

Mumo, Peter Mutuku

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Continuing Relevance of African Traditional Religion: Case Studies of African Instituted Churches in Kenya

Peter Mutuku Mumo

Abstract

Despite the condemnation of African Traditional Religion by western missionaries and writers, the religion has demonstrated its resilience by thriving up to the 21st Century. The first generation of African scholars of African Traditional Religion did thorough research on it in various parts of sub-Saharan Africa, documented its contents and disputed the prejudices and biases presented by Western writers. Through the use of case studies of African Instituted Churches (AICs) in Kenya, the chapter analyses from written literature how aspects of African Traditional Religion are continued in contemporary society. It argues that the distortions of African Religion by Western writers and their condescending attitude acted as the fodder for the emergence of AICs on the continent. It is further argued that after the translation of the Bible into African languages, Africans realised that Africans' beliefs and practices were in sync with the Jewish way of life. The founders of AICs felt that the best option for the survival of African Traditional Religion and the African way of life was to break away from the missionary-led churches in Africa and found churches where Africans would feel at home in expressing their religious and cultural practices. The chapter highlights major aspects of African Traditional Religion which have been continued by AICs, such as the concept of God, mystical powers and spiritualism, worship, initiation rites, marriage, empowerment of women in religion, communalism, wholeness of life and music, among others. The chapter also highlights the shortcomings of African independent churches such as their regionalism versus universalism, limited exposure to advanced theological training and unnecessary rivalry and competition for power leading to schisms. It is concluded that AICs continue aspects of African Religion in contemporary society.

Introduction

Africans reacted to the massive deculturation by colonialism and western evangelisation by founding African Instituted Churches (AICs). They wanted to have churches where they could feel at home. Welbourn and Ogot (1966) stressed the psychological aspects of founding AICs, where Africans wanted churches where their spiritual and cultural needs were met. The churches founded by western missionaries were excluding members who were deemed sinful due to their embracing of some African cultural practices, such as polygamy, among others.

Even Africans who embraced Christianity in mission founded churches realised that, during crises, these churches did not give them adequate solutions to their cultural and social challenges. Christianity, as expressed by the mission founded churches, could not adequately address their concerns. They started to secretly consult African culture in order to get solutions. The founding of AICs provided a Christian platform from which Africans could address their cultural and religious issues adequately. The African converts founded AICs because they wanted to remain true Africans and Christians at the same time.

The chapter makes use of experiences of AICs in Kenya, Eastern Africa, to illustrate how aspects of ATR are continued in the twenty-first century. The chapter also analyses the significance of ATR in the formation of AICs. It further uses case studies of some AICs to illustrate how aspects of ATR are continued in contemporary African society. Finally, the chapter examines the challenges that have engulfed the AICs, making some of them ineffective in promoting aspects of ATR.

African Traditional Religion and the Founding of African Instituted Churches

The Berlin conference of 1884/85 brought about the division of the African continent among the European powers. The European countries wanted to acquire as much land as possible for the exploitation of its resources. European colonies were subsequently established, and colonial governments replaced the traditional African kings, chiefs and councils of elders. The traditional rulers thus lost their authority over their people. According to Mkangi (Bahemuka & Brockington, 2004, p. 223) the colonialists embarked on a mission to bring Africans to the level of Europeans.

The lands formerly owned by clans were declared crownlands and were apportioned to European settlers (in cases of settler colonialism). The Former African owners were reduced to squatters who were supposed to provide the required cheap or forced labour on the settler farms. The Africans were therefore deprived of their livelihoods.

A new master-servant social structure was created in which Africans became the servants of the white masters. A further development that took place was the arrival of Western Christian missionaries in Africa. Whereas their main objective was to convert Africans into their respective denominations, their approach brought them on a head-on collision with some of the African converts. Mkangi (in Bahemuka & Brockington 2004, p. 220) writes: "Coming from an alien culture but armed with a gun and with an ideology based on social Darwinism of evolution of the species, Europeans arrogated themselves the high status on the evolution scale." Hence, they declared every African to be inferior.

To the missionaries, Africans were heathens and pagans who had not been exposed to the light of civilization and the gospel of Christ. Mkangi (in Bahemuka & Brockington 2004, p. 237) argues: "The missionaries considered themselves as having divine mission not only to civilize Africans but also to save lost souls from the primitive way of life and pagan religion." Their customs, therefore, were collectively condemned as unchristian and called for their immediate eradication. The missionaries decided to impose European culture and Christianity on the Africans. However, to be a member of an African community, one had to fulfil and participate in those customs such as initiation, marriage and burial. The attacks on their age-old customs brought missionaries and African converts into a conflict. Karanja (1999, p. 182) observes: "Rigid church leaders who attempted to implement missionary policies without regard to local Christians also widened the rift between missionaries and African Christians." The African converts wanted to remain true Africans and Christians at the same time. The missionaries, on the other hand, wanted Africans to be Europeanised Christians.

Another problem African converts faced was that, whereas the missionaries taught about God's love for all and the equality of all before God, in practice, this was not the case. African converts were treated as "boys", and those who got leadership positions were equally treated as juniors by their European colleagues. Kibicho (2006, p. 189) argues that the attitude adopted by missionaries went against the Christian biblical teaching that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither rich nor poor,

neither free nor slave, neither male nor female, neither young nor old, neither white nor black”

Due to their grievances against the Western Christian missionaries, some Africans opted to pull out of the mission churches and found their own independent churches where they would be free from missionary control. Anderson (1977, p. 145) writes: “Independent churches sprang in some cases because African Christians believed African leadership was necessary for a genuinely African Christianity.” Their main goals were to liberate their people from social, political and spiritual domination.

As argued above, AICs emerged due to a clash between the missionaries and African Christians. The levels of dissatisfaction with Western Christianity are depicted by the large numbers of AICs which spontaneously emerged in all major regions of Africa, Southern, Western and Eastern. Despite their large numbers, there is a common trend in all of them: the desire for freedom, identity and self-realization. It is, therefore, not surprising that several of these churches have the term “Independent” in their official names. Shorter and Njiru (2001, p. 15) argue that AICs are theologically similar to mainline churches but sociologically distinct and separate in organization. It is therefore concluded that AICs are churches that were founded by Africans without external support or control.

Different names have been given to AICs by African scholars depending on their perspectives. The following names are commonly used: African Indigenous churches, African Independent Churches, African Initiated churches, African Instituted Churches. The phenomenon of AICs is an ongoing process. New churches are emerging each day in Africa. Scholars have created two categories of AICs: those created during the colonial period in Africa are called classical AICs, while the new ones are called neo-Pentecostals due to their Pentecostal features.

Africans founded AICs due to various grievances against the missionaries and colonialists. On top of the list of grievances was the domination of the missionaries on the church. They did not give the Africans the space to express their spirituality in accordance with their cultures. On top of the domination was over-regulation of the church, where the missionaries developed over-strict rules for the African converts. When African church ministers went through training, upon employment, they found that they were treated as inferiors to the white missionary ministers.

Africans were forbidden from continuing with their African customs. For example, those Africans who were polygamists were being forced to divorce several of their wives and retain one wife. This caused African men to be at loggerheads with the missionaries. Most African customs such as dances, rituals, consumption of traditional brews, and African aesthetics were declared unchristian.

When the Old Testament was translated in African languages, African converts found that it seemed to endorse their customs. For example, the leading figures of Judaism were polygamous. The African converts realized that the condemnation of their cultural customs could not be based on Biblical teachings especially the Old Testament. It was for this reason that some African Christian converts broke away from the mission churches. They founded churches where they would be true Africans and Christians at the same time without any contradictions. Africans founded AICs to liberate themselves from both the oppressive colonial and missionary paternalistic systems. They purposed to reclaim the African identity and dignity while at the same time embracing the gospel.

An equally important vision of the founders of AICs was to embrace the whole of the African continent. This is demonstrated by the names they gave the churches they founded such as African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa (AIPCA), Church of Christ in Africa, African Brotherhood Church, and National Independent Church of Africa, among others. To capture this Baur (2000, p. 34) writes: "At the beginning of the African Independent Church Movement there stood the dream of one great African church embracing the whole Negro race and being born from the encounter of the gospel with African men and women, without the domination of European leadership and culture". In reality though, this was rarely actualised. In name, there was a desire to embrace all Africans but in practice most AICs were ethnic or regional-based.

Due to the exposure that the Africans had gained by associating with the colonialists and Western missionaries, they wanted to create a big church which would be for all Africans in the African continent. Their vision envisaged liberating Africans from social, religious, cultural and economic domination by outsiders who had no respect for the African way of life and its treasured institutions. This implied the expulsion of the colonialists from Africa, the establishment of African governments, the resurrection of African culture, the creation of material wealth, the overcoming of racial discrimination, and a reversal of colour roles.

The founding of AICs was not restricted to any part of the African continent. It was happening in all regions of sub-Saharan Africa. Africans in these regions were experiencing the same encounters with foreign domination. It can be rightly argued that the founding of AICs occurred spontaneously. The Africans were fed up with mission Christianity, which went against Christian values and doctrines. Africans were fed up with the missionaries' hypocrisy where they preached a gospel which claimed that there was neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, yet they practised ethnocentrism and condoned colonialism.

African scholars have classified AICs into various categories. The first category consists of AICs named *Ethiopian*, which stemmed from the interpretation of Psalm 68:31, "Envoys will come from Egypt; Cush will submit herself to God." These are mainly in Southern Africa; they advocate that African churches should be under African leadership. Another type is the Zionist or spirit type, which emphasises faith healing, prophesy, revelation and glossolalia. Another type comprises prophetic movements which are led by charismatic leaders. There are also the messianic movements whose founders claim to be the fulfilment of the second advent of Jesus Christ. Finally, we have the millennial movements which claim imminent millennium – a coming to the end of the present world order followed by the golden age.

Since the founding of AICs started at the peak of colonialism and missionary enterprise in Africa, most leaders of the AICs were severely persecuted by both the colonial governments and missionaries. The leaders of AICs were seen as challenging the status quo; hence, most of them were imprisoned. For example, in Kenya, the founder of *Dini ya Musambwa* was jailed until Kenya attained independence in 1963. Others were rounded up and harassed and later released. The missionaries fought the AICs by declaring them as heresy and a threat to Christianity. Their leaders were excommunicated from the former mission churches.

After the attainment of independence by African countries in the 1960's, the AICs were accorded recognition by the secular authorities and, to some degree, gained tolerance and acceptance from the mainline mission churches. From this time, the AICs started spreading unhindered throughout sub-Saharan Africa. According to Olowola (1993, p. 21), AICs are the fastest-growing churches in Africa. Kaelotswe (2014, p. 227) argues: "By the end of the 20th century, AICs had spread all over Africa, becoming the largest Christian church on the continent." He attributes

this phenomenal growth to the inclusion of aspects of African culture in most AICs.

African Instituted Churches and Continuation of Aspects of African Traditional Religion in Contemporary Society

Despite the introduction of Christianity in various parts of Africa, the influence of ATR has persisted. While writing on the resilience of ATR, Gehman (1989, p. 19) states, "... over 100 years since the introduction of the Christian faith, ATR persists and shapes the attitudes of a large number of people". AICs, which are the main carriers of aspects of ATR in contemporary society, have been founded in different ethnic groups. African Christian converts in various African ethnic groups founded AICs which addressed the cultural concerns of their particular communities.

The *Nomiya Luo Church* among the Luo was started by Yohana Owalo for the Nyanza people in 1912, and was registered in 1914 (Opwapo 1981, p. 61). It was the first AIC to be started in Kenya. Nomiya means "God has given me a revelation." It was started in Siaya County and spread to other parts of the Nyanza region. It has attracted many followers because it accommodates Luo cultural practices such as polygamy and the inheritance of widows, among others. Although the Luo do not practise circumcision of boys, due to the influence of the Old Testament, the practice is encouraged among Luo boys. In order for men to become members of the church, they have to be circumcised and then be baptised. The church teaches that as God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, likewise, He gave the Luos their customs. The Luo Nomiya Church was founded so that the Luo people could worship God in their own way and simultaneously uphold Luo traditional customs. Opwapo (1981, p. 83) writes: "Christianity dressed in Western garb was not really coming to grips with the emotional, moral and religious needs of the Luo."

In contemporary society, the Luo Nomiya Church allows its members to continue traditional burial ceremonies. According to Luo religious traditions, the dead are supposed to be buried in their ancestral lands, and traditional burial rites are supposed to be observed. When Luos die outside their homes, the corpses are transported and buried in their ancestral lands. In 1990, the burial of Luos in ancestral lands became a subject of litigation when a prominent criminal law advocate, S. M. Otieno died (Mumo 2021, p. 74). Wambui Otieno, the widow of the deceased, wanted

the body to be buried in Upper Matasia near Nairobi, while the clan wanted him to be buried in Siaya County. Both the High Court and Court of Appeal ruled that S. M. Otieno should be buried in his ancestral land in Siaya. These two court rulings legalised the custom of the Luo being buried in their ancestral lands.

In worship, the Luo Nomiya Church uses traditional Luo musical instruments such as drums and horns. They also dance using Luo rhythms. In keeping up with African care for the disadvantaged, the church allows its followers to practise levirate marriages where widows are inherited by a brother of the deceased. Although these kinds of marriages have become controversial in contemporary society, their objective in traditional Luo society was to protect the widow and her children from exploitation and the vagaries of life.

Another Kenyan church, *Dini ya Musambwa*, was founded by Elijah Masinde among the Bukusu of Western Kenya in the 1940s (Mukanda, 2008, p. 2). Although it was founded in Western Kenya, the church managed to spread to the Rift Valley, Uganda and Tanzania (Kuluba n.d., p. 3). It was founded as a resistance movement against political and western missionary domination. It was against the missionary type of Christianity, which had rejected many African practices. It advocated for Africans to return to the veneration of their ancestors. In fact, the name Musambwa is a Bantu name that means revering ancestors. Its founder Elijah Masinde was an activist who fought both the colonial and post-independence governments. For his resistance, he was detained by both governments. *Dini ya Musambwa*, strictly speaking, was not an AIC; Elijah Masinde rejected Christianity but embraced the Old Testament. The theology of *Dini ya Musambwa* is exclusively centred on the Old Testament. Kuloba argues that the theology emerged out of the fusion of ideologies of the Bible, especially the Old Testament and African traditional beliefs. Elijah Masinde urged Africans to abandon Western culture, which was being propagated by Western missionaries and the colonialists, and embrace African culture. *Dini ya Musambwa* promotes African values such as family, communal living, African unity and worship of *wele*, the African God. It urges Africans to embrace African names and abandon Western names.

In contemporary society, *Dini ya Musambwa* together with other AICs in western Kenya have managed to enable their members to continue African cultural practices such as traditional circumcision of boys, marriage rituals, traditional burial ceremonies, and use of traditional dances, among others. Through the practice of aspects of African culture, *Dini ya*

Musambwa has continued aspects of ATR in contemporary society. Magesa (1997, p. 6) argues: “Indeed, African perspectives persist despite the odds against them, and they serve a positive purpose.”

Another AIC that embodies the continuation of aspects of African Traditional Religion in Contemporary Society is the African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa (AIPCA). The church was founded among the Kikuyu people of Kenya in the late 1920s. The main reason for its founding was to preserve Kikuyu cultural practices and political independence, which were threatened by the aggressive evangelisation of the missionaries operating in central Kenya. The missionaries were on a spirited mission to eradicate cultural practices which they deemed incompatible with the teachings of Christianity. The various missionary societies operating in central Kenya were preaching against polygamy, traditional dances, snuff taking, beer drinking and female circumcision. AIPCA was principally founded to resist the cultural attacks by the missionaries. Writing on why AIPCA was founded, Ndungu (1979, p. 42) says: “The life of the Kikuyu was thus threatened from all sides, and they had to find ways and means of responding to the external forces.” The church was concerned about protecting and preserving African identity embodied in African culture and values.

Due to the impetus created by AICs in central Kenya among the Kikuyu, there is a resurgence of Kikuyu culture in the area (Omondi, 2023). The Kenyan constitution in 2010 legalised the formation of cultural groups. In 2014, the Kikuyu Council of Elders Association Trust was registered and was followed in 2018 by the Kikuyu Council of Elders. These groups contend that missionaries and colonialists unfairly treated Kikuyu culture. They call for the restoration of Kikuyu cultural beliefs and practices in contemporary society. These groups attribute moral decadence in contemporary society to the abandonment of Kikuyu cultural practices. These councils initiate young men into elderhood. During the initiation ceremonies, young Kikuyu men are required to sacrifice a goat under a *mgumo* tree. The ceremony is conducted facing Mount Kenya (Omondi, 2023). The councils have also revived traditional marriage ceremonies and the traditional Kikuyu naming system. To participate in traditional marriage ceremonies, the brides and grooms dress up in Kikuyu traditional attire. Through these cultural practices, the Kikuyu have maintained aspects of African Religion in contemporary society. Several radio FM and TV stations that broadcast in Kikuyu language have been used to promote aspects of the Kikuyu traditional culture.

It can also be observed that since the AICs were based on ethnic interpretations of Christianity, they addressed the cultural aspects of the communities concerned. Their understanding of the gospel mirrored the worldview of the specific communities. Mbiti (1969, p. 4) observes: "Each religion is bound and limited to the people among whom it has evolved." In addition, whereas the missionaries were communicating the gospel in English and Kiswahili, AICs communicated it in a wide range of African languages. Since the Bible had been translated into various African languages, AICs preached and interpreted the Bible in the contexts of African languages and world views. Most African societies already believed in a monotheistic concept of God; the AICs used the names and attributes of God as understood by African communities (Idowu 1973, p. 140). This presented a continuation of African belief in God. AICs gave Africans an opportunity to authentically understand God. Commenting on the significance of AICs adaptation of African cultural elements, Kealotswe (2014, p. 228) argues that they have made Christianity real and meaningful to African adherents. Whereas missionaries struggled to make Africans understand the Christian God, AICs did not have similar difficulties in presenting the same. The use of the Old Testament by AICs made it easy to express African cultural aspects. The Jewish religious practices were perceived as similar to those of most African communities. Therefore, the AICs founded in various African ethnic groups were able to continue aspects of ATR such as their concepts of God, spirits, rites of passage, wholeness of life, morality and spiritualism.

Due to their belief in spirits, AICs are able to deal with spiritual challenges among the Africans, which the missionaries were unable to deal with. For example, most spirit churches (type of AICs) use the holy spirit to assist members who are tormented by evil forces. Ministers of AICs are able to exorcise evil spirits. While writing on features of traditional healing using the case study of the *Akurinu Church* in Kenya, Ndungu (2009, p. 96) argues that the Akurinu Church has practised faith healing since its inception. The members of the Akurinu Church do not use modern medicine. Ndungu argues that Akurinu faith healing is derived from four sources, namely revelation received by the founders on Mount Kenya, the Bible, the fact that Akurinu pastors consider themselves as *nabi* (prophets) such as Elisha and Elijah, the belief in the holy spirit and the influence of traditional healers. The healing process among the Akurinu is very elaborate and is conducted as part of the church service. Those with physical or psychological problems are asked to go in front of the assembly and are surrounded

by other believers. The pastor leads in a prayer session, and the sick and the entire congregation join in the prayer. Ndungu (2009, p. 99) comments: "There is communal participation, which ensures that the sick are comforted by being made to feel that their suffering is shared by the rest."

In Central Kenya, the Akurinu Church has been instrumental in continuing aspects of African Traditional Religion. Its services are enriched by African music and dances. Despite their services taking too long, the music using African instruments and rhythms makes them lively. The Akurinu live a communal life like Africans in traditional African society (Njeri, 1984, p. 87). They have a very strong sense of community even in their church services. They allow polygamists to be members of their church. They also believe in the reality of ancestral spirits (Njeri 1984, p. 85). During the missionary period, they were opposed against missionaries destroying the Kikuyu culture. They believe in prophecy and the holy spirit. In the field of mystical powers, which the missionaries had condemned as evil, the AICs have been active players. For example, the AICs are able to deal with the challenges of witchcraft. AIC ministers, across Africa, through the use of the holy spirit, have been able to convincingly neutralise witchcraft and deal with its effects. Those who claim to be bewitched have received faith healing from the AICs. The Pentecostal AICs, especially, have been instrumental in dealing with issues of mystical powers.

It can also be observed that most AICs were founded to accommodate those Africans who had been thrown out of mission churches because of issues related to African cultural practices. For example, in Ukambani in Eastern Kenya, the *African Brotherhood Church* (ABC) was started to accommodate polygamists, among other members who practised cultural aspects that were condemned by the missionaries. Hayward (1963, p. 53) argues: "For the majority of the peoples of Africa polygamy is a normal and sanctioned institution." The Africa Inland Mission, operating in this region, was not tolerant of African cultural customs. Ray (1976, p. 194) contends that AICs represent a radical indigenization of Christianity in Africa and that their rapid expansion presented a serious challenge to the established churches. In fact, the ABC ended up attracting nearly equal numbers of adherents with the *Africa Inland Church*.

Most of the AICs have an administrative structure which resembles the traditional social structures. Wepener & Swart (2021, pp.1-4) argue that AICs make use of African social structures to illustrate theological concepts and institutions. The leader of the church is viewed as the father of the spiritual family while the leader's wife is the spiritual mother. Due to

this constitution, there is an intimate interaction between the members and their leaders. Life in the AICs is characterised by communal brotherly love, which is a significant feature of ATR.

Women play a more important role in AICs than is the case in most main-line churches. In traditional African settings, women were given significant roles in religious matters. There was a considerable number of women in African societies who were prophetesses, diviners, medicine-women as well as herbalists. For example, among the Kikuyu, elderly women were accorded religious duties and responsibilities during worship sessions. In some AICs, women continue in this vein. For example, some AICs were founded by women. A case in point is Mary Akatsa who founded the *Jerusalem Church of Christ* (JCC) in Kawangware in Kenya (Nandi, 1993). She is referred to as a prophetess. Services in her church are conducted in Kiswahili language. Hymns use African tunes and melodies. Faith healing and revelation are key practices which attract Kenyans to the church (Nandi, 1993, p. 172). Although Mary Akatsa was born in Western Kenya, she migrated to Nairobi where she founded her faith healing ministry. Writing on this church, Nandi (1993, p. 172) says that the church is like a hospital and it attracts people from all races, the rich and the poor. Nandi (1993, p. 180) further writes: “Many Asians who seek healing at JCC believe that the foundress has a special gift from God to heal patients and that she has healed them and their relatives of incurable ailments”. Nandi also says:

“Other than healing Akatsa also eradicates witchcraft. Many testimonies were given by former patients and their relatives to prove that Mary Akatsa is a faith healer and that she owes these special healing powers to God. Before performing healing patients are required to repent their sins to pave the way for their healing. Most female patients suffer from barrenness, sterility and stomach complications while a few men suffer from impotency” (Nandi, 1993, p. 156).

The above section has illustrated how aspects of African Traditional Religion are continued in various African Instituted Churches in contemporary Kenyan society. Due to the inclusion of these aspects the churches have ended up attracting thousands of Kenyans. AICs have kept aspects of African Traditional Religion and culture a reality in contemporary society.

Challenges Facing African Instituted Churches in Contemporary Society

Although AICs are among the leading institutions in the promotion of aspects of ATR in contemporary society, they also have their challenges. For example, some of them condemn the ATR as an untrue religion. Their attitude towards ATR is similar to that of some mission churches. They see the aspects of ATR which they affirm as aspects of African culture rather than of religion. They do not approve of some aspects of ATR, such as using shrines as places of worship, consulting medicine men, and offering sacrifices, among others. Nevertheless, despite their insinuations, Mbiti (1969, p. 5) argues that African Religion is the African way of life. So to Mbiti, there is no difference between culture and religion, which some AICs stress.

However, the AICs that do affirm ATR, also have internal problems that negatively affect their positive promotion of ATR for the larger society. Falaye (2014, p. 91) observes that “AICs are not without problems even though they are attractive...” One of their most significant challenges is poverty. The majority of the members of AICs are extremely poor. Due to the poverty of their members, the AICs are poorly funded. Some of their members’ refuse to send their children to school, denying them opportunities for social transformation. A vicious cycle of poverty has been perpetuated from parents to children.

The AICs also have faced prejudices perpetuated by missionaries and the mainline churches. Their founders have been viewed as a spiritual cancer eating steadily into the church of the land. These prejudices are a result of ignorance. Those who condemn the AICs have not critically examined their beliefs and practices. They just condemn them without first trying to understand them. Few of the AICs have been systematically researched on by qualified researchers. The negative perception of them is also augmented by the fact that the AICs have not documented their beliefs, practices, and history. Due to lack of information, many outsiders have unfairly attacked the AICs. Some of these attacks are also due to jealousy of the phenomenal growth and expansion of the AICs. Several mission churches have lost substantial numbers of their followers to the AICs.

The AICs have also been accused of syncretism. Mugambi (2002, p. 68) argues that syncretism is a negative word which Western theologians use to suppress the inclusion of aspects of African culture into Christian practices in Africa. Promoting African religious beliefs and customs has been

seen as a promotion of syncretic religiosity. This accusation is unfounded since all religions, including Islam and Christianity, are a collection of beliefs adopted from various belief systems. Syncretism is an issue to the mission churches only when they refer to AICs. The emergence of AICs in Africa was as a result of mission churches' failure to accommodate African cultural aspects such as the spirit world, witchcraft, polygamy, and rites of passage. If the mission churches seriously addressed these issues, the AICs would not have attracted the numbers they have done.

Another challenge facing AICs is lack of training of their clergy. Due to a lack of funding, most AICs cannot sponsor their clergy to go to advanced theological colleges. There are also instances where some pastors have been sponsored by some donors and acquired theological training run by the mainline churches. Still, after graduation due to jealousy, they have been rejected by their churches. In fact, some trained ministers have ended up migrating to the mainline churches.

Another serious challenge is that some AICs are ethnic-based and have not attempted to evangelise among other ethnic groups due to their ethnocentrism. There are very few AICs which have become national churches. Some writers, such as J. N. K. Mugambi (2002), have accused AICs of not promoting national cultures like how national protestant churches in Western Europe promoted Western European culture. Many AICs are localised and hence have not acquired a national outlook. Other AICs have been rocked by succession controversies. These battles have ended up preoccupying the top leadership of these churches.

CONCLUSION

Africans founded African Instituted Churches in order to perpetuate aspects of African culture, among other reasons. AICs in the twenty-first century are vehicles through which aspects of ATR are continued in contemporary African societies. Through the use of several case studies from Kenya in Eastern Africa, this chapter has demonstrated how AICs have incorporated aspects of ATR in their practices, liturgy and worship. It has also demonstrated that they continue practices such as burial rites, traditional circumcision of boys, use of African naming systems, communalism, marriage rituals, wholeness of life, empowerment of women in church ministry, use of African music rhythms and African spiritualism.

The chapter has further demonstrated that many of the AICs are theologically similar to the mission churches; hence they have retained some aspects of the mission churches from which they broke away. Although they continue some aspects of ATR, some of them only accept these aspects as “African culture”, not religion. Some of the AICs still condemn some aspects of African religion, such as respecting traditional shrines and consulting traditional medicine men. They also outright reject the African Tradition Religion and see it as an untrue religion. Though some AICs have managed to spread to certain regions and developed infrastructure similar to that of mission churches, the majority of them are still ethnic-based and lack basic educational and pastoral training facilities. The majority of them are also poor and have not been able to sponsor their ministers for advanced theological training to empower them to systematically articulate their teaching and document their histories.

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