

# AFRICANS DOING MISSION IN BRITAIN

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## Section 1.0 Introduction

The topic of this dissertation has been chosen primarily to affirm the mission of African Christians in this country. It is considered necessary to explain the nature of the ministry of Africans doing mission in Britain. Some of them are the products of the mainline churches in Africa. An example is John Sentamu who ascended the See of York in July 2005 as Archbishop from the Anglican Diocese of Birmingham.<sup>1</sup> There are many more Africans in the ministry of the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian and other denominations which have previously sent missionaries to Africa. These types of missionaries have not come to Britain with a new or modified Christian message. They have come simply to reinforce the home mission of their respective churches. Their ministry will not necessarily be different to the traditional British clergy as they minister within the defined doctrines of their denominations. The Anglicans, for instance, must conform to the thirty nine Articles of the Church of England, although they do not explicitly teach what the Articles affirm.

On the other hand, there are African missionaries who are the products of the African Initiated Churches (AIC). The middle initial in AIC has been variously used by authors as 'Independent', 'Indigenous', 'Instituted', and 'Initiated'. The author prefers to use the last, not only because it is the preference of the World Council of Churches, but also because it resonates with the initiative of black Africans in their interpretation of Scripture, and their expression of Christianity in the African context. According to

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<sup>1</sup> Arora, Arun, 'The impatient archbishop', *The Tablet*, 25 June 2005, p12

Bengt Sundkler's typology<sup>2</sup>, this category falls into three groupings: Ethiopianism, Zionism and Messianism.<sup>3</sup> AIC throughout South Africa, East Africa and West Africa can broadly be classified under each of the above. To Sundkler's typology the author would like to add a fourth group, New Charismatic Churches.

For the purpose of this dissertation, field research has been carried out to establish exactly why adherents to the various AIC have remained committed to the churches and to discover their respective long term missionary strategies. Some authors on AIC who are not within the membership have been interviewed, and some AIC members who either have been converted or were actually born into the fold have also been interviewed. The latter is of more interest to the author. One interviewee, Professor Chris Oshun, happens to be a theologian, missiologist and writer. The reason for relying more on the evidence of insiders is because a host of outsiders have already produced materials on the AIC in published text books, contributions to theological and missiological journals and in occasional papers. Theologians, scholars and writers have only started to emerge within the AIC during the last ten to twenty years. They have embarked on the idea of telling their own stories in a different way to the often distorted views of the earlier writers, both black and white, who owe allegiance to their various denominations and would like to portray the AIC as mixing Christianity with traditional religion.

Questionnaires for these interviews were designed to establish the origin of the churches, their founding prophets, and the nature of their mission to Britain amongst other foreign countries. Secondly, the questionnaires were designed to find out

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<sup>2</sup> Sundkler, Bengt, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, London, Lutterworth Press, 1948, p38ff

<sup>3</sup> Hollenweger, Walter J. *The Pentecostals*, SCM Press Ltd, London, 1972, P149.

whether their mission to Britain has been casual and for the convenience of their nationals, or a response to the Great Commission, to spread the good news to the uttermost parts of the earth. Thirdly, it is desired to identify the composition of the adherents in each location and their missionary intentions for the future. Findings from these have enabled the author to describe the nature of their mission to Britain. The aim is to establish which of these AIC groups are prepared to do mission not only in the midst of their own nationals, but also for the benefit of other ethnic sections of a multi-ethnic Britain. The AICs operate mainly in the inner cities of the industrialised regions of the country where African immigrants have settled. The population characteristics of these regions are multi-racial and multi-cultural as immigrants came from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean islands. The author's idea of doing mission to the fullest is to be able to involve these sections of the community as much as possible in the short term, and to involve all ethnic groups in the longer term. This dissertation attempts to spotlight the theology of the AIC from an inside perspective, to analyse an appraisal of their strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats to British Christianity. By the same token, the same analysis is applied to British Christianity to identify gaps in British theology and to suggest strategies available to fill the gaps by dialogue, and partnership formations.

## **2.0 AIC's in their African context**

African Initiated Churches, according to Harold Turner, are founded by Africans in Africa and primarily for Africans.<sup>4</sup> These group of churches have developed throughout Africa, south of the Sahara, from the Southern through to the Eastern and

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<sup>4</sup> Turner, H.W., 'A typology for African Religious Movements', *Journal of Religions in Africa*, 1967 p17

Western coasts of the continent with pronounced diversity of doctrine and culture. The “three self” formula for indigenisation put forward by missionary leaders, Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson in the mid nineteenth century – self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating – was automatically and effortlessly achieved by the AICs long before this goal was realised by European mission churches.<sup>5</sup> During the late 1970’s, John Mbiti<sup>6</sup> complained that

‘it is utterly scandalous for so many Christian scholars in the old Christendom to know so much about heretical movements in the second and third centuries, when so few of them know anything about Christian movements in areas of the younger churches.’<sup>7</sup>

The position is now different and excellent books are now written about the growth of Christianity in Africa, south of the Sahara with significant contribution to the growth by the AIC. The author agrees with Philip Jenkins when he argues that

‘rapid growth is occurring in non-traditional denominations that adapt Christian belief to local tradition, groups that are categorized by titles like “African Indigenous Churches.” Their exact numbers are none too clear, since they are too busy baptizing newcomers to be counting them very precisely. By most accounts, membership in Pentecostal and independent churches already runs into the hundreds of millions, and congregations are located in precisely the regions of fastest population growth. Within a few decades, such denominations will represent a far larger segment of global Christianity, and just conceivably a majority.’<sup>8</sup>

It is very difficult to classify the different churches that constitute the AIC. Different writers have attempted to group and regroup according to different characteristics but no one has been able to come up with an accurate classification. It is understood that the number of church denominations are in thousands across Africa who profess

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<sup>5</sup> Bosch, David J, *Transforming Mission*, New York, Orbis Book, 1995, p331

<sup>6</sup> Mbiti, John S, *New Testament Eschatology in an African background*, London SPCK, 1978, p32

<sup>7</sup> Mbiti is quoted in Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, p154

<sup>8</sup> Jenkins, Philip, *The Next Christendom, The Coming of Global Christianity*, Oxford, OUP, 2002, p7/8

minor differences. Part of the problem of classification stems from the absence of any defined statement of doctrines for these churches. Most of these churches developed through the calling and ministry of their prophets. These prophets were called mostly by visions or through dreams. Through these media, they were given divine instructions to preach or to do the work of healing. As they were called by the Holy Spirit, there could not be written documentation to guide their ministries as would be expected of organised structures found in European churches. It is believed that even till today, many of the AICs have no written doctrines, and of those who have, there are always generalisations which lack uniqueness. There must be some distinctiveness to affirm a separate identity. However, the following headings provide a rough guide to the various groups as classified by Sundkler.<sup>9</sup>

## **2.1 Ethiopian Churches**

The AICs designated ‘Ethiopian’ are non-prophetic and lay no emphasis on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They do not practice baptism by immersion and their worship services are non emotional. They do very little or no exorcism and are not interested in the menace of witches. They have fewer rules and regulations about the consumption of food and drink. There is little or no difference between them and their parent churches in worship, liturgies, clerical vestments and administrative structures. For survival, some of them have recently modified their worship styles to imitate those of the Pentecostals and Zionists as their membership continued to decline. Ethiopianism is very common in Zimbabwe and South Africa, with a few in West Africa. To the Africans, Ethiopianism usually refers to the broad movement of

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<sup>9</sup> Sundkler, Bengt, *The Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, London, Lutterworth Press, 1948

ecclesiastical independency in South Africa at the turn of the nineteenth century and hence defined in broader terms.

The successful resistance of European colonial power in Ethiopia, coupled with the historiography of the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8) and Psalm 68:31 'Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God' are interpreted as a sign that the oppressed black people have a specially appointed place in God's plan for salvation. The fact that baby Jesus was taken to Egypt for refuge by divine instruction, coupled with the fact that it was prophesied by Hosea that 'Out of Egypt have I called my son' gave Africa the pride of playing a leading role in the divine plan for salvation. The carrying of the cross of Christ by Simon of Cyrene was seen as a claim that Africa responded to Christ's message of salvation long before the European peoples did. This gave rise to a psychological sense of self confidence, self-esteem and responsibility for spreading God's kingdom in Africa.<sup>10</sup> Ethiopianism, therefore, does not imply that any church from Ethiopia planted churches in other parts of Africa.

The case for Ethiopianism has been weakened especially during the past fifty years. As the number of educated and articulate black people grows, many mainline churches have been forced to accept black people into leadership positions. Today, unlike half a century ago, there are African bishops, moderators and high ranking officials leading multiracial churches even in Southern Africa which suffered a long spell of apartheid in her political and religious history. This is a reversal of the experience of the Church Missionary Society in West Africa where the leadership of

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<sup>10</sup> Daneel, Inus, *Quest for Belonging*, Harare, Mambo Press 1987, p38

black people was successfully resisted by the white missionaries and leading to the downfall of Samuel Ajayi Crowther, the first black African bishop.<sup>11</sup> This is also a victory for the vision of Church Missionary Society's Henry Venn, who campaigned for self-supporting, self-governing and self-extending churches, a campaign which led to the consecration of Crowther as bishop on June 29<sup>th</sup>, 1864.<sup>12</sup> The churches identified under this heading include: In Southern Africa, African Methodist Episcopal Church, Thembu Church of Nehemiah Tile, Transkei Church of Christ,<sup>13</sup> and in West Africa, United Africa Church.

## 2.2 Zionist Churches

Zionism is a term that covers churches which are described as 'Zionists' in Southern Africa. Opinions differ widely as to the most apposite nomenclature for these type of churches. 'Zionist' is preferred by Sundkler in his original writing<sup>14</sup> because so many of the prophetic groups in Southern Africa are Zionist.<sup>15</sup> The word 'Zion' often features in their names and they have indigenised concepts of a kingdom of God in which the holy city of Zion occupies a focal position in their thoughts, either symbolically or in a concrete sense. Whilst Sundkler calls this group 'Zionist' type churches, Daneel calls them 'Spirit-type'<sup>16</sup> churches, because some prophetic movements specifically do not want to be considered Zionist, so that the designation is not general enough. The Apostolic Faith Mission also comes under this description

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<sup>11</sup> Omoyajowo, Akin J, *An African Expression of Christianity*, ed Basil Moore, Black Theology, London, C Hurst & Company, 1973, P84

<sup>12</sup> Beaumont, Mark, *Henry Venn on planting self-supporting, self-governing and self-extending churches*, MA Module403, BCC Lecture Note 6, 2003/04

<sup>13</sup> Pretorius, H L, *Ethiopia stretches out her hands unto God*, Pretoria, University of Pretoria, 1993, p40

<sup>14</sup> Sundkler, Bengt, *Bantu Prophets of South Africa*, London, Lutterworth Press, 1948, p302

<sup>15</sup> Daneel, Inus, *Quest for Belonging*, p39

<sup>16</sup> MacRobert, Iain, *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the USA*, Basingstoke, Macmillan 1988, p60

although there are some differences between ‘Zionists and ‘Apostolics’ but not as marked as with the Pentecostals. Both Zionists and Apostolics emphasize the working of the Holy Spirit including dreams, speaking in tongues, visions, prophecy and healing. They are not too preoccupied with ‘speaking in tongues’ or glossolalia, which is the hallmark of classical Pentecostals, who regard it as the ‘initial evidence’ of the baptism with the Holy Spirit.<sup>17</sup>

In West Africa, ‘Zionism’ covers Aladura and Prophetic churches like the Apostolic, Christ Apostolic, Faith Tabernacle, Musama Christo Disco, Divine Prayer Society, Cherubim and Seraphim, Celestial Church of Christ, the Brotherhood of the Cross and the Star and the Prophet Harris group. According to Daneel, some prophetic movements specifically do not want to be considered Zionist<sup>18</sup>. A prominent example is the Apostle Church of Johane Maranke, who claims to represent a more authentic version of Christianity than the Zionist churches. They also claim that their doctrine and worship are living examples of the first Apostles of Jesus Christ.<sup>19</sup> Their voice is difficult to ignore because they represent a significant number in Southern Africa: being the largest Indigenous church in Zimbabwe with branches in Zambia, Zaire and Malawi. Turner believes that the diversity of accents on the work of the Holy Spirit justifies a subdivision into soteriological and revelational churches.<sup>20</sup> The soteriological churches place the main emphasis on prophetically guided faith healing.<sup>21</sup> Redemption is interpreted mainly as deliverance from disease caused by demonic forces – especially witches, wizards and evil spirits. Because of the

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<sup>17</sup> Turner, Max, *Power from on High, The Spirit is Israel’s Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts*, Sheffield, SAP, 2000, P446ff.

<sup>18</sup> Daneel, M.L., *Quest for Belonging*, p40

<sup>19</sup> Daneel, M.L., *Zionism and faith-healing in Rhodesia*, The Hague, 1970, p350

<sup>20</sup> Turner, H W, *A typology for African religious movements*, in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, (1)1, 1967 (c), p76

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*

persistent emphasis on healing one could also refer to them as “therapeutic churches.”<sup>22</sup> By contrast the “revelational churches” place the accent on revelations given to prophets through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In this way, the Spirit regulates church activities and the lives of individual members. ‘There are shifts of emphasis, but these are mainly among different congregations of the same church, depending on the tastes and talents of the prophets concerned.’<sup>23</sup> This kind of shift also relates to the Aladura churches in West Africa.

