

An Aspect of the Character of Christianity in Africa¹

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ABSTRACT

Much has been written on and about Christianity in Africa but with relatively little on the subject of understanding it. This is an alarming state of affairs if we take it that Christianity in Africa may soon become the pre-eminent expression of Christianity in the world. To stimulate, therefore, a critical discussion on the subject of understanding Christianity in Africa, I give my observations on an aspect of the character of Christianity in Africa, by which I mean its form. I argue that the interface between the Christian faith and Africa's 'enchanted' world is what predominantly gives shape to, and accounts for, Christianity in Africa. Although this is best seen in African Instituted Churches, it is also present in Mission Churches.

Introduction: Why Understand Christianity in Africa?

Currently, according to the study of Jenkins, 'there are about two billion Christians, of whom 530 million live in Europe, 510 million in Latin America, 390 million in Africa, and perhaps 300 million in Asia'.² If this is the case, then the majority of Christians are in the Southern Hemisphere. And as Jenkins goes on to note: 'By 2025, Africa and Latin America will vie for the title of the most Christian continent'.³ Indeed, given the spectacular growth of Christianity in Africa,⁴ African Christianity may well become the dominant form of Christianity there is on the globe, and whose numbers will contribute a visibly high proportion of

- 1 'Africa' as used in this study refers, with the exception of Ethiopia, to Africa south of the Sahara.
- 2 P. Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 9. For more on the growth of Christianity in Africa, see A. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996); J. Carpenter and L. Sanneh, eds., *The Changing Face of Christianity: Africa the West and the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); L. Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); and P. Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- 3 Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity*, 9.

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world Christians. For a variety of reasons, this, then, throws into sharp relief the importance of sharpening our *understanding of the character of Christianity in Africa* (by which I mean the collective characteristics of Christianity in Africa).⁵

The first concerns those who wish to work with or who must work within the context of Christianity in Africa. Prudence would have it that anybody wishing to work with African Christians or who must work within the context of Christianity in Africa would have his/her work made easier by an understanding of African Christianity. In addition, one would think that a prerequisite to any fruitful work with Christianity in Africa, or in the context of Christianity in Africa, would be a good understanding of the same. This may seem obvious but the history of Christianity in Africa tells a different story.⁶ Furthermore, it seems to me that the remarkable growth of Christianity in Africa makes it an essential component of the rich diversity of global Christianity and, as such, a part of global Christianity which needs to be understood.

The second, and perhaps the most important, reason has to do with the need of African Christians themselves to understand Christianity in Africa. It cannot be taken for granted that the spectacular growth of Christianity in Africa is matched proportionately by an understanding of the same by African Christians. Indeed, as the South African theologian, Tinyiko Maluleke, has shown (and I fully agree with him), there is a need for African Theologians to understand Christianity in Africa more profoundly. Maluleke⁷ argues that this is the case on account of some of the wretched experiences in Africa in places where Christianity held sway, or where Christianity in Africa was used as an instrument that facilitated those wretched experiences. In this regard, he cites Apartheid (where Christianity was used as basis for racial segregation), the Rwanda genocide (where Rwandan *Hutus* and *Tutsis* killed each other yet 90% of both groups claimed to be

4 'Between 1900 and 2000, the number of Christians in Africa grew from 10 million to over 360 million, from 10 percent of the population to 46 percent' (Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity*, 9).

5 So, when I write of understanding Christianity in Africa, I mean understanding the forms and manifestations of Christianity in Africa. This entails giving an answer, somewhat, to the questions: How does that Christianity look like and why does it look like that? I find this explanation helpful in giving precision to the concerns of my discussion, otherwise I would just have written of the importance of understanding Christianity in Africa rather than of '*understanding its character*'.

6 At a concrete level, the very formation of the so called 'African Instituted Churches' (more on these churches later) was a reaction to the dominance of western understanding and expression of Christianity in Africa. And when these churches were formed, 'Mission Churches' (more on these churches later) were not willing to try and understand their form of Christianity but, on the contrary, cast aspersions on them.

7 T. Maluleke, "What if we are Mistaken about the Bible and Christianity in Africa," in *Reading the Bible in a Global Village*, edited by J. Ukpong (Atlanta, SBL 2002), 151-172.

Christians), and the Kanungu massacre in Uganda (where a Christian group in Western Uganda was burnt to death by their leader when his prophecy of the end of the world on 31st Dec. 1999 did not come to pass). It is therefore obvious that not all is healthy with Christianity in Africa.

