

African Initiated Churches as interlocutors of African spirituality of liberation against colonial spirituality of the empire

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Prof. Vuyani Vellem was a scholar of Black Theology of Liberation. However, he placed the African Initiated Churches (AICs) at the centre of his heart as a basis for African spirituality of liberation. He believed that the whole of African life is infiltrated by spirituality which is based on African religiosity. He mentioned African religiosity as an alternative to what he expressed as 'authoritative salvationist dispensation of Western religiosity'. The AICs present a formidable platform for 'un-thinking' colonial religiosity. He extended the notion of 'un-thinking' the West beyond the cognitive space and embraced spirituality, hence cognitive spirituality. This article, therefore, argues that the AICs are the protagonists in the interlocution project of African spirituality of liberation. They are formidable giants in unshackling African spirituality from Western Christian spirituality and its expansionism that attempts to unseat the liberation paradigm of African spirituality. The author's approach will, therefore, be to identify and analyse selected areas in the ministry praxis of AICs in their quest for African spirituality of liberation. In order to reach this objective, the author will examine the subject of African spirituality, by discussing colonial spirituality of the empire that gave rise to the AICs and find out the liberating spirituality of the AICs. At the end of this discourse, the author will conclude that the AICs succeeded to not only preserve, but also to construct, contextualise, protect and promote African spirituality of liberation against the antics of the empire.

Contribution: Based on the thoughts of the late Prof. Vuyani Vellem about the role of AICs within the space of African spirituality of liberation, this article not only provides insights and better understanding, but also highlights the ministry praxis of the AICs on this subject against the imperial spirituality. This study, therefore, combines the notions of multi and transdisciplinary religious elements of the focus of this journal.

Keywords: African spirituality; AICs; Western Christianity; empire; Black Theology; OAIC.

Introduction

Vuyani Vellem was a black Reformed Christian (2014:1), a minister in the Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa. He was also a scholar of Black Theology of Liberation (BTL) (2017:1). He drank, dreamt and immersed himself deep into it, the evidence of which reflected in his writings. He viewed it as 'a theology of life' (2015:2). Despite the tensions that exist between mainline churches and scholars of theology on one side, and the African Initiated Churches (AICs) on the other side of the spectrum as alluded by an AIC leader, Archbishop Ngada and others (Ngada 1999:4), Vellem had an important place for the AICs in his heart. He regarded the AICs as an important element for the spirituality of liberation for the Africans. In his own words, he stated (2014):

As the site of the spirituality for liberation, African religiosity as expressed by AICs, ... is not merely a quest for the inclusion of the African moral and ethical dispensation in the Western salvationist hegemonic forms of religiosity, but a well of liberating resources for life and consciousness on its own, and against extinction. (p. 5)

Vellem considered the AICs as those who can play an important role in reconstructing, promoting and securing the 'free dispensation of moral and ethical thought that shaped the lives of the black African people' (2014:1) from the terror and destruction of the Western empire. The author decided to use the term 'empire' to indicate Christianity from the global north that supported colonial

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governments to promote their political interests. Vellem understood it the same way as meaning the direct imperial control of Western Christianity that went along with colonialism (p. 3). Verkuyl (1978:163) expressed it well in his description of English missionaries as 'covert imperialists interested more in British empire than in the kingdom of God'.

To provide a better understanding of Vellem's concept of 'unthinking' the Western empire by the AICs, the author will explain about African spirituality, identify the elements of the colonial spirituality of the empire that gave rise to the AICs and find out the aspects of liberation spirituality of the AICs. The notion of 'unthinking' the West is used in this article to mean that the AICs refuse to employ Western religious cosmology as their point of reference.