In the opinion of the author, Turner’s preference for ‘prophet-healing churches’ is more appropriate to these churches. Peel quoted a leader of one of these churches who wrote scathingly about Joseph Babalola, founder of Christ Apostolic Church, one of the most powerful prophets, as joining one of the ‘churches mighty in prayer but weak in Scripture.’<sup>24</sup> Peel’s assessment of being mighty in prayer is the very essence of healing backed by prophetic visions and revelations, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. His assessment of being weak in Scripture, is now an anachronism even before the turn of the last century. With the emergence of intellectuals including outstanding theologians in the membership of the Christ Apostolic Church, Cherubim and Seraphim Church and other Aladura groups in Nigeria, Musama Disco Christo Church in Ghana and elsewhere, the AIC can now rightly claim ascendancy into theological maturity. There is now established, Joseph Ayo Babalola University manned by eminent theologians from within the CAC in Nigeria. Other Aladura groups like Cherubim & Seraphim and Celestial Church of Christ have also started building their own Universities. There are similar initiatives in other parts of Africa

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid p77

<sup>23</sup> Daneel, M.L., *Quest for Belonging*, p40

<sup>24</sup> Peel, J D Y, *Aladura: A Religious Movement Among the Yoruba*, London, OUP, 1968, P138

where seminaries and colleges of higher education have opened the gateway to the training of AIC ministers and church workers.

### **2.3 Messianic Churches**

The term 'Messianic' is basically a sub-division of 'Zionist.' It is a term used to describe groups which, centred around a dominant personality, claim for him special powers involving a form of identification with Christ. Hayward argues that 'when this identification with Christ becomes substitution, the group has .....moved outside the sphere of the Christian Church.' <sup>25</sup> Nathaniel Ndiokwere expressed dissatisfaction with this kind of definition and argues that an AIC prophet must necessarily possess special powers, which make him unique in his community. Such a prophet does not, and cannot usurp the identity of Christ who has given him these powers.<sup>26</sup> Because of the uniqueness in spiritual powers, some of them have been accorded names and titles like: Jesus of Achalla, Jesus of Ikot Ekpene, Jesus of Oyingbo, Samuel Mutendi in Zimbabwe, Simon Kinbangu in Congo, Prophet Harris in Ivory Coast. Have they usurped the messiahship of Christ? Messianism is considered a sub-division of Zionism because the so called Black Messiahs would not personally confess to be comfortable with accepting such roles. Examples of such prominent leaders who deny the acceptance of Messiah as titles are Leader Olumba Olumba Obu of the Brotherhood of the Cross and the Star in Nigeria, Simon Kimbangu of Congo and Isaiah Shembe of South Africa.

Sundkler initially used mediation at the gates of heaven as a criterion for a basic

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<sup>25</sup> Hayward, V E W, *African Independent Church Movements*, London, Edinburgh House Press, 1963, p71

<sup>26</sup> Ndiokwere, Nathaniel, *Prophecy and Revolution*, London, SPCK, 1981, p 9-10

distinction of Messianism. The crucial question to be asked is: who stands at the gates of heaven, Jesus Christ or the Black Messiah? If the answer is the latter, then Christ's mediatorship is either violated or superseded and the designation 'Black Messianism' is applicable. Sundkler researched into this problem and explained that many Zionist prophetic leaders were attributed with the functions of 'custodian of the heavenly gates' yet this special task was never interpreted in an exclusivist sense as replacing Christ as Mediator.<sup>27</sup> The author finds this explanation satisfactory and there is no sufficient reason for raising the question of substitution.

#### **2.4 New Charismatic Churches**

These churches adopt some of the characteristics of 'Aladura' theology and modify them with the flamboyance of American preaching, singing and healing styles. Some of them seek to develop what is now popularly known as the 'prosperity gospel.' An example is the Kingsway International Christian Centre operating in East London. This church is reported to be multi-national and commands the largest number of adherents in Europe as a single congregation. In Nigeria, there is a group of churches known as 'Winners.' They have achieved spectacular growth throughout the country and elsewhere and they are probably the most wealthy of the new AIC's. Another new church spreading not only in Nigeria, but also throughout the length and breadth of Africa is the Redeemed Christian Church of God. Like the Winners, they also preach prosperity gospel but are down to earth in preaching in the fashion of the televangelists. This group would probably like to dissociate themselves from the

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<sup>27</sup> Daneel, Inus, *Quest for Belonging*, p41

mainstream AIC, just like the Pentecostals who keep their distance from the Apostolics and the Zionists in Southern Africa.

## **2.5 Notable Strengths**

One of the reasons for the emergence of the AIC is the desire to construct a new theology that is relevant to African culture in the first instance, and secondly, to follow certain guidelines which are discernable from the Holy Bible. As a result, to the African thinkers, AIC theology can be appraised as innovative, progressive, bible-based, bible-affirming and bible-fulfilling.<sup>28</sup> It is bible-fulfilling in the sense that signs and wonders are retrieved from obscurity and made realistic in the lives of believers. Hence, it becomes possible to dispense with the services of Traditional healers and to end the ambivalent living of Christians who cannot do without the services of Traditional religion and healers. The following exemplify these notions.

### **2.5.1 Spiritual Renewals**

Jesus always taught by example. He was fond of prayers to the Father. His prayer retreats usually took place at the mountain, the wilderness or the seaside. Many of the AIC have taken to this habit because in these places, one is cut off from the environment which is full of sin. In these places, fuller awareness of the glory of God is bestowed and the devout Christian can be best placed to draw spiritual strength. Experiences derived from visiting these resorts are similar to the experience of the three Apostles on the Mount of Transfiguration, where Moses and Elijah appeared

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<sup>28</sup> Omoyajowo, J Akindele, op cit, *Cherubim and Seraphim, The History of an African Independent Church*, New York, London, Lagos, Enugu, NOK Publishers International, 1982, p91

with Jesus. It is common that some members receive the Holy Spirit for the first time in these places. This is the reason why one will find the AIC making regular pilgrimages to resorts for spiritual renewal. During the retreats, signs and wonders are very common and many people try to create time to attend for this purpose. Roswith Gerloff has described how believers encounter that kind of rapture which takes one beyond one's narrow confines into a new plane of existence, or into the inner court of an awareness of the presence of the Divine, which opens up a new perception of life and self:

‘Touching and falling, weeping and laughing, dancing and speaking in tongues thus become quite natural vehicles of understanding the world, not only with one’s intellect but with one’s whole self. The Spirit of Jesus enters the depth of people’s lives, falls afresh on them, fills them with power.’<sup>29</sup>

In the AIC milieu, the Kingdom is not yet, and the need for fasting is still appropriate. The African wants to cry to God in the time of crisis, and to expect an answer. Milingo has described the concept of the God of the believer thus.

‘This is the God whom we need in Africa. A God who is a real father, one who cares for his children, protects them, gives them security and is accessible. The God who is said to be in the Holy Heaven, who is at peace with himself and does not care about what is happening among the people on earth, is certainly not an African God.’<sup>30</sup>

Milingo’s thoughts describe the basis of the AIC approach to communicating with God in prayers and fasting. Although he is a Catholic bishop, his gifts and theology are basically AIC compatible.

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<sup>29</sup> Gerloff, Roswith I H, *A Plea for British Black Theologies*, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang 1991, p62

<sup>30</sup> Milingo, E, *The World in Between, Christian Healing and the Struggle for Spiritual Survival*, London, C Hurst & Co. (Publishers) Ltd, 1984, p75

### 2.5.2 Integrated Worship

In Africa, diversities in language, culture and class can be visible even within small communities. Yet, coherent worship in the AIC is still possible and is well managed according to the nature of the diversity. This differs from the idea of homogeneous unit churches proposed by Donald McGavran<sup>31</sup> from the background of sociology. According to his theory for church growth,

‘People operate better in social groups more than they do as individuals. A social group may be considered a homogeneous unit. It is comprised of one kind of people. It conditions the individual, it makes up his mind; to some degree it controls him. It gives meaning to his life. Among the many aspects of human society none is more important to church growth than these homogeneous units of mankind.’

This method of church growth takes inculturation too far and creates religious apartheid in which middle class is separated from working class; black people from whites; aristocrats from peasants; one linguistic tribe from another. In larger congregations, it is easy to segregate worshippers according to age or language. Each sub-congregation is led by a worship leader and occasionally, all the sections come together either in an open space or by electronic devices linking them together. At such times, all matters that concern everybody are dealt with. In smaller congregations, all sections are integrated and participation is shared across the board, men and women, young and old, clergy and laity. In all congregations, integration is always across the board, irrespective of class. It is common, therefore to find within ranks of Elders and clergy, men and women, young and old, academics and professionals, traders and craftsmen. Selection is not always by a particular criteria,

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<sup>31</sup> McGavran, D.A., (Ed.) *Church Growth and Christian Mission*, New York, Harper & Row, 1965, p69

but by a combination of spiritually gifted and administratively skilled individuals. This pattern is common among most of the AICs but in the newer groups, especially the charismatics, there is more emphasis on training for ministry where educational background is crucial.

### **2.5.3 Inculturation**

The relationship between the gospel and different cultures remains controversial in contemporary missiology. Lesslie Newbigin has argued that,

‘The gospel endorses an immensely wide diversity among human cultures, but it does not endorse a total relativism. There is good and bad in every culture and there are developments continually going on in every culture which may be either creative or destructive, either in line with the purpose of God as revealed in Christ for all human beings, or else out of that line. The criteria for making judgments between the one and the other cannot arise from one culture. That is the familiar error of cultural imperialism.’<sup>32</sup>

Conversion of a person requires the conversion of the person on the one hand, and the conversion of his culture on the other. When an individual is converted and not the culture, the result is a partial conversion in which the convert reverts to his culture to find an answer to his problem in the time of crisis. There is certainly a falsity in this dualism and it is necessary to appreciate that ‘there is not and cannot be a gospel which is not culturally embodied.’<sup>33</sup> In order therefore, to avoid superficiality in the religion and as a result, living an ambivalent Christian life, full attention must be paid to the culture in which the gospel is preached. Certainly, the Gospel must confront inappropriate aspects of a culture. What it cannot do successfully is to change the culture completely and substitute another strange culture in its place.

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<sup>32</sup> ,Newbigin, Lesslie, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, London, SPCK, 1992, p197

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p189

Elom Dolvo argues that inculturation is one of the major factors contributing to the growth of AICs. He defined it as a local process of making Christ and the Gospel message of salvation known and understood by people of different cultures, localities and time, using the resources of their culture to promote meaning, acceptance and owning the Gospel. He contends that ‘inculturation in Africa strips the Christian faith of some of its missionary (Western) cultural context in exchange for African cultural idioms that make it relevant and ingrained in its new context.’<sup>34</sup> Dolvo’s description means that Africa can now put a round peg into a round hole. Previously, it was a square peg in a round hole which left gaps. Inculturation is the means by which the gaps can be filled in the African setting. In the Nigerian Yoruba traditional religion, there are many gods representing different functions of the life of the people. But there is also a pre-eminent god called ‘Olodumare.’ Bolaji Idowu explains that the Yoruba people see the god Olodumare as equivalent to the Christian God.<sup>35</sup> This is because the functions of Olodumare and the Christian God are similar. Substituting the former for the latter posed no problems. It was just a matter of changing names. Hence in all Yoruba Christian liturgy, ‘Olodumare’ becomes synonymous with ‘Almighty.’ The Yoruba Bible actually translated ‘Almighty’ to read ‘Olodumare’ It should be recognized that ‘Olodumare’ is the highest in power and might among all the lesser Yoruba deities. The actual translation should have been ‘Alagbara’ meaning the one with unlimited power and authority. Some sceptics may call this sacrilege, but the author calls it inculturation. Donal Dorr<sup>36</sup> has explained that there are many similarities between the Yoruba divinities and those of ancient Celtic peoples. He outlined different parallels including the goddess Brighid. He explained ‘When

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<sup>34</sup> Dolvo, Elom, *Exchange, Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research*, vol 33 No1(2004), p29

<sup>35</sup> Idowu, Bolaji, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*, London, Longmans, 1962, pp 32-62

<sup>36</sup> Dorr, Donal, *Mission in today’s world*, Co Dublin, The Columba Press, 2000, p45

Ireland became Christianised Saint Brigid, who has the same name, took her place and was given many of her functions.<sup>37</sup> The author sees this also as inculturation in the making. Similarly, when the Yoruba became Christianised, the Christian God took over the functions of 'Olodumare'.

Substitution of water for herbs and medications is one of the key factors leading to the sustained growth of the AIC. In the African traditional belief, herbs prescribed by herbalists have spiritual powers to effect healing or to provide a solution to problems. Similarly, some Africans believe that water, when sanctified by a prophet, has been charged with power by the Holy Spirit for the same or better results. This change in the substance of the water is similar to the medieval doctrine of 'transubstantiation', by which 'the bread and the wine are transformed (at the level of unseen substance) into the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, while retaining their outward appearance.'<sup>38</sup> This explanation is enough to dispel the criticism that the new ritual can be tantamount to traditional rituals or a continuation of them. Within the AIC, contextualisation can find a comfortable home among the Zionist and Messianist cultures. It is partly applicable in Ethiopianism but not at all among the Charismatics. There are numerous Jewish-biblical themes which can be developed to provide effective bridges into African worldviews. It is important to understand African worldviews if theology and indeed, missiology is to be meaningfully applied to meet the spiritual needs of Africans. Bongani Mazibuko has suggested that

'We need to recover a Christian understanding of the ancestors, and discover creative responses to the practice of ancestral veneration, perhaps by developing a Christology of "Christ our Ancestor" or "Christ the New Adam". in theological terms, whereas in the lineage of the old Adam, all have sinned,

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<sup>37</sup> O hOgain, Daithi, *The Sacred Isle: Belief and Religion in Pre-Christian Ireland*, Cork, Collins Press, 1999, p112 and 203

<sup>38</sup> Pruitt, Raymond M, *Fundamentals of the faith*, Cleveland, White Wing Publishing 1981, p367

in the new Adam, all are made alive to God.’<sup>39</sup>

Sound theology should always begin with the aspirations of the people. It should be remembered that all biblical interpretation is done from a specific historical situation. To talk of ‘Christ our Ancestor’ can be alarming but it should be remembered that Jesus shocked the establishment of his days by befriending everyone, including the destitute and hungry, tax collectors and extortioners, men and women, rich and poor. The author affirms this kind of theology because Jesus related to diversity as a friend of the rich and the poor, the learned and the unlearned, of sinners and the self-righteous. It is difficult to blame God for creating diversity. On the other hand, the diversity should be celebrated in unity, love and understanding rather than let it be a basis of disagreement and polarisation.