Moreover, as again pointed out by Maluleke, some leading African Christian theologians have shown the need for more understanding of Christianity in Africa on religious and, what I would call, ecclesial-health grounds. The first of these theologians is Simon Mbiti,⁸ who, in his own reflections on Christianity in Africa, confessed his desire to understand this Christianity more profoundly in order that he may 'understand the mysteries of God at work'. Implicit in this confession is Mbiti's feelings that he has not grasped Christianity in Africa adequately to understand the mysterious workings of God in the continent. Much has happened with Christianity in Africa since Mbiti made this confession in 1986, which makes Mbiti's call for a profound understanding of Christianity in Africa more urgent.

The other leading African Christian theologian showing the need to understand more of Christianity in Africa is Kā Mana.⁹ He warns (with examples) that unless African theological reflection redefines the range and direction of Christianity in Africa, spiritual confusion and doctrinal ambiguity may destroy the Christian faith in Africa. Indeed, as the wretched experiences alluded to above show, the numerical growth of Christianity in Africa should not be cast uncritically in positive image and hope, but ought to be examined critically with its limitations and weaknesses acknowledged. So we have two leading African Christian theologians concerned with the need to understand Christianity in Africa: one from the view point of religious appreciation, and the other from the view point of ecclesial-health, i.e., directing and sustaining Christianity in Africa.

A third reason that makes the understanding of Christianity in Africa critical is its potential to determine new directions for Christian life. Walls prescriptively puts it thus:

African Christianity must be seen as a major component of contemporary representative Christianity, the standard Christianity of the present age, a demonstration model of its character. That is, we may need to look at Africa today in order to understand Christianity itself ... Africa may be the theatre in which some of the determinative new directions in Christian thought and activity are being taken.¹⁰

For these reasons, it seems worth while to present my observations and analyses of Christianity in Africa from the perspective of its character. In consequence, this paper is an effort towards a better grasp of Christianity in

8 J. Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in Africa* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1986), ix.

9 K. Mana, *La Nouvelle Évangélisation en Afrique* (Paris: Karthala, 2000), 24.

10 A. Walls, *The Cross Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 119.

Africa.¹¹ More precisely, I wish to sketch out quite briefly but in a broad way¹² an understanding of an aspect of the character of Christianity in Africa. In order to do this, we need to take into consideration a significant part of the context of Christianity in Africa and, subsequently, how that context has determined an aspect of the character of Christianity in Africa. As we shall observe, the product of the interaction of this context and the Christian faith in Africa is a predominant element in giving Christianity in Africa its character.

The Context of Christianity in Africa

Let me begin by noting as Turaki¹³ and, earlier on, Idowu,¹⁴ amongst others make clear, the cosmology of Africa is encompassed by spirit beings: ancestors,

11 It is my view that more work on understanding Christianity in Africa and in particular its character is needed since there is relatively little we possess on this subject as such. To be more precise, there has been considerable studies describing African Christianity, for example P. Gifford, *New Dimensions in African Christianity* (Nairobi: All Africa Conference of Churches, 1992) and K. R. Ross, *Christianity in Malawi: A Source Book*, with a Foreword by K. M. Phiri (Zomba, Malawi: Mambo Press, 1996); studies on the history of Christianity in Africa (see for example B. Sundkler and C. Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), M. Shaw, *The Kingdom of God in Africa: A Short History of African Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), A. Hastings, *A History of African Christianity 1975-1990*, African Study Series 26 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) and C. P. Grove, *The Planting of Christianity in Africa*, Vol 3: 1878-1914, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1964); studies on African Churches (for example L. Mullings, "Religious Change and Social Stratification in Labadi, Ghana: The Church of the Messiah", in *African Christianity: Patterns of Religious Continuity*, edited by G. Bond (New York: Academic Press, 1996]) and D. Barret, *Schisms and Renewal in Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968); and even studies on the role/significance of Christianity in Africa, for example P. Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (London: Hurts and Co., 1998), L. Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983), K. Bediako, "The Significance of Modern African Christianity - a Manifesto", *Studies in World Christianity: The Edinburgh Review of Theology and Religion* 1 (1995), 51-67, and K. Bediako, "Africa and Christianity on the Threshold of the Third Millennium: The Religious Dimension", *African Affairs*, 90, 2000), and O. U. Kalu, ed., *African Christianity: An African Story*, (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 2005), but very little on understanding the character of Christianity in Africa. In fact, I have only come across one book (A. Hastings, *African Christianity: An Essay in Interpretation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1976) that does this if indirectly.