Analysing the debate on African spirituality

In order to better understand Vellem's view on the AICs' praxis regarding 'unthinking' the West and unshackling African indigenous dispensation from the disruption of the Western empire, it is imperative to proceed the debate around the many faces of African spirituality. This could be observed from Marsh-Lockett and West (2013:3) who reasoned that the meaning of African spirituality can generate varied and even conflicting definitions or expressions. They base this view from their opinion that, 'Africa is a land mass of diverse population groups with distinct cultural beliefs and traditions' (p. 3). Oduyoye (2019:20), when referring to the many variants of definitions of spirituality, observed and contended that it has many sides. She further highlights that spirituality responds to the demands of 1 Corinthians 12:7: 'To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good'. She determined the correct definition of this concept from the relationship between what she called, 'prayer prayed and life lived' (p. 20). In this way, she further envisaged spirituality from the life of the earliest disciples whereby authentic seeing of the Lord was the manner of living in imitation of Christ's life '... a life lived with Christ love'. She argues that the Spirit moves and inspires and this results in what the body does. The struggle for survival, built into all that life has, is the primary gift that women hold dear (p. 20). Lombaard (2012:111) touched on the question of biblical spirituality and stated that it is an old concept by highlighting the fact that it has recently been acknowledged as an academic discipline, hence Biblical Spirituality as a study field.

It is difficult to describe spirituality as it has many sides. Vellem (2017:1) recognised this aspect and came to include his concept of *unthinking* the West as part of spirituality which he also gives a Nguni translation, *uMoya*. Oduyoye (2019:21) further supports his view by recognising this difficulty from the fact that spirituality does not even translate into her language, *Mfantse*. This word is usually coupled with words like combat, justice, mutual respect, sustenance and empowerment in the face of hostility.

Associated with spirituality is the will to improve the quality of lives of others and oneself.

Spirituality is part and parcel of the life of faith. Vellem (2014:5) argued that it 'embraces one's whole religious experience – beliefs, convictions, patterns of thought and emotions – about the ultimate understanding of the transcendent'. Lombaard (2012:114) takes it further by reasoning that it has to do with the search for 'meaning-personal, faith-orientated and existential from the Bible for today'. Within the Christian lines, there is emphasis on biblical studies and described it as an attempt to live life in obedience to the Gospel. Spirituality is a Christian response to the aspects of life such as political, social, environmental, cultural and economic context of one's lived experience. It is a fulfilment of one's Christian vocation or just being a Christian. Vellem (2015) added as follows along the lines of BTL:

The spirituality for life in a Black Theology of liberation is, amongst others, the energy to holding on to life in conditions of death. All of life is regarded as spiritual without any dichotomies; hence, a cry for life and that power to resist death, providing strength to live, puts our understanding of God as embedded in the struggles of the marginalised. (p. 2)

There is also another element of spirituality that could be called medieval spirituality. The expressions of this could be found within monasticism, liturgical practices, preaching, and Eucharistic discipline (Oduyoye 2019:21). This spirituality was preserved in drama, events of the crusades, veneration of the saints, pilgrimages and in imposing cathedrals. This era was also marked by a heritage of women spirituality. Unfortunately, some of them ended in death as they were accused of witchcraft (p. 21).

The terms spirituality and religiosity have been confused and employed interchangeably in some academic circles. Vellem (2014:2) prefers to use these concepts synonymously as part of African response to the disruption caused by Western Christianity to African spirituality. Soédé (2018:421) defined both religion and spirituality in a holistic sense. He argued that, 'religion is all encompassing as it can never be separated from all these phenomena. It is a way of life as it can never be separated from the public life'. Oduyoye (2019) as has been seen earlier in this article, limits the holistic aspect to spirituality. On the other hand, Adogame and Pickard (2010) seemed to define religion in institutional terms as they argued:

Whenever we look for religion, we find it in churches, mosques, temples, synagogues, prayer meetings, pilgrimages, or in the solitude of individual holy places. We find it in the ways that people in such places interact with one another, carry out their religious duties, and envision a universe that makes those duties meaningful. (p. 1)

Women played an important role within the realms of both African and Christian spiritualities. Vellem (2014) mentioned Nontetha Nkwenkwe as:

[O]ne of the remarkable examples of a religious leader, and in this case a woman, a seer and prophetess who was incarcerated

by colonial authorities for resisting to submit to psychic-cultural dominance of the West. (p. 2)

To extend Vellem's view, Oduyoye (2019:21) disclosed that women were leaders in spiritual practices such as prayers and communion with Jesus. They were encouraged by their spirituality to choose to suffer and die for their faith. Christian spirituality promotes inclusiveness of human love and encourages finding Christ in all people everywhere as well as hospitality. Spirituality is demonstrated in a life lived for all in which God's mercy is asked for all. Oduyoye (2019:22) acknowledged that women want praxis on spirituality. She stated that women, 'have focused on the need for word to become action and for theory to engineer praxis' (p. 22). She propagated the Christian spirituality that acts for the wholeness of the whole community and the individuals.

African spirituality is so deeply rooted amongst Africans that even those in diaspora, maintained their spiritual systems in different ways. West (2011:47) was therefore correct that the survival of what she termed Africanity indicates the undercurrent of a traditional African worldview that would be transformed but not extinguished altogether. She holds that traditional African rituals and ideologies will remain part of the black oral culture. They will claim their spiritual authority from Africa. With a sharp focus on African Americans, Marsh-Lockett and West (2013) observed this in literary expressions of African spirituality. They noted a unique dimension of diasporic cultural and artistic expressions originating in the African spiritual world. The said artistic expressions that are spiritually infused:

[C]ontinue to inform and shape the public and private life of the diasporic Africans, and they continue to find a way into black art, asking an ongoing question: namely, 'who are we?' (p. 4)

This demonstrates a return to the origins or back to the spiritual roots that not only anchors, but also controls the cosmos. Hawley (in Marsh-Lockett & West 2013:6) seemed to support this view when he contends that although Islam and Christianity are formidable religious influences to the African societies, Africans in large numbers still look at traditional religions as their bridge to an idyllic past spiritual experience.

Can one intellectualise spirit and reason? Vellem (2017:1) described the combination of faith and reason, that is, BTL and Black Consciousness (BC) as expressions of good news. Du Bois (in Marsh-Lockett & West 2013:6) attempted to answer this question although it was regarded as paradox in some circles. He attempted to reconcile his commitment to sociology with his faith in black subjectivity. He tried to make use of sociology as a means for unshackling the mysteries of spiritual experience and identity because of the tensions between modernity and his sense of African spirituality. Manigault-Bryant (in Marsh-Lockett & West 2013:6) holds that at some stage, Du Bois came to understand African spirituality as central to humanising the black body, but also as being important to understand the emerging

world economy and its encounters with a black spiritual world.

African spirituality of liberation should be one that projects God the Father, Son (Jesus) and Holy Spirit as well as salvation and should be able to relate them to real experiences in life, the injustices of the socio-economic material and the greed and oppression that go with it. It should be the spirit of resistance and reconstruction. Oduyoye (2019:22) puts it well when she stated; 'spirituality has to do with concretising one's faith'. In this type of spirituality, one sees ministry praxis, the notion of praxis resistance and reconstruction being embedded in it. Asamoah-Gyadu (2004:234) used the term 'relevance' to refer to Christian spirituality that is practical to the experiences of people. Similarly, there is reference to 'practical Christianity' or 'theologically relevant' meaning a God whose power is unsurpassed and practically manifesting his presence in the experiences of his people.

Therefore, it became apparent from Vellem that the concept of African spirituality and religiosity were used synonymously as tools to combat what he called; 'historically intolerant, authoritative and violent' (2014:2) Western Christianity in Africa. He presents the AICs as an expression of African spirituality in response to the Western Christian spirituality. The AICs as a responsive force acted within 'the context of political, economic, spatial and cultural domination' of the Western spirituality (2014:2).

Another point of note is the conundrum of differentiating between the African spirituality as seen within the space of African Traditional Religions and the AICs. This phenomenon seems to have been a challenge as well for Vellem. For instance, he argues that the resources of the spirituality of African religiosity are 'expressed through the AICs as a response to this salvationist, violent and subjugating form of Western religiosity' (2014:1). While he sees the AICs as interlocutors for African spirituality of liberation, within the same space he also sees African religiosity as offering 'resources for cultural liberation, African history, black African agency and moral consciousness'. Within this light, the AICs become vehicles for liberation spirituality of African spiritual dispensation that was disrupted by the modernist ethos. That is why *etic* interpreters of the AICs judge them as means for the heathenisation of Christianity (Pobee & Ositelu 1998:2).

Within the same space, others see the AICs as syncretic, 'mixing or fusing of Christianity and African Traditional religion and practices' (p. 27). A challenge faced by AICs in putting a line of difference with the spirituality of African religiosity was on 'how deep did they go in their project of adapting Christianity to African cosmology?' For instance, how to differentiate on the praxis of an AIC leader who has been described by Vellem (2014:2) as having 'led her people with the values and norms of salvation rooted in her own culture and African religious views'. How much did AICs borrow from the spirituality of African religiosity? Something

that leaves one more confused is the argument by Ngada and Mofokeng (2001:23) who, in his discussion of the spiritual traditions of Africa, with reference to the Holy Spirit, states: 'In Africa the Almighty Spirit was there healing us long before the missionaries landed on our shores'. In the same space he reasons that in the upbringing of children, both the Spirit of God and ancestors are expected to guide and protect them (p. 24). Therefore, it appears that there is a thin line of boundary, if any, between the spirituality of African religiosity and that of AICs.