## **2.6 Perceived Weaknesses**

The AICs in Africa have for long suffered humiliation from the religious elites especially the clergymen of the mainline churches. Even until now, only a few of the AIC churches are ‘recognised’ by the ecumenical communities in the different countries in Africa. This is because the founding prophets and many of the succeeding Leaders had very little or no academic and theological education. There are other perceived weaknesses but it will suffice for the purpose of this dissertation to discuss polygamy, ancestor worship, pro Old Testament tendencies, schism and paganism.

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<sup>39</sup> Mazibuko, B. A , *Mission is Crossing Barriers* ed. Roswith Gerloff, p221-223-7

### 2.6.1 Polygamy

The author confronted respondents to the questionnaire about this issue and there seems to be consensus between AIC and non-AIC respondents. First, it was agreed that the Bible does not expressly condemn polygamy as such but encourages Christians, especially those aspiring to leadership positions, to be either celibate or be the husband of only one wife.<sup>40</sup> The author is personally convinced that God is neither interested in polygamy nor in monogamy because in heaven, ‘they neither marry, nor are given in marriage.’ Missionaries did insist that newly converted polygamists should put away all but the first wife. Putting away of wives and retaining only one cannot be seen as an act of kindness and piety as preached in the Gospels. Moreover, it can be argued from the AIC perspective that most of the founding prophets were polygamists and they did not put away any of their wives in order to do mission. The question arises then whether the Holy Spirit made mistakes in calling the wrong persons to service or that they were never called at all. Newbigin was right to argue that

‘to contemporary African Christians, looking at Western society with its serial polygamy, it seems obvious that the traditional African pattern is more true to the gospel, since it at least acknowledges binding covenant obligations while the Western model dissolves them.’<sup>41</sup>

One of the AIC respondents explained that the question of marriage should be separated from the question of personal sanctity<sup>42</sup>. The founding prophets of the AIC have been single and celibate like Orimolade of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church;

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<sup>40</sup> Some non-AIC respondents argue that I Tim 3 is not necessarily restricted to leadership but applicable to all Christians, quoting other supporting scriptures. On the other hand, some AIC respondents argue that if monogamy was a blanket criteria for Christianity, why did Paul have to remind Timothy at all?

<sup>41</sup> Newbigin, Lesslie, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, p187

<sup>42</sup> Osun, Chris, *Encountering Aladura Spirituality in Britain*, p9

monogamists like Simon Kimbangu in Congo; and polygamists like Joseph Oshofa in Nigeria and Shembe in South Africa. It is believed that all were sanctified by their calling, and signs and wonders were their hallmarks. Asked whether he believes that Christianity should absorb polygamy in Africa, one respondent replied that the church should not condemn those who are already polygamists, but that those who are married to one wife should remain the husband of one wife; and those who are still single and who are already Christians should be encouraged either to remain celibate or marry only one wife.

Paul did not attempt to change round the beliefs of the men at Athens who worshipped the unknown God. He simply introduced Christianity as the true substitute, and from then, Christianity was adopted in the place of the unknown God.

Speaking of the doctrine of election, Lesslie Newbigin asked

‘would this mean, then, that Hebrew culture has to become the world’s culture? Is this, in fact, just one more version of the familiar imperial story, the conviction of one human culture that is the way for all? That is, indeed, what is explicit in the universal claim of Islam. God’s will as it is communicated in the untranslatable Arabic of the Qur’an is that to which every human society must conform. There can be no translation.’<sup>43</sup>

Within the AIC, monogamy is considered a Western rather than a biblical culture. Acceptance of polygamy in no way condones immorality in the sense of loose living, but is subject to moral norms and church control that are strictly enforced. If Christian mission must differ from the Islamic stance, then inculturation should be encouraged in order to allow mission to cross cultural barriers ‘unto the uttermost parts of the world.’ That being the case, care should be exercised in the process of inculturation.

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<sup>43</sup> Newbigin, Lesslie, *The Gospel in a plural society*, SPCK, 1989, p145

## 2.6.2 Ancestor worship

Africans do not worship ancestors but see them as living spirits who, although physically dead, they still care for their community spiritually. What is called ancestor worship is nothing more than according the ancestors the status of some kind of mediators. This should not be confused with Jesus as mediator. It is similar to Catholics praying through certain saints or through Holy Mary as intercessors. Milingo finds in the person of Jesus the link through which this African spirituality can be transformed into a Christian spirituality. Jesus fills for all humanity the role of a supreme ancestor. He sees this as a very noble title, because

‘when we consider Jesus as an ancestor, it means that he is to us an elder in the community, an intercessor between God (Mwari, the high god) and our community, and the possessor of ethereal powers which enable Him to commune with the world above and with the earth. He is able to be a citizen of both worlds.’<sup>44</sup>

Here, Milingo adopts the principle of substitution or inculturation as exemplified above on the question of marriage. In effect, Milingo does not advocate praying to ancestors, but he finds no fault in cherishing their memory; for although dead, they still remain part of the family life in absentia.

The typical African lives a societal life. He does not exist on his own but in bond with the community, with the ancestors and even with the generation yet unborn. In life or in death, the bond is never broken. The intensity of maintaining this bond differs from tribe to tribe in Africa. Features of this bond are quite visible till today in churches, not only of the AIC group, but also among the mainline mission churches. One should

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<sup>44</sup> Milingo, E, *The World in Between*, C Hurst & Co. (Publishers) Ltd, 1984, p78

observe the rituals<sup>45</sup> in naming, marriage and funeral ceremonies in all the churches, and even in social functions in Africa, to have a greater understanding of African spirituality. Pretorius has confirmed that ‘Zionists no longer accept that ancestors affect their lives in a dominant way. A female says with great sincerity and firmness: “I do not believe in them, I don’t put my hope on them as they have no influence over our lives.” Another agrees: “A person serves Christ or the ancestors, not both. We now have Jesus and we have abandoned the habit of attending to the ancestors”<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, it still cannot be said categorically that Africans have completely abandoned their ancestors as there is some continuity in contact through dreams. Most of the Zionists will now choose to ignore such dreams or counter them with prayers.<sup>47</sup> This approach to the ancestors would eventually disappear completely, either in this generation or in the generation to come.

### **2.6.3 Pro Old Testament**

The Old Testament is central to the initiation, development and growth of the AICs, but without neglecting the New. This is because the AICs make extensive use of the Old Testament scripture especially in prayers. There is no good reason in defending the leaning on the Old Testament because Jesus did not come to destroy the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfil. The views of one respondent, who is a Baptist Pastor and Lecturer, and also a co-author of a book on AIC, Dr Deji Ayegboyin<sup>48</sup> represents those who still think that the AICs misuse the Scripture in prayers. Such Scripture as

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid p76

<sup>46</sup> Pretorius, H L, *Ethiopia stretches out her hands unto God*, ISWEN, Pretoria, University of Pretoria, 1993, p99

<sup>47</sup> Ibid p100

<sup>48</sup> Ayegboyin, Deji & Ishola, S Ademola, *African Indigenous Churches*, Lagos, Greater Heights Publications, 1997, p87

Psalm 35, which is full of curses for the destruction of the enemy is an example cited. The important thing to remember is that man can only pray, but the answer comes from God. There is simply no logic but foolishness in praying for the enemy's destruction to Him who asks them to be blessed. Perhaps some have the habit of cursing their enemies within the AIC, but their actions do not represent the policy of the whole.

Because the Bible was translated, Africans could read in their own language and understand the Scripture. The AICs embrace elements of worshipping God as they see them in the Bible. Some of these elements are familiar from African traditional religions, but others are new and enriching. The narratives of dreams, visions and prophecy which resonate with the African culture are not so prominent in the New Testament. Although, the latter is full of signs and wonders in its narratives, the former contains powerful stories of anointed leaders and prophets like Moses, Joshua, the twelve Judges, Elijah and Elisha, Jesus associated himself with the Old Testament when on the mount of configuration, he appeared with Moses and Elijah.

The healing ministry is the most common feature of the AICs. In this practice, the Old Testament is used more than the New. It is the practice that Scriptures are read with prayers for motivation and affirmation. This can happen in two ways. Either that the scripture reading is given through vision or prophecy; or that the leader of service uses his/her discretion to prescribe the scripture. In both cases, the book of Psalms is extensively used because it is full of songs and prayers for different purposes. The Prophets like Isaiah and Ezekiel are also frequently used.

### **2.6.3.1 Old Testament Taboos**

There are many practices derived from the Old Testament which are found within the AICs. Some do not wear shoes in worship because they believe that the worship area of the church should be holy to the Lord. This derives from the burning bush experience of Moses. The AICs in this tradition of worshipping barefooted are: in Southern Africa, the Zion Church of Christ; in West Africa, the Cherubim and Seraphim Church, the Celesial Chruch of Christ, the Church of the Lord, Aladura, the Brotherhood of the Cross and the Star. These churches also encourage every member to robe in white during worship.

For the reason of holiness, these same churches observe the strict hygienic rites of Leviticus. All things considered as abomination to the Lord are not allowed into the Prayer House. Blood is one main example. Women in their menstruation period are barred until they are clean again. Wounded people still covered in blood or people who have touched blood, or have shed blood, irrespective of sex, are also barred. It is believed that for this reason amongst others, God disallowed David as a soldier, to build the Temple for Him, and instead, gave the honour to his son, Solomon. Other abominations barred from the Prayer House include dead bodies. Funeral services are conducted in the premises of the diseased instead of the Prayer House, and internment at the graveside, the same way as other churches. It is claimed in defence of this that God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

There are rules of certain AICs relating to food consumption. In Southern Africa, the Zion Church of Christ forbids the eating of meat of animals killed by violence and

accident because their blood would not be completely drained from their bodies. Hence African hunters who go to the bush to shoot down animals, and those who set traps to catch animals to be marketed in the shops, will not find customers amongst the Zionists. Meat eaten by them should be systematically and ritually slaughtered. Among the West African Aladuras, the ritual for slaughtering animals and fowls for domestic consumption would take the form of a short prayer like: ‘Cursed be to the name of Satan; glory be to the name of the Lord.’ After this, the knife is struck into the neck of the victim and the head is held tightly until the last drop of blood and until there is no longer movement from the animal.

#### **2.6.4 Schism**

Schism is defined in The Oxford Illustrated Dictionary as ‘breach of unity of a Church, separation into two Churches or secession of part of Church owing to difference of opinion on doctrine or discipline.’ It is a fact that schism is very rampant within the AIC. Researchers have produced statistics of AIC churches numbering thousands of small denominations across Africa and that the trend continues. David Barrett<sup>49</sup> lists as many as six thousand separatist religious movements and groupings in Africa. These statistics affirm the fact that one of the most disturbing aspects of the AICs is their propensity to fragment continually into a multiplicity of autonomous groups and denominations. This can be described as un-Christian not only because there is strength in unity, but also because Jesus particularly prayed for the unity of his followers before his ascension. Schism can arise out of disagreement with certain aspects of a doctrine. For instance, the method of baptism is controversial and some

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<sup>49</sup> Barrett, David, in *Schism and Renewal in Modern Africa*, Nairobi, OUP, 1968, P57

Christians believe it should be a sacrament for adult believers on the one hand and that it should be by immersion on the other. Some believe in the Matthew 28 formula of the Trinity, and some in the Apostolic formula of simply in the name of the Lord, as in Acts 2. Even among the Trinitarians who do immersion, some believe that the immersion should be once, and others, thrice. Such little differences in doctrine can always cause division leading to schism. Another possible cause is on the ground of nationalism. This is common among the 'Ethiopian' churches. They separate from their church in order to be free to dominate church polity which would allow for ease of contextualisation of certain aspirations of their culture. Some schism among the AICs emanate from unhealthy rivalry among ambitious aspirants to high office in the church. When an aspirant cannot have his way, the result is usually separation. Other sources of schism will include incompatibility between, for instance, a minister and his church wardens or other officers. If frequent disagreement becomes the order of the day for them, such a church could be heading towards schism.

Schism is one thing Africans have copied badly from Europeans who brought Christianity in a number of denominational bodies. Schism is bad enough for copying but perhaps inevitable, considering the environment in which the AICs have developed and grown. There is no advantage of strong central controlling bodies for most of the AICs. As a result, people do go down the road casually to start their own church under a different name as soon as there is an unresolved dispute. Perhaps the AIC must necessarily go through these teething problems before the emergence of a more credible profile towards the advancement of the gospel and the preparation for the Lord's parousia.

### 2.6.5 Paganism

At the very beginning, the theology of the AIC was difficult to understand. The fact that mainline churches and scholars saw the new movement as deviant from the norm, the norm being the way the missionaries to Africa taught Christianity there, coupled with the fact that these new churches in their opinion were unlicensed and unauthorised, complicated the problem and resulted in condemnation of the AICs as syncretistic. Sundkler, in his first edition of *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, saw the churches as a ‘bridge over which Africans are brought back to the old heathenism from whence they once came.’<sup>50</sup> But in the second (1961), after many years of research and interaction with the AICs, Sundkler saw more light and the error of his initial judgement, repented and modified his stance.