12 Details and particulars of what I discuss can be followed up in the relevant literature that I point to in my references. My intention here is to discuss an aspect of the character of Christianity in Africa which has not been an area of focus in discourse on Christianity in Africa (see preceding) in the hope of stimulating more reflection, discussion and writing on the same.

13 Y. Turaki, *Foundations for African Traditional Religion and Worldview* (Nairobi: Word Alive, 2006), 23-29.

14 E. B. Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (London: SCM, 1973), 139.

spirits, and divinities or deities. It could be further argued that to this should be added nature and natural forces (whether as animistic or theophanous). This supra-human or spirit world is understood to be hierarchically ordered. It is easy to overstate this and to imagine that African cosmology is in harmony, in the sense that all have a world perceived of as having spirit beings which exist in a neat hierarchic order. In fact, this is not the case. For example, some communities like the Shona of Zimbabwe¹⁵ may have a simple hierarchically ordered spirit world starting from humans (themselves having a hierarchical ordering) at the bottom, then ancestors, and then a Supreme Deity at the top, while others like the Yoruba of Nigeria¹⁶ have a complex hierarchically ordered spirit world, having humans at the bottom, then ancestors, then a horde of deities, and lastly a Supreme Deity at the top. Nevertheless, they are all in common believed and understood to be populated by spirit beings and also that, simple hierarchically ordered spirit worlds characterize East, Central, and Southern African societies while complex ordered spirit worlds characterize West African societies. To Africans, this higher spirit world is in constant interaction with the material world of humans, greatly influencing its fortunes; we could conceive of it actually as a world of spiritual cause and effect.¹⁷ We may call this worldview an 'enchanted'¹⁸ world.

One may be tempted to think, as suggested by Schoffeleers¹⁹ that such a phenomenon is limited to rural Africa, or has been attenuated by the economic and social modernization forces of globalization. But clearly this is not the case. This phenomenon is still alive in Africa even in the very big cities as shown by

15 M. L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Independent Churches*, Vol 2 (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), 51.

16 Idowu, *African Traditional Religion*, 139.

17 Some commentators on African Christianity, for example J. Harris, "The Magical Worldview in the African Church: What is Going On?" *Missiology* 28 (2000) 487-502, call this a magical worldview.

18 I am using the term 'enchanted' in this essay in a rather loose way to signify a high degree of consciousness of the spiritual world. This world is composed of entities that cannot be measured or identified in an empirical or scientific way but, according to the experience of those concerned, no less real.

19 M. Schoffeleers, "Black and African Theology in South Africa: A Controversy Re-examined", *Journal of Religion in Africa* 18 (1988), 99-124. Schoffeleers suggests this in the context of his argument that Black theology, and not African theology, took hold in South Africa because it was an urban creation unlike African theology which derived from peasant culture. This argument implies that the mentioned African cosmology does not hold sway in the urban centres of Africa because it is limited to peasant cultures. Indeed, according to him, the migration of blacks in South Africa from their rural homes to black townships meant that, 'the rural world-view which had been once a dominant ideological orientation for black South Africans, gradually lost its relevance and self-evidence' (101-2).

Setiloane's²⁰ earlier reflections, *contra* Schoffeleers, on the persistence of traditional world-view in Africa. Setiloane shows the persistence of this enchanted world among Africans in the cities in their attitudes towards marriage, in their view of ancestors, and in their perception of life as more than what can be physically verified. Concerning the last point, he writes:

The main point here is that the Africans' "world" of witchcraft (I use this word without the derogatory sense it often carries in the literature of Western scholars) and related ideas concerning the cause and cure of illness, does not leave him when enters the city.²¹

Moreover, there is considerable support for the argument advanced by Chabal²² that due to the current conditions of Africa, there is a re-traditionalization of Africa where 'individuals in Africa increasingly are, or are perceived to be, behaving according to norms, criteria, values and so on, more readily associated with what passes for "traditional" Africa than with the Africa which the colonial masters thought they had constructed'.²³ Put differently, there seems to be a revival, relatively speaking, of the traditional African worldview, contrary to the expectations that economic and social modernization following on the worldview of the European Enlightenment would eliminate it. This African worldview, in which we have a constant interaction of the physical and spiritual worlds, with the latter perceived to be heavily influencing the former, is a crucial part of the context of Christianity in Africa.

I suppose that one may argue that there are crucial contexts of Christianity in Africa other than the one I have pointed to above, such as poverty,²⁴ or post-colonial issues of socio-political and economic emancipation and reconstruction²⁵ since these are realities that are facing African Christians. Indeed, in a detailed discussion of the context of Christianity in Africa, Gifford²⁶ makes no mention of the 'enchanted' world which I have given above. Rather, he gives the ones

20 G. Setiloane, "How the Traditionalist Worldview Persists in the Christianity of the Soth-Tswana", in *Christianity in Independent Africa*, edited by E. Fashole-Luke (London: Rex Collings, 1978), 389-401.

21 Setiloane, "How the Traditional Worldview Persists in the Christianity of the Soth-Tswana", 408.

22 P. Chabal, "The African Crisis: Context and Interpretation", in *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*, edited by R. Werbner and T. Ranger (London: Zed Books, 1996), 29-54.

23 Chabal, "The African Crisis: Context and Interpretation", 33.

24 J-M. Éla, *My Faith as an African*, Translated from French by J. P. Brown and S. Perry (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), for example, argues that poverty was the pre-eminent context of Christianity in Africa.

25 J. Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1995), in discussing the urgent task at hand for African Theology presupposes this as the vital context for Christianity in Africa.

26 Gifford, *African Christianity*, 1-17.oip

that deal with historical forces of colonialism that continue to shape Africa, together with those of the socio-political and economic situations prevalent in Africa.²⁷ I do not dispute the significance of the purely political and economic situations in affecting and determining the immediate response of African Christians. But these situations as contexts for African Christianity are not divorced from the one I have just discussed. In fact, it is on account of the relationship between these contexts and that of the 'enchanted' world, that the pre-eminence of the 'enchanted' world as context of Christianity in Africa emerges. This is because for most Africans, regardless of their past, and of their socio-economic and political contexts, as Gifford himself notes elsewhere, 'witchcraft, spirits and ancestors, spells and charms are primary and immediate and natural categories of interpretation'.²⁸ Further still, we may add, Africans are bound to interpret the historical, socio-political and economic realities facing them, especially at a personal and local level, through their 'enchanted' world.²⁹ It is on account of this that this 'enchanted' world is ubiquitous in Africa: apparently no sphere of life in Africa is spared the influence of this so called traditional worldview. It is in view of this state of affairs that I am convinced that this 'enchanted' world is a predominant context of Christianity in Africa. This being the case, I contend that no approach to any appreciation of the character of Christianity in Africa would be adequate unless thought is given to how Christianity in Africa grapples with this 'enchanted' world that dominates African consciousness. To this we briefly turn now.

A Character of Christianity in Africa

As a result of the ubiquity of this 'enchanted' world Christianity in Africa, as surveys from various perspectives and concerns show, is heavily characterized

27 The ones Gifford (*African Christianity*, 1-17) gives (all of which are socio-political and economic in nature, at least *prima facie*) are: 1. The legacy of colonialism; 2. Neo-Patrimonialism (by which he means that Africans have a system of governance that revolves around authority and loyalty and whose (negative) manifestation in Africa is corruption and clientelism); 3. Externality (by which he means that African states, on account of their dependency on the outside world, are not determining their own destiny but are, in a relatively pronounced way, perpetually reacting to forces from outside their borders); 4. Moves (from both internal and outside forces) for the reform of society and; 5. Civil society (especially in its ends in Africa of both helping to check-and-balance the state and aiding it to fulfil its role).

28 Gifford, *African Christianity*, 382.

29 Interpretation in turn affects responses to, and practices that affect these realities.

by its efforts to deal with the 'enchanted' world.³⁰ In the words of Gray: 'These fundamental assumptions about the nature of the world and the place of human beings within it have profoundly influenced the development of African Christianity'.³¹ To put it perhaps in a clearer perspective, *Christianity in Africa has had to (and still does) address the 'enchanted' world that African Christians find themselves immersed in, and this predominates the forms that Christianity in Africa assumes.* What orientation are African Christians to have towards these spiritual entities which they cannot ignore and are particularly prone to deal with in times of crisis? Are they to be taken as illusory or real? If real, are they to be identified with forces in conflict with the Christian God, or benevolent and not contrary to the Christian God? If they are in opposition to the Christian God, how are African Christians supposed to deal with them? If they are benevolent, how are they to be incorporated into the Christian faith? Nowhere else do we see this world being addressed in earnest in Christianity in Africa than in the so-called 'African Instituted'³² Churches' (AICs),³³ and in particular, following Sundkler's typology of AICs,³⁴ in the Zionist AICs. (Of course, the so-called

30 See for example F. B. Welbourn, *East African Christian* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 34-42; Mullings, "Religious Change", 75-81; P. Gray, *Black Christians and White Missionaries* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1990), and M. Schoffeleers, "Pentecostalism and Neo-Traditionalism: The Religious Polarization of a Rural District in Southern Malawi", in *Christianity and the African Imagination*, edited by D. Maxwell and I. Lawrie (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

31 R. Gray, *Black Christians*, 6.

32 Although still called 'African Independent Churches' in some places, this reference has largely been discarded in official reference to these churches.

33 For definitive studies on AICs, see Barret, *Schism and Renewal in Africa*, and P. Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, (Oxford University Press, 1961; Repr. London: Lutterworth, 1970).

34 Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, 38-59, mapped out AICs of Southern Africa into two types: Ethiopian and Zionists. Even though he came up with these types on the basis of the historical events of the AICs in Southern Africa, his typology has been found to be very useful as it corresponds, to a large degree, with the observation made on AICs in other parts of Africa. 'Ethiopian' AICs have one thing in common, which is that they have no unique religious feature that marks them off from the orthodoxy of the older, or Mission churches. Their main motivation usually is ecclesial independence. Whereas, 'Zionist' churches have healing, speaking with tongues, purification rites or taboos, or some other religious feature as their main expression of faith and seem primarily not to be motivated by ecclesial independence. For more on typologies of AICs, see H. W. Turner, "A Typology for African Religious Movements", *Journal of Religion in Africa* 1 (1968), 1-34; J. B. Kailing, "Inside, Outside, Upside Down: In Relationship with African Independent Churches", *International Review of Mission* 77 (1988), 51-56; and A.H. Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century*, (Asmara: Africa World Press, 2001) 3-22.

Mission Churches³⁵ have strived to address this as well but in a relatively less pronounced way, primarily because of the missionary legacy to deny the African worldview in question here, and because Africans were often ejected from those churches when they decided to address their 'enchanted' world with their Christian faith.³⁶) It is on this account that I proceed to look at the characteristics of the AICs and use those observations as the basis of my explication of the character of Christianity in Africa which I have just mentioned.

Ositelu II and Pobee³⁷ isolate the following as the characteristics of the Zionist AICs: experience of the spirit, a penchant for healing and exorcism, personal testimonies, protest movements and rediscovery of the earliest Christian communities' self-understanding of 'the way'. A few comments here are in order. Of the enumerated characteristics, healing and exorcism, and the experience of the spirit (which is on account of its connection with healing) seem the most fundamental in AICs, so much so that all Zionist AICs share these characteristics.³⁸ This is the reason why Sundkler, when comparing the Zionist AICs to the Catholic and Protestant Churches, wrote: 'While the Roman Church is an institute of Grace through its sacraments, and the Protestant Church in Africa appears as an institute of the word through teaching and preaching, the

35 As opposed to AICs, these are churches that have, in the words of Turner, "Typology for African Religious Movements", 10, 'developed from modern missionary work, together with the churches of white settlers and administrators... They range through most of the familiar names in the ecclesiastical spectrum of the West Anglican, Baptist, Congregational, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, ...'.

36 For more on this see G. Duncan and O. Kalu, "Bakuzufu: Revival Movements and Indigenous Appropriations in African Christianity", in *African Christianity*, 278-307, and P. Mwaura, "Gender and Power in African Christianity", in *African Christianity*, 446-468.

37 J. S. Pobee and G. Ositelu II, *African Initiatives in Christianity: the Growth, Gifts and Diversities on Indigenous African Churches – a Challenge to the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: WCC, 1998), 40-43.

38 And for that reason Zionist AICs are also called 'spirit' or 'prophet-healing' churches. For helpful readings on, especially, the 'Zionist' AICs, see, for general studies, G. C. Baëta, *Prophetism in Ghana: A Study of Some "Spiritual" Churches* (London: SCM, 1962); D. Barret, ed., *African Initiatives in Religion* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1971); F. K. Githieya, *The Freedom of the Spirit: African Indigenous Churches in Kenya* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997); P. Makhubu, *Who Are the Independent Churches?* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1988); and A. B. Ramussen, *Modern African Spirituality: The Independent Spirit Churches in East Africa* (London: British Academic Press, 1996). For studies on specific 'Zionist' churches, see J. D. Y. Peel, *Aladura: A Religious Movement Among the Yoruba* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968); M. L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches*, Vol 1 (The Hague: Mouton, 1974); M-L. Martin, *Kimbangu: An African Prophet and His Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975); S. S. Walker, *The Religious Revolution in the Ivory Coast: The Prophet Harris and the Harrist Church* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983); and H. L. Pretorius, *Ethiopia Stretches Out Her Hands Unto God: Aspects of Transkeian Indigenous Churches* (London: Rex Rollings, 1993).

Independent Church, the Zionist type, is an institute of healing'.³⁹ This phenomenon is well recognized. In his study, Anderson highlights this phenomenon thus: 'Healing and protection from evil are the most prominent practices in the liturgy of many AICs and are probably the most important elements in their evangelism and church recruitment especially in the early stages of their development'.⁴⁰

It follows that it is in these churches where Christianity is expressed chiefly as a healing faith that the 'enchanted' world of Africans is clearly tackled, and in so doing not only bringing about a particular expression of Christianity, but also having the Christian faith in Africa applied directly to meet the felt needs of Africans.⁴¹ This is because to the African, sickness is related to this 'enchanted' world. In the words of Hastings:⁴²

African concepts of health and sickness were an absolutely integral part of the single mesh of social structure and religious consciousness inside which people lived unhesitatingly. ...It is common place that in theory Africans regularly explained deaths (at least the deaths of any except the very old) and unexpected misfortune in terms of spiritual agencies. They did not deny that there was a natural causality of sickness, caused by the body simply breaking down or coming into contact with dangerous physical substances.... (but) a second type of causality was posited – one relating to spiritual forces. This duality of explanation, physical and spiritual to be found in traditional African interpretations of sickness is not in fact so far different from a similar duality in the thinking of most Christians, but whereas the latter largely, though not wholly, relate the spiritual dimension to God alone, Africans on the contrary seldom relate the spiritual dimension to God but rather to the activities of their ancestors, other spirits or – alternatively – malevolent neighbours (who may, of course, have set the spirits on them). ...It was as a consequence necessary for good treatment to tackle both the physical ailment and the deeper moral 'ground' for the trouble.⁴³

So in Africa, one is sick because an ancestor is displeased, or some hostile spirit has invaded one's life, or because an evil spell has been cast on one, etc. In

39 Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, 220.

40 A. H. Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century*, 35.

41 See J. Loewen, "Mission Churches, Independent Churches, and the Felt Needs in Africa", *Missiology* 4 (1976), 409-419, and Lugwanya, "Medicine, Spiritual Healing and African Response", *Africa Theological Journal* 23 (2000) for more on AICs' relationship to felt needs in Africa.

42 Though he writes of the past, what he says, as I have argued in the previous section of this paper, still holds true in Africa today. Westerlund's (D. Westerlund, "Spiritual Beings as Agents of Illness", in *African Spirituality: Forms, Meaning and Expressions*, edited by J. K. Olupona (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 2001) thorough study of a typical view of illness in African society is helpful in clarifying this point; see also G. C. Oosthuizen, *The Healer-Prophet in Afro-Christian Churches* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), J. P. Kiernan, "The 'Problem of Evil' in the Context of Ancestral Intervention in the Affairs of the Living in Africa", *Man* 19 (1982), 287-301, and A. Shorter, *Jesus and the Witchdoctor: An Approach to Healing and Wholeness* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985).

43 Hastings, *A History of African Christianity*, 64-65.

various ways, then, AICs deal with sickness by invoking power and protection by means of the Christian faith against these causes of sickness, and also by the ability to isolate (through prophets and other charismatic figures) the particular source of a sickness, and subsequently provide a Christian solution to the same.

The expression of the Christian faith as a healing faith is what gives AICs great appeal among Africans as particular manifestations of Christianity, because they apply the faith to the felt needs of Africans which have been occasioned by their 'enchanted' world. As Ndiokere puts it: 'The Simple truth has to be accepted that if there were no healing mission there would be no meaningful Independent [Instituted] Churches; if there were no sick people or individuals craving for security, there would be no followers'.⁴⁴ It is also precisely for this reason that various forms of Pentecostalism, which have been in Africa for a while,⁴⁵ are fast taking root (if not already) as forms of Christianity in Africa. Such an observation should not be taken to mean that the Mission churches are left out completely in matters of healing (and with it an appeal to Africans). In bringing this fact to our attention, Mana writes that: "It is important to note that exorcism, which was a domain somehow resigned for sects and marginal churches, has now forcefully entered the domain of established churches ... this has led theologians such as Monsignor Milingo of Zambia, Father Hebga of Cameroon and Father Abekan of Côte d'Ivoire, to theorize about the struggle against the devil".⁴⁶ Certainly, there have been developments in the Mission churches which have seen them move away significantly from the forms of Christianity passed on to them by the missionaries.⁴⁷ These are especially through charismatic groups

44 N. Ndiokwere, *Prophecy and Revolution: The Role of the Prophets in the Independent African Churches and in Biblical Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1981), 57.

