Inculturation: Adaptation, innovation and reflexivity. An African Christian perspective

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The purpose of this article is to examine the changing understandings of processes and terms which have been and are currently in use regarding the outworking of the mission of the church. This historical and missiological approach will evaluate the contribution of a number of African and other theologians during the 20th century and also the opening years of the 21st century. It will cover the missionary period from the end of the 18th century with a special focus on the impact during the 'high missionary era' (1880–1920) to the present. The focus will predominantly be on Africa and Pentecostalism, the role of women and the African diaspora as examples of effective inculturation.

The person who is dressed in other people's clothes is naked, and the person who is fed on other people's food is hungry. (Opoku 2012:150)

Introduction

The topic on inculturation is used in different ways, some related to particular faith traditions (e.g. Roman Catholicism) and this can lead to a lack of clarity of meaning and expression. Inculturation as adaptation, innovation and reflexivity in their purest form are adaptation, innovation and reflexivity which arise out of a situation of pure necessity based on self-awareness within the African context. These focus concepts cannot be categorised neatly into three separate processes but are constantly interlinking with one another. Adaptation involves innovation and is dependent on reflexivity, and other combinations work too (cf. Kritzinger 2008, 2011). It has its inception in the earliest Christian community so Pobee (2013:15–16) is not correct in his assertion that Christianity was a simply foreign invention imposed on Africa. However, he is correct to say that early theologians such as Tertullian, Cyprian and Augustine, did not sufficiently engage their North African *milieu* (although Clement of Alexandria, Basilides and Valentinus, Coptic and monastic communities seemingly did) and that the church went into a severe decline as a result. Also, new paradigms have to be evaluated in terms of the African context no matter what influence the West has had.

This article encompasses the modern missionary era, with a specific focus on 1880–1920, the high imperial era and high missionary era which present the early 20th century as the most active missionary period. Colonialism, civilisation, commerce, capitalism, conquest and Christianity endured until and beyond the end of the 20th century and into the 21st century where globalisation, militarisation, 'terrorism', poverty, HIV and AIDS and a new form of slavery in the form of human trafficking are rampant. International politics became a field of enforced inculturation during the 'high imperial' period beginning with the Berlin Conference (1884–1885):

> which partitioned Africa between the European powers, had an enormous effect on the relationship between white missionaries and Africans. It brought the Gospel and missionary cultural values down to the grass roots, where an attempt was made to domesticate them in the local cultural terrain. Africans responded by weaving Christian strands of their own. (Kalu 2012:43)

The period following the First World War (1914–1918), including the economic depression of the 1930s was difficult for missionary agencies. The position of the West, as a leader of Christian civilisation had changed forever as the focus of world Christianity began to move inexorably towards the South. This provided an opportunity for innovation on the part of African Christians. In the global context it is virtually a truism that all major world faiths were challenged and moulded by the impact of their meeting with mission Christianity in the 19th and 20th centuries. This became the process of contextualisation or adaptation to the local context. It often happened as the result of isolation. For instance, St Thomas Christians in southern India integrated ceremonies and architecture from Hinduism (Woodberry 2012:265) as well as influences from Syrian liturgy and theology (Jones 2012:93). In Europe, Christianity integrated 'pagan' concepts into its faith expression, for example, the fertility symbol of the Easter egg. It also produced resistance as in the contemporary period as people interpret concepts from their own cultural context and meanings change. This is especially true of language. These were all experienced as aspects of the mission of the church.

A working definition of mission is that it is God's work in reconciling the world to God self in which humans are called to participate and through which all are transformed, both the subjects and objects of mission outreach on the periphery of life. Kritzinger (2011:21) defines it more succinctly as 'transformative encounter'. This, of course presumes a centre from which mission is directed. He has developed a 'praxis matrix' for mission (Kritzinger 2011:20ff.) which has a number of dimensions – agency, contextual understanding, ecclesial scrutiny, interpreting the tradition, discernment for action, reflexivity and spirituality. This seems to be inclusive of an inculturative mission viewed in terms of adaptation, innovation and reflexivity and as the church grew during the 20th century so did reflections on the faith in Africa (Gathogo 2013:28) and these were characterised by 'adaptation, … inculturation and liberation' (Gathogo 2013:35). Inculturation has been variously defined. Arbuckle (1984:186–197) notes the dissatisfaction with the terms 'contextualisation', 'accommodation', 'and adaptation'. Broadly, inculturation can be defined as a process whereby cultural values can be transformed through their exposure to the Christian message and the insertion of Christianity into indigenous cultures. Bosch (1991:454) has summarised this well: '[I]culturation suggests a *double movement*: there is at once inculturation of Christianity and Christianisation of culture.' This process can only be undertaken where there is already comprehension of the local culture as it relates to world views, ways of thinking, group solidarity, understanding of history and of modernity and its impact (Yung 2014:64–76).

