

**The nature and character of the  
African Independent Churches (AICs) in the 21st century:  
Their theological and social agenda**

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*Abstract*

The middle of the 1960s to the end of the 1990s saw great interest in the lives of the African Independent Churches (AICs) as a world phenomenon. However, the advent of HIV and AIDs shifted academic research and interest from the AICs to the HIV and AIDS pandemic, especially in African scholarship. As a result, the study of the AICs remained the interest of a few African scholars. This article attempts to find the place of the AICs in the 21st century and the new areas of interest in the study of the AICs. The article gives an overall view of the African situation of the AICs and then focuses on southern Africa with examples from Botswana. The article critically examines the theological and social agendas of the AICs in Africa and particularly southern Africa. The theoretical framework of the article is that of selected classical sociologists who maintained that religion binds people together. The functionalist theories of Redcliffe-Brown and Malinowsky are applied.

**Introduction**

The classical studies on the African Independent Churches (AICs) have been done by Barrett (1968:1-7), Sundkler (1961:13-64), Turner (1967:xiv) and Oosthuizen (1986:1-20). These works have focused on the reasons that caused the rise of the AICs. In many cases, the major reasons were those concerning the African Traditional Religious beliefs in the Western expressions of Christianity. The other reasons were the paternalism of the

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missionaries which disadvantaged many African-emerging Christian leaders. The worst of them all was that in many areas of Africa, missionaries became agents of colonialism.

By the end of the 20th century the AICs had spread all over Africa, becoming the largest Christian church on the continent. Their growth was made possible by their inclusion of many aspects of African culture in their expressions of the Christian religion and its practices.

The aim of this article is to find the place of the AICs in the 21st century, the roles they play and their areas of interest. The article observes that study of the AICs has diminished due to the diverted interest by many African scholars to HIV and AIDS research. The article gives a general overview of the nature and character of the AICs and then moves on to give examples from the situation of the AICs in Botswana. The theological and social agendas of the AICs are examined.

The theoretical framework of the article is the functionalist theory as developed by Redcliffe-Brown and Malinowski. Giddens (1989:561) states:

Redcliffe-Brown and Malinowski both assert that we must study a society or a culture as a whole if we are to understand its major institutions and explain why its members behave as they do. We can analyse the religious beliefs and customs of a society, for example, only by showing how they relate to other institutions within it, for the different parts of a society develop in close relation to another.

Redcliffe-Brown and Malinowski also share the view that studying the function of a social practice or institution contributes to the continuation of a society as a whole. On this point they share the idea of Durkheim that religion reaffirms people's adherence to core social values, thereby contributing to the maintenance of social cohesion. One of the major arguments of this article is to show how the AICs have to some extent maintained the social values and customs of the Africans, which have always put societies and communities together. Pauw (1964:212-213) cites a statement from Redcliffe-Brown (1952:164) that:

... an ancestor cult is a concomitant of kinship system which stresses unilineal descent, and that its social function is the strengthening of the sentiments which bind together the members of the lineage. Where these sentiments are weakened through the impact of "European culture"... the ancestral cult disintegrates.

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It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the study of Pauw, but it suffices to state that his study of the AICs among the Batlhaping who belong to the Batswana ethnic groups has showed that the AICs have made some social continuity in spite of the impact of European culture. This study, by appealing to the functionalist social theories of Redcliffe-Brown and Malinowski, will also show how the AICs in Botswana and the southern African region still contribute to social cohesion in the 21st century. They do this by developing an African Christianity.

**The AICs as expressions of African Christianity**

By the middle of the 20th century, the AICs had established themselves so firmly that they were no longer just protestant movements, but had started establishing themselves theologically as genuine expressions of the Christian faith from an African perspective. In southern Africa, this development had started earlier among the Xhosa (Sales 1971:67-77). The Xhosa had fought for an indigenised church. The early 20th century realised some changes in attitudes from the missionaries in southern Africa. Smith (1946:1-30) made a sympathetic study of some African traditional religious beliefs and practices. Callaway (1970:18-40) made a detailed study of the belief systems of the Zulu. These works and many others which followed started the construction of what ultimately became African Christianity. Some Western religious and theological scholars such as Parrinder (1969:7-13) and Taylor (1963:7-17) began to engage in serious academic studies of African Traditional Religions and their relation to the Christian faith. This article argues that through the findings of these religious scholars, many researchers of the religious and theological beliefs of the AICs found some concrete support. The situation was helped further by the emerging writings of some African religious and theological academics who elaborated further on the similarities and differences between the Christian faith and African Traditional Religions (ATRs). The classical examples are the works of Mbiti (1975) and Setiloane (1976). These works have made it possible for Western missionaries to realise that Western expressions of the Christian faith are not valid for Africa. In this manner some tolerance and sympathy for the AICs emerged. One other factor which assisted the AICs in their development and establishment were the case studies made by various scholars on some major aspects of the African Traditional Religious beliefs and practices. Hodgson (1982) gave an illuminating account of the concept of God among the Xhosa. Such detailed studies focusing on different African ethnic groups and tribes has helped the Christian religion and the missionaries to realise that Africans have very strong religious beliefs which must be taken into account when one spreads the gospel message.

The beginning of the 1970s ushered in a new approach to the study of the AICs. The works that came during this period recognised the AICs as valid expressions of African Christianity. Daneel (1987:245-273) made it clear that the AICs were no longer subjects of mission. They were expressions of African Christianity. He did this by carefully discussing the major beliefs of the AICs on the major doctrines and beliefs of the Christian religion such as Baptism, Holy Communion or Sacraments in general, Eschatology, Salvation etcetera. The AICs clearly understand these doctrines from the Bible and they interpret them from the African understanding of such beliefs. They have applied the enculturation of some of the Christian beliefs such as eschatology and used some Christian beliefs and practices to transform the African Traditional Religious beliefs and practices such as the idea of ancestors becoming the equivalent of saints in the Christian faith. Daneel (1971) gives a wide history of the development of the AICs in Zimbabwe with their roots from South Africa. Throughout the accounts, he gives some clear elaborations of how African beliefs and values were incorporated in the development of the theology of the AICs in Zimbabwe.

Similar to the missionary-founded churches, the AICs also formed some associations through which they cooperated.

Daneel (1989) discusses in detail how the AICs operated at ecumenical levels.

In South Africa, West (1975:142-170) made a very good study of the development of the AICs in Soweto near Johannesburg and how they also operated at an ecumenical level. These movements were studied as independent expressions of the Christian faith. Vilakazi et al (1986) made a very good study of the Amanazaretha of Isaiah Shembe. They regarded the church as a revitalisation of African society. But this does not in any way make the Amanazaretha un-Christian because Shembe the founder was a very devoted Methodist. Oosthuizen (1986) edited a collection of articles from the different parts of South Africa giving some detailed studies on the various aspects in the lives of the AICs. These articles were written from the point of view that the AICs are genuine expressions of African Christianity. Oosthuizen (1992) again edited a book which covered a much wider area than South Africa, discussing various aspects of the lives of the AICs in the southern African region. All the articles point to various aspects of the lives of the AICs as genuine expressions of African Christianity. There are many such works which have appeared and it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss all of them. What this article wishes to do is to give an idea of what is going on now in the study of the AICs in Africa and particularly southern Africa. The article argues that present studies on the AICs have accepted the fact that the AICs are an African expression of the Christian religion and faith.

### **The current situation regarding the study of the AICs in southern Africa**

This article argues that from the year 2000 till today, academic studies of the AICs have diminished. This is due to several major factors which have been observed by this article. The first one is that many Western scholars who had some interest in the study of the AICs have either passed away or retired from any active academic work. Secondly, the major characters in the history of the development of the AICs have also passed away or retired from their active ministries. Thirdly, the appearance of HIV and AIDS shifted the economic support for academic scholarship from the AICs to HIV and AIDS. Fourthly, the attaining of independence by the southern African countries contributed to some lack of interest in the study of the AICs since to some extent their uprisings had also attracted the interest of the politicians who used them in their political struggles. In other words, the attaining of political freedom also meant full religious freedom to the AICs. Fifthly, many scholars who studied the AICs relied on some funding – mainly from abroad. When the Western donors lost interest in the study of the AICs and shifted their focus to HIV and AIDS, the young African scholars had no choice but to solicit funding in order to do research on HIV and AIDS.

Amanze (1998:62-88) gave a detailed overview of the expressions of African Christianity by the AICs in Botswana. The work discusses the theology, life experiences, and the healing methods of selected AICs, which are led by both male and female prophets and prophetesses. The studies which come from field research show and demonstrate very clearly how the AICs live their lives and practice their beliefs in concrete life situations. Amanze et al (2007) have contributions from many parts of Africa showing the African reaction to HIV and AIDS. The role played by the AICs in some countries is also included. Amanze et al (2010) also has contributions from many African countries on the theology of the AICs. Togarasei et al (2011) has discussed the faith sector and HIV and AIDS in Botswana. The role of the AICs in the fight against HIV and AIDS has been included. Two issues edited by Werner et al (2010), and also edited by Phiri et al (2013), discuss theological education from a world perspective. The theological education for the AICs is also discussed in the two issues. Particular attention in the theological education of the AICs is that their theology is different from Western theology.

### **The present nature and life of the AICs in southern Africa**

Southern Africa has not remained immune to the fast changes brought about by secularisation and the globalisation process. To put our discussion in proper perspective, it is important to learn what some classical and modern

sociologists have realised about modern and postmodern societies and communities within which the AICs work and live.

Coser (1977:136-138) discusses the sociology of Durkheim on religion. Durkheim has argued that religion is studied because it is one of the forces that created within individuals a sense of moral obligation to adhere to society's demands. He argues that religion had been the cement of society; the means by which men and women had been led to turn from the everyday concerns in which they were variously enmeshed to a common devotion to sacred things; religion had been the anti-individualistic force par excellence, inspiring communal devotion to ethical ends that transcended individual purposes. Macionis & Plummer (2008:610-612) argue that religion deals with ideas that transcend everyday experience; neither common sense nor any scientific discipline can verify or disprove religious doctrine. Flanagan and Jupp (1996:1-13) have argued that religion has once more come to the fore in sociological discourses. This is contrary to the beliefs of the classical sociologists such as Marx, Durkheim and Weber who had argued that with social and technological development, religion would disappear from society (Coser 1977:43-86; 129-173; 217-260). Giddens (1989:433-468) and Ritzer (2000:10-11) show the presence of religion in modern and postmodern societies and communities regardless of the impact of secularisation. Parsons (in Ritzer 2000:431ff) has argued that society has become Christianised. His argument is that acts of charity, which were at one stage dominated by religious organisations, are now done by non-religious bodies but following religious ethics. The AICs are alive and active in attending to human needs in all their aspects. What is more interesting about the AICs is that they are not controlled or influenced by modernity and globalisation, but they respond to these by becoming more and more conservative and sticking to the Biblical message and the lessons found in African culture. They function like New Age Movements which are resorting to the traditional, including pagan beliefs and practices in their responses to the impacts of modernity and globalisation (Cole et al 1990).

#### **The use of the Bible by the AICs in creating African Christianity**

This article argues that although modern theology does not necessarily derive its content from the Bible or any scriptures, the Bible still remains the major source of AIC theology in the 21st century. The AICs derive their theology specifically from the Old Testament (OT). To put the theology of the AICs in proper perspective, it is important to mention the major characteristics of the OT which the AICs use in developing their theologies. Biblical scholars from the Western world have developed many methods and ways of understanding the Bible and, especially, the OT. This article selects those methods and understandings which are similar to those of the AICs. Kaiser (1975:5)