45 D. Maxwell, "Christianity Without Frontiers: Shona Missionaries and Transnational Pentecostalism", in *Christianity and the African Imagination*, edited by D. Maxwell and I. Lawrie (Atlanta, SBL, 2002) The comprehensive study on Pentecostalism in Southern Africa underlines this point. See also, P. Gifford, *African Christianity: A New Dimension*, African Challenge Series (Ibadan: Sefer, 1993); H. Cox, *Fire from Heaven: the Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Cassell, 1996), 243-262; and O. Kalu, "'Globalisation' and Religion", in *Uniquely African? African Christian Identity from Cultural and Historical Perspectives*, Religion in Contemporary African Series, edited by J. L. Cox and Gerrie Ter Haar (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003), 215-240.

46 K. Mana, *Christians and Churches of Africa Envisioning the Future*, Theological Reflections From the South (Yaoundé, Cameroon: Regnum Africa, 2002), 85-86.

47 We may understand these developments as the Africanization of Mission churches, so that today we can refer to the Mission churches as the; African Anglican church, African Presbyterian church, African Methodist church, African Baptist churches, and even the African Roman Catholic Church etc.

and individuals⁴⁸ within them that have resulted in the Mission churches dealing with healing and exorcism in a way that resonates with the laity in those churches. As Lugwanya notes:

some established Mission Churches 'are beginning to turn a new leaf by way of allowing evidently gifted "spiritual" healers in their various congregations freedom to perform this function under the umbrella of the church instead of misunderstanding them, describing what they are doing as fetish, occultic and devilish and thus forcing them out to establish their own churches'.⁴⁹

In the Anglican Church of Kenya, for example, it is not uncommon today to have churches conducting healing services once a month within their regular Sunday services. During such services, divine power for healing is invoked. Thirty years ago and further back in time, such services were alien to the Anglican Church of Kenya.⁵⁰

In regard to the spirit world, the AICs' beliefs and, therefore, responses and practices, are also variable. But before I look at them, it is important to note, as I earlier mentioned, that AICs relation to the spirit world of Africa is related to healing. This is principally because (given the cosmology of Africans which I looked at), the wellbeing or problems of a community and the individual within it, its preservation or demise, is determined by the spirits in the spirit world. Accordingly, any healing on offer is by this very fact rooted in the spirit world. Now, there are three ways that AICs relate to the spirits in African cosmology, which I turn to briefly.

There are those AICs which have substituted the Holy Spirit, angels and other servant-spirits as the ones through whom God's healing and other activity is mediated, for the myriad spirits populating African cosmology. This replacement has been effected by the demonization of the various spirits in the African cosmos

48 This is one of the reasons that makes Kalu tie the relationship of newer forms of Pentecostalism in Africa with Mission churches closely. He makes the observation that the newer forms of Pentecostalism, whose emergence he dates to the 1970s, are a 'third response' of Africans to missionary expressions of Christianity (after 'Ethiopianism' in the 19th Century and Zionists and Aladura at the beginning of the 20th Century) which 'arose from inside the mission churches urging for the full gospel' (Kalu "'Globalisation' and Religion", 223). See also C. N Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches of Ghana* (Amsterdam: Boekencentrum, 2002) for more on the same. This observation is noteworthy since there is likelihood of this point being overlooked in studies on African Christianity. Anderson (*African Reformation*, 167-190), for example, seems oblivious of this connection in his study of African Christianity.

49 L, Lugwanya, "Medicine, Spiritual Healing and African Response", *Africa Theological Journal* 23 (2000), 32

50 In fact, there is now a 'healing service' included in the Anglican Church of Kenya's official prayer book, *Our Modern Services*, (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 2002).

as opposed to (or even compromising) the Lordship of Christ or as harmful to Christians, thus seeking to banish them. So, for example, Malone in his study of an AIC church in Zambia ('The Mutumwa Church') observed that the spirit beings (especially *fibanda* and *ngulu*) in the traditional world of the Bemba (which before may have been seen as benevolent or malevolent depending) are now:⁵¹

clearly lined up on the side of Satan as his followers and accomplices in evil whose main purpose is the destruction of humans through disease and death. ...They are understood as somehow part of a unitary force of evil, a form of conspiracy which both absorbs and grows with the accumulation of human wickedness and maliciousness, a power which persists with even greater intensity after death and which can have such disastrous effect on the health and well-being of the living (24).⁵²

Such AICs on the whole tend to offer a very strong healing ministry, normally through it's spiritual' or 'gifted' healers, that is seen to be effective.