Based on the above debate, African spirituality is a holistic form of spirituality borrowed from African cosmology which refuses to accept a dualistic world-view that divides the spiritual aspect from the social aspect. The concept of deity in African cosmology was never dualistic. All aspects of life were seen in a spiritual sense with an involved deity, not one who is withdrawn on matters affecting creation.

In concluding this section, the author presents the spirituality profile of Vellem. He was a black, male and student of BTL. He was trained as a pastor at Federal Theological Seminary (FEDSEM) in the late 1980s. His attraction to FEDSEM was its inextricable link with BC which he regarded 'as a rational and ideological philosophy for the dignification of a black interlocutor is good news for black faith' (2017:1). This philosophy inspired his reason of faith. He believed in the proverbial doublet 'faith and reason' to which he argued that it suggests that religion is a combination of ideology and faith, philosophy and spirituality, or BTL and BC. This combination for him is an expression of Good news in his journey as a pastor, researcher or teacher (2017).

The colonial spirituality of the empire that gave rise to the African Initiated Churches

Vellem lamented the disruption made by Western Christianity in Africa to what he called, 'a free dispensation of moral and ethical thought that shaped the lives of black African people' (2014:1). This disruption included the free spiritual dispensation, norms and values that were in existence amongst Africans. Therefore, it is important to recapture the processes that marked the arrival of Christianity in Africa, in order to better understand the onslaught made on the free dispensation of African religiosity and spirituality. This process will also bring to light the factors that gave rise to the formation of the AICs which brought African spiritual response to this scenario.

The first wave of the Christianisation of Africa was in North Africa during the 1st to the 7th centuries by the imperial Rome. The second took place towards the end of the 15th into the 16th centuries. The focus of this mission was on central Africa and it was driven by the Portuguese Catholics. The religious ambitions of the Portuguese were tainted with what Verkuyl (1978:168ff.) referred to as 'impure motives'. These included imperial, cultural, commercial and

ecclesiastical colonialism motives for the mission in Africa. In addition to the Portuguese mission, most of the other mission agencies from the West pursued impure motives. This was in line with Vellem's argument that the Reformed faith was part of the modern ethos coupled with missionary enterprise in SA that disrupted 'free dispensation of moral and ethical thought that shaped the lives of the black African people' (2014:1). This mixture of both pure and impure motives was well captured by Adogame and Spickard (2010) as follows:

Church and State worked hand in hand to realise possibilities on all fronts. Whenever the Portuguese flag was pitched, the Jesuits and other missionaries were on its trail ... The Catholic mission enterprise in Africa was intricately linked with the Portuguese crown. When Portugal imperial power dwindled, the mission shrank with it. The great weakness of the Christian efforts in Africa in these middle years was its close association with the slave trade. (p. 3)

On the southern side of the continent, Protestantism also made its mark in SA since 1652 with the arrival of the Dutch settlers. This was followed by the Huguenots in 1688. Slavery was practised at that time although the baptised were declared free since 1683. Vellem (2014:2) agreed with Ngugi wa Thiong'o in describing the arrival of Vasco da Gama in Cape Town in 1498 as part of 'the beginning of the destruction of African civilization to synchronise with the ascendancy of capitalist modernity and the expansion of Western Christianity'. The protestant missionary societies that came in the last part of the 18th century also traded slavery. Many other mission bodies followed with impure motives as well. Adogame and Spickard (2010) correctly captured the impure motive of these missionary bodies as follows:

[M]issionaries in the field often supported the imperial ambitions of their compatriots, so much so that mission and imperialism became understood by many as two sides of the same coin. The missionizing task also became synonymous with transplantation of western civilization. (p. 5)

These impure missional motives as were housed in Western Christianity in Africa, amongst others gave rise to the formation of the AICs. Through the eye of Adogame and Spickard (2010:5), this development of the emergence of the AICs was made in three levels. Firstly, the AICs severed ties from the mission churches from 1890s. The reasons identified for this were conflict over rigid missionary control and domination, discrimination against Africans which included apartheid in SA, dispute over resources and a general feeling of marginalisation against educated Africans. What Adogame and Spickard (2010:6) referred to as 'prayer bands or fellowship groups' within the mainline churches also caused the separation.

Secondly, the AICs' wave of independence was seen during the 1920s and 1930s. This was marked by prophetic and healing spiritualities that shook sub-Saharan African Christianity in the 20th century. This wave was characterised by 'centrality of the Bible, ecstatic prayers, healing, prophecy, visions and dreams, elaborate rituals, flexible modes of worship and liturgies, and

charismatic leadership' (Adogame & Spickard 2010:5). It marked a new brand of African Christianity which resonated with African cosmologies through their belief systems and ritual praxis. The visionary experiences of a charismatic leader emerged prominently as drivers in this category.

Thirdly, the 1950s and 1960s saw the emergence of Pentecostal and Charismatic AICs. Adogame and Spickard (2010:6) succeeded to distinguish between Pentecostal/Charismatic movements, namely the indigenous Pentecostals and those founded as branches or missions of Pentecostal groups from overseas. The thread of line that marks both Pentecostal groups is their quest to address the everyday existential problems of the people and see benevolent spiritual entities as means to help people in their day-to-day problems.

Kilonzo (in Adogame & Spickard 2010:166) correctly captured the reasons for the emergence of the AICs as follows: 'Missionary Christian religiosity thus drew forth a counterforce from Africans, leading to the formation of AICs, which respect the culture of African communities'. Vellem (2014:1–2) explained the emergence of the AICs from the point that Western Christianity was negatively characterised by expansionism as a religion, modernity, terror, distortion of theological basis for apartheid in SA and the Reformed Tradition as a kind of salvationist religion which followed its own authoritative doctrine of salvation that pursued a doctrine of true belief. He further observed violence, upheaval and revolt as promoted by this Reformed tradition. He reminds that 'One cannot forget that missionaries purposed to dismantle the indigenous cultural dispensation of Black Africans' (Vellem 2014:3).

Liberation spirituality of the African Initiated Churches

... it is important first to argue that African religiosity maintained the sanity of the African soul within the underbelly of modernity. The narrative of the AICs is an expression of this spirituality of sanity in the context of a political, economic, spatial and cultural domination of a salvationist religion of the West ironically expressed as terror by black Africans. (Vellem 2014:2)

Vellem (2014) proposed the synonymous usage of the concepts of both African religiosity and African spirituality in response to the onslaught posed by authoritative expansionist Western Christianity. He crowned the AICs as protagonists who maintained African spirituality against the terror of Western religiosity. Kilonzo (in Adogame & Spickard 2010:165) presented and interrogated the acronym AICs and came out with the most acceptable definition that explained the one the author adopted in this study. The 'I' in the acronym is understood in different ways. The name African Independent Churches means that they are independent in their origin and organisation. On the other hand, AICs means that they came into being by the initiatives of Africans. The other category is African Indigenous Churches. This means that they retain the African ethos and developed a theology

with distinctive local flavour. These three categories do overlap to a certain extent although not completely. With the understanding of this, the three categories of the AICs, regardless of their expressions of the 'I', make Africans to feel at home as a refuge ground from the attitude of Western missions.

African Initiated Churches are organised continentally in terms of structure. The Organisation of African Initiated Churches (OAIC), which was founded in Cairo in 1975 with the secretariat stationed in Nairobi, Kenya, is a body that brings them together and address their concerns. Knowledge of this body will pave a way towards better understanding of their ministry praxis, more specifically with regard to their spirituality of liberation. Molobi (2011) correctly captured the description of this body well as follows:

OAIC International is incorporated as a registered society under Kenyan law, and has its international secretariat in Nairobi, Kenya. The organisation is active in East Africa, South Africa, Central Africa and West Africa, and works through regions and national chapters. A group of chapters constitutes a region. The OAIC is a recognised regional ecumenical partner of the World Council of Churches, participates in the Global Christian Forum, and is an associated member of the All Africa Council of Churches. It is also an active member of the World Conference on Religion for Peace. In this way the OAIC seeks to share AIC insights and understandings with other Christian traditions and other faiths, and also to learn from them. (p. 5)

