

# THE AICS AND THEOLOGICAL TRAINING: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE ST JOHN APOSTOLIC FAITH MISSION OF MA NKU

*Victor Molobi*

Research Institute for Theology and Religion,  
University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

## *Abstract*

The St John's Apostolic Faith Mission is one of the African Indigenous Churches founded by Mother Christinah Nku in the 1930s. Since then this church has gone from strength to strength; however, it has no "theological muscle". Given this lack of theological guidance, what has facilitated growth in St John's (AFM)? This church is one of the major African Indigenous Churches, similar to the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), Shembe and the International Pentecostal Church (IPCC) of the late Modise. In some of the interviews, it became clear that the St John's Apostolic Faith Mission lacks theological training and its efforts towards addressing this problem have borne little fruit in South Africa. In my research, I discovered that the crux of the matter was the tension between "institutional education" versus "natural wisdom" (natural wisdom mainly consists of an oral tradition). The article concludes with a few suggestions on how the theology of St John's and the AICs generally could be advanced.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Aim

The aim of this article is to discuss the theological efforts of the African Independent Churches and to attempt to identify what blocks theological training at the St John's Apostolic Faith Mission. I will also investigate the lack of uniqueness in the theological basis of St John's and the AICs in general. I will also discuss the way forward, given that St John's and the AICs want to create a theology of their own.<sup>1</sup> We will briefly look into what kept St John's "intact" and growing, despite its lack of strong theological input. The tensions between the institutionalised and natural wisdom are then investigated critically and a conclusion deduced. The method employed will include a historical review of the sources, literature, and personal interactions, with the aim of acquiring a fuller knowledge of the theological background of these churches. The catalysis model will also be employed in this discussion, to transcend the prescriptive method with a view to nurturing the development of theological discourse within the AICs. I will conclude by drawing up few guidelines about a possible way forward.

## 1.2 The nature and basis for a theology for St John's

There are two questions that need to be asked when we enquire into the significance of the theology of the St John's AFM. Is theological debate really important for these churches? Secondly, what form of theology is practised by St John's? Historically, St John's may have not shown any remorse for its lack of theology, but the public now wants to know more about St John's. This, of course, is true of all AICs in and outside South Africa. St John's developed autonomously, through the prophecy of Ma Nku. Its theology will always be influenced by the laws of its founder.

Barrett, in his book *Schism and renewal in Africa* (1968) discovered that the theological problem of the AICs, including St John's, is based on the core roots of the different denominations within the stream itself. Barrett (1968:169) acknowledged three themes through which the theology of St John's and the AICs could be established. He labelled these themes: biblicalism, Africanism and Philadelphia. This approach has resulted in a sufficiently creative reinterpretation of the Christian faith for one to be able to speak of emergent African theology and churchmanship. Barrett<sup>ii</sup> came to this conclusion after investigating most of the AICs throughout South Africa and larger parts of the African continent. We now need to investigate the possibility of St John's theology, keeping these themes in mind.

In attempting to identify what is blocking the theological progress of St John's, we will first give a brief description of, and historical insight, into Ma Nku in terms of education in her church. We will also investigate the church ranking, leadership relationships, church control and educational levels<sup>iii</sup> to identify the various stumbling blocks. These characteristics are found among the AICs in Gauteng and Kwa-Zulu Natal, and apply to the apostolic AICs also. We will come back to this issue, but for now we will turn to the personal views of Ma Nku on education in her church.

## 1.3 Ma Nku's attitude towards education

Mother Christinah Nku seems to have been very conscious of education; this comes out very clearly in her attachment to institutions of learning, albeit at a primary level. For instance, St John's founded three primary schools: Mosioa Community School, which was named after the late Archbishop Lazarus Mosioa Nku in Sebokeng Vaal Triangle, Mokotuli Higher Primary School, which was named after Mother Christian Nku in Everton in the Vaal and Motlollo Primary School, built by the late Archbishop Johannes Tieho Ralentsoana Nku at Ma Nku's resting place in Vogelstruisdraai (Motlollo). St John's trained its ministers at the R R Wright School of Religion, commonly known as the Wilberforce Theological Seminary in Everton.

Interestingly, the St John's Apostolic Faith Mission also established a bursary fund known as the "Christinah Nku Bursary Fund."<sup>iv</sup> This was a sign of the consciousness of the importance of education within St John's. Also, the ecumenical relationship between the St John's AFM to the broader Organisation of African Independent Churches (OAIC) was essential. Among other things, educational matters, in conjunction with Theological Education

by Extension in Churches (TEEC), were taken seriously. Perhaps this was because one of Mother Christinah Nku's daughters, Dr Lydia August, was the president of the AIC women's fellowship (an international organisation). Mrs Christinah Nku was the president of St John's Theological Training Centre. Lydia was the assistant chairperson of the OAIC Southern Africa Region, and the Secretary of the national AIC. All these factors show the importance of investigating the educational and theological viewpoint of St John's. This will be done by looking closely at the perspective of the AICs' theological development, particularly in South Africa. Referring back to the theological characteristics of biblicalism, Africanism and Philadelphia as discerned by Barrett (1968), the following points emerged clearly:

- Biblicalism

The Bible has always been at the heart of the AICs' reformation as understood in the Christian tradition. This is the pattern which the AICs have followed. The evidence of the AICs involvement in the Bible is clearly discernible in the fact that the Bible has been translated into a number of sub-Saharan African languages (Barrett 1968:165). The Bible is also important to St John's: biblical texts are referred to in all their services. Mbiti (2005) has posed the question: "does Africa understand what she is reading?" The translation of the Bible into more different languages in Africa than any other continent or region in the world suggests, in fact, that Africa is well acquainted with the message of the Bible. The United Bible Societies statistics are an indication that many are becoming acquainted with the Bible. The translation of the Bible into African languages had an enormous impact on St John's. Using the Bible from an oral viewpoint and relating it to their own context and understanding, the members of St John's regard the Bible as *phoko e kgolo, thamaga ya bo Jeso* meaning "great medicine and graphics or biblical writings about Jesus". This is a clear expression of the honour and very positive attitude St John's and other AICs have towards the Bible. The Bible is the doorway to their Christian belief. What is needed, perhaps, is an in-depth study of the Bible and how it can be better articulated to enter into debate within the ecumenical levels in terms of knowing more about the Christian God. St John's insists that the Bible should be studied – but how should the Bible be studied? The answer is: by interpreting it through the context of St John's, a context that encourages Africanism.

- Africanism

There has been a determined attempt to vindicate Africanism as not only good in itself, but also as a culture that is closer to the biblical way of life than European culture. Africanism was regarded as a more suitable basis for building a Christian society, a society that would be an African Christian society. The discovery that traditional customs that had been criticised by the missionaries were by no means always inconsistent with scripture came, to many, with the force of revelation. Barrett (1968:166) maintains that the widespread practice of attempting to combine all that is valid in the traditional world with the world of biblical faith has been markedly successful and, even more surprising perhaps, has been free of the perils of syncretism.

According to Barrett (1968:166), Turner describes independence as having achieved a radical breakthrough from pagan idolatry and the worship of a number of divinities, to the worship of the one true, living, loving and all-powerful God of the Christian scriptures. This breakthrough has given to the African personality a new confidence in its inner intuitions, a new integrity, autonomy and initiative. It has made possible the emergence of St John's forms of worship, leadership, and the exercise of special gifts. In short, it has vindicated Africanism. How is this theology going to be articulated and debated in such a way that it will benefit the AICs and the grassroots world of the African?

- Philadelphia

The third theme is one which has permeated the St John's movement: the emphasis on Philadelphia, brotherly love, which is seen as the Christian version of Africa's traditional values of corporate life, community, group solidarity, hospitality and the like (Barrett 1968:167). It is at this point that we see most markedly the creative power of African religious genius, expressed in the differential selection of religious concepts. Confronted with a whole vast range of doctrines and concepts offered by some six hundred disparate missionary bodies, African Christians have sifted out and concentrated on a small selection that has real meaning for their own societies.<sup>v</sup> Where missions had failed by offering selective giving in place of the fullness of biblical agape, Africans now responded with selective receiving; and the concept they have emphasised most has been the concept of Philadelphia.

