

Giant sea trees would offer refuge to wildlife in big cities

Adam Epstein

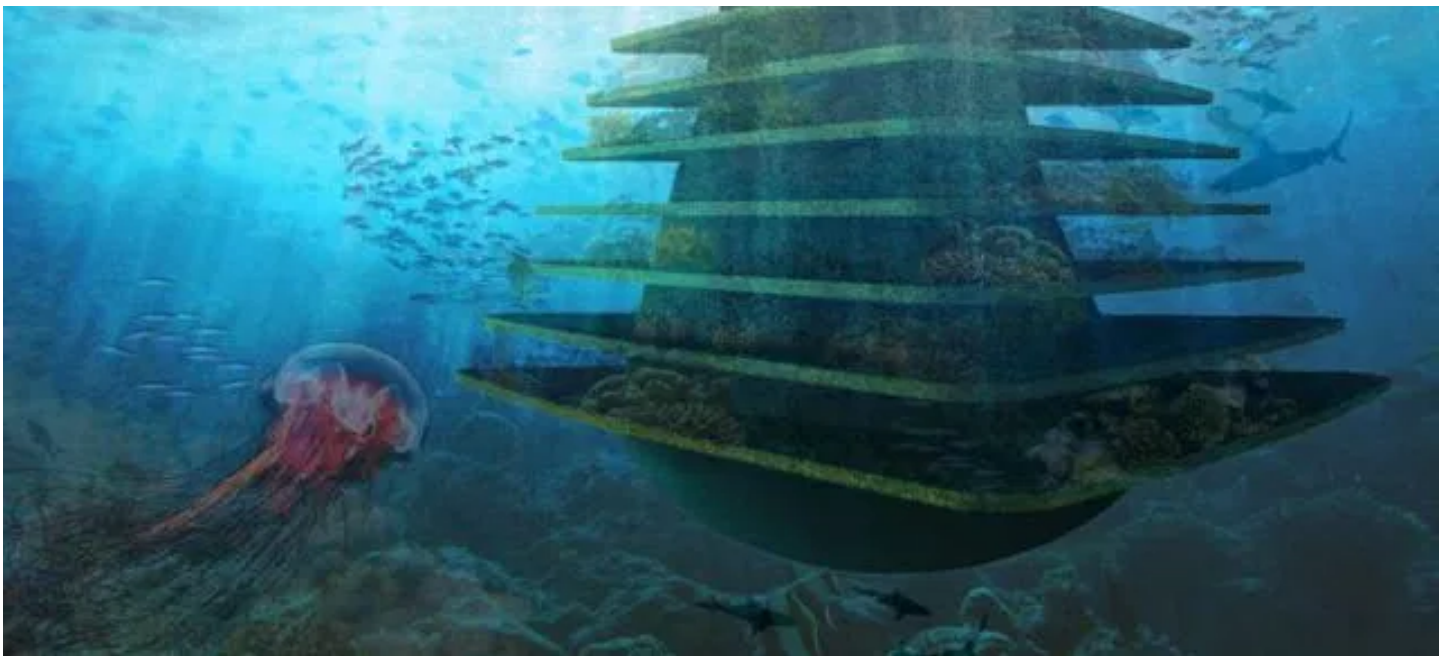
December 08, 2014



📷 The Ritz Carlton for birds. (Waterstudio)

In many of the world's fast-growing cities, there isn't enough room for people to live, let alone wildlife. Our friends beneath us in the food chain are becoming increasingly marginalized—world wildlife populations have [decreased by about half](#) over the last 40 years alone. Now, there's a plan to give urban homes back to wildlife. But these homes aren't *quite* urban. They're, essentially, giant floating trees.





📷 The underwater portion of a "Sea Tree." (Waterstudio)

Waterstudio, a Dutch architectural firm that specializes in designing floating structures, wants to erect “[Sea Trees](#)” in major cities. The structures are multi-tiered, tree-shaped habitats that float near urban areas and could provide sanctuary for birds, bees, bats and small aquatic creatures that might not be cut out for city living in the 21st century.

Based on the technology in oil storage towers, the trees have multiple platforms for accommodating wildlife. The underwater portion can house fish and other sea creatures and even provide an artificial coral reef in climates that will allow it.

Koen Olthius, Waterstudio’s founder, [told Fast Company](#) that the concept is ready to be implemented as soon as possible. “Our favorite locations would be Mumbai or New York,” he said. “Both have such a high price on land that it makes the construction of new park zones on land not feasible.”

According to Waterstudio, the design would cost approximately 1 million euros (\$1.23 million) to build. The idea, of course, may never actually come to fruition, but it looks like a clever and innovative way for cities to give refuge to animals that badly need it.

SPREAD THE WORD

Africa's "reverse missionaries" are bringing Christianity back to the United Kingdom

Lily Kuo | 5 hours ago | Quartz Africa



📷 Spreading the faith. (Getty/Photo by Gideon Mendel)

YORK, UNITED KINGDOM

Fourteen years ago, Reuben Ekeme Inwe's wife, Roselyn, had a dream. In it Inwe is preaching to a large crowd—not unusual given the young pastor had been delivering sermons in Lagos for years—but this time the faces in the audience aren't black but white. A material like white sand falls on the building where Inwe and his fictive congregation have gathered.

“We later recognized this was snow. There’s definitely no snow in Lagos,” Inwe says, seated at a cafe in York’s old city center of winding lanes and overhanging second-story shops. Roselyn’s dream, or “vision” as Inwe now refers to it, would be the first of several signs that led the couple to uproot their lives in Nigeria and move to the north of England. Here, their mission is to spread the gospel, specifically among white British nonbelievers.

Today, Inwe leads a church called Hope Centre out of a community center that also hosts mothers’ groups, Zumba classes, and French lessons. He’s worked hard to connect with his English neighbors. He brings their trash bins in from the street, invites them to tea (a new habit for him), and sends them Easter cards. His Twitter profile is a picture of him [standing in the snow](#) in his adopted city.

Inwe is what some scholars would call a “reverse missionary,” evangelists from former mission fields in Africa, Asia, and Latin America who believe their calling is to revitalize Christianity in the countries that first brought the religion to them. It’s a phenomenon that marks a shift in Christianity’s cultural center from the West to the so-called global South. By 2025, [at least 50%](#) of the world’s Christians will be in Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia; in 1950, an estimated 80% of the world’s Christians were in Western countries.

“The fire that we read about in books about this very great country that sent out missions, that same fire was missing,” says Inwe. After his wife’s dream, he visited York, touring churches and speaking to local pastors, and was dismayed at the rising tide of secularism. Today, half of all British adults describe themselves as having [no religious affiliation](#), the highest proportion since the late 1980s. “I knew that if there was anything I could contribute to bringing that fire back I was up for it,” Inwe says.

Inwe isn’t alone. Majority African diaspora churches in the UK that have for years recruited mainly from their own communities are now trying to win over the native English population. Some church leaders are training African missionaries and pastors in cross-cultural understanding to better evangelize in

the UK. Others are trying to forge closer relations between African congregations and the “[indigenous churches](#)” near them.



📷 The Pentecostal Nigerian megachurch, Redeemed Christian Church of God, has churches in more than 100 countries, including the UK. (Reuters/Jessica Rinaldi)

Like Inwe, they believe this is their duty. “Britain brought the gospel to us in the past. Now, by God’s providence we are here when Christianity is very much challenged and the UK churches are really declining,” says Bishaw, an Ethiopian-British pastor based in London. “It’s not just coincidence we’re here.”

God’s own county

York, quaint in its cobbled streets and medieval churches, doesn’t make for your typical mission field. The city of almost 200,000 people is 94% white, and more than half of its residents identify as Christian. It was one of the earliest sites of Catholic conversion efforts in the 7th century and its surrounding county, Yorkshire, is nicknamed “God’s own county” for reasons not entirely known.

Still, Christianity is losing its hold here. In 2001, three quarters of the city's residents identified as Christian. That proportion fell to under 60% as of 2011, the last time a census was taken, and as much as 30% of York's population identified as having no religion at all, a rate higher than the national average.

