

African Independent Churches: Effects on the social and religious lives of the Africans
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Abstract

African Independent Church (AIC) has become the fastest growing phenomenon in the Christian expansion in the last two decades posing a major challenge to the mainline Churches or denomination (Nichol 168) today one cannot say AIC is a thing of just Africa but its cutting across the world, in Nigeria today it is not possible to estimate the numerical strength of the AIC Churches (Gwamna 63). This is due to the fact that they emphasised God not just up there but God down here. The paper aimed at examining the African independent Churches; Effect on the social and religious lives of the Africans, using descriptive methods of analysis. African Independent Church represent one of the most profound developments in the transmission and transformation of both African Christianity and Christianity in Africa, great rival sparked out in Christianity as the results of the movement of the AIC.

Key words; African, independent, Churches, Effect, social and religious

Introduction

An African initiated Church in a simple term is a Christian Church independently started in Africa by Africans and not by missionaries from another continent. The African independent Churches constitute the significant portion of Christianity in Africa. The development of the Churches has attained a dimension unprecedented to Christianity in the history of the Christian Church. The independent Churches have been founded by separation from parent Churches, missions, or independent Churches, in a few cases under the initiation of a dynamic leader. (Falk 452).

A variety of overlapping terms exist for these forms of Christianity: African initiated Churches, African independent Churches, African indigenous Churches and African instituted Churches. The abbreviation AIC covers them all. The differences in names correspond to the aspect that I wish to emphasize. Those who wish to point out that AICs exhibit African cultural forms, describe them as "indigenous," and so on. These terms have largely been imposed upon such groups, and may not be the way they would describe themselves. (Stephen 21)

Recently, the idea that AICs are indigenous to Africa has had to be surrendered, as AICs can now be found in Europe (e.g. Germany, Britain) and the United States. In such cases, the term "African" suggests the continent of origin, rather than of location.

Haven known what AIC is, this paper will explain the classification of the African independent Church, the list of the Churches, the characteristics of AICs factors that lead to the formation of AIC and the effects of AIC to Africa.

Classification of the African Independent Churches

There are thousands of African Initiated Churches and each one has its own characteristics. Ecclesiologists, missiologists, sociologists and others have tried to group them according to common characteristics, though disagreements have arisen about which characteristics are most significant, and which taxonomy is most accurate. Though it is possible to distinguish groups of denominations with common features, there is also much overlap, with some denominations sharing the characteristics of two or more groups. Many AICs share traditions with Christians from other parts of the Christian world, and these can also be used in classifying them. So there are AICs which share some beliefs or practices with Anglican, Methodist, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal and Orthodox traditions. Some are Sabbatarian, some are Zionist, and so on.

The African initiated Churches can be classified into three different categories

The Ethiopian The people appreciate all references in the Bible that presented the Africans in the dignified light, among the Ethiopian there are those who separated from the mission Churches, this is as a results of leadership desires which prompted them to be independent Churches. They maintain and adhered strictly to the Bible interpretations as is in the protestant Churches from which they came out of. They recently formed Protestant congregations, mostly in southern Africa, arose from the Ethiopian movement of the late nineteenth century, which taught that African Christian Churches should be under the control of black people. They should not be confused with the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church or Coptic Orthodox Church, which have a much longer and an utterly distinct doctrinal history. Some denominations that arose from the Ethiopian movement have united with these earlier denominations (Falk 454).

The Zionist movement the Zionist movement had its origin from the United States of America in 1912 when John A. Dowel founded the Catholic Apostolic Church of Zion. They officially recognised Jesus of Nazareth as being somehow the messiah of the Bantu. They believe in faith healing, practice triple Baptism by immersion and are waiting for the second return of Christ in a near future. They emphasised divine healing, abstention from pork, and the wearing of white robes. They insist on the work of the Holy Spirit in the revelation and healing. The prophet is the head and the bishop of the Church and his calling comes from above. Veneration of the ancestors is projected. They are found chiefly in Southern Africa. (Falk 457).

The Bantu messianic movement the messiah group are formed through adherence to a dominant person or prophet. Some AICs with strong leadership have been described by some researchers as Messianic, but opinions also changed. The Churches that have been called Messianic focus on the power and sanctity of their leaders; often the leaders are thought by their followers to possess Christ-like characteristics. Denominations described as Messianic include the Kimbanguist Church in the Democratic Republic of Congo; the Nazareth Baptist Church of Isaiah Shembe in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa; and the Zion Christian Church of EngenasLekganyane with headquarters in South Africa's Limpopo province (M.L 18)

Most of these as explain above have links with some of the mission denominations as the Church traditions and even there order of worship are from the outside world like Zionist, and the bantu which have things in common with some of the Churches in the west.

It will be of great important to explain briefly AIC by bring out one of the Churches in AIC as listed above for a better understanding of the concept, Aladura Pentecostal and spiritualist.

In the Aladura Church we have Aladura Pentecostals and Aladura spirituals all of which are independent Church from Africa I will discuss a little of it below. As Abiodun opined that;

The Aladura Pentecostal Churches originated in Nigeria. They rely on the power of prayer and in all effects of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Today such Churches include Christ Apostolic Church, Cherubim and Seraphim, Celestial Church of Christ and Church of the Lord (Aladura). The first Aladura Movement was started at Ijebu-Ode, Nigeria in 1918 by Sophia Odunlami, a school teacher, and Joseph Sadare, a goldsmith. They both attended St. Saviour's Anglican Church. They rejected infant baptism and all forms of medicine, whether western or traditional. In consequence, they initiated the "Prayer Band", popularly called *EgbeAladura*. Joseph Sadare was compelled to give up his post in the Synod and others were forced to resign their jobs and to withdraw their children from the Anglican School. The Aladura began as a renewal movement in search of true spirituality.

A revival took place during the 1918 influenza epidemic. The group used prayer to save many lives affected by the influenza epidemic. This consolidated the formation of the prayer group and the group was named "Precious Stone" and later the "Diamond Society". By 1920, the Diamond Society had grown tremendously and had started to form branches around the Western region of Nigeria. In particular, David Odubanjo went to start the Lagos branch. The group emphasized divine healing, Holiness, and All Sufficiency of God, which form the three cardinal beliefs of the Church today. For this reason, the group had association with Faith Tabernacle of Philadelphia and changed its name to "Faith Tabernacle of Nigeria". The great revival in Nigeria started in 1930 where the Leaders of the Cherubim & Seraphim, The Church of the Lord (Aladura) and the Faith Tabernacle played important roles. Some people think that these leaders - Joseph Sadare of "Egbe Aladura", David Odubanjo of "Diamond Society", Moses Orimolade of "Cherubim & Seraphim", and Josiah Ositelu of "The Church of the Lord (Aladura)" performed several miracles. The revival started in Ibadan in the South-West of Nigeria and later spread to other parts of the country.

The Revival group went through several name changes until, after 24 years of its formation, it finally adopted the name Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) in 1942. Today,

CAC has spread worldwide and is the precursor of Aladura Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria. The Church has established several schools at all levels, including Joseph Ayo Babalola University.

The CAC today has helped in changing some of the western way of worship and even added social value to African society, their University is one of the best private University in Nigeria.

Aladura Spiritualists

Eternal Sacred Order of Cherubim and Seraphim

Moses OrimoladeTunolase, who was later called Baba Aladura, or Praying Father, founded the Eternal Sacred Order of Cherubim and Seraphim in 1925, also as a prayer group within the Anglican Church. Captain Christiana Abiodun's later adopted daughter fell into a trance, and Moses OrimoladeTunolase, who was already an itinerant evangelist and teacher, was the only one who could awaken her. By 1925 they had left the Anglican Church to become independent. Their most distinctive ministry was to openly ferret out and challenge witches on their long evangelistic journeys through the countryside. These long trips were typical of Cherubim and Seraphim (as they are most commonly called) evangelists and missionaries. Today the Church is one of the most popular, most attractive and most influential of the Aladura Churches worldwide. (56-67).

Even though there are the emphases of prayers in the African independent Churches that also helped in changing the way Africans use to see prayers. There are things that are still maintained. What are the distinctive features of the African independent Churches that make them different from the mission founded Churches. Below are some of the features.

The general characteristics of the African independent movement

- Local autonomy -Strict adherent to the Old Testaments passage
- Female leadership -Toleration of polygamy
- Emphasis on pure and practical religion
- Believe in the efficacy of prayers and faith healing
- Believe in vision, Dreams and prophecies
- Lack of adequate theological training - Use of white gowns

Factors that lead to the African independent Church

There are so many causal factors that lead to the formation of the African independent Churches but in this research little will be explore. Daudu states few below;

1. **Leadership Tussle**, African Churches emerge due to completion over position of authority in the Church. The mission Churches failed to properly involve the

Africans into the leadership of the Church mission were divided into Europeans management and Africans labour. Although some worthy Africans may be permitted to work but will do all under serious guide, they receive directives from the Europeans in running the Church.

2. **Authoritarian and Racist tendency;** when the missionaries came to Africa, there was much interaction between them and the African Christians as a results so much progress was made through evangelisation. But during the second half of the nineteenth century, the white missionaries began to discriminate against the Africans in the Church. This was the main reasons that lead to the formation of the native Baptist Church in 1868 and was lead by pastor stone, after he was dismissed by the white missionaries.
3. **Polygamy;** the issue of the polygamy was one of the causes of the coming of the African Church but that is not the leading and major causes. The CMS allow polygamist into the membership of the Church but subsequently there was a conference in 1888 in England which ruled against the practice of the polygamy and that was a denunciation of the entire African system.
4. **Search for purer form of Christianity;** some independent Churches began in order to revive and purify mission. These Churches sought to purge and purify Christianity of what they regarded as incompatible with Christianity Ideals.
5. **Inadequate contextualization of the Christian gospel;** African Churches arose as the result of the inability of the mission Churches to contextualize to the African converts in the way they will understand rather the missionaries imposed the Europeans ways of thinking to them.

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Effects of social and religious change on the Africans

The African independent Churches have greatly influenced the social and religious lives of the Africans, in their effort to indigenise Christianity they make Christianity more attractive and this affected the growth of the main stream Churches. Many members of the old Churches drift away to the new African Churches. To check this mission Churches must relax their rigid policies otherwise it may not see members again in a near future.

The African independent Churches not only preaches about God up there they also preach God down here a God that is interested in both the physical and spiritual well being of the people and that make the Churches to grow faster. The African Church independent movement have created in African religious pluralism and tolerance.

They have also developed in Africans new social bond and brotherhood base on faith rather than blood or ethnicity. It is this that checked the individualism of the historic

orthodox Churches, they members of the African independent Churches treats each other with special love which the mainline Churches were not exhibiting such.

They have contributed greatly to the social development of the host communities in the provision of medical and health facilities, and building of schools. This help in improving the lives of the people thereby complementing governments' effort even though some of the mission founded Churches also provided some of these services but the impact of the one that the AIC are providing has more impact on the people.

Conclusion

African initiatives and imputes in God's movement is phenomenal. AIC represent one of the most profound developments in the transmission and transformation of both African Christianity and Christianity in Africa, great rival sparked out in Christianity as a result of the African independent movements thereby changing the original order. The movement has also helped in remoulding and contextualising Christianity into African context which is totally different, to a greater extent African independent Church has change the original system and has softens the rigid doctrines of the orthodox Churches.

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Chibuzor I Nwanguma, Journal of University scholars in Religions (JUSREL) issue 6