

AIC theologies and western missions

A South African analysis

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Abstract

African Independent Churches are groups of churches emerging out of western mainline church experiences. They have increased into many small groups with variant names of their interest. The process of constant breakaways gave them the urge to multiply and gain autonomy. The mainline churches constantly criticise the disadvantaged of this uncontrollable proliferation for lack of theological focus. In South Africa, they are in both large and small faith groups. They are, however, growing irrespective of the theological concern of the mainline scholars and researchers. Since they have evolved over many years alongside the mainline churches, they are aware of such criticisms. As a result, they are compelled to work on a strategy to develop their theology to public spaces. The founding leaders and visions form the core of their theologies. Their biblical faith learned from their founders' leadership and visions. They are Africans who want to teach themselves the Christian ways anchored in their traditional heritages. Can African Independent Churches ever have their own unique theologies? This is the core-interest approach to this article.

Keywords: mainline, theological categories, theological training, founding leaders, traditional heritages

1. Introduction

African Independent Churches (AICs) are all over South Africa; around cities open spaces, townships, squatters, and rural areas with the colourful uniform display on Sundays. They arose out of similar patterns of background circumstances in each of the ethnic groups concerned, yet in most cases without links or coherence (Barrett, 1970:3). As a result, their theologies are merely being observed from their traditional attitudes and churching behaviour.

For not viewing the AICs in their context is to create speculation and manipulate their actual interest (Adamo, 2006:53). Their theologies are traceable within the views of their founders who are the custodians of wisdom to guide their faith. Their founding leaders' conduct is their source of indigeneity, history, cultures and opinions, apart from the general social conducts. They guide members' values, ethics

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and precepts. As long as the AICs stay apart and remain a separate field, their entire picture will not be reflected (Hayes, 1992:143-146). Being aware of their subordinate character to mainstream churches, they insist to “speak for themselves” for better understanding and relations with other Christian bodies. Can this kind of behaviour venture a meaningful response and make sense to broader debates in circles of Christian churches in and outside South Africa? What are their consistent messages to the ecumenical movement and social communities? The best method to understand them is to move closer to them and listen to their sayings about themselves. A participatory and active literature review process may be helpful in this regards.

AICs have already, through the Organisation of African Independent Churches (OAIC), suggested working through their ‘Founding Visions’ (FV) and “visions for the better world strategy plans” (Padwick, 2009). What are these plans and their value?

In attempting to answer the raised questions above, we firstly dedicate the paper to Rev Prof Nico Botha, a great ‘moruti or minister’ and liberationist scholar. He is someone interested in unity, justice and peace, reconciliation, and respect for humanity. He does not believe in absolutism and therefore listens to others ideas. The AICs on the same category lack a platform to air their views relating to what they perceive to be a theology of their own. This is traceable to the early times of missions in South Africa. The paper raises some personal theological issues from the AICs. The term mission from western perspective is interwoven with western theology as its core. Thus, the tone might be more emphatic on theology than mission, though the meaning is one and the same in this article.

2. Brief background and formation of independence

The African societies and faith gave way around 1885-1914 to a disapproved superstitious and the unacceptable institution of European ethics. At first, they had hoped that missionaries would end the “slave trade” and other abuses, including the view of African culture as feeble and doomed to collapse. Less social mixing with Africans and increasing social distance from them, direct control of mission stations from Europe has severely damaged the relationships with Africans at most essential and critical levels (Barrett, 1970:266).

The Western ethnographic literature was ignorant of African worldviews and the societal practices of traditional faith. As a result, biblical theology was always going to stand in judgement upon culture and opposes it at numerous points. The AICs are the product of that and it has increased their confidence to brew their Christian beliefs. In addition, such perspective of the belief systems became a criterion for their spiritual sustainable theological expertise. It has also become a holding ground for them to participate in the international and ecumenical dialogues.

The immediate challenge for these churches was the rejection of certain concepts, including initiation rites, polygamy and some ritual practices, particularly by the western and local mainline churches. The following are the examples.