Adaptation

Adaptation is fundamental to the missionary enterprise inasmuch as it determines what is consistent and inconsistent with the gospel as expressed by the church. It is therefore a missiological and a theological issue as it seeks to extend the incarnation of the Word, God's adaptation to humanity. When we consider such appropriation as part of the inculturation process, do we consider it to be prior to or integral to adaptation? The answer is most probably the latter, for appropriation is not simply the process of accepting western impositions. But in some cases it went beyond this as missionaries assimilated themselves to the traditional cultures they found, as in the tradition established by Ludwig Krapf in Kenya (Gathogo 2013:42) during the 19th century. Here African evangelists, pastors and teachers played a seminal role. The *fifohazana* (a late lay-led Shepherd revival movement in Madagascar originating in 1894) gives evidence of cooperation with mainline mission churches leading to a situation where they gained legitimacy:

> Local Christianities are always appropriations based on already existing concepts and notions, results of complex interactions between actors who are empowered and constrained by social and historical contests. Thus, all local Christians in Africa are genuinely 'African', both from a theoretical and empirical point of view. (Skeie 2011:157–158)

Establishing creative synergies has become a critical component within reflection on mission. Account also has to be taken of the relationships which developed between missionaries and local agents and communities, and their long-term effects on all parties involved. The majority of locally innovative movements took place within the churches of European origin. This was a story of cooperation, coexistence and conflict which was both direct and indirect. This is evidenced in Martens's (2011:297) approach to 'centres' (mission stations) and 'peripheries' where the latter (outstations) 'change and develop independently *of* the centre, and act in ways that necessitate the centre occasionally needing to re-gain or reassert its position *as* the centre.' The same can be true on an international scale between sending body (home) and mission country (out there). This situation is dynamic and characterised by fluidity and simultaneity, except that peripheries are always the constant.
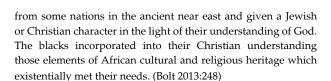
Sugden (1992:6) suggests that missionaries erred in the belief that in order to evangelise black people, they had to persuade them to reject their traditional heritage and religious culture and adopt a new identity in order to be remade as converts. However, black people could not simply give up all that had made them what and who they were. Hence, from 'the creative genius of the blacks there arose a synthesis of development that met their needs in their oppression' (Bolt 2013:245). Experience was the crucible in which their faith was forged. However, the Pan-Africanist Edward Blyden suggested that the impact of Christianity in Africa was superficial (Gatwa 2013:90). That may be but it was a resilient superficiality. And from it emerged African theologies, focusing on adaptation and contextualisation through discussions of '*ubuntu*, solidarity, hospitality, humanness, dialogue and mediation', and black theology (Gatwa 2013:91). There was nothing significantly different from the experience of the British missionaries who had been the objects of mission themselves where:

> [T]he premises of the Bible being the best source for acculturation as that had been the experience of England which they were convinced had emerged from uncivilised and barbarous states. (Bolt 2013:246)

Andrew Walls's (1982:96) assertion that significant theological reflection occurs where the majority of Christians understand that they share a continuity of consciousness 'about the final significance of Jesus, continuity of a certain consciousness about history, continuity in the use of Scriptures, of bread and wine, of water' (Walls 1982:97). This necessitates a shift in orientation that was facilitated by the decolonisation of African from European Christianity and the growing need for cultural and spiritual freedom for Africans to secure their identity both as Africans and Christians within a context that is 'occasional and local' (Walls 1982:100), that is, *praxis* oriented. In a sense Pentecostalism (to be discussed later) is an important expression of this personality and identity.

In both cases experience was the source of reflection. And so:

> A significant number of blacks resisted what they saw as the imposition of the missionaries' Christianity and interpreted their religious way of being with its roots in their African religious culture while taking over from Christianity what they could adapt to their religious preferences. This will be judged as syncretism but it was a legitimate way of deepening their understanding of their religion and of themselves. They had biblical precedence for so acting since in the Bible ways of being were taken over

from some nations in the ancient near east and given a Jewish or Christian character in the light of their understanding of God. The blacks incorporated into their Christian understanding those elements of African cultural and religious heritage which existentially met their needs. (Bolt 2013:248)

Adaptation is not restricted to the spiritual realm. Democratic and nationalistic ideas had their source in European and American contexts (Woodberry 2012:262). In South Africa, for instance, almost all of the first nationalist leaders had been educated at mission schools (Duncan 2003:276–277; Manala 2013:294; Webster 2013:12, 74). This also caused a wave of resistance among those who proposed leaving their faith in favour of Christianity and had no wish to enter their new-found faith with symbolic elements of the former (e.g. African Christians who reject ancestor veneration and the oppression of women). In contrast, there are those beyond the confines of Europe and America who have focused on locally felt needs such as spiritual healing and the challenge of demonic powers and the Pentecostal movement has been sensitive in this area.

Adaptation as a working term has been displaced, largely because inculturation is far more than mere adaptation, though it remains a component of the larger process. Inculturation is a form of donation through adaptation, acceptance and rejection all in an active process of reflection. Africa was Christianised as the result of adaptation and accommodation rather than full-scale onslaught of coerced conversions. Yet, traditional religion endured. This is affirmed by Iliffe (1995):

> In practice, adaptation took place, but it was done by the converts themselves in the process of accepting the new religion and reconciling it with inherited beliefs and practices. As, at best, newly literate people, they did this in an eclectic manner, but eclecticism could point in two directions, as at earlier periods of African Christianity history. Some Christians continued to believe fervently in the reality of their old gods but saw them now as evil forces. (p. 226)

This process of adaptation is not complete as can be seen from the contemporary Pentecostal context. Pentecostalism cannot be simplistically regarded as a means of Christian colonisation and of reshaping African cultures. It possesses its distinctive identity, authenticity and integrity. In this context it is not possible to deny that there are economic and other influences of the American origin of some of the Zionist churches in South Africa which have to be engaged and negotiated as individualism displaces communalism. The same is true of Nigeria following the civil war when political factors came into play with an emphasis on reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation and a need to foster hope in the post-war crisis. Hence, we can understand the attraction of the health and wealth gospel. Yet, it also has to be noted that there was an African genesis to many revival movements in which Kalu (2008:249) distinguished five dimensions which demonstrate considerable adaptation, innovation and reflexivity as a response to missionary efforts: reconstruction of identity, imagining social space, representation which employs an innovative hermeneutic, a *praxis* approach to the text and reclaiming the public space.