Other AICs, quite in contrast to the ones I have summarily looked at above, have accommodated some of the spirits in African cosmology, and African Christians have continued to relate to them, alongside their Christian faith, for healing and other functions. Walls argues that this is especially the case with second or later generations of African Christianity. He writes: 'In later "Christian", generations, those who resort to old powers usually intend no apostasy, no abandonment of the Christian framework... Rather, they have run out of resources to face the difficulties of the contemporary world, and are looking for additional resources beyond the Christian framework'.⁵³ What he says may well be the case in some instances, but I think that it is most likely that later 'Christian' generations are going back for healing and help to the spirits of their African cosmology, but apparently still holding on to the Christian faith, because their churches are failing to offer them healing and protection or, the healing and protection that they are offering them seems not to work. This is the reason why the AIC churches that demonize African spirits have a strong healing ministry to offer and which is also seen to work, otherwise, their members would revert back to the spirits in the African world, as is the case in point here.

51 C. D. Malone, "The Mutumwa Church of Peter Mulenga", *Journal of Religion in Africa* 17 (1987), 24.

52 On reading the preliminary draft of this paper, Professor Jesse Mugambi remarked that this reaction to the spirit world of Africa was actually preceded by missionaries in Africa. He brought it to my attention that we have numerous examples of past missionaries in Africa teaching that the spirits in the African world were evil. Spirits such as the 'jok', in the greater Luo peoples groups (in East and Central Africa), and 'ngoma' among the peoples of central Kenya, were taught by missionaries to be evil. Yet in the African world, they were good or evil.

53 A. Walls, "African Christianity in the History of Religions", *Studies in World Christianity: The Edinburgh Review of Theology and Religion* 2 (1996), 192. See D. Philip, *Bishops and Prophets in a Black City: African Independent Churches in Soweto Johannesburg* (London: Rex Collings, 1975), 185ff, for a concrete example.

Although I have no written study on any AIC to support this, my experience with some African Christians in East Africa points to a third belief and response to the spirit world. Here, the AICs demonstrate or show that compared to the Christian God, the Holy Spirit, angels (or other Christian servant-spirits) which have replaced them, the spirits in African cosmology are not as powerful or are simply surpassed by the Christian spirits. In consequence, the spirits in African cosmology are made redundant (and thus abandoned) for healing and other functions. For example, in the course of my pastoral work in Western Kenya I encountered AIC members who went to church specifically to pray for rain. In the past, they would have gone to the rain-maker to consult the spirits or ancestors in order for rain to fall. I am also aware of AIC members going to church to ask God to speak to them by his Spirit through their leader (a prophet figure) concerning a problem they have or about their future, or for prayers to God for healing. Previously, they would have gone to seek diviners to consult spirits on their behalf and subsequently counsel them concerning a problem they have or their future (which many Africans still do!). In both these cases, they have abandoned the spirits in African cosmology not because they view them as harmful or demonic, but rather because they are convinced that they have more powerful spirits now in their Christian faith, more capable of granting them what they seek.

In any given AIC, therefore, one is bound to find one of these three enumerated beliefs and responses to the spirit world predominating. This understood, we need to note here that what is common in all the three responses to the spirit world is that the myriad spirits in African cosmology are recognized (not denied or rejected) and dealt with variously,⁵⁴ but accordingly, by the AICs' perception of the Christian faith. In other words, the AICs are applying, quite starkly, the Christian faith to the world of Africans. This is the reason why AICs (together with various forms of Pentecostalism) have great appeal among Africans as witnessed in their numerical growth relative to Mission churches.

Conclusion

In short, the essential point of the foregoing is that the forms of Christianity in Africa have been dictated by the context in Africa and in particular by the 'enchanted' world of this context. As a result, African Christianity, properly understood, is in a significant way the product of the interface between the

54 The variety of responses should not surprise us for, as the various typologies of AICs indicate, there is no single form of Christianity in Africa but rather a variety. What we are arguing here is that their forms are all chiefly determined by their interaction with the 'enchanted' world of Africa.

Christian faith and the 'enchanted' world of Africa. This 'enchanted' world has considerably shaped Christianity in Africa, for in the efforts to apply the Christian faith to this ubiquitous world, Christianity in Africa has been, and is *still being*, fashioned. As it were, the product of this interface is a predominant aspect of the character of Christianity in Africa. Any understanding of the character of Christianity in Africa, and any meaningful engagement with Christianity in Africa must reckon with this and all the more because unless African experience of life and the resultant perception of that life changes drastically, this aspect of the character of Christianity in Africa will be with us for the foreseeable future. And it may well be the pre-eminent manifestation of contemporary Christianity.