

CHAPTER 9 

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African “Biblical” Christianity

Understanding the “Spirit-type” African Initiated Churches in Zimbabwe

Introduction

African Initiated Churches (AICs) arose in Zimbabwe as a response to the success and failure of the evangelization of the country by western missionaries. A discussion of AICs demands that we pay attention to the Christian landscape in Zimbabwe from the end of the 19th century, when Christian missions made real in-roads into Zimbabwe. This western evangelization saw the setting up of mainline Christianity (Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Methodist and United Methodist Churches, the Dutch Reformed Church, the Lutheran Church, the Presbyterian Church and many others), as well as classical Pentecostalism represented by the Apostolic Faith Mission. Even though Zimbabwe experienced this Christian explosion, it would appear that indigenous people remained with many unfulfilled aspirations and questions. These unfulfilled aspirations and questions explain the rise of AICs in Zimbabwe. While there are different categories of these AICs ranging from the Ethiopian, Spirit/Healing/Prophetic to Pentecostal types, this chapter focuses on the so-called spirit-type AICs. These are churches that believe and proclaim the centrality of the Holy Spirit in their lives, hence credit the Holy Spirit with extraordinary deeds within the churches and by leading prophets.

Through a socio-historical and theological approach to the sources on the rise and development of AICs in Zimbabwe, this chapter contends that these AICs can be legitimately understood as Africa’s “biblical Christianity,” since “these churches appear to have seriously attempted

to establish a biblically based religious tradition” (Gunda 2011b:136). Their adherents believe that they are the churches that most closely follow the biblical prescriptions, hence Loveness Mabhunu (2010:65) asserts; “the Bible is the primary source of most, if not all, values that regulate the practice of prophecy in AICs”. In these churches, the Bible is clearly a source of power, which grants its power to those who follow its prescriptions the most. Its power is a result of its divine origin and status. In order to develop a fuller understanding of the “biblical Christianity” assertion, this chapter will address various issues under the following sub-sections: the first section looks at methodological questions, followed by an outline of the origin and history of AICs, then the complexity of calling AICs “biblical Christianity.” The penultimate section will focus on the interconnectedness of the biblical worldview and the African worldview, two worldviews which may have opened the way for greater correlation between biblical claims and African aspirations. Some concluding observations will be given to sum up this chapter.

Some Methodological Issues

In doing this study, there are essentially two major issues concerning methodology. The first relates to how I will do this study and the second concerns how the AICs use the Bible. In essence, what is my method? What is their method? To briefly answer to the first question, this study relies on socio-historical and theological approaches to data analysis. While there is data in many publications on AICs, in order to achieve the aim of this chapter the data has to be socio-historically and theologically analyzed. The socio-historical approach is an approach that understands ideas, texts, movements and practices as contingent on the social and historical condition in which such subject arises. To that extent, the key questions put forward are: how is the idea, movement or text related to the general aspiration of the society within which it arises? Is it a movement that is in agreement or disagreement with the general aspiration of that society? Subjecting the AICs to this socio-historical analysis will shed light on the significance of the Bible in the origins and development of these movements. This approach allows for a closer look at the manner in which the Bible was and continues to be understood and interpreted in these churches.

Central to the use of the theological approach is the realization that Christians in general "are never content with the world of the Bible only, but in essence seek to transform the world they abide in" (Rogerson 2000:47). This means that it is not enough to treat the Bible merely as literature. In fact, the Bible claims that it is "theological," that its subject is God. While the Bible is certainly not a systematic theology, it is nonetheless, theological in as much as it relates the manner in which ancient Israelites as well as early Christians spoke about God in the course of their daily lives. It is for this reason that any study of the Bible among AICs must employ theological interpretation as a method. "The Bible takes God's existence for granted and relates how the world came into being, what went wrong with it, and God's plans for its reconstruction and ultimate salvation" (Constantelos 1999:137) and AICs believe this to be a continuing truism hence they understand the Bible to be "a normative standard for the faith, practice and their worship" (Fowl 1998:2). A theological approach, therefore, is not a method of producing a systematic theology as is suggested by disciplines such as Old Testament theology, New Testament theology or Biblical theology. A theological approach, in this study, is a method of analyzing how AICs conceive of God as they reflect on the demands of being a Christian in Zimbabwe. The Bible comes in as the basis of understanding the nature and demands of God; hence the interpretation of the Bible becomes a critical component of these churches. This approach is not only important for scholars, it is also the method that "thrives outside the walled precincts of academic biblical theology even as biblical theologians wonder how they lost their mojo" (Adam 2006:23). In short, the Bible is more important for those Christians who approach it through a theological approach through which they have found answers to their never ending existential questions.

Among AICs a canonical-theological approach to the Scriptures is widely used. By calling their approach a canonical-theological approach, I am not suggesting that the approach is systematic and well-articulated, rather this labelling is descriptive. Their reading of the Bible is canonical because these churches rely on the canonical text of the Bible. They do not resort to any other texts behind, beneath or above the written text of the Bible. It is canonical because it is limited to the canon. The second adjective suggests that their reading of the Bible, over and above the selective literalism that we often highlight, is theological. The Bible is not literature, as scholars are fond of saying: the Bible is Scripture, it is

the Word of God, and it is the Law of God. As such, all readings of the Bible assume that the center of Scripture is God. Various methods such as allegory, typology and literal interpretations may be used only for as long as they conform to this theological goal of unlocking the message of God, not to the Israelites but to contemporary believers and non-believers alike. Their approach to the Bible coupled with tangible activities of the spirit through prophets is what keeps the Bible alive, sacred and central, giving credence to their claim to being “biblical Christianity.”

Origins and History of AICs: An Outline and Placement of the Bible

The origin of AICs in Zimbabwe is one area that has been dealt with by many scholars. This section does not therefore claim to add anything particularly new to the tomes that already exist. It is widely agreed among scholars that “AICs are churches founded by Africans with no missionary links, in essence these are churches founded by Africans for Africans in Africa” (Makhubu 1988:6) as a response to various factors. However, this section will place some emphasis on an issue of particular interest to this chapter, that is, the Bible. In doing this, I acknowledge that “in an attempt to explain the causes for the rise of these churches, scholars from different disciplines have come up with various theories incorporating social, political, economic and cultural factors” (Sundkler 1961:37, Anderson 2001:24-5, Ndung’u 2006:484) while guarding against the tendency to “underrate the impact of the Bible” (Ndung’u 2006:484). Adrian Hastings (1979:68) is one of the respected voices on the history of Christianity in Southern Africa and he suggests that “from 1910 to the early 1930s spirit churches began in South Africa, Nigeria and Rhodesia [Zimbabwe],” and these churches largely “emerged as the following of a prophet or group of prophets” (Gunda 2010a:41). That central to these churches was the “prophet” should be understood “within the sacramental worldview in which the African generally lives, the services of ‘religious functionaries’ or ‘religious specialists’ are critical. These are people with a proven ability to read and interpret occurrences in the supernatural realm” (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:95). What makes this development fundamental is that while the need for “super-religious functionaries” was emanating from the traditional worldview, this traditional worldview had been seriously undermined by the missionary

supported western worldview, which apparently did not appreciate this kind of religious functionary. This battle of worldviews is what led Desmond Tutu (1973:42-3) to argue;

Those who have denigrated things African would probably be surprised to discover that the African way of life, his worldview, his thought forms, are those, not only of the Old Testament but those of the entire Bible, since the New Testament is based so firmly on the Old Testament.

I am not at all suggesting here that the social, economic and political factors in the rise of AICs should be ignored; I am, however, suggesting that the religious reasons are much more important than hitherto acknowledged by many scholars. The prominence of religious reasons will also explain why the Bible becomes a critical factor in this historical development.

This became especially the case since the rise of AICs occurred concurrently with the rise of translated vernacular Bibles in many African states. "The vernacular scriptures provided an independent standard of reference that African Christians were to seize on" (Barrett 1968:129). Prior to these translations, indigenous Christians relied on the missionaries' readings of the Bible, and as is now fairly understood, the missionaries did actually withhold some parts of the contents and distorted some of the things they reported from the Bible. They chose to share only some sections and leave out others (Kalilombe 2006:443). While social, economic and political factors could have been better fought by rejecting Christianity, the religious factors acknowledged the supremacy of Christianity hence had to be addressed by adopting and adapting the Christianity of the missionary. The resource that could allow this process was especially the Bible because it "provides a rich repertoire of inspiring, empowering stories and images through which believers can redefine themselves" (Maxwell 2005:20). These inspiring stories and images became readily available once the Bible had been translated into vernacular languages. Reading the translated Bible; "African Christians began to detect a basic discrepancy between missions and the scriptures on what were to them the major points of conflict, namely the traditional customs being attacked by the missions" (Mbiti 1986:30). To that extent Frans Verstraelen (1998:82) is right when he writes

Once Africans had the Bible at their disposal in their own vernacular languages; they made a number of discoveries. These can be summarized by their finding out that there were many things in the Bible that made

sense to them, but were not communicated to them because they were played down or overlooked by the missionaries from the West.

The African discoveries from the Bible were such that the Bible ceased to speak about the ancient Israelites. The Bible actually was speaking about and to contemporary Africans; those who were reading the Bible were the audience implied in the text. The Bible was then understood as a record of covenants, promises, pledges, and commitments between God and his chosen. This was not just a record of covenants and commitment to others in the past: so it was not primarily a historical document at all, it was and is a contemporary document (Gifford 2009:174). This realization gave birth to the religious protests that led to the rise of the AICs. The Bible, especially the translated Bible, became the major driving force in the rise of AICs alongside the prophetic revelations received by the leading prophet-type figures who led these movements from the beginnings.

A “Biblical” Christianity: Possibilities and Complexities

Once the position of the Bible in the life of AICs is agreed upon as outlined above, it becomes relatively viable to think of AICs as “biblical” Christianity. While this is possible, as I shall attempt to demonstrate here, I am equally aware of the complexities of labeling any strand of Christianity as “biblical”. There are two possible ways in which one could explain the meaning of “biblical,” that is, it could be used to mean something that is confirmed or sustained by any part of the Bible or it could mean something that is confirmed or sustained by the entirety of the Bible. Of these two, Christians in general and denominations in particular tend to make claims that assume confirmation from the entirety of the Bible. In essence, however, it would seem that most claims are supported by some part of the Bible and not the entire Bible. That AICs form some form of “biblical” Christianity is implied in observations such as that the entire movement of AICs across Africa takes on the aspect of a drive to recover a more biblically based religion (Barrett 1968). This was observed especially when these movements were compared to western missionaries’ led de-nominations. However, we must quickly agree with Gifford (2002:180) in noting that “the claim to be simply ‘biblical’ requires careful scrutiny. Normally it masks an attempt to construct a theory out of a few texts, which is then fathered on ‘the Bible’.” The claim to being “biblical” can be a dangerous claim,

similar to phrases such as "the Bible says..." In response to such claims, Leonard Hodgson (1957:12) cautioned;

As one who has been a professional teacher of theology for forty-three years, I now publicly declare my hope that no pupil of mine will ever be guilty of using the expression: 'The Bible says...' Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, when that expression is used, it means the speaker has found some passage which he/[she] quotes as authority for the position he/[she] is maintaining, regardless of the fact that those who disagree with him/[her] may find others which support their views. In the hundredth case its use may be more deserving of respect: it may be based on a study of the Bible as a whole, and the words may be intended to mean that what is being said is in accordance with... 'the Bible view of life'. Even so the phrase is misleading, and its use is to be discouraged.

I am, therefore, fully aware of the dangers of making claims to the effect that something is "biblical." If by "biblical" we only mean that which is attested to by the entire Bible, we may as well suggest that there is nothing that is "biblical". However, I remain tempted and convinced that the same claim can relatively explain the nature of AICs. I will briefly outline the basis for making this claim on their behalf.

One of the reasons why these AICs can be seen as biblical is because "these movements thrive on biblical traditions [and such] close connections between the legendary births of Johane Masowe [founders in general] and the biblical figure, John the Baptist, that Johane Masowe alleges he is a replica of" (Bishau 2010:424-5). The founders of these movements cease to be the ordinary boy next-door as they join the long list of biblical figures. Names of biblical prophets such as Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isaiah are prominent names of contemporary prophets among these spirit-type AICs giving the impression that the Bible is a manual that is closely followed in ordering their life. Indeed, AICs use "Bible verses to justify their practices, and found new prohibitions there that were taken literally, from the Old Testament in particular" (Anderson 2001:32). As Anderson observes here, not only do these churches take names from biblical figures, they have equally adopted practices and taboos from some biblical texts especially from the Levitical laws (Gunda 2011a:132). That AICs are biblical has always been taken as a way of contrasting them from mission churches which are "widely accused of neglecting the Holy Spirit or in some cases even suppressing the work of the spirit" (Daneel 1987 100, Anderson 2001:33, Gunda 2007:229-246). Without taking anything away from mission churches, there is a sense in which "the growth of these AICs should be

seen as the result of a proclamation of a relevant message, an authentically indigenous response to the Bible” (Anderson 2001:34). The AICs, therefore, are a manifestation of “biblical” Christianity since they took little from Christian tradition and history and relied heavily on the translated text of the Bible.

The dependence of these churches on the Bible has led to one of the most popular dictums of the last decades, that is, the “Bible is an African book.” Several claims have been made to the effect that the African worldview is the same as the “biblical worldview(s)”, such that the story of the Israelites, Jews and Early Christians is continued on the African continent, especially from the period of colonialism to the present” (Gunda 2011a:14). The story of the Bible is not seen as an ancient story that was concluded; rather, the story is seen as having been started a long time ago and continues in the present. This explains why African Christians “come to the Bible armed with questions arising out of their time and circumstance” (Dickson 1984:142) implying that the questions we bring to the Bible are questions on issues that we must put into practice. In the history of Christianity, despite contemporary misgivings about the relevance of allegory as a method of biblical interpretation, allegorizing has been a predominant exercise “because allegorizing turned everything in the Bible that was particular and historical into something more general and immediately applicable” (Kugel 2007:19). Among AICs, the interpretation to which the Bible has been subjected was geared towards finding “ways in which they could translate the Bible to something pragmatic that could be lived” (Gunda 2011a:10-1). AICs have attempted to make themselves some “biblical” communities following the prescriptions they extract from some texts of the Bible from both the Old and New Testaments.

The active pursuit of a biblical lifestyle among disenchanting African Christians who flocked to join AICs is the reason why Gunda (2011a:12) contends that “the Bible has survived for close to three millennia because of many reasons, chief of which [being] the availability of some people who have vowed to “live according to its teachings” because it is “sacred”.” These churches continue to live in a world that is dependent on the guidance of the spirits and not scientific explanations hence as Patrick Kalilombe (2006:447) writes;

In order to interpret and apply to life what is being taken in, they have such potent tools as *acting*, *retelling* in their own words, or *responding* through gestures or emotion-filled expressions. Through these appropriate methods,

messages and instructions are passed around, selected, interpreted and evaluated, and then assimilated so that they influence people's lives.

It is because of this reverence of the Bible that adherents of these churches accuse "mainline Christians [for being] 'not biblical' because they do not take seriously divine and demonic interventions and apparitions that fill the Old Testament. They 'do not believe in miracles' because they regard the stories of Elijah, Elisha and Jonah as unhistorical, and do not seriously expect to replicate New Testament miracles today" (Gifford 1998:329). All these aspects of the biblical narrative are lived in AICs, giving credence even if somewhat tentative, that these churches are indeed a manifestation of an African "biblical" Christianity. In this "biblical" Christianity, "the Bible became an independent source of authority apart from the European missionaries" (Anderson 2001:31).

The Bible in the African Worldview; the African Worldview in the Bible

One of the central claims made by AICs and scholars who have studied them is the interconnectedness of the Bible and the African worldview, such that, in some instances "the use of the Old Testament as a manual for daily practice is readily observable from the practices themselves" (Gunda 2011b:132). This is especially pronounced in these churches because "Africans hear and see a confirmation of their own cultural, social and religious life in the life and history of the Jewish people as portrayed and recorded in the pages of the Bible" (Mbiti 1986:26). In other words, by living according to the dictates of the Old Testament, Africans must simply remain Africans. The demands on their lives are not foreign to their own traditional worldview. The enchantment of the African worldview, the spirits that affect, effect and infect everyday life, the individuals who have been bestowed with abilities to enter into the sphere of spirits are all retained in this African manifestation of "biblical" Christianity. This Christianity has echoes of traditional religion, which "dramatizes its unity in the universal appeal to the spirits that animate all of nature. Humans, stones, trees, animals, lakes, rivers, and mountains are conjoined in one grand movement toward the continuation of life" (Asante and Mazama 2009:xxii). We are talking here of worldviews that give eminence to spirits whether bad or good.

There are various ways in which the biblical worldview and the African worldview are married into a single unity that stabilizes the AICs as both African and Christian. Naming churches was one such issue, while African Christians were exposed to names such as the Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Church, Lutheran Church, Dutch Reformed Church, Methodist Church and so forth, these names were not in essence “biblical.” Among Africans, as in many other societies, “names are not merely convenient labels used to distinguish people. Names are often symbols laden with meaning” (Chitando 1998:24), hence the names given to churches became a reason for labeling them “unbiblical.” In order to counter this, biblical names are normally chosen for these churches such as, Paul Apostolic Church, Bethsaida Apostolic Church, Followers of Jesus Christ Apostolic Church, Bible Apostolic Church, The Miracle of God Apostolic Church and many others (Gunda 2010:44) are therefore chosen. From the research done by Gunda (2010:45-7) it seems the New Testament-inspired names dominate in these churches, covering prominent figures, events and places in the New Testament. While the names of these churches are largely New Testament inspired, “the practices and beliefs appear to be dependent on the Old Testament more than the New Testament. There is no denying that the New Testament is important in these churches, as seen in the idea of the Holy Spirit and the belief in Christ as saviour. However, the daily life of adherents to these churches is governed more by the laws and injunctions of the Old Testament” (Gunda 2011b:134). Indeed “these churches stand far away from Martin Luther’s “Justification by faith alone” and apparently have adopted James’ “faith without works is dead” perspective” (Gunda 2011b:143). The Old Testament is critical in moulding a work-based-faith, “a faith that is sufficiently bold will produce evident this-worldly results. How can you believe in God if you do not see the results of your faith?” (Freston 2005:42). This belief is critical in understanding the demand for miracles among African Christians, a service provided by prophets.

Another way of looking at the correlation between the African worldview and the biblical worldview is by considering the institution of prophecy. According to Marthinus Daneel (1980:23), “in the Shona spirit-type churches, the prophetic office finds expression both in the reformed sense of the word of God being preached and in the Old Testament sense of revelations and divine communications being transmitted to the wider body of believers by individuals with special

prophetic gifts." The latter sense is more prominent among AICs prophets than the former, which is normally the interpretation of "prophetic ministry" given by mainline churches (Gunda 2006:20-1). In spirit-type AICs, "the idea of prophets is greatly inspired by Old Testament prophetism, contemporary prophets adopt names of OT prophetic figures, they are masters of prediction and they divine spiritual causes of misfortunes" (Gunda 2010:48-9). In these contemporary prophets, one is sent back to the time of Elijah and Elisha, an era when the extraordinary was the mark of the presence of the living God of Israel. The same is true of the miraculous stories of Jesus and the Apostles in the New Testament, which are retold not to inform adherents of what happened in the past but to give them hope of what can happen to them today. In both worlds, the need for individuals who commuted between the spirit world and the world of the living was obligatory. It was not a question of whether society wanted them or not, these individuals were indispensable. With most mainline churches having done away with these religious functionaries, AICs made sure one could be a Christian and still receiving the service of such figures who clearly rivaled the traditional diviners (Gunda 2007:229-246). It is in this context that one can agree with the contention that;

Prophetism appears to me to be a perennial phenomenon of African life, and the basic operative element in it seems to be personal in character. Whether in relation to or independently of events or developments in society, the individual endowed with a striking personality and the ability to impose his will on others, believing himself, and believed by others to be a special agent of some supernatural being or force, will emerge from time to time and secure a following. Powers traditionally credited to such persons, of healing, of revealing hidden things, predicting the future, cursing and blessing effectually, etc, will be attributed to him whether he claims them or not...Such things... are facts of life and have their effects on African society (Baeta 1962:6-7).

In all this, "the Bible is used as though it transmits some mystical power which makes things to happen...the Bible is treated as though it transmits a power which will scare away or even destroy the evil powers responsible for the suffering the person is experiencing. The Bible is more than a text; it is a religio-magical symbol of God's presence and power" (Ndung'u 2006:489-90). What the Bible records as having happened before can be repeated today with the right faith and intermediary, it is not simply a text, it is equally an object. It works both opened and closed.

Looking at the worldviews, it is apparent that “the Old Testament was of particular interest because it resonated with much of what was important within an African outlook on life: the importance of fertility and sexuality, the place of ancestors, polygamous practice, the importance of land and a host of other cultural and religious similarities” (Anderson 2001:32, Clarke 2006:5, Ndung’u 2006:486). This close relationship in the worldviews is then seen in the manner in which practices such as *kuuchika* (a practice of divining for barren women to conceive) become a central concern to prophets. Infertility of women is understood as the work of evil spirits that seek to frustrate the God-ordained duty to procreate. It is in the same context that one can argue that “male domination is based on their reading of the Old Testament traditions and is further endorsed by St. Paul’s teaching on the role of women in the Church 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, 1 Timothy 2: 8-15” (Ndung’u 2006:491). Practices and beliefs are biased towards the dominance of men. This situation is taken as contrary to “the New Testament [which] presents women as ecclesial vanguards and progenitors of salvation. Jesus exalted the position of women” (Mabhunu 2010:68). Since Jesus’ exaltation of women was the exception of his time, it is possible to retain the argument that in both worldviews, women were generally seen as second class citizens, whose major function was making babies and keeping the house. Polygamy was such a critical issue in the rise of these churches that the Bible had to be invoked to license it:

The emphasis on monogamy was dressed as a biblical imperative yet as the Constitution of the Zion Christian Church (ZCCMutendi) of Ezekiel Mutendi expounds on the subject, it directly challenges the missionary reading of the Bible on that subject based on some discoveries made in the Bible: The Church members are not bound strictly to marry only one wife, nor did God blame those who married more than one wife; Lamek, Abraham, Jacob, David and Solomon [...] We are irrational if we think that monogamy is a way of preventing sin from entering the family according to Christian experience. God married Adam, the first man, to one wife, through whom sin penetrated into the family. This we write to some who think that marrying many wives is the gateway of sin in the family [...] If we read these books (II Sam. 5:12; [I] Chro. 14:3; I Sam. 1:2; Judg. 8:30; 12:8; Isa. 4:1), we shall have wisdom to know what God wants and what he does not want, because all wisdom is found in the Bible (Daneel 1971:499).

In the search for political mileage, Obvious Vengeyi (2011:351,362) argues that “all over Africa, political elites make use of religious

communities for purposes of mobilizing voters, creating clienteles or organizing constituencies” and in the same vein observed that “[Robert] Mugabe cite[d] the biblical basis for supporting polygamy when saying ‘We will not force people into monogamous marriages. It’s there even in the Bible. Solomon was not only given wealth but many wives’.” While it could have been easy to support polygamy on the basis that our forefathers practiced it and that it served them well, African Christians turned to the Bible for justification. Turning to the Bible was a sure way of deflecting criticism because what is in the Bible cannot be evil, was the understanding. What is apparent from this section is that while “western missionaries believed in the *content* of the Bible, they did not usually see any *continuity* or connection between the biblical context and the present African one; [however] this was a feature that Africans were quick to discover and proclaim, especially after the translation of the Bible into the vernacular” (Hastings 1994 527-9). African readers of the Bible saw their own worldview as the worldview of the Bible.

Concluding Observations

For close to a century now AICs have been part and parcel of Zimbabwe’s religious landscape, and from the evidence of their activities in urban, peri-urban and rural areas, these churches appear to have fully established themselves as permanent features of Zimbabwe. Unlike Pentecostal churches, the spirit-type AICs have largely been frowned upon by other Christians and even scholars for being backward. Other Christians accuse them of smuggling traditional religion into the church while scholars have tended to consider them unsystematic since their leaders are not trained. It is true that among scholars;

The Bible is seen primarily as an ancient document under the control of specialists and therefore remote from the concerns of contemporary life. In this perspective, biblical interpretation tends to be treated as a forbiddingly difficult attempt to find a way to leap across the great chasm of time that separates the present from the biblical era. The enormous effort thought to be required for this dampens the traditional Christian habit of reading the Bible spontaneously and experiencing one’s life directly mirrored in its pages. This can have a desolating effect on preaching. Classic Bible stories of patriarchs and kings that have guided generations of Christians tend to fade from the preachers’ imaginations as they are bombarded by scholars with questions of historical veracity, textual complexity, and obscurity of original intention (Harrisville and Sundberg 1995:11).

This understanding is clearly opposed to the manner in which the Bible is understood by AICs adherents, for whom the Bible is contemporary and valid as a manual for daily living. In these churches, there is no question on whether the Bible can be applied today or not. The question is how adherents should apply the Bible in their lives. Since this understanding and need to “live the Bible” is so central to these AICs, it would appear that these churches are better understood as religious protest movements against the rationalized religion of mainline churches. The Bible provided the basis of the religious ideas that have come to characterize faith, practice and spirituality in these churches. Through a canonical-theological reading of the Bible, these churches have established communities that are the closest Zimbabwe has seen to “ancient biblical communities.”

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