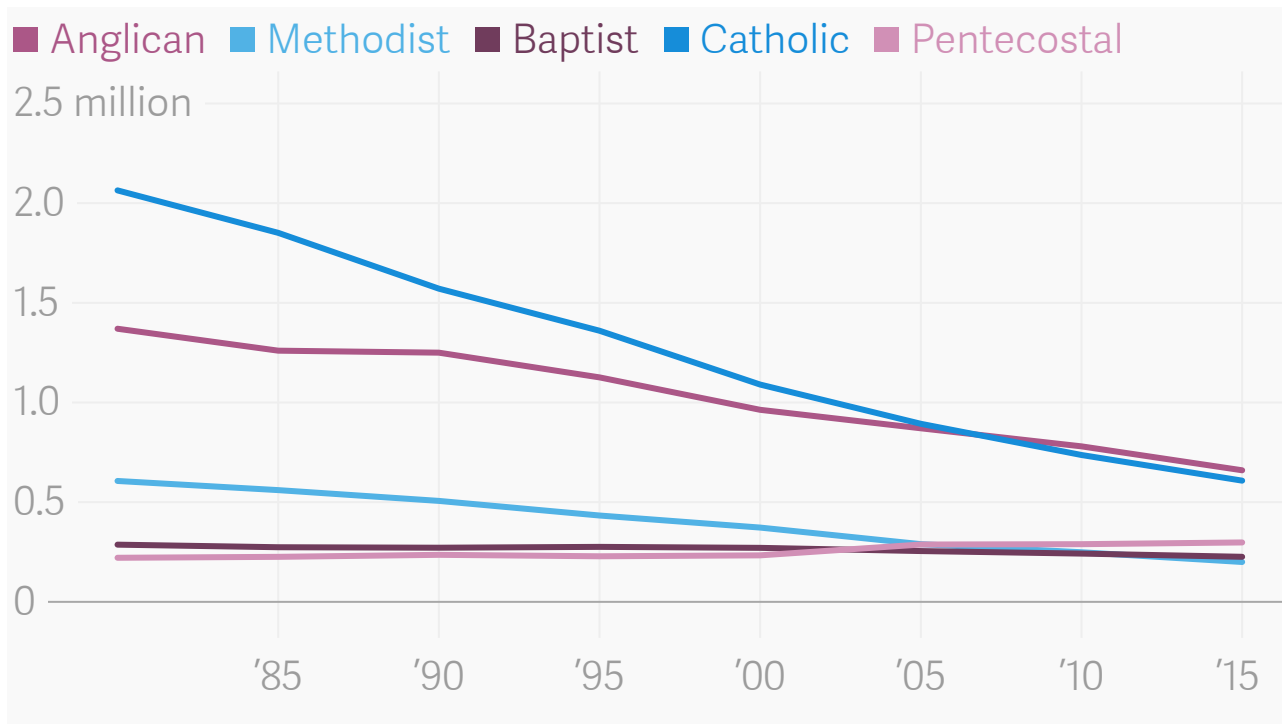


📷 A service at the Hope Centre church in York, UK. (Hope Centre)

Across the UK, social commentators have been sounding the death knell for Christianity. Church membership is expected to fall to **just 8%** of the population over the next decade, from more than 30% in the early 1900s. Almost all major Christian denominations in the UK churches have seen their numbers decline. Some predict the Church of England, where attendance has **more than halved** since the 1960s, will cease to exist **by 2033**.

The denominations that are growing—Pentecostal, Evangelical, and other charismatic congregations—can thank black-majority churches that have expanded to serve the flow of immigrants from West, Central, and East Africa coming throughout the 1990s and early 2000s.

Church membership in England



△ T L △ S Data: Religious Trends, British Religion in Numbers

Share

They are concentrated in cities like London. On any given Sunday, [at least half](#) of all churchgoers in inner London are black, of African or Caribbean heritage, a group that accounts for only 13% of the capital's population. Researchers [found 240](#) black-majority churches in the south London borough of Southwark, almost half of them in one postcode, operating out of old Bingo parlors, movie theaters, warehouses, and storefronts among kebab shops and convenience stores.