‘To the African masses ... their churches appeared as definitely Christian organizations, adapted to their own real needs, and as bridges to a new and richer experience of life. In the city, with its rapidly industrialized civilization, they functioned as ‘adaptive structures’. In Zululand and Swaziland they were, relatively speaking, reaching the difficult transition period from traditional religion to new structures and a new ideology.’<sup>51</sup>

This notwithstanding, some critics like Beyerhaus, as mentioned below, still think that the paganism stigma should remain on the AICs. The AICs have welcomed Christianity wholeheartedly and have totally forsaken traditional religion. But in the process, the AICs have intensified rituals in the use of consecrated water and oil primarily for healing and also for other adversities. Most AICs light candles and flick incense in worship and during prayers. These practices have been offensive to other Christians, especially the Pentecostals who associate such rituals with pagan worship. But these rituals also feature in the worship of the Catholics and the Anglican high

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<sup>50</sup> Sundkler, Bengt, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, Pretoria, Lutterworth Press, 1948, p55

<sup>51</sup> Sundkler Bengt , *Bantu Prophets of South Africa*, Lutterworth Press, Pretoria, 1961, p302

church. The substitution of rituals is the equivalent of what an African will miss from the traditional religion. As long as Jesus is at the centre of the rituals, the AIC should be seen to be on the right side of Christianity. Despite their effort to sever the African people from traditional religion, the AIC have not totally escaped the criticism of scholars. Oosthuizen, Marie-Louise Martin and Beyerhaus have all adopted a condemnatory approach.<sup>52</sup> Oosthuizen bluntly refers to the AIC as ‘post-Christian’, In his view, ‘these movements are neither Christian nor traditional. Because of their ethnocentric features they cannot claim to be churches of Christ.’<sup>53</sup> Oosthuizen is entitled to his own opinion but nevertheless, a majority of scholars today accept that the AIC effectively represent a significant opinion in African Christianity which will continue to play a leading role in Christian mission and evangelism not only in Africa, but also globally.

### **3.0 AIC’s in Britain: history and practice**

The presence of the AIC in Britain cannot be by human design but most certainly by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The first evidence is from the initiation of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church in London in 1965, forty years after the founding of the church in Nigeria. At the inauguration of the church in 1925 in Lagos, it was prophesied that the church would expand on a large scale throughout West Africa, and that after forty years, the expansion would reach out beyond the shores of Africa. The mysterious point is that nobody sat down to do a plan in order to fulfil the prophecy of 1925. By coincidence, at the influx of mass immigrants to Britain from the former

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<sup>52</sup> Daneel, Inus, *Quest for Belonging*, p246

<sup>53</sup> Oosthuizen, G.C., *Post-Christianity in Africa – A theological and anthropological study*, London, C Hurst & Co, 1968

British colonies in the 1950s and 1960s, some members of the church from Nigeria found themselves in London. Most of them were inexperienced in running any church but luckily, a soldier from Nigeria who was a high profile member of the church was training at Sandhurst at that time. He was a prophet and visited London at Weekends. His expertise became useful and a group gathered in 1965 and invited him to lead a branch in London. Since then, the church has gradually expanded, and today, there are more than fifty congregations. Similar stories of initiation and growth are true of other AICs in Britain.

### **3.1 Historical perspective**

The inspiration of the Holy Spirit is appealed to because initially, there was no planned preparation by any of the AIC to do mission in Britain. It would be expected that if any church would send missionaries to a foreign country, such missionaries would be equipped adequately in funding and training. None of these was possible but there was a major contributory factor, namely, that the Africans did not find hospitality in British churches. Most adherents of the AIC in Britain today, who are Africans, had belonged to one or other of the mainline denominations from their home countries. On arrival in Britain, these immigrants discovered that the British churches were not prepared for mass immigration and so, no hospitality was on offer. The African had come from a culture where hospitality is an essence of religion, not dissimilar to the hospitality of Abraham when he entertained three angels and was rewarded with the promise of a covenant son. The angels did not ask for hospitality.

Abraham ran after them to offer kindness. This is the kind of hospitality that the Africans expected but which was not to be found on arrival in Britain.<sup>54</sup>

However, the post-war influx of immigrants was the initiative of the British Government and Industry who needed extra labour to help them cope with the industrial boom and consequent surge in demand for British products. The setting up and running of churches in Britain provided the most needed place of security and survival for the Africans after enduring a long week of hard work, racism and humiliation at work and in the society where they were strangers. It is against this background that the AIC developed and are flourishing in Britain today. The absence of satisfaction in the spiritual needs has forced the African to find a solution, and the initiation of the AIC in Britain provided that solution.

Most AICs in Britain are churches that started in a little way like a cell church in the front rooms of members. As membership grew, the cell units developed into small and large congregations. As the front sitting room became too congested, the need for larger accommodation arose and some found solutions at school halls which were available on Sundays, some looked for community halls and a few lucky ones found accommodation in churches, but outside the worship hours of the host churches. Where the host churches held morning and evening services, the available time in between was usually less than the African churches needed because they worship for long hours on Sundays. As a result, some time management became necessary and where there is laxity, they were forced to vacate the premises even in the middle of their service. Such inconveniences led to the AICs taxing themselves to purchase their

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<sup>54</sup> Adegoke, John, *Learning in Partnership*, ed. R Gerloff/M H Simmonds, London, BCC, 1980, p24

own church buildings or to buy land and build. Hence, many of the AICs now own their own properties but the majority still rent suitable accommodation. Some are able to purchase disused church buildings but most of them who own their buildings can only purchase any large building with enough room to accommodate their membership in worship. Today, the AIC churches have a footing in most cities in Britain. Notable statistics are taken from the latest Directory of Black Majority Churches in UK published by The African and Caribbean Evangelical Alliance and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. The Directory, however, is not exhaustive as there are many omissions and errors that the author can personally spot in the analysis. Below is an analysis by typology.

### **3.1.1 Ethiopian Churches:**

African Methodist Episcopal Church 1787 has five congregations, all in London. Enquiries can be directed to Elder Reverend Joseph E S Jacobs of 3 Pennethorne House, Wye Street, London. SW11 2SH

African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (Shaws Temple) has four congregations in Britain; two in Wolverhampton, one each in Coventry and Manchester. Contact Right Reverend Clinton Sealy of Brownley Road, Wythenshaw, Manchester M22 9UH.

### **3.1.2 Aladura and Zionist Churches:**

Aladura International Church has three congregations in London. Contact Most Reverend Father Olu A Abiola, 31 Norton House, Sidney Road, London SW9 OUI

Born Again Christ Healing Church has two congregations in London. Contact Her Grace Fidelia N Onyuku Opukiri, Archbishop, 77 Beechwood Road, Hornsey, London N8 7NE

Celestial Church of Christ has 29 congregations in Britain, 26 in London, 1 each in Essex, Middlesex and Manchester. Contact Most Senior Evangelist Segun Olarinde, 8 Harton Street, Deptford, London SE8.

Cherubim and Seraphim Church has 30 congregations with 26 in London and 2 in Birmingham. Contact Special Apostle E O Oluwole, 175 Earlham Grove, Forest Gate, London. 37 9AP

Christ Apostolic Church, Mount Bethel has one congregation in London. Contact Apostle Ayo Omideyi, 215-233 Kingsland Road, Dalston, London E2 8AN

Christ Apostolic Church of Great Britain has 12 congregations in Britain with 10 in London and 1 each in Birmingham and Sussex. Contact Reverend Alfred Shosanmi, 202 Page Green Terrace, High Road, Tottenham, London N15 4NP

Church of the Lord, Aladura has 5 congregations with 3 in London and 1 each in Birmingham and Kent. Contact Most Reverend E T Odusola, 25 Surrey Square, London SE17 2JU

Church of Universal Prayer Fellowship has one congregation in London. Contact Most Reverend J H Odonkor, 80 Balham Park Road, London SW12.

### **3.1.3 New Charismatic Churches:**

Deeper Christian Life Ministry has 7 congregations, 6 in London and 1 in Kirkby-in-Ashfield. Contact, Reverend Pre Ovia, 82 Borough Road, London SE1 1DN.

Foursquare Gospel Church of Great Britain has one congregation in Leighton, Buzzard. Contact, Reverend Ian Walker, PO Box 438, PITSTONE, Leighton Buzzard LU7 9RE

Kenyan Back to God Fellowship has one congregation in London. Contact Pastor Jessie Nderitu, 12A The Woodlands, London SE19 3EQ.

Kingdom Vision Ministry, one congregation in London. Contact Kate Owoh, Ferry Lane Primary School, Jarrow Road, Tottenham London N17 9PP

Kingsvine Church, one congregation in London, Contact Pastor Kemi Johnson, PO Box 19898, London SE25 4XH.

Kingsway International Christian Centre has one large congregation in London. Contact Reverend Matthew Ashimolowo, 57 Waterden Road, Hackney, London E15 2EE.

New Covenant Church has 26 congregations with 20 in London 2 in Kent and 1 each in Luton, Essex, Leicester and Manchester. Contact, Reverend Timothy Kolade, 214 Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre, London SE1 6TE

Pentecostal Revival Church of Christ has 2 congregations in London. Contact, Rt Reverend A O Ajibode, 220 Ellison Road, Streatham, London SW16 5DJ

Redeemed Christian Church of God has 101 congregations with 57 in London, 2 in Herts, 2 in Bedfordshire, 3 in Surrey, 5 in Kent, 11 in Essex, 2 in Middlesex, 2 in Milton Keynes, 1 in Watford, 1 in Bristol, 3 in Birmingham, 1 in Coventry, 1 in Leicester, 2 in Manchester, 1 in Liverpool, 2 in Norwich, 1 in Northampton, 2 in Yorkshire and 2 in Aberdeen.

### **3.2 Notable Strengths**

The AICs are seen as ‘bible-based, bible-affirming and bible fulfilling.’<sup>55</sup> This implies that the AICs are still very much fundamental and dogmatic in their theology. The tenets of both the Old and the New Testaments are held intact in their songs, prayers and preaching. Whether this can be described as a permanent advantage is probably controversial as paradigm shifts in economic, social and political factors could

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<sup>55</sup> Oshun, Chris, *Encountering Aladura Spirituality in Britain*, A paper presented to the African Religious Diaspora Conference at the University of Leeds, 1997, p8

inevitably result in paradigm shifts in theological thought within the AIC in the unforeseeable future. For the time being, theology is done from the grassroots. Adherents are motivated to self development in faith and explicit trust in God. The average AIC worshipper goes to church for two main reasons. First, to worship God in praise and thanksgiving for His mercy and favour during the week. Secondly, to communicate with God about plans and needs for the present and future, believing that ‘God shall supply all his needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.’ During the service, there is usually space for individuals to give their testimonies in front of the congregation, telling their success stories for the congregation to appreciate the greatness of God, and to renew their own faith, believing that what God has done for others, He will also do for them.

In Britain, unlike in Africa, there is difficulty to find wilderness. The mountains in Britain are not particularly suitable for prayers and worship as there are busy mountaineers with a different agenda. The seaside can be cold and crowded in the summer, but it is the only manageable resort for prayers and worship for the AICs who care to look for such places. At the seaside, one can look far into the sea as if there is no end to it. Such an environment usually brings the awareness of the greatness of God nearer for spiritual renewal. There are, therefore, some pilgrimages to the seaside resorts during the summer by different groups. The AICs seek to re-enact the bible stories and acquire the virtues therein for self edification. Therefore, the ‘Calvinistic belief that the present generation of Christians do not, and cannot

share in the privilege of Apostolic powers of signs and wonders that were the hallmarks of the early church,<sup>56</sup> would fall on deaf ears within the AIC.

Despite their evolution from the oral tradition, adherents in the AIC are typically knowledgeable in the Scriptures. It is common to find virtually every member of a congregation carrying a Bible to worship services and prayer meetings. At Sunday School and Sermon sessions, members take out their pens or pencils to mark and highlight certain verses that they find of interest. These are memorised and used in Bible stories and even during prayers, these passages are often quoted. Most members of the AIC have to change their Bibles very often when the old one are over-used with markings and worn from usage and frequent openings.

### **3.3.0 Perceived Weaknesses**

There are some weaknesses attributable to the AIC theology. The leaders of the AIC in Britain have been called to mission without being equipped with any formal academic, theological or missionary training, and for this reason, their theologies have always been more oral than systematically written. The leaders were mainly people drawn from differing trades and professions who gave their spare times to doing mission. Hollenweger has described their Pastors as ‘often earning their living as farmers, bricklayers or university professors.’<sup>57</sup> Only very few do full time ministry work, some do part time and most are voluntary pastors who live on their trades and

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<sup>56</sup> Adegoke, John, ‘*How central is prayer for healing in the mission of AIC?*’, MA essay, BCC, June, 2004, p17

<sup>57</sup> Hollenweger, Walter J, ‘The Significance of the New Churches for the Future of Mission, Theology, Ecumenism and the Renewal of Christianity’ in *Mission is Crossing Frontiers*, p330

professions. Because of these weaknesses, many aspects of their ministry do suffer from inefficiency and growth of their mission has been impeded.

### 3.3.1 Oral Theology

On their first visits to AIC services, many visitors have always asked for their generic literature to take away with them. The answer has always been that none are available. In panic situations, some AIC Pastors would rush to write brief notes to satisfy the curiosity of the enquirer. This is because many AICs developed and grew from the background of oral theology. This orality is not different to the experience of the New Testament church in the first century. No books were written and the church had always been driven by the Holy Spirit. With the exception of Ethiopian churches and the New Charismatic churches, the AIC founders had always come from humble backgrounds, sometimes, poor, illiterate, but bold and highly spiritual and mighty in prayer. Because of this, most of the order of the churches, their liturgy and doctrine had always been oral. Bongani Mazibuko has described how oral theology works in the following words,

‘In some sense, we might say oral theology operates like a modern computer. The people are the microchips. Various peoples have different stories or sayings in their memory data banks. The whole memory can only be called upon when the community comes together, when the microchips are connected. One can observe this very well among the AICs.’<sup>58</sup>

Oral theology is problematic in Britain because of the difference in literacy between this country and the sources of the AICs in Africa. This is a problem which the

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<sup>58</sup> Mazibuko, Bongani A, ‘The Emerging Field of Missiology in the context of African Religions and Cultures’ ed. Roswith Gerloff, *Mission is Crossing Frontiers*, p 224-225

leadership of these churches in Britain have to address urgently in order to achieve success in marketing the African Christianity in an literate culture.

### **3.3.2 Church Buildings**

Since taking root in Britain, some AICs have managed to purchase church buildings of their own. Most, however, are still sharing with other churches and renting other suitable accommodation for worship. For those sharing and renting, there are always problems of time and space. Time becomes crucial because the owners of the buildings only allow the use of their premises within defined time scales. They have other uses for their premises and so, the time available for the tenants is restricted. This limitation therefore, creates unwelcome constraints for full expression of their spiritual energies. The question of space is also crucial because weekday activities cannot always be possible. During the week, the typical AIC will like hold meetings for prayers, vigils, counselling, choir practice, bible classes and induction for baptism and initiation to ministry. Without free access to the premises, many activities can be strangulated.

As the AIC leaders are usually not adequately equipped from their home churches, no funds are readily available to procure church buildings. Of those who have managed to purchase their own buildings, their members have been heavily taxed over some years before sufficient funds become available. This is because the AICs have not found fundraising easy in Britain. Even when church buildings are purchased, money is still required to buy ecclesiastical furniture and equipment, not to mention maintenance and running costs.

### **3.3.3 Time Management**

Most AICs in Britain are still struggling with managing their worshipping time. The average worship time is around three hours. A few have managed to cut down to less than two hours but most still exceed three and in extreme cases, extending to more than five hours. There are obvious reasons for the irregularity. Certain activities in the service such as songs, lesson readings, announcements, testimonies and thanksgivings can be timed. Others like visions and prophecy cannot be timed as the timing is left to the direction of the Spirit. Preaching can also fall into this category as the Spirit is also seen as the driver. Because of this, many potential adherents hesitate to make up their minds as they say ‘we love and enjoy your service, but the time is too long.’ For such, it is a problem, but for those who have become used to the practice and are committed, it is a pleasure to spend the time for ‘I would rather be a door keeper in the House of God than to dwell in the tent of wickedness.’ On reflection, the AIC could have grown bigger than they are but for this weakness.

In order to do mission in Britain, the AICs need to adapt to the culture of the people in order to attract the indigenes of the country. It is reasonable to assume that Europeans do not like to spend unusually long time in worship. But worship in Western Europe is quite different to what obtains in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. There, worship can be stressful, not only because it takes longer hours, but also that there is no provision for seating except for the very old and disabled members. This gives the hope, therefore, that longer hours can be endured in Britain if the service is enjoyable. Afterwards, British people especially the young ones, do spend long hours in cinemas and other entertainments because they enjoy the offerings. The church can also do this

without diluting her doctrine. The British cultural perception of church is that the building should be a place of quiet recluse where worshippers should behave themselves and be quiet. Some people even go to the church when it is open for private devotion either to pray or to have a quiet time for reflection on matters other than religious!

### **3.3.4 Administration**

The ideal situation for an organised church is to have full time workers who can attend to the daily demands of the church. A church needs to open her doors to provide spiritual services to those in need as many days as possible during the week and as long hours as possible. For most AIC churches, the ideal is not always possible and gaps are left unfilled. Finance is probably the most important constraint because, without money, many things can become impossible. These churches develop from poor backgrounds and in most cases, the ministers or pastors are non stipendiary. For this reason, ministers can only volunteer their spare time for church work as they toil daily for their living in other trades and professions. For such ministers, the only time available for church affairs will be in some evenings and week-ends. As a result, such church matters like correspondence cannot always be dealt with on time.

Also, participation in ecumenical demands cannot always be met regularly because most ecumenical meetings are held during the week when the AIC minister is not available to do church work. These weaknesses will not be helpful to ecumenical and conciliar initiatives which are essential for facilitating church unity. A few AIC churches are able to avoid these weaknesses as they either employ salaried full time

ministers or other church workers who maintain church offices or keep the doors of the church open for those in quest for spiritual answer to their needs. Where such luxury is not possible, the minister or pastor then has no alternative but to operate church office from his/her home. Sometimes British colleges run short courses for church administration and for church treasurers. Most churches in the AIC are unable to take the advantage because of the timing as most of them have to earn their living outside of the church environment.

### **3.4 Opportunities**

Britain now has a second chance of incorporating revival into her church life with the presence of African Christians (amongst other foreign Christian presence) in her midst. Allan Anderson has pointed out that

‘Most of the biggest AICs ... have transcended parochial limitations and have become international and multiethnic African movements, forming new voluntary organisations to replace traditional kinship groups. The planting of these churches in the “African Diaspora” is an example of the multiethnic and international dimension of this form of African Christianity.’<sup>59</sup>

Branches of the AIC are now operating in most cities of Britain.<sup>60</sup> But they have gained very little or no recognition and attention from the British churches. It should be remembered that the first Revival in 1906, led by Evan Roberts in Wales was similarly discouraged because it did not conform with the spirit of the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason.<sup>61</sup> Roberts eventually withdrew through nervousness and

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<sup>59</sup> Anderson, Allan, *The Gospel and African Religion*, International Review of Mission, Vol. LXXXIX, July 2000, p374

<sup>60</sup> Details of contact names and addresses, number of congregations and where in Britain are shown in Section 3.0.to this Dissertation.

<sup>61</sup> Hollenweger, Walter J, *The Pentecostals*, p176ff.

illness and the Revival cooled down and disappeared before 1914. Evan Roberts who spearheaded the Revival eventually died in 1947. This second chance must not fail for the sake of the Gospel of Christ and furtherance of the Great Commission.

Interviews with leaders of the AIC in Britain show that many are ready to work closely with British churches to promote inter-racial and inter-cultural church in the country. They are here for the asking for a partnership but they cannot do the asking as the weaker partner for fear of rejection or of being snubbed. The presence of the AIC in Britain presents an opportunity to do mission more effectively on the home front. In the past, Mission Agencies had centres in Britain where missionaries were trained before being sent overseas to do mission. For the past few decades, the reality is that overseas missionaries come to Britain to enhance their basic training from abroad in these training centres. Today, however, the Mission Agencies are rationalising their training programmes by relocating the training centres overseas. A local example is Crowther Hall in Selly Oak, Birmingham, which was closed down for this reason in 2004. Also, the United College of Ascension in Selly Oak will close down during 2006 for the same reason. From these Agencies, there must be resources that needs to be deployed. Many of them probably have their eyes on overseas projects. This is an area where, on the home front, partnership deals with the likes of the AIC can be fruitful to the Christian mission in Britain.

### 3.5 Threats?

At the beginning of Black churches taking root in Britain, the British churches were taken by surprise and wondered why visiting foreign Christians could not be integrated into the existing British churches. They forgot that their unwelcoming attitudes were the major factors in prompting the emergence of the Black churches. Is this a hardening of hearts on the part of the British churches? Is it on the other hand, the prompting of the Holy Spirit? Responses to my question ‘How far do you see your church as posing a threat to the British churches?’ have been varied. A few replied that the time will come when their churches (AIC) will assume leadership globally including Europe and Britain in particular. Most respondents, however, do not see themselves as threats to any church, but think their contribution will be complimentary to the effort of the ailing British churches for the enrichment of the universal church of God on earth. The AIC are not in Britain to compete, but to compliment.

The author subscribes to the latter opinion and would like to elaborate on it. At the inception of the video industry, the entertainment industry felt threatened. Their fear was that customers would not go to cinemas as much as before, but stay at home watching films on television. The reality is that as video production increased, the attendance at cinemas also surged to new heights. The old English adage says ‘the more, the merrier.’ This is interpreted to mean in this context, that more hands on the deck can only expedite the accomplishment of the arduous task of mission ahead of all Christians. It is different to ‘too many cooks spoil the broth’ adage because the mission field is very broad. Jesus himself says, ‘The harvest truly is plenteous, but the

labourers are few.’ If now, therefore, the Lord is sending more labourers into his harvest, then, we must see it as an opportunity to celebrate and not a threat to be afraid of.

#### **4.0 AIC’s mission beyond their African Community in Britain**

Enough has been said about the appraisal of the AICs in Britain. It is time to begin outlining some virtues which the AIC have to offer. British Christianity had the opportunity for revival during the early twentieth century but killed it off at infancy because it was strange and probably also because the leadership was not of the right educational calibre. ‘The wind drops; the revival is ignored.’<sup>62</sup> A second chance is right here at the doorstep of Britain, and it remains to be seen what is made of the opportunity. For the past few decades, the coming decline or disappearance of Christianity as we know it has been a commonplace assumption of Western thought, and church leaders have often shared this pessimistic view. Recently, the Roman Catholic Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O’Connor lamented over the declining number of church attendance and the shortage of priests and candidates training for the priesthood in his church<sup>63</sup>. A similar pessimism was echoed by the leadership of the Church of England complaining about the empty pews and shortage of money. The latter was contemplating shutting down some parishes and merging some into one under a single priest.<sup>64</sup> Incidentally, in the Anglican Parish where the author is a colleague in an ecumenical council, the priest in charge of Saint Alban’s had moved

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<sup>62</sup> Harper, Michael C, *As At the Beginning, The Twentieth Century Pentecostal Revival*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1965, p28

<sup>63</sup> Peter Brierley, “Church attendance in 2040”, *The Tablet* 29 July, 2005, p2

<sup>64</sup> Andrew Carey, “Church to direct funding to enable mission Ventures”, *The Church of England Newspaper*, Friday 10 June, 2005, p4

on elsewhere and after six months interregnum, the Parish was added to two other Parishes, Saint Agatha and Saint Barnabas, in a new 'Mission Partnership' under one priest. The reason that one priest must run three parishes stems from decline in attendance resulting in each parish not being sufficiently viable. In 1998, the Episcopal Bishop John Spong of Newark advocated just such a sceptical and secularist New Reformation in his book 'Why Christianity Must Change or Die.'<sup>65</sup> Although Spong is an American, his views represent a host of others in Britain who think that the church must abandon the "incomprehensible and unbelievable" teachings of supernaturalism, and present the faith in a "credible" manner if the church must survive.<sup>66</sup> In this spirit, the AICs in Britain is seeking to make meaning out of a life that is futile and disillusioning. This section will attempt to portray the AIC's offering to British Christianity in particular, and global Christianity in general. This does not imply that the AICs have a ready magic wand to turn around the declining trend in British Christianity. They are only asking to be engaged in dialogue and given the opportunity of doing mission together for mutual benefit and for the growth of evangelism and mission in Britain. Dialogue can tease out potential which has been long overlooked and miracles can result from joint initiatives if a little effort is made to explore possibilities. The AICs in Britain are keeping their doors open for such initiatives.

#### **4.1 Doctrine**

Most of the AICs are fundamentalist in practice. The Bible is taken to be the inspired Word of God. They draw daily inspiration from the Bible, in both Old and New

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<sup>65</sup> Spong, Johnh, *Why Christianity Must Change or Die*, Harper, San Francisco, 1998

<sup>66</sup> Jenkins, Philip, *The Next Christendom*, p9

Testaments. To the AIC, 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.'

Although liberal theology delves into analysis and finds errors, inaccuracies and contradictions in certain narratives, the fundamental approach is to adopt the message of the Bible in totality as sufficient for the salvation of man. Meticulous search for details and expectation of perfection and rational answers can only give the impression that the authors of the books in the Holy Bible must be good scholars. Jesus has taught us that nobody can be perfect except God, and he went on 'but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.' Asking too many questions can only lead to loss of faith and consequently loss of salvation. 'The African does not ask 'how do I understand the nature of God?' but rather, 'how do I experience God?'<sup>67</sup> This kind of faith which does not question but believe, is the one that paves the way for miracles in one's life. It is this kind of dogma that the AIC can preach to British people, not only in word, but also in deed. What the AICs are saying to British Christians is that if an approach to Christianity through an epistemological stance does not work; and if it is understood that other approaches which are devoid of empiricism and rationalism look like succeeding, why not learn to listen to these other worldviews beyond their own horizon. An AIC chorus goes:

*Trrry, try Jesus, if you try everything, and everything fails, try Jesus.*

There is usually nothing to lose by trying. On the other hand, there can always be much to gain. In other words, the AIC can say, give God a change. He is always open

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<sup>67</sup> Jehu-Appiah, Jerisdan H, *An overview of indigenous African churches in Britain*, <http://www.pctii.org/jehu95.html>, p8

to challenge. He has promised that those who come unto Him, He will in no wise cast away. This is a blessed assurance.

## **4.2 Theology**

Akin Omoyajowo has described the theology of the Aladura churches, Zionists by typology, as the theology of the Bible which is ‘not interested in the debates about the Jesusness of Christ or the Christness of Jesus.’ He further explained that ‘such inexplicable mysteries are not lacking in the traditional beliefs.’<sup>68</sup> This is one of the strong commonalities of the AIC and one of their strong points that can be shared with other Christians in Britain and elsewhere. If faith is removed from our religion, the result will be emptiness. We can safely take a rational stance in secular matters for satisfaction and material benefit, but in matters of religion, rationality and empiricism can be dangerous.

People speak of Liberation Theology and Black Theology but what they are actually saying is that different people have differing approaches to theology. The theology of the AIC may be African or Black but what matters is that it is different to the Western worldview in that it is neither ‘systematic’ nor ‘liberal’. Because it is ‘oral’ it commands little or no credibility by Western standards. The author gives support to the view of Hollenweger when he argues that ‘mission can no longer be understood as the expansion of western Christianity. Missiology only has a future if it sees the challenge of these “different” Christians as an opportunity for self-critical

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<sup>68</sup> Omoyajowo, Akin J, ed Basil Moore, *Black Theology, The South African Voice*, London, C Hurst & Co, 1973, p87

reflection.’<sup>69</sup> It is to be recognised that the relation of missiology to oral cultures is particularly important for theological reflection in the academic community because Western Universities are children of those traditions, and more so, because the oral culture is the majority Christian culture in the world today. Christian theology has always been both oral and literary. Mazibuko has argued that ‘The Gospels belong to the oral genre, and the Epistles to the literary genre. Yet, academic theology has so far not developed sophisticated oral theologies.’<sup>70</sup> It should be recognised in the context that a missiologist is a theologian who should be bilingual, with deep appreciation of both oral and literary theology. Oral theology can therefore, be translated into literary, and vice versa for mutual enhancement.

### **4.3 The Efficacy of Prayer**

This is one of the core beliefs of the AIC. The Aladura prays and believes that the answer will be positive. The AIC accept the sovereignty of God but the point of the AIC is to motivate greater faith and belief. The AIC do not loath failure because, it is not all prayers that are answered positively. If that were so, there would not be room enough for people who would rush to take advantage of answered prayers, including even non believers who are after material gains. But the fear of failure should not discourage believers to try, try and try again as the story of Jesus about the importunity of a friend at night. It takes a humble person to keep asking after the first refusal but what does it matter if the blessing accrues now or later?

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<sup>69</sup> Hollengeger, W J, ‘The Future of Mission and the Mission of the Future’, *Occasional Paper No 2*, Birmingham, Selly Oak Colleges, 1989, p7

<sup>70</sup> Mazibuko, Bongani, ‘The Emerging Field of Missiology in the Context of African Religions and Cultures’, ed Roswith Gerloff, *Mission is crossing Frontiers*, p226

Because of the strong faith in God who can heal instantly or serially, the AICs make room for differing possibilities. Some healings take effect quicker than others. When it is instant, there is usually loud shouts of halleluyah with rejoicing for victory won. Where the healing is gradual, some AIC churches provide accommodations called ‘Shiloh’ where patients can stay for the duration of their illness. That is why Dr Baeta received the unexpected answer to his question: ‘and what does your church stand for?’ The surprise answer came from a leader of the Church of the Twelve Apostles in West Africa: ‘We are here to heal.’<sup>71</sup> A similar question was put by Sundkler and the reply came from a Zionist prophet in South Africa: ‘This is not a church, it is a hospital.’<sup>72</sup>

It is not uncommon within the AIC that terminal patients who have been abandoned by hospital doctors as having no hope, have found a new lease of life through prayers. When this happened during the 1960s in London, some prophets from Cherubim and Seraphim were asked to visit terminal patients in the Intensive Care Unit of some hospitals for prayers. Some such patients survived and some did not. No prophet can claim credit or admit failure in such cases. It is the duty of the prophet to pray, but the blessing comes from God. Reports of signs and wonders litter the pages of the Acts of the Apostles, but perhaps there were also failures unrecorded? What the AICs are offering here is simply humility first, to follow the importunity road, and secondly, to sum up courage in the face of failure as the popular song goes:

*Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take; the clouds ye so much dread  
are big with mercy, and shall break in blessings on your head.*

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<sup>71</sup> Mitchell, Robert C, ‘Christian Healing,’ ed. V.E.W.Hayward, *African Independent Church Movements*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh House Press, 1963, p47

<sup>72</sup> Ibid,

This is not an AIC song but it is adopted and widely used in deliverance and healing services within the AIC liturgy. Deliverance and healing prayers are not limited to physical and mental ailments. They also include deliverance from fear, domestic troubles, peace of mind, provision of needs such as for good employment, promotion at work, success at undertakings, breakthrough in life for peace and happiness. The liturgical prayers are designed to cater for these needs for all adherents. Victory emanating from these prayers is usually evident from testimonies and thanksgivings of members during the church services. As the writer of Psalm 126 explains: ‘When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them.’ This kind of victory is usually envisaged during prayers for deliverance and healing within the AICs.

Many AICs have attracted adherents from nationalities other than from Africa in Britain, mainly because of deliverance and healing received. Signs and wonders which are not common in other churches have given the AICs marginal advantage in church growth over and above other churches in the country. It is like what the writer of Psalm 114 described: ‘when Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language, Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion. The sea saw it, and fled: Jordan was driven back.’ Many testimonies from non- African nationalities reveal from time to time that the power of prayer is more prominent than singing and preaching. It is interesting to note that the Cherubim and Seraphim Church Headquarters in London bought a mini bus some years ago and wrote the name of the church on the vehicle. In addition to the name of the church, they

included in bold words ‘Prayer is our business.’ To the curious observer, this inclusion proclaims a spiritual message and doubtless, it triggers inquiry into what it means and how it works. This slogan is similar to the earlier quotes of ‘we are here to heal’ and ‘this is not a church, it is a hospital.’ Together, therefore, the AICs have firmly presented themselves as the military wing of Christianity. One Cherubim and Seraphim song confirms this assertion as it goes:

There is an army of the Lord, travelling through this land.  
Delivery is their song, healing in their hands.  
I am proud to be, proud to be part of this army.

#### **4.4 Spiritual Gifts**

Extensive belief in and the exercise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is one of the fundamentals that makes the AIC different to other churches. The Prophet, visioner or dreamer hears the voice of God and relays messages to the congregation for edification. The AIC see the absence of these gifts in the British and European mainline churches as symptoms of spiritual sterility and hence, they see Britain as a fertile ground for doing mission. In the AIC theology, the exercise of spiritual gifts goes hand in hand with the healing ministry. In traditional African religion, the diviner prescribes medicine in the form of concrete objects like herbs to be taken at particular times in similar ways that a medical practitioner prescribes medications for his patients. Some AICs discourage consulting both the diviner and the medical practitioner and instead, encourage devotion to prayer where the prophet or pastor can consecrate water and oil as substitutes for medications for the patient. Both approaches have similar effects with the difference that patients cured by the diviner

and the medical practitioner very often go back for repeat prescriptions. On the other hand, those healed through prayer seldom go back.

Spiritual gifts are usually not the same for individuals in the church within the AICs. Some members are gifted in dreams, some in vision and prophecy, some speak in tongues, some are gifted in praying with power and authority, and some are gifted in powerful preaching. The churches in the AIC except the Ethiopian churches devote great attention to helping individuals to develop their appropriate gifts for mutual edification in their churches. It is acknowledged that Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in Britain do give serious attention to these spiritual matters, but other churches who are too cautious should be encouraged to provide more time to recover these virtues.

Visions and prophecy are common in prayers for deliverance and healing. The AICs take literary meaning to verse 18 of Proverb 29 saying, 'Where there is no vision, the people perish.' Many adherents therefore, attend prayer meetings for deliverance and healing where visions and prophecy abound. Guidance is given to individuals as the Spirit directs from time to time. As John revealed when he was in spirit as written in Revelation chapter 4, he heard a voice 'as it were of a trumpet talking with me: which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereaftet.' During these prayers, it is common to prophesise future events to individuals, which when they they come to past, testimonies and thanksgivings are given during the worship service before the congregation. Although this kind of vision and prophecy is not dissimilar to what is given by palm readers, diviners and other non Christian predictors, there is usually a big difference. These prophecies are usually backed with

prayers, so that when goodness is prophesied, that the recipient does not lose the benefit; and where possible adversity is prophesied, prayers can be organised to counteract it. When adversity is turned into joy through prayers, the Holy Spirit has intervened and deliverance is claimed.

#### **4.5 Mode of Ministry**

The AIC seek to embody the five hierarchy ministry which the mainline mission churches have selectively reduced. Jesus, according to the author of Ephesians, appointed people to the offices of Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Whilst the AIC implement all the five offices to the fullest, the non-AIC tend to ignore the function of some, especially the office of Prophet and Evangelist. The AIC ministry is therefore, similar to some British churches like the Apostolic Church of Wales and the New Frontiers. Liaison and dialogue with these churches would be synergistic to the effectiveness of the Great Commission. In evangelism, the AIC engage in regular open air preaching. Other channels of evangelising are through house to house visit to members and non members who welcome their ministry, organising social events where the Gospel can be preached, and lately through radio and television broadcasting. These practices are possible for a few AIC churches or congregations who can afford the cost of such ventures.

The office of Prophet appears to be marginalised in the mainline churches as dreams, visions, speaking in tongues and prophecy do not feature in their present day liturgy. Except where the prophet is the leader of the church in AIC, the prophet is subject to

the authority of the leader, who can use his gift of discernment and discretion to act on the prophecy of the prophet. However, it is through the office of a prophet that the Holy Spirit gives directives not only for the strategic acts of the church, but also to aid the healing ministry, by indicating how prayers are to be conducted for efficacy. This way, the church can be self-sufficient in spiritual and temporal matters, including social, economic, political, bodily and mental wellbeing.

Ultimately, the believer does not need to consult medical doctors or traditional healers in cases of illness or any other adversity. In this position, the believer would have reached the climax of his/her faith in divine healing. Nevertheless, most adherents still consult their medical practitioners in times of illness. The office of Apostle is partially evident in the ministry of non-AIC churches. Hierarchies like Superintendents, Archdeacons or Bishops fill the function of Apostles in administration and taking strategic decision concerning the future direction of the church. What is lacking is the apostolic powers of signs and wonders. Most of these officers believe that the present generation of Christians do not, and cannot share in the privilege of Apostolic powers of signs and wonders that were the hallmarks of the early church.<sup>73</sup> The AIC believe, on the other hand, that the apostolic powers were not, and cannot be exclusive to the first Apostles, because the problems of their generation have not suddenly disappeared from the face of the earth, despite the dramatic surge in education and science after the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. In Britain as in Africa, Christians with similar beliefs can always work together to rediscover the riches in store for the enrichment of our religion.

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<sup>73</sup> Adegoke, John O, *How central is prayer for healing in the mission of AIC?*, MA ESSAY, BCC, Birmingham, June 2004, p17

#### 4.6 The Reality of God

The reality of God can always be discerned in the modality of AIC theology and liturgy. African Christians approach God without undue protocol associated with the mood of worship in the mainline churches. In the African context, the author agrees with Gerloff's thoughts that

‘God is not a philosophical proposition nor an anaemic thought. God is not a supernatural substitute for things yet unknown nor a suprarational idea for matters I cannot comprehend. God is life-giving Spirit, one with people, earth and cosmos, creating, sustaining and reviving life. God is energy in nature, homes and cities, alive like the people I embrace, the air I breathe, the meat and bread I eat, the water I drink. God is power – befalling, touching, and healing.’<sup>74</sup>

Because God loves us, we do not need to approach Him in fear and doubt. To be able to cry, Abba Father, is the same as having free access to the Father who loves us. We do not need a special visa neither do we need to be scrutinised before entry to the grace of God. One of the great contributions of the AIC to global Christianity is their ability to exemplify the reality of God. Living by example and demonstrating the miracles of God in their lives. Wonderful testimonies have always been given by adherents during church services to affirm that God is real. One of the favourite choruses of the Cherubim and Seraphim goes:

*Real, real real, He's so real to me, I love Him, He gives us the victory*

*So many people doubt Him, I can't do without Him*

*That is why I love Him so, He's so real to me.*

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<sup>74</sup> Gerloff, Roswith I H, *A Plea for British Black Theologies*, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang 1991, p61

To the AIC theology, those who doubt God will always miss out on miracles. On the other hand, those who trust in Him will always abound in victory and success in mysterious ways. The incidence of faith is therefore a major factor in achieving victory and success through prayer. As Psalm 34 affirms, 'This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.'

The reality of God can always be affirmed through answered prayers. For this reason, people of faith will not like to miss vigils and prayer meetings. In these meetings, prayers are taken very seriously and vigorously by shouting, stamping, clapping as in war situation during the invasion of Jericho by the children of Israel. There are strong spiritual powers arising out of these methods of praying within the AICs. The whole mind and body are involved in devotion and many do actually sweat themselves out in the process, but there are always a sense of satisfaction and joy in the belief that victory has been won. Roswith Gerloff has described the West African AICs as

'Emphasizing, similarly to the Afro-Caribbean Revivalists and Spiritual Baptists, African cultural symbols such as dreams and visions, prayer for healing, shouting and dancing, and water symbolism, together with a straightforward both social and ecumenical consciousness. They all began as problem-solving and healing churches as part of the Nigerian Aladura and similar movements, or the Ghanaian prophetic groups.'<sup>75</sup>

This West African testimony by Gerloff describes the characteristics of the mainstream AIC throughout Africa, south of the Sahara. One needs to see the Kimbanguist Church in Congo and Angola, and the Zionist Church in South Africa to confirm this assertion. Unhurried worship, total commitment and devotion are the

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid p54

hallmarks of the AICs. Worship should not be timed and restricted. The free operation of the Holy Spirit can always bring spiritual rewards to the lives of believers.

#### **4.7 The AIC Pneumatology**

There are two schools of thought on pneumatology and it will be useful to identify what is applicable to the AIC. James Dunn has argued that. ‘no Christian was unbaptized, but not all those baptized were ipso facto Christians. No Christian was without the Spirit, for only those who had (received) the Spirit were ipso facto Christians.’<sup>76</sup> Dunn’s assertion derives from Paul’s letter to the Romans (8:9b): ‘Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.’ Paul’s thoughts on Spirit reception are, therefore, described as soteriological pneumatology. This means that water baptism cannot be separated from Spirit reception. Therefore, a convert who is baptised in water and who does not receive the spirit is not regarded as a Christian. There are quite a few examples of such experiences within the AIC. Some receive the spirit at baptism and some even receive the spirit before baptism. However, the vast majority receive the spirit at a later stage and many do not even receive the spirit at all after water baptism.

The second school of thought is that the reception of the spirit can be a two stage process. The first stage being water baptism after faith and repentance. The second stage comes at the will of God, when the baptised convert is anointed with the spirit any time afterwards. This is Luke’s kind of theology which is in agreement with the prophecy of John the Baptist as he said ‘I indeed have baptised you with water: but he

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<sup>76</sup> Dunn, James D G, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, London, SCM, 1973, p228

shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost.’ Most adherents in the AIC would fall into this framework as the reception of the Holy Spirit can be long after water baptism. This model is described as prophetic pneumatology. Within the AIC, different people have different gifts, albeit some people can be multi-gifted. Most respondents to my interview believe that Spirit baptism is not essential to salvation and that water baptism will do. This means, therefore, that for the AIC, Spirit baptism is seen as a gift which is desirable but not necessarily a criteria to salvation.

#### **4.8 Participative Worship**

The AIC have introduced a new or innovative mode of worship that is quite distinct from the formalities of the mission churches. It can be seen how both clergy and laity participate in the liturgy in turn for all who would like to participate. This way, every member who cares is equipped as a priest in fulfilment of James’s admonition that everyone should be ‘doers of the word, and not hearers only.’ (Ja 1:22) Hollenweger points out that ‘spontaneity and enthusiasm in the worship, rather than leading to an absence of liturgy, produce flexible oral liturgies memorized by the congregation. The most important element of these liturgies is the active participation of every member in the congregation.’<sup>77</sup>

This way, every member is given the opportunity for self development into the ministry of the Word. In an emergency, a member would not have to wait for an Elder or minister before tackling a problem with prayer. This includes knowing what appropriate scriptures to read or rehearse and how to design an appropriate prayer for

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<sup>77</sup> Hollenweger, W J. *Pentecostalism, Origins and Developments Worldwide*, Peabody, Mass, Hendrickson, 1997, p269

efficacy. In the Cherubim and Seraphim Church, for instance, members who have reached proficiency level for efficacious prayers and subject to satisfying other criteria, are invited for ordination as ‘Aladuras’ meaning people who are licensed by the church for praying for themselves as well as for others in need.

Participation in worship is not limited to adults, clergy and laity; it also extends to youth and children. Within the AIC time and space is created for them to exercise their knowledge and develop their potential. Hence, there are young people who can perform virtually everything except the administration of the sacraments. They are encouraged to put on dramas based on Bible stories, to read poems, to learn and recite scripture verses, to pray for various needs and also to preach from the background of their learning and environments. They compose songs and play musical instruments for the enrichment of liturgy. The youth and children are encouraged to organise their own Harvest Thanksgiving Services and even to fund raise for the church. The implication of these activities is that their thoughts are fine tuned religiously from their youth, and hence there can be no room for laxity and unruly behaviour like drinking, drugs or sexual impropriety.

#### **4.9 Training for Ministry**

What shall we say then about academic and theological education and training for ministry? The AIC approach is to encourage education where it does not adulterate the faith of the believer but helps, which it can do, to facilitate the making of disciples for the ministry, and the effective propagating of the Gospel. This is not contradictory

in terms, because the eligibility for the ministry does not exclude education; it just does not rely on it.

The criteria for recruitment into the ministry within the AIC are quite different to what obtains in the British mainline churches. Whilst the latter would be particularly interested in the educational and family background of the candidate, the former would look for the spiritual gifts inherent in the person, in addition to the person's personality. The candidate must be seen to lead an exemplary life; sympathetically disposed and not easily angered; able to exercise authority over people and influence them; able to initiate ground rules and uphold them. Bishop Forridge's comment is representative of the view of most AICs:

‘I choose new office-bearers myself. In the first place I examine the person's way of life. If his reputation is good and his life exemplary I will appoint him first as a preacher, then as a deacon, then as an evangelist, and eventually as a minister. I do not care much whether or not the person is clever. I am looking for a reliable person who is able to lead others.’<sup>78</sup>

Such gifts are found across racial barriers and social class of adherents. British charismatic churches such as the New Frontiers also do training for ministry on the lines of the AIC. As a result, it is not uncommon to find within the ministry of the AIC, people with little or no education but with strong Christian personality: blameless, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach, not given to wine, not a striker, not greedy of filthy lucre, patient, ruling his own house well and having his children under control in love and Christian charity (I Tim 3). This will be in sharp contrast with the position of some clergy who do not even

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<sup>78</sup> Daneel, Inus, *Quest for Belonging*, p160

believe in what they preach. According to a report “Fragmented Faith?”<sup>79</sup> it is reported that ‘whereas 97 per cent of committed Anglicans believe God exists, 1 in 33 priests is doubtful.’ This is not meant to ridicule the Anglicans or to preach holier than thou to anyone, but to highlight gaps in sections of British Christianity and to provoke self-criticism which can lead to innovation in mission and evangelism in Britain.

#### **4.10 Integrated Worship**

The AIC theology takes no account of class discrimination in worship. Callum Brown has pointed out that within the cities as well as smaller towns in Britain, the working class became alienated from organised religion<sup>80</sup>. Without giving absolute validity to this claim, the author can discern some element of truth in it. Looking at ecclesiastical settings in the mainline churches today, the middle class has always dominated the clergy, the parochial committees, the wardens, ushers and other worthwhile offices in the church, apart from cleaners and gardeners left for the working class<sup>81</sup>. With such a setup, the working class did not feel valued. As Robinson rightly asserted,

‘their opinions are thought to be unimportant, unheard and unwanted. Although the working class do acknowledge that religion does provide some comfort in times of distress, they see such comfort as good only for ‘women and children, and for such men that are so weak that they cannot manage without the crutch of religious involvement.’<sup>82</sup>

That is a sad conclusion induced by frustration and loss of hope. This is a story that is yet absent within the ranks of AIC, which can be shared with the rest of the world in

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<sup>79</sup> Philip Crispin, ‘Fragmented Faith?’ *The Tablet*, 9 July 2005, p37

<sup>80</sup> Brown, Callum G, *The death of Christian Britain, Understanding secularisation 1800-2000*, Routledge, London, 2001 p9

<sup>81</sup> Adegoke, John O, *Major contributory factors in the passage of Europe from mission sending base to mission field*, MA ESSAY, BCC, Birmingham, September, 2004, p11

<sup>82</sup> Robinson, Martin, *The faith of the Unbeliever*, Monarch Books, London 1994, p88

mission and evangelism. Hollenweger elucidates this innovation as he pointed out that the liturgy ‘has social and revolutionary implications in that it empowers marginalized people, takes as acceptable what ordinary people have in the worship of God and thus overcomes “the real barriers of race, social status, and education”.’<sup>83</sup> This is an area where the AIC can share competences with the British churches in dialogue so that the British working classes can be brought back into the Christian fold. A renewed interest and participation of the British working class would be a welcome boost to the revival of Christianity in the country.

The AIC in Britain also provides for integrated worship between people of different languages. Interpreters are always on alert to identify visitors or members who are not conversant with the English language. Such people can receive explanations of the proceedings of the service when the need arises and can understand the sermon through interpreters. Even where interpretation is impossible, the common language can be enjoyed in the form of the melody of the songs and body language in dancing and free self- expression in worship.

#### **4.11 Obliterating Pessimism**

It is an understatement to say that mission agencies are facing difficult times today. David Bosch, in his section on “Mission: The Contemporary Crisis” asserts ‘more than ever before in its history, the Christian mission is in the firing line today.’<sup>84</sup> Wilbert Shenk is more particular by describing the situation as ‘the crisis of identity

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<sup>83</sup> Hollenweger, W J, *Pentecostalism, Origins and Developments Worldwide*, Peabody, Mass, Hendrickson, 1997, p274

<sup>84</sup> Bosch, David, *Transforming Mission*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1991 p2

that many long-established Western missionary societies are facing today.’<sup>85</sup> While James Engel and William Dyrness appraised the situation as ‘missions agency mired in an effectiveness crisis.’<sup>86</sup> These comments are summed up by Richard Tiplady who argues that ‘there is a widespread sense that the old ways of doing things, and the structures that served them, no longer fit the new realities of the twenty-first century.’<sup>87</sup> With these comments, the mission agencies do not require convincing that a new approach to mission is imminent and that partnership with the likes of the AIC can no longer be ignored for greater effectiveness of mission and evangelism today.

Fear of the demise of Christianity in Britain and Europe has been expressed by people like Callum Brown who wrote on ‘The Death of Christian Britain, Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000’, Philip Jenkins, who wrote on ‘The Next Christendom, The Coming of Global Christianity’ and many others. Callum Brown has predicted the demise of Christianity in Britain and Europe; and Philip Jenkins has argued that the North, meaning Europe and North America would require evangelisation from the South, meaning Africa, Asia and Latin America to revive Christianity in the North. The AIC is coming from a different direction to defuse the pessimism of these scholars. The demise of Christianity feared by many is salvageable if the British churches will listen to other opinions and take remedial actions before it is too late. It is the opinion of the author that the AICs may not be capable of evangelising Britain on their own as it is believed that the British churches can revive themselves by listening to other Christian worldviews and readjusting themselves accordingly. The role of a catalyst is thought to be more apposite to the AICs in Britain more than that

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<sup>85</sup> Shenk, Wilbert, *Changing Frontiers of Mission*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1999, p177

<sup>86</sup> Engel, James F, and Dyrness,, William A, *Changing the Mind of Missions: Where have we Gone Wrong?*, Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 2000, p17

<sup>87</sup> Tiplady, Richard, ‘The End Of The World As We Know It: Where did it all go wrong for mission agencies?’, *Connections, Resourcing ecumenism and mission, Vol 9 (2005), Issue 1*, p8

of an intervener, through evangelism. Daneel has argued that ‘missiology, the study of the mission of the church ... must take cognisance of the fact that no segment of our planet can survive on its own, and only by working together with people and nations who are not like us do we have a future.’<sup>88</sup>

If it can be recognised that global Christian mission will be successful on a larger scale with the pooling of competences globally, then both the host churches and the immigrant churches like the AICs will need to find a meeting of minds in dialogue and joint initiatives. A few of the AIC respondents to the questionnaire for this work have indicated that they are ready and available for joint mission. It is very likely that many more immigrant churches will be willing too, if they are approached. The host British churches need to be approached to find out how much ecumenical and conciliar efforts they are prepared to make. These approaches can rightly be channelled through the ecumenical instruments like the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, and the four national Churches Together in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland.

#### **4.12 What the Leaders say**

Many church leaders from within the AIC have been interviewed but only a selection can be listed here for the sake of brevity and in order to avoid duplications. In answer to the crucial question:

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<sup>88</sup>Daneel, M L, “The liberation of creation: African traditional religious and independent church perspectives”, *Missionalia*, 10/2, 1991

Will your church consider giving commitment to joint prayers, worship, evangelism and mission with the British mainline churches or any other church group if asked?

Most Reverend Father Olu A Abiola<sup>89</sup> of the Aladura International Church, said:

I am always ready to work with anyone who believes in Jesus Christ as the Son of God because ‘we preach Christ crucified’ at every opportunity. Our Church has been part of the Council of Churches in this country and also in membership of the Conference of European Churches based in the World Council of Churches building in Geneva. We believe in corporate strength in getting people back to church and to this end, we will take part in any joint initiative for worship, seminar, dialogue, mission and evangelism if invited. Our goal is to promote the Gospel of Christ to all corners of the world.

Special Apostle Father S A Abidoye<sup>90</sup> of Cherubim & Seraphim Church, said:

For a long time, we have been ecumenical in Britain. We are the first African church to join the British Council of Churches in the seventies before it became the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland in 1990, and lately Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. We still play our part in the CTBI and CTE. We are established in Britain as a multi-racial and multi-national church as we have a few whites, a few Africans other than Nigerians and

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<sup>89</sup> Fr Abiola was one of the first six Presidents of the old Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland on its inauguration in 1990-. He was awarded OBE in the Queen’s Honours List in 2002 for his contribution to ecumenism in the UK.

<sup>90</sup> Fr Abidoye is the Chair of Cherubim & Seraphim Council of Churches in Britain and Europe. Through his initiative, the C & S Church was established in London in 1965.

many Caribbean members in our congregations. We are always ready to work with our colleagues from the mainline churches if asked to.

Revd Dr Jesisdan Jehu-Appiah<sup>91</sup> of the Musama Disco Christo Church,<sup>92</sup> London said:

We will definitely do mission and evangelism with any Christian Church except the “Messianic” types in Africa, India and elsewhere. Even outside Christianity, we do recognise the validity of Judaism and Islam as monotheist religions who believe not only in one God, but that there actually is only one God. This, therefore, excludes Hinduism, Buddhism and other polytheists. Our church has always been open and we have taken part in many ecumenical initiatives in Britain and internationally on invitation. In addition to Ghana nationals, we also have members who come from the Caribbean and other West African countries. It will be our pleasure to get other ethnic groups involved in our membership in the near future.

Revd A M O Adedimeji<sup>93</sup> of Christ Apostolic Church, Birmingham said:

As to the decline of Christianity in Britain, there is no doubt because as far back as 1987, I had a vision of a crash of Saint Paul’s Cathedral in London and the Lord told me that African missionaries have great work to do in the restoration. When the time of the Lord will dawn on us, AIC missionaries will

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<sup>91</sup> Dr Jehu-Appiah is the grandson of the founder of MDCC, Joseph William Egyanka Appiah

<sup>92</sup>Information about the MDCC derives from field research of the author as the church has not been listed in the Directory of Black Majority Churches in UK. His doctoral thesis from the University of Birmingham was on The AIC: An Investigation into their Theology.

<sup>93</sup> Adedimeji is a converted Muslim who left his family to become a Pastor of the CAC in Birmingham.

be anointed to work with the mainline churches not as second fiddles, but as equal partners in the revival of our religion in this country. Like Bishop Tutu's rainbow country of South Africa, Britain will be revived by black and white ministers working together in partnership and nobody will speak of colour, but of the progress of the Gospel of Christ. The anointing power of the black missionaries will work faster and achieve greater results than financial resources can achieve. The Holy Spirit will take control and this land will be spiritually revived.

