

African 'Independent' Churches (AICs) and Postcolonial
'Development'
Uppsala University, Sweden, 2 June 2017

Rev Sithembiso S Zwane

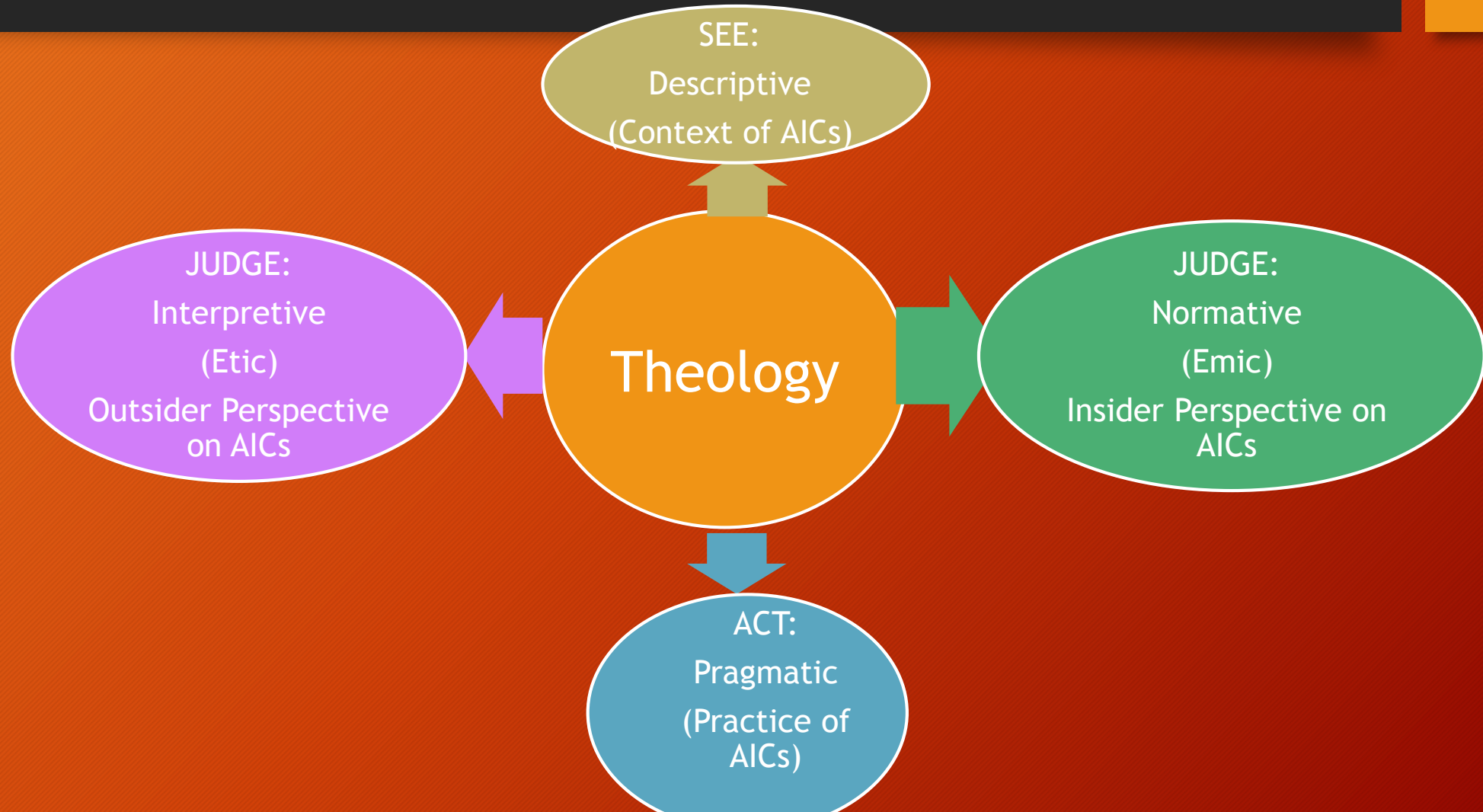
Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research, University
of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Ujamaa Centre's Methodology

□ SEE-JUDGE-ACT

- A **transformative method** from the Worker-Priest Movement, the Young Christian Workers (YCW)
- A **dialogical method** popularized by Cardinal Joseph Cardijn in 1930s in Belgium working with young people in factories affected by capitalist economic policies
- A **biblical method** as reflected in the work of Gunther Wittenberg, founder of the Ujamaa Centre (Exod 3: 7-8) (1991: 2)

Theological Methodology: Richard Osmer (2008)



The Context of AICs in South Africa (SEE): Descriptive

- ❑ The pre-colonial and colonial era did not consider the AICs as a significant movement in the struggle for economic and political emancipation
- ❑ Until the early 1980s the AICs were seen, mistakenly, as too cultural to be part of the struggle for economic and political transformation
- ❑ Since 1994 there has been a growing recognition of the importance of the AICs within the South African Christianity and their role in economic and political transformation
- ❑ Furthermore, the Post 1994 era recognized that AICs membership made up a considerable component of the working class and this was crucial to both the economic and political aspect of the struggle
- ❑ The AICs contributed immensely to the political emancipation of South Africa from minority colonial rule to a democratic rule
- ❑ The AICs continue to contribute to the decolonization of theology (Eg Inculturation) and socio-economic development (Eg Modernization)

Terminology in the AICs

- ❑ The term African 'Independent' Churches (AICs) refers to a wide range of issues and is used interchangeably with other terms like 'initiated' or 'instituted' and 'indigenous' churches
- ❑ The designation 'independent' offers the most acceptable, generalized title without any implied judgement, it means a "church which has been founded in Africa, by Africans and primarily for Africans" (Daneel 1987)
- ❑ The term 'independent' refers to the 'independence' of AICs from racial and economic exclusion by the historical or mission churches during the colonial period which led to the breakaway or schism
- ❑ The term 'Indigenization' of AICs is also a realistic identification of these movements because it indicates a need for the adaptation of the Gospel to African contexts, which is known as 'inculturation'
- ❑ The terms like 'Zion' or 'Apostolic' and 'Catholic' did not initially originate from AICs; but were adopted from other contexts or were used by the researchers as 'symbols or signs' for the different groups of AICs

Typology: AICs

❑ Ethiopian Movement of AICs

Eg Samuel Brander (USA) and Mangena Mokone (RSA)

❑ Messianic Movement of AICs

Eg Isaiah Shembe and Barnabas Lekganyana

❑ Spirit-Type Movement of AICs

Eg Daniel Nkonyana and Johane Maranke

Ethiopian Movement of AICs

- ❑ In 1884 Rev Nehemiah Tile became the first black Christian to break away from the Methodist to establish an Independent Church called Thembu National Church (TNC) because he felt strongly that the white church and government were destroying his African culture and heritage (Ngada & Mofokeng, 2000: 4)
- ❑ In 1872 the Herman Congregation broke away from the Paris Mission (PM), the Native Independent Congregation broke away from the London Mission Society (LMS) in 1885, and the Bapedi Lutheran Church broke away from the Berlin Mission in 1889 (Ngada & Mofokeng, 2000: 4)
- ❑ According to JA Millard (1999), Samuel James Brander established the Ethiopian Catholic Church in Zion on the 3 April 1904 in Marabastan in Pretoria with 45 worshippers, this was a protest against mission dominated Methodist church
- ❑ The Ethiopian Movement of churches are non-prophetic and lay no claim to any manifestation of the Holy Spirit, the Ethiopian Movement of churches originated largely as a reaction against White-dominated mission churches (Daneel 1961)
- ❑ The text like Psalms 68: 31 “Ethiopia hastens to stretch out her hands to God” featured prominently in the Ethiopian churches established during the colonial period and was the justification for an African independent Black church
- ❑ The Ethiopian ideology took root mainly in the South and East Africa during 1890 and 1920 (Sundkler 1961, Daneel 1971)

Ethiopian Movement of AIC: The NDJ Ethiopian Catholic Church in Zion



Ethiopian Movement of AICs



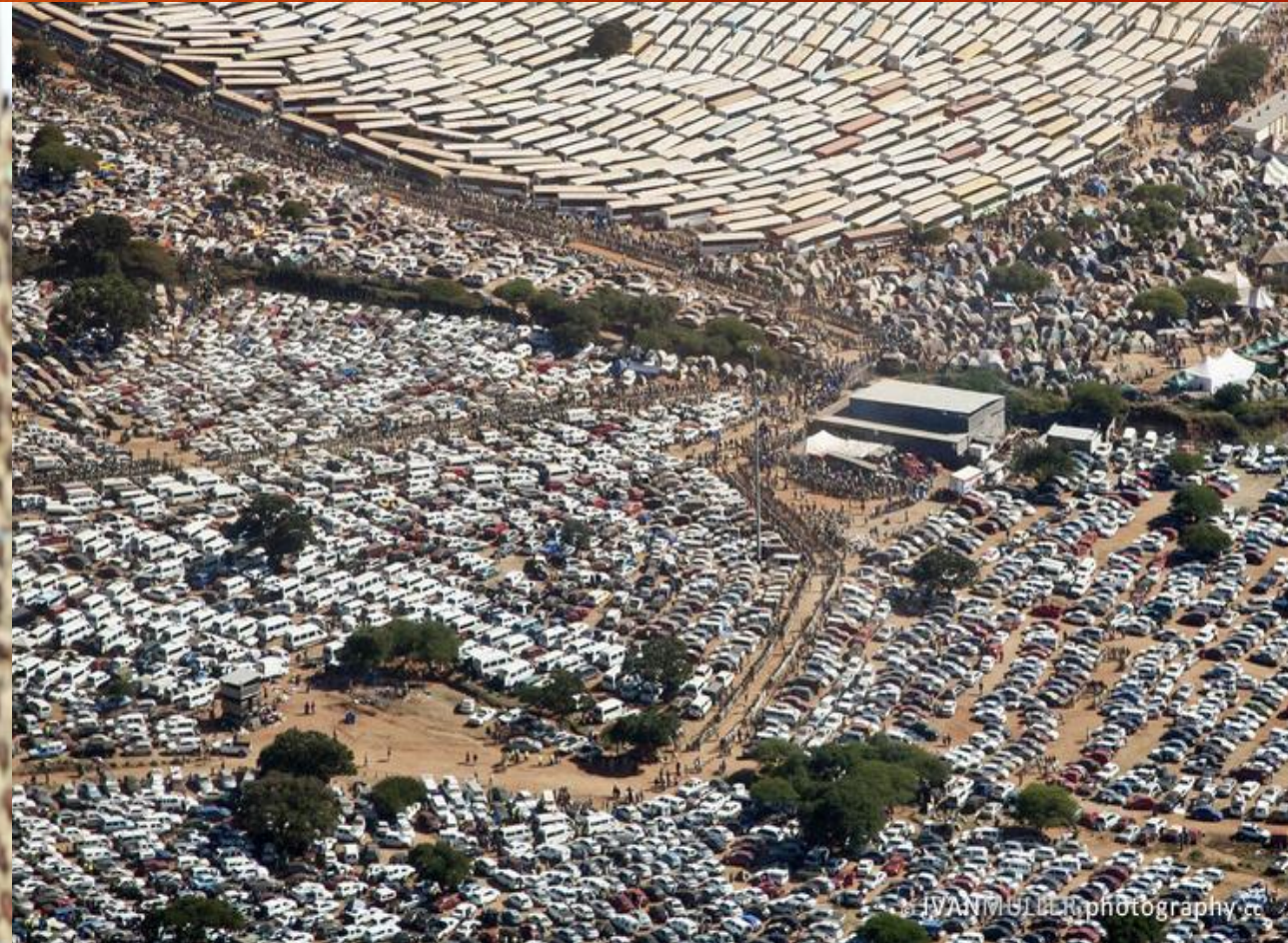
Messