
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 RESEARCH PROBLEM

The aim of this research is to study how to get the best of African culture to engage with the best of consecrated life, to bring about something new and relevant to our South African situation. The two key concepts in this investigation are inculturation and consecrated life. The task at hand is not to embark on a detailed definition of inculturation nor of consecrated life; many books have been written about these two subjects. This study is more about the application of the process of inculturation in consecrated life as experienced in a specific congregation, the Companions of St Angela. It is important to give a proper explanation of the terms inculturation and consecration. The following paragraphs will define the two terms as a way of introducing the topic of this dissertation.

In a sense all Christian life is consecrated life, for all Christians are consecrated to the Lord in baptism and anointed for the mission of the Church (McGarry, 1996:5). Moreover, according to Vatican II¹, all Christians are called to live the evangelical counsels according to their state of life, whether in single or married lay life, or as priests or religious (*Lumen Gentium* =LG 39). Religious life and consecrated life are used interchangeably in the documents of the church. That will also be the pattern in this dissertation. Religious take vows of celibacy, poverty and obedience in a special community recognised and ratified by the relevant authority in the Catholic Church. The theological basis for choosing to follow Jesus in such a radical way centres around the example of Jesus himself who called some of his disciples to welcome the Kingdom of God into their lives and to put their lives at its service, leaving everything behind and closely imitating his own *way of life* (*Vita consecrata* =VC 1996:14).

¹ This refers to the Second Vatican Council 1962-1965.

Schleck (1969:244) points out that religious life pertains to the area of faith realities and can therefore not be rationalised. If it could, then the aspect of self-giving in faith would no longer be tenable. At the same time, it does not mean that the religious life is irrational or unreasonable or that it is not relevant or meaningful. Schleck goes on to define religious life in this way:

Very briefly it would seem to me that the religious life might be defined as a call from God to a permanent and primary publicly approved life project or state that by its nature aims at the acquisition of holiness or the fullness of *agape* by means of the evangelical counsels which have a multi-dimensional relationship with it - ascetical or liberating, Christological, ecclesiological, and eschatological² (Schleck 1969:249).

VC (1996:14) appearing twenty years after Schleck, defines consecrated life in this way:

This special “following Christ”, at the origin of which is always the initiative of the Father, has an essential Christological and pneumatological³ meaning: it expresses in a particularly vivid way the Trinitarian nature of the Christian life and it anticipates in a certain way that eschatological fulfilment towards which the whole Church is tending.

It is clear that religious life is a call. It is the following of Christ under the direction of the spirit. It is communal and is not something isolated, marginal or unimportant in the church; it stands at the very heart of the church as a decisive element of its holiness and mission (McGarry, 1996:16). People bring themselves and their cultural background to religious life. Pope Paul IV (1969) at his first visit to Africa on the occasion of the canonization of the Martyrs of Uganda had this to say to the people of Africa: ‘You may, and you must have an

2 Schleck (1969 : 244) explains the fourfold service; an ascetical or liberating function or service; a Christological function or service refers to the imitation or following of Christ; an ecclesiological function or service means total service of the Church; and eschatological function or service which refers to the hope for the ultimate fulfilment of God’s covenant promise.

3 The word is derived from the Greek *pneuma* meaning spirit, breath or wind (Downey, 1993:911).

African Christianity' (in Okure, et al. 1990:v). I believe that an African Christianity must give birth to an African religious life.

Mbiti (in Cassidy & Verlinden (1976:275) goes deeper into the issue of African Christianity:

As such, there is no divine form of Christianity which is 100% suitable for all peoples and at all times. Every form of Christianity as its impurities-because of man's [sic] sinfulness. Therefore every cultural setting has a right to evolve its own form or expression of Christianity. No single form of Christianity should dominate another.

In the past very little consideration was given to culture in the work of evangelisation. Today the Church has grown to the awareness that culture is a reality which cannot be avoided or side-stepped. Azevedo (1988:28) explains the change of heart very clearly when he writes:

Since the Synod on evangelisation in 1974, and the publication by Paul VI of *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), there has been an ever growing reflection in Faith-Culture-Society relations. Today there is a basic assumption, widely accepted theologically and pastorally, that there can be no complete *evangelisation* without a true *inculturation*. In other words, true evangelisation must always be inculturated. Inculturation is a qualification of evangelisation. It is not, then, a theological or pastoral method; it is not a new and passing fad. It is something directly linked to the mission of the church: to *evangelise*.

The church has come to accept that a culture transformed and regenerated by the gospels brings forth from its own living tradition original expressions of Christian life. This understanding is developed by Arrupe (1978) in one of the most comprehensive definitions of the concept of inculturation. Father Arrupe, in a letter to his brother Jesuits, gives the following explanation which touches the main elements in the life of a Christian. It is about faith and life in its totality:

Inculturation is the incarnation of Christian life and of the

Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about a “new creation” (Arrupe 1978).

Ukpong (1992:10) follows the same line of thought in his definition of inculturation as:

A method which may be defined as a process of interpreting and living Christianity from within the perspective of a particular culture and the people’s social and historical life experience in such a way that the Christian values are made to animate the people’s way of life.

The theological basis for this shift in understanding is a deeper theological interpretation of the mystery of the Incarnation, *the Word was made flesh, he lived among us...Jn 1:14*⁴ Through the mystery of the incarnation the eternal Word took on our exact human nature, becoming one with us in everything except sin (Heb 4:15); in everything, that is, except what was incompatible with divinity (Brown, Fitzmyer & Murphy, 1968:423).

One important factor in Christian spirituality is the doctrine of the incarnation, which affirms the twofold mystery of (1) the history of God’s self-communication (Trinity), and (2) the history of humanity’s self-transcendence (Downey 1993:537). Rahner (1978) interprets the mystery of the incarnation as the supreme fulfilment of God’s self-communication in human persons so that they might fulfil themselves in self-transcendence. For Wakefield (1989) the doctrine of the incarnation has had a profound effect on Christian spirituality not only in the revelation of the immensity of the love of God and the reconciliation of people to God but in the human expression and experience of Jesus, the word made flesh. According to Okure (1990:57):

Incarnation presupposes the existence of two distinct realities, which then become united to form a new and unique reality in Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ. In this

⁴ All Bible quotations are taken from *The Jerusalem Bible*.

union, neither reality is destroyed, down-graded or absorbed. Yet each is enriched and mysteriously transformed by the other.

Okure (1990:58) holds that this understanding of the mystery of the incarnation enriches and transforms in Christ, and that the divine reality is also enriched and “relationally” transformed by its union with our humanity in Christ. It is common for humans to accept the former statement and to feel uncomfortable with the latter, especially when reflecting on the statement “becoming one with us in everything except sin” (Heb 4:15). Okure’s further commentary is reassuring:

... insofar as it is not possible for us to speak of, or relate to God the Father [sic] Son and Holy Spirit, without thinking of Jesus of Nazareth, as much as it is not possible for us to think of the fullness of our humanity without also thinking of Jesus of Nazareth (Eph 4:13). In the incarnation, therefore, it is not only humanity that tends towards God in Christ and becomes one with God, but it is God also, who tends towards humanity and becomes one with humankind. Paul would regard this as a great mystery (cf Eph 5:32) (1990:58).

Through her exposition of the mystery of the incarnation Okure (1990:57-58) supports the view and the understanding that inculturation can be defined as incarnation, a view which was strongly emphasised she believes by the synod of bishops in Rome in 1974. People relate to God and to each other in the only medium at their disposal, their culture.

The word *kenosis* or self-emptying is used by theologians such as Okure (190:62) and Shorter (1998:1) to illustrate Jesus’ attitude towards cultures. Shorter (1998:7) poses the question “But is cultural *kenosis* possible?” and concludes that it is not possible to empty oneself of one’s culture, it is part of one’s identity as a human being. We can however, according to Shorter (1988:7-8) be relatively objective about other cultures, stand in awe as we encounter other cultures and distance ourselves from our culture of origin. Okure (1990:65) expounds self- emptying or *kenosis* with the example of the early Christians illustrating how in accepting the teaching of Jesus their attitude towards Gentiles had to

change radically. They had also to accept that the Torah was not the only means to salvation. In the case of Jesus, St Paul explains that self-emptying happened when he became like us in everything except sin, when he took on our human nature (Phil.2:7; Heb. 2:17-18, 4:15). Tastard (1989) gives the following exegesis of Phil. 2:7:

Jesus spent some thirty years 'hidden'. It was during this time that he was learning to be man, for God had never been man before Christ. He was learning the world from a human perspective, learning to work out his Father's will in the human situation, until the right time came and the Spirit fired him to preach the good news to the poor (Tastard 1989:xi).

The human struggle of Jesus is so movingly described in Heb. 5:7-10. If Jesus had to learn how to act in the human situation and to understand the world from a human perspective this means that his objective was to make a difference in the human situation (Jn 10:10), and to bring about transformation in the human perspective. In Luke 2:51-52⁵ Jesus is learning and maturing in

Nazareth. In reflecting on this aspect of the life of Jesus Coventry (1965) wrote:

It is not just a question of what Our Lord *said* but primarily of what he was - a divine person expressing himself humanly, not only in word, but in gesture and mannerism and deed, above all in his life, death and resurrection (Coventry 1965:10).

The conclusions drawn by Okure (1990) at the end of her discourse on the biblical and theological bases for inculturation seem an appropriate ending to the foregoing discussion:

Far from being a betrayal of our Christian faith, inculturation is called for by the very nature of this faith, faith in Christ, as the incarnate Son of God, and saviour of all humankind. Inculturation is not a betrayal of the

⁵ He then went down with them and came to Nazareth and lived under their authority. His mother stored up all these things in her heart. And Jesu increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and men.

universality of the church, but rather an active effort to help bring about this universality. Finally, we owe it to ourselves to allow Christ to assume our different cultures substantially, and transform them from within, and thereby become himself fully part of us and one of us (Okure 1990:61).

The problem to be investigated with this research is therefore a valid one and the results flowing from the study will hopefully contribute towards the prophetic sign of consecrated life in the African context.

1.2 IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The positive response from a number of three-day workshops⁶ in Gauteng, Kwa-Zulu Natal and Botswana on inculturation of the vows highlighted the need for further exploration of the subject. There is a need for South African religious to define themselves according to their charism in their own context and culture in order to keep the prophetic impact of religious life alive.

As women today are growing in consciousness of their position alongside men, consecrated women are also playing their role by rewriting history and in so doing seek to highlight the forgotten role played by women in the spiritual and overall development of the church and in society. African women religious are very silent in South Africa. What Azevedo (1988:26) mentions about the effects of repression on Latin American cultures is worth contemplating in relation to the history of African women religious in South Africa in the church as well as in society. He writes:

The socio-cultural transplanting of Iberian elements and models eclipsed or repressed the precolumbian indigenous cultures, whether they were the expressions of small tribal

⁶ Two workshops 1999 and 2002 in Johannesburg for 40 male and female novices from 8 congregations, one in Botswana 2002 for 15 novices from 3 congregations, one in Pretoria 1999 for 8 novices from one male congregation, one in Hibberdene 2001 for 10 formators from five African countries. The topic was Inculturation of the Vows and the workshops were conducted by myself, Mary Modise.

groups or the patrimony of complex societies with definite features and records of civilisation. Consequently, with few exceptions, our Latin American cultures suffered a culture rupture which is still experienced today. This rupture is manifested in their dependency, and imitativeness, in their frailty, inferiority and insecurity.

The implantation of religious life in our milieu, followed in principle, the same paradigm. The Western model is mostly still in place, although there have been genuine attempts to change this situation. Inculturation need not be a reaction to repression. This study aims to demonstrate that inculturation is a process of ongoing conversion and growth.

To date I have not found any South African publication by a local African Sister attempting a work of this nature. Many reasons can be given to explain the dearth of literary contributions by African women religious in South Africa on the important subject of inculturation and consecrated life. Amongst others the following could be cited:

- many sisters have been totally committed to being the workforce in pastoral ministries, nursing
- and teaching quite often with a minimum standard of education;
- many sisters have come from previously disadvantaged communities due to the legacy of apartheid policies, accepting the status quo without questioning;
- religious life was introduced to South Africans ready made, well regulated, efficient and Western in outlook, with hardly any room for local input;
- until quite recently uniformity as opposed to unity in diversity was the norm within the church and even more so in religious communities;
- it could be that African women religious in South Africa have not yet become aware of the fact that:

Inculturation begins with a new level of consciousness on the part of the Africans to seeking answers to their existential questions (Appiah 2000:32).

I believe this study will help to raise awareness of the need of self- definition so that the reservoir of dormant gifts among local Sisters may be awakened. Nasimiyu-Wasike (1994:50)⁷ makes a very interesting point when she writes about the experiences of African women in their various ethnic groups:

In nearly all of the African ethnic groups women hold inferior status. This reality is often disguised and masked by gender role segregation (Nasimiyu-Wasike 1994:50).

Others may view this gender role segregation as a strength but on the whole these roles tend to perpetuate the dominant position of men over women (Maimela, 1996:83). It is therefore important for African religious women to work for the enrichment and spiritual empowerment not only of themselves, but of women in general as well as the people amongst whom they serve.

The following seems to be a fitting quote with which to close the argument in support of the importance of this work:

One Sabbath day he was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who for eighteen years had been possessed by a spirit that left her enfeebled; she was bent double and quite unable to stand upright. When Jesus saw her he called her over and said, ‘Woman, you are rid of your infirmity’ and he laid his hands on her. And at once she straightened up, and she glorified God (Lk 13:10-12).

The importance of this incident in the historical context in which it occurred as well as the time and place endorse the attitude of Jesus towards women in contrast to what was customary at that time. McBride’s (1982) commentary on Jesus’ action in the text (Lk 13:10-12) reads:

Jesus was obviously aware of the legal dispute about what kind of knots could be tied and untied on the Sabbath, but he has no time for a theology of knots which can justify the

⁷ This quote is taken from Nasimiyu’s article “Acceptance of the total human situation as a precondition for authentic inculturation”. Turkson and Wisjen ed. 1994 *Inculturation*.

release of an animal, and keep a woman bound in her affliction. His opponents do not see the Lord of the Sabbath who liberates those who are bound; they only see a man who has broken the law. Again, his opponents ignore the signs which are under their noses (McBride 1982:178).

1.3 FOCUS AND LIMITATIONS

The number and the variety of the forms and families of consecrated life within the Catholic Church in different countries and in different cultures is so vast that exploration of this topic in all its aspects is too daunting to attempt. Secondly to focus on so many congregations of such a variety would render this study too cumbersome and too complex. Thirdly the requirements for this research are of a limited scope.

In this study therefore the concept of inculturation will be studied in relation to the spiritual development of one congregation of sisters, the Companions of St Angela, a local diocesan congregation of women in the Catholic Diocese of Johannesburg. The reasons in support of this focus are clear: in the first place from the time the congregation was founded in 1954 it has attracted only African women. Secondly, as one of the members of this congregation, I have a vested interest in promoting an inculturated religious life here in South Africa, aware that:

Inculturation must be the fruit of maturity in faith; it requires a great deal of theological lucidity, spiritual discernment, wisdom and prudence, and also time- and there is always a conversion to be effected...to the person of Christ (Beyer 1982:9)⁸.

It is possible that the majority of African religious sisters have come to that maturity in faith, they might simply need to be affirmed and encouraged. They, like all African women, come from a past where they have been excluded from important decision-making structures in the political and in the religious history of the South African society. Inculturation under these circumstances will require liberation and assertiveness on the part of these women. The

⁸ This quotation is found in Beyer's compilation of the addresses of John Paul II to religious (1981-1982).

reality is partially formulated by the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT):

The social underdevelopment of Africa represents a fundamental aspect of the anthropological pauperisation of the African person. If we define pauperisation as the fact of becoming or making poor, namely, by being deprived of all that we have acquired, all that we are and all that we can do, we shall recognise that Africa is subjected to structures which result in complete pauperisation: political economic and social. When it is not a matter of being deprived of all that we own, but rather, all that we are - our human identity, our social roots, our history, our culture, our dignity, our rights, our hopes, and our plans-then pauperisation becomes anthropological. It then affects religious and cultural life at its roots⁹ (Appiah 2000:32).

The scenario painted here is not a complete picture of the position of local religious. Their reality cannot be described as one of complete impoverishment. They freely chose to enter religious life because they were attracted to it. Their poverty lies in the fact that they have not made an African contribution towards a truly South African expression of consecrated life for religious life to really take root in South Africa.

This study will cover the first thirty years in the history of the Companions of St Angela 1955-1985. Though much has been written about religious life in South Africa, there is nothing published on the congregation's history and spirituality. This is a serious limitation as it means that research on the Companions of St Angela will depend on the letters and the notes found in the archives of the congregation as well as from the personal experiences and testimonies of the members. Some of the founding members are still alive. Oral tradition can be a limiting factor because people only remember what was important to them; in this way valuable contributions regarding the history of the congregation can be lost. This observation does not ignore the fact that story-telling can provide a rich tapestry of insights into the beginnings of the congregation. The focus will be limited to the efforts of the Companions of St Angela to make the charism of Angela Merici their own. It will not study all the aspects in

⁹ The African Report presented at the Second General Assembly of EATWOT held in Oaxtepec, Mexico, 1986.

the life of the congregation of the Companions of St Angela.

The writings Angela Merici, will be introduced in greater detail in subsequent chapters because the Companions of St Angela are meant to express the charism of Angela Merici in their way of life and in their ministries. Biographies and commentaries on various aspects of her contribution to consecrated life will also be used.

1.4 METHOD OF APPROACH

A historical approach will be taken in this study. Firstly, because I am concentrating on the first thirty years of the existence of the congregation of the Companions of St Angela. Secondly, because inculturation is a contemporary concern of the church which acknowledges and respects all cultures, it is of historical significance. Numerous books have been written on the history of consecrated life in the Catholic church. This study takes this into consideration and does not attempt to offer a history of religious life, but carefully selects material relevant to the topic under discussion. The life of Angela Merici cannot be looked at without any reference to the historical context of her time and the place she occupied in it; she is an historical reality. The Companions of St Angela form part of the South African past and present and hopefully the future; they therefore also constitute a historical reality.

Even though this study is in the field of Christian spirituality the sociological analytical approach is essential because both Angela Merici and the Companions of St Angela were influenced by and were influential in their respective societies. Angela Merici saw a need in her society and through her charism addressed that particular need. The appropriate values operating in the social milieu in which the Companions of St Angela were founded will form the frame of reference which will be drawn into the dialogue with the charism of Angela Merici.

A theology of consecrated life will inform and guide the whole discussion. One of the central

ideas of this investigation is inculturation which means that cultural factors will play a significant role. Methodology will include an anthropological dimension. The bulk of the work will be confined to library research. Examples taken from the experiences of members of the congregation of the Companions of St Angela will be included. Some interviews will be conducted with experienced people in consecrated life. The beneficiaries of the service rendered by the Companions of St Angela will also be interviewed.

1.5 LITERATURE SURVEY

According to Neuman (2000:445) a literature review is based on the assumption that knowledge accumulates and that we learn from and build on what others have done. The comment accurately captures the value of books, journals, magazines and newspapers in the flow of information as well as in the sharing of other people's insights and skills for growth, development and for awakening new ideas for research. For the purpose of this particular dissertation two of the four goals¹⁰ of a literature review outlined by Neuman (2000:446) most definitely apply. These are:

- to demonstrate a familiarity with a body of knowledge and establish credibility;
- and
- to learn from others and stimulate new ideas.

It would be almost an impossible task to try and review all the sources consulted on the two key concepts, namely consecrated life and inculturation. To make this survey more manageable sources are grouped by fields, namely, church documents, inculturation, consecrated life and historical sources.

Consecrated life has received much attention in the official documents of the Catholic church. Beginning with LG 43-47 where religious life is seen in terms of the larger mission

¹⁰ The two remaining goals given by Neuman (2000:446) are: 2. To show the path of prior research and how a current project is linked to it. 3. To integrate and summarise what is known in an area.

of the church official documents have praised religious life as a gift of the Spirit. It was *Perfectae Caritatis* (=PC 1965) that called all religious Orders and congregations to a return to the sources of Christian life. Perhaps its most important contribution to the renewal of religious life was its call to religious to return to the spirit and original charisms and aims of their founders and foundresses. It is a watershed document that opened the way for serious study of the sources of consecrated life and an appreciation of the uniqueness of the charisms of religious families in the church. In the following year, 1966, the church issued *Ecclesie sanctae* (=ES) which spelled out the norms for renewal. This document is seen as a companion text to PC and was meant to assist congregations in preparing their constitutions. *Renovationis causam* (=RC 1969) gave individual religious Orders and congregations much more leeway in organizing their formation programmes according the charism and aims of each institute, without jeopardising the basic theological and spiritual values mandated for all religious congregations within the jurisdiction of the church. Two years later *Evangelica testificatio* (=ET 1971) appeared. This document is significant in that it stressed the specific contribution expected of the different forms of consecrated life in the prophetic mission of the church.

Mutuae Relationes (= MR 1978) was welcomed not only for its doctrinal content but more especially because it provided some useful guidelines on mutual relations between bishops and leaders of religious congregations. Individual bishops as well as Bishops' Conferences and religious leaders engaged in profitable dialogue in matters of mutual concern.

A book which took many years of hard work before it was finally ready was the *New Code of Canon Law* (= JURCAN 1983). Part III which deals with institutes of consecrated life was acclaimed for its clarity and its appreciation of the role and position of consecrated life in the church. It differs from the 1917 *Code* in a number of important aspects. Firstly it is shorter and is not just a dry legal document; secondly its focus is different in that religious life is acknowledged as a gift for the holiness of the church; and finally recognition is also given to the charisms of founders of religious congregations.

With JURCAN(1983) in place *Potissimum Institutioni* (=PI 1990) which gives guidelines for formation in religious institutes was published. Although the document was not received with great excitement it nevertheless gives all the essential elements required for initial and ongoing formation. Each institute needs to study and interpret the norms to address its own situation. The document which attracted a lot of attention was VC. There were two preparatory documents ahead of it the *Lineamenta* (=L 1992) and *Instrumentum Laboris* (=IL 1994). There were 25 questions for discussion in L, and IL contained collated responses from all over the world. VC is a product of the deliberations at the synod on religious life where valuable contributions were made by representatives of religious congregations. The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated and Societies of Apostolic Life based in the Vatican has expressed its appreciation of the contents of this document because it was able to:

clearly and profoundly express the *Christological and ecclesial dimensions of consecrated life in a Trinitarian theological perspective*, shedding new light on the theology of the following of Christ and of consecration, of communion and of mission. It has contributed to the creation of a new mentality regarding the mission of consecrated life within the people of God. It helped consecrated persons themselves to capture a greater awareness of the grace of their own vocation (CIVCSVA¹¹ 2002:7-8).

Starting Afresh From Christ-A renewed commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium (2002) was refreshingly new in both content and style. It follows on *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2001) the pope's letter to all Catholics urging them "to contemplate the face of Christ, to start afresh from Him and to witness to his love." The document is a response to the letter and does not give any new thoughts but seeks to restore the fervour and commitment of consecrated people.

The gradual progression in the focus and emphasis in the writings of the church on consecrated life is worth noting. The tone and the quality has changed from pure canonical

¹¹ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated and Societies of Apostolic Life.

legislation in the past to the present situation in which religious life is regarded as part of the “grace and mission” of the church (LG 43).

1.5.1 Inculturation

Through the documents LG (1964), *Ad Gentes* (=AG 1965), *Gaudium et spes* (=GS 1965) and *Sacrosanctum concilium* (=SC 1963), Vatican II vigorously reaffirmed the validity and urgency of the church’s incarnational approach to all peoples (Komonchak, Collins & Lane, 1996:510). *Evangelii nuntiandi* (=EN 1975) also reaffirmed the importance of inculturation and went further urging:

The evangelisation of peoples not as though they were merely aggregates of individuals without particular historical contexts and cultural matrices, but together with their cultures in their respective spacio-temporal situations. Far from ignoring indigenous cultures, much less trying to replace them with foreign ways of being human and religious, the cultures themselves were to be evangelised, “not in a purely decorative way as it were by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way and right to their very roots”(20, 63) (Komonchak et al. 1996:513).

Journals, periodicals and Bulletins, amongst others *Theological Studies*, *Theology for Southern Africa*, *Black Theology*, *Theology Digest*, *Afer*, *Grace and Truth*, *Review for Religious*, *Supplement to the Way*, sometimes carry good and thought provoking articles on inculturation. Rahner (1979) in Hillman (1993:511) calls for a new approach to missionary activity:

The actual concrete activity of the Church in its relation to the world outside of Europe was in fact (if you will pardon the expression) the activity of an export firm which exported a European religion as a commodity it did not really want to change but sent throughout the world together with the rest of the culture and civilisation it considered superior (Rahner 1979:717).

The book *Africanness, inculturation, ethics: In search of the subject of an inculturated*

Christian ethic by Appiah (2000), is intended to advance the engagement of African culture with Christian ethics and religion. The writer has succeeded in stimulating interest in this kind of research. Bujo (1992) *African theology in its social context* prods the memory in the search for forgotten and lost traditional African values. Schreiter (1992) points out that Bujo does not engage in hypothetical designs, he simply takes traditional African values to the horizon of contemporary social issues because that is where and how you do theology. The careful research by Burke (2001) on the topic *Towards the inculturation of religious life*, is a contribution and a model which can be applied in similar studies. A critical appraisal of African theologies of inculturation in Munga's (1998) book *Beyond the controversy; a study of African theologies of inculturation and liberation*, enhances the inculturation debate by taking it to a different level. Weaknesses are exposed and dissected so as to bring about transformation. The 32 articles in Okure, et al. (1990) entitled *Inculturation of Christianity in Africa*, all of them by eminent theologians, have touched all areas with regard to inculturation. The articles are essential reading for all those who are serious about inculturation.

1.5.2 Consecrated life

Besides church documents there are many articles and books on consecrated life. The written materials are plentiful. Writers like Gambari (1974) and Shorter (1977, 1989, 1998, 1999 & 2000) have contributed much to the growth in understanding of the prophetic witness of religious life. Chittister (1998), Barr (1995), O'Murchu (1991, 1999) and Schneiders (1986, 2000) have moved beyond the conventional way of looking at the vows. They see them as first and foremost about values and not about laws.

1.5.3 Historical sources

Mariani, Tarolli and Seynaeve (1989) acknowledge some of the difficulties that researchers into the early history of Angela Merici and the origins of her work have to face. They give three main reasons for this: the invasion of Italy by Napoleon, the subsequent suppression of

religious associations and the two world wars of the 20th century. Documents were dispersed and some existing documents are still to be re-classified. The research by Mariani et al (1989) has achieved a lot by uncovering invaluable documents which were unknown, and now thanks to their efforts these have become available. On the cover of Ledochowska's work (1967) there is reference to the great wealth of archives at Brescia, Milan and Rome and of the abundant documentation which places us in direct contact with historical reality. Writers like, Bertolotti Lubienska, Guerrini, Cistellini, Ledochowska, Mariani et al, all of the 20th century have contributed to the wealth of material referred to above. The impact of Angela Merici over more than four hundred and fifty years can now be traced back to Desenzano, the birth place of Angela. All these writers listed above have made important contributions to this history. Subsequent writers have benefited and have been able capture the spirituality of Angela from these contributions. Buser (1990) with *Also in your midst*, and Muller-Freund and Werr (1999) wrote, *With a great longing heart Praying with Angela Merici*, these books together with *Follow the Spirit* (1998) are but a few of those who have drawn their inspiration from the above mentioned sources. *Angela's Rule, the Counsels and Legacies* and her way of life delineate her spirituality.

There are no published works on the Companions of St Angela. Sources used are the archives of the Ursulines in South Africa, the archives of the Companions of St Angela of the Diocese of Johannesburg, and the Constitutions of the Companions of St Angela.

1.6 OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter One, the introduction to this dissertation, describes the aim of the study and introduces two key concepts inculturation and consecrated life. The chapter also explains the significance of the research and sketches the focus and the limitations of this study. The methodology used in the research that was conducted is followed by a comprehensive literature survey which has actually given substance to the introduction and has helped to clarify the overall purpose of the dissertation. The chapter ends with an overview of the contents of the chapters followed by a conclusion.

Chapter Two introduces Angela Merici, her context and her charism, and its spread to Africa and South Africa in particular. Chapter three gives a brief history of the foundation of the Companions of St Angela and tells how the charism of St Angela was conveyed to the Companions of St Angela.

Chapter four brings together ubuntu and the spirituality of Angela Merici. The envisaged fruit of this interaction will hopefully be a gradual process of entering into, claiming and truly owning the charism of Angela Merici by African women. Amalados (1993:490) points out that there is a growing awareness that charisms have remained Western and they have to be reinterpreted. Segundo as quoted in Thomas (1995:176-177) speaks of a 'hermeneutic circle' methodology where each new reality calls for a new interpretation of the word of God with certain preconditions.¹²

This methodology must also happen for charisms. The task is a mighty challenge for our South African situation. The difficulty is captured by Bate (1998:27) where he describes the South African society in this way:

We are a patchwork quilt of different traditions and value systems, sometimes interweaving and interlinking us, sometimes bounding us off from one another as separate groupings.

Bate (1998:27) also mentions that very few South Africans live within a traditional African cultural framework. The problem can be overcome by a conscious effort on the part of African religious to become truly African religious, not carbon copies of religious of other countries. For the Companions of St Angela this means carrying the spirit of Angela Merici through the best of who they are and have in their culture to the service of God's people. African roots are buried deep in the people, they have not been completely eroded. Zwane

¹² The preconditions mentioned by Thomas (1995:177) are: 1. That the questions rising out of the present be rich enough, general enough and basic enough to force us to change our customary conceptions of life, death, knowledge, society, politics, and the world in general. 2. If theology somehow assumes that it can respond to the new questions without changing its customary interpretation of Scripture, that immediately terminates the hermeneutic circle.

(1988:20) asserts “As we decolonise ourselves we are discovering that there are riches in our heritage and we learn to appreciate them.”

It is precisely those riches which the Companions of St Angela want to discover, and to use in their expression of religious life as daughters of Angela Merici as they reread their African memory. The conclusions draw the four chapters together, pick out the salient points from each chapter, bring the discussion to a closure, point out the picture emerging from the research and map out the way forward.

1.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter, though an introduction to the dissertation, holds a significant position in the whole document because it sets the scene by outlining the purpose of the study, its format, the content and the method of approaching the proposed problem. The chapter gives direction to the research, and it requires discipline, systematic thought and reflection. Working through this chapter serves to clarify and to highlight the challenge posed by the title of this study. The call is quite clear as it appears in VC (1996:46): “The consecrated life itself, since it is the bearer of gospel values, must be inculturated in order to preserve its prophetic impact.”

The challenge is further compounded by the statement made by the African bishops, IMBISA¹³ (1983:33), which reads:

Consecrated religious life is a challenge to African culture and to every culture. A life of obedience, poverty and celibacy is only present in African culture in an analogous way. In its form of consecrated life, according to the three vows, religious life very much challenges African values and lifestyles.

Challenge does not preclude dialogue. The aim of this study is tenable. It requires diligent,

¹³ IMBISA Inter-regional Meeting of Bishops in Southern Africa.

courageous engagement which will serve to encourage more African Sisters to tell their stories and in so doing feel the call to search for authenticity in consecrated life.