2.1 Initiation rites

Initiation is the form of an educational system as African societies have their systems of education (Waruta, 2000:133). Many people believed that initiation is mainly to prepare an African person for procreation only. Young people were prepared to face the challenges before them and the unknown future. Some young men later became ironmongers, smiths, woodcarvers, builders, hunters, herdsmen and farmers. I had a conversation with an elderly resident of Melorane in the North West Province before the force removals from their ancestral land in 1950. According to him, some men from the same community regiments make beautiful wristlets and other artefacts from raw copper. My grandfather could build ox-wagons and wheels, a skill, which he learns from his predecessors. Such education dissipated or weakened when people were placed forcefully in barren lands by colonialists. AICs from the religious perspective through the book of ML Daneel summarise it well when indicating that to the AICs (2007), “All things hold together” in Christ Jesus. This title is a significant faith statement, which makes them tick both in rural and urban situations.

2.2 Polygamy

In other circles, issues of polygamy emerged and were deemed entirely unacceptable, particularly by some of the mainline church members and researchers. Nevertheless, for some AICs, it was what they believed since it was practiced from time immemorial, again moreover that the Old Testament (OT) refers to polygamy. One of the well-known practitioners in South Africa is the International Pentecostal Church (IPC) of Modise. Barrett (1972:117) mentioned that at some stage in Nigeria, two-thirds of the inhabitants lost to Christianity after a pastor refusal to baptise a wealthy polygamist. It comes as no surprise that the churches that practice polygamy often function in isolation from the others. They don't participate in matters like weddings and funerals with others for fear of criticism. Besides, a man who marries more than one wife would build each wife a house to guarantee their relationship freedom and comfort.

In South Africa, the Nazarene Church of Isaiah Shembe and International Pentecostal Church of Modise exhibit the polygamist practice (Barret, 1972:119). We mention polygamy because it is one of the traditional institutions practiced by many in these churches. In the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), polygamy is not compulsory and the St Johns Apostolic of Manku professes monogamy. These above mentioned

religious groups, though they have their unique doctrines, do not oppose each other on polygamy. Consequently, dealing with them is pending on the individual objective to research them.

2.2.1 Ritual practices

There had also been a serious concern from the 'western missionaries' since many African rituals are labelled demonic. As a result, the traditional ceremonies should not be part of the African churches the missionaries have developed although such practices are visible in some mainline churches. The Roman Catholic Church, Anglican and Methodist Churches do practice some form of rituals. The use of incenses, coupled with ritual murmuring is not different. Some ritual implications had a theological bearing among the AICs just like them in some mainline churches as we have indicated.

2.2.2 Approach

Imagine how the AICs will look when they have cast off their foreign mantle and assume the African garment of their indigenous faith (Amanze, 1998:91)? Though they grumble about the continuing theological education from other formations with little apprehension of their origin, their ecumenical body 'OAIC' keeps the relationship with them on ecumenical and evangelical levels until such time that they can present theology their way (Lubaale *et al.*, 2009-2013:30).

The AICs desired to document what is happening in their churches and vocalise their position as much as possible. Some ideas from their visions draft are engaged to solidify their argument. The initiative, through the OAIC in Nairobi, is imperative to create a united voice of the AICs. A possible alternative will be proposed for future development among them. This option came from the recommendation by Bishop Markos (2003:116-117)² who appealed for a Christian orthodoxy idea of faith for the AICs faith practices.

3. Literature review

Allen Anderson's book 'Bazalwane' (1992), sympathises with the evangelising style of the Pentecostals AICs. They form a large group among the AICs family in South Africa. Besides Anderson, Daneel's 'African Earth-keepers' (1999) grappled with bringing the messages of the AICs together. It is in the uniting effort that one can think of assessing the interest of the AICs theologically. The AICs have never opposed each other beyond their doctrinal formation. According to Gutierrez (1997),

² Bishop Markos acted as the General Secretary and Treasurer of the organisation in the early stage of the formation of the OAIC. Then Pope Shenouda III appointed him as the bishop of African Affairs.

“drinking from own wells” is exciting. The “AICs speaking for our self” (1985) is also crucial in projecting the voices of the AICs beyond the external understanding of them. Earlier, Sundkler (1964) and David Barrett (1970) formed the cradle of the AICs beginnings, but later the AICs wanted to represent themselves.

The ‘handbook’ by Padwick (2009-2013) became part of the result of the series of workshops which this author has attended in assisting the theological formation of the AICs. The author was also part of Anderson and Daneel’s research in the ’80s and 90s on the AICs in Greater Pretoria and Zimbabwe. He is currently part of the Task Team of the AICs “‘FV’” developed in 2009 in Nairobi to address with them their theological concerns across the African continent.

4. AICs early attempts on religious development in South Africa

The stories of the white researchers on the AICs are mainly from the western missionary doctrinal perspectives. For example, Sundkler (2000:1) has confessed that his research on the AICs was largely ‘limited’ to two Lutheran churches: one in the then Zululand and the other to northwest Tanzania. In his first publication (1948), ‘Bantu Prophets in South Africa’ reprinted in (1964) and the Maphumulo Theological Seminary in 1965, interest in the AIC theological debate was a matter of intellectual exercise. Additionally, there campaign out of theological curiosity to understand these churches. His volume, however, from the western scholastic perspective, has become an imprint of these churches to date.

The second author was Barrett (1968) with his ‘Schism and Renewal in Africa’ reprinted in 1970. His approach on the AICs continentally has also informed many of these churches. He spoke more to the Western academia than the AICs. Barrett (1970:37-38) justified his interest by stating that:

This extraordinary movement has given rise to an extensive modern literature, consisting of one thousand five hundred published studies in shape of books, articles, surveys, essays, reports, notes and monographs. These were written on the whole from an objective and sympathetic viewpoint; this study described the movement in considerable detail and brilliantly set forth their theological and religious calibre and dynamic African creativity that they represent.

Most of the studies are historical and deal with only one particular prophet, movement, era or area. Implicitly or explicitly their authors hold that the time has not yet come for overall assessment or interpretations of the entire range of actions, and a considerably large number of detailed case studies will be needed in the future. Consequently, there were very few works which attempted this more comprehensive work.

Apart from the works of Sundkler (1964) and Barrett (1970), there are many more who wrote about these churches. Also, one can recall the name of Pretorius' (1985: foreword) 'Sound the trumpet in Zion', in which he described the history and phenomenology of religion, and focussed on the Zionist section of independent churches. Oosthuizen said "let the people speak for themselves," referring to the AICs in KwaZulu-Natal (in Zwane, 1999:36). There were other AICs theological initiatives to consider before we came to the alternatives assisting them in moving forward theologically.

5. Effort by Daneel

In response to the previous AICs religious attempts, Daneel proposed other models to address the issue of theology among the AICs. He referred to Schreiber's (1985:7 in Daneel, 1999:5) patterns of translation, adaptation, and contextualisation among his choices for assessment. He also tried the 'traditional model' from the cross-cultural missionary perspective to explain the church ceremonies, worship, catechetical instruction and gospel translation into the recipient cultures. He thought that the translated Bible into the indigenous forms would free the Christian message from its precious cultural association into the new situation. Thus, the adaptation model was compatible with the local cultures.

Daneel's methodological presupposition came out of his effort to become part of the AICs ecological voices in Zimbabwe. His interest was from an ecological perspective. He waged war together with concern communities against deforestation and the chopping of indigenous trees relentlessly. In doing so, Daneel (1999:8) wanted to widen his research by linking the AICs and the mission churches in the process. He pronounced himself as a freelancer among the AICs, seeking the OT interpretation to take part in their ecological theological initiative, as a kind of adopted insider rather than acting as a missionary of the Western Church.

Daneel wanted to construct an indigenous philosophical framework as a basis for African Christian theology (1999:39). Bishop Kindiam Wapendama's sermon on tree planting indicated that:

Mwari (God), therefore, sends his deliverers to continue on earth with his work, with all the work that Jesus Christ started here. So let us all fight, clothing the planet with trees! Let us follow the example of the deliverers sent by Mwari (Daneel, 1999:39-41).

This sermon highlights the devastation of the land and calls unto God for the healing of the earth. Before anything, God's obedience is a priority as the deliverer. Moreover, in this instance, the bishop is aware that Jesus was once here on earth and the responsibility to keep his work rests with us.

Daneel had the full intention; for instance, he formed several associations, including the Association of African Earth-keepers; the Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologist, Women Desks and Youth Desks; all produced by the grass-roots communities mainly connected with AICs. He (1999:328) became a significant juncture between the African scholarship and the development of AICs theological discovery towards developing AICs theology. He absorbed the African eco-theologians to rethink about the neglected aspects of the liberation struggle in various forums like:

World Council of Churches; African National Christian Councils; All Africa Church Conference; Ecumenical Association of the Third World Theologies (EATWOT) among others. Daneel discovered that some essential themes have been developed in the various meetings held by the listed organisations. For example, biblical foundations for ecological stewardship; the nature of ecumenical interaction between the 'earth-keeping' churches; conversion and sanctification of individuals and Christian churches; ecclesiological perspectives; healing and salvation in holistic African and Biblical eschatological views; sin wizardry and church discipline; African eco-feminism; state and church interaction; African liberation theology and earth-keeping at the behest of Trinitarian deity (Daneel, 1999:328-9).

Nevertheless, all Daneel's above-listed efforts did not entirely bring much success to a vital turnaround strategy of the AICs for their theological discourse. Daneel had worked and advised on ecological research in South Africa as well. The formation of the Faith and Earth-keeping (F&E) Project in 1996 was his initiative with Dr Olivier of Systematic and Ethics Department at the University of South Africa. Although the project investigated the AICs and ecology, the objective was pro-western mainly because of funding.

6. On the side of the AICs

The AIC scholars like Oduro (2006) had a similar concern for a theological strategy like the western countries. For instance, Oduro (2006:1-16) suggests several categories that formed a glut which African Independent religious education can take. He listed them as follows:

The informal or western institutional type; the periodic or seminar, workshop type; the mentorship, apprenticeship or discipleship types; theological education and training (TEE); distance learning; self-taught type; lastly, Christian education facilitated through the teaching of adult Sunday School and teaching manuals.

The problem with Oduro's categorisation is more divided than uniting like in the western patterns. In that way, AICs may not be able to justify their concept of

comprehensiveness. Perhaps because of the low educational upbringings among the AICs. The OAIC elected a Task Team.

7. OAIC theological Task Team for developing the AICs theology

The working committee of the OAIC, ensuring a proper theological foundation suggested a theology of the AICs development from within its constituency. Such synergy should happen between the three broad types, of the nationalist, spiritual, and Pentecostals, as they are enormous. It is from such interaction between the faith traditions, and the study of the scriptures, that the AIC member churches are in a better position to keep their ministers effectively (Lubaale & Padwick, 2009, 2013:28). The OAIC had to work with the AICs, particularly from a leadership perspective. Their theological educational initiated programmes aimed to serve and promote communicating the gospel among the youth and youngsters generally. In the process, the development of appropriate models of the AICs church leadership surfaces.

The document of the OAIC on 'Visions for a better world' (Padwick & Lubaale, 2009, 2013:29), listed their critical theological points based on the following:

Useful tool for policy development and implementation; to enhance AIC understanding and practices of mission, especially in cross-cultural and urban settings, and among young people; to sharpen and refocus OAIC distance education methodology and practice; facilitate the strategic growth of AIC theological institutions; and to promote active teaching of AIC theologies and their issues outside AIC religious institutions.

On par with the OAIC "visions for better world" above, Magesa (2010:164) criticised the over-centralised spiritual and administrative powers, indicating fear and distrust on the part of the religious institutions and its leaders' membership. He supports Hillman's (1993:84) view on pluralism against rigid uniformity practices. Space for the AIC to express themselves theologically within their contexts may be possible.

8. Cosmic understanding of AICs realities

Anderson (1991:4) believed that we should not discuss the AICs outside their infinite knowledge of the truth. To Africans, all things share the same nature and the same interaction one upon the other. They recognise the hierarchy of power and not of being; for all is all and are here and now. No distinction between the sacred, secular, between natural, and supernatural in nature, man, and the unseen is inseparably involved in one another in the whole community. This is partially

true from the traditional African perspective which observes the following African mythology informing symbolic and configurative power of the human mind at varying degrees of strength (Deme, 2010:8). It is the fruit of spiritual experience, which has a remarkable influence in any grass-root Christian convert.

In an interview with Mr Kgori, a shepherd and member of Independent Church (not actual name) in the North West Province, he told me of the ancestors mountain which no-one should climb during midday. He argued that only powerful traditional healers and powerful prophets could climb. He indicated that somewhere on top of the mountain there is the following Setswana writing, “joko, kika, motshe le mogoma.” In English this translates to, “yoke, wooden mortar, a wooden pestle, and plough.” Adjacent to them is a carved stone with water, but no-one can drink from it.

Testing the allegation, Mr Kgori and I climb that mountain. The closer we get to the top, reluctant he became. Eventually, he decided not to climb anymore. We realised how he valued that place and believed the story of his predecessors. The story became a power and harbour of the Holy Spirit with the experience that was deeply rooted in AIC worship. Many of the AICs we have interviewed in the past confirmed the same. That only bishops and specialised traditional leaders in the community can visit such places. That has helped to keep the hierarchy or protocol in the life makeup of the AICs.

Kgori's case supports what Anderson has said; that indigenous Africans and the many AICs do not separate the sacred and the secular in their given environment. AICs are indigenous, although they are both urban and rural. It is their social, ethnic and economic conditions that separate them from other parts of the national community, whose position is governed wholly or partially by their customs (Posey, 1999:3). We should not forget that many colonial mission stations existed mostly in rural villages in South Africa. Intensive research is necessary to determine their influence in those areas after many years. The issues of language, culture and traditions in such stations and reactions of people are worth noting.

The second point comprehends the degree of change when the indigenous Africans encounter the gospel through a foreign person. Traditionally some behaviours were not for missionaries to decide for Africans, rather Africans themselves. In some areas there are no foreign missionaries at all, or very few. In such places, the local traditional experiences may dominate even the gospel.

Another notable example is from the AIC ‘prayers for rain.’ This prayer is from Saint John's Apostolic Faith Church member. We transcribe this prayer and interpret it for non-Africans to understand:

Our God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Modimo “God” Ntate “Father,” Modimo Mora “Son,” Modimo, Moya “Spirit” O Halalelang “Holy”), God of our

ancestors, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God of Manku (founder of St Johns) and “several other founders and elderly bishops and mentors mentioned,” please give us rain. We pray to you through your Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. If we have offended you by breaking laws which you have laid before us to obey in this village (or place), have mercy on us and forgive us.

In the same sequence, they recite prayer to get healing, fortunes or to control rough ancestors. They rebuke evil spirits consistently, whether seen or unseen, just like in the mainline churches. AICs prayers are targeting specific things or events. You do not just pray to God, but you pray because there is a particular need or challenge to resolve. In the case of the church visions, prayer is in sequence, to observe the protocol and God at the helm. In this way, there are no contradictions foreseen since the ancestors and elders are at the level of God realm. Nevertheless, as real ancestors, they are the great servants who communicate with the living. As a result, the lack of dialogue may not be a lack at all, but undermining of other religious opinions which may have helped to enrich the course of appreciating God’s divine rule.

The separations in the early AICs from the mission churches may warrant investigation regarding the disruptions that have occurred. Surprisingly, the OAIC FV has become a better option articulating a new theology of the AICs after many attempts without any success. There have been, though, other development initiatives on AICs theologies outside the OAIC parameters. For instance, Inus Daneel has worked extensively on the AICs for many years in both South Africa and Zimbabwe. Some of his research findings have led to the present quest for theological development of the AICs.

9. Error and balances in initiating doctrinal theology of the AICs

Following the completion of the religious event that recently directed the AICs to the FV by the OAIC in Nairobi Kenya was a long process. It was a process that possesses an underlying history, which was narrated from different periods and positions. It is from that basic history that special attention was required. Its intension was to discover the AICs central theological focal point. Such a point will prepare a platform for debates with the mainline theologians and the ecumenical movement on theological development. So far what we have gathered from the different mainline researchers was mostly fixed ideas, not meaningfully interpreting the fundamental theological aspirations of the AICs. Anderson (1992:107-108) expressed it well when stating that, “The AICs are to develop their theology and are irritated by the secularized theology of the West.”

Anderson (1992) believed that before the AICs formulate the AICs, scholars themselves should carefully scrutinise any theology, their world view and its operational parameters. For instance, their belief system needs to be studied, and data are statistically given to the gratification of their religious adherents (1992:107-108). It is

in the light of those mentioned above that the AICs theological interpretation should be approached, in the light of their Biblical understanding and preferred options (including cultures and traditions as aspects of their heritage). Once this is exposed to the public scholarly space, meaningful dialogue with other faiths may be possible.

Daneel (1999:4-5) believes that theology of the AICs is community-based. Thus, concluding that the AIC theology, by definition, is spontaneously enacted sang and danced in direct response to African needs. AIC theology for all its lack of books written by the actual participants is contextualised theology par excellence.

We can engage the accuracy of the term spontaneous, because, to colonial missionaries, there was no such for them. AICs have objected the tendency of missionaries to become players and referees at the same time. Questions like how possible can they become Christians without losing their African and cultural identities are common. Who can bring a better model of theology for these churches is in the mouth of every western theologian and missionary. AICs have indicated that the ready-made western theology is not an option for them, although they had no ready substitute for it. As a result, spontaneity is a suggested compromise. We should not forget that the AICs are not merely community of the elders, they have evolved and their children studied to higher levels.

10. AICs interactions with the African theologians

The subject of the book 'Separate but the same Gospel' (Mijoga, 2000) is about preaching in the AICs in Malawi. The Bible has the authority and a fundamental role for these churches. It is vital for teaching as a whole. The laws in Exodus protect the freedom of God, and everyone should obey them. Through each of the above-raised points, the writer confirms two things:

- (a) the sermons do not demonstrate any significant conflict between what the AICs preach and what the Mission Churches (MC) in Malawi preach, that the AICs are separate from the MCs. (b) They prophesy the same Gospel as the MCs (as the title of the record argues); in their preaching, the AICs are not forerunners of African culture (Mijoga, 2000:194).

Bosch (1992:447), for instance, confirms that inculturation is one of the patterns in which the platform character of contemporary Christianity manifests itself. It confirms the reality that the original Christian faith never exists except as "translated" into a culture. In his broad definition of contextual theology, Bosch (1992:421) views inculturation and contextualisation in a complementary pattern. The reason for this is that AICs are actively cultured churches and working from the particular context and understanding of faith from a specific African setting.

The sole weakness of implied African settings above is that most of the African theologians hold two titles on Christian faith, mainly with a stronger presence in support of the very western faith they aspire to criticise. It is at this stage where difficulty surfaces because African theologians are unable to get a convincing conclusion. They cannot discard themselves from the mission churches of the west or the so-called mainline churches. Theologically speaking, what is at stake is the failure to give out from the Christological uniform pattern for diversity (Hillman, 1993:84). The continuous dialogue may be necessary to unlock this dispute.

11. Founding Visions

During the initial stages of founding theologies in the Christian faith, the AIC founders often experienced a direct sense of God's guidance and sought to conclude that it is God's will, without properly defined implications. In positions like that, an FV was what the people of faith hear God telling them about what they should execute. In addition, that has been the responsibility of the leadership and guidance from apostles, bishops, prophets and preachers. They believed in their experiences and how they understood their calling to live out faith in their communities. For the AICs, these visions emerge when people of faith spend time reflecting on the Christian Scriptures under the guidance and sometimes the revelation of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes individuals inspired by God steered the process resulting in prophets or apostles. Sometimes a congregation gathered in fasting and prayer to meditate together on their calling, and the visions emerged communally (Ambani *et al.*, 2009:8-9).