There is another issue that we need to look into, an issue that has had a significant impact on the theology of St John's and the AICs. This is the whole issue of worship. Worship is taken so seriously that it is often used as a measuring stick for promoting and grading members into higher positions of leadership in the church. Those who take worship seriously can become church leaders. These people were first known as the Levites and sisters (*ba-Lefi le barweetsana* as they are commonly known), ministers, bishops or archbishops or (*baokamedi* - overseers). These people can be identified by their colourful attire and the rods or staffs they carry. Their members believe that they are powerful in terms of teaching, leading and healing. The prevailing belief is that these leaders should always be ready to defend themselves and others, since they are constantly challenged by witchcraft and, as result, take nothing for granted, including their own members (Molobi 2001:196). Their members could be affected by misfortunes as well and need to be taken care of. This raises questions about the viability of institutionalised theology within St John's. What would be the appropriate way of presenting the AICs' theology? Indeed, how we promote the oral tradition is yet to be determined. St John's attempted to improve its theology in partnership with the AME (the African Methodist Episcopal Church), but was this necessarily a good way of mapping its theology?

#### 1.4 The St John's Apostolic Faith Mission and the AME

From the early days, St John's was very ably managed by Ma Nku, the founder. The issue of education arose later, by which time the church had made considerable progress. The idea of a theological college was cherished

by the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Later on in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the 1960s, Dr Coan<sup>vi</sup> resided and served in Southern and Central Africa as an overseas Missionary of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME). Coan was keen to help St John's and others, since it was the AME's policy not to discriminate against any African group educationally, especially those groups who were interested in developing churches. However, over the decades, this institution (and St John's in particular) has made very little progress, although many have acquired their theological training through this institution.

The remaining critical question relates to St John's sluggish progress in educational initiatives. Was this because members were mainly interested in what benefited them personally? A tension arose between "institutional education"<sup>vii</sup> and what can be termed "natural wisdom."<sup>viii</sup> Of course, all education is based on natural ability, but as far advanced levels of education are concerned, some form of institutional education is nearly always required. That said, any oral tradition advances knowledge and wisdom without having to worry about institutional qualifications. Let us look into the following themes closely to see how they have influenced and sometimes blocked the progress within St John's theological discourse. These themes have been referred to already and are: ranking, leadership, church control and educational levels. We will deal with them one by one.

- Ranking

Independent churches are weakened by their feudal system<sup>ix</sup> of ranking. A leader occupies a position and his or her administration role must not be questioned. Often, high positions are held by bishops who themselves are not particularly well educated. Ranking itself is a matter of personal status and support rather than creativity. Barrett (1968:218) correctly indicated that leadership within the AICs must emerge with a major innovating idea that is capable of building a church out of the existing feeling of deprivation caused by intense socio-religious stress.

- Leadership

St John's can be regarded as very much a family church, since Ma Nku's children and relatives have always held high positions in the church. (Although there were outsiders such as Bishop Masango of St Paul's Apostolic Faith Mission and others who built a reputation for themselves by starting branches in Swaziland, Botswana and elsewhere.) Those who planted St John's "branches" could not, unfortunately, "let go" and create a chance for those who were more able to lead. In short, leadership based on birth posed a serious threat to the development of the church, both doctrinally and ecumenically.

- Church control and educational levels

In the 1960s, Josephus R Coan<sup>x</sup> developed an idea originally put forward by Bishop Wright by founding the R R Wright School of Religion in Everton, fifty miles away from Johannesburg in the province which, during the apartheid

era, was called "The Transvaal". Some of the leaders of St John's Apostolic Faith Mission of Ma Nku studied through this institution, which was better known as the Wilberforce Theological Seminary. The educational output of this college, in line with others at the time, was well captured by Sunkler (1964:124) when he stated that:

Besides the president himself (now deceased), there were forty-eight ministers' in the Church. Of the forty-eight ministers one was a graduate from a Negro Teachers' College in the United States; six had South African Teachers' Certificates; one had passed Standard VII; five Standard VI; three Standard V; fourteen Standard IV; eight Standard III; and eight Standard II. As for additional theological training, nine of these men had studied at three different Mission Bible Institutes, while thirteen others had been working in Mission Churches and presumably taken some Bible study there, and twenty-three had had "private studies" in theology. The Holy Communion Church of South Africa: one of the ministers has attained a Standard IV in school; the bishop himself and the three ministers claim knowledge of Zulu or Xhosa, but none of them has had any theological training whatsoever.

It is clear that most of the AICs had very little in the way of institutional, higher level education. A church that has leaders with such limited education will find it difficult to progress as far as secular and academic life is concerned. Most of the St John's ministers who attended Wilberforce did so merely for the purpose of internal church activities. St John's theology was no different from the theology of the broader AIC movement.

## 2 THE BROAD VIEW OF THEOLOGY AMONG AICs

What do we think AICs understand when they use the term "theology"? This question was also raised by Mbiti, in an unpublished paper presented at Unisa in January 2005. In this paper Mbiti (2005:1) asks a question: "Do you understand what you are reading?" This question is relevant to homes, schools and churches. Theology, according to Mbiti, comes from the heart of the people who are encountering biblical truth and interpreting it according to their own understanding. This approach to theology meant that the theology of St John's Apostolic Faith Mission was not based on theological discourse, but on prophetic experience. Theology, therefore, was merely intended to interpret St John's experience and knowledge of Christianity. However, St John's affiliation with AICs had another significant role when viewed from a broader, ecumenical level. It also implied that AIC Christology and theological discourse had the duty of challenging circular theology (often referred to as "mainline theology") to justify its existence.

West (1975:53) showed that independent churches regard marriage, titles such as prophet, prophetess, Archbishop or bishop,<sup>xi</sup> president and their vices, ministers and elders as determining someone's status in the church. This view has implications for the AICs' leadership and theological qualifications,

especially since, according to West (1975:53), their members' average years of schooling are five and half years. In most cases, AIC leaders have reached standard 3, 4 or 6 elementary theological education. What educational strength do they have that will stand against the challenge of mainline township churches?<sup>xii</sup>

I am not saying any of this to mock the AICs. I am simply pointing out that their elementary education is not doing them many favours as far as their theology is concerned. Another obstacle is that upcoming and educated young AIC members are not given the chance to support the church's higher structures in terms of administration and theological output. Another problem is that AIC church leadership does not give them this space, because they are regarded as inexperienced in terms of age and marital status.

AICs are also being torn apart by the internal disputes; unfortunately, St John's Apostolic Faith Mission has never been unsusceptible to this sort of internal rupturing. Thus we can conclude that "institutional acquired education" versus "natural traditional wisdom" has created a serious tension that has barred the St John's and AICs theological progress. Institutional education offers space for open debate, while traditional wisdom tends to remain closed. This is because traditional wisdom is far more internalised than institutionalised education. What, then, is the best strategy for helping St John's and AICs as far as improving their theology is concerned? Let us look into this from the broader perspective of the AIC movement in South Africa, and assume that whatever happens in the AIC movement will influence St John's.

## **2.1 AICs and theological education**

Since 1964 (Khoapa 1972:32), AICs have been concerned about their educational future. AICs had earlier approached the Christian Institute of Southern Africa for advice and guidance on the theological training for their ministers. Several educational training projects<sup>xiii</sup> have been undertaken since then (i.e. since 1964). The Association of South African Theological institute (ASATI) was responsible for examining and issuing certificates to all member churches affiliated to the ASATI. The courses it provided were correspondence courses.

The AICA Theological Seminary near Alice in the Cape became the extension to the correspondence course initiative. The Seminary was administered under the Theological Educational Committee, which was elected by the AICA conference. In 1969, a small group broke away from the AICA to form the Reformed Churches Association (RICA), which was funded by the Dutch Reformed Church. This is why the RICA's theological educational projects were administratively assisted by the then department of Bantu Education.

The Khanya Theological Institute was the latest attempt in educational development among the AICs. It became less effective after the Rev Makhubu died. The reason for its demise was basically the bureaucratic<sup>xiv</sup> way in which it was run. The only remaining semi-active correspondence and some kind of theological school for the AIC presently is the African Spiritual Churches

Association (ASCA) under the leadership of Bishop Ngada and the Rev Kenosi Mofokeng. There is therefore a strong need for support in helping the AICs to reorganise their theological educational colleges.

When the Christian Institute was banned in 1977 some of the AIC leaders, including Bishop Ngada and Rev Makhubu, were part of the negotiation team who worked to form another college. The South African College of the Independent Churches (SATCIC) was opened at St Ansgars<sup>xv</sup> (ICT 1985:8). Its major weakness was the lack of funds. Correspondence courses were taken over by the Theological Training by Extension College (TEEC). Both colleges used the TEEC material. Khanya used a rented building in Johannesburg. All its educational and administrative assets were repossessed when Archbishop Ntongana was in charge of the college. Presently, educational achievement in the AICs is back to square one, in that some AICs have no legitimate educational training centre of their own. St John's was part of this organisation especially since AICs were aware of their size in numbers, including ZCC, Shembe and the IPPC among others. These churches make up the majority of the AICs in South Africa.

AICs such as St John's worked closely with Wilberforce AME theological college, but wanted to build a theological college of their own. The school was built at the headquarters of St John's in Everton (see introduction). Local ministers acquired their theological training from this college. One would expect the ZCC to have its own theological college also, but this was not the case; however, the ZCC built two schools, a primary and a secondary school by the name of Marobathota on the Eastern side of Morijah (the ZCC's headquarters). These schools are officially registered with the Education Department of South Africa.

Bishop Lekhanyane himself acquired his theological training through the Stoffberg Theological Seminary,<sup>xvi</sup> located near the University of the North (Limpopo) in Polokwane. This was done through a correspondence course; Lekhanyane did not attend classes with other students. Most of the members of the church are appointed as ministers on the basis of their experience and spiritual gifts (including healing and prophesy). Among AICs, education is not compulsory and it is therefore difficult to increase the level of theological learning in these churches.

The struggles for leadership and the meager funds available to the AICs were, and still are, the key frustrations among these groups. This lack of resources has torn the good image of the AICs apart. Most of the positive attempts made towards the development of theological education have been met with interruptions.<sup>xvii</sup> Although many AICs in South Africa are affiliate members of the Organisation of African Independent Churches in Africa (OAIC), with the headquarters based in Nairobi, Kenya, this had done little to reduce poverty, suffering and illiteracy in Africa. However, in terms of education, a small but important initiative has been made. This initiative will have to be encouraged by those interested in developing AIC theology. Many views are put forward about the theological initiatives in the AICs but, it seems, to no purpose. This is true of St John's Apostolic Faith Mission also, since St John's forms part of the core AICs in South Africa.



## 2.2 AICs' personal view of theology

The engagement of St John's Apostolic Faith Mission has a broader bearing on the organisation of AICs. I said in the introduction that Ma Nku's family and the church were directly involved in the activity of AICs, including the OAIC as an ecumenical body. We should not be surprised to learn that the name "AIC" overshadows the name "St John's Apostolic Faith Mission". The family of Ma Nku played a highly significant role in the development of both the AICs and the OAIC. It would be unfair not to reposition Ma Nku's family in the history of the AICs' organisational development. Some perceive the theology of both St John's and the AICs to be oral and claim that it should be kept that way. "Speaking for ourselves" (Institute for Contextual Theology 1985:25) briefly outlines AIC theology as a theology of the heart, a theology which is neither spoken of nor written about systematically. They admit that they cannot express their theology as do western theologians; however, they want to systematise theology in their own way – not someone else's. AICs have tried to form churches as the Spirit has led them and according to what they read in the Bible. They confirm that, as far as the incarnation is concerned, they believe what they read from the Bible about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, but know nothing of the arguments that western churches have had about these matters.

AICs regard the Bible as a book that comes from God and take every word in the Bible seriously. Thus, when they are asked why they celebrate the Lord's Supper at night and include the ceremony of feet washing, they can only refer to what they have read from the Bible. When they are asked about Jordan baptism (by immersion in a river) or about baptising only adults, they simply reply that this is what they read in the Bible. They know that Jesus blessed the little children and therefore that children need to be cared accordingly.<sup>xviii</sup> In some circles they are viewed as "fundamentalists", because they are not interested in any interpretation of the Bible that softens or waters down its message. Their African spiritual and traditional experiences of the Spirit make it easy for them to appreciate the style and symbolism of the Bible. The central focus of their theology is the Holy Spirit.<sup>xix</sup> The Spirit is their teacher and guide in everything. It is the Spirit who guided their founders to found new churches (Institute for Contextual Theology 1985:26).

The AICs are keen to develop their own theology and are irritated by the secularised theology of the West. What would then be a satisfactory theology for the AICs? Perhaps, in dealing with this, we should look beyond the confinements of the theological arguments between the AICs and the mainline churches. For instance, Anderson (1992) believes that, before the AICs formulate any theology, their worldview and its operational parameter should be fully scrutinised. For example, their belief systems need to be examined, and data statistically given to the satisfaction of their religious adherents. Some of the key elements to be further investigated (Anderson 1992:107-8) include the following:

- healing by the use of symbolic objects
- being given a uniform after baptism by threefold immersion

- the question on certain taboos (in order of importance):
- abstaining from eating pork (92%), smoking (89%), polygamy (69%) and beer drinking (66%)
- the purifying effect of water

These abovementioned points should be approached in the light of how AICs understand the Bible and prefer it to be interpreted. To date, the AICs have made several strides forward in their attempts to explain their preferences in terms of a theology in context. The late Bishop Frank Ntsuntsha, Director of Christ the Rock Indigenous Churches Association (CRICA), made the following statement:

In 1962, CRICA ministries were formed and it was called “Christian Rock Mission.” This was a mission to the indigenous churches of Southern Africa. As it is difficult to teach the membership without reaching the heads first. CRICA (Christ the Rock Indigenous Churches Association) - which is the association of Bishops – was formed, as we needed to work from the top down. In Soweto we had nine evening Bible schools and in each one of them our men helped. Classes were held simultaneously.

AICA (African Independent Churches Association) was formed in 1965. AICA had the same aims as those of CRICA mentioned above. They needed trained leadership. They also needed a theological training for leadership training among their bishops and ministers to grow them in grace and the knowledge of Christ Jesus. They needed to look at the denominations as dividing the Christians. Pastors’ wives and women among AICs were to be trained to train other care givers for caring of children at home, to do community work and to help the sufferers (Ntsuntsha [nd]:10-12).

In his article entitled “Education will not bite you”, Maluleke (2002:171) encouraged AICs to strive for better quality education. St John’s building of primary schools is a good sign that they acknowledge the importance of education. The problem with education in the AICs was that the ministers and bishops themselves are, for the most part, unlearned. They adhere to the old order “doctrine” of doing things to the point that they ignore new forms of education available.

### **2.3 Possibilities and hope for AIC theology**

The scenario in which AIC theology will be formed is multifaceted. It requires not only assumptions but also direct enquiry from the communities involved. Anderson (1993:94-98) investigated the possibility of theology among the AICs in Soshanguve northwest of Pretoria. He started first by investigating the literature on theology, and this led him to the conclusion that Pentecostal churches, and especially indigenous Pentecostal-type churches, seldom have an elaborately worked-out theology such as that found in most mission churches (Anderson 1993:94). Nevertheless, Pentecostal-type churches do

have a distinct contribution to make to African Christian theology, a point emphasised by Daneel (1989:51-57). These churches have inculturated Christianity into Africa in such a way that these churches are of considerable significance in African theology. Daneel (1989:54) considers that their main significance is twofold: it lies firstly in their spontaneous indigenisation of Christianity, uninhibited by direct western control, and secondly in their unique erection of “bridgeheads between the Christian gospel and traditional thought forms”. Fashole-Luke (1976:144) made the point that African Indigenous Churches constitute part of the “raw material” for the building of African Christian theologies. He also pointed out that a careful and critical study needs to be made of these churches to assess their value for the development of African theology as a whole (Fashole-Luke 1976:148).

