

Models of Change in African Christianity: South African Case Studies

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This paper defines conversion as a process of change management by looking at two churches, one conventionally classified as African indigenous and the other classified as mainline. In the research done two models of conversion emerged, the crisis model at St John's and the growth model at the Reformed Presbyterian Church (RPCSA). In the crisis model individuals join the group because of some crisis in their lives, e.g., illness or misfortune. The healing practices and rituals serve to manage and mediate the crisis for individuals. Healing is at the heart of the recruitment strategy at St John's and other African Indigenous Churches (AICs). On the other hand, the growth model as represented by the RPCSA, is about organic growth and development where new members are mostly recruited among the children of members. The two models mobilise resources and formulate strategies for self-definition and what it means to be human in a hostile environment.

Introduction

The present study is aimed at exposing the inadequacies of the divide between the mainline or missionary churches and the African independent or indigenous churches by looking at how they perceive the process of conversion. Conversion is a complex concept which different faith communities interpret differently. For this study, conversion is defined as both a process of change and the ways in which that process is managed. Each of the two faith communities has a set of strategies of managing the process. Change does not happen in a vacuum, but it takes place within a certain context within which there is a complexity of factors that influence the direction of change for both individuals and groups.

Change is a volatile and dynamic process, which causes anxiety and uncer-

tainty among those going through it. As a result, it needs careful management and mediation. In scholarship there are various models which all have something significant to contribute to our understanding of conversion. However, each explanation, on its own, does not investigate all possible angles to this complex process. For us to have a deeper and broader understanding of the process, a multi-disciplinary approach is necessary. Such an initiative will have more explanatory power as it is an interpenetration of various theories and it draws from their strengths.

First, the historical context is important in understanding the processes that shaped conversion experiences. The socio-economic and political dynamics have a bearing on the shape and direction of the process of change. The historical approach acknowledges the adversarial encounters between Africans and missionaries in which material and intellectual interests were at stake. The history of these encounters is important in understanding the nature of Christianity in South Africa. African converts played an important role in the establishment of Christianity as an indigenous resource. Black mainline churches and the AICs draw from it in their resource mobilisation efforts. Ranger (1987) pointed out that Christianity in the twentieth century had become an aspect of an African identity. It became a readily available resource from which to draw strategies for self-identification and group formation. He further argued that aspects of AIC practice that have been heralded as being continuous with African belief and practice, such as spiritual healing, prophecy, and exorcism, are equally aspects of Christianity. In South Africa Christianity is seen as an important component of the religious landscape. The majority of people in the crime-ridden, disease-infested and poverty-stricken township of Gugulethu identify themselves with some form of Christianity. Since the advent of democracy and majority rule in South Africa in 1994 there is greater religious freedom. Africans openly acknowledge their participation in indigenous religious practices.

Second, reference groups are socialisation and re-socialisation agencies. They provide blueprints of how society ought to be organised. The individual derives his or her identity from a reference group and is socialised into its universe of discourse. The idea of a reference group is important for self-identification and self-definition, as it highlights the role of social structures in individual identity formation and re-formation. The reference-group has a vision, values, beliefs and morals. As a result, individuals refer to the reference-group when "evaluating people, situations, and life projects" (Hefner 1993: 25). They provide individuals with tools to decipher and make sense of the world around them, while at the same time giving them a sense of selfhood and humanness. Reference groups are historical entities. They came into existence as a result of socio-historical and ideological factors. In the process of their formation, reference groups mobilise various religious and cultural resources as a way of defining person and place for its members. They create a symbolic meaning system, which

distinguishes them from other groups. They appropriate symbols and give them meaning in accordance with their vision. Actually, "meaning is not something waiting to be 'discovered'" but, it is "always emerging, changing, and 'at stake' in the strategic, contested process of negotiation" (Chidester 1991: xiv). Therefore, meaning is constructed to serve the interests of the group. Since such groups claim to own appropriated symbols, they believe that they can interpret them in the way they like.

Third, converts are active in the process of their conversion. Ikenga-Metuh was critical of the view that conversion was imposed on Africans, because "Africans and African religions responded to Islam and Christianity through conversion" (1987: 12). Conversion, in this context, does not mean uncritical embrace of either Islam or Christianity but critical engagement with the two religions. Such critical engagement is evident in encounters documented by Simensen (1987) and John and Jean Comaroff (1991) between Africans and Christian missionaries, in which the two groups were involved in material and intellectual exchanges. In these exchanges each group defined being human in terms of resources at its disposal. Horton (1971) and Opoku (1993) observed the dynamism and openness of African thought to other explanations of reality as reasons for such exchanges and the eventual embracement of both Islam and Christianity. The IsiXhosa and IsiZulu terms *ukuguquka* (turning, returning, re-turning) and *ukukholwa* (believing, having confidence) are processes where the convert plays an active role. These dynamic terms have been given different meanings in different contexts. The dynamism of African thought has been demonstrated in the way in which Christianity was translated into an indigenous idiom. This dynamism is crucial in understanding the processes of change among Africans.

Ukukholwa (to believe or believing) is an important aspect of the process of conversion. It is the central pillar of the group's world of discourse. It is the confidence, trust, and faith that an individual has in the efficacy of the group's resources and strategies to manage and mediate change. It is an element that all members must have in order to maintain group unity. Members must have confidence in the group's ability and capacity to mediate and manage their conversion experience. In the crisis model an individual must have confidence in the power of the healer-prophet to successfully mediate or manage the crisis. It is important for the client to have confidence and trust in order to participate actively in the resolution of his or her crisis. Healer-prophets inform their clients that only the Holy Spirit has power to heal them. They ask their clients to have faith, trust, or confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit to deal with their crisis. Healing elements and medicaments given to clients derive their power and efficacy from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is said to direct the healer-prophet to the appropriate medicament for a particular ailment or crisis. Confidence in the crisis model is reinforced through other people's testimonies of how the church helped to mediate their crisis. These are stories of people who were able to get

jobs, settle their marital problems, normalise relations with their neighbours, resolve their financial difficulties, and were healed from various ailments. They demonstrate the power that the church possesses. Since healing encompasses the individual and the environment, individual clients are integrated into society and the environment in which they live is also cleansed from the power of evil.

Fourth, the universe of discourse is an important aspect in constructing individual identities and group formation. Murphy argued that discourse is a means by which the world is constructed (2000: 400). At the level of verbal discourse the text constructs its object, and at a sociological level society is constructed in and by discourse. Therefore, each universe of discourse expresses its vision of society and how it should function. Language is highlighted as a means of identity formation and knowledge construction. Among the BaTswana in the 19th and 20th centuries “[l]anguage was the medium in which political and religious allegiances were forged, and it changed constantly” (Landau 1995: xxv). The universe of discourse sustains and keeps alive the vision of the group and shapes the language used in myths, rituals, and other performances. Faith or religious conviction is framed in the language particular to the group.

A new recruit adopts the cosmology of the group and that enables him or her to understand and fully appreciate explanations about the source of his or her problems and the solutions to them. In other words, a new recruit has to share the group's universe of discourse. An individual fully participates in the group's activities because he or she understands all explanations given. Rituals and other performances are underpinned and sustained by the universe of discourse, as it is a theoretical framework within which all performances take place. The nature and style of the performances are determined by the universe of discourse.

Fifth, the above-mentioned approaches lead to an understanding of the process of conversion as a negotiation. Negotiation involves exchanges in the world of ideas. Furthermore, it involves the mobilisation of resources and formation of strategies to define person and place. This process leads to the creation of the world of discourse which sustains the rituals and other practices of a group. The vision of the group is kept alive in its universe of discourse. For Snow and Machalek (1983, 1984) and Travisano (1970), conversion is marked by the change in an individual's universe of discourse. Such a change implies turning away from the previous universe of discourse and towards another one. New members learn the language and rhetoric of the group and its method of delivery (oratory). In the black townships in Cape Town it is common that new members learn from the older members how to testify. New members spend sometime in the group observing others before standing up to make their testimonies.

Finally, all these elements help to explain conversion as change management. Processes of change take place within a social historical context. Individual identity is connected to a social world, and social groups are responsible for the management of the conversion experience or process through the exposi-

tion of various layers of the group's belief system, morality, values and vision.

Social groups use resources at their disposal to manage and mediate change for their members. Each social group has a set of strategies it uses for this purpose, such as, rituals. Social groups are crucial in the socialisation and re-socialisation processes. However, the role of individual converts should be acknowledged because without their co-operation and participation the process would not succeed. That is why it is important that members must have confidence, trust, or faith in the ability and capacity of the group to manage the process for them. Social groups have to introduce new recruits to the talk and reasoning of the group as a way of building group unity.

In the research undertaken in Gugulethu and KTC two models of change management emerged, the crisis model (St John's Apostolic Faith Mission) and the growth model (Reformed Presbyterian Church). In each model there are resources and strategies used to manage the process of change for members. Change is a volatile and uncertain process that needs to be carefully managed.

The two models of conversion that have been considered, the crisis model and the growth model, are both Christian and African in drawing upon religious resources and developing strategies for using those resources to manage change in the lives of individuals and the formation of communities. They are strategies to negotiate being human in an urban township context. The two models have the same goal, that of defining being human in an urban context, but they use different routes to reach that goal.

What is obvious in the two models is that in their processes of defining being human, they developed different emphases. It is this fact that has been exploited by those who wanted to exclude the AICs from the category "Christian". They built a huge divide out of the different emphases. The Anglicans, Methodists, and Presbyterians have different theologies, traditions and visions but there has never been an attempt to say that any of them is less Christian than the others. Historically, there has always been a mutual recognition and respect by all missionary organisations in South Africa.

Perhaps the AIC phenomenon was not expected to flourish in the way it did, because it did not represent orthodox Christianity. For example, the case of the Independent Methodist Church in Swaziland, which the white Methodist leadership predicted would not survive beyond the founder Joel Msimang's lifetime, has managed to survive and grow (Balia 1994: 24). The influence of what Chidester calls the frontier classification of world religions is evident in how the AICs are perceived and classified (1996:27). The frontier classification system put the people of Southern Africa in the category of ancestor worshippers. The influence of ancestor worship was believed to be dominant in the AICs. Therefore, they could not be "authentically" Christian. This judgement about the AICs permeated the discourse of ordinary Christians who ridiculed these churches as *oozenzele* (self-made churches or do-it-yourself churches).