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discusses the fourfold sense of scripture. The argument is that scripture could be understood and interpreted in four senses. It could be interpreted in the literal sense; the allegorical sense; the moral sense; and finally the anagogic sense. Many AICs use all four of these senses. In the literal sense, many AICs believe that Moses literally hit the waters of the Red Sea with his rod and separated the waters to allow the people of Israel to go free. For this reason, they always carry the rods which they use for several functions and purposes. The allegorical sense is very popular with the AICs. To cite an example, in the Lambs Followers Apostles Church of the late Bishop Isaac Madlabantu in Botswana, members are not permitted to play football. They can watch it but not play because the ball is the symbol of the head of John the Baptist who was beheaded by King Herod (Matthew 14:1-12). To play football is equated with participating in the beheading of the innocent John the Baptist. There are many similar stories in the AICs which show the allegorical interpretation and understanding of the Bible. The moral interpretation is the most popular. Many AICs respect and practice all the taboos related to morality as found in the OT. They also perform many rituals such as those pertaining to pregnancy and good hygiene. The good life is guided by rituals from child-outing ceremonies to overnight vigils for baptisms, Holy Communion and all festivals of the AICs. All these constitute the basic understanding of life among the AICs and how life should be lived in this world. The anagogic sense plays a great role when it comes to healing in the AICs. The healing methods of the AICs contain both mystical and psychic experiences. This article then argues that the theology of the AICs is developed following the basic understanding and interpretation of the Bible even from a Western theological perspective.

The other factors as discussed by Kaiser are those of land, climate, language and religion. Kaiser argues that the nature of the land of Palestine played a great role in the development of the theology of the Jews or Hebrews. The size, topography and the climate of Palestine cannot be separated from the theology of the Jews. The AICs are very good at using land and climate in developing their theologies. In the Head Mountain of God Apostolic Church in Zion Botswana (Kealotswe 1993:249-250) at one of its branches in Rakops Village, baptisms are done in the Boteti River when it flows during the winter season. Its flow gives life to the whole region, similar to that of the Euphrates and the Tigris in Palestine. The symbolism of land and climate is very important in theological development. The other issue is that of language and religion. Kaiser argues that the Aramaic language played a great role in the development of Jewish theology. Yahweh was addressed in Aramaic and sometimes given Aramaic names in spite of the fact that his dominance still remained above that of the Aramaic gods. Similarly, the AICs in Botswana use two basic languages which they consider to be holy. The Zionist churches use Zulu or Ndebele, while the Apostolics use Sesotho.

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The founders of the Zionist churches have their origins in Zululand (Sundkler 1976:56-64). The Apostolic tradition follows its origins from the St John Apostolic Faith Mission of Mrs Christinah Nku who used Sesotho (Sundkler 1976:79-84). It is an amazing experience to hear Batswana speaking Zulu in church, but they cannot enter into conversation with a Zulu speaking person outside the church. The same applies to Sotho. The religious beliefs and practices of the AICs are very much connected to the languages used. The theological development also follows this route.

In the process of developing their theologies and wanting to be relevant to their communities and societies, the AICs have created names which are relevant and meaningful to their members. Boadt (1984:11-14) argues that the names and places of the Bible are often strange and hard to pronounce; the ideas belong to a world that has long since passed away. He argues that all religion seeks to make known divine communication to humans and it is for this reason that God could be discovered in nature or through divine words and decrees. The OT recognises that God could be found in nature and through his decrees. Boadt cites Psalm 104:4 where God is found in nature and Psalm 119:129-130 where God is found through his decrees. Through nature God revealed himself for example, the burning bush of Moses. Through his mighty acts God has made the Exodus and the conquest of Palestine possible. He made the selection of David as King and finally gave the Covenant to Moses at Mount Sinai and the Covenant resulted in the Torah and the Pentateuch. Boadt further argues that the Wisdom literature shows the manifestation of God in nature. The Bible does not give one revelation of God, but many, since it is a collection of books which contain different revelations of God. Boadt argues that the Bible makes two offers to societies and communities. They are the negative ones which show things and acts that break and destroy people; and the positive ones which offer things and acts that offer a way of life based on discovering and obeying a loving God. The AICs are very conscious and aware of all these aspects of the Bible. They apply them in developing their theologies. Let us end this discussion by making reference to Gottwald (1987). Gottwald makes a statement which leads us to the place of the Bible in our modern and postmodern world and how it is used by the AICs. He states:

It teems with strong expressions of Israelite/Jewish belief in God whose special name was Yahweh, leading to a wide spectrum of religious and ethical concepts and practices closely connected with the social and political experience of the people (Gottwald 1987:6).

Gottwald emphasises the fact that the Bible still remains the sacred scripture for Jews and Christians. To summarise Gottwald, he argues that the Bible



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calls the reader to understand and consider its notions of the deity and humanity and how these relate to the concrete historical process and development of social order with its ethics and the good life. This is the manner in which the Bible is understood and used by the AICs. They apply it to the daily needs of their members and communities, giving them a God who is always active and attending to their needs, materially, spiritually, socially, economically and politically.

In their theological developments, the AICs also take seriously many aspects of African culture and its religious beliefs and practices.

**The major aspects of African culture and religious beliefs and practices which are included by the AICs in developing their theologies and addressing the concerns and concrete needs of their members**

The point of departure in the theology of the AICs is their understanding of nature or the universe. The cosmology of the AICs follows the traditional African cosmology where there is one world and one God. God is far above the material world and controls it from above. God has intermediaries who are called the ancestors or the *living dead*. The ancestors take instructions from God and communicate them to the people and nature. Like the Hebrew God, the African God demands rituals and offerings of respect and thanksgiving for his control and directing of human and natural life. If God observes something that is contrary to nature and the good life, he commands the ancestors to communicate that to the people through many types of spirit mediums including the *dingaka* or traditional healers. Similar to the prophets of Israel, the spirit mediums always caution the people to refrain from violating the demands of God because God controls all aspects of life. If any mistake happens, it must be corrected by appeasing God through the ancestors.

Life is continuous and cyclical. People are born; they live for a long time in the material world. At a ripe age they die and join the spiritual realm. To keep them alive and remembered, their names are given to their descendants. In this manner life is continuous and does not come to an end. The bearing of children is very important. Marriage is not a condition for bearing children. African communities recognise the fact that in many cases, the number of men is less than that of women. It then becomes practically impossible for all women to get married. The African God then allows men to marry more than one wife or have concubines alongside their wife or wives. Concubines come from women who could not find men to marry them and are ripe for child-bearing. In Setswana they are called *mafetwa* and in Kalanga they are called *magwimba*.

In spite of the impact of Western Christianity and its beliefs and practices, children are still an important aspect of African life and their birth

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does not rely on marriage. Families who claim to abide by the rules of Western Christianity will always be happy whenever a child is born – whether in wedlock or out of wedlock. Molokomme (1991:57-62) found out that among the Bangwaketse of Botswana, parents are no longer worried about the fact that their young girls have children out of marriage. They are more worried about the maintenance of children born out of marriage or extra-marital children. This is a clear sign of the fact that children are more important than marriage in many African cultures. Life is communal and individualism is discouraged at all costs. This is the synopsis of the African world view which has a great impact on the theology of the AICs.

To understand this view of life, let us contrast it with the Western view of life. In Western cosmology, there are two worlds. There is the material earth in which people and nature live, and there is the spiritual world called heaven where God lives. Contrary to the African world view, the material world is evil and people who live in it are evil and they need to be freed from evil in order to go to heaven where they will live forever in eternal life. In other words, people in the world are on a linear journey which should take them to heaven after death. This world view of the Western world has many contradictions when it comes to real life situations. For instance, the Western world respects the Bible but it does not agree with many customs of the Jewish people as found in the Bible. The most challenging is the one on family life and the value of life. Western Christianity is individualistic and does not put much emphasis on big extended families. It is for this reason that it emphasises monogamy as the Biblical form of marriage whereas the Old Testament has room for polygamy. The New Testament rejects polygamy to certain classes of people (1Tim.3:2). Western Christianity puts more focus on the individual than the community. This is contrary to the Jewish Bible and the Jewish religion. It is also contrary to African Traditional Religions where the community is more important than the individual. African cosmology always wants what is good for all and not for individuals to be the norm of societies and communities. This is the belief of the AICs and they do all they can to promote this world view through their theologies.

#### **The AICs in Botswana and their activities**

In 1966 when Botswana attained its independence, many AICs were formally recognised by the Botswana government. The recognition came through the Societies Act of 1972 which demanded that churches be registered as societies. This resulted in many AICs being registered and becoming formally recognised by the Botswana government as authentic expressions of the Christian faith.

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The AICs are now involved in social work such as poverty eradication, funeral arrangements for the members of their churches and the sister churches, and many other societal needs.

This focus on the social needs of the people, which are dominated by health needs, has forced the AICs to accept some aspects of traditional healing in their Christianity. It is not surprising to find church leaders who are church prophets as well as being *sangomas* or other forms of traditional healers (Amanze 1998:183; Kealotswe 2005:109-120). The purpose of this integration of religious beliefs is to address the real needs of the people in their daily lives and life experiences.

To give some examples, the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) in southern Africa keeps its members very active. Pilgrimages are made to Moriah on a weekly or monthly basis. I have come across people in Botswana who cannot go a month without visiting Moriah. The reason is that for them to live their lives effectively, they have to visit Moriah regularly. In a recent interview with a university female student, she claimed that she always goes to Moriah for spiritual fulfilment and to get the power to face all the problems of this world. Asked about the current television preachers and how they influence her life, she said that the television preaches are just entertainers of people and they do not reach the deeper spiritual needs of their listeners. But when one is in Moriah, one gets deep spiritual satisfaction which makes one face life without any fears. Members of the St John Apostolic Faith Mission and the various denominations that are affiliated to it, make pilgrimages to its headquarters in South Africa. They believe that if they do not make pilgrimages, their lives won't be in order. The members of the International Pentecostal Church of Christ (IPCC) also pay regular pilgrimages to Silo in South Africa. Failure to do so means that life cannot be good for the member. The members of the IPCC do not only make pilgrimages to Silo, but they also buy video cassettes, DVDs and all musical recordings from their church choir. They never play any other music except that of their church. The church has and is accumulating wealth through the sale of these artefacts. The members of the Head Mountain of God Apostolic Church in Zion (HMG) make pilgrimages once a year to Jackalasi No 2 where the founder of the church is buried. Jackalasi No 2 is also the headquarters of the church. This once a year visit enables all the members to face the problems that challenge them throughout the year without any fears. Some denominations have such pilgrimages to their headquarters twice or four times a year. Such visits help members to transcend all the challenges brought about by modernity and globalisation.

### **The AICs modernity and postmodernity**

The most interesting aspect of the lives of the AICs in southern Africa and Botswana in particular is how the AICs react to modernity and postmodernity. The countries that form southern Africa such as South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Zimbabwe are modern or postmodern countries. The sociological definitions of modernity and postmodernity do vary in accordance with the arguments of various sociologists. But for a working definition for this article, modernity simply refers to the modern period where there is fast change due to technology and the increase in scientific knowledge. Modernity challenges traditional values because of the process of secularisation. Postmodernity is the other argument by some sociologists that the present world is a postmodern world which does not have values and is constantly changing. To put the situation of the AICs in this context, it is important to see how the AICs respond to these theologically and practically. Theologically, most of the studies done on the AICs have demonstrated that the AICs are traditional and biblical.

### **The basic understanding of God in the AICs**

The AICs are very monotheistic. They believe that Jesus was the Son of God. He was God because he was sent by God to deliver people from their sins and help them get eternal life. To the AICs, eternal life is attained immediately after death. There is no concept of waiting for the second coming of Christ and the resurrection. People are judged at death and they either go to hell or to heaven. But the heaven of the AICs is not far above. It is still within the community because the ancestors who are the founding members of the churches are still loved and venerated even after their death. Bishop Mzonda of the HMG argued that he could not call his father a demon after his death when his father had brought him up and given him all the good things of life (Kealotswe 1993:262). He believes that the ancestors are part and parcel of our daily lives and they play an important role in guiding the lives of the living. In the AICs, God communicates with the people through the prophets who also use the spirits of the ancestors. By keeping the tradition of the Jews through prophecy, the AICs provide room for the vitalisation of African cultural traditional religious beliefs and practices.

They are traditional in the sense that they include a good number of African beliefs and practices in their theology. Most of these are conservative and do not change with time. For instance, an AIC prophet has a very similar character to that of a *sangoma* or a traditional healer, *ngaka*. Before he or she can diagnose patients, he or she needs some inspiration from the ancestors, *badimo*. The inspiration is induced through singing and dancing. However, in my interviews with Morongwa, the Messenger of the Lambs Followers

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Apostles Church in Maun between 2000 until his untimely death in 2012, he had adopted modern technology in his diagnoses. The church of Morongwa is a very widely spread denomination. It is composed of more youths than elderly people. Most of the youths have university degrees and they are highly enlightened people. Morongwa himself had ended with Form Five in his academic career. He was also an enlightened and understanding leader. In his communications with his members, cellphones were also used. His members always needed his advice whenever they took a trip, applied for a job or any other undertaking. They had to seek his advice before they could embark on anything. Thus, instead of going to Maun, they would just make a phone call and present their request. He would communicate with the Holy Spirit quickly and give them an answer to their request. When I asked him how this happens, he stated that the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ communicates with anybody, even those using modern technology. He argued that modern technology is not a challenge to Christianity but helps the Christians to communicate the gospel by using modern technology. The Holy Spirit understands and accepts technological communication. He argued that God is a God who understands everything and he has inspired humanity to develop and that technological development is encouraged by God.

On the issue of some African beliefs, customs and religious traditions, Morongwa argued that his church is an apostolic church and does not respect African customs which are contrary to the Christian faith.

Some African taboos which are also found in the Bible are observed by the church. But generally speaking, the church has adapted itself to modernity and postmodernity.

This article observes that some researchers on New Religious Movements (NRMs) regard the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches as AICs. Sundkler (1976:56-57) has briefly discussed how the Pentecostals separated from the AICs. But in spite of the separation, historically, Pentecostals and charismatics are of Western or particularly American origin. The AICs are the ones which broke away from the Pentecostals due to the basic understandings of the Holy Spirit and how it functions with regard to the ancestral spirits. So, when this article discusses the AICs, it does not include Pentecostals and charismatics. The AICs in Botswana, and most of the AICs in southern Africa, have become conversant with rapid social and infrastructural changes to the extent that they have become modern churches. Most of the founders of these churches have passed away, leaving the younger generation to carry forward the theologies, beliefs and practices of the AICs and adapting them to changes brought by secularisation. While the AICs started as protestant movements in South Africa, they are now concerned with the daily needs of their members in the squatter camps and in the fast developing towns of South Africa. They are helping their members to find their place in the midst of rapid social change. Through their theology of healing, their

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members are helped to cope with change and adjust themselves to the technological world. They are fortified so that they should not be bewitched or lose their jobs. They are given *isiwasho* so that they can find jobs and live well. The spirituality that has been developed by the theologies, beliefs and practices of the AICs is still very strong in the members of the AICs in spite of rapid social development and changes brought by secularisation. Members of the AICs are always faithful to their beliefs and practices in spite of their academic qualifications. They hold very strong religious beliefs and practices which help them to transcend the challenges brought about by modernity and postmodernity. One of their most important influences is that they function as family churches. Members are very close to each other and they know each other by name. By so doing, they provide some hope and courage to their members in spite of the social, economic and political conditions in which members find themselves. In Botswana, members of the AICs always find some comfort from the support of their fellow members regardless of which part of the country they find themselves. They address each other as *bakaulengwe*, which means my brothers and sisters. The bond that is created by faith becomes stronger than that of the family when one is faced by the challenges of the modern and postmodern world. The life and theology of the AICs has a binding factor in rapidly developing communities and societies. While the Botswana communities and societies are undergoing rapid social changes, the AICs are there to sustain the binding force of many African Traditional Religions and that of the Christian religion. They are in many respects confirming the findings of the two sociologists, Redcliffe-Brown and Malinowski, that religion has a binding force. This theory goes even beyond to Durkheim, arguing that the function of religion is to bind societies and communities. The argument of this article is that the AICs have a place in the 21st century which equals that of other church denominations and expressions of Christianity.

### **Conclusion**

This article has demonstrated and argued that in spite of the rather quiet discussion and researches on the AICs, the AICs are still an important aspect of Botswana Christianity and that of the southern African region. They are no longer subjects of academic study because they are established expressions of African Christianity. They form an important aspect of the growth and spread of Christianity in the Southern Hemisphere. Above all, they address the daily needs of their members faced by the challenges brought by secularisation and consumerism.

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