Pastor Beno Mario of Kimbaguist Church,<sup>94</sup> London said:

Our church has been present in this country since 1991 and now we have three congregations in London, one each in Birmingham, Manchester, Bedford and Luton. We worship in French and English and we are open to all nationalities. We believe in ecumenism and we are in membership of the African Caribbean Council of Churches in London. We very much like to widen our outreach and will join other churches in Britain if we are invited to partnership in worship, prayers, vigils, mission and evangelism. Let me know when you have information about these. God bless you.

Revd Theophilus Adeniyi Adesina of Redeemed Christian Church of God, London said:

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<sup>94</sup>Information about The Kimbaguist church derives from the author's Field Research as the church has not been listed in the Directory of Black Majority Churches in UK and hence has not been included in Appendix I derived from the Directory. It is the largest church in the Republic of Congo.

We have recruited a few white members who did not stay for long, but our intention is to indigenise as much as possible wherever we do mission. Our church has made significant progress in America where we already have a few white Pastors and multi-ethnic parishes. Whenever the opportunity arises in Britain, we are ready to do mission with any church or Christian organisation. It will be our pleasure to be seen as bringing mission back to Britain in a revival with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Pastor Dede Kasay Okan of the Evangelical New Light Church,<sup>95</sup> Birmingham said:

My Church is one of the youngest Evangelical churches in Congo. It was started 32 years ago as a prayer group but became registered as a church in 1997 due to growth of membership. We have one branch in Birmingham but another one in France and two in Spain. We worship in French and English and we have no problem in articulating with British churches for joint worship, mission and evangelism. It will be wonderful if it is possible to share our gifts with the British mainline churches for the propagation of the Gospel of Christ.

Revd Shitoko Katende of The Lambs Gate Church,<sup>96</sup> London said:

Our church is a charismatic church from Congo and we now have four congregations in Britain: two in London and one each in Birmingham and Cardiff. At the moment, we worship in French because our members are

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<sup>95</sup> Evangelical New Light Church is from Congo and new in Britain and not listed in the Directory of Black Majority Churches in UK and hence has not been included in Appendix I.

<sup>96</sup> This Church was established in Congo in 1993 and has already planted four churches in Britain.

French speaking. When we grow bigger in the future and have English speaking members, we will change to English worship. If we are called upon for joint worship and mission, we will be glad to join.

Pastor Rehoboth Beyene of Rhema Faith Ministries, Birmingham said:

We believe in the power of the Holy Spirit and we pray for deliverance from various adversities. We worship in two languages on Sundays, first worship in Ethiopian and later in Eritrean. We are open to multi-cultural and ecumenical worship and we will accept invitation to such meetings.

The above respondents are selected from the others interviewed. Many of the respondents gave 'yes' and 'no' answers but after more open questions were put, it can be concluded that their answers are compatible with those listed as above. Those who gave constructive comments have been selected for analysis. It is observed that some AICs especially from East Africa have resisted being interviewed. They have been sceptical and suspicious of the motives of the interview despite all attempts to explain the purpose. However, a few from this group have shown willingness to engage in dialogue and ecumenism at the earliest opportunity. They still worship in their home languages and may not be ready at present for joint initiatives and partnership. The group still worship in French, Spanish, Ethiopian and Eritrean languages.

Attempts have been made but it has not been possible to interview any church from the South African region because the Zionists and Apostolics from the area cannot be

identified in Britain. Some of the New Charismatic groups from Zimbabwe like Family Faith Tabernacle Church have resisted being interviewed; and Forward In Faith Ministries also from Zimbabwe have been elusive. No attempt has been made to interview the Deya Ministries because of their recent involvement in baby trafficking scandals.

The interviews listed emanate from Nigeria, Ghana, Congo and Ethiopia. Virtually all respondents from West Africa signify their readiness to engage in dialogue and in some cases, have already been involved in ecumenical activities. It is considered possible that with encouragement and motivation, many churches not listed as respondents would be willing to work closely with British churches to promote Christianity in the country. The author has observed that AICs are not necessarily homogeneous in their ambitions and openness to engage in dialogue with the wider British public and that it could be attributed to the length of time those congregations have been in the UK. For instance mass immigration from West Africa occurred during the late 50's and early 60's to the UK, compared to other African regions in the last twenty years.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

On reflection, attention has been drawn to how the AICs emerged, grew and expanded even beyond the shores of Africa. Because of their humble beginnings, it can be said that with little or no resources available to them for the arduous work of mission, the accomplishments of the AICs have been acknowledged as greater than organised

missions.<sup>97</sup> It can be argued that ‘flesh and blood’ has not earned the credit for the AIC’s success stories. The Holy Spirit has been at work as driver and motivator of the events, leading to global recognition of the enormous contribution which the AICs are bringing into global Christian mission today. Allan Anderson has argued that ‘there must be something that they are “doing right” from which all Christians can learn in the ongoing task of proclaiming the gospel.’<sup>98</sup> The dogmatic theology, efficacy of prayer, Spiritual gifts, mode of ministry, proclaiming the reality of God, participative worship, priesthood of all believers, intergrated worship, healing and prophecy are among the offerings of the AIC from which other churches in Britain can learn. It may be arrogant for anyone to claim perfection in doing things right. That is not what the AICs are claiming. It is just a matter of relativity. The learning process in Anderson’s argument is the basis of enquiries to establish ‘who’ should be doing ‘what’ in order to get the learning process started.

Some groundwork has been done by some AICs who started worship in Britain in their own mother tongues. More and more of the churches are now worshipping in English and hence, more of the ethnic communities in the country can make sense of the offerings of the AIC. Great effort has gone into translating hymns, songs and choruses from the different languages into English so as to facilitate ecumenism and partnership formations for greater effectiveness in mission and evangelism.

The AIC’s presence in Britain opens up a new opportunity to investigate what they have to offer to facilitate global Christian mission. Most certainly, Christianity cannot be imported to Britain, packaged in the African culture. It will not work; just as

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<sup>97</sup> Anderson, Allan, ‘The Gospel and African Religion’, *International Review of Mission*, Vol. LXXXIX No. 354, July 2000, p373

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, p379

European culture does not work perfectly in the African context, despite the relative advantages. What is needed in Christianity is to think globally and act locally. It is not helpful to talk about African churches in Britain, dominating Christianity with African culture, but rather, about churches in Britain with an African approach to theology and worship. In this case, Africans are not in control, but they would be viewed as catalysts to enable the British people to establish control.

Why should British churches believe in the credibility of the AIC theology? Hitherto, most if not all AICs were perceived as syncretistic. How then can the British churches articulate with syncretism? Leonardo Boff argues that ‘Christianity is a syncretism par excellence.’<sup>99</sup> Walter Hollenweger also argues that a closer look at the Bible and European churches would reveal that ‘syncretism belongs essentially to the Christian message.’<sup>100</sup> Both scholars agree that the New Testament and European churches have grossly syncretised the Christian message. Examples quoted by Hollenweger include: the fact that the love song of Paul in I Corinthians 13 is a quotation from popular religious sources and cannot be recognised as a Christian text because the text does not mention the name of Christ; that European churches have borrowed funeral rites from their Germanic and Celtic ancestors and Christianised them because there are no such rites in the New Testament. On the contrary, Jesus said ‘let the dead bury their dead.’ He commanded his disciples to ‘raise the dead.’ Every funeral he attended was spoiled by his opening the corpse and raising the dead!; that December 25 is not in the New Testament, but that it was an important holy day for European ancestors,

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<sup>99</sup> Boff, Leonardo, *Church, Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church*, London, SCM, 1985, p92ff.

<sup>100</sup> Hollenweger, Walter J, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide*, Peabody, Ma, Hendrickson, 1997, p132-141

but that the day was Christianised.<sup>101</sup> These allusions can be taken as confirmation that ‘Syncretism belongs essentially to the Christian message’ and hence, there is no justification for British churches in hesitating to articulate with the AICs and the likes of them in Britain.

The AICs, whether syncretistic or not have biblical legitimations as the author of Ephesians says ‘it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.’ This statement was elucidated by David Sheppard who argues that ‘the wisdom of God can only be known through the Church in all its varied forms, if the church is made up of people of all races and classes; the world can then see how these different groups can learn to bring their different gifts to the whole body.’<sup>102</sup>

This is the reason why the AICs operating in Britain cannot single-handedly bring a revival to British Christianity. A real partnership with the British churches would promote the effective and efficient advancement of the Great Commission. Multiplicity of effort for revival is advocated by the AIC because ‘there was never a monochrome Christianity’ as asserted by Pobee and Ositelu II <sup>103</sup> As Britain is increasingly and irreversibly becoming multi-racial and multi-cultural, the onus is placed on British churches to adjust to their new environment by opening up to other Christian convictions in the country through contacts, dialogue, ecumenism and

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<sup>101</sup> Hollenweger, Walter J, ‘The Significance of the New Churches for the Future of Mission, Theology, Ecumenism and the Renewal of Christianity’, ed. Roswith Gerloff, *Mission is Crossing Frontiers*, Pietermaritzburg 3200, Cluster Publications, 2003, p337-338.

<sup>102</sup> Sheppard, David, *The Black Experience in Britain*, Herts, Christian Action 1981, p22

<sup>103</sup> Pobee, J.S., and Ositelu, Gabriel II, *African Initiatives in Christianity: Growth, Gifts and Diversities of Indigenous African Churches, A Challenge to the Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva, WCC, 1998, P14

conciliar initiatives. These roles will befit the Mission Agencies of the different denominations; the African and Caribbean Evangelical Alliance, the British Ecumenical Instruments: Churches Together in Britain and Ireland; Churches Together bodies in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland; not forgetting any other Christian Councils in Britain. These bodies should be telling the British churches that the time is ripe to begin to engage with other Christians on their land, and to do mission at a higher level. It would be expedient to end with the words of Kwame Bediako as he describes the African potential in these words:

I do not wish to exaggerate the significance of the African dimension in the present global transformation of Christianity. Yet, it seems that the sheer surprise element in the emergence of that continent as a major base of Christian faith at the close of the twentieth century makes it important that we seek to understand what this might mean both for Africa and for the Christian faith.<sup>104</sup>

Also, Hollenweger, speaking about the need for liaison with the AIC says, ‘we (Western Christianity) have to learn about the beliefs and theologies of these other Christians if we want to remain in contact with the centre of gravity of the Christian faith.’<sup>105</sup> This wish points to the need to dialogue in an ecumenical setting. James Cone has argued that ‘When people can no longer listen to the other people’s stories, they become enclosed within their own social context ... And then they feel they must destroy other people’s stories.’<sup>106</sup> The author agrees with these scholars that dialogue and partnership is called for in order to take forward the message of the Gospel.

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<sup>104</sup> Bediako, Kwame, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Book, 1995, p252

<sup>105</sup> Hollenweger, Walter J, ‘Calculated Beliefs’, *Review of World Christian Encyclopedia*, in: Times Literary Suppl, 5.11.82. p1224

<sup>106</sup> Cone, James, *God of the Oppressed*, New York, Seabury Press, 1975, p102

Some of the AICs in Britain are already making inroads into British ecumenism but at a lower level of participation so far. What is perceived as good for British home mission is a greater level of participation by all home and foreign churches who care to give priority to the growth of the global Christian mission over and above their denominational preoccupations. It is intended that this will be communicated to the appropriate mission agencies and ecumenical instruments for their information and action in a later publication which will be based on this dissertation.

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## INTERVIEWS:

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Abiola, Olu A,	Interview on 8 <sup>th</sup> August, 2005-09-24
Adedimeji, A. M. O.	Interview on 30 <sup>th</sup> April, 2005
Adesina, T. O.	Interview on 14 <sup>th</sup> June 2005
Ayegboyin, Deji <sup>107</sup>	Interview on 17 <sup>th</sup> December, 2005
Beyene, Rehoboth	Interview on 25 <sup>th</sup> September, 2005
Couson D. O.	Interview on 15 <sup>th</sup> January, 2005
Dedji, Valentine <sup>108</sup>	Interview on 1 <sup>st</sup> July 2005
Fasunloye, R.	Interview on 21 <sup>st</sup> May, 2005
Jehu-Appiah, J	Interview on 9 <sup>th</sup> August, 2005
Jegede, A. O.	Interview on 17 <sup>th</sup> October, 2005
Katende, Shitoko	Interview on 17 <sup>th</sup> September, 2005
Mario, Beno <sup>109</sup>	Interview on 12 <sup>th</sup> September, 2005
Okan, Dede Kasay	Interview on 5 <sup>th</sup> September, 2005
Olayinka, J. O.	Interview on 30 <sup>th</sup> April, 2005
Olotu, J. O <sup>110</sup>	Interview on 18 <sup>th</sup> February, 2005

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<sup>107</sup> A non-AIC respondent. Interviewed because he is one of the authors on AICs and can be considered as an enthusiast of the AIC theology.

<sup>108</sup> A non-AIC respondent. Interviewed for his enthusiasm for AIC theology. He presented a paper to the British and Irish Association for Mission Studies in Belfast during June 28<sup>th</sup> – July 1<sup>st</sup> 2005 on ‘Non-White Pentecostalism on a White Continent: Missiological Challenges from Africa for Europe’ during which he spotlighted the contributions of the AICs to global Christianity.

<sup>109</sup> This respondent from Congo represents probably the largest AIC in Africa with millions of adherents in Congo and Angola and being the National Church of the Federal Republic of Congo.

<sup>110</sup> A retired Archdeacon of the Anglican Church of Nigeria who admits the adoption of the AIC theology has facilitated the growth of his church in Nigeria.

Oshun, Chris<sup>111</sup>

Interview on 21<sup>st</sup> March, 2005

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<sup>111</sup> This respondent is an AIC theologian, writer and scholar. His response has not been listed in Section 4.12 because he is not resident in Britain although he was an Assistant Pastor during his student days in the country.