“We suspect that this represents the greatest concentration of African Christianity in the world outside of Africa,” [concluded](#) Andrew Rogers, a lecturer in practical theology at the University of Roehampton in London, who led the research project “Being Built Together” between 2011 and 2013.

Now, African diaspora churches are beginning to face an existential threat of their own. Under a Conservative government promising to [reduce immigration](#), church leaders are worried about maintaining growth from the African community. Immigration to the UK has already fallen from a peak of 632,000 in 2014 to 588,000 in 2016, with net migration reaching its lowest point in three years.



📷 An RCCG church in Southwark, London on Mother's Day. (Quartz)

“Immigrant members of the church will be outnumbered,” says Yinka Oduwole, head of communications for the Nigerian Pentecostal megachurch Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), which is also Inwe’s home church. Oduwole points out that those of African and Caribbean descent make up less than 2% of the British population. “If we are going to win the nation, we are going to need to carry along the majority groups.”

To do that, RCCG, which already has more than 800 branches in the UK, has been planting new churches not in cities home to large Nigerian communities but places like York or Knebworth, a village north of London with less than 5,000 people where Oduwole has started one.

The church is employing less traditional methods too. A new RCCG drama academy is training future actors and directors to make movies and plays with religious messages. In its first production in March at a small theater in London’s Leicester Square, actresses performed Shakespeare, reciting monologues of Juliet and Lady Macbeth in a mix of West African and London

accents. In an epilogue, the cast noted that the famous playwright took inspiration from the Bible and infused his work with “moral dilemmas.”



📷 Winner's Chapel, another Pentecostal Nigerian church, is expanding across the UK. (Reuters/Akintunde Akinleye)

For some, the mission is inspired by a newfound recognition of the UK as their real home. RCCG, which owns mass [tracts of land](#) in Nigeria and commands sizable influence with members that include the country's vice president and several state governors, is turning its political focus to the UK. Every day at least one RCCG church in the UK has been assigned to pray for the country's leaders.

Its annual mega service, the Festival of Life, is a prayer meeting of tens of thousands of RCCG members calling [for spiritual revival](#) in the UK. (UK politicians like former prime minister David Cameron have started [making appearances](#) at the event.) RCCG is also grooming the next generation, British-born children of the African diaspora who have one foot in both worlds, to be leaders and help better integrate the church with its host country.

“When you’re an immigrant to a new country the first phase of your life is trying to settle. You want to get work, to study. Once you’re settled, the problem is your heart goes back to your own country,” says Bishaw, who came to the UK from Ethiopia in 1990. “How can you preach to people that you don’t love? How can you earnestly pray for a country you don’t care about?”

Five years ago, after opening his church to the public as a community center during the London Olympics, he realized that cross-cultural mission work might be possible. “For me, it became a passion to mobilize the diaspora to mission and consider Britain as our own country,” he says.

Mission in reverse

The idea of the reverse mission has been around for a while. In 1880, a West African preacher named Edward Blyden predicted that one day Africa would be the “the spiritual conservatory of the world.” In the early 1900s, Daniel Ekarte, a sailor from Nigeria, started a church in the slums of Liverpool for both Africans and white British. Around the same time, a Ghanaian businessman, Kwame Brem-Wilson, also founded a pentecostal Sumner Road Chapel in Peckham, London and helped spread Pentecostalism in the UK.

In the 1970s, as former colonies adjusted to newfound independence, religious leaders from Africa, Asia, and South America began calling for a moratorium on Western missionaries to give local churches a chance to “stand on their own feet.” The International Congress on World Evangelization, held in Lausanne Switzerland, declared in 1974, “A [new missionary era](#) has dawned. The dominant role of western missions is fast disappearing.”

Since then, the growth of Christianity in the developing world, migration, and the explosion of diaspora churches have given the idea new currency. Today, the largest Christian church in Europe was started by a Nigerian pastor, Sunday Adelaja, who first went to the Soviet Union and Belarus in the 1980s to study

journalism. In the US, the Catholic church has been [recruiting African priests](#) for years.