Anderson (1993:97) maintains that AIC theology is obscure. He came to this conclusion by posing a question: To what extent are the traditional African concepts of God carried over into the theology of Pentecostal and Pentecostal-type Christianity? St John’s AFM of Ma Nku itself belongs to the Pentecostal churches in South Africa, but it is regarded as an African Indigenous Church and a family of the AICs. Some theological opinions and observations are that AIC Pentecostalism overemphasises pneumatology and that the African spirit world, particularly the ancestor cult, has found new expression (e.g. Oosthuizen 1968:129; Pauw 1960:207). It has also been said that this overemphasis on pneumatology has led to the neglect of God and the overshadowing of Jesus Christ.

Maluleke (in Molobi 2004:91-95) is of the opinion that most researchers (white researchers in particular) have utilised theological information obtained from interviews given by black scholars and students. Black scholars have simply not been given the chance to be productive in terms of publishing in accredited journals and academic texts. Maluleke believes that the field workers may be genuine people, people who can tell true stories about what is happening among the AICs in the light of the AFM Pentecostal church of Ma Nku. Also, Anderson (1993:95) followed an interesting methodology when he attempted to obtain information that was as accurate as possible about the theological discourse used in these churches. Anderson labelled his approach as being a practical approach.

### **3 CONCLUSION**

This article discussed the theological efforts and attempts to identify blockages in the theological training of St John’s Apostolic Faith Mission. The theology of St John’s Apostolic Faith Mission was not based on theological dialogue, but on prophetic experience. One reason for its lack of theological engagement was that St John’s church status was impoverished owing to bureaucracy. The latest attempt of the AICs to develop their education was the Khanya Theological Institute. The scenario in which AIC theology will be formed is multifaceted. African Indigenous Churches constitute part of the “raw material” for building of African Christian theologies. AIC theology is obscure and needs to be researched in a lot more detail to establish its meaningfulness.

St John's AFM of Ma Nku belongs to the Pentecostal churches in South Africa, but is regarded as an African Indigenous Church and a family of the AICs. The struggle between institutional education and natural wisdom has been a serious challenge to this church. Fortunately, many AIC leaders are now starting to take education seriously. For example, many of them are now enrolling in certificate programmes at the University of South Africa (Unisa) (these certificates are awarded by the Institute of Theology and Religion and the CB Powell Centre). This initiative needs to be looked into critically and constructively to help the AICs, including the St John's, but they must be given a chance to say what they think is an appropriate theology for them.

## WORKS CONSULTED

Anderson, A 1991. *Moya: The Holy Spirit in African context*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

Anderson, A 1992. *Bazalwane: African Pentecostals in South Africa*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

Anderson, A 1993. *Tumelo: The faith of African Pentecostals in South Africa*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

Barret, D B 1968. *Schism and renewal in Africa*. London: Oxford University Press.

Daneel, M L 1989. *Christian theology*. Study guide 1 for MSB301F. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

Du Toit, C W 2002. *Research, identity and rationalism: Thinking about theological research in South Africa*. Pretoria: Research Institute for Theology and Religion, University of South Africa.

Du Toit, C W & Ngada, N H 1998. *Hearing the AIC voice*. Pretoria: Research Institute for Theology and Religion, University of South Africa.

Fashole-Luke, F E 1976. The question of Christian theologies, in Anderson, G H & Stransky, T F (ed), *Mission trends no 3*. New York: Paulist.

Guitarrez, G 1997. *Drinking from our own wells*. New York: Orbis.

Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT) 1985. *Speaking for ourselves*. Braamfontein: African Independent Churches.

Khoapa, B A 1972. *Black review: Black community programme*. Braamfontein: Ravan.