Paradoxically, it was the OAIC development and HIV/AIDS work rather than in the formal theological programs (Lubaale *et al.*, 2009-2013:24-5). They learn the significance of encouraging the AIC leaders and their members to articulate their visions. The FV ideas during the struggles of hearing that God is calling and to obey it in the particular circumstances and communities they are a part of. In the subsequent generations and different cultures, the community of faith will face new challenges. The founders themselves pass on, a new generation leader emerges, society changes and people have new expectations of the church. It is the procedure of passing on the FV from one generation to the next. Such modifications are not readily observable since, at the same time, the cultures of the church and social club are also changing. Thus, the FV influenced the evolutionary changes, which happen because of external social forces.

12. AICs definition of theology

The word theology entails a written and published work in several volumes, which attempts to systematise Christian faith. Alternatively, employed in the theology without books of the AICs, which may articulate as an 'implicit' theology. To differentiate

between the two meanings, we use the term FV to refer to the implicit theology of an AIC during its years. We reserve the word theology to see what it has produced in the secondary process of recovery and reflection (Padwick, 2009:8). In their 'FV,' the OAIC view of theology is the peak of their discussion. It is the people making sense of God amid their accounts, cultures, and worldviews. The vision is people, building on their African cultures and values, 'changed' by the Good News of Jesus Christ and consecrated by the Spirit of God as they create an abundant life in the community of their children and the Earth. It is creating enough bases for them to develop their theologies from oral perspectives.

However, this does not mean that the mainline approaches of theology are irrelevant, but that the AICs will want to be vocal about what is regarded as their own theological makeup. It is not competition, rather self-expression theologically. To understand the challenges of the AICs, African and black theological concerns may be revisited to form a perspective. The next section will relate to the formation of such a perspective.

After looking into all models of theology, which different scholars attempted to implement, none of them has convinced the AICs locally and internationally. Bishop Markos (2003:116-117) of the Coptic Church has appealed for Christian orthodoxy among the AICs. His view is that Protestant and AICs proliferated with little evidence of 'orthodoxy' and AICs must take advantage of that. Orthodoxy, according to him, emerges as a practical means of steadfastness in the straight ways of our Lord Jesus Christ and vital Christian life. It brings the early church to the human mind and heart, through the power of the Holy Spirit in the sacraments. This explanation by Markos came through the OAIC general secretary that the Coptic Pope Shenouda the 117th in Cairo founded the organisation. Many of the AIC representatives across the continent, including South Africa, were present. In this way, it is offering an alternative for the AICs to initiate a proper biblical theology for themselves. It is, however, at this stage that African and black theologians warn against AICs isolating themselves from them. The sense is that they can all work together for a common theology that is African since they claim to represent the African continent. Their position can be explained as in the following paragraphs.

13. The position of AICs within the conversation with African and black theologians

African, black and AIC theologies are the primary historical sources of the construct for an African church (Molobi, 2010:494). Mugambi's, though not a missiologist, prolific writings dispensed a missiological necessity. Because of his depository information, it is clear that in the long run, such information may not elude its significance of encouraging African Theology as heritage. Mugambi emphasised a

need for a paradigm shift from the 'Old World Order' into the 'New World Order'. This initiative was not individualistic but cooperative and communal. In this way, Mugambi was not just a scholar but a mentor to many in the African continent and abroad. He wished to hear from the voices of many Africans, and the AICs ranked in social levels. As a result, the activity of the AICs from inculturation perspective remained a true reflection in its context.

According to Molobi (2010:501), African Theology, black Theology and the AICs are contextual and they reveal how Christianity ought to take place in the African soil. Kairos document the other appeal for theologies that are prophetic and shift from Church institutionalism (Van Der Walt in Speckman & Kaufman, 2001:34). Prophetic Theology is referring to the moment of truth for liberation and freedom of expression in one's language as well. Christ the African in inculturation remains one of the patterns in which a 'pluriform' character of contemporary Christianity manifests itself (Bosch, 1992:447). The original Christian faith never exists except as 'translated' into a culture.³ Christianity, as a result, should not be a burden to the people of cultures, but an alternative towards solutions of their social problems.