For missionaries, orthodox Christianity was supposed to be dominated and controlled by European leadership reflecting a Western cultural orientation and its values. There was also failure to grasp the complexity of Christian development among Africans in mission or mainline churches. Sundkler (1987) in exploring African Church history demonstrated how much Africans participated in the promotion of Christianity. He suggested that there must be a new way of writing African Church history. He asserted that, over the years, scholars have studied the AICs in an attempt to find something that is "authentically" African. A lot of effort was put into analysing their healing practices and other rituals in an attempt to link them to an African past. In the process, the mainline churches among Africans were ignored. It was through the efforts of the African clergy and laity that Christianity was spread to many areas of Africa outside mission stations. Africans within the mission churches played a crucial role in making Christianity truly their own. Gaitskell (2000) documented the role played by Methodist Biblewomen in the promotion of the Christian message in African communities. Biblewomen "evangelised in homesteads and public places, won converts, supported ministers and prayer unions, visited the sick, encouraged backsliders to return to the church and gave children Bible teaching" (Gaitskell 2000: 301-302). Therefore, it is important to understand the dynamics of both mission and indigenous churches in the making of African Christians. Africans in these churches engaged with Christianity and the end product was a religion that is not foreign but indigenous, because, "[r]eligion itself is an activity of symbolic and material negotiation that is fluid and mobile, relational and situational, distinctive and diverse, collective and personal" (Chidester 1994: 10). Christian symbols were appropriated and adapted to serve the interests of African Christians. The process of appropriation and adaptation changes all the time due to socio-economic and political factors.

Commenting on animal sacrifices among AICs in Lesotho, theologian Stan Nussbaum observed that, "Independent church thanksgiving sacrifices are not an attempt to accommodate something in the traditional religion but a new ritual considered to be definitely within a Christian context" (1984: 53). The end product is as a result of reflection by Africans on African religions and cultural heritage and Christian teachings. AICs crafted a religion that reflected the influences of the above resources. The point has to be made that the AICs are not a replacement for African religion or orthodox Christianity. They "are complex strategic negotiations in which symbolic forms are formulated, appropriated, manipulated, and mobilized to carve out a human identity and a place for that human to stand and to act as a human being" (Chidester 1989: 21). In other words, AICs might have Christian, Western and African influences but they are attempts by Africans to be human in an increasingly hostile environment of poverty, crime, violence, corruption, unemployment, and uncertainty.

The influences of missionaries are still evident, but the AICs have taken all of

that as part of their heritage, as part of their church, as part of who they are. It is clear that the two models of conversion appropriate the same symbols, but they develop the meaning, content, and power of those symbols in different ways.

The two models considered are attempts by African Christians to define being human in a volatile urban context, marred by crime, poverty, and unemployment. They operate within a religious landscape that is dominated by various shades of Christianity and African traditional religion.

Comparisons

About these two models

It is noteworthy that there are instances where both communities (St Johns and RPCSA) use aspects of the other model. However, such acts do not undermine the dominant model within the group. There are instances when somebody at RPCSA (an example of the growth model) has a crisis at home, after having spent a lot of time away from church, and would come back and claim to convert, thus asking the rest of the group to accommodate and help them through the crisis. The time when this person was away from the rest of the group would be interpreted as a period in which he or she was lured by the trickery of the evil one. For example, elder Ziqubu from the RPCSA grew up in church. As he became older, he stopped attending church. He experienced major family problems and he decided to come back. He was warmly welcomed. When someone returns to the fold people would rejoice and this will be seen as a new beginning, a conversion. The analogy of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) is used and parallels are drawn between the two situations. The church is obliged to forgive and accept this individual back because forces beyond any control possessed him. At St John's (an example of the crisis model) one also has members who were born of parents who are members of the church and they see it as part of their identity. They grow up within the church and learn the rules.

Crisis and growth are observable in both groups at some point in their spiritual journey. These are times where a person feels that it is a defining moment in their lives in terms of their spiritual development. These are mostly crisis moments, especially a death in the family or other misfortune, where one feels that God is directly intervening in their lives to give direction. After this moment there has to be spiritual growth and development which is catered for in both groups. Both groups acknowledge the importance of nurturing new converts as well as to keep the old members well "fed" spiritually.

The outward projection of the St John's understanding of conversion is a crisis model. It is part of the recruitment strategy. It is not properly explained that this is the initial contact and what then happens, as a person becomes a member of the church. Of course there is growth and development as a convert is introduced to the church hierarchy, the church norms, the church procedure, and a

definition of who they are as members of St John's. As part of the journey an individual has ups and downs and through those one is able to grow and develop. The two models are then in operation side by side, but the official view is that conversion occurred at initial contact when one was rescued from a crisis; as such, it is reinforced all the time in prayer meetings and services.

According to Sundkler, scholars have given Independent Churches a lot of attention in search for something "authentically African" (1987: 74). This search has led to a situation where the Africanness of Black mainline churches is undermined or simply neglected. The AICs are perceived to be the guardians of African culture and tradition. However, the situation on the ground is much more complex. Black mainline churches shaped Christianity into a language and idiom that is African. It is true that there are certain areas of African beliefs and practices that were excluded from the dominant church discourse but this does not mean that people in their individual capacities have also not embraced them.

