian communities when race-ethnic group commitments are at odds with faithful Christian commitments. Two fundamental aspects of a person's identity—their race-ethnic identity and their Christian identity—are brought into conflict. The scriptural language for this tension is found in Paul's appeal to the Christians in Rome: "Do not be conformed to this world…" (English Standard Version, 2001, Romans 12:2). There are patterns embedded in the construction of race-ethnic identities that act as modes of counter-discipleship to lived faithful Christianity (Parker, 2024, pp. 94-95).

*Racism and the Subversion of Lived Christian Faithfulness*

An example of this race-ethnic counter-discipleship that looms large over the history of the whole of today's world is the relationship of Western Christianity to modern racism. History demonstrates that there is a calamitous relationship between the Church and the development of systemic racism in the West, where "the modern racializing of bodies" derives from the ways in which "Christian identity was reimagined…" as Western and "White" (Carter, 2008, p. 372). The racism that has resulted from Western history's construction of racial identities within the context of its own Christian identity has functioned as an acute and destructive influence both inside and outside the Church.

For instance, Mark Noll has described the nineteenth-century Civil War of the United States as a theological crisis (Noll, 2006). Religion, for the white Protestant majority of the antebellum U.S. population, was "more important than any other center of value at work in the country" (Noll, 2006, pp. 11-14). Nonetheless, in a complex and contorted relationship between white identity and Christianity, many of these white Christians elevated their racial commitments over their Christian ones. This misplaced identity resulted in the creation of a racialized social system intricately bound together with Christianity. It was a system in which white Christians too often chose, as Jemar Tisby puts it, "compromise" over "courageous Christianity" (Tisby, 2019), subverting lived Christian faithfulness to the demands associated with their racialized identities in ways that continue to dramatically impact the social, political, and religious landscape of the United States (Emerson and Bracey, 2024).

**Multi-ethnic Churches as Spaces of Redemption**

Willie James Jennings writes, "There is within Christianity a breathtakingly powerful way to imagine and enact the social, to imagine and enact connection and belonging" (Jennings, 2010, p. 4). A true account of the story that Christianity announces to the world is one of welcome, belonging, and unity. Although Jennings notes that history exposes too often "a distorted relational imagination" which has compelled the opposite along race-ethnic lines (Jennings, 2010, p. 4), he also sees local churches as uniquely situated to generate productive theological responses to the problem of racial and ethnic division. Local churches are spaces ripe with prophetic and missional potential, where anti-racist or unifying theological ideas can meet and confront context specific race-ethnic narratives that are at odds with lived Christian faithfulness, especially narratives that promote racism or disunity among race-ethnic actors inside and outside of the congregation.

In particular, multi-ethnic churches have unique potential for confronting the challenges associated with racial and ethnic difference in specific contexts. While it is true that racial and ethnic identities exist through patterns that are sometimes at odds with lived Christian faithfulness, race-ethnic identities can also highlight important aspects of faithful Christianity. For instance, cultures that are more inclined towards embodied welcoming of strangers, when intersected with a Christian vision of welcome, can instruct, through their culturally embedded Christian expression, cultures that prioritize privacy and individualism. Likewise, those cultures that are more inclined towards a preference for individualism can shine light on other aspects of lived Christian faithfulness through their own culturally embedded Christian expressions. When these differences are united in multi-ethnic Christian communities, concrete expressions of missional and prophetic witness are possible.

*Dynamics of Power*

Before exploring how diverse race-ethnic communities can pursue this prophetic and missional potential, a caution is necessary. A pernicious challenge that results at the intersection of race-ethnic difference is the misuse of power in relationships across racial and ethnic lines, especially amidst the residue of Western racism and imperialism. This challenge, because of its relationship to race-ethnic narratives and their attendant embodied practices, can often remain hidden, operating below the consciousness of race-ethnic actors, and it can impact the life of a church community.

Elaine Robinson warns of the "danger of paternalism and even neocolonialism in forms of 'inclusion'..." when majority cultures, particularly in Western contexts, invite race-ethnic difference into their churches (Robinson, 2012, p. 92). Reggie Williams, who suggests that "the cure to the problem of a diseased Christian imagination…is empathetic, incarnational action on behalf of…marginalized people (Williams, 2014, p. 140), too, warns that an embrace of the Other "must include awareness of its potential abuses" (Williams, 2014, p. 3). A faithful Christian emphasis on joining in concrete spaces must keep in mind the conditions which frame the structure of that joining in terms of power.

*Mutuality and Self-giving*

Churches can bear witness against the concrete realities of race-ethnic disunity and injustice in the communities in which they are embedded. Those who do so from positions of power must exercise much caution. Nonetheless, they need not let fear of power dynamics forestall the work towards the healthy joining of diverse groups of people as a missional and prophetic community. Instead,

the church must work hard to foster a shared culture of mutuality and self-giving, with those in positions of power being the first to give up cultural preferences and open themselves to change.

Race-ethnic identities, especially in globalized contexts, are already in the midst of change. As described above, this change belongs to the very nature of race-ethnic identity. Change can happen without race-ethnic identities being erased. The fear of "losing one's culture" often animates anxiety and its attendant social animosity and fracture amidst race-ethnic diversity. This frequent development is true for both host cultures and diaspora communities. However, under the conditions of mutuality and self-giving, when infused with gospel-centered narratives of unity and embrace, race-ethnic difference can be preserved while bringing about mutual edification for everyone in living amidst the community's united difference. That is, new embodied rhythms of concrete Christian faithfulness can emerge which allow for difference to exist and at the same time manifest prophetic and missional expressions of edification, unity, and cohesion.

## How It Can Work

This study now leads to its primary question: How? In concrete terms, how can multi-ethnic churches navigate race-ethnic difference in ways that prevent injustice and misuses of power while fostering faithful missional and prophetic witness to the onlooking world, a world for whom fracture along race-ethnic lines is normal? There are at least three steps that are particularly helpful.

### *Embrace the Truth that Christians Are "Mulatto"*

Christian communities must develop an adequate theological account of identity, especially Christian identity. For instance, Brian Bantum has described Christian identity as "mulatto" (Bantum, 2010). In so doing, he attempts to subvert the historically troubled term "mulatto" which referred to mixed-race persons during and in the aftermath of colonialism and slavery in the Americas. For Bantum, Christians are "mulatto" in the sense that their former identities are necessarily upended and changed through their joining to Christ and indwelling by the Spirit. This joining does not erase their previous identity, nor does it make them co-equal or equivalent to God. Instead, something new occurs as "mulatto" Christians" receive in the Spirit a new aspect of their lived identities that points beyond old patterns of being. This new aspect entails being conjoined to the body of Christ and His community of faith from within the context of their race-ethnic selves.

To name the Christian as mulatto is to claim that Christians, through their union with Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit, can and should embody patterns of existence that are not *constrained* by race-ethnic logics. Whereas race-ethnic logics exist under conditions of "we" are not "them," mulatto Christian identity insists that "we" are united with "them" in Christ. The Christian is the one who is no longer simply who he or she was before Christ; he or she is bound to Christ and bound to others, others who are often "other." This binding has become a real aspect of their new person without destroying their old person. Hybridity is no longer a sociological fact; it is a theological one. And this theological account of identity creates the expectation that racially and ethnically situated persons can hold onto those identities safely while opening themselves to deep connections, relationships, and modes of embodied existence with the "other." A concrete effort to foster race-ethnic unity, for Christian communities, begins with embracing a theology of the person that explicitly recognizes the urgency of unity across lines and in the midst of race-ethnic difference for Christian persons.

*Identify the Operative Narratives*

With a sufficient theological account of identity in place, churches can better identify and understand the specific race-ethnic narratives operative in their community. Every person in a congregation will have a specific sense of self that will have been formed through race-ethnic embodied narratives. The specific narratives and attendant practices will vary from context to context. However, all race-ethnic actors in a church are necessarily negotiating their own identity in relation to the Christian community of the church.

These race-ethnic identities will exist on a continuum in terms of commitments to those race-ethnic identities, and they will all be hybrid and contingent to one degree or another. Wherever specific people land on the continuum of commitment to a particular race-ethnic identity, those specific race-ethnic narratives of understanding and identity for individual race-ethnic persons will have been fashioned from social narratives that they will have encountered throughout their personal history. The narratives against which their personal stories of identity will have been shaped will exist in tension, especially to their concomitant Christian identity, as those stories have encountered race-ethnic fracture, injustice, violence, and the like. A "mulatto" (or similar) theological account of identity creates a safe space in which congregations can have honest conversations about the ways their pursuits of lived Christian faithfulness are impacted by their race-ethnic commitments. By identifying those specific embodied narratives, the community can clearly identify the ways that edification, mutuality, and self-giving can take specific shapes within the Christian community.

Race-ethnic actors will have uniquely negotiated identities between their race-ethnic selves and their Christian commitments. Likewise, the church will have its own cultural shape. It will similarly have been shaped by its rooted history in a specific context and the histories of its participants. Moreover, the church community will reflect the story of its relationship to the society in which it is embedded, sometimes through embrace, sometimes through prophetic protest, and often unconsciously. The embrace and the protest can flow in multiple directions which, in some ways will likely reflect desired Christian values and commitments, and in other ways will run counter to desired Christian values and commitments. Because narratives often simply "are," because they do not derive from intentionality and exist unconsciously, each specific church will be required to reckon with and describe its own narrative, including its unconscious assumptions, before a praxis of cohesion tethered to intentional embodied narratives of cohesion can be formed. Such growth requires a sort of spiritual ethnography. This need not be a complicated process, but it does require intentionality.

*Script an Embodied Narrative of Cohesion*

A spiritual ethnography can be led by someone with experience in qualitative research methods. A spiritual ethnography, simply stated, is a process whereby members of the church are guided to describe the relationship of their race-ethnic identities and their Christian identities as well as the culture of the church itself. Culturally preferred Christian practices can be identified along with the stories those practices reveal about who people are and how they understand lived Christian faithfulness: how to pray, how to express devotion, how to care for one another, how to show welcome, etc. An example of such a process can be found in *Embodied Cohesion: A Framework for Fostering Race-Ethnic Cohesion in Local Churches* (Parker, 2024).

This spiritual-ethnographic process of identifying and describing a church's own identity allows for both an evaluation of that corporate identity—noticing unconscious or unstated narratives that contort faithful expressions of lived Christianity—and for a reconfiguring of that identity based on the diversity of its community—a reconfiguring tethered to the promise of unity amidst its diversity.

To avoid unjust abuses of power, churches must pay special attention to allow for race-ethnic identities, especially for minority and diaspora communities, to persist. That persistence can take place with the understanding that these identities are malleable, contingent, and hybrid. The identities can and will evolve in relation to the Christian community, while at the same time, they may remain as essential for many members of the community. Indeed, when a specific member of the church brings their own history and person into the community, they bring resources attendant with those histories and person-specific stories which can be of value to the life of the church community and its equally contingent hybridity. Indeed, God's Spirit works through this melding of unity that resists conformity to accomplish God's own missional purposes in and through the community in those specific local places.

Once a robust understanding of the embodied culture of the congregation and the relationship of the various members of the congregation to it exists, the church will have the resources necessary to then work together to forge a new shared culture that is shaped under conditions of edification, mutuality, and self-giving. Cultural preferences can be shared. New shared meanings can be forged in an ongoing process of giving and receiving.

**Conclusion**

Read theologically, race and ethnicity feature prominently in a biblical theological account of human history. Mankind's story, according to the total biblical account, unfolds as unity and fracture in the book of Genesis, followed by restored unity in John's book, Revelation. However, and importantly, the story of restored unity is one in which difference is preserved. Difference exists, but it no longer exists as fracture. Instead, it exists as an integrated whole, one people of God in Christ from every tribe, nation, and tongue.