However, mission is time and place specific. Sowing the seed of the gospel in a 'new' cultural context is, according to Njoroge (2013):

> [A] missiological process that through the guidance of the Holy Spirit allows the gospel, faith in Jesus Christ, to develop roots and mature at its own pace. Inculturation allows transformation of a culture and the people involved anew … it is an unending dialogical process that balances culture in the anthropological sense of the term and the divine presence of the Holy Spirit. … The inculturation process starts when a community starts functioning as an indigenous or local church. To be local means that the church has taken roots in a given place with all its cultural, natural, social, and any other characteristic that constitutes the life, values and thoughts of the people involved. (pp. 242–243)

The process of adaption is grounded in the diversity of creation and takes account of contradiction. Ohm (1962:700) articulates a three-step process of adaptation: accommodation (reception, enculturation), assimilation and transformation which draw people into communication, as it 'absorb[s] the riches of others' (Oborji 2013:139) and hopes for a better future commonwealth. Adaptation is not simple conversion from a western perspective where new converts were isolated in mission stations to be remade in the image of the missionary (Duncan 2003:18–27). The transformation has to come from within an existing dynamic culture through transformation by all interlocutors rather than be imposed from without. The process begins with a thorough understanding of one's own (sending) culture prior to its being offered within another culture. This is difficult because even our own understandings are borrowed from other cultures, for example, Graeco-Roman; so there is no consensus on which to build. The omnipresent issue of dualism is present as a source of conflict. In opposition to European faith systems there is no distinction made between the sacred and secular for all is sacred in Africa. Theirs is an integrated cosmology. Maggay (2013:127) illustrates this by pointing to the different understandings of the person of Jesus within different cultural contexts. Cultures are not only dynamic; they are also resilient: 'they adapt to alien influences and subvert even powerful influences grafted into them' (Maggay 2013:128). This is clear from the work of Jean and John Comaroff ([1991] 1997) where the power of culture to adapt, and resist, is such that its core values persist despite many outward manifestations. An example of this is the Zion Christian Church which:

> … includes Christian principles and African cultural traditions. New members are asked to forsake their beliefs, ancestor 'worship' or customary rituals. Instead, all these rituals are embraced by the church (BBC *Focus on Africa* 2001:44). With the introduction of Zionism in the Tswana community, certain concepts were reintroduced, such as *go tlhapiswa* (ritual washing) as opposed to go *kolobetsa* (to make wet) which was used by the Orthodox Church. As part of an attempt to contradict the colonial, reactionary movements such as the Zion Christian Church used, the term *didiba* (wells) to refer to their own churches. This I find interesting as a form of struggle, using words which colonised the Tswana to now set them 'free' from mainline European churches. (Ntsoane 2013:56)

Adaptation here is the role of the outsider through identification with that culture's positive aspects. Theologically this marks the continuity between the works of creation and redemption. The issue is whether it is the sender or receiver who is to adapt, or should there be a mutual process of adaptation at specific points of insertion? The matter of points of insertion would tend to deny the integrity of culture as an entity on both sides as attempts are made to define comparisons and contrasts between sending and receiving cultures. It does not, however, take note of coherence and integration within cultures: 'Each centre sees itself as a full participant in the evangelising process' (Oborji 2013:149). If this is the case what chance do either culture or faith have of maintaining their integrity? Yet, in this process faith travels through migrants. Adoption (reception) needs to examine the theologies of the local peoples. We also need to take account of the situation in contemporary mission where cultures are not unitary silos. They have already been impacting on and have been impacted on as we are progressively assimilated into a globalised culture.

In practice, there was less adaptation than was necessary or appropriate. Great damage was done by replacing traditional societies with individualism imposed by missionaries. A few positive examples exist. For example in East Africa Bruno Guttmann, a Leipzig missionary, worked among the Chaga people on Mount Kilimanjaro between 1902–1938, with an interval from 1920–1925:

> He saw Chaga not as individuals to be saved, almost from society, but bound by 'primal ties' to an organic community, which contrasted favourably with the merely constructed organisation of a society. European civilisation was the great enemy to the African. (Knighton 2012:25)

This represented a radical departure from the expectations of home supporters. But the guilt for this was more widespread for 'many African church people were ready to support missionary decisions in the first place, or invent their own, and then replicate them for many decades' (Knighton 2012:25).

One tool that was effective in replication was theological education implemented in true western style throughout Africa, often in ecumenical contexts. Here the future teachers of African ministers were trained, often followed by a period studying theology in the West, prior to returning to assume responsibility for the Africanising of ministerial formation (Gyadu 2013:150). These names include Kwesi A. Dickson, Kwame Bediako, Mercy Amba Oduyoyo, Teresa Okure and Lamin Sanneh.

However, in the African Initiated Churches (AICs), there was no such training and Oosthuizen (1982:37–38) has suggested that training was undertaken through the Holy Spirit and the ancestors under the supervision of senior and experienced ministers. It must be noted that this ministerial formation is not theological education as traditionally conceptualised and the call is established by investigation of dreams or visions (Kealotswe 2013:436). This was quite a shift from the imposed epistemological assumptions of the West which persist in theological education, having successfully disempowered African knowledge systems.

Fortunately there is a revival of African epistemologies in the work of recent black theologians such as E.B. Farisani, Madipoane Masenya, M.K. Nzimande and M.S. Tsehla (Masenya 2013:463), not least in the translation (Majola 2013:496–497) and contextualising of scripture as imperatives of mission. Luka-Mbole (2013:519) insists that this involves engaging in 'a constructive dialogue between an original biblical culture, a church tradition and a contemporary culture.' Here no epistemological value system is privileged above another.

Another of the most significant means of transformation and adaptation was the printing press, the mechanical accompaniment of language. This was the means used to inculturate European concepts through the medium of language, and the missionaries took up the task of committing African languages to written form, often by mis-'reading' and misconceptualising important African cosmological concepts. It always indicates a shift in meaning to a greater or lesser degree. This can also occur in the linked area of music which was conceived both as a form of religious liberty but it was also a form of literary and expressive captivity.

The process of inculturation is founded on 'moulding the Bible and symbols [*culture*] of Christianity into a profoundly African expression of the church' (De Gruchy & Chirongoma 2010:299; Ma & Ross 2013:226). The indigenisation of the faith, through inculturation involves realising 'the intention of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, to be incarnate in every human culture whose authors he came to save' (Okyerefo 2013:43) and this includes the liturgy and can contribute to the regeneration of cultures. Although inculturation as a process includes accommodation, innovation, consultation and conflict, it also produces benefits as Christ is encountered and communities are revitalised. It cannot occur outside a particular historical period in which 'a situation in a cultural ecosystem … demands important changes in its operation if it is to remain viable' (Leedy & Ormond 1985:184), that is, major change has to happen. This can occur through the use of experimental forms of communal worship 'that share striking similarities with the primitive Christian communities of the pre-Constantine, missionary church unfettered by power and riches' (Okyerefo 2013:39). Revitalisation and renewal are results of the growth of Pentecostalism. In all, this leads to what by what Ukpong (2013) calls '*integrative inculturation theology*' which is:

> *A dynamic on-going process of conscious, critical and mutual interaction between the Christian faith and the religious and secular aspects of cultures such that the Christian reality becomes appropriated from within the perspective of and within the resources of these cultures to challenge and transform society and bring about a re-interpretation of faith. It seeks to open up new understandings of faith and lead to recreating culture and society.* (p. 531, [emphasis in original])

We would assume from this that the church is integral to both culture and society in this definition.

While the focus has traditionally been on the instigators of change from external sources bringing benefits of a variety of kinds to poor primitive people, 'reception is that process whereby the [*resident*] Christian community acknowledges, accepts, and integrates the insights of a church teaching or experience' (Kroeger 2013:100). This raises the question: Who are agents (the who of mission) of transformation (or democratisation where everyone can enjoy full participation and access to the sacred as the result of baptism in the Spirit, speaking in tongues, for example) in relation (the how of mission) to the community in which they work for change, that is, how are they 'inserted' into the context in relation to others? What are their social, political economic, gender, class positions in relation to the 'others'? This raises a number of questions for reflection:

• How do I analyse this context?
• How am I inserted into the space I share with the others?
• How do these factors affect their approach?
• What has been the practice of Christians and others in the past and in the present?

On this last question for example, giving was introduced by missionaries and became part of the church culture; part of total response to God in worship, tithing (deriving from the Old Testament support of the ministry of the Temple), and offerings; now the New Testament 'sowing and reaping' metaphor is common. Then there is the covenant paradigm where God blesses according to a covenant of giving or good works; giving to alleviate poor economic conditions. This results in transactional (reciprocal – expecting material blessings and health, Lk 6:38) rather than sacrificial giving, but for the poor this is sacrificial.

In the period under consideration, mission was in and from the majority world. And in the 20th century this movement took on another dimension as the world of missionary enterprise witnessed the beginning of reverse mission (but was almost in reverse gear as far as reception was concerned) as the minority world did not know how to receive, adapt, innovate or reflect in this new circumstance, despite some valiant attempts using the concept of 'partnership' on terms set by the minority in the sending nations (cf. Duncan 2008). Attractive as the concept is in theory it failed to integrate the philosophy and theology of partnership as *praxis*. It has remained a sending rather than receiving approach to mission with the power being retained by the sending agencies from the north. They have not been able to replace relationships based on power relationships leading to authentic *koinonia* which:

> [*M*]ust mean a renunciation of power. Churches of the North need to reject their reliance on power. Placing themselves in faith before God in solidarity with peoples who have been marginalised, so that all people's hopes and dreams may be transformed in God's image. The *kenosis* of mission keeps the church from initiating a new form of colonialism, and mission becomes the power of self-emptying. (Wickeri 2002:349)

Now 'partnership' has been forced upon the West through the diaspora movement (Adogame 2013). But the receiving nations in the West no longer have control of the agenda and pace of change. However, these diaspora groups tend towards insularity. It is about 'how African Christianities are negotiating and assimilating notions of the global, while maintaining their local identities' (Adogame 2013:xi):

> African Christian communities consisting largely of immigrants, typically develop a set of structures and practices designed simultaneously to help their members to maintain and reproduce their cultural and religious heritage, identities on the one hand, and also assisting immigrants in the process of adapting to the new host context. (p. 203)

This suggests that outwardly they are world-transforming as perpetual transients (Adogame 2013:26) in their chosen locations and at home by their eventual return, targeting local peoples, though inwardly self-maintaining and self-expanding, as is witnessed by the growing autonomy of women. In addition, account must be taken of emergent and resilient theologies and spiritualities in such contexts. Here is evidence of a two-way process of adaptation, innovation and reflection – this is the zenith of a *praxis* approach where liturgy precedes theology as it arises out of a fluid contextual experience. However, Adogame (2013:85) correctly emphasises that adaptation results in resistance and/or rejection or negotiation between world views as people struggle towards self-insertion and integration in their host communities often in the face of insidious racism. Continuity is demonstrated, for example, in beliefs in the reality of evil 'principalities and powers' ('spirits or superhuman powers' [Rm 8:38]) and the practice of spiritual warfare. This is an example of adaptation to the 'existential needs of Africans' (Adogame 2013:93) especially within the Pentecostal dimension of Christianity which takes account of its indigenous world view. Religious identities are also fluid both in time and space. In this it is important not to underestimate the contribution they can make to the host nations by sharing the substantial spiritual resource benefits African migrants bring with them.