Rituals

Rituals of incorporation

Rituals of incorporation are performed to symbolically make new members part of the group. Such rituals are important for an individual's identity formation and transformation. After the ritual, the individuals concerned fully identify with the group. His or her identity would now be linked to the group; and he or she gets a sense of belonging. The approach to incorporation at RPCSA is growth and developmentally orientated. There are different stages toward confirmation. Confirmation is an end product of a process of education, development and growth. In other words, incorporation is a process, which starts at baptism (infant), to Sunday school, to the confirmation class, and finally culminating with the confirmation ritual. Once people in charge are satisfied with the development of an individual at one stage, he or she would be promoted to the next. The initial stage of baptism is through sprinkling during public worship. The child is "claimed" for the church and the onus is upon parents to raise him or her in accordance with the vision of the church. Noticeable here is the use of agricultural metaphors of "sowing" and "growing". Parents are to sow seeds of righteousness in their children so that they can grow in the knowledge of God. The role of parents is crucial in the realisation of the goals of the growth model because they are the primary socialising agents. Children look up to them.

The symbolism of water is very significant. In the Christian tradition water has many different characteristics. First, water played a crucial role in the creation of all things (Genesis. 1: 2, 6-7). Second, it served to destroy creation (Gen. 6: 17- 7:24). Third, it delivered the Children of Israel from an advancing Egyptian army at the Red Sea (Exodus 14: 26-31). Fourth, it was used by John the Baptist to baptise Jesus at the River Jordan, which launched Jesus's ministry (Matt.

3, Mark 1: 9-12, Luke 3). As Jesus was baptised the Holy Spirit anointed him. In baptismal water there is new birth as well as anointing. Fifth, there were pools which had healing powers, e.g., Bethesda (John 5: 2), Siloam (John 9: 7). Jesus used water as a cleansing and healing agent. He sent the blind man to go and wash at the pool of Siloam. All the above-mentioned properties of water make it a powerful symbol. Hence it has been appropriated at St John's for healing and cleansing.

For Presbyterians baptism is new birth. The water of the womb brings a child to birth, and so baptismal water brings the child to new birth. The child becomes a new being. Adults who were not baptised as infants are baptised subject to their confession of faith in Jesus. An adult has to make a self-conscious decision to make a commitment. Nevertheless, all this means that through baptismal waters a new life or a new creature emerges.

Confirmation, as mentioned above, is a culmination of a number of stages. The individual concerned must have attended Sunday school where some instruction was given to supplement that given by parents. Confirmation into membership in full communion gives one access to the sacred power in the church. The divine power is dangerous and it has to be approached with caution. Individuals need specialised knowledge in order to be able to tap into the sacred power. It is the duty of the leadership of the church to provide education, guidance and instruction in this regard as stated in the *Manual of Law, Practice and Procedure in the Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa*:

The instruction and preparation of the young communicants is the special duty of the minister and of the Session. The Session must take care that such as are ignorant or scandalous be not admitted to membership till it is satisfied as to their knowledge and repentance! (1958: 6)

The rule clearly excludes those whom the Session is not satisfied with, in terms of their mastery of, and competence in specialised knowledge required of all members. Since the Session are custodians and protectors of the collective *seriti* of the church, they have to ensure that only those who would not compromise the integrity of the church are allowed in. Those who compromise the integrity of the church are excommunicated, which means they are excluded from certain key church activities, such as participation in the Lord's Table, as well as being removed from all offices held. They are cut off from the activities of the church. The confirmation ritual is performed in public worship where new members are accepted in full communion through the shaking of hands. Confirmation allows one to participate in church organisations.

At St John's members believe in the baptism of adults through a triple immersion in "living waters" (Sundkler 1961: 206), whereas children only receive

the blessings (Mark 10: 13-16). Living water refers to the river, sea or any moving water. It has to be this kind of water because baptism is not only a new birth or a sign of being part of the "flock" but also cleansing. It cleanses one of the sins of the previous life. Sundkler, commenting about the use of flowing water, said that it is "efficacious in washing and rapidly removing sin, sickness and pollution" (1961:207). Baptismal waters take that sin away. Comaroff pointed out that baptismal water dissolves former identities (1985:201). Once former identities are dissolved new ones are established on the basis of the vision of the church. The individual is reborn into the family of St Johns. According to Mhlongo, the biographer of the prophet, and Mrs Melusi, Bishop Masango was given power to bless water to heal people. All healers at St Johns dispense water that belongs to Baba Masango. It is made very clear by members of the congregation that the water they drink after every service, or have a bath, steam or enema with, is Baba Masango's water. They would normally say,

We are grateful to Baba Masango for having sent us MaMelusi from Johannesburg, to come and give us Baba Masango's water. She gives us water to drink and wash with.

Water is not only used at baptism, but the entire healing system depends on water. Baptism happens alongside another important healing ritual, called *isiwasho* (cleansing). After new members have been baptised, the sick and other members of the congregation would then be dipped for cleansing. *Isiwasho* removes all the impurities and evil forces that attach themselves to people. Again, this serves to renew and re-establish people in their community of faith.

Baptism is the most important requirement for membership at St John's. There are no formal confirmation classes, but what is important to them is the new member's commitment to the church. It is only after baptism that a new member is issued with the blue and white church uniform. The blue represents special peace and the white for purity (Thomas 1999: 91). Through baptism *umuntu omdala* (the old person or identity) dissolves and a new one is established. The uniform symbolises the newly established identity, which makes one part of the group. By putting on the uniform, the new convert becomes one with the group. It is a sign that she or he has chosen the group and it has accepted him or her. Social relations are redrawn; all previous identities fall away. The uniform symbolises oneness in spirit— it does not matter whether one is a parliamentarian or a domestic worker, all become the same. A sense of oneness and sameness is established. The new identity cuts across economic and social statuses and membership of St John's become the member's primary identity. For those who come because of *ingulo emblope* (white illness) there will be people who will mentor and guide them. They will be taught *mela ya kereke* (rules of the church). The rules are the special knowledge for approaching the divine. Mrs Melusi teaches

about the rules mostly at the 7pm service. Since ministers are the last to get the platform to speak at services, she has enough time to observe how people do things and then she can correct them where they went wrong.