Maluleke, T S 1996. Research methods in AICs and other grassroots

- communities. *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa*, 10(1), 29-43.
- Maluleke, T S 2002. Black and African theologies in the New World Order. *Missiology MSB301-F, Tutorial letter 102/2002*, 32-48. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Mbiti, J 2005. Africa, do you understand what you are reading: The Bible in African homes, schools and churches. Paper presented at the Annual Congress of the South African Missiological Society (SAMS), Pretoria, South Africa on 21 January.
- Molobi, V S 2004. African theology, black theology and the AICs: A vision for mission. Mth thesis. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Molobi, V S 2005. *Worship and celebration in ministry and community Service*. Study Unit 6. Pretoria: Research Institute for Theology and Religion, University of South Africa.
- Ngada, N H & Mofokeng K E 2001. *African Christian witness*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster.
- Ntsuntsha, F [nd]. *Millions are still waiting to hear*. Johannesburg: Christ the Rock Indigenous Churches Association.
- Pauw, B A 1960. *Religion in a Tswana chiefdom*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Oosthuizen, G C 1968. Causes of religious independentism in Africa. Alice: Fort Hare University Press.
- Roosevelt S Coan 2006. *Chicken bone: A Journal for literary and artistic African American themes*. Daniel Alexander Payne: Christian Educator. Philadelphia: AME Book Concern, 1935. Available: <http://web.library.emory.edu/libraries/speccolls/announcements-aa.html>.
- Sunkler B G M 1964. *Bantu prophets in South Africa*. London: Oxford University Press.
- West, M 1975. *Bishops and prophets in the black city: African Independent Churches in Soweto*. Cape Town: David Philip.

## ENDNOTES

- 
- 1 African Independent Churches: *Speaking for ourselves*, ICT (1985) and *Hearing the AIC voice*, Du Toit & Ngada (1999); Unisa are evidence of this.
  - 2 Ibid.
  - 3 See also Sunkler (1964:137) and West (1975:144-46).
  - 4 See the programme of thanksgiving celebration in the honour of Mother Christina Mokotuli Nku – 1984-1985. (Available at the St John's head office in Everton).
  - 5 Ibid.

- 
- 6 Dr Coan was the President and Superintendent of the Wilberforce Institute, a school that provided elementary and secondary teacher training. While he also served as Acting Bishop, his primary vocation was teaching. An excerpt of an invitation from Bishop Adam Richardson, presiding bishop of the same area of Dr Coan's work in South Africa, sheds light on the importance given to the ten years of dedicated work by Josephus Coan. (Daniel Alexander Payne: Christian Educator. Philadelphia: AME Book Concern, 1935). Available: <http://web.library.emory.edu/libraries/speccolls/announcements-aa.html>.
- 7 "Institutional education" refers to education acquired through state or private institutions.
- 8 Natural wisdom is the traditional or natural gift of doing certain things. For example, prophecy could be a gift from God but how you apply it is an art which you must acquire or develop.
- 9 By the "feudal system", I mean a social system which makes it possible for the bishops of the AICs to, at least theoretically, own everything in the church. This system results in their word being final. In short, a feudal system means that the bishops do not have to accept any proposal that does not come from them.
- 10 The Reverend Dr Josephus R Coan was regarded as an icon in Christian Education. He was a faithful servant of God, family, community and an example to all whom he taught and influenced.
- 11 Titles are particularly important to independent church leaders and by far the most popular is Archbishop or Bishop. Of the 252 churches leaders in the surveys, no fewer than 80% carry the title Bishop or Archbishop. 15% were Presidents, 3% were Moderators, and 2% had lesser titles (West 1975:53).
- 12 No adequate explanation has been offered for the popularity of the term. It is suggested that (a) the title confers prestige because of the prestige of bishops in the mission churches, and (b) it is used rarely enough in the mission churches to make it uncommon, thus allowing relatively exclusive use by independent churches – for example, the only bishops in Soweto are from the independent churches. The term is also convenient because it specifically distinguishes church leaders – the title "President" may be held by a variety of secular office-bearers.
- 13 They introduced a correspondence course to give theological tutelage to the various ministers in charge of the Independent Churches. This course dealt with biblical principles and the message from the scriptures. The principal of the college was the Rev Maqina, who was also the president of the Association. Students' fees were only R20-00 per year since the remaining fees were subsidised by donations from churches in Germany, Holland and Switzerland.
- 14 Information, especially that relating to finances, was never disclosed to colleagues.
- 15 Ansgars – after many controversies the seminary was closed.
- 16 The seminary was a Dutch Reformed property affiliated to University of the North, although now it belongs to the uniting Reformed Churches of South Africa.
- 17 Lack of coherence and a lack of administrative skills in running these institutions created a crisis which later resulted in the failure of all efforts made to organise legitimate theological education centres.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid.