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(42) INDEPENDENT CHURCHES IN AFRICA (AICS)

Thomas Oduro

The history of African Independent Churches dates back to the first century AD when according to Coptic Orthodox traditions, John Mark, a Jew who was born in Cyrene, one of the Pentapolis in North Africa, established Christianity in Alexandria. ‘Traditional Coptic sources hold that “the Coptic Church is based on the teachings of St Mark who brought Christianity to Egypt during the reign of Emperor Nero in the first century, a dozen of years after the Lord’s ascension...”’¹ This belief is so entrenched in the history of the Coptic Church of Egypt that in 1978 Pope Shenouda III, then the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria, convened an assembly of twenty prominent AIC leaders in Cairo² to form the Organisation of African Instituted Churches (OAIC), an ecumenical council of African Instituted Churches.

Next in the line of churches believed to have been founded by Africans with a strong Afrocentric emphasis was the ancient Ethiopian church that was established by Egyptian Copts. ‘The story of this church provides fascinating parallels and inspiration to parts of the AIC movement to emerge in the nineteenth century, particularly for those who see Ethiopia as the model of African dignity, independence and prestige’.³ AICs can, therefore, be categorized into two main genres: early AICs and post-reformation AICs; the latter are the ones that this article is mainly about.

Activities of western Protestant missions and missionaries in sub-Saharan Africa from the nineteenth century onwards were successful; not only did they plant many denominations, they built and operated schools, hospitals, clinics and agricultural ventures. Many African languages were written. The Bible was translated into some African languages. Christianity, thus, got a firm footing in Africa.

Despite the success story of western missionaries in Africa, many African Christians drew people’s attention to the need to establish African churches. These have been called precursors of AICs. Some of them robustly and plainly critiqued western missionaries and called for the Africanization of the church. David Brown Vincent, a Nigerian who later changed his name to Mojola Agbebi, in his Africanization campaign, stated emphatically that ‘The foreigner is not fitted to construct an African Church’.⁴ Other precursors⁵ quietly ministered among Africans without openly critiquing western missionaries but incidentally taught African Christians that they too could minister in an African milieu.

Following the examples set by the precursors, many Africans began establishing their own form of Christianity which was different from the mainline African Christianity planted by western missionaries. The new form of Christianity was called African Independent Churches (AICs) by some western scholars and missiologists. They are so-called ‘because they are African-initiated, are indeed indigenous, and – with some important exceptions – have carried on their life and ministry quite independently of mission-planted denominations, of local and national councils... which are themselves all emanations of western missionary endeavours’.⁶ In most cases, the independence of the AICs was intentionally carried out in

¹ Thomas C. Oden, *The African Memory of Mark: Reassessing Early Church Tradition* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2011), 36.

² Allan H. Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century* (Asmara: Africa World Press, Inc., 2001), 162.

³ Anderson, *African Reformation*, 46.

⁴ Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa 1450-1950*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 495. See also Anderson, *African Reformation*, 47-51.

⁵ Deji Isaac Ayegobyin and S. Ademola Ishola, *African Indigenous Churches: An Historical Perspective* (Bukuru: Africa Christian Textbooks, 2013), 39-54.

⁶ David A. Shank, “African Independent Churches, African Theology and Western Co-workers in the Missio Dei” in David A. Shank (ed), *Ministry in Partnership with African Independent Churches* (Elkhart, Indiana: Mennonite Board

reaction to some missionary policies, practices and interpretation of Scripture. Some African Christians became disgruntled with western missionaries' attempt to blend Christianity with western civilization, thus making African Christians conform to western Christianity, culture and lifestyles, as stated by Paul Makhubu, an AIC leader in South Africa.

Some white missionaries, instead of teaching Christianity, promoted and taught white civilization. The blacks were stripped of their customs, and in exchange were forced into a culture they could never embrace.⁷

Many African beliefs, worldviews, cultures, personalities, values and concepts were either derided, dissuaded, discarded or labelled 'superstitious'. The use of African music, songs, liturgies, choreography, exuberance and costume in the church was discouraged and to some extent banned.⁸ Africans who were trained in western educational institutions and seminaries were perceived fit to lead only Africans since it was difficult for some western missionaries to serve under African leaders.⁹ Even though some scholars rebuff the reactionary theory and situate it to the initial emergence of the AICs,¹⁰ there were many AICs that were established from the first quarter of the twentieth century in reaction to western missionaries' concept of Christianity.¹¹ No matter how the AIC phenomena is perceived, it is a fact that the 'AICs...seek the Africanization of Christianity in outlook, form and scope, distinct from and without administrative connections with foreign mission-based organizations'.¹² Other non-reactionary factors such as the translation of the Bible into African languages, the religious activities of African precursors of AICs, passion for a purer form of Christianity, the desire for a pragmatic Jesus and sheer ambition to be idolized¹³ were prominent in the establishment of African Independent Churches. The complexity of the nature and ministry of the AICs earned them descriptions such as 'nativistic', 'tribal', 'neo-pagan', 'Ethiopian', and many others.¹⁴ However, many scholars used the title 'African Independent Churches' (AICs) to describe the phenomena.

Over the years, some scholars have replaced the word 'Independent' in the AIC acronym with 'Initiated', 'Indigenous', and 'Instituted' but these are all varieties of their independence. The use of the word 'independent' is, however, the core description and understanding not only of their history and theology but also of their liturgies; it is the very reason for their existence. As a result, some AICs are not inhibited to 'repeat the Western pattern of some of the older churches in their doctrine, worship, polity, and to a large extent in their ethos'.¹⁵ No matter how one regards the independence of the AICs, they 'fully

of Missions, 1991), 5.

⁷ Paul Makhubu, *Who are the Independent Churches?* (Braamfontein: Skotaville Publishers, 1998), 24.

⁸ For examples of reactions against western missions, read Harris W. Mobley, *The Ghanaian's Image of the Missionary: An Analysis of the Published Critiques of Christian Missionaries by Ghanaians (1897-1955)*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970.

⁹ Ted Olsen, "Bishop Before His Time," *Christian History*, Issue 79 (Vol. XXII, No. 3) 10-11, 13, 15. See also, Wilbert R. Shenk, *Henry Venn – Missionary Statesman* (Ibadan: Orbis Books, 1983), 112, 113.

¹⁰ See Anderson, *African Reformation*, 27-29.

¹¹ In South Africa, according to Paul Makhubu, the Tomlinson's Report in 1955 listed thirty reasons for breakaways from white churches to form African Independent Churches. Most of the reasons were reactionary in nature. See, Paul Makhubu, *Who are the Independent Churches?* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1988), 20-38.

¹² John S. Pobee and Gabriel Ositelu II, *African Initiatives in Christianity: The growth, gifts and diversities of indigenous African churches – a challenge to the ecumenical movement* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1998), 4.

¹³ See, Kofi Asare Opoku, "A Brief History of Independent Church Movement in Ghana since 1862" in *The Rise of Independent Churches in Ghana*, Asempa Publishers (ed) (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1990): 12-21; Allan Anderson, *African Reformation*, 31-33; Ayegobyin and Ishola, *African Indigenous Churches*, 11-16.

¹⁴ Afe Adogame & Lazio Jafta, "Zionists, Aladura and Roho: African Instituted Churches" in Ogbu U. Kalu, ed. *African Christianity: An African Story* (Asmara, Eritrea: African World Press Inc., 2007), 272-274.

¹⁵ Harold Turner, *African Independent Church II: The Life and Faith of the Church of the Lord (Aladura)* (Oxford:

deserve their name; they are nobody's puppets'.¹⁶ As a result, they do not seek approval from any western church to develop their own doctrines, liturgies and mission; they are neither afraid nor embarrassed to be distinct from all other churches or Christian communions.

The African nature of AICs prompted Harold Turner to define AICs as 'a church which has been founded in Africa, by Africans and primarily for Africans'.¹⁷ Other scholars later modified the definition as, churches initiated or founded by Africans for Africans.¹⁸ Initially, such definitions seem legitimate but when one considers the spread of the AICs beyond the borders of Africa and the multiculturalism of their membership,¹⁹ one realizes that the AICs are not homogenous religious organizations founded in Africa for Africans.

Growth of the AICs

The growth and spread of African Independent Churches has been phenomenal. Though it is difficult to compute the exact number of AICs in Africa, 'there are at least 10,000 different AIC denominations across the continent'.²⁰ Philip Jenkins observes:

Every Easter, more than a million ZCC (Zion Christian Church) pilgrims gather for several days of celebrations at Zion City, the church's chief shrine in South Africa. To put it in perspective, the crowd gathered at the ZCC's pilgrimage is larger than that which greets the Pope in St Peter's Square on Easter morning.²¹

African Independent Churches can be found in about forty-three countries in Africa. In some countries, they form the largest population of Christians, as stated by Jenkins in 2002:

Only about 30% of Botswana's church members belong to familiar denominations like Anglicans, Methodists and Roman Catholics. Seven per cent more adhere to Pentecostal groups, while the remainder, almost two-thirds of Christian believers, belongs to AICs. In this region at least, independent groups continue to grow quickly, while membership in the mission churches stagnates.²²

Some AICs can be described as 'mega-denominations' since they have millions of congregants. Some of the mega-AICs are Zion Christian Church (ZCC) in South Africa, founded in 1924 by Engenas Lekganyane,²³ the Aladura group of churches and their appendages,²⁴ and the Church of Jesus Christ on Earth by His Special Envoy Simon Kimbangu (*Eglise du Christ sur la Terre par le Prophète Simon Kimbangu* (EJCSK)). It was established by Prophet Simon Kimbangu of the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1921.

Clarendon Press, 1967), xvi.

¹⁶ Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of a Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 68.

¹⁷ Harold Turner, *Religious Innovation in Africa* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1979), 92.

¹⁸ See Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 52. See also, Anderson, *African Reformation*, 45.

¹⁹ Pobee and Ositelu II, *African Initiatives in Christianity*, 52. See also, Afe Adogame, *The African Christian Diaspora: New Currents and Emerging Trends in World Christianity* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 70, 71.

²⁰ Thomas Oduro, Hennie Pretorius, Stan Nussbaum and Bryan Born, *Mission in an African Way: A Practical introduction to African Instituted Churches and their sense of mission* (Wellington, South Africa: Christian Literature Fund, 2008), 10.

²¹ Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 68.

²² Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 69.

²³ Read more about Zion Christian Church, Anderson, *African Reformation*, 98-106.

²⁴ Adogame, *The African Christian Diaspora*, 67

Today, the Kimbanguist Church is not only present in Congo (country of origin) but also in other countries in Africa, as in Angola, Congo/Brazzaville, Zambia, Central Africa, Burundi, South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Cameroon, Gabon, Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire, and other continents, as in Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Spain, Finland, Germany, England, Sweden, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Canada, Brazil and the United States. Statistics gathered in 1981 put at more than five million the number of Kimbanguists around the world.²⁵

Factors in Growth

The ability of leaders of the African Independent Churches to integrate African worldviews, personalities and concepts into their brand of Christianity attracts many people – including Christians from western mission churches and non-Christians – to them. The AICs are places where African worshippers feel at home because the worship styles, interpretation of scripture, emphasis on healing, interpretation of dreams and concept of *ecclesia* are not strange to them. Hannah Botsie, for instance, left the Methodist Church of Ghana to become a member of the Divine Healer's Church at Winneba, Ghana, because:

In the Methodist Church there was no healing, our dreams were never interpreted; we never had messages (i.e. prophetic messages). Nothing was done to heal us of our diseases and no word at all was said about our future. There was nothing spiritual about the Methodist Church.²⁶

In Africa, where most events are considered to have spiritual connotations and ramifications, practising a high sense of spirituality seems to be the *raison d'être* of the AICs. No wonder they are called 'spiritual churches' in Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria.²⁷

Their emphasis on prayer and fasting and its resulting efficacy equip their members to wage spiritual warfare against the forces of darkness and to seek protection from God. As a result, AIC leaders claim to be spiritual stalwarts. 'Politically, we are harmless; economically, we are feeble; socially, we are downtrodden; but spiritually, we are more than giants.'²⁸ They claim to be in close communion with the Holy Spirit even to the extent of 'catching' songs,²⁹ receiving directives to where and when they should missionize,³⁰ from the Second Person of the Trinity. Therefore, their followers approach them for solutions to what they perceive as spiritual challenges.

Their worship styles are vibrant and vigorous. 'When black people worship, it is with the entirety of their being. Singing and dancing go together... They become emotionally involved, especially in the Zionist and Pentecostal churches.'³¹ Women are not marginalized in AICs; their claim to being called into pastoral ministry and to lead denominations is respected. The use of their spiritual giftedness is also highly

²⁵ "Histoire du Kimbanguisme," Translated from French. www.kimbanguisme.net/histoire/histoire1.htm (accessed 26 January 2015).

²⁶ Robert W. Wyllie, *Spiritism in Ghana: A Study of New Religious Movements* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1980), 128.

²⁷ Ayegboyin & Ishola, *African Indigenous Churches*, 18. Note: the term "Spiritual Churches" was initially used to ridicule the AICs but it has now become normative.

²⁸ Wyllie, *Spiritism in Ghana*, 105.

²⁹ Thomas Oduro, "Church Music in the Life of African Christian Communities", in Roberta King, et al. *Music in the Life of the African Church* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2008), 81-99. See also, J. Akinyele Omoyajowo. *Cherubim and Seraphim: The History of an African Independent Church* (Lagos: NOK Publishers International, 1982), 61.

³⁰ Thomas A. Oduro, "'Arise, Walk through the Length and Breadth of the Land': Missionary Concepts and Strategies of African Independent Churches" in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 38, No. 2, April 2014, pp. 86-89.

³¹ Makhubu, *Who Are the African Independent Churches?* 25.

patronized.³² In fact, AICs put a greater premium on the giftedness of women than their gender. Therefore, the AICs are churches where women receive the dignity they deserve among humanity.

Receiving divine healing is a central point of attraction of the African Independent Churches. Ayegboyin and Ishola have rightly observed that:

Indeed, sickness is by far the most common reason which people give for attending AICs. Testimonies of healing, soundness and miracles are heard from many about their answered prayers. In quite a number of cases those concerned claim that they first went to the hospitals, and or consulted traditional leaders.³³

AIC leaders, at times, heal without the use of elements³⁴ while in most cases they use many elements to heal.³⁵ AICs believe that Jesus Christ, being ‘the same yesterday, today and tomorrow’,³⁶ still heals. They do not relegate healing to the time of Jesus Christ and the apostles. They believe also that there is no disease that is beyond the healing power of Jesus Christ so they neither panic nor doubt whenever they are called to pray for the sick to be healed. In fact, they habitually invite people who are sick to come to Jesus for healing in their congregations.

The growth of the AICs does not depend only on their attempts to make Christianity look African; it also depends, to a larger extent, on a conscious commitment to evangelism and mission. Engaging in a conversation with people with problems – depression, fear of demons, marital problems, single-parenthood, drug addiction, unemployment, nightmares, constant miscarriages and child mortalities, fear of the future, etc. – and inviting them to come to Jesus for a solution is the commonest evangelistic strategy. Some AICs invite members to testify to what God has done for them whenever they meet to worship. Testimonies tend to build the faith of the audience and expand their theological perceptions. Furthermore, testimonies are disseminated to non-members with the purpose of inviting them to join AIC congregations. Some AICs in Nairobi, Kenya, strategically choose to worship near bus terminals and open spaces just to attract people who, under normal circumstances, would not dare to listen to them.

Initially, the uniqueness of the ministries of the AICs caused many members of western mission-founded churches to defect from their mother churches to join them. There was, thus, a great concern of leaders of some western mission-founded churches either to find the causes of the stupendous growth of the AICs or to devise some means to reclaim their members.

Persecution of the AICs

David Barrett has rightly observed that ‘The history of modern African religious movements reveals a remarkably long list of movements and prophets that have fallen foul of colonial and other governments in Africa and have suffered persecution.’³⁷ The growth and spread of African Independent Churches is ironic when one considers the persecution some AIC forerunners endured at the hands of some colonial and African rulers for fear of instigating popular uprising due to their massive numbers of followers. The best-known ones are the burning of Kimpa Vita (1684-1706), also known as Donna Béatrice, and her son in the

³² Philomena Njeru Mwaura, “Gender and Power in African Christianity: African Instituted Churches and Pentecostal Churches” in Ogbu U. Kalu (editor), *African Christianity: African Story* (Eritrea: Africa World Press Inc., 2007), 359-388. See also the ministry of prophetess Agnes Okoh in, Thomas Oduro, *Christ Holy Church International: The story of an African Independent Church* (Lagos: Greater Heights Publishers, 2009), 71-98.

³³ Ayegboyin and Ishola, *African Indigenous Churches*, 19.

³⁴ Oduro, *Christ Holy Church International*, 122, 123.

³⁵ Anderson, *African Reformation*, 199, 200.

³⁶ Hebrews 13:8

³⁷ David Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968), 72.

Kongo kingdom at the command of King Pedro of Portugal and at the request of the Catholic Capuchin missionaries,³⁸ and the extradition of William Wade Harris from Ivory Coast to Liberia, his home country, after a successful evangelistic stint in Ivory Coast and western parts of Ghana.³⁹ Some AIC leaders who followed the footpaths of the precursors were equally persecuted by some colonial governments who were alarmed at their numerous followers and popular message. The popularity of Prophet Simon Kimbangu, after raising a dead girl back to life, caused some uncomfortable political ripples in the administration of the Belgian colonial rulers. Consequently, he was arrested, tried and imprisoned for thirty years until he died.

The adherence of some AIC movements to directives of their leaders rather than the orders of some colonial governments became fertile grounds for persecutions. The Bulhoek massacre in May 1921 in which the colonial government of South Africa assembled 800 policemen to forcefully evict the Israelites (followers of prophet Enoch Mgijima), from the holy village of Ntabelanga at Kamastone, in which nearly 200 Israelites were killed, is a clear example. The Israelites congregated at Ntabelanga at the instruction of Mgilima who prophesied an impending millennium. Mgilima and other Israelites were jailed.⁴⁰ Prophetess Nontetha Nkwenkwe, a Xhosa who was born about 1875 and grew up at a place near King William's Town in South Africa, was an illiterate widow with ten children to care for. She was a herbalist and seer before God called her to begin a prophetic movement. Her followers refused to kill locusts in defiance of a law passed by the colonial government.

According to her followers, Nontetha before she was arrested, had predicted that an invasion of locusts would sweep through the region. She proclaimed God had sent them as a punishment and decreed that none be killed. When a swarm of *voetganger* locusts descended on the area in September and October 1923, government officials ordered the people to kill them... When Nontetha's followers refused to kill the locusts, officials had a legal pretext for disrupting the movement.⁴¹

Prophetess Nkwenkwe was arrested and jailed in 1922. She was later released but banned from preaching. She disregarded the ban so she was labelled insane, 'a sufferer of dementia praecox or paranoia' and committed to mental hospitals at Fort Beaufort (1923) and at Pretoria in 1924 till she died on 20 May 1935.⁴² Some Christians from western mission-founded churches also persecuted the AICs. Such persecutions emanated from their perception of the AICs.

There was a time (and even today) when it was taught in the Established Churches that the Independent Churches are sects, Dissident churches, churches of ill-disciplined people, and therefore it was necessary to be careful not to mix oneself too much with these churches; if these lost sheep want to return to the fold let them repent and rid themselves of their dirty linen of independency.⁴³

This Madagascan perception of AICs was also shared by many members of western mission-founded churches in other parts of Africa. Consequently, the uniforms, flags, colours, style of singing, liturgies,

³⁸ Anderson, *African Reformation*, 47-51.

³⁹ Ayegboyin and Ishola, *African Indigenous Churches*, 39-46.

⁴⁰ Robert R. Edgar and Hilary Sapire, *African Apocalypse: The Story of Nontetha Nkwenkwe, a Twentieth-Century South African Prophet* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2000), 23. See also, "A History of the Bulhoek Massacre," www.sahistory.org.za/topic/history-bulhoek-massacre. (accessed 5 February 2015)

⁴¹ Edgar and Sapire, *African Apocalypse*, 29.

⁴² Edgar and Sapire, *African Apocalypse*, 25-87. Attempts by the government to proscribe Nkwenkwe's moved failed. Her followers formed the Church of Nontetha.

⁴³ Rev. Dr. Ratovonarivo, "The Independent Churches in Madagascar: A Brief Survey" in *African Independent Churches in the 80s*, Sam Babs Mala, ed. (Lagos: Gilbert, Grace and Gabriel Associates, 1983), 52.

doctrines, beliefs, choreographies, intellect, hermeneutics, homiletics and even worship styles of AICs have been ridiculed in various forms and degrees. Electronic and print media have been used extensively to vilify and demonize AICs and their leaders in many countries. African Independent Churches have, undoubtedly, been persecuted more severely than any Christian communion in Africa. The plight of the AICs can be likened to that of the Anabaptists in sixteenth-century Europe.

Contributions of the AICs to African Christianity

African Independent Churches can be said to have dramatically reformed the trend and perception of Christianity in Africa and of Africans when one considers the type of Christianity that was in place before their emergence. Theologically, they have inculcated African traditional concepts of God to give Africans a better understanding of God. They have accomplished this through the lyrics of their hymnodies, gospel songs and prayers.

Through the healing ministries of the AICs, Africans no longer perceive God as a transcendent God who should be approached through many human intermediaries for the forgiveness of sins and the efficacy of prayers. The intensity of their fasting and prayers, spiritual retreats, and their emphasis on living a spiritual life which is concomitant with being acceptable to God, have enabled Africans to retrieve their high sense of spirituality. AICs have reformulated the Christology of Africans. Jesus is no longer perceived only as a great moral teacher and a saviour but also a leader who pragmatically meets the needs of those who seek him. The Holy Spirit is now perceived as one who not only heals and regenerates but one who equips Christians to engage in battles with spiritual forces. African Christians no longer dread the mention of the name of the evil one and his cohorts or dismiss their reality as a figment of one's mind. By the testimonies of the AICs, African Christians believe that they are capable of resisting and overpowering Satan and his demonic alliances.

Liturgically, AICs have proven to Africans that God accepts contextual worship. During the consecration of the second bishop of the Cape Coast diocese of the Church of the Province of West Africa (the Anglican Church), John Pobee observed the enthusiasm of the congregation when they sang and danced to songs which emanated from the AICs. He later commented,

The atmosphere accorded well with African style – spontaneous dancing, singing, and enthusiasm at public meetings. What is interesting is that an historic church like the Anglican Church was called and was able... to borrow from the music and style of the African Independent Churches.⁴⁴

Pobee's observation is not peculiar to the Anglicans in Cape Coast. Many African Christian communities – including the ones established by western missionaries – now worship God by using their traditional choreographies, costumes, mother tongues, worldviews, cultural matrix, leadership concepts, rhythms, songs and instruments.

Missiologically, the AICs, though without mission professors, mission institutions, and mission committees, have spread, not only in African countries where they began, but beyond their countries of establishment to other African countries. AICs have planted many congregations in almost every continent of the world. Their missionary concepts and strategies are different from traditional western missionary concepts.⁴⁵ The spread of the AICs to other continents and African countries have made them the trailblazers of mission in reverse. Now, African Christians know that they can establish their congregations in foreign lands without necessarily receiving help from any church in the West.

⁴⁴ Pobee and Ositelu II, *African Initiatives in Christianity*, 1.

⁴⁵ Thomas A. Oduro, “‘Arise and Walk....’”, 86-88.

Socially, AICs have widened the understanding and scope of the *ecclesia* in Africa. The persecutions they endured and the lack of support from western Christians made them see themselves as the only ones to determine the qualitative, quantitative and financial growth of their churches. Following the trend of the AICs, African Christians now perceive the church as their own institution. As a result, Christianity is no longer referred to in Africa as 'the white man's religion'. Members of AICs see themselves as members of an extended African family – caring for one another as if they were genetic siblings.

Economically, AICs – though mostly poor and without receiving financial aid from the West – have built agricultural, health and educational institutions. AICs have proven to other Africans that the African Church can use her scarce resources to improve the economy of her immediate environment, just as western mission-founded churches, with some support from the West, have done in Africa.

Pastoral Training and Ecumenism

African Independent Churches use many pedagogies to train their leaders and members.⁴⁶ They also congregate in ecumenical bodies, the largest being the Organisation of African Instituted Churches (OAIC).

Conclusion

The emergence, meteoric growth, persecutions and contributions of African Independent Churches have enriched the story of Christianity in Africa and the world. It is not strange, therefore, that Pobee and Ositelu have stated emphatically, 'There is no way we can talk of world Christianity, much less Christianity in Africa, without taking account of this genre of AICs.'⁴⁷ Indeed, the AICs are 'the signature tune of African Christianity'.⁴⁸ Without taking account of them, it is difficult to either understand or appreciate African Christianity and its ramifications.

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⁴⁶ See Thomas Oduro, "Theological Education in African Independent Churches: A Plethora of Pedagogies" in Isabel Apawo Phiri and Dietrich Werner (editors), *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2013), 423-432.

⁴⁷ Pobee and Ositelu II, *African Initiatives in Christianity*, 5.

⁴⁸ Lamin Sanneh. "World Christianity and the new Historiography: History and Global Interconnections" in Wilbert R. Shenk (editor), *Enlarging the Story: Perspectives on Writing World Christian History* (Maryknoll, New York: 2002), 109.

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