The issue of resistance and/or rejection is not, however, a novel one. During the attempt to restore the 'lost authenticity' (Henningsen 2011:135) of South African blacks, the Moravians demanded that their standards be rigidly complied with; consequently, only the dispossessed complied with their demands. Even when they were invited to enter an area this did not lead to mass conversions (Henningsen 2011:138). They rejected the '*strategy of sameness*' (Henningsen 2011:139) or compliance with missionary requirements. Even within the black context, the Moravian pastors, brothers William, Jonathan and Petros Mazwi adopted different stances. Jonathan left the Moravians and joined the Presbyterian Church of Africa, a church which had seceded from the Free Church of Scotland Mission (Henningsen 2011:139). William set himself apart from his brethren whom he treated as 'other', all the while criticising his white mentors thus initiating the race *versus* class debate and failing to be accepted in middle-class white society. All

of their responses were related to a failure to achieve their aspirations. The strategy of sameness has its counterpart in the '*strategy of difference*' (Henningsen 2011:145) which, while rejecting the white hegemonic paradigm, wishes to benefit from it, for instance at the Moravian 'Goshen Kloof' where inhabitants used their occupancy of land to secure their future prospects as 'aboriginals of the country' so that they could be identified as authentically different (Henningsen 2011:146). The issue here is that missionaries retained the authority to designate people as 'authentic'. Yet, 'authenticity discourses can work both ways: they can be part of a divide-and-conquer policy while simultaneously being an empowerment tool in the hands of the oppressed' (Henningsen 2011:149–150) leading to 'double bind' communication – 'become like us but stay as you are/were' (Henningsen 2011:153).

In another situation, during the 1930s in Natal, South Africa, the American Board Mission (ABM) encountered difficulties with local pastors due to conflicts regarding policy and status even although this was consonant with the government policy of transferring authority to Africans: 'The quarrels between the missionary leadership and the pastorate in one sense reflected the fact that the indigenisation model was starting to work' (Rich 1995:194). This is an example of contestation which was vital for survival and growth to occur for almost:

> All missionaries paid lip-service to the idea that, eventually, the churches they had founded would be taken over by their converts, or their descendants. In practice though, most saw this as happening far in the future, far later than was envisaged by their congregations. Even when this was not the case, there was always disagreement, in greater or lesser measure about the form of worship the church was to take. If all those involved were unable to bend, the result was an insoluble conflict and schism. More often, however, matters did not come to such a pitch, and compromises were continually worked out. In this tension lies the dynamic of much of South African religious history. (Bredekamp & Ross 1995:3–4)

This context of negotiation was exemplified far beyond the confines of South Africa and it became less and less the case that the missionaries made the final choices. This is especially true in the case of the AICs of the Ethiopian type where the local members themselves consciously or unconsciously decided to perpetuate the doctrine, liturgy, polity and dress of their former masters. However, as they did this they took responsibility for their choices to retain certain features of the denominations they left. Perhaps it is as Gatwa (2013:86) suggests that it 'survived in the subconscious'. Hastings (1979:265–266) expresses it rather negatively as 'time and again to steal [*the mission churches'*] clothes and grow very effectively as just this and little else.' Bredekamp and Ross (1995:4), following the Comaroffs ([1991] 1997), assert that the indigenous consciousness was not so easily colonised as their land; nor was their massive contribution to mission Christianity and politics (Werner 2013:82).

But it was more than simply a matter of rejection of western Christianity for it was '*a resistance movement involving a protest and an affirmation of people's identity and personhood in the religious context as a matter of their faith commitment*'

(emphasis in original) (Ukpong 2013:533). The significant issue here is that secular matters are part of this movement's work and is, in part, a response to local issues, for example, apartheid in South Africa. But it is also important that this does not become the preserve of 'professional' theologians for all Africans are interlocutors. Hence there exists a complementary relationship with liberation theologies, all of which aim at reconciliation derived from justice so that people can have a sense of authentic self-worth and freedom through empowerment. This issue of identity was raised earlier by Bediako ([1992] 1999:93) by comparing two periods of African Christianity, the 2nd century and the second half of the 20th century. In this later period, it became clear that African theology could not be grounded in African religion and culture and western theology. African Christian identity must restore its cultural heritage and religious consciousness as an ontological exercise that leads to 'integrity in conversion, a unity of self in which one's past is genuinely integrated into present commitment' (Cragg 1980:194). The issue of the validity of such an approach has occupied substantial discussion in African theological circles; however, Bediako ([1992] 1999:5) remains convinced that 'the African theologian's concern with the traditional religions of Africa must find its fullest interpretation within the framework of *Christian* theology.' Having done a comparative study of the early African Graeco-Roman world and the modern African context, he reached the conclusion that:

> [*I*]n the process of the adjustments, adaptations and rejections that took place, that some of the formative factors in the Christian theological tradition were clarified and bequeathed to later generations. (Bediako [1992] 1999:8)

This was a vital process as mission Christianity projected a tabula rasa on to Africa which wiped out their rich past as a poor substitute for dialoguing with it. The rise of African theology, concurrent with the rise of African nationalism, was also concurrent with the development of radical theology in Europe which denied the sense of one living God by intellectualising the concept (Idowu 1969:21) and distanced Africans from an immanent Lord Jesus Christ known in the continuity of the tradition of the church and in its liturgy. The universality of such belief is at the core of African theology and African Traditional Religion (ATR). Hence, it is not possible to engage authentically without taking account of African culture and history and this is marked by suffering, exploitation and liberation.

This was taken up in the field of theological education, where contextualisation as 'listening to the culture and discerning the ways of God within the context' (Naidoo 2012:163) was equally important. The formation of the Institute of Contextual Theology (ICT) in 1980 'to develop a truly South African theology' (Nolan 1991:235) helped AICs and others, for example, blacks, youth, feminists and Kairos theologians to speak out for themselves. It also facilitated engagement on contextual issues such as poverty, abuse, HIV and AIDS, xenophobia through 'a rigorous social, cultural, historical, economic and political analysis within theological reflection; and more action' (Botha 2010a:194), that is, *praxis*. For the time,

this was particularly innovative and creative. But innovation has reached new heights more recently, as is exemplified in the rapidly developing Pentecostal movement.

Innovation in Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism is a globalised form of faith expression, a transnational, worldwide form of Christianity. It offers a rich textured example of innovation (distinguished by prayer, prophecy and healing). It is a recent type of Christianity in which there is marked engagement between the natural and supernatural worlds marked by personal conversion to God through the spirit on offer to all without condition, empowering people to be assertive in societies where they have been excluded.

The recent and progressive rise of Pentecostalism in Africa experiences the benefits of adaptability due to the recognition of the existence of a spiritual realm and supernatural events are regarded as 'normal' along with a 'pluralistic religious environment' (Anderson 2013:xv). We can compare this with Europe which is now dominated by state churches and secularism. Pentecostalism is now more open to discussions with other churches. Perhaps this is attributable to Pentecostalism having a developing, rather than an established, fixed, theology. Even historic churches are adapting their traditions to accommodate the charismatic renewal and had been for some time during the 20th century as the result of the threat of losing members and money.

Pentecostalism is also a 'protest movement against [*western*] "man-made creeds" and here it may be a form of AIC on this continent. It is also a challenge to the "coldness" of traditional worship' (Cox 1996:14). These are often based on assumptions that western faith comes as a 'strictly defined, theologically delimited religion' (Singh 2013:155). It is also assumed by many that it comes to a context devoid of a spirituality which reaches far back into ancient times. This is important because the source of spirituality and devotion are authentic and reliable sources of faith. Historically and contemporaneously:

> In the African context worship is also an engagement with the supernatural world of inanimate beings and ancestors. When the older African initiated churches emerged at the turn of the twentieth century, they were affirmed not only for their ability to incorporate charismatic renewal phenomena into their worship but also for engaging constructively with African ways of being religious. (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013:25)

Hence, people were offered solutions to all their problems and needs through prayer. Pentecostalism offers a radical new life – a place to be at home. Central to its innovative style is its ability to stand both inside and beyond traditional culture. It is also innovative in the manner in which it has become the main religious expression in diasporic faith (Adogame 2013) in European immigrant churches. It aims 'at revivalism and the renewal of world Christianity' (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013:5) and can therefore be classified as an '*ecclesiological experience*' (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013:6).

The potency of African Christian spirituality superseded ATR, but by the end of the 1980s its influence was waning in the face of deteriorating economic and political conditions. This has led to the historic churches re-evaluating, reforming and transforming as a consequent imperative, and provided African churches with a fresh opportunity to develop a critical awareness and to conscientise their people particularly with regard to its relationship with the state and governance in general in the post-independence period (from the 1960s) (Ojo 2013:48). This has been as much a problem for the mainline churches as for the AICs in the 1980s and 1990s. Ojo (2013:49–50) attributes this to a number of 'disconnections' between spirituality and ethics, spirituality and development *praxis*, spirituality and governance, spirituality and quality education, and spirituality and quality leadership. These disconnections provide Christianity with a full agenda if it is to continue to impact on Africa in the 21st century. The pick-and-pay mentality may lead African Christians to choose and/or deselect that which does not appeal to them in faith perspective, for example, the wealth motive as a distorted value. The rise of the Pentecostal and charismatic churches offer a means of communicating the gospel with the aid of up-to-date technology, and has led to more optimistic faith expressions based in moral responsibility and sensitivity. The promotion of, participation, accountability, transparency, discipline, trust, tolerance and democratic values provide a meaningful alternative to corruption and ethnicity.

Creative innovation among Africans is related to the motives of those receiving the mission either in spiritual or material ways. If we look at worship, we realise that worship is unique in each context even when the imposing styles of historic denominations are taken into account. These have often been transformed in time through a creative and integrative blend which is biblically based and is marked by contemporaneity, freedom of movement, spontaneity, joyfulness, relevance, shared experience of anointing of the Spirit and is consonant with indigenous religious traditions (trance, visions, healing, dreams, dance) all leading to the divine visitation in worship, for example, through *glossolalia* in stressful and traumatic situations; it is worship in expectation. Hence, the role of emotion is linked to experience of God and may be marked by loud noise, tears, sorrow, laughter and smiles. Prophecy aids understanding and growth. This is a context in which the primal imagination transcends traditional religion and transforms Pentecostal Christian African faith in a meaningful and relevant manner (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013:30; cf. Dickson 1984:111). The values and beliefs of traditional religion are appropriated by Pentecostal faith and challenge the rationally-based faith of the historic churches. In particular, they provide means of challenging the evil powers which confront people regularly. William Wade Harris (Kalu 2005:285–286, 390) and, more recently, Archbishop Emmanuel Milingo (Kalu 2005:398) provide examples of the development of theological ideas on healing, exorcism and pastoral care deliberately within the context of the primal vision of African societies.

Forms of worship include worship services, prayer vigils, revival services, regular prayer services, healing camps (the use of oil in anointing as a means of healing is viewed as interventionist) and evangelistic crusades. Vibrant worship, eclectic music and dance, emotive prayer, prophecy, words of knowledge, release from bondage, intense prayer for healing, total participation of concerned and committed believers, all leading to the edification of God's people and to the restoration of 'wholeness and balance in life' (Magesa 1997:195). In addition, prayer plays a significant role in the preparations for migration as has been emphasised by Asamoah-Gyadu (2013:35–57), Kalu (2008:282) and Adogame (2013:22).

When we come to the high point of Christian worship, the sacrament of Holy Communion, there is no evidence of the sacrament being a sign of membership. Therefore it is a source of unity rather than division. What is required is confession of experience of Jesus as Lord and Saviour through the power of the Holy Spirit. Consequently there has been a marked declericalisation of the sacrament and democratisation of ministry. But, further this is a characteristic of indigenous African Christianity that reflects traditional religious beliefs. Swift transfer to local leadership has been unprecedented in Christian history; it is 'grassroots lay oriented' and has sought to 'mobilise the laity for aggressive evangelism' (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013:60). In particular, it has liberated women from male patriarchy, not least in the diaspora. Thus, there is no separation between clergy and laity. The leader is the pastor rather than minister or priest. Access to charisma and ministry has been democratised; it is for all, not only the ordained. The outcome is participatory and missions-minded congregations which integrate praise, liberation and mission. This is energised lay missionary activity emerging from the democratisation of religious experience where power is offered to all regardless of class, status, gender, race or education. All have access to the sacred dimension, that is, all of life!

Innovative Pentecostal faith in Africa acknowledges palpable forms of evil, (cf. Eph 6:11–12), which are no longer taken so seriously in the West as the result of the western *psyche* having 'become domesticated by modernity' (Yung 2014:197). This is derived from traditional views of witches, evil powers, and harmful supernatural forces that diminish life. In the first two decades of the 20th century, West African prophets, Garrick Braide (Ghana) and William Wade Harris (Niger Delta), challenged that world view through powerful preaching. This is a context in which spiritual beings are authentic. This is mirrored in the life of the African diaspora.

Pentecostalism is the most versatile and flexible of Christian expressions with regard to integrating itself into African forms and expressions due to its predominant dependence on the activity of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of healing and miraculous occurrences. It is multi-dimensional, makes significant innovations and provides a comprehensive experience. Put simply, it meets people's hopes through the irruption of the sacred into the secular through activity of the Spirit by means of healing and deliverance from demons; it is where spirituality is marked by the unity of the material and spiritual realms. It links with ancient African traditions and the modern world by means of unmediated accessibility.

Scripture is used within Pentecostalism to define it over against historic churches' liberal tendencies, by referring to authentic issues, for example, the constant presence of poverty; it speaks into existential situations of believers and they believe it will act in their favour. There is no compromise on the authority of scripture. This is innovative, compared with contexts of debt, famine, natural disaster, oppression and militarisation; contents integral with the supernatural features.

In the process of inculturation, people were driven to dispose of sacred artefacts, charms, amulets, sacrifices and rituals which protected them and were left solely with the Bible without sufficient guidance (Yung 2014:177) on how to use and interpret it. Thus, indigenous peoples came to appropriate the Bible in their own way to ensure their well-being for example, the Yokuba and Akan use of the Psalms. All of this is normative in Pentecostalism.

The role of women

It is not just to discuss processes of inculturation without acknowledging the place women have adopted in the life and witness of a developing world Christianity. From the New Testament we receive tantalising glimpses of women in leadership positions and also in Christian communities, albeit in male dominated societies, in most indigenous cultures where Christianity has been implanted.

In terms of the democratisation of the clergy, it has to be noted, however, that long before the rise of the Pentecostal movement, democratisation, innovation and freedom are nowhere seen so clearly as in the life and work of the women's *manyano* [guild] movement. In South Africa, in the face of substantial opposition they forged a novel form of solidarity which gave them strength both personally and socially in cultures where they were seriously undervalued and this was their distinctive feature (Gaitskell 1995:218). This was particularly true at times of grief, mourning, tragedy, self-discipline and repentance. From the close of the 19th century 'the *manyanos* seem to have been part of a more general indigenisation of religious initiative' (Gaitskell 1995:212). Their work was based in a revivalist (*umvuselelo*) form of worship including prayer, praise, preaching, exhortation, confession and repentance characterised by a lack of reticence. Night meetings became popular. Integral to *manyano* worship was preaching and witnessing. Here women found the voices they were denied in the mission churches and coming from oral cultures they were well equipped to exercise their gifts to the full and without official training. Gaitskell (1995:225) alludes to blending 'tradition and creativity, memorisation and improvisation, the communal and the individual.' Yet, they were restricted in the wider church community by patriarchal prejudice. Worship life was complemented by visitation of heathen women in