In attempting to better understand the spiritual liberating praxis of the AICs, it is advisable to consider the opinion of Molobi (2009:2) who argued that AICs can be seen as an important local contribution to Christianity and should be seen as more than just reactions to mainline churches or colonialism. Much of what the independent churches do and experience emerges as their own creative genius and authentic response to their sociocultural environment, a contribution for which they themselves are solely responsible without any conditioning by foreign missions. Vellem (2015:2) added to this by highlighting the AICs and referring to them as standing amongst those currents that can inspire vision for a new way of living. Molobi (2011) summarised their ministry praxis as follows:

AIC leaders and prophets spread the gospel of Jesus Christ over wide areas of Africa, confronting spiritual, social and political evils in the community, and founding churches as they went. They affirmed the positive values of African culture in protest against the individualism, secularism and Northern models of development that were propagated by colonial governments and missionary churches. (p. 4)

It could be concluded that African spirituality of the AICs has strong anthropocentric values rather than a theocentric drive to their adherents. The leaders of the AICs seem to be the centre of attraction because of their healing, prophetic and other supernatural claims of capabilities than they should be to God. The example of such leaders is the aforementioned Nontetha Nkwenkwe who was a seer and prophet, and was described by Vellem (2014:2) as a

remarkable leader. The messianic element attached by AICs to some of their leaders bear witness to this phenomenon. The examples of messianic leaders are Bishop Lekganyane of the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) and Isaiah Shembe of the Nazarene Baptist Church of SA (Pobee & Ositelu 1998:33). This situation dilutes the theocentric and eschatological view of God within this space.

The AICs, however, succeeded to create a model of healing ministry. Molobi (2009:2) presented the case of an AIC leader, Bishop Mashitsho of the Ark of Noah Church in Atteridgeville, Pretoria. The Bishop indicated that the name of his church carries a salvation element to it in healing ministry. In his healing ministry, he employed herbs and other traditional healing items. He admitted to combining prayer and traditional herbs in his ministry and argued that the herbs and other items that he used have been blessed by God. He confessed to be a puppet of God through the guidance of the Holy Spirit in his healing ministry which includes the traditional items that he used. This AIC case study of healing ministry seems to address the broader African concept of 'illness' as outlined by Setiloane (1976:44). He further indicates that there are actions that could be cured by what he calls 'living man' and 'badimo' (ancestors). He also reasons that there are physical illnesses with a variety of symptoms which could be cured by a variety of medicines (p. 45). The AICs appear to be having a holistic approach which Western Christianity lacks. An AIC leader, Makhulu, seems to be agreeing with this view when he states, 'There is a particular aspect of this holistic spirituality that needs highlighting. It is the area of healing. It is one of the attraction of AICs for Africans' (1999:19).

The AICs presented an excellent response of colonial oppression. Vellem (2014:3) indicated that 'the AICs had been linked to praxis and thus the tradition of liberation and resistance'.

Masuku (2019:201) reasons that the AICs as products of colonial Christian ethos played an important role in the awakening of black nationalist movements by addressing themselves to the grievances of black people under white rule. They rose up as early warning signs of white discrimination and domination in churches. Additionally, they compensated for the loss of self-determination and allowed themselves to be spaces for grievances and dissatisfaction. Because of their black membership on both sides, they were able to secure a close relationship between them and the black nationalist movements. This is because the leaderships of the nationalist movements were Christians and depended on the AICs' leadership. Daneel (1987:128) also observed the same trend in the former Rhodesia. He highlights an incident which happened in 1918–1919 in Northern Rhodesia during which the prophets of the Watch Tower proclaimed imminent day of vengeance when the whites would turn black people into slaves. Additional suppressive incidents by government were highlighted. The example is the Bulhoek massacre in 1921 during which

hundreds of fanatical 'Israelites' were killed by the South African government. In 1925, the prophetic movement of Kimbangu was suppressed. During the early sixties in Zambia, there was a conflict between Alice Lenshina's Lumba church and the newly elected government. In the light of all these, Vellem (2014:4) thus concludes that the praxis of the AICs is the site of spirituality of liberation.

