

TOP 100 *Public Sector / Religion* **MATTHEW ASHIMOLOWO**

Senior Pastor at the Kingsway International Christian Centre

OUR CHOICE of Pastor Matthew Ashimolowo ahead of other public figures like Cabinet minister Baroness Patricia Scotland is simply because he has a strong influence over many thousands of ordinary people as well as being respected and listened to in the corridors of power.

Every week, his voice is broadcast to legions of followers on *Premier Christian Radio*. Every week, his sermons are broadcast across the globe on cable TV.

And in an age when charismatic church leaders are leading ever-growing super-churches, Ashimolowo has stood out as a pastor willing to speak out on social issues as well as help his flock towards the love of God.

But for us the number one reason why he is number one is because Ashimolowo has been using his influence to lead a one-man mission to uplift the black community with knowledge of self. A prolific author, he has penned an amazing 71 books as well as a tireless preacher, his classic *What's Wrong With Being Black?* reached the parts that community campaigners cannot reach.

Interweaving Christianity with an historical narrative about the glorious civilisations of Africa before slavery, and the legacy of pain that slavery left, was a groundbreaking move for a churchman.

He has also been outspoken about the normally taboo subject of mental health and is one of the leading thinkers about solutions to tackle the spate of gun and knife crime.

Physically short in stature, Ashimolowo stands tall in the estimation of decision-makers and despite his campaigning zeal and willingness to

tackle controversial issues, he has a place at the top table whenever politicians want to consult religious leaders.

He has also overcome bad publicity when the Charities Commission criticised financial management at the church, including how much money he was being paid.

Despite some headlines there was never any suggestion of corruption. The episode merely underlined the cultural gap between the watchdog which regulates charities and the internal set-up at many black churches including the status of the pastor.

He has now been a minister for over 30 years. Aged 56, Ashimolowo's story is itself an inspiration. Born a Muslim in Nigeria, he arrived in Britain almost penniless before building KICC from a congregation of 300 into Britain's biggest independent church which attracts 8,000 worshippers every Sunday, and now many more to the dozens of KICC satellite churches across London and the country.

But despite this success he shows no signs of slowing down. 'There are 37,000 churches in England and 32,000 are 100 and below,' he says. 'The reason is, in my opinion, many get to 100 and do not realise that there are things they needed to put in place. There are structures they needed to put in place.'

'When you were first conceived, you were one cell as you were growing in your mother's womb. God was adding cells until you became 9 billion cells by the time you were born.'

If cells are an analogy for Christians, that's a pretty big church he's got in mind.