

## **The relationship between the WCC and OAIC: an assessment of the mutual influence on ecumenical praxis**

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### *Abstract*

This article will examine how the World Council of Churches (WCC) has carved its historical mission and influence in the African Independent Churches (AICs), through the Organization of African Independent Churches (OAIC) in Nairobi, Kenya. The progress made in assessing the value of the two bodies of unity will help to bring them together. It will also evaluate the two ecumenical bodies' orientations to enhance the relevance of the proposed unity. The discussion will seek to understand the weight ascribed in the field of ecumenical importance that has developed historically to build on such unity. In terms of the relationship between the WCC and the OAIC, good communication has existed for years. The developmental structures affirm the OAIC as the birth child of the AICs. They are peculiar because of their unique histories and theologies. The Limuru consultation has created a platform for the relationship and participation among them. Initially the AICs were happy to utilise the Theological Education by Extension (TEE) for their training, but later challenged it for either review or replacement. The writings of Inus Daneel became vital literature and contained much information about the AICs. The OAIC's "founding vision"<sup>1</sup> remained a source of encouragement for new theological thinking and patterns in the AICs. A literature review and active participation methods will follow.

### **Introduction**

This article wants to place the World Council of Churches (WCC) alongside the Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC) with the aim of evaluating their influence on each other. This will be done to find out whether the relationship between them was deliberate or not, and will determine which organisation has been more influenced the most by the other.

The areas of influence and activities from the two organisations will be highlighted and assessed. For instance, the OAIC's main focus has been in development, the empowerment of women and research and communication. The WCC's focus was on change, unity, dialogue with other Christian and religious organisations, and the use of the scriptures to bring about justice and peace. However, it should be emphasised that the suggested key focus areas by the OAIC were not new to WCC as they were dealt with differently in the past.

The report of the WCC in Nairobi Assembly of 1975 entitled: "Breaking barriers" was important and significant by breaking the ground of ecumenicity among the AICs in Africa. The outcome of this assembly has led to the 8th Assembly of the WCC of December 1998 in Harare. At this Assembly the WCC reaffirmed its ecumenical vision by embodying the vision of what they anticipated as what God's people were called to be.<sup>2</sup> To them among others the following were to be included:

- The opening up to culture through dialogue and solidarity.
- Sharing of life with strangers and seeking to encounter with people of other faiths.

The two bullets above became a platform on which the OAIC could work closely with the WCC, especially since the AIC was always seen as the estranged groups of indigenous churches. This development has created ecumenical excitement which has eventually led to among others the 8th Assembly in Harare which has worked favourably towards the developments in the AICs.

The alleged favour was not only shown by the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), but also through some of the AIC exponents. One of those was Inus Daneel, a retired missiologist from the University of South Africa (Unisa). He specialised in researching the AICs in Zimbabwe, though from the personal and

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<sup>1</sup> Founding Vision concept is originating from Rev. Lawford Imunde, at the OAIC Johannesburg in 1996 on an AIC theology of development. He introduced the concept (borrowing from Basil Davidson). Davidson in, *The search for Africa*, (1995:256), speaks of "founders" vision or charter, as does Imunde (2006), *The vision of founders*. See also the OAIC Consultation on AIC Theology and ministerial formation. Kaaren, Nairobi, 1–3 December 2009.

<sup>2</sup> The official report of the assembly Harare, Zimbabwe, 3–14 December 1998.

academic perspective. He has published significant books<sup>3</sup> which became the source of information for the entire African continent and beyond. The excitement of the presence of WCC Assemblies of 1985 and 1998 both in Nairobi, Kenya and Harare, Zimbabwe have sparked the AICs' interest to work closely with WCC in the African continent and diaspora.

This article firstly looks into the background and the interests of the OAIC and the WCC. The reorganising structures of the OAIC and chapter formations are highlighted. In this article The OAIC is perceived as the birth child of the AICs. We will discuss the role played by the OAIC's and WCC's consultation in a conference in Limuru. AICs do not correspond to the WCC because of their peculiar theological outlook. It is the same peculiarity suggested which is the cause for the OAIC's theological ideas that need to be kept and handled on the basis of these ideas. The OAIC and other ecumenical organisations are also highlighted to show the organisational growth. The significant interest and influence of the WCC on the OAIC is highlighted. Collaboration between the OAIC and WCC is deemed very necessary. The rise and fall of AIC ecumenism in South Africa and the new signs of AICs meaningful participation in ecumenism are discussed. Lastly we will make brief concluding remarks and give the overall conclusion.

## **Background**

### *The World Council of Churches*

This section presents background of the World Council of Churches (WCC) to highlight its functionality and to explain where the OAIC fits in. The WCC is a well known fellowship of confessing churches of Jesus Christ as the Lord and Saviour. They seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. The WCC is a community of churches on the way to visible unity in one faith and one Eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and in common life in Christ. It seeks to advance towards unity, as Jesus has prayed for his followers, "... so that the world may believe" (John 17:21). The World Council of Churches (WCC) remains the broadest and most inclusive among the many organised expressions of the modern ecumenical movement whose goal is Christian unity.

The WCC brings together 349<sup>4</sup> regional council churches, denominations and church fellowships in more than 110 countries and territories throughout the world. It represents over 560 million churches including most of the world's Orthodox churches, scores of Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist and Reformed churches, as well as many United and Independent Churches. Their cores of founding churches were European and North American. Today most member churches are in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, the Middle East and the Pacific.

For its member churches, the WCC is a unique space: one in which they can reflect, speak, act, worship and work together, challenge and support each other. As members of WCC fellowship, member churches are called to:

- Unity in one faith and one Eucharistic fellowship
- Promote their common witness in work for mission and evangelism
- Engage in Christian services by serving human need, breaking down barriers between people seeking justice and peace, and upholding the integrity of creation
- To foster renewal in unity, worship, mission and service

Indeed the World Council of Churches (WCC) is bigger than the OAIC by far, while in the African continent AICs are growing by leaps and bounds. As a result, the intention of placing the WCC alongside with the AICs was mainly to assess the parallel development in ecumenical and church unity. We can thus say that the outcome of the Limuru consultation between the OAIC and WCC has paved a way for the AICs to progress not only spiritually but also socially.<sup>5</sup>

### *Organization of African Instituted Churches*

The Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC) was founded in 1975 in Cairo, Egypt and is the representative international body that has brought together the African Independent and Instituted Churches. It has offered them a forum for sharing their concerns and hopes. Also it worked to enable them to minister effectively to the needs of their members and those of their entire AIC communities.

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<sup>3</sup> Refer to works consulted of this article to see some of his publications and also the bibliography.

<sup>4</sup> Refer to <http://www.oikoumene.org>.

<sup>5</sup> The OAIC is making the AICs improve socially because of the chains of self-empowering community projects taking place at the moment to alleviate poverty.

The OAIC was founded when a number of AIC leaders from across the continent were invited by Pope Shenouda III of the Coptic Church for a meeting in Cairo.<sup>6</sup> The OAIC's original objective was to provide a forum for AIC leaders to fellowship and share their concerns. The OAIC also sought to provide a better theological and biblical education for its members, including the promotion of Sunday Schools. The OAIC was thus an institutional expression of the movement, vision and aspiration of the AICs.<sup>7</sup> One of its basic aims was to promote teaching and training among the AICs.

The new vision from the OAIC is alluded to mean to provide a forum for the AIC leaders to fellowship and share concerns. There are about 60 million AIC<sup>8</sup> members spread over tens of thousands of denominations across sub-Saharan Africa and the African diaspora.<sup>9</sup> Most of these denominations are small, but some are large and significant with over a million members. This serves to reorganise and create recognised chapters for them.

- Reorganising wider structures and chapters for the OAIC

A serious review of the organisation was recently conducted and regions were formed. Churches had to first affiliate to one of the Organization of African Instituted Churches' (OAIC) regions, or chapters. The general assembly was composed of the representatives of those regions. Internal administration would be re-organised for them as well. The new structure was put up in place in 1997 when the assembly was able to meet. That meeting was in conjunction with a joint OAIC-WCC consultation on the relationships between the AICs and the mission founded churches in Africa.

At the time of that joint OAIC-WCC meeting significant moves have been made from the OAIC perspective towards becoming more ecumenical in profile. This was mainly due to the growing self-confidence of the AICs on their own accord. Presently there are chapters in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Botswana, Zimbabwe, West Africa, East Africa, Ghana, Madagascar, Nigeria, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Southern Africa chapter is presently worked on. The mission of the OAIC continues to bring AICs together in fellowship and to equip them to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ their way. It should be made clear however that OAIC is not a separate organisation from the AICs, but is born from within the movement.

- OAIC as birth child of the AICs

Initially the Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC) was not meant to be a separate body, rather a birth child of the AICs. The AICs are the grassroots Christian movements affirming the positive values of African culture in mission and confronting spiritual, social and political evil in society. AICs are profoundly African and stress the role of the community of faith in mediating the teaching of the Holy Spirit. They work through a vision mandated by all members. They are the "first nation" communities grounded on founding visions which are expressed in their church teachings and rites, their prayers, prophecies, and exorcisms, their sermons and dances as well as their uniforms and church flags.

The OAIC needs to relate, collaborate and coexist with other national religious organisations on behalf of the AICs. The influence of the World Council of Churches (WCC) is mentioned to explain the complexity of their interrelatedness. For example, some of member churches<sup>10</sup> share the meaningful relationship from the two organisations. In South Africa for instance, independent church groups like the Lutheran Bapedi, Lutheran Hermansberg, African Methodist, and Ethiopian Methodist Episcopal Churches,<sup>11</sup> are some of those which share the strong doctrinal origin with many western mission churches who are members of the WCC. Although these churches are autonomous,<sup>12</sup> they have on their own affiliated to the WCC from long ago even though some of them are members of the OAIC.

It is again in the interest of this discussion to assess the stability and uniqueness of the AICs through the OAIC in spite of their double affiliation. AICs have been known to be indigenous and autonomous in character

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<sup>6</sup> Padwick & Lubaale(2009).

<sup>7</sup> See the section on, "The development of the AIC theologies in South Africa."

<sup>8</sup> Refer to the OAIC website: <http://www.brand2d.com> for more information.

<sup>9</sup> See also Padwick & Lubaale (2009).

<sup>10</sup> The Africa Inland Mission (AIM) for example has moved into the southern Sudan from what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Mission was established in 1949 in good understanding with the Anglican Church which existed already in the area. It was expelled only 15 years later when all foreign missionaries had to leave the southern Sudan. In the meantime the Africa Inland Church came into being. The church became autonomous in 1972, when it had about 1 000 members and a few Sudanese pastors. Under indigenous leadership the church began to grow steadily and to expand to other parts of the country. To date it has 70 000 baptised believers, 154 congregations and 320 pastors (including 6 women trained in pastoral work but not yet ordained). The church is Trinitarian, confesses the divinity of Christ and accepts the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the absolute and final authority in all matters of faith and conduct. The Central Church Council declared its agreement with the WCC Basis on 23May, 1997. <http://www.graymanknives.com/aic.html> .

<sup>11</sup> See also Clasquin & Molobi (1994).

<sup>12</sup> There are indeed many AICs churches particularly in East and West Africa which are independent and have affiliated of the WCC.

and have remained like that till today. The next section will give an overview of the AICs peculiarity on their understanding of theology and to unity.

- Peculiarity of the AICs' understanding of theology

African Instituted Churches (AICs) form an integral part of Christian World Communions (CWC), a wing of WCC. Consequently, the AICs share in the common theologies of wider biblical Christian traditions. This emerged from their emphasis and belief in the revelation of the biblical God, the Trinity, the atonement, the humanity and deity of Jesus Christ, the vicarious death of Jesus Christ, the resurrection, ascension and second coming of Jesus Christ, and many other prominent beliefs in Christianity.

In addition AICs, like other faith communities, have their peculiar understanding of theology. It is like that because they have their own histories, worldviews, societies, and religious experiences. Some of the peculiar theologies are common to all the AICs despite their environments, regional peculiarities, aims and goals. Examples of theologies that are common to all AICs are the reality and existence of the devil and demons. The efficacy of curses, the practical omnipotence of God, the efficacy of prayer and fasting are additions. Faith healing, exorcism, and the emphasis on the activities of the Holy Spirit also forms part.

Chapter 4 in the book *African Independent Churches speaking for ourselves* (ICT 1985) outlines how AICs perceive their theology. This is at least referring to AICs in South Africa. They used interviews to arrive at their respective conclusions. In that book, their theology<sup>13</sup> carried the following significant points:

- (a) Theology of the heart was to be made explicit from the implicitly; (b) The expression of faith by the AICs was not to be conceptually the same as Western, for example Congregational, Presbyterian or Episcopal than following what the Spirit is saying to them; (c) The question of Trinity was also to be merely viewed from the Bible, celebrating the Lord's supper at night and the washing of feet, Jordan baptism by immersion were all said to be learned from the Bible; (d) Challenges by the spirits and the role of the Holy Spirit who guides every activity of the AICs are very significant. The same can be said of healing, church communities, Easter time gatherings at headquarters celebrating the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; (e) Concern about poverty denied them to express themselves politically and soundly other than participating with rest of the community involvement in matters of politics; (f) AICs still recall the Bambata rebellion of 1906, the notorious massacre at Bulhoek. All of these need a theological interpretation from within their context.

Thought the above indent emphasises the Southern Africa context it does apply to the rest of the African continent. South Africa is viewed by the OAIC as an important link and the source of AICs development. The peculiarity of theologies has various emphases according to categories that fit particular AIC member types, depending on their ministerial emphasis and religious orientations. African or Ethiopian, Prophet healing or Spiritual, Pentecostal and or Charismatic have a bearing on this. The AICs have been lacking ardent theological scholars who could engage, advance and develop the grassroots theological ideas. Their wish and initiatives are well supported by the WCC.

#### *OAIC-WCC consultation in Limuru*

The consultation at Limuru, Kenya of the Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) from 24 to 30 August 1997, was jointly organised by the Office of Church and Ecumenical Relations (OCER) of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC), based in Nairobi.<sup>14</sup> The intention was to bring together a more representative group from all over Africa and to deal with two issues:

- The relationships between African Instituted Churches and mission-founded churches.
- The participation of AICs in the coming 8th Assembly of the WCC that was held on December 1998 in Harare.

Because of the size of the group and the shortness of time it was not possible to use the methodology of "storytelling" and "testimonies" as in the Nigeria meeting and in the consultations with Evangelicals and Pentecostals. The program was more conventionally made up of plenary presentations and group work.

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<sup>13</sup> ICT (1985:25-31).

<sup>14</sup> See <http://search.conduit.com>.

In the opening address entitled: “African Instituted Churches today in Africa”, Archbishop Wambugu, then the Acting General Secretary of the OAIC, suggested distinguishing three categories of AICs:

- The Ethiopian or nationalist churches which parted ways with the missions for mainly political reasons
- The Holy Spirit Churches with a particular emphasis on culture and spiritual gifts
- The Pentecostals which consist of the African Pentecostals who are close to the Holy Spirit Churches and the Newer Pentecostal movement influenced by North American groups and visiting mass evangelists

Archbishop Wambugu pointed especially to the weaknesses of the AICs and some of the reasons for their vulnerability and poverty. They have the tendency to have leaders and families who treat the church as their property. Their lack of giving in the biblical sense, weak administrative structures, political co-option by governments and an overemphasis on spirituality marks their weakness and vulnerability. This critical self-examination was well received and seemed to reflect the sentiments of many of the participants.

The point made by Wambugu in the previous paragraph also suggested that the AICs may not have waited to receive foreign help through donors, especially through the WCC. They took the initiative of working closely with each other in attempting to solve their own problems. Presently their main challenge is their lack of established own theological institutions and relevant theological material as well. It is understandable to see them grappling and seeking to present their own unique theology, not only to their own members but also in the public domain.

### **OAIC theological and ecumenical views**

#### *AIC theology*

By the time developments from 1985 Assembly and Limuru 1997 has taken place, the Theological Education by Extension (TEE)<sup>15</sup> was well spread throughout Africa from Latin America. This program has received much support from the WCC but could no longer receive support from the AICs circles because of many unanswered questions concerning it.

Oduro, an ardent member of the AICs and scholar from Ghana, has discussed some types of theological education and training in attempting to discover the possible types which may suit the AICs’ expertise. He defined education as a broad process of learning which enables the learner to understand, evaluate and challenge whatever is learned. It equips the learner for life in the community and develops the ability to integrate new knowledge and advocate for appropriate change. Training on the other hand, focuses on the development of particular skills for a distinctive context and purpose.

The TEE program was to be evaluated by a special AIC committee which would also set new directions. The Rural Development by Extension Program had been going through such a process since 1995. Its new orientation towards participation and community development was welcomed. It is now called the Program for Participatory Development. The Women's Program was another subject of debate. Women came with an excellent report from the HIV/AIDS Program which has become operative since. A remarkable piece of work was done by Uganda and Kenya among the AICs which tend to be conservative on issues of sexuality. There was much appreciation for the Program on research and communication, reflected on in the OAIC “Baragumu”<sup>16</sup> Magazine.

Padwick<sup>17</sup> was convinced that theological education and training among AICs could take many forms and types. He identified seven types as follows: (a) formal or Western institutional type, with well written curriculum, duration of the study, library, and award certificate after completion, unusually called the Bible or Seminary; (b) the periodic type or seminar and workshops; (c) mentorship, apprenticeship or discipleship; (d) theological education by extension; (e) distance learning; (f) self-taught method; (g) regular Christian education facilitated by the teaching of an adult Sunday School teaching manual.

These above-mentioned theological themes relate to the question: How can theological education be facilitated in a grassroots environment? Can it continuously appreciate and enhance a meaningful development and discourse? It is known that AICs lacked the ability to be effective in all of the above-mentioned forms of education because of the extreme poverty affecting many of their members. What remains is to look for other means from other sources, especially through the help of the governments and its resources.

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<sup>15</sup> TEE was founded in 1938 with the goal to provide trained Church leaders for the Guatemalan church by Ralph Winter, James Emery, and Ross Kinsler. A 1983 survey revealed more than 100 separate programs in Africa. By 1995 this had increased to 341 with an estimation of over 100,000 learners enrolled in 2002. Similar growth has occurred across the globe (Baylor 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Baragumu means “the horn or trumpet,” refer also to <http://world.livingsources.org>.

<sup>17</sup> Padwick & Lubaale (2009). See also bibliography.

### *OAIC and other ecumenical organisations*

The OAIC has consistently worked with other Christian churches and organisations such as evangelical and ecumenical bodies. In 1996 the OAIC became a member of the All African Conference of Churches (AACC). The organisation has also developed good working relationships with a number of African evangelical faith-based organisations and fellowships at a continental level, OAIC's chapters and regions have well-established partnerships with their national ecumenical bodies. The OAIC Nigeria Chapter, for example, is an active member of the Christian Association of Nigeria. Similarly, the Botswana Chapter is a member of the Botswana Council of Churches. The Kenya Chapter is also highly involved in several Kenyan ecumenical groups including the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK), the Ufungamano Inter-Religious Forum (UIRF), and the Inter-Religious Council of Kenya (IRCK). We could also add the South African AICs who have been closely linked with the OAIC but also retained the SACC interest.

OAIC's connections are not limited to the African continent alone, but also include partnerships with several European and North American agencies. It is an active participant of the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Global Christian Forum (GCF), and the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP). Through these various partnerships, the OAIC seeks to share AIC insights and values as well as learn from other Christians and religious traditions as partners and not a minor. But it also offers them the space to reflect on their own theological doctrinal framework.

### **The WCC and the OAIC**

The 1975 WCC Assembly in Nairobi Kenya tackled a theme “Jesus Christ Frees and Unites.” At that assembly the AICs gained interest especially on the subtheme: “Seeking community: the common search of people of various faiths, culture and ideologies”. In the same report, seeking common ground for people of various faiths through dialogue was emphasised. Five points were tabled and point five states that:

Dialogue is essential to dispel the negative attitude we have to people of other faiths which makes proclamations ineffective and irrelevant. A negative attitude invites a negative response. Dialogue therefore is essential in order to dispel the misunderstandings and prejudices of the past created by our negative attitude to other faiths and thereby create a healthy atmosphere where we can receive as well as give, listen as well as proclaim.<sup>18</sup>

The issue of environment espoused by scientist Charles Birch<sup>19</sup> remained imperative. He referred to the connection between human justice and the deterioration of the environment. He called for a radical change in human behaviour towards the natural world. It is interesting that the 1985 Assembly and Lemuru 1997 have created a carryover to the Harare assembly of 1998 which has tackled a theme: “Come Holy Spirit – renew the whole creation” Harare (Zimbabwe). It was from that theme presumably that missiologist Inus Daneel established the AIC ecumenical body *Fambidzano* through which he eventually produced publications including: *Quest for belonging* (1987), *Fambidzano – ecumenical movement of Zimbabwean Independent Churches* (1989), and *Christian theology of Africa* (1989), *African earthkeepers: interfaith mission in earth care*, Vols. 1-2 (1998, 2000), *African Christian outreach*, Vol. 1 (2001), and *Fullness of life for all* (co-editor, 2003). All of these books were the outcome of the project he undertook in the Zimbabwe area of Masvingo.

The listed books above are somehow raising concerns about care for our own environment. We are beginning to feel the effects of global warming and as a result, ecologists, religious groups and scientists are raising concerns about our ecosystem. The World Council of Churches through its allies sets the pace for conscientising communities of the world. Educational programs are some of the strategies to care for the world. Daneel's writings mentioned in the previous paragraph are also showing the same contribution to ecology. The influence came through an ecumenical interest shown particularly from the movements in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

### *The OAIC and WCC collaboration*

In working closer to the WCC, the OAIC managed to partner with the important theological and training bodies such as ETE<sup>20</sup> and WOCATI<sup>21</sup> for their own advancement. The general secretaries of the OAIC and the AACC agreed to work together as they were brothers serving the same African continent.

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<sup>18</sup> Padwick & Lubaale (2009).

<sup>19</sup> Birch (1991: 134).

<sup>20</sup> ETE stands for Ecumenical Theological Educational Program.

<sup>21</sup> WOCATI stands for World Conference of Association of Theological institutions.

The WCC has been collaborating with the OAIC on the education of AIC leaders to enable them to be equal partners with the leaders of the mission founded churches. Community development and social affairs were emphasised. The pulpit exchange, ministers' fraternal, joint youth programs, cooperation of the women's departments were some of the focus areas. Joint workshops and seminars were utilised to build mutual confidence.

Forums where AICs and mission founded churches could meet and interact regularly at national level were encouraged. Also the integration of AICs in local and national councils of churches was found to be helpful. The reconsidering to use theological institutions of missions founded churches to train AIC students were to be evaluated. And the issue of African music was to be taken into consideration as AICs are known to be singing unique church music. All of these have created positive collaborative measures with other ecumenical bodies including the WCC.

Before we conclude the section on collaboration we should look into the AICs relationship with the South African Council of Churches (SACC). The AICs in South Africa formed an important part of the founding history and development of the first establishment of mission work in South Africa.

#### *The rise and fall of AIC ecumenism in South Africa*

Debates among the AICs were very strong in the 1970s and 1990s in South Africa. In that period there were very active interactions with the South African Council of Churches (SACC). Later the African Independent Churches Association (AICA) split to form the African Spiritual Churches Associations (ASCA) due to leadership and financial challenges. The remaining part of AICA with the SACC enjoyed taking the Khanya African Independent Theological College (KAITC) under its wing under the principalship of Rev Makhubu and Bishop Ntongana.

When a serious tension surfaced between Bishop Ngada and Rev Makhubu and some of the AICs representatives on financial matters, Ngada broke away and formed the ASCA, separately running at the Braamfontein Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT) building. Ngada became very close to Chikane, Nolan and Beyers Naude. In closer relations with these three scholars, Ngada managed to publish a booklet *African Independent Churches: speaking for ourselves* published by ICT in Braamfontein in 1985. The most challenging in the AIC ecumenical growth in South Africa was the recurrent internal squabbles. However, the OAIC remained optimistic for the revival of the ecumenical movement that would impact positively on the AIC in South Africa as well.