Another contribution by the AICs is an enacted theology. Asamoah-Gyadu (2004:235) observed that this type of theology that he calls 'practical Christianity', was absent from the Western orientated mainline churches. A prominent AIC leader Bishop Ngada (1999:1) points out that 'The AICs theology is instinctively embodied in its members' everyday lives'. He further indicates that they do not need to study theology at institutions of higher learning in order to know and worship God. He shows how they are depended on Holy Spirit as commanded by the Christian Bible. They are 'uneducated' but proudly and deeply rooted in their Africanness culture. It becomes clear that the AICs do not study but do their theology taking into consideration their African cosmology as a guiding lighthouse. Ngada (1999), while referring to the AICs' appreciation of African culture further states as follows:

Their African values are of uppermost importance because, without them, it would be very difficult to understand the Gospel ... That is to say, through African culture they worship God, who is portrayed in the Bible. This is what we call contextual theology which liberates one from all forms of oppression, both physical and spiritual. (p. 1)

From the liberating spirituality of the AICs, one observes a ministry that seeks to bring unity to the divisions amongst Africans brought about by Western Christianity. Vellem's (2014:2) story of Notentha Nkwenkwe depicts a picture of a religious leader who forged unity amongst Africans who were divided by Western missionaries between the converted and the unconverted through the division of land in 'mission stations' and 'mission field'. Ngada (1999:2) blames what he calls 'unbecoming manner' in which the gospel was brought by missionaries to the Africans. In his understanding, Africans were confused by this type of approach. They were made to choose between their African culture and the new faith wrapped in Western culture. Ngada, in his own words, referring to how Africans were forced to discard their culture for the gospel stated, 'They were made to accept three-quarters of Western culture and one quarter of Christianity, all portrayed as Christianity' (p. 2). In Ngada's mind, this amongst others, encouraged the AICs to construct African spirituality that is rooted in African culture. He further argued, 'The establishment of AICs transformed theology dramatically and drastically, to the point that the mainline churches had to start afresh to accommodate black aspirations in their theological thinking' (p. 2). The destruction of African culture seems to continue today. Vellem (2014:3) held this view when he stated, 'The reality to dismantle cultural dispensation of Africans still continues today'. This comes in the form of colonialism,

hence the call by university students for a decolonised education and in other aspects of life.

The AICs are proud of themselves for introducing an African friendly liturgy in churches which ultimately became attractive to other churches like the mainline. Ngada (1999:3) considered that the processes of enculturation and Africanisation in the mainline churches are the results of the AICs' initiatives on African spiritual liberation drives. With reference to the mainline churches, Ngada believes that 'Their constitutions, liturgies and catechisms, their theological training, their teaching and church life in general, all prohibit them from genuinely practicing the AIC's way of transforming theology' (p. 3).

The management of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in an African cultural setting seems to have found a place in the AICs. It is along these lines that Ngada (1999) was able to state:

The AICs are the spiritual base for Africans experiencing a spiritual crisis and loss of identity in the so-called mainline churches, which are desperately seeking theological transformation in the form of enculturation and Africanisation. (p. 4)

While considering the views of Ngada, one notes that the spiritual actions like clapping of hands and dancing, elements of ministry such as live revivals, church women's prayer meetings on Thursdays, funeral vigils and burial societies and in general, the spirit of freedom in worshipping God in churches, are the products of the AICs' efforts and are copied by the mainline churches today. Ngada concludes by saying that:

In the AICs the Holy Spirit is cultivated to take its course in every aspect of a member's life. Everyone is allowed to manifest the gifts of the Holy Spirit, whether young, old, female or male. (p. 5)

The scope for women's ministry which has been denied for ages in the mainline churches, has found a place in the AICs. The AICs regard themselves as pioneers in this African spirituality. They consider themselves as leaders in 'having women archbishops, bishops, and ministers in their churches long before the mainline churches even thought about ordaining women priests in their churches' (Ngada 1999:5). Oduyoye (2019:22) should be referring to the developments such as these when she touched on what she calls, 'Women's spirituality'.

The fact that AICs are growing in the midst of secularisation means that their African spirituality of liberation is at work. Molobi (2011:1) agreed that they are the fastest growing churches in Africa. An AIC leader, Makhulu (1999) argued that the ministry of the AICs was helpful to the victims of what he called 'enlightenment' that marks the beginning of secularisation. He also blamed modernity for being an enemy of Christianity. Makhulu states as follows:

So the holistic spirituality which the AICs offer is a very needed ministry. Now it is attracting even the intellectual community. The too rational Christianity of historical churches is not satisfying. The historical churches have, by and large, ceded

healing to the hospitals. This is not proving satisfying for many Africans. (p. 19)

The liberating spirituality of the AICs could also be noticed in their urbanisation ministry. Urbanisation in Africa is growing at an alarmingly fast rate. For the majority of poor black Africans, this is caused by what Vellem (2013:3) referred to as 'the history of economic exclusion and injustice in South Africa'. He also blamed what he called 'the problem of economics — the market economy' (2015:2). In the same way, he viewed these as having a huge catastrophic impact on the poor and the marginalised. Cities became attractive with the higher records of service delivery than rural setups. The AICs' ministry accommodates urban ministry for the majority of the poor who flock to cities in search for employment, better education and other opportunities. Makhulu (1999), in support of this view, argued as follows:

Many who come to the cities, following the 'bright lights', get into bad ways — drunkenness, prostitution, etc. In clear encounters with AICs, transformation has come upon these individuals. AICs, if the testimonies are to be believed, have helped people to get out of these evils, making honest believers of them. (p. 25)

Daneel (1987:133) also observed this ministry in the case of the former Rhodesia. He indicates how the AICs contextualised their ministry, especially sermons, to fit the urban settings. Remarking on the adaptation of AICs' urban orientated sermons, Daneel (1987:133) stated, 'Often the sermons deals with life in the urban situations; relations between employers and employees, moral decline and especially the use of alcoholic beverages in beer-halls'.

The quest for honest citizenry appears in the AICs' spirituality of liberation. The evils such as corruption, crime, and so on are growing alarmingly in South Africa and other parts of the world. Makhulu had this concept of ministry in mind when he advised that 'the mission of the AICs, like other churches, must be to try to make honest citizens of people and this will make a much needed contribution to national development' (1999:26).

The crisis in education has also not been eradicated by the liberating spirituality of the AICs. The AICs warn that education must seriously consider the fact of pluralism of ethnicity, religions, races, and so on. The accommodation of pluralism in education will promote peaceful co-existence in SA and the world. It is therefore from this background that 'any effort of the AICs in education should contribute to the entire national commitment to education of all peoples, it should not only be a handle to conversion or proselytism' (Makhulu 1999:21). As part of national development drives, vocational institutions must be encouraged. This will avoid channelling all students to university education which does not guarantee employment. Education seems to be a formidable vehicle towards BC in many respects. Vellem (2014) saw the potential within the AICs to address what he called death in consciousness when he said:

As an alternative to the authoritative salvationist dispensation of Western religiosity, black theology of liberation identifies the death of consciousness as its starting point. This struggle against death is enacted in the praxis of the AICs. (p. 4)

Conclusion

From the interpretation of Vellem's viewpoints, it became apparent that the AICs are formidable players for African spirituality of liberation. They demonstrated to be protagonists in what Vellem (2012:1) calls 'interlocution' of African spirituality of liberation project. Through their pursuance of an exclusive approach from the empire, they succeeded to construct, protect, continuously contextualise and promote African spirituality of liberation against the enemies of African cosmology. The AICs demonstrated their ability to unshackle a free dispensation of moral and ethical thought that shaped the lives of black African people from the Western empire. Therefore, they succeeded in 'unthinking' the colonial Western Christianity of the empire.

This debate on African spirituality opened a window by which scholars were seen exploring different faces of this phenomenon. It was discerned from Vellem that the colonial spirituality of the Western hegemony that gave rise to the formation of AICs, manifested the dimension of terror, disruption and damage caused by the empire in the process. The ministry praxis of the liberation spirituality of the AICs was also outlined. It became apparent that the African spirituality as driven by the AICs succeeded to withstand the challenges such as modernity, secularism, apartheid and other evils.

Vellem (2014) correctly summarised the ministry praxis of AICs as follows, in which he employs the notion of *mokhukhu* (a residential shack in squatter camps and liturgical dance for the ZCC) as a symbolic meaning for the AICs and African spirituality:

As the site of the spirituality for liberation, African religiosity as expressed by AICs, *mokhuku* is not merely a quest for the inclusion of the African moral and ethical dispensation in the Western salvationist hegemonic forms of religiosity, but a well of liberating resources for life and consciousness on its own, and against extinction. (p. 5)

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