



Migration and Christianity in the UK

WJEC A level R.S. Unit 3A Christianity Theme 3B



Key Concepts:

- Large numbers of Christian immigrants have come to the United Kingdom from the Caribbean, West Africa and the European Union. Seventy-five percent of these have settled in London and an additional 10% in the Southwest, with the rest primarily in cities across the UK.
- Immigrants who join existing, **indigenous congregations** face issues of adjusting to new worship styles. In addition to this, language barriers can make it difficult to receive pastoral care or training in the faith.
- Catholic and Anglican Churches have tried to respond to these issues by appointing **immigrant chaplains**, episcopal vicars, and/or trained volunteers to assist with integration.
- Many immigrants, especially those from Caribbean or West African countries, have joined independent churches or non-indigenous **Pentecostal denominations**.
- This has the advantage of offering a familiar worship style and social support.
- There are now an estimated 500,000 Christians in the UK attending black-majority churches; 70 years ago, there were hardly any of these churches (see the Redeemed Christian Church of God denomination, UK [**RCCG**]).

- Reverse mission is the recent phenomenon of missionaries coming to the United Kingdom in the 21st century from countries to which missionaries from Britain travelled in the 18th and 19th centuries.
- These missionaries see the United Kingdom as now so secular that it constitutes a '**mission field**'; this corresponds with the **global shift** of Christian adherence from the Northern to the Southern hemisphere partly due to the rise of Pentecostal forms of Christianity.
- Reverse mission includes short-term visits of groups or individuals (i.e. a visiting African choir), longer-term church workers, **majority migrant churches** who see **evangelisation** as a part of their mission and indigenous UK denominations or theological colleges who appoint leaders from migrant backgrounds hoping this will positively influence their churches.
- Neither reverse mission nor the rise of immigrant churches have stemmed the tide of **Church decline** in the UK.
- Many reverse missionaries report a lack of progress in their efforts due to the strength of **secular** attitudes and the resistance of UK nationals to an evangelistic form of Christianity.

Key quotes:

"The Catholic Church has been further strengthened with the arrival of migrants from the new member states of the EU." (The Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales)

"The 'Pentecostalisation' of African Christianity can be called the African Reformation of the twentieth century." (A. H. Anderson)

"...the growth of Christianity in the 'global south' and of immigrant congregations has made mainline churches in Britain take notice..." (R. Catto)

Key arguments/debates:

Some Christians view the UK as a 'mission field', citing the relevance in the 'great commission' of Matthew 28 and declining belief and attendance. Other Christians argue that Christianity is either in a dormant phase or is actually alive and well in deeply culturally embedded attitudes and actions. Liberal Christians might say that God works in a variety of ways inside and outside of the Church and even through other religions. A focus on conversions misses agape love.

It could be argued that immigrants have assimilated well into some churches and denominations, especially when they share a common liturgical heritage and are in churches which have developed special initiatives towards migrants. On the other hand, it seems that new, non-indigenous congregations and denominations are better places to meet the needs of migrant Christians, especially when they offer training in areas such as cultural issues, financial management and vocational themes.

Key questions:

- What is the state of Christianity in the UK?
- What is the Christian mandate in terms of its relationship to culture?
- To what extent, if any, can it be said that Christianity in the UK is over?
- Are traditional churches handicapped in reaching out to Christian migrants?

Key words:

Indigenous congregations | immigrant chaplains | Pentecostal denominations | the RCCG | mission field | global shift | majority migrant churches | church decline | evangelisation | secular