Amazing Clip - Embassy Of God Church



“Global migration has changed the face of mission,” says Yemi Adedeji, a pastor at a church in London and associate director at Hope Together, a Christian charity.

In the UK, it’s not just African churches and missionaries who are coming. Prayer Mission UK, a South Korean Christian group, has sent more than [300 Korean missionaries](#) to the UK since 2010. Latin Link, a British charity, brings Christians from South and Central America to help keep Great Britain and Ireland from “[abandoning its Christian roots](#).” The Anglican Church Mission Society, which got its start sending missions to Africa during Great Britain’s colonial expansion, now regularly invites missionaries and pastors from Africa and South America to the UK.

“The typical identify of a missionary in this century will no longer be that of a Westerner serving in some remote areas of Africa, but probably that of a Mexican, a Nigerian, or perhaps a Korean serving practically anywhere in the

world,” writes Harvey Kwiyani, a UK-based pastor originally from Malawi, in a 2014 book on the topic, *Sent Forth: African Missionary Work in the West*.

Lagos to Oxford

In the UK, the reverse mission still faces obstacles. At a Sunday service at Winners Chapel, a branch of another Nigerian megachurch, in Dartford just outside London, there are few white faces in the audience. Today’s service on “fruitfulness” is aimed at couples struggling to have children. The pastor delivers his sermon from a platform, pacing and sweating in front of a widescreen projecting his face to the audience.

“You don’t need to have sperm to have a child. You don’t even need to have a womb,” he calls out. A little while later he seems to have changed his mind, promising that “the spirit shall quicken your sperm... quicken your ovaries.” Some of the women begin to cry. A man lies facedown on the ground.

So far, most African diaspora churches like RCCG and Winners, derisively referred to as “happy clappy” churches, have failed to attract a large following among the English. For critics of immigration, the predominately African congregations are yet another example of new migrant communities doing [little to assimilate](#).

The churches often make the mistake of using the same style of preaching as at home. Services are long and meandering, with heavy appeals to one’s emotions. “What worked in Lagos isn’t going to work in Oxford,” says Kwiyani, who is also head of Missio Africanus, an organization based in Oxford that teaches non-Western missionaries how to operate in the UK and Europe.

Kwiyani’s program includes workshops focused on Britishness, advice on how to build rapport with British people, and excerpts of the book *Watching the English*, an anthropologist’s popular analysis of British social mores. Intensive sessions cost up to £70 (\$92) each for one main takeaway, to make friends. “If you are

going to talk to British people about their faith you can't do it like we did in Africa," he says. "You have to build relationships."



📷 Living Faith Church, also known as Winners' Chapel, conducts a service for worshippers in Ota, Nigeria. (Reuters/Akintunde Akinleye)

Others are turned off by African churches where senior pastors are often wealthy and respected for their success, a sign of God's blessing. Both pastor [Enoch Adeboye](#), the head of RCCG, and Bishop David Oyedepo, the head of Winner's Chapel, [own Gulfstream jets](#). Like megachurches at home in Nigeria or in the US, the pastor is something of a celebrity. After Winner Chapel's Sunday service, the head pastor is flanked by security guards as he greets congregants.

"There have been instances where the African model of leadership hasn't transferred well to the UK. You get this 'big man' model, who is very much in charge. You have to look after him and respect him," says Andrew Davies, director of the Edward Cadbury Centre for the Public Understanding of Religion.

Abiodun Ojelowo, who attends the RCCG church in Hackney in east London, believes the obstacle isn't always communication or the style of African church

services. He goes to various outreach days, approaching people on the street and handing out religious tracts. British people are surprisingly open to talking about their faith, he's found.

“The English people, for them it seems like something they've lost,” he says. Sometimes he manages to get them to come to church, but that's often where it ends. “They come but they don't stay. Probably they think it's a black thing.”

[Sign up for the Quartz Africa Weekly Brief](#) — the most important and interesting news from across the continent, in your inbox.