their communities. Their solidarity (spiritual unity) with one another under God became their inspiration and their greatest strength in the face of their contextual trauma during the early years of the 20th century. The ethos of worship might be described as iterative and helical in its impact rather than time and space bound. Another characteristic is marked by independence through the 'scope it gave for indigenous zeal, initiative and leadership' (Gaitskell 1995:215) from the 1870s and the resultant spiritual energy and growing self-confidence were evidence of the capacity of women for leadership in the churches. These well-educated ladies were among the first and second generation of women to graduate from mission schools. Their failures were in the realm of actual limited practical caring for those in the greatest need. In sum, Gaitskell (1995:223) could affirm that at that time 'the *manyanos* in their prayerfulness are being identified as the epitome of African Christianity.' Certainly they demonstrated most of their most positive distinctive factors in, at least, the informal ecclesial establishment. They were a significant source of transformation and appropriation of mission Christianity in African communities. Subsequently, engendering theological education has become one effective means of challenging western assumptions, for example, the work of the Circle of Concerned Women Theologians (Phiri & Siwila 2013:966–973). This movement towards reflexivity has made a substantial contribution to the development of theology in Africa.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is 'what we learn from our past – from our failures, successes and silences?' (Kritzinger 2012:241). However, Botha (2010b:144–153) writing about theological education from a 'social constructionist' approach raises a prior question: Did they learn from their experience? For most Africans, remembering the past refers to the colonial past in which they were involved through adaptation and innovation. But between these two processes a process of reflection was being engaged either consciously or subconsciously. This has become an explicit activity because following the early church period in North Africa, the continent, particularly sub-Saharan Africa has only recently rejoined the community of Christian theological reflection, that is, formulation of the faith, through the truism – liturgy precedes theology, that is *praxis*, action precedes reflection which paves the way for renewed action in an iterative and helical manner. For instance, the early church praised God and worshipped before they began to actively theologise. Their basic proclamation was 'Jesus is Lord!' (Rm 10:9) as a liturgical prior to becoming a theological statement. In many cases theology follows worship or practice. What we learn from reflection on the experience of subjects and objects of mission during the colonial and imperial period is that black objects were quick to adapt to missionary incursions into their spiritual domain while the missionary subjects were very slow to adapt to the contexts which they invaded (Kritzinger 2011:40). This was a reflective movement akin to Botha's (2010b:145) interpretation of social constructionism which understands that 'all knowledge is contextual knowledge

[*and*] therefore contradicts the notion of readymade universally valid ideas that could be appropriated and applied to different contexts.' This has serious implications for theology, and especially theological education:

> The rebirth brought on theology by social constructionism is to perceive of reality not as God ordained but as socially constructed, much as in Christian theology there is a basic understanding of creation and of culture as gifts from God. Social constructionism forces theology and the church to be more rigorous in their discernment of the reality around them, more careful in reading the signs of the times. In the African continent social constructionism as yet another import article, can however, salvage at least the following situation for theology and the church: to perceive the woes in the continent not as divine revelation almost or as the consequence of natural laws, but as the logical consequence of the type of social, political, economic and cultural constructions in the continent either by people from elsewhere in the world who benefit from the situation or by the powerful elite in the continent itself. (Botha 2010b:146)

Literature emanating from within the Pentecostal movement:

> [*C*]ontain insightful theological reflections on the Christian faith from Pentecostal/charismatic perspectives and experiences. They are useful as sources of primary data for understanding the nature of contemporary popular Christian thought in Africa (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013:62),

where Africans adopt a problem-solving approach to religion. In the AICs, though not restricted to them the role of collective prayer as 'a process of collective reflection' (Lubaale 2013:31), *praxis*, transcends the purely spiritual and theological dimensions and leads to common understanding of problems and possible approaches to their resolution emerging from such reflexivity. As the result of such reflexivity, the AICs have from the end of the 19th century been building communities at the margins of larger communities based on mutual care and concern. In these counter-cultures they have learned to critique and reject the ethos of western individualistic and secularised societies based on the spirit of colonialism and imperialism: 'People develop their understanding of mission through listening to the voice of the Spirit and reading the scriptures in the situations in which they are placed' (Lubaale 2013:31). But how do the change agents analyse that specific context? They cannot do it independently of those who have imposed novel standards for 'reflexivity … highlights the wholeness and situatedness of the specific encounter … the description … can easily become a form of "othering"' (Kritzinger 2008:766). Kritzinger (2008:767) favours making explicit the dynamics of the encounter: '[*W*]e need to start listening to the "self-identification" of religious believers if we wish to overcome the … inevitable essentialism produced by such an approach' (Kritzinger 2008:767). Rather we should concentrate on the complex nature of the construction and maintenance of religious identity 'and to the role of insiders in this dynamic process and to 'the analysis of attitudes' (Kritzinger 2008:768). It is necessary to adopt a culture theory, such as cultural materialism which interprets culture as the result of material, ecological, and economic adaptations which people make (Howell & Paris 2011:235–238) to understand one's own culture and enhance quality of intercultural communication.

Thus, we can analyse the reality of the church (internally and externally through using the pastoral circle) which is essentially conservative, through initiating investigations on the implications of injustice and alienation, leadership structures and organisational patterns, ethnic, gender, class and 'racial' make-up. The question to be interrogated is what is the quality of our agency? Can we submit ourselves, our beliefs and practices to scrutiny and critique by others? If we consider this in light of the democratisation of spiritual gifts, this can lead to the loss of denominational commitment. A new generation of ministers without formal theological education is emerging who are not distanced by intellectual development and a cerebral form of religiosity; but in general this is beginning to lead to discernment that this has gone too far towards the opposite extreme. Apart from this we must note the implication of women's (including a growing number of them educated) freed for lay and ordained (Nkomazana 2013:407–408) involvement, that is, ministry.

In a sense Pentecostalism is an African brand of religious expression that offers an approach to religion that has not been far removed from traditional religion where God is creative, faithful, powerful and reliable although Nkomazana (2013:409) claims that it has eschewed the study of ATR. Yet, the role of the Holy Spirit in context of suffering and persecution is efficacious as it takes indigenous world views of mystical causality and evil seriously, expecting the defeat of evil and restoration of harmony individually and collectively. In this respect, Lockhead (1988) refers to ideologies of encounter involving hostility, isolation, competition, partnership and dialogue.

Conclusion

From its inception, Christianity has been a missionary faith and has interacted with and within the cultures it encountered. In this process all participants have been transformed by the gospel of Christ. The outcome is long-term renewal and revitalisation. This has been a struggle for dominance through a total onslaught by western theology through missionary agents. Western theology still holds sway but is constantly being challenged from within the African context.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

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