In conclusion, it has been demonstrated that even though the two churches understand baptism to mean rebirth, they have different ideas about who has to be baptised, how, why and where. The major difference between the two churches is the baptism of children. St John's believes that children can only be blessed and not baptised because they cannot publicly declare their faith in Jesus. At RPCSA they believe that Jesus commanded them to baptise children. The place of baptism is another major difference between the two churches. At St John's they believe in baptism by triple immersion. John, who also baptised Jesus, practised this type of baptism. The prophet Masango was also commanded to have this type of baptism. In Mhlongo's words "a word came to Baba Petros John Masango and told him to seek the baptism of John in the river". For them it has to happen in a river, sea or pool— but the whole body has to be immersed. The RPCSA practice, however, is to baptise children and new converts who were never baptised before, through sprinkling on the forehead during public worship, that is, in church. But, there is a provision for baptism to take place in another place other than the place of worship. Water is very crucial at St John's because everything revolves around it, while at RPCSA it is only significant at baptism. For the RPCSA, baptism is only the beginning of the process of incorporation, culminating at confirmation, while at St John's baptism is the beginning of a new life for the individual as a member of the church. There is no structured education programme for new converts and most of the teaching about the church procedures and rules is gleaned from the speeches and sermons of the minister.

Rituals of celebration

Good Friday and Easter are the commemoration of the death and resurrection of Jesus. For St John's it is a national festival where congregations from various parts of South Africa congregate at National headquarters. This is one of the few times when the Lord's Supper (Eucharist) is celebrated. Like all other *imigidi*, there will be baptism and *isiwasho*. On the other hand, at RPCSA the celebration is localised and takes place in Gugulethu. All the church organisations are given an opportunity to celebrate; a service is set aside for each organisation during one of the days over the weekend and a particular group will organise all details of that service. They also use the celebration to recruit new members and revive those who have "fallen". It has been my observation that in Gugulethu the busiest time of the church calendar is Good Friday and Easter, whereas, during Christmas very few people go to church.

In both churches at other services (St John's: daily services, 5am service, 7pm service, and Sunday service; RPCSA: Sunday services) the power of God is

celebrated. The difference is in the emphasis. St John's celebrates the power of God in healing through the Prophets and the Angels. The prophets are acknowledged for having received the master plans for healing from God and for having revealed them to ordinary mortals. There is a sense that God can only be approached through the prophets as people preface their prayer with "*Nkulunkulu ka Baba Masango no Mme Anna* (God of Baba Masango and Mme Anna)". There are also prayers for the sick, as well as the giving of holy water. Numerous people do the teaching or preaching, with the minister having a final say. After each of the preachers, the congregation bows and renders a prayer for them. All these practices are part of the strategy to keep them on a crisis-alert. There is a sense that because they have been "washed" in Baba Masango's water, people have become vulnerable to crisis. Therefore, it is important for them to be alert all the time and do what the religious leadership asks of them.

On the other hand, at RPCSA they celebrate the saving power of God in Jesus. They celebrate through song and praise. A designated preacher does the preaching. Prayers are for thanksgiving and aversion of crisis, as well as for those who are experiencing problems. The church projects the image of a caring organisation. There is recognition that crises are not to be feared— they are seen as challenges to make one's faith strong. The celebration is geared toward "arming" the believers with the "armour" to deal with problems. Sermons deal with everyday issues but toward the end they implore people to be steadfast in their faith.

Tradition

The idea of the church is perceived differently by the two churches. That perception is part of each group's self-definition. St John's is said to be the church of the prophets, the church for the sick and troubled, and the deep and complicated church. On the other hand, at RPCSA it is their home church, which they suckled from their parents, it is the church of their forefathers. There is a contrast between a church of the prophets and a church of history.

The St John's church allows for discussion on the ancestors and even rituals to venerate them. Individuals often make remarks about *isinyanya sakokwethu* (family ancestral spirit) during services. There is continuity between church and home. On the other hand, at RPCSA there is discontinuity between church discourse and practice at home. The issue of the ancestors is not part of that discourse, which does not mean that the church disapproves of them. Sometimes individuals refer to them in their speeches, especially during joyous occasions, like fundraising. One person alluded to "the bones of some dead leaders moving in their graves", indicating that these leaders would have been happy with what is currently being done. Such statements indicate that the issue of the ancestors is part of the people's resource base to which they appeal in times of crisis. People in their homes carry out rituals where ancestors are venerated, for example, house-opening rituals, un-

veiling of tombstones, and the initiation and circumcision of their sons.

RPCSA refer to their practice as *ubuRhabe* (Presbyterianism). The emphasis, though, is more on the history of the family of the individual. One member pointed out that her great-grandfather, her grandfather, and her father and now herself, are part of the Presbyterian family, which makes the church part of her heritage. She will do whatever is needed to impart that heritage to her children. The church is part of her identity.

At RPCSA people feel some historical connection and loyalty to the church. Most grow old there. This shows up in the large number of senior citizens, some of whom are sickly. There are regular visits to these people, especially those who are bed-ridden. The minister pays them visits and serve communion to them. The youth also visit them to clean their homes and keep them company. Some of the youth have reported that they enjoyed visiting the elderly because in some cases the elderly tell them stories and tales. The youth also sing and read the Bible for them. By giving senior members of the church these regular visits, they are made to feel like they are part of the community. The women's *Manyano* also hold some of their Thursday prayer meetings in such people's homes. In such situations the church acts as an extended family.

At St John's there is intense concentration on healing, as it has been pointed out above, and the very ill are accommodated within the church complex. They are cared for and looked after by the minister and her assistants. The church community helps with prayers and gives some food to support the minister. She was very grateful to the individuals in the church who helped to extend her complex. She said they were people who were sick and got help from the church and now they were making such a contribution as a way of saying thank you. According to Mhlongo, Baba Masango and Mme Anna were able to build a number of Temples through donations from grateful clients. The first major project was to build the St John's headquarters in Katlehong where rooms to accommodate the sick were built as well. The neighbours derogatorily called his church "the hospital". In other words, it is not unusual for satisfied clients to return the favour and do something good for the church.

The most significant part about the two churches is that in their discourse they draw a line between themselves and the "world". *Intlo zangaphandle* (things of the "outside") is a commonly used phrase at RCPSA. The implication is that even though they live in the township, their church membership makes them different from the rest of the township population. Church membership prescribes a certain kind of behaviour that is different from that of those who are not. Because of the moral teachings of the church, members – especially those in the leadership – are expected to be morally upright and be an example to the others, especially the younger generation. Similarly, at St John's they instruct their members to uphold their morals so that the prophets would be able to help them. People are also instructed not to consult *izangoma* (traditional healers)

because they are seen as using evil powers and they manipulate people, while St John's, on the other hand, uses the power of God through the Prophets.

What makes the AICs attractive to researchers is the healing dimension that is often associated with traditional African healing practices. Healing is a major component of the recruitment strategy at St Johns, which means that it is crucial in mediating crisis. Healing forms an important part of crisis management. Once healed, people are always on a crisis-alert. Healing normalises an abnormal situation. An individual would be restored to good health, and he or she would have a new realisation that the crisis situation was meant to bring her close to the community of faith. On the other hand, Sunday school and confirmation at the RPCSA forms an important part of the growth and development of youngsters. Basic information about the community and its work is disseminated to them gradually. This is an important time because *umuthi ugotshwa usemanzi* (a tree is bent while young). Youngsters are impressionable and as they grow older the church will be second nature to them.

Healing concerns not only the physical body but also the psychological and the social aspects of a person. In order for one to be restored to normality or to humanness all these aspects have to be harnessed. The patient has to believe in the power and efficacy of what comes out of the mouth of the prophet-healer. The patient must be prepared to do everything and pay attention to details in order to avert the crisis.

The crusade (*uhlaselo*) is one of the strategies employed by the RPCSA to recruit people from the township. The township is understood to be full of people *abakude nofefe luka Thixo* (who are far from the grace of God). Part of the congregation would march through the streets of the township in order to make such people realise that the church is there for them. As they march, they sing and dance and stop at various points where one of them would address a group of people and invite them to join. The township appears like an enemy territory and the crusade is an attack launched by the church. Such an attack, in its style, is reminiscent of the attacks launched by Joshua to Jericho. It is the soldiers of the cross marching for Jesus, in fulfilment of a Christian commandment to convert sinners.

Reinforcement

After recruiting members into their fold, each community has strategies to educate and make them comfortable. Such strategies are designed to meet the needs of each model. In terms of the crisis model, the reinforcement comes in the form of testimonies by those who were sick or had problems and now can be proud that they are now healed or their problems have been solved. While I was doing participant observation, Mrs Melusi gave her own testimony. She told the congregation how she got her call. She said she ignored it for a long time and the last

time she was very ill. Her parents tried all they could but it did not work. As the last resort, she was taken to Baba Masango. He told her that if she did not accept her call she was going to die. There was no need for her to occupy space and not do God's work. She made up her mind instantly and was baptised. From then on she was on her way to recovery. She also mentioned some of the things she did in her "previous" life. Mrs Melusi's story is similar to many stories told by healers in most AICs. The aim of such stories is to encourage people not to despair if they have problems. For those who are not completely healed it gives hope that one day they would be well and tell their stories as well.

The stories reinforce belief and faith in the power of healing, which the church has through the prophets. The fact that even their esteemed leader had to be "washed" in order to realise her potential encourages ordinary members. At this level there are no church organisations because the minister has her hands full with people who are not well. Mrs Melusi tried to start a Women's *Manyano* but it did not work out because some of the women worked till late. They could not have it on a Saturday because it is a day of healing.

In terms of the growth model, reinforcement is in the form of church organisations, as shown at the RPCSA. They are the Youth Fellowship, the Girls Christian Association, Women's Christian Association (*Manyano*) and *Amadodana* (Young Men's Christian Guild). Each of the organisations meets the spiritual needs of the sector of the congregation— they each deal with matters of interests to each group. However, the most important function is to reinforce what was taught from Sunday school to Confirmation. They reinforce the values and morals of the church. They each organise fund-raising events in order to help raise the finances of the church. Members are instructed about their responsibility as members of the church. A sense of loyalty to the church is built through uniforms. According to Xapile, a RPCSA minister,

There are members who see the uniforms merely as clothes that one would wear when on duty. In that case, it becomes a constant reminder that they are soldiers of the cross. It reminds them of their commitment to make disciples and to exercise their ministry. (2000:164)

Kinship terminology

The use of kinship terminology in the two churches, that is, RPCSA and St John's, highlights a sense of family, a sense of oneness and a sense of belonging. West (1975) observed the prevalence of the use of kinship terminology like "brother", "sister" and "family" among AIC members in Soweto.

This means that both churches project an image of a family. Family relations

are marked by different positions members find themselves in it. The whole terminology is structured in such a way that all people feel that they are part of one family. Within the family there are different ranks, like mother and father and children (brother and sister). Spiritual leaders play the role of mother and father in both instances because they educate, give pastoral care and counsel, and at St John's it includes healing as well. In both cases individuals are said to grow and develop. This is one of the instances where the two models are seen operating side by side. People might have joined St John's because of crisis but once they have joined, the church has ways to educate and develop them. The spiritual parents ensure that they get all the necessary material to grow. However, at RPCSA there is a structured programme that caters for the education and spiritual needs of converts.

Gender

Women are numerically superior in both St John's and RPCSA. The irony is that there are no women at the top of the leadership hierarchies. Because of the patriarchal nature of our society, church leadership has been a male prerogative for a long time. Oduyoye made an important observation that "Church women are the acknowledged backbone of the church's finances and upkeep. Yet they rarely serve on church boards and when they do more often they are to represent 'women's interests'" (1986: 124). West observed among the AICs in Soweto that there was an unwritten rule that a woman cannot become leader of her church, no matter how powerful and gifted she could be. He cites two cases where women were dynamic leaders, with powerful personalities, and healing powers. In both cases these women appointed their husbands as bishops. The husbands ended up leaving the running of the church to their wives because they did not have the charisma and gift of leadership. West referred to them as "reluctant bishops" because in most instances they opened services with prayer and handed over to the wives to do the rest (1975: 52).

It is within the context of patriarchy that the case of St John's split in the 1970s should be considered. Mrs Nku started the church and worked in partnership with her husband. The problems started after the death of Bishop Nku in a train accident in 1967. "While Mrs Nku was the effective leader of the church, it had an archbishop, who was constitutionally head of the church" (West 1975: 52). Mrs Nku then appointed her son to this position. During her husband's lifetime, Mrs Nku had full control of the church because he was her appointee. It was logical for her to want someone in that position who would recognise her as the sole leader. The bitter wrangling and eventual court battles with the elected archbishop Masango emanated from the fact she could not control him, as she would her son. West further reported that Masango "wanted more say in the church affairs than did Bishop Nku" (1975: 67). In fact, Masango was not

prepared to be a nominal leader, he wanted real power and he went to court to challenge the decision by Mrs Nku to shorten his term as archbishop. The church was eventually split between Evaton (Mrs Nku) and Germiston (Mr Masango). In this event males went through courts of law to wrestle the authority of the female founder from her. Though she claimed divine authority the courts only interpreted the constitution of her church and made a ruling based on that.

The senior leadership at St John's at national level is male dominated. Women attain the status of being ministers but the title of bishop is reserved for men. Mrs Masango (Mme Anna) played a crucial role in her husband's work. She built a big St John's complex in Claremont, near Pinetown in KwaZulu Natal. This church is fondly referred to as *isonto lika mama* (mother's church). She is one of two women who are spoken of regularly. She is one of the prophets. Her title was Lady Archbishop. There are no other women who have risen to the same prominence as Mrs Masango and Mrs Nku.

At local level female leadership is not frowned upon at St John's. There are many congregations that are led by females. The majority of such women are healers and that is the most important activity at a local level. It is where people with problems, members and non-members, are helped (*bayasebenzelwa*). This is an area of operation in the church that requires that a person must possess the gift of healing. One is only responsible for a small group of people.

At RPCSA, on the other hand, the national leadership is also male dominated. Women play their leadership role within the women's *Manyano*. They are the ones who do most of the fund-raising for the church. The minister's wife presides over groups under the jurisdiction of her husband's ministry. Theoretically she could become president of the national *Manyano*. Opportunities for leadership for the lay women are there in *Manyano*, as well as in the congregation. There was a resolution by the national body to allow for the appointment or election of women elders. Currently, women act as deacons. They play a crucial role in the deacon's court, which looks after church properties. During the annual fundraising effort it is the deacons in the Zones who do most of the work. They collect money and encourage members to give. For a long time many churches had a problem with the ordination of women as ministers but that has changed in that RPCSA is one of those churches that have accepted woman ministers.

The General Assembly of the church recognised the women's *Manyano* (WCA) as an important organisation in the life of the church. Xapile reported that the General Assembly has made it a custom to invite them to give a report. In his words:

It has become a tradition of the RPCSA to give time to the WCA during the General Assembly meetings, to address the Assembly and make official presentations of financial

support to various schemes and projects that the church as well as various congregations are involved in. (2000: 162)

The WCA is treated like an organisation outside of the church. The General Assembly is depicted as an interested spectator. There is a sense in which this group is only invited because of the financial contributions they make. It is ironic that in his report Xapile does not say anything about resolutions on theological or ecclesiastical matter as well as other important business of the General Assembly.