During the times of AIC tension in South Africa the SACC attempted to facilitate and reconcile them, but somehow was held apart from the AIC by its own internal challenges. As a result, nothing positive came out, to keep the AICA intact during that period. Lately communication between the SACC and the AIC is nonexistent. From the side of the AICs, the lone Bishop Tshabalala, a leader of the Amazioni groups mostly from Swaziland, Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng, is the only person keen to keep them afloat. Bishop Ngada has recently departed from this life and Bishop Ntongana is now very old. Reverend Dhlula, the youngest energetic and AIC hope in South Africa was involved in an atrocious accident and has been inactive for a few years now.

The Southern Africa OAIC chairperson, Bishop D Rakodu in Botswana is now responsible for revival and the development of the AIC Southern Africa Chapter. This position includes the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), including countries such as Madagascar, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Swaziland and South Africa.

#### **Concluding thoughts**

The Organization of African Independent Churches (OAIC) which is now the main body structure of the AICs across the African continent and provides leadership and guidance for their development. Their concept of "founding vision" creates a platform of debate for their written theology and acceptance in the ecumenical movement circles. This idea is currently marketed to most of the AICs across the African continent with the following:

#### *Theological advocacy*

The OAIC founding vision was first articulated and formulated in a workshop that was held in Johannesburg in 1996. It was meant to advocate for a theology that is making sense of God to the people in the midst of their histories, cultures and worldviews. The OAIC vision is that people should build on their African cultures and values, that they be transformed by the Good News of Jesus Christ and blessed by the Spirit of God as they create an abundant life in their communities. OAIC theology works to advance the AIC theological understanding and its application in the context of the contemporary realities facing African people.

### *Transformed theology*

The founding vision also seeks to locate the AICs within the wider Christian faith tradition. The program was founded on the celebration of African cultures as the venue for the reception and interpretation of the Gospel. The creation of the original AIC theologies, known as “the founding visions”, demonstrate the power of the gospel to continuously transform people, theologies and churches so that the message of the gospel remains focused on the contemporary realities.

The founding vision also helped the AICs to have a central point of development ecumenically, and that they should be able to interact with other ecumenical bodies such the World Council of Churches (WCC) and its regional wings like the South Africa Council of Churches (SACC). The founding vision referred to is the original AIC founders’ understanding of the world of gospel of their own.<sup>22</sup> The concept has since become an increasingly important tool for the development of the OAIC vision and programs. It has been used to assist AIC members working with HIV/AIDS and development to identify the sources of the values which motivate them in their sacrificial service to the community.

The influence of unity among the WCC and the OAIC has helped to assess and categorise their ecumenical endeavour regarding their social responsibilities. This effort has equally helped to discuss and understand the degree of influence upon them. The OAIC remained an institutional expression of the movement, vision and aspiration of the AICs. There was a great awakening to AICs through the OAIC to establish and implement the new vision to revive a meaningful theological integrity among the AICs in Africa and in the diaspora as well.

The WCC became a barometer for the OAIC to measure its progress in terms of growth, vision and mission strategy. Notably the willingness by the WCC to provide the OAIC such a space for assessment through the Conference of Secretaries of World Christian Communion (CSWCC)<sup>23</sup> was a major step of religious and diversity appreciation.

### *Initiating new literature for AIC theology*

The AICs theology was initially and mainly confined to the research findings and interpretations by the mission churches alone. The *Bantu prophets in South Africa* by Sundkler (1964), *Schism and renewal in Africa* by Barrett (1970), *Bishops and prophets in a black city* by West (1975) and *Causes of religious independentism in Africa* Oosthuizen (1968) are evident of that. It was only through the booklet *AIC Speaking for themselves* published in Braamfontein (1985) where the AICs have shown objection to the existing writings about them.

Anderson’s publications including *Bazalwane* (1992), *Moya* (1993) *Tumelo* (1993) became some of the not so new titles which were widely recognised among the AICs of the Apostolic Pentecostal types and the Zionists. Daneel’s books<sup>24</sup> were written at almost the same time when Anderson was completing his research work on the Pentecostal Zionists AICs. Many of the AIC especially in Southern Africa cherish the idea of partnership in writing the new AIC theology. They however want their voices to be more vocal in those writings.

The objections like that of the late Archbishop Wambugu<sup>25</sup> on the church leadership that wants to possess AICs for own benefit was worrying. However response to these concerns encouraged the AICs to want to do more for themselves. Themes on dialoguing “syncretism” raise much needed space for positive debates. Remember, it was in 1910 when Engenas Barnabas Lekganyane established what would be one of the most successful, South Africa’s Zion Christian Church (ZCC).<sup>26</sup> Despite the American influences in their origin, Zionists and other independent churches soon developed purely African leaderships. They adopted African customs, including polygamy, and in some cases, observed ritual taboos. This information meant to highlight the rich ground for new literature build-up from within the AIC circles.

Conferences that we have attend internationally affirmed the new ambition and determination to create meaningful literature and data for the AICs. The Growing harvest conference<sup>27</sup> in Jumua Nairobi, Kenya was aimed to launch different projects to alleviate poverty and encourage meaningful administrative strategies for

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<sup>22</sup> The early history of the OAIC has been charted in Barrett and Padwick (eds, 1989).

<sup>23</sup> The annual Conference of Secretaries of World Christian Communion brings together representatives from diverse Christian traditions to discuss their work and fellowship together. Oct. 23, 2012. <http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu>.

<sup>24</sup> See bibliography for more of Daneel’s listed titles.

<sup>25</sup> Archbishop Wambugu was concerned that the AICs possessiveness, lack of biblical sense, weak administration, political corruption by government and overemphasis on spirituality, would make them weak and vulnerable.

<sup>26</sup> Statement by Bishop B. E. Lekganyane at: [http://www.uct.ac.za/depts/ricsa/commiss/trc/zcc\\_stat.htm](http://www.uct.ac.za/depts/ricsa/commiss/trc/zcc_stat.htm).

<sup>27</sup> Growing the harvest: rethinking the agriculture and food security in Sub-Saharan Africa conference was held on 17 September 2012 in Jumua Conference and Country Home, Nairobi, Kenya and was organized by the OAIC.

self-improvement. The other conference was on “Faith for life”<sup>28</sup> and it was also intended for the same purpose of uplifting the standard of the AICs and fighting poverty. Other religious organisations and NGOs<sup>29</sup> were to be roped in to address the issues of poverty and education in Africa. This was a positive sign that was long overdue. A team of AIC scholars is formed to investigate the possibility of writing materials that are purely AICs. The group is including the mission church scholars as well.

## Conclusion

Placing the Organization of the African Initiated churches (OAIC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) side by side has helped to show how the two organisations are structurally functioning. Presently the OAIC as an ecumenical body is focused on the theology and poverty among the AICs in Africa and diaspora. On the other side the WCC focuses on unity and dialogue for peace. The OAIC is working with other organisations affiliated to the WCC like the All African Council of Churches (AACC), the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK) and the Inter-Religious Council of Kenya (IRCK) which are capable of influencing the OAIC. Interesting was the willingness for the WCC to categorically state that they will open up for other cultures and sharing with strangers for unity.

The WCC has provided opportunity for the OAIC to benefit from the TEE program on which the AICs relied for theological training. The same program was once dominant in training the AICs in South Africa as well. However around 1994 the ecumenical structure of the AIC in South Africa began to crumble as a result of aging leadership and drying up of financial subsidies mainly from abroad.

The “founding vision” program is fairly new among the AICs and it was initiated to give them a new theological facelift. The Christian World Communions (CWC), a wing of the WCC which brought together the representatives from diverse Christian traditions in the world, gave the OAIC a platform to express the agenda of the AICs in the African continent.

What should be kept in mind is that AICs have never gained a space to express their own thoughts and initiatives on an ecumenical platform. The dawn of expression of indigenous knowledge systems has created a window for the AICs to present their indigenous experiences and dialogue and supply reasons why they should not be regarded as syncretistic anymore.

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