While humanity must wait for that glorious future to be fully revealed, a foretaste can exist amidst the fracture and brokenness of the world's present postlapsarian state, especially in contexts that experience dynamic movements of diaspora communities. That foretaste becomes especially visible, with missional and prophetic promise, in multi-ethnic churches. The development of cohesive multi-ethnic churches is not easy, but the Spirit of the living God, a Spirit of unity and reconciliation, can work to bring this about when churches give themselves intentionality to this pursuit. They need the Spirit's leading and a plan, or framework.

A framework for pursuing race-ethnic cohesion in local churches should include:

1. A process of clarifying the specific narratives that are animated in the church in relation to identity and belonging,
2. An integrated process of identifying the specific practices that embody the narratives,
3. An evaluation of those narratives and practices with respect to the values which the church desires to see shape renewed narratives which foster or strengthen cohesion, paying close attention to
    a. the specific dynamics of power difference that are operative, and

   b. creating a context in which race-ethnic identities can persist amidst a new, hybrid, shared cultural identity within the community, and
4. Finally, a commitment to developing the narrative-shaped culture that is desired through specific embodied practices (Parker, 2024, pp. 233-234).

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# Between Two Worlds: Identity-Theological Reflections of Second-Generation Chinese Christians in Germany—A Case Study

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Published in *Global Missiology*, www.globalmissiology.org, October 2025

## Abstract

This article explores the identity-theological dynamics of second-generation Chinese Christians (ZGCC) in Germany by examining two contrasting congregational models in two major cities. Drawing on qualitative fieldwork—including participant observation and ten interviews with youth, parents, and church leaders—the study investigates how ZGCC navigate their bicultural heritage within the Chinese Christian diaspora and in relation to the German Christian context. Conceptually grounded in research on migration and diaspora, as well as on congregational typologies, the study reveals that Chinese identity plays a crucial yet ambivalent role in shaping ZGCC's self-understanding, communal belonging, and theological reflection. The article analyzes structural church models (Transfer vs. Duplex), linguistic and generational tensions, and hybrid faith expressions. It argues that the ZGCC embody a distinct form of contextualized faith that resists binary identity frameworks and instead integrates Chinese and German elements in a theologically meaningful way. Possible implications for church structure, leadership development, and intergenerational integration are discussed. The study concludes by proposing further avenues for theological and missiological research on this topic.

**Key Words:** second-generation Chinese Christians, bicultural identity, Chinese churches in Germany, intergenerational tensions, cultural hybridity, identity-theological reflection, Duplex church model, Diaspora Theology

## Introduction

The Chinese Christian church in Germany (Ma, 2025; Ma & Chen, 2025a, 2025b)[1] is a diasporic phenomenon that has grown since the late twentieth century, giving rise to congregations of first-generation Chinese immigrants and now their German-raised children. These second-generation Chinese Christians (ZGCC) occupy a bicultural space (Benet-Martínez et al., 2002; Berry, 1997; Bhabha, 2012; LaFromboise et al., 1993)—often born or brought up in Germany while rooted in Chinese heritage—and they navigate between Chinese church traditions and the German societal context.[2] This study explores how Chinese ethnic identity intersects with the Christian faith of the ZGCC. In particular, this article asks: *What significance does Chinese identity hold for the Christian faith of second-generation Chinese Christians? Further, how is cultural identity perceived by ZGCC within the diasporic Chinese-Christian context, and how is it negotiated within the German Christian context?*

These questions probe the heart of a hybrid identity: ZGCC must reconcile the cultural heritage and social present in their spiritual lives. In practical terms, many Chinese diaspora churches in Germany are wrestling with generational transitions—the "intergenerational tensions" that emerge as the German-raised youth develop different perspectives on faith and community than their immigrant parents (H.-S. Lee & Kim, 2014, pp. 106–107). The implications of these dynamics are far-reaching: unresolved tensions could lead to a "generational break" or even a "silent exodus" (H. Lee, 1996) of youth from the immigrant churches, while successful integration of the second generation could transform these communities into bridges between Chinese and German Christian worlds. By examining identity and theology (and setting aside for now practical missionary strategies), this article

aims to shed light on how being Chinese shapes the faith of the second generation, how young Chinese Christians perceive their cultural-religious identity in diaspora, how they negotiate that identity in the German context, and what these processes could mean for the future of Chinese churches in Germany.

## Research Focus and Method

This study focuses exclusively on the identity and theological self-understanding of second-generation Chinese Christians in Germany (ZGCC), setting aside detailed discussions of church programs or outreach strategies. While practical ministry questions are acknowledged as important, this article prioritizes the underlying dynamics of cultural and spiritual identity as a necessary foundation for future applied work. The central aim is to examine how bicultural individuals navigate notions of faith, church, and belonging under the dual influence of Chinese heritage and German socialization.

Methodologically, the research combines qualitative ethnography with selected quantitative support (Girtler, 1984; Mayring, 2023, pp. 81–83). Fieldwork was conducted over four years in two Chinese migrant congregations in Germany, involving participant observation in worship services, youth meetings, and informal gatherings. Ten semi-structured interviews were carried out: six with second-generation youth (late teens to early thirties), two with first-generation parents, and two with ministry leaders. Interviews were held in German, Chinese, or both, depending on the participants' preferences, and were transcribed and translated into English for analysis. To preserve anonymity, interviewees are referenced by category rather than name. In addition, data from a prior nationwide survey of 83 ZGCC respondents complement the qualitative material.

The two congregations represent contrasting approaches to second-generation ministry. The first, a small church in central German (hereafter "CG"; 20 members), adopts a "Transfer model," encouraging its youth to join German-speaking churches after adolescence. While CG offers Chinese-language services for the first generation, it provides minimal youth programming of its own. In contrast, the larger church in northern Germany (hereafter "NG"; 60 members) implements a "Duplex model" with parallel structures: a German-language youth service runs concurrently with the Chinese service, both under shared leadership. These two models—one emphasizing external integration, the other internal bilingual differentiation—form the comparative framework for this study.

Interview data were analyzed thematically across both cases, focusing on such dimensions as self-identification, language use, perceived community belonging, and theology. For instance, participants were asked how they define being both Christian and Chinese, how they experience God across cultural boundaries, and how they relate to their congregation and the wider German society. By foregrounding theological and identity-oriented themes, rather than programmatic outcomes, this study seeks to uncover the implicit narratives that shape second-generation Christian formation.

Due to the limitation of scope to two congregations, this study does not claim to represent the entirety of second-generation Chinese Christians in Germany; rather, it should be regarded as a foundational contribution within a broader research framework, offering preliminary insights into a complex and evolving field.

## Macroscopic Perspective: Chinese Churches in Germany and Generational Challenges

Chinese immigrant churches in Germany, though generally small and scattered, form a resilient and culturally significant part of the religious landscape. Unlike their often larger, well-resourced counterparts in North America, most Chinese congregations in Germany have fewer than 30 active members and were founded by first-generation migrants in the 1980s and 1990s.[3] Today, over 70 fellowships and churches are linked through *the Forum für Mission unter Chinesen in Deutschland* (FMCD), yet only a few congregations exceed 100 attendees (Chinesische Leihbücherei, 2025; Ma & Chen, 2025b, p. 241). In this fragile institutional context, the rise of a German-raised second generation presents both a challenge and a chance for renewal.

For the first generation, churches serve as spiritual homes and cultural enclaves, preserving Chinese language, values, and traditions (Kang, 2021, pp. 97–99). However, this ethnic-centered structure increasingly clashes with the lived reality of second-generation members, who are shaped by German education, language, and social norms. As one interviewee noted, "The young people don't show the same respect for authority; they question things we never questioned," reflecting generational gaps in worldview and behavior. These tensions surface in disagreements over worship styles, leadership, and definitions of community.

If unresolved, such tensions risk leading to generational attrition. Although Germany's Chinese churches have not experienced the scale of the North American "Silent Exodus," there are signs that youth disengage. As another interviewee mentioned: "the youth either join the majority German church, form their own [German-speaking] groups, or turn away from church altogether."

Yet this second generation also offers unique promise. As bicultural, bilingual individuals, they could become cultural bridge-builders between the Chinese church and German society. Some congregations have responded by launching bilingual services or youth-specific ministries. However, as I, the author, caution elsewhere (Ma, 2025, pp. 10–12), an overly inward, ethnocentric orientation may isolate rather than empower young believers. A missionary working among the second generation summarized the dilemma: "they [the second generation] move in two worlds and could be bridge-builders, but in ethnically closed-off congregations they often hit boundaries."

In sum, Chinese churches in Germany are navigating a critical juncture. Whether they remain inward-facing or embrace intercultural potential will shape their relevance and survival in a pluralistic society.

## Mesoscopic Perspective: Congregational Models (Transfer vs. Duplex)

Zooming in to the congregational level, our two case study churches—CG church and NG church—can be placed within the typology of immigrant church models outlined by Shin and Silzer (2016, pp. 7–30), which uses housing metaphors to describe structural dynamics. Initially, both churches resembled the "Room-for-Let" model, where limited space is allocated to the second generation—a temporary arrangement meant to delay generational disengagement (Wong, 1998). Over time, however, the two congregations developed along diverging paths. NG church progressively transitioned into what Shin and Silzer define as a "Duplex" model—offering a parallel German-speaking ministry under the same roof. In contrast, CG church followed a markedly different trajectory, which I refer to in this study as a "Transfer model": here, the spiritual formation of the second generation is intentionally entrusted to local German congregations outside the ethnic church. While the Duplex model is

a recognized category within Shin's typology, the Transfer model emerges inductively from empirical observation and represents a practical, context-specific adaptation not formally captured in existing frameworks. This divergence highlights both the fluidity of real-life congregational responses and the need to refine and expand immigrant church typologies accordingly.

In the CG church, with roughly 20 members, youth ministry is minimal due to lack of a critical mass. Children attend Chinese Sunday school, but as they reach adolescence they are encouraged to join youth programs in nearby German evangelical churches. As one elder explained, "We don't have the teachers or resources for a youth program, so it's better if our teens join the German church." This model delays defection, but it ultimately externalizes spiritual formation. A second-generation member reflected, "When I started going to the German church, I suddenly felt like a guest in my parents' church." While this "Transfer model" bears resemblance to the "Hotel" model described by Shin and Silzer (2016, p. 18)—where youth transition out into majority-culture churches—it is distinct in its reliance on small, local German congregations rather than large churches. This situation in the CG church highlights the identity cost: the young people lose regular involvement in their ethnic church, which may weaken their connection to their Chinese Christian heritage. Moreover, for the Chinese church, this model fails to cultivate future leaders.

By contrast, NG church has around 60 members and has intentionally developed a parallel German-speaking ministry under one roof. This approach aligns with the "Duplex" model, in which two language-based congregations coexist within a shared governance structure. A dedicated youth pastor leads German services while the first generation maintains Mandarin worship. Both groups share facilities and occasionally join for retreats or combined services. This model seeks to retain the second generation by offering culturally relevant ministry. As one 22-year-old said, "I love that I can worship in German with friends who are also Chinese—we understand each other's situation." Parents also value the proximity: "We're still one church family—we just have two [heart] languages now."

The Duplex model offers advantages: youth benefit from the church's infrastructure, shared budget, and relational proximity. In NG church, first-generation members often cook lunch for both services, encouraging cross-generational interaction. A few second-generation leaders now serve on the church board, indicating emerging leadership. However, the model is not without tension. Major decisions remain under first-generation control, which can frustrate youth leaders. One noted: "We wanted to invite a German worship band… but the elders didn't approve the expense." Shin (2016, pp. 10–12) warns that such imbalance risks stifling long-term development if the second generation is not prepared for eventual leadership. Furthermore, the structural division may foster segregation. As a missionary working in the NG observed, "You get two mini-churches that don't interact much… it can unintentionally foster an us-vs-them mentality."

Despite efforts to bridge the divide through combined services and mentoring, cultural tensions persist. Elders worry that youth are becoming "too German," while younger members push back against conservative traditions. The Duplex model holds these dynamics in creative tension—it offers contextualized ministry but under shared authority.

Neither model is a panacea: The Room-for-Let preserves ethnic identity in the parent generation but risks losing the youth; the Transfer model enables resource-sharing from the German mainstream, but it weakens the ethnic identity associated with the migrant church; the Duplex model retains the youth but struggles with autonomy and power-sharing. A potential middle path is Shin's "Townhouse model," where second-generation ministries become equal

partners or spin off into independent congregations while maintaining relational ties. With a view to the future, the NG church's youth wing might evolve from the Duplex model into a Townhouse model. The CG church may continue toward mono-generational decline within the ethnic congregation, but through the Transfer model it facilitates the integration of the second generation into the German mainstream, both ecclesially and culturally. In sum, both the Duplex and the Transfer model reflect distinct theological and pragmatic responses to bicultural ministry. Their trade-offs illustrate how structural choices shape the identity formation and ecclesial belonging of second-generation Chinese Christians in Germany.

## Microscopic Perspective: Identity and Faith in the Voices of the Second Generation

At the heart of this study are the personal experiences and reflections of second-generation Chinese Christians themselves (alongside perspectives of their parents and pastors). The interviews enable delving into how these individuals articulate their self-identity, cultural tensions, sense of community, and theology as Chinese-German Christians. Several key themes emerged, which presented below with illustrative quotes. These narratives illuminate how the second generation perceives their Chinese identity in relation to their Christian faith, and how they negotiate that identity within both the Chinese church milieu and the broader German context.

### *Bicultural Self-Perception*

The second-generation interviewees overwhelmingly described themselves as living in-between Chinese and German cultures. There are no fundamental differences in the research results of the two congregations. Rather than choosing one culture over the other, most embrace a hybrid identity. "I see myself as both Chinese and German," said a 21-year-old university student. "With my family and at church I'm Chinese; with my school friends I'm German. Honestly, I'm a mix." This sense of being a "mix" or mélange was common—they feel simultaneously 100% Chinese and 100% German, depending on context. Interestingly, many youth leaned toward identifying as Chinese in certain aspects. Some mentioned that their values or outlook felt culturally Chinese due to their upbringing. "Deep down, I think I'll always be somewhat Chinese—it's in my upbringing and how I approach life," noted one young professional, "even though Germany is my home." This self-assessment aligns with survey data: a majority of Chinese diaspora youth in Germany identify as bicultural, with a notable portion feeling "more Chinese than German" in identity.

Yet there is a perception gap: church leaders often assume the youth see themselves primarily as German. One parent admitted, "I thought my daughter was basically German now, but she actually cares a lot about being Chinese." This observation was borne out by responses indicating that young Chinese Christians have a strong desire to remain connected to Chinese culture. For example, several interviewees said they want to uphold their heritage (language, festivals, food, etc.) as part of their identity. However, they also described a feeling of liminality. A 19-year-old second-gen who attends a German school and a Chinese church laughed, "I'm not sure if I'm a fake German or a fake Chinese. I'm somewhere in between – a real 'banana'!" (using the colloquial term for someone yellow on the outside, white on the inside). Such humorous labels aside, there is sometimes an underlying anxiety about not fully belonging to either world. This tension does not necessarily weaken their faith, but it does frame it: their Christianity becomes a space where dual identities meet. As one young man put it, "Being both Chinese and German is part of how God made me. I think God wants to use that somehow." In this way, a bicultural self-perception is being integrated into their understanding of vocation and identity in Christ.

*Heart Languages and Worship Preferences*

Language plays a crucial role in the spiritual life of second-generation Chinese Christians. They often speak of having different "heart languages" (German: "Herzenssprache") from their parents (M. K.-Y. Lee, 2025, p. 52). Most youth are significantly more fluent in German than in Mandarin or Cantonese, which directly affects how they relate to church. "I pray and think about God in German," one interviewee explained, "because that's the language of my everyday life." Others described difficulty engaging with Chinese-language Bibles, preferring German translations or Christian podcasts in German for deeper understanding. A teenager from CG church, for example, recalled: "The Chinese service was in Mandarin—I hardly understood the sermon. At the German youth group, I finally understood the message and could sing worship songs in my own language."

To meet these needs, many Chinese churches offer bilingual or German-language youth programs. NG church's parallel German service was created in response to this linguistic reality. One second-gen leader noted, "When Bible study was in Chinese, half of us were lost. Now in German, everyone can participate."

Yet, Chinese remains emotionally meaningful. A 25-year-old shared: "Singing in Mandarin sometimes touched me deeply… because I know my parents and grandparents sang these hymns." Some youth describe their spirituality as bilingual—worshiping in Chinese with family and in German with peers. However, language barriers can still alienate them from the main congregation. As one 17-year-old admitted, "During the Chinese sermon, I mostly sit politely and daydream."

Parents recognize this tension. One mother from NG church expressed concern: "My son didn't follow the Chinese sermon. I worried church feels irrelevant to him." Such concerns have prompted some churches to hire bilingual pastors or provide either a sentence-by-sentence on-site translation of the sermon or simultaneous interpretation, bridging generational and linguistic gaps.

Interestingly, youth from CG church—despite their congregation's Transfer model—sometimes expressed more emotional connection to Chinese language worship than their NG church peers. Meanwhile, NG church youth, with regular intergenerational contact, tended to show higher Chinese proficiency. However, such patterns are shaped by multiple factors, including family life and education, not only congregational structure.

In sum, language is not only a practical issue but a theological one: it determines whether youth feel church is truly "for them." Most navigate a bilingual faith, expressing themselves most fluently in German while treasuring aspects of Chinese-language worship that connect them to family and heritage.

*Cultural Tensions and Church Life*

Nearly all second-generation interviewees reported experiencing cultural tension in church and family life, often around leadership styles and generational expectations. A key friction point is authority. Chinese churches, shaped by Confucian values (Berling, 2015; Liu et al., 2010; Park & Müller, 2014), often emphasize hierarchical respect, while youth influenced by German egalitarianism expect participatory roles. "In German circles, you can challenge your leaders," noted one NG church youth, "but in the Chinese church, contradicting an elder—even respectfully – is just not done." After voicing disagreement in a meeting, this youth's parents scolded him for being disrespectful. Another interviewee shared: "Our parents want us to lead, but then we're not given real authority or trust." From the first-generation side, a father

explained, “In our culture, young people should be humble and learn first. The Western way is everyone speaks up, but that can cause chaos.” These differing assumptions often stifle youth initiative.

Worship styles also reflect this divide. A 16-year-old said, “The Chinese service is very traditional… I prefer the youth service with music and small groups.” Some elders, in turn, criticize youth worship as “too loud” or irreverent. Cultural differences also shape community dynamics. One respondent reflected: “Chinese church is like family, but it can feel invasive—everyone knows your business. German fellowship gives you more space.” This difference in how communal life feels reflects a deeper negotiation between collectivist and individualist values. Second-gen youth try to respect their heritage while seeking authenticity.

These cultural clashes extend to theology and ethics. Parental expectations around dating, career, or church involvement often combine Chinese values with Christian teaching. One youth explained: “My parents’ faith includes Chinese ideas of honor. I respect that, but sometimes I need to follow God in my own way.” Another was discouraged from dating a non-Chinese Christian due to cultural concerns. This dual pressure—meeting family standards while living out a personal faith in a Western context—can cause internal conflict.

Interestingly, youth in CG church (Transfer model) reported fewer tensions. Immersed in German church life, their ethnic identity remains important but less conflictual. NG church youth (Duplex model), still sharing space with first-generation members, reported stronger cultural friction—highlighting how structural proximity can heighten generational and cultural tensions.

*Community and Belonging*

A core question for second-generation Chinese Christians (ZGCC) is where—and with whom—they feel they truly belong in the body of Christ. Many interviewees expressed deep appreciation for the Chinese church as an extended family and cultural home. “At Chinese church, people get my background,” shared one NG church youth. Another noted, “In school I was the only Chinese kid, but at church I’m not different—I’m just me.” Familiar celebrations, bilingual conversation, and shared meals contributed to a sense of rootedness. For youth in congregations with structured youth ministries (like NG church), this cultural-religious environment fosters sustained belonging.

Yet tensions persist. In smaller churches like CG church, youth often feel isolated due to a lack of peers. “I had no friends at church. I only went because of my parents,” said one. Such youth frequently find fellowship in German churches, where they can participate in age-relevant and linguistically accessible ministries. While they report feeling welcomed, subtle reminders of otherness—such as questions about their ethnicity or stereotypical comments—can surface. As one observed, “I’m still Chinese in a German space.” Belonging, then, becomes layered: rooted in multiple contexts, none of which feel fully complete.

Some ZGCC ultimately relocate spiritually. A young woman shared, “I still visit my parents’ Chinese church, but I don’t feel I belong there anymore—I’m more of a guest.” Her story reflects a shift toward a primary identity in a German church, while retaining cultural ties to the Chinese community. Others voiced a longing for integration. “It would be great if Chinese and German churches did more together. Then I wouldn’t feel like I live two church lives,” said one CG church member.

Despite these complexities, many youth embrace the in-between space. Their bilingual, bicultural capacities allow them to act as bridge-builders, translating not only language but also

values and expectations. “I’ve realized I have two homes in God’s family—and maybe I’m meant to link those homes together,” reflected one interviewee.

The two church models foster different patterns. CG church’s Transfer model encourages full integration into German churches, often at the cost of ethnic ties. NG church’s Duplex model maintains connection to the heritage community, producing hybrid identities that navigate between cultural belonging and spiritual independence.

*Theological Identity and Hybrid Faith Expressions*

An important aspect of identity is how ZGCC understand and express their faith theologically in light of their bicultural background. While they largely share the evangelical beliefs of their parents, they often emphasize or reinterpret aspects of theology in ways shaped by their dual cultural lens.

One recurring theme was community and church life. While first-generation teachings emphasize collective identity and sacrificial loyalty to the church as family, second-gen believers often reframe this corporate ephasis through a more participatory ecclesiology. “Biblical community isn’t one-sided obedience; it’s about each part contributing,” said a youth leader from NG church, advocating for balanced roles and individual spiritual agency within the body of Christ.

A major shift is also visible in their understanding of mission. First-generation churches often focus on reaching Chinese migrants. In contrast, second-gen Christians envision broader engagement. “I believe God wants me to serve beyond the Chinese circle,” said one CG church interviewee. This bicultural awareness fuels a more integrative theology of mission—one that includes both Chinese and German contexts. As one leading missionary among the ZGCC put it, “The younger Chinese Christians in Germany have a potential to be ‘bicultural missionaries’—reaching Chinese and Germans alike. Their theology of mission is less narrow; it’s not just saving Chinese students: it’s about being a witness in German society too.”

In personal spirituality, many ZGCC describe a synthesis of Chinese and German Christian influences. One young woman reflected: “From the Chinese side, I learned disciplined prayer. From the German side, I learned to ask tough questions. Together, they make my faith stronger.” Others spoke of bilingual Bible studies where differing cultural metaphors led to richer understanding, such as linking grace to both filial piety and forgiveness in school.

This theological hybridity (Liu et al., 2010) is often intuitive rather than systematic. Still, some are starting to voice the need for a contextual theology. “We need a theology for us—Asian Germans,” said one seminary student. Rather than choosing between Chinese or German models, many seek to hold both in tension, integrating elements such as honoring elders, personal discernment, traditional values, and expressive worship.

In sum, ZGCC are not simply inheriting faith—they are rearticulating it. Their emerging theology reflects their lived experience of hybridity. As one participant put it: “Jesus is the same for everyone, but He made me Chinese in Germany for a reason. My way of following Him will have both flavors. And I think that’s beautiful.”

## Conclusion

This study has examined how second-generation Chinese Christians in Germany understand their faith in relation to their bicultural identity. The findings reveal that Chinese identity remains a meaningful, though complex, dimension of their Christian discipleship. Rather than choosing between Chinese and German identity, most second-generation believers embrace a

hybrid sense of self. Their bicultural faith is expressed in bilingual worship, intercultural ministry engagement, and an evolving theology shaped by both heritage and local context.

The two congregational models studied—CG church's Transfer model and NG church's Duplex model—illustrate contrasting approaches to second-generation identity formation. The Transfer model supports smoother cultural integration into German churches but weakens continuity with the ethnic congregation. The Duplex model fosters bicultural engagement within the Chinese church yet introduces tensions around leadership and intergenerational dynamics. Both trajectories underscore the need for context-sensitive strategies that support resilient bicultural faith.

Second-generation Christians often act as bridges—navigating both Chinese and German communities, translating between cultures, and serving in both spheres. Their dual perspective enables them to envision a more inclusive, intercultural church. If Chinese churches adapt by empowering youth and fostering shared leadership, and if German churches embrace partnerships, new hybrid congregational forms could emerge that enrich the wider Christian landscape in Germany.

Ultimately, cultural identity is not a hindrance but a resource for theological reflection and mission. For ZGCC, being both Chinese and German is not a contradiction but a calling. As these believers articulate faith in both idioms, they model what it means to live as disciples across cultures. Future research should further explore these hybrid ecclesial forms and deepen theological understanding of diaspora identities—so that the churches may more faithfully support their next generation at the intersection of heritage and hope.

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[1] While numerous works have been published on the Chinese diaspora and Chinese migrant communities, particularly in the context of the United States, explicit scholarly contributions on this topic within the German context remain scarce. A few of the existing studies have been authored by the writer of this article: Ma (2025); Ma and Chen (2025b, 2025a).

[2] Although there has not yet been an in-depth scholarly study on the second generation of Chinese Christians in Germany, there are nonetheless comparable investigations focusing on other East Asian communities, such as the Korean: M. K.-Y. Lee (2025); Lim (2020).

[3] For a detailed account of the historical origins and development of Chinese migrant communities in Germany, see Ma and Chen (2025a, pp. 113–119). A comprehensive discussion of the key differences between the U.S. and German contexts can be found in Ma and Chen (2025b, pp. 240–242).

# Missiological Response to the Vulnerability of Hausa-Speaking Migrant Christians in Nigeria

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For Publication in *Global Missiology*, www.globalmissiology.org, October 2025

## Abstract

Nigeria's North-South migration has missiological implications. Hausa-speaking migrant Christians (HSMC) are doubly vulnerable: they suffer persecution in their northern origin, where the majority are Muslims, and stereotype-induced identity crisis in their southern 'place of refuge'. Therefore, this study explores a missiological response to the vulnerability of HSMC in Nigeria. Understanding the phenonmenon associated with HSMC's vulnerability can foster opportunities for a comprehensive—centripetal and centrifugal—missions approach. This descriptive study combines literature, practical observations, and interactions with HSMC in southwest Nigeria to recommend ways of enhancing comprehensive mission mechanisms.

**Key Words**: Hausa-speaking Christians (HSC), Hausa-speaking migrant Christians (HSM), migration, missiological, Nigeria, vulnerability

## Introduction

Though scholars like Ogunewu (2019, p. 171) and Akano (2023a, pp. 115-116) describe Nigeria's insecurity as hydra-headed, they also state generally that the South is more stable than the North. Consequently, there is a phenomenal North-South migration that has implications for missiological engagement. This study examines a missiological response to the vulnerability of Hausa-speaking migrant Christians (HSM) in Nigeria. The relevant issues include the ethnic architecture of Nigeria, the nature of insecurity and internal migration, and the missioloical role of the church in relation to vulnerable individuals.

## Ethnic Architecture of Northern Nigeria

Nigeria is a multicultural nation-state. Different kingdoms, such as Kanem, Songhai, Oyo, and Benin, form its background. Like other African states, the boundaries are artificial as most member people or ethnic groups have different shared values (Ajayi, 1986; Gifford, 1998, pp. 3-5). Falola and Aderinto (2010, pp. 240-243) argue that, apart from the differences between the two amalgamated North and South British protectorates, each former protectorate has internal differences and the resulting regionalisation that set the Igbo as the dominant culture in the East, the Yoruba in the West, and the Hausa-Fulani in the North is an untidy situation.

Johnstone's (1993, pp. 424-426) research identifies over 420 people groups and cultural identities across Nigeria's south, middle belt, and north. The north has Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri and about 40 smaller groups; the middle belt has over 230 languages with no particular dominant group; Yoruba, Ibo, Urhobo, Edo, Isoko, Efik, Ijaw, Ibibio, and Anang dominate the south, in addition to about 50 other indigenous peoples. Thus, apart from the Hausa, the Fulani, and the Kanuri peoples that form a large majority, Northern Nigerians speak over 270 more languages. Also, while the Hausa language is mostly spoken by people groups in northern Nigeria in public places, each group still retains its distinct language and rich cultural heritage. Thus, contrary to a general misconception, northerners are not all Hausa, Fulani, or Kanuri people.

## Insecurity and Migration in Nigeria

Most people would agree with Stott (2006, p. 122) in asserting that terrorism gained global attention starting on September 11, 2001, when terrorists deliberately crashed two passenger jets into the World Trade Centre. That event changed the global security architecture. In Nigeria, the 9/11 attacks compounded the existing ethno-religious and socio-cultural tensions that have manifested as Boko Haram insurgence, socio-economic agitations, kidnappings, boundary disputes, cultism, herdsmen attacks, and banditry (Ozoemena, 2016, pp. 190-191). Furthermore, as the world was breathing a sigh of relief from the trauma resulting from the havock wrecked by the COVID-19 pandemic, Nigeria woke up with a fresh challenge of an upsurge in cases of these problems with varying operational dimensions (Akano 2023b, p. 71).

While insecurity in Nigeria is hydra-headed, religious undertones often are discernible. Since 2009, the Nigeria's insecurity has been largely due to increased religious activities of Islamic fundamentalist groups like Boko Haram, Islamic State in West African Province (ISWAP), and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (Akano, 2023b, p. 71; Adesote 2017, p. 20). Thus, while there are different forms of insecurity challenges, religious terrorism and banditry rank ahead of others. Further, since both of these challenges are associated with Islamic fundamentalism, it is a little wonder that insecurity is more pronounced in the northern part of Nigeria than in the south. Empirical studies have shown that "Muslims are more concentrated in the northern part of Nigeria and Christians in the southern part" (Pew Research Centre 2011). The South is observably more peaceful than the North.

Therefore, as people seek for survival and protection from chronic threats such as hunger, disease, and repression, they are often forced to move to a more promising location. In addition, insecurity often affects people's physical, mental, and social well-being (Adegbami, 2013, pp. 8-9). Forced migration is the movement of people in escape of unpalatable conditions such as "armed conflicts, human rights violations, natural or environmental disasters, chemical or nuclear disasters, famine, or development projects . . . persecution, conflict, repression, natural and human-made disasters, ecological degradation, or other situations that endanger their lives, freedom or livelihood" (Adesote, 2017, p. 6). Such conditions obviously constitute the situation in northern Nigeria, and residents are thus more vulnerable physiologically, socially, and psychologically.

Kanu (2019, p. 42) argues that a good percentage of migrations in Africa are rooted in insecurity, causing people to move out of their home lands—internally or internationally. Findings show that between 2009 and 2015, Boko Haram alone caused the movement of about 2.3 million people from their homes. They ended up becoming internally displaced persons, refugees, or asylum seekers (Mukhtar et al., 2018, p. 55). The activities of Boko Haram, which is located in the north, have thus caused a rise in people's health vulnerability due to deprivation of drinking water, food, healthcare, sanitation, land for farming, and housing.

## Vulnerability of Hausa-Speaking Christians in Nigeria

Whenever an individual is forced to escape situations of threats to life and property, they are already vulnerable to poverty, ill health, joblessness, economic struggles, and other physical threats. In addition, some of the most critical fall-outs of forced migration occasioned by insecurity often revolve around in-group versus out-group identity challenges that neither the migrants nor their hosts prepared for. One of the critical in-group versus out-group tensions that leads to, or aggravates, other tensions involves stereotypes. A stereotype is a means of describing a group of people and categorising them using some common characteristics for ease of identification. Its disadvantages in an intercultural setting is that people generalise a negative trait found in some members of a group for the whole group. Assigning stereotypes is

common when such negative traits are pronounced in a few members of a group or those that people first encounter (Peterson, 2004, p. 26). Akano (2023b, pp. 74-75) notes that assigning stereotypes can be more serious in contexts of insecurity because of an associated suspicion that suspected people's conflicting cultural ideologies can be infectious. Innocent people in an insecure group can thus be suspsected as well.

The vulnerability of the Hausa-Speaking Migrant (HSM) Christians occurs in two phases. The first phase is what they experience while in their northern Nigerian home as a religious minority among the Muslim-dominated people. The second phase has to do with their experience in the south as an ethnic minority among their host communities where they have relocated. Though the second phase is heavily connected with being stereotyped, the first phase also involves a significant element of stereotype.

*Hausa-Speaking Christians in Northern Nigeria*

Cases of Hausa-speaking Christians being marginalised in their home region include being hindered from acquiring landed properties for building churches. For example, some landed properties used to build churches in some major cities bear names of individuals who turned them over to churches for use, but some national dailies have reported that a church was burnt down for that reason (Egigogo, 2024; Bago condemns 2024). Also, some states do not allow the teaching of Christian Religious Knowledge in their public primary and secondary schools. Another example is the difficulty that Christian organisations face in registering private schools they have established, and the regulating bodies often do not give reasons for not registering the schools.

It is noteworthy that, while insecurity affects everyone in northern Nigeria, the Christians are more vulnerable. There are more attacks on churches than mosques. The insurgents and Islamists focus more on Christian communities, killing, abducting, and destroying properties and farmlands. The abduction of Daphci girls that included Leah Sharibu, which drew global attention, and the beheading of a Christian leader in January 2020 illustrate this reality (Oghuvbu, 2021, pp. 205-206). The cases are associated with stereotype because the fundamentalists have wrongly associated Christianity with the Western culture that they abhor. Whatever represents Western culture is usually associated with Americanism, which they consider opposing the principles of Islam (p. 203). Thus, with insecurity, the Hausa-speaking Christians have become more endangered than their non-Christian counterparts in the north. As a result, their migration rates have increased rapidly in the last couple of years. They hope for a better environment to live and practise their faith.

*Hausa-Speaking Migrant Christians in Southern Nigeria*

This second phase is more troubling for some Hausa-Speaking Migrant (HSM) Christians. The composition of HSM Christians cuts across ethnic groups across the three geo-political zones in the north. The researcher's personal observation and interaction reveal that HSM Christians are rarely from the Hausa, Fulani and Kanuri ethnicities. A list of ethnic groups who are HSM churches' members in the southern cities of Ogbomoso, Ibadan, Lagos, Benin-City, Osogbo, and Ilorin include Ron (Chala), Gbagyi, C'lela (Zuru), Mwaghavul, Tarok, Mopun, Baju, Jabal, Berom, Maguzawa (Hausa), Gobrawa, Maigi, Michika, Tangale, and Anaguta. Churches in other cities include Eggon, Mada, Koro, Kataf, Chawe, Amawa, Kurama, Tarok, Angas, Bokgom, Glavda, Tula, Numana, Awak, Siyawa, Angas, Kunwur, Lala, Tal, Tiv, Egede, Idoma, Lunguda, Guyuk, Warjawa, Bachama, Kanakuru, Kagomaamong, and other groups.

The list above indicates that only a few of the HSM Christians in southern Nigeria are actually of the Hausa/Fulani stock as often misconstrued. Such a mischaracterisation

compounds the vulnerability of the HSM residing in southern Nigeria by the way that the majority of southerners have stereotyped all northerners in the following three levels:

1. All Hausa-speakers are Hausa/Fulani

This stereotype overgeneralizes that anyone from the north is from 'Hausa/Fulani' ethnic people. The foundation for this ethno-linguistic stereotype is associated with the errorneous belief that there are three tribes in Nigeria—the northern Hausa/Fulani, the eastern Igbo, and the western Yoruba. This mistaken generalisation has earlier been refuted. Further, Falola and Heaton (2008, p. 4) put the Hausa population at 21 percent of Nigeria's population, the Yoruba at 20, and the Igbo at 17. Assuming each of these is a unified group, they only sum up to 58 per cent of Nigeria's population, leaving 42 percent is unaccounted for (Ikime, 2010, p. 170).

2. All 'Hausa/Fulani' are Muslims

This stereotype assumes all northerners, regarded as Hausa/Fulani people, are automatically Muslims. Personal experience as a missionary in northern Nigeria has shown that, apart from the fact that northerners are not all Hausa or Fulani Muslims, there are also Hausa and Fulani that are Christians. Granted that the majority of northerners are Muslims, the reality is that there is "a significant Christian minority and a generous sprinkling of followers of African Traditional Religions" (Mustapha & Bunza, 2014, p. 54). Northern Nigerians are not all Muslims.

3. All Northern Muslims are Fundamentalists

This third myth of overgeneralization is the critical part that create suspicion about the HSM. It is based on the origin of previous religious violence, jihads, and the contemporary insecurity in Nigeria. Thus, some southerners associate all Hausa-speaking northeners with the insurgents. Akano (2023b, p. 75) illustrates that some think all Fulani are AK-47-carrying herdsmen. This perception affects southerners' attitudes towards HSM in general, creating complications in their relationships.

In summary, there is a complicated problem of identity for HSM in southern Nigeria. This problem is rooted in an identity gap, where the avowed identity of the HSM is different from the identity ascribed to them by their hosts. Ethno-linguistically and religiously, their hosts see them differently from the way they see themselves (Ting-Toomey, 2009, p. 494). This gap agrees with Hecht's (2009, pp. 140-141) communication theory of identity that individuals have four layers of interpenetrating identity layers that may manifest differently under different circumstances. How one individual is perceived by others, particularly when that person is from a different cultural background, affects how they communicate or react to that individual. Identity gaps result at any point that others see people differently from the way those people see themselves. Thus, rather than seeing HSM as fellow human beings, and fellow Nigerians, particularly those in challenging situations that need help, southerners see HSM as threats to their holistic security.

Another complication in the identity problem relates to where HSM behaviour falls on the association-dissociation continuum. This matter is well captured by Kim (2009) as follows:

> Communicators in inter-ethnic encounters behave associatively when they perceive and respond to others as unique individuals rather than as representatives of an out-group category; …. In contrast, a communication behavior is characterized as dissociative when it is based on a categorical, stereotypical, and depersonalized perception that accentuates differences. Dissociative behaviors also include many forms of divergent verbal and nonverbal behaviors that indicate psychological distance and emotional

> intensity, from subtle expressions to blatantly dehumanizing name-calling, ethnic jokes, and hate speeches. Nonverbally, a communicator acts dissociatively through a range of behaviors, from subtle facial, vocal, and bodily expressions of lack of interest, disrespect, arrogance, and anger to more intense expressions of hatred and aggression, such as rioting and acts of violence (p. 185).

This analysis fits the experience of some HSM living in southern Nigeria, and the implication is that the identity gap problem widens the 'we–they' gulf that worsens the communication situations. Communication in this context includes all verbal and non-verbal expressions, including people's speeches, attitudes, and behaviours. HSM in southern Nigeria are vulnerable to different unpleasant communications before their hosts because of stereotypes. I have witnessed atttitudes, speeches, and behaviours that tended towards the dissociative end of the continuum. Some southerners, including Christians, deal harshly with HSM Christians. The first of several examples of maltreatments from my interactions are how the HSM in cities like Ibadan, Lagos, and Benin-City complain that church officers have often derogatorily and relegatingly reserved dirty jobs like drainage and toilet cleaning for them, treating them as second class citizens in the church. Sometimes they are not even adequately remunerated because they are mere 'malo' (a derogative rendering of the Hausa word 'mallam,' meaning 'teacher,' 'learned or educated man'; the derogative meaning presents them as a nonentity in the society who are to do the dirtiest jobs because they are unimportant).

Second, some southern Christians are also guilty of dissociative attitudes, speech, and behaviour towards the HSM Christians. Sarvimaki et al. (2009) notes that the displaced farmers do not often get enough farmland in their new farming communities, leading to vulnerability to poverty and low standards of living. Different groups of HSM Christians have complained that their hosts, including Christian communities and individuals, have treated them with dissociative interactions. In a village in southwest Nigeria, a group of HSM Christians lamented that they had to relocate twice within one year because of the ways they were treated. As casual workers, they had worked on the farms for some of their hosts, majority members of churches in those villages, who refused to pay them or unnecessarily delayed the agreed wages. Consequently, the HSM refused to work for such people and focused on their small farms on pieces of land given by the host communities. In reaction, the host communities revoked the farm land given them, or reduced it, to force them to have no option other than work for the hosts. Thus, those southerners have compounded the traumatic experience these HSM workers were struggling with due to their experience in the north, by virtue of their insecurity. This situation makes them more vulnerable.

Another common experience of vulnerability for the HSM Christians in rural areas is that some pastors who do not speak Hausa, or do not have capable interpreters of Hausa, would not want the HSM to form a church where they can worship in a language they understand. Apart from the researcher, some other Hausa-speaking pastors have lamented how they have been opposed by the leadership of the local church in the host community. Sometimes the local pastors are only interested in their offerings (monetary and material) to the church with no commeasurate pastoral responsibilities targetting their traumatised situations. Some of the HSM are 'forced' to remain in the church, even though they may not understand what goes on due to the language barrier.

It was also discovered that, due to the origin and prevalence of insurgence in northern Nigeria, and owing to the fact that many criminals associated with insecurity have porpotedly been apprehended as having originated from the north, all HSM, including Christians, are viewed as potential criminals. In other cases, whenever there is a case of misunderstanding

involving a northern HSM person, some southerners are too quick to side their fellow southerner against the northerner, without due consideration of the situation.

**Missiological Response to Vulnerability of Hausa-Speaking Christians**

A missiological response to the vulnerability of the Hausa-speaking Christians, particularly the migrants in southern Nigeria, must be rooted in *missio Dei* which, as a divine prerogative, is the move of God by the Spirit, and through the Church (Ott et al., 2010, p. 62). The Church must seek how the overall purpose of God may be achieved through the existing challenges of migration and possible suspicions in the world. From the foregoing, I wish to consider five key areas of such a response:

*1. Missions As Holistic Diakonia*

The holistic nature of missions stipulates that the witness (*matyria*) functions and the service (*diakonia*) functions of the Church are inseparable twins (Stott, 2006, pp. 43-45). While evangelising the unbelieving Hausa-speakers and encouraging the believers among them, the Church must engage more in comforting them and confronting injustices metted on them. The Church should also see its role as ensuring peace and harmony amidst tribal, ethnic, and cultural differences, as in Ephesians 4:1-6:24 (Turaki, 2006, p. 1425). The Church also serves as the example for the larger society that is already ravaged by inter-tribal or inter-ethnic suspicions and tensions. Through these functions, the Church achieves the overall goal of mission of bringing *shalom* to the world (Moreau, Corwin, & McGee, 2004, pp. 86-87; Stott, 2015, p. 18). In addition to the spiritual realm, HSM Christians also need physiological, psychological, and social peace.

*2. Missions As Integral Engagement*

Mission is not only holistic; it is also integral. Integral mission is about connecting *shalom* to every aspect of Christian lives (Lausanne Movement, 2025; Waweru, 2015). The host believers should not limit their *shalom* functions towards the HSM Christians to 'mission fields' and church gatherings. Instead, they should be agents of *shalom* in every aspect of their daily activities within and outside the church walls. This implies that southern Christians should meet HSM with *shalom* in the local markets where they sell their wares, as well as in towns and villages where they engage in casual farm works and other menial jobs. Christian from the south must intensify marketplace ministry.

*3. Missions As Migration*

Missions has always involved migration, especially the movement of the heralds. But sometimes, the people who need the gospel message also move towards the location of the faith community, voluntarily or otherwise. Winter (2007, pp. 148-149) identifies four mechanisms of missions, namely, voluntary centripetal, involuntary centripetal, voluntary centrifugal, and involuntary centrifugal mechanisms. While the traditional emphasis in mission has been centrifugal missions where the Church goes to the nations, proclaiming the message of the kingdom, the current situation has created opportunities for centripetal missions in Nigeria. Both dynamics of centripetal and centrifugal are present in the prophetic visions of bringing nations to God to achieve His redemptive purpose (Wright, 2000, p. 707; Akano, 2021, pp. 28-29). Thus, the Greek participle 'going' in Matthew 28:19 is for the Church to locate the unsaved nations wherever they are—immediately around in the diaspora, or afar in their home lands, and engage them accordingly in disciple-making. The Church in the south must intentionally embrace centrifugal dynamics to reach the northerners residing in the north, and centripental dynamics for northerners who have migrated to the south.

*4. Missions As Philoxenia*

*Philoxenia*, a Greek expression combining *phileo*, meaning affection or love of kindred, and *xenos*, meaning 'stranger,' refers to an attitude of hospitality as used in Hebrews 13:2. Often used as the opposite of *xenophobia*, *philoxenia* is the attitude that transforms the identity of a stranger, such as a Hausa speaker in southern Nigeria, to that of a guest. Such an attitude makes the host to allow the 'stranger turned guest' into their space (Smither, 2023). The Church in southern Nigeria must seek to interact with Hausa-speaking migrants 'philoxenially,' eliminating every form of dissociative tendency so these already traumatised people may feel secure and welcome. Achieving this scenario requires a holistic transformation of the southerners' perceptions, attitude, and behaviour from stereotype that leads to xenophobic tendency to missional *philoxenia*. Such integration will enhance equipping the Christians among the Hausa speakers for ministry among their unbelieving 'kindred' in the south and in their home lands, strengthening the centripetal-centrifugal missions of the Church.

*5. Missions As Diaspora Leadership Development*

An important milestone in Christian missions is the establishment of truly indigenlus church. For a healthy church circle, there must be a phase of leadership development to ensure the continuity of the work (Plueddemann, 2009, p. 48). When the four other areas above have been handled properly, the church will be well positioned to raise indigenous leaders among the dispora faith communities who would carry on the missions among their own people, both in diaspora and at home. An indigenous leader would have overcome some of the barriers associated with migration.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The contemporary Church in Nigeria, especially in the south, must rise up to its missiological task of re-orientating its members to leverage the opportunities brought about by the challenges of north-south migration. Pastors and other church leaders need to educate their members accordingly, and both the host faith community and the diaspora faith community can collaborate to advance the course of the gospel. Through this collaboration, the dividing wall of hostility would be destroyed and both southerners and northerners would be reconciled to God and to each other (Ephesians 2:14-16).

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# Living the Tension: Toward a Theologically Reflexive Methodology for Diaspora Missiology

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Published in *Global Missiology*, www.globalmissiology.org, October 2025

**Abstract**

Diaspora churches in North America inhabit the intersection of theological conviction and cultural complexity, navigating tensions between inherited frameworks and the pluralistic realities of their host contexts. This article proposes a theologically reflexive methodology for diaspora missiology, addressing Joel Robbins's critique of the "awkward relationship" between theology and the social sciences (Robbins, 2006). Drawing on Paul Hiebert's critical realism, Peter Berger's sociology of knowledge, and Dallas Willard's epistemic realism, the article's framework—termed *Living in Tension*—integrates theological reflection with sociocultural analysis.

**Key Words:** critical realism, diaspora missiology, epistemic realism, liminality, plausibility structures, theological reflexivity, *Living in Tension* framework

## Introduction: Theological Method in a Fractured Age

On a Sunday morning in a modest storefront sanctuary tucked between a laundromat and a halal market, congregants gather—some in brightly patterned attire reminiscent of their homeland, others in jeans and hoodies, children weaving between pews speaking in two languages. The worship team alternates between a familiar hymn in the community's mother tongue and a contemporary chorus in English. After the service, conversations drift between prayer requests for relatives back home and questions about navigating school board politics, immigration paperwork, and workplace ethics in North America. This congregation, like many diaspora churches, lives at the intersection of two worlds—bearing the theological heritage of their sending cultures while immersed in the pluralistic, secularizing, and religiously fragmented landscape of their host society.

This intersection gives rise to a central tension: inherited theological frameworks, formed within particular historical and cultural contexts, must now engage a society marked by pluralism, privatization, and disaffiliation. Pluralism presents a mosaic of divergent worldviews, compelling Christians to engage across cultural and religious boundaries. Privatization relegates faith to the realm of personal preference, eroding its communal and public dimensions. Disaffiliation—from churches, denominations, and civic institutions—signals growing skepticism toward organized religion, forcing the church to reimagine its role. Lesslie Newbigin warned that when the gospel is confined to the private sphere it ceases to function as "public truth," forfeiting its capacity to inform culture, politics, and shared moral vision (Newbigin, 1991). In today's environment, confident statements of belief are often dismissed as dogmatic, further marginalizing Christianity in public discourse.

Peter L. Berger explains that this decline in credibility stems from changes in the "plausibility structures" that shape what people consider reasonable (Berger, 1967). In the West, such structures once upheld the Christian faith, but many have eroded. Influential institutions—including schools, media, and digital platforms—often advance secular and individualistic narratives. As these supporting structures crumble, faith is reduced to a personalized lifestyle choice, detached from

communal practices or comprehensive truth-claims (Smith, 2005). This privatization both reflects and reinforces the cultural disintegration the Church seeks to address.

These dynamics are felt acutely within diaspora communities, whose lives are shaped by the interplay of inherited theological convictions and the pluralistic, social, and epistemological realities of their host societies. Often inhabiting a "liminal" space (Pocock & Wan, 2015, p. 84), diaspora Christians experience in-betweenness that disrupts conventional notions of belonging while opening opportunities for transformation and contribution (Phan, 1999, p. 113). In North America, they must negotiate tensions between theological heritage and cultural complexity. While this positioning can lead to marginalization within both ethnic enclaves and mainstream Christianity, diaspora churches also possess distinctive capacities for developing contextual theologies that address the epistemic crisis confronting North American Christianity.

Yet traditional missiological methods fall short. Too often, theology is insulated from sociology, or sociology is detached from theology—resulting in doctrinal abstraction or culturally unmoored analysis (Robbins, 2006; Swinton & Mowat, 2006). This study responds by proposing a theologically reflexive methodology for diaspora missiology—what the article calls a "Living in Tension" framework—that integrates theological reflection with sociocultural analysis.

This approach builds on Paul Hiebert's critical realism, which affirms that objective reality exists but that human understanding remains limited and culturally mediated (Hiebert, 1985; 1994). Critical realism offers a middle ground between naïve realism and postmodern relativism, insisting that knowledge of the world is possible yet imperfect, requiring critical methods to discern the difference between the world as it is and as we human beings perceive it. This article's approach also draws from Dallas Willard's epistemic realism—the conviction that human minds can apprehend objects of knowledge and that spiritual formation involves practices grounded in metaphysical realism concerning the soul, the Kingdom of God, and the Trinity (Moon, 2018).

By integrating epistemology, formation, and mission, the *Living in Tension* framework equips diaspora churches for faithful gospel witness through apologetics, evangelism, discipleship, and spiritual formation, maintaining critical awareness of epistemic and cultural location while remaining rooted in divine self-revelation. The framework affirms what Hiebert (1994, 75–92) calls "self-theologizing"—the capacity to interpret biblical revelation within a specific cultural context while preserving theological fidelity. Rather than importing frameworks wholesale or uncritically adopting North American models, diaspora churches can cultivate contextual theologies that speak prophetically to both their ethnic communities and the host culture's epistemic fragmentation. Embracing the tension between particularity and universality, between cultural authenticity and gospel transformation, diaspora congregations can act as bridges of understanding in a polarized religious landscape, sustaining their witness to God's reconciling work in Christ.

## The Missiological Context of Diaspora Churches

The twenty-first century is characterized by an unprecedented demographic reality where significant numbers of people live outside their places of origin due to various global forces like globalization, economic factors, and conflicts. Within this shifting landscape, Christian witness in North America faces profound challenges, including rising pluralism, the increasing privatization of belief, and widespread disaffiliation from traditional institutions.

*Global and Local Forces Shaping the Diaspora Experience: Globalization, Economic Change, and Conflict as Drivers of Diaspora and Mission*

Globalization—marked by interconnection, mobility, and cultural homogenization—has reshaped mission. It enables partnerships across borders and brings unreached groups into Western cities, creating "mission at our doorsteps" (Lee, 2025; George, 2023). Yet it also spreads secular values and religious competition, producing a "global marketplace of religions" (Lee, 2025; Bishop, 2014). This dual reality requires theological reflexivity: churches must discern how God's mission unfolds amid both opportunity and threat. The demographic shift of Christianity to the Global South has introduced "reverse mission," in which non-Western Christians now evangelize former missionary-sending regions (Da Silva, 2015).

Economic change also shapes diaspora. While affluent nations supply mission resources, global disparities drive migration and marginalization of diaspora communities. Historically, missionaries leveraged economic opportunities to expand work (Cheong & Meneses, 2018). Today, instability affects the sustainability and form of mission (Global One80, 2025). Reflexively, diaspora churches must ask how to interpret economic vulnerability not as hindrance but as locus for God's activity.

Conflict accelerates migration through war, persecution, and political unrest, creating crises where displaced populations encounter the gospel (George, 2023). Local churches often remain when expatriates withdraw, embodying witness through suffering (Wan & Gross, 2015). Jeong (2016) calls this "mission from weakness," reframing vulnerability as theological strength. Reflexively, diaspora missiology interprets such fragility through biblical paradigms of God's power made perfect in weakness.

*Diaspora Churches in the Liminal Space: Plausibility Structures and North American Realities for Christian Witness*

Globalization, economics, and conflict not only produce diaspora but also shape their theological identity. Diaspora Christians inhabit what Pocock and Wan (2015, p. 84) call a "liminal" space—disrupted identities that open new possibilities for transformation (Phan, 1999, p. 113). In North America, this liminality generates tensions between inherited theology and pluralist realities. Reflexively, these tensions become a site for theological creativity, pressing communities to articulate faith anew.

Berger's sociology shows how belief depends on plausibility structures—social frameworks that render truth credible (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, pp. 28–79; Berger, 1967, pp. 127–54). Historically, Western churches supplied such structures, embedding Christian nomos into public life (Berger, 1967, pp. 19–25, 45–51). Secularization now destabilizes them, reframing faith as private preference. Reflexively, diaspora churches must sustain Christian plausibility through embodied communal life, not only defending doctrine but enacting truth in practice.

Liminality itself, grounded in van Gennep (1909) and Turner (1969, pp. 94–95), is more than sociological—it is theological. Turner (1975) notes liminality fosters *communitas*, solidarity born of marginality. For diaspora churches, this *communitas* enables them to act as cultural interpreters, embodying the gospel between homeland traditions and host culture. Bhabha's (1994) "third space" highlights hybridity as a generative zone where new theological forms emerge. Reflexively,

this hybridity calls for ongoing discernment: contextual theologies must be critically tested by Scripture while responding to lived realities.

Biblical paradigms reinforce this reflexive lens: Israel's wilderness (Exod. 16), the sojourner identity (1 Pet. 2:11), and Christ's ministry at the margins. Jung Young Lee's (1995) theology of marginality describes diaspora as both "in-both" and "in-beyond," transcending cultural boundaries. Reflexively, diaspora churches embody a reconciled identity rooted in Christ rather than ethnicity.

By engaging multiple plausibility structures—homeland, host society, and transnational networks—diaspora churches live "in tension." Their liminality, when reflexively interpreted, becomes a theological resource: a countercultural plausibility structure and laboratory for epistemic discernment, offering a credible vision of Christian witness in pluralist North America.

## Limitations of Current Missiological Methodologies

Traditional missiological frameworks, shaped largely by Western mission history, have provided a foundation for global missions but are increasingly inadequate for today's complex realities. Rooted in fixed theological assertions and pragmatic strategies for evangelization, they often prioritized church growth and replication of Western forms over deep contextual reflection (Da Silva, 2015, pp. 233–35). This reliance on individualist models of conversion, as Ross, Kim, and Johnson (2023, pp. 142–43) observe, risks sidelining communal dimensions central in non-Western contexts. Reflexively considered, such methods lack mechanisms to critique their own cultural assumptions and re-engage mission practice in light of Scripture and lived reality.

### *Fragmentation and Polarization*

A core weakness of existing models is their polarizing dualisms: soul-saving vs. social gospel, proclamation vs. service, career missionaries vs. tentmakers. Enoch Wan argues that such fragmentation produces siloed mission activities instead of integrated witness (Wan, 2010). This tendency is particularly damaging in diaspora contexts, where congregations are often treated either as "mission fields" or pipelines for labor rather than as theological agents in their own right. Reflexivity challenges these dichotomies by pressing mission practitioners to hold together the fullness of gospel witness, critically discerning where integration is necessary.

Similarly, the emphasis on "unreached people groups" sometimes privileged distant fields over proximate diaspora communities (Wan, 2010), reducing migrants to evangelistic instruments while neglecting their social and existential struggles (Kim, 2016, pp. 149–50). Reflexively missiology insists that theology cannot abstract persons from their contexts; mission must interpret and engage the lived vulnerabilities of displaced peoples in light of God's Kingdom.

### *Methodological Reductionism*

Existing missionary models often pursued "what works" pragmatically—church growth formulas, program replication—at the expense of contextual theology. Kim (2016, pp. 19–21, 55) critiques this reductionism, warning it risks measuring success by numbers alone while neglecting holistic discipleship. This compartmentalization extended into academic missiology, where theology of mission was often divorced from strategy. Reflexively, methodology must continually revisit both theology and context, discerning how practices align—or fail to align—with Scripture and lived reality. Without such self-critical loops, missiology becomes static and unresponsive.

Postcolonial critiques further highlight how exporting Western ecclesial models perpetuates cultural dominance. George (2021, pp. 7–9) notes that inherited geographies of "sending and receiving" ignore the polycentric nature of mission in an era of globalization and migration. His call for attention to *motus Dei*—God's movement through people on the move—demands reflexive reexamination of anthropology, soteriology, pneumatology, and eschatology. Reflexivity here means holding inherited theology accountable to God's work discerned in new, mobile contexts.

*Theology and Social Sciences: The "Awkward Relationship"*

Another challenge is the uneasy relationship between theology and the social sciences. Anthropology often dismissed the supernatural as obsolete (Shepherd, 1972, pp. 230–31), while theology resisted engagement, creating mutual suspicion (Davies, 2002, p. 2). Even with renewed anthropological interest in Christianity (Robbins, 2006, p. 285; 2018, p. 232), the relationship remains "awkward," marked by epistemological divides over normativity (Robbins, 2018, p. 204).

Swinton and Mowat (2006, pp. 80–86) argue that detachment from sociology produces theology that is doctrinally sound yet socially disconnected, while sociology without theology yields description without missional horizon. Reflexively, missiology must integrate both: theological convictions are tested and deepened through social engagement, and sociological insights are submitted to theological discernment.

*Toward Reflexive Methodology*

Taken together, these critiques reveal not just methodological insufficiency but the absence of reflexive engagement. Traditional missiology often lacked the capacity to interrogate its own assumptions, contextual limitations, and cultural biases. A reflexive methodology addresses this lack by cultivating self-critical, interdisciplinary, and context-sensitive engagement that continually holds together gospel truth, theological integrity, and social reality. Without such reflexivity, missiology risks remaining bound to outdated paradigms, unable to equip the Church for faithful witness in the twenty-first century.

## Foundations for a Theologically Reflexive Methodology

Developing a missiology capable of bridging theological conviction and sociocultural complexity requires grounding in frameworks that affirm truth while engaging critically with human experience. Paul Hiebert's critical realism resists both naïve absolutism and postmodern relativism by affirming reality while acknowledging the partial, mediated nature of human knowing (Hiebert, 1985; 1994). Peter Berger's plausibility structures illuminate how social contexts shape the credibility of belief, requiring churches to reflexively sustain witness within shifting cultural frameworks (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Berger, 1967). Dallas Willard's epistemic realism reinforces these commitments by affirming that divine and moral truth is genuinely knowable and must shape discipleship, evangelism, and formation (Willard, 1998; 2009). Together, these perspectives scaffold a methodology that is reflexive, socially engaged, and missionally resilient.

*Hiebert's Critical Realism*

Hiebert's critical realism mediates between naïve realism, which assumes exact knowledge of reality, and postmodern relativism, which denies objective truth altogether. Critical realism is *realistic*, affirming an objective world, and *critical*, recognizing that human apprehension of

reality is partial, approximate, and culturally mediated (Hiebert, 1999, pp. 289–90). This combination enables theology to remain tethered to Scripture as divine revelation while acknowledging that interpretation is always situated (Hiebert, 1999, pp. 334–39).

This reflexive epistemology safeguards against two extremes that distort mission. Naïve realism, often aligned with Western positivism, universalized Western cultural forms and neglected the "middle level" of spiritual realities central to non-Western worldviews (Hiebert, 1982, pp. 122–29; 1999, pp. 214–15). Postmodern relativism, by contrast, reduces truth claims to useful fictions, eroding the uniqueness of Christ and the impetus for evangelism (Hiebert, 1999, pp. 233–78). Critical realism avoids both by affirming truth while acknowledging mediation (Hiebert, 1999, pp. 300, 326).

Theologically reflexive practice emerges here: missionaries are freed to proclaim gospel truth with confidence while engaging cultures with humility, subjecting both inherited theology and local practices to communal discernment. Hiebert's emphasis on community hermeneutics (1999, pp. 328–30, 343) ensures that theology is not constructed in isolation but reflexively refined through dialogue across cultures and contexts. This interaction grounds critical contextualization—evaluating cultural forms against Scripture without erasing local identity (Hiebert, 1999, pp. 360–61).

*Berger's Plausibility Structures*

Berger's sociology of knowledge provides tools for reflexively analyzing how social contexts render faith credible. Plausibility structures are the social bases—institutions, rituals, conversations—through which beliefs are reinforced (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 7). Historically, the Church functioned as the primary plausibility structure in the West, embedding Christian nomos into public life (Berger, 1967, pp. 19–25, 45–51). Secularization, however, has fractured these structures, recasting faith as private preference (Berger, 1967, pp. 127–54; 2014, p. 51).

Reflexivity here requires churches to recognize that plausibility is not secured by doctrine alone but by lived, communal practices. Berger shows that without such reinforcement, faith loses its self-evident force (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, pp. 176–78; Berger, 1979, pp. 171–73). In pluralist contexts, individuals must actively choose belief—the "heretical imperative" (Berger, 1979, pp. 11–26). For diaspora churches, this imperative means reflexively cultivating practices—bilingual worship, intergenerational catechesis, intercultural hospitality—that sustain credibility amid competing frameworks.

Berger's work also resists relativism: though all knowledge is socially situated, not all truth claims are equal (Woodhead, 2001, p. 4; Imber, 2023, p. vii). Reflexively, missiology can use sociological analysis not to relativize the gospel but to strengthen its plausibility through embodied apologetics and communal witness (Guinness, 2015, p. 161). Berger's notion of "signals of transcendence" (1969) further enables reflexive bridge-building, connecting human experiences of meaning and longing with theological truth.

*Willard's Epistemic Realism*

Willard complements Hiebert and Berger by insisting that Christian truth is not mere belief or cultural construct but genuine knowledge. For Willard, truth corresponds to reality: "a thought or statement is true provided that what it is about is as it is represented" (Willard, 1998, p. 142). This

epistemic realism resists the privatization of faith, locating discipleship in the realm of public, warranted knowledge (Moon, 2018, pp. 198–205).

In a reflexive frame, Willard's emphasis on knowledge critiques both secular reductionism and internal Christian tendencies to relegate faith to opinion. His notion of the "disappearance of moral knowledge" (Willard, 2009, pp. 2–3; Willard et al., 2018) highlights how Western institutions have stripped morality from public discourse. Reflexively, diaspora churches must reassert moral knowledge not as cultural nostalgia but as embodied truth validated in transformed lives (Willard, 2009, p. 184).

Willard's framework also reshapes mission praxis. Evangelism is not manipulation but invitation to reality; apologetics is a "helping ministry" clarifying reasons for hope ("Knowledge in the Context of Spiritual Formation"); discipleship is internalizing reality as it truly is (Willard, 1998, p. 316). Reflexively, this calls diaspora communities to examine whether their practices communicate Christianity as objective, public truth or as ethnic identity and private tradition.

Willard's "curriculum for Christlikeness" (Willard, 1998, pp. 320–23) illustrates reflexivity in formation: practices like solitude, study, and worship reshape thought, emotion, and habit to align naturally with God's Kingdom. For diaspora churches negotiating conflicting plausibility structures, such disciplines enable believers to live integrally across cultures (Willard, 1998, pp. 145, 431). Reflexivity here ensures that formation is not insular but oriented toward credible public witness.

Together, Hiebert, Berger, and Willard provide the foundations for a theologically reflexive missiology. Hiebert safeguards truth while enabling contextual engagement; Berger reveals how plausibility requires communal enactment; Willard grounds discipleship in public knowledge of reality. Each, in different ways, insists that theology must continually test itself in dialogue with context while remaining accountable to divine revelation. For diaspora churches, this reflexivity is not optional but essential: it equips them to live in tension, negotiate pluralist contexts, and embody the gospel as both true and credible in North America's fragmented landscape.

**The "Living in Tension" Framework for Diaspora Missiology**

Over the past half-century, the plausibility of Christian claims in North America has eroded, as Berger (1967) observed in his analysis of "plausibility structures"—the social frameworks that make belief credible. Where once public institutions reinforced Christianity, today secular, pluralist, and individualist narratives dominate education, media, and digital culture. The result, as Smith and Denton (2009) show, is the rise of "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism," a privatized, therapeutic form of faith detached from thick communal traditions (Berger, 1967; Guinness, 2024, p. 21). For diaspora churches, this erosion is compounded by their liminal position between inherited traditions and host-culture pluralism (Pocock & Wan, 2015, p. 84; Phan, 1999, p. 113).

Inherited traditions, especially vernacular expression, however, could potentially provide diaspora churches with crucial counter to the erosion of plausibility structures in secular and pluralist contexts. Kwame Bediako argues that using the vernacular is essential because God communicates in our languages, making the gospel more understandable and credible through familiar linguistic categories (Bediako, 2010, pp. 17–19). Andrew Walls similarly emphasizes translation as intrinsic to Christian identity, grounding the translatability of Scripture in the incarnation itself as the first act of divine translation (Walls, 1996, p. 26). Situated between

multiple linguistic and cultural worlds, diaspora churches are tasked with thoughtfully negotiating inherited vernacular expressions and host-culture pluralism appropriately.

The Living in Tension framework offers a theologically reflexive methodology for such churches. It seeks neither nostalgic preservation of homeland forms nor assimilation into secular privatization but ongoing discernment: testing theological convictions and ministry practices at the intersection of Scripture and social reality, gospel and culture.

*Gaps in Traditional Missiology*

Traditional mission paradigms, forged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, often emphasized fixed doctrinal assertions paired with pragmatic strategies for church planting and growth (Da Silva 2015). Ross, Kim, and Johnson (2023) argue that such methods privileged Western individualism, sidelining communal dimensions vital in non-Western settings. Reflexively viewed, these models lacked mechanisms to interrogate their own cultural biases.

Enoch Wan (2010) highlights the dualisms—soul vs. body, proclamation vs. service, career vs. bi-vocational missions—that fragmented witness. In diaspora contexts, this fragmentation reduced immigrant congregations to mission "fields" or sending pipelines, ignoring their agency. Postcolonial critiques deepen the problem: mission as cultural export perpetuates methodological reductionism (Kim, 2016, pp. 19–21, 55, 149–50). George (2021, pp. 7–9) warns that inherited geographies of "sending and receiving" obscure today's polycentric reality of mission and the *motus Dei*—God's movement through global migration.

Finally, the relationship between theology and the social sciences has often been "awkward" (Robbins, 2006, pp. 285–94). Anthropology tended to reduce religion to function (Shepherd, 1972, pp. 230–31), while theology often engaged sociology defensively (Davies, 2002). This mutual suspicion left theology abstract and sociology without a normative horizon (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, pp. 80–85). Reflexively, missiology requires ongoing dialogue where theology tests social insight and social analysis refines theological praxis.

*How the "Living in Tension" Framework Addresses These Gaps*

The Living in Tension framework integrates apologetics, evangelism, discipleship, and formation into a coherent, reflexive witness. Hiebert's critical realism affirms that theology is accountable to objective truth while recognizing cultural mediation (Hiebert, 1999). Berger's sociology shows that belief endures only when embodied in communal plausibility structures (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Willard's epistemic realism grounds discipleship in public truth, resisting privatization and affirming knowledge of God as reality (Willard, 1998).

In practice, apologetics gains credibility not through abstract argument alone but when beliefs are embodied in practices such as hospitality, justice, and worship that render Christianity experientially credible within pluralist contexts; evangelism initiates believers into communal life (Abraham, 1989); discipleship equips for faithful cross-cultural formation (Hiebert, 1994; Willard, 1998); and, formation prepares for credible public presence (Willard, 1998; Smith, 2005). Reflexively tested against Scripture and context, these interwoven practices sustain diaspora churches as living plausibility structures, offering a credible and integrative gospel witness in pluralist North America.

The Living in Tension framework addresses the shortcomings of traditional missiology not simply by adding new strategies but by embedding theological reflexivity into the very process of mission. Grounded in Hiebert's realism, Berger's sociology, and Willard's epistemic vision, the living in tension posture equips diaspora churches to sustain plausibility, resist privatization, and embody gospel truth in pluralist North America. In doing so, diaspora communities can model, for the wider church, how reflexive engagement of theology and context can yield credible, integrative, and transformative witness.

## Practical Expressions of the Framework: A Thought Experiment

Diaspora churches in North America navigate liminal spaces shaped by migration, secularization, and pluralism. Berger (1967) reminds us that plausibility structures that once sustained Christian credibility have eroded, while George (2021) emphasizes that global migration has created mission "at our doorsteps." In this setting, apologetics, evangelism, discipleship, and spiritual formation cannot function as isolated tasks. They must be reflexively integrated—tested against Scripture, informed by social realities, and woven into communal life—to render the gospel both plausible and transformative.

### *The Fragmented Landscape: Forces Shaping Diaspora Missiology*

The dominant cultural institutions in North America promote secular, pluralist, and individualist narratives that erode Christian plausibility (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 7; Guinness, 2024, p. 21). In this context, diaspora churches occupy a liminal "in-between" position (Pocock & Wan, 2015, p. 84; Phan, 1999, p. 113; Bhabha, 1994, pp. 218–20), vulnerable to marginalization yet also uniquely positioned to bridge worlds. Reflexively, fulfilling that opportunity requires acknowledging how forces that disintegrate plausibility can simultaneously be engaged as theological opportunities for witness.

### *The Integrative Imperative: Why Fragmentation Fails*

When disciplines operate in isolation, they fracture witness. *Apologetics alone* defends ideas without lived plausibility (Guinness, 2015, p. 161; Berger, 1967, p. 56). *Evangelism alone* reduces mission to decisions rather than lifelong apprenticeship (Abraham, 1989, pp. 18–19). *Discipleship alone* risks privatization, fostering inward piety without public credibility (Willard, 1998, pp. 320–23). *Spiritual formation alone* produces depth without missional direction, a "monasticism without mission" (Willard, 2002; Smith, 2005).

Reflexively, this fragmentation mirrors cultural disintegration—individualism, privatization, consumerism (Smith & Denton, 2005; Ross, Kim, & Johnson, 2023). What is needed is not programmatic addition but integration: an interpretive posture that continually tests whether practices cohere with the gospel and with each other.

### *The "Living in Tension" Framework: An Integrative Model for Diaspora Churches*

The Living in Tension framework grounds this reflexivity in three pillars:

- *Hiebert's critical realism* affirms objective truth while recognizing the cultural mediation of all knowing, fostering humility and contextual.
- *Berger's plausibility structures* highlight that Christian truth must be embodied in community life to be persuasive, making churches themselves living plausibility structures.

- *Willard's epistemic realism* anchors mission in the conviction that Christian claims are public truth, resisting privatization.

Practically, apologetics becomes embodied in hospitality and justice. Evangelism is integrated into catechesis and sacramental life. Discipleship equips believers for cross-cultural tensions, in the company of 'others,' and spiritual formation prepares believers for public plausibility.

In reflexively holding these practices together, diaspora churches embody a theology that is not static but continually discerned in lived tension between gospel and context. This integrative reflexivity enables diaspora communities to resist fragmentation, sustain credibility, and witness to God's reconciling reign in pluralist North America.

## Conclusion

Pluralism, privatization, and disaffiliation erode the plausibility structures that once sustained Christian faith in North America, rendering fragmented approaches to mission inadequate. The Living in Tension framework integrates theology and sociology into a reflexive, contextually grounded missiology. Drawing on Hiebert's critical realism, Berger's sociology of knowledge, and Willard's epistemic realism, the framework equips the church to engage culture with humility and confidence, fostering communities where the gospel is credible, embodied, and transformative. Situated in liminality, diaspora churches can model for the wider Church how to inhabit the "third space" faithfully, embodying and proclaiming Christ's reconciling reign in a pluralistic age.

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**Call for Papers:**

**Witness Amidst Confessional Plurality and Nationalism**

For Publication in *Global Missiology*, www.globalmissiology.org, April 2026

The April 2026 issue of *Global Missiology - English* will take up the vexing reality of multiple Christian traditions co-existing amidst nationalistic contexts. The fact that there are myriad Christian traditions has been explored, explained, and both justified and criticized. Even so, many Christians can be perplexed as to why numerous traditions not only persist but seemingly keep multiplying. Moreover—and arguably more importantly—people outside the Christian faith cannot help but ask why Christian groups cannot seem to agree with each other, further inhibiting their interest in the Christian gospel.

In addition, Christian traditions relate differently to the state(s) within which they exist. Some offer unwavering support, others criticize, some resist, others begrudgingly comply, and many try to ignore. Governments also differ in how they expect or demand loyalty from religious groups—but all states require some measure of compliance. Given today's seemingly rising number of nationalistic settings with autocratic leaders that both demand ultimate loyalty and do not wish for antagonistic religious groups, how churches can best give appropriate witness to Jesus Christ within settings of confessional plurality and nationalism is a widespread and practical challenge.

The following topics—in particular case studies—are examples of requested articles:

- Historical examples
- Earlier studies, e.g., the WCC's 1997 "Towards common witness"
- Current Contexts
- New Proposals
- Co-authored, cross-tradition studies

Proposed titles with approximately 100-word abstracts are due November 30, 2025. Full manuscripts of approved paper proposals will be due January 31, 2026. Manuscript guidelines, including a template for formatting, can be found on the *Global Missiology* website at:

http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/about/submissions#authorGuidelines

Please address all submissions and questions to globalmissiologyenglish@gmail.com.

**Call for Papers:**

**Christian Conversion and Mission**

For Publication in *Global Missiology*, www.globalmissiology.org, October 2026

Andrew Walls's posthumous *Christian Conversion and Mission: A Brief Cultural History* offers a nuanced and incisive overview of the history of Christianity's encounters with Judaism, Roman Hellenism, Germanic custom, the modern West, and the cultures of the global south from the first century to the twentieth century. The recurrent pattern in the gospel's interaction with successive cultures through the ages is conversion, understood at its most fundamental level as "turning," that is, turning to God in response to God's saving activity. By taking Christian history as a whole and inviting the reader to see it from the perspective of conversion, Walls challenges Western theology in several striking ways. First, he decenters Western theology as the standard by which to judge authentic or orthodox Christian faith and expression. Second, he suggests theological frontiers to be explored as Christianity enters the cultures of the global south. Third, he proposes a fresh way of seeing historic Christianity that is not defined by the creeds of Roman-Hellenistic Christianity.

As southern expressions of Christianity increasingly become the dominant forms of the faith, new themes and priorities that never occurred to Western Christians or to earlier Christian ages will appear. As Walls notes, "for it is the mark of Christian faith that it must bring Christ to the big issues closest to men's hearts," and it does so "through the structures by which people perceive and recognize their world," which are not universally the same. And as Christian faith is worked out within accepted views of the world in all their diversity, "those worldviews… are transformed, yet recognizable" (130).

*Global Missiology* invites submissions for this theme issue on "Conversion," as sketched above, from any of the following angles:

- Descriptive reports of Christian conversion in your locale: What themes and priorities are emerging? What are the big issues closest to local Christians' hearts? In what ways are local structures and worldviews being transformed, yet recognizable?

- Theological frontiers that need to be explored to reflect local realities and meet local concerns: What new issues need examination that Western theology overlooks entirely? What old issues need re-examination that Western theology addresses inadequately?

- Historic Christianity not defined by credal formula: Walls proposes a few essential convictions and responses that are observable when Christians of any culture express their faith.

  1. The worship of the God of Israel.

  2. The ultimate significance of Jesus of Nazareth.

  3. That God is active where believers are.

  4. That believers constitute a people of God transcending time and space.

  Along with these convictions and responses, a small number of practices or institutions have continued across the generations, namely, the reading of a common body of Scriptures and the special use of bread and wine and water (128-129).

Do these traits accurately reflect your local congregation? Is this framework of convictions-responses and practices-institutions a satisfactory way of seeing or understanding historic Christianity? Why or why not?

Proposed titles with approximately 100-word abstracts are due April 30, 2026. Full manuscripts of approved paper proposals will be due July 31, 2026. Manuscript guidelines, including a template for formatting, can be found on the *Global Missiology* website at:

http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/about/submissions#authorGuidelines

Please address all submissions and questions to globalmissiologyenglish@gmail.com.

**Book Review**

**Jacky Lau, Mark Hedinger, and Sadiri Joy Tira, eds.,**
***MAP: Missionary, Anthropologist, Professor—***
***A Festschrift for Dr. Enoch Wan***

Reviewed by Chris Carr

Published in *Global Missiology*, www.globalmissiology.org, October 2025

Lau, Jacky, Hedinger, Mark, and Tira, Sadiri Joy, eds., (2025). *MAP: Missionary, Anthropologist, Professor—A Festschrift for Dr. Enoch Wan*. PageMaster Publishing, ISBN: 978-1-77354-705-3 (paperback) pp. 226, $24.90; ISBN: 978-1-77354-706-0 (e-book) $9.90.

## Introduction

This festschrift volume, *MAP: Missionary, Anthropologist, Professor*, emerges as both an academic tribute and a testimony to the extensive missiological impact of Dr. Enoch Wan. Compiled and edited by a team of former students, ministry partners, and expert missiologists, the book exemplifies excellence in festschrift tradition: a carefully curated collection of essays recognizing not merely the intellectual contributions of Dr. Wan, but also the enduring network of global relationships cultivated through his life and career. The book is as much a window into the evolving field of diaspora missiology as it is a testament to Wan's uniquely integrative scholarly leadership.

## Scope and Structure

Like most festschrifts, *MAP* is multifaceted and thematically broad, organized into groups reflecting the disciplinary range of Dr. Wan's influence: Theology & Missiology, Diaspora Missions, the Relational Paradigm, Church Planting, Hybridity & Home, and Orality in Global Mission. The organization is not simply for editorial convenience; it mirrors the interdisciplinary legacy Dr. Wan fostered in his teaching, writing, and advising.

The early chapters situate the reader within the theological landscape of diaspora, creatively leveraging biblical, historical, and personal narratives. Notable essays such as Ria Llanto Martin's "An Introduction to Diaspora Theology as a Form of Scriptural Reflection," as well as Tereso C. Casiño's analysis of creative tension between diaspora missiology and migration theology, stand out for their clarity and depth. Each piece is carefully footnoted, with extensive bibliographies supporting further inquiry.

The subsequent sections reflect on lived practice—diaspora church planting, cross-cultural case studies, and the "relational paradigm" that Dr. Wan championed. These accounts are at once anecdotal and analytical, balancing personal tribute with methodological critique. In particular, the contributions on Chinese and Vietnamese diaspora ministries illustrate Dr. Wan's relational and pragmatic approach to missiology, while also underscoring his remarkable mentorship legacy.

## Strengths

Foremost among *MAP*'s strengths is the evident coherence between theory and praxis—a hallmark of Dr. Wan's work and a point of repeated emphasis throughout the book. The editors have selected entries that exemplify a pointedly integrative approach: biblical fidelity, anthropological sensitivity, theological creativity, and practical insight.

The volume is peppered with personal vignettes and tributes, highlighting the truly global impact of Dr. Wan's scholarship and leadership. The inclusion of substantial chapters on orality, relational realism, and intercultural theology, along with an exhaustive bibliography of Dr. Wan's published work, makes *MAP* not only a tribute but a resource for ongoing study.

The stylistic variety—essays, case studies, testimonials, biographical sketches—is another asset, preventing the volume from ever feeling redundant or merely ceremonial. The multi-generational, multicultural cross-section of contributors offers a living testament to the scope of Dr. Wan's influence; *MAP* is a collection that "models" as it informs.

**Critical Assessment**

While the festschrift format naturally constrains thematic focus in favor of breadth, *MAP* handles this tension with unusual deftness. Each essay, while honoring the central figure, also stands sufficiently alone in argument and research. There are occasional redundancies in recounting Dr. Wan's core contributions—diaspora missiology, relational paradigm, integrative methodology—which could have benefitted from a tighter editorial hand. However, for readers engaged with contemporary missiological scholarship, these repetitions reinforce, rather than detract from, the book's value as a scholarly resource.

Some essays are more accessible than others, and perhaps, given the broad intended audience, a concluding synthesis or section on "future research trajectories" would have been beneficial. Yet the editors' preface and the closing tributes function admirably as both frame and transition.

**Personal Reflection**

What makes *MAP* especially meaningful is how it demonstrates the ripple effect of Dr. Wan's life across generations, disciplines, and continents. Contributors recount being shaped not only by Dr. Wan's theory but also by his kindness, hospitality, and intentional empowerment of others. As a reader based in Canada, I found the Canadian case studies (such as Vietnamese and Filipino diaspora ministries) particularly relevant and moving.

In April 2025, I had the privilege of meeting Dr. Enoch Wan in person at a Chinese-background mission conference held in the Toronto area, where I reside. This opportunity to interact directly with Dr. Wan and witness his impact on the global missions community is an experience I value highly.

**Conclusion**

*MAP: Missionary, Anthropologist, Professor* is a fitting and thoughtful tribute to Dr. Enoch Wan—a scholar whose relational approach has reshaped the contours of evangelical missiology, diaspora studies, and theological education globally. The book's editorial intention is clear: to honor, yes, but also to further conversation and collaboration across cultures and disciplines. This volume marks not only a career but a continuing movement—one in which the "missionary, anthropologist, professor" model is both subject and challenge for a new generation of Christian scholarship. I recommend *MAP* without hesitation to missiologists, theologians, practitioners, and anyone interested in the intersections of migration, global Christianity, and relational ministry.