According to Anderson (1992:117), relating to Jesus as the ancestor is marked by the concept of spirit, which remains vital in the African life as is immemorial in Africa. These are not merely superstitions but real in African people's lives. Spirit in African understanding is the core of cultural existence and sustainability. Since the dawn of Christianity, 'spirit' activity gained a public emphasis through biblical Christ. What makes the spirit unique is its continuum of the traditional religion, where life needs to be always identified with the will of the essence, at work and play, at worship, at a wedding perhaps, at mealtimes, in the harvesting and preparation of food (Anderson, 1991:8-9). It is the deeper level of spiritual responsibility that leads to a successful life. For example, the Pentecostal and Charismatic groups, the African Apostolic Churches and the Zionist Churches go deeper in their healing beliefs. They prophesy and speculate about the cause of deceases. In the mainline churches, on the other hand, although they pray for the sick, they will not commit themselves – other than suggesting that a sick person either consult a conventional doctor or a traditional healer.

To enter into a dialogue with the AICs (Opuka, 2006:100) suggests that the facilitators of the AICs theological education encourage meaningful adult learning. The AICs play roles in creating a learning climate, posing problems and promoting the processes of research to find solutions from within their ranks. The AICs need to be assisted in rediscovering for themselves, though with the impartation of information to the African and black theologians as partners to engage the world debate on the potential dawn of new buds within the theological discussions.

³ *ibid.*

To allay fears from all African and black readers of the Bible and culture, Masoga (in Molobi, 2001:501-502) referred to the 'African organic readers' of the Bible. For example, to him, the power of interpreting the Bible functions in a two-way process. Firstly, that the organic readers are produced from the periphery and advance to learn the ropes in the centre,⁴ they have a task to advance the edge to become itself and not the copycat of the centre. Secondly, there is an ongoing relationship between organic readers and organic reading context. The challenges encountered daily by AICs in grappling to interpret the Bible offers them growth, understanding and creativity, critical, empowerment and openness. It is the context which encourages the modelling of the African bible reading. This process from the African, black and AIC theologians may reveal the real source of their theological reflections.⁵

To maintain the momentum in the development of African theologies, we will include the AICs insight as the newcomers in terms of expressing their personal theological views. It will assist and foster internal debates between the three theological groups. It will also assist to project the outcome as the necessity to be shared in the public space. African Theology, black Theology and the AICs coexist. Their initial growth and development rendered them to be autonomous (Molobi, 2004:141). It should be clear that as much as African and black theologians articulate what ought to be African, they are captured as they are not willing to engage their theological cases outside the western theological parameters. As a result, there is an unfinished case between them and the western theological epistemologies. We are not encouraging unruly interruption in theology since that could be labelled colonialism and racism functioning in the reverse.

14. Conclusion

The article maps a brief background of the formation of AICs discussed in the books of Barrett and Sundkler. Some scholars worked hard towards understanding the theology of these churches, especially in South Africa and we appreciate their works. However, their works lack focus in the AICs faith experiences. We also briefly explained the concept of polygamy as some AICs practice it. Moreover, we responded to the most criticised area against the AICs – the areas of initiation, polygamy and ritual practices. We took ritual practice as no exception as some mainline churches also practice it. The latest development from the AICs, through the OAIC, is their concept of FV. This concept strengthens the belief in their founders and hoping that whatever development they initiate must not be far from that of the founders.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

A popular suggestion is that the AICs theologies are spontaneous (impulsive), enacted and sang, but AICs were not all convinced by this assumption. AICs came with the concept of FV. Bishop Markos of the Coptic Church suggested that the AICs learnt from the Orthodox Church to justify some preconceived ideas such as the bishopric protocol. The OAIC appointed a 'Theological Task Team' to look into the challenge relating to theologies of the AICs. This provided an opportunity for further research and development in theological initiatives and possible integrations of ideas for further advancement. From other parameters, the AICs should not always be viewed as isolated faith groups, particularly by African and black theologian scholars. The nature of theological challenges of the AICs affects African and black theology more or less the same. The three of them may have to begin to engage each other theologically for the sake of progress. The western theologies have done lots of work from their perspectives and may be interested to enter into debates with new themes.

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