In conclusion, it is clear that women in the churches are treated as second-class citizens. Numerically they are the majority but the decision-making structures are still male dominated. Women are relegated to minor positions or heads of women's organisations. They are known for their financial contribution but given no platform to make ecclesiastical or theological contributions. They can exercise leadership in a small area but once it becomes larger it then requires male leadership. The tradition of leadership structure that is followed by most AICs, where a woman founder appoints a male to act as a leader, is indicative of the fact that women's leadership is not trusted. At St John's women prophets are referred to by their first names, for example, Mme Christina (Mrs Nku), and Mme Anna (Mrs Masango), whereas their male counterparts are addressed in a dignified way by their surnames, for example, Baba Masango or Ntate Matsotso. This might sound like a minor issue but it indicates that there is a sense in which women are placed in the same category as children.

Conclusion

The two churches are both African and Christian. They are both involved in ways of defining for themselves what it means to be human in an urban township context. They employ different strategies and tactics in their endeavours. In other words, they draw on more of the same resources but each elect to have a different emphasis. Each emphasis is determined largely by the missionary tradition from which they draw. Both churches define themselves as Christian. They draw on the Christian tradition. Firstly, they both use the Bible as an important symbol. They have each appropriated it as a symbol of their own, and given themselves the right to interpret it their own way. Secondly, they both draw on the mission heritage. The mission churches continue to use, in a more adapted form, liturgies that came with missionaries. On the other hand, missionary teachings and other influences directly or indirectly influenced the AIC phenomenon. The earlier AICs broke away from the mission churches; they maintained the liturgy and confession of faith. The second string of AICs, that of the Zionist orientation, has the influence of John Alexander Dowie whose church sent missionaries to South Africa. Leaders who founded the AICs came from the mission

churches. The prayer books that are used are mostly those of the mission churches from which the leader came.

African culture, customs and tradition feature prominently in the organisation of the two churches. One obvious example is the seating arrangement. Men and women sit in different aisles and children at RPCSA occupy the third aisle, and at St John's even the children are separated. The style of preaching and the music have been influenced by traditional praise-poetry. Good singing inspires preachers. Another area that has persistently been present is ancestor beliefs and veneration. In fact, ancestors are a very important part of the cultural landscape of Gugulethu. It is a taken-for-granted fact that an average person believes in the ancestors and performs ancestor rituals. In fact, Bediako suggested that "ancestors represent a more enduring reality in African worldview" (1995: 216). The case of the house-opening ritual by an elder at RPCSA is an indication of deep-seated beliefs in the community. Likewise, at St John's they have "respect for, and remembrance of their ancestors in their Christian faith and practice" (Thomas 1999: 61). Although the two models of conversion, that is crisis and growth, are different, each model uses some elements of the other. In the crisis model the signs of growth are apparent in firstly, their use of kinship metaphors denoting growth, nurturing, birth, feeding, sowing, rearing, maturing, and protecting and secondly, in the tradition of prophets as parents and providers. There is a popular song at St John's which says:

Baba Masango ngumelusi wami ungenzela konk' okuhle (Baba Masango is my shepherd, he does all that is good for me).

The message of the song is clear that Masango looks after them and provides for them. He can only provide for them if they belong to his family, his flock. In the growth model there are events in people's lives, which change their perspective on things. Such crises bring them closer to the church and in their testimonies they identify them as their moments of conversion. Individuals who left the church for some reason, on their return also claim that something compelled them to return and that also is said to be a moment of conversion. It is, however, crucial to note that the use of elements of each model in the other does not undermine the dominance of that model. The crisis and growth still remain the distinguishing features of the two models.

Conversion was defined as a process of change management. It was demonstrated how the two groups used different strategies and resources to manage the process of change for their members. The crisis model starts by managing the crisis for the individual through healing rituals. Once they decide to be part of the group that process is managed through rituals of incorporation and maintained through teaching and mentoring. The growth model has different stages of development for individuals to go through. As they move up the stages, they

mature in the faith. There are rites of passage, for instance, confirmation and acceptance into church organisation. Confirmation is when an individual comes of age in terms of church practice. They earn the right to sit at the Lord's table and the right to wear uniform of a church organisation of his or her choice (after meeting the requirements). It indicates maturity. It is the culmination of a number of years' work from Sunday school through the confirmation classes. The church organisations serve to consolidate and reinforce what one has learnt. They keep on reviving one's faith.

Spear pointed out that "conversion to Christianity also involved fundamental reorientation of African religious beliefs and practices" (1999: 6). Moreover, Africans were not passive recipients of the Christian religion but they engaged with it. The process of conversion was not a simplistic move from traditional religions to Christianity. In other words, Christianity was not an all-conquering force that destroyed everything on its way. The process involved the appropriation and reorientation of symbols from both traditional religions and Christianity. The product of this process reflected the influences of both traditional religions and Christianity. This product was neither an Africanised version of Christianity nor a Christianised version of traditional religion but an indigenous religion. It reflected the creativity and innovativeness of those who were involved. Neither the St John's church nor the RPCSA, is considered as an alien or foreign church by its members. Christianity was translated into an African idiom, and as such was identified as part of the African cultural and religious landscape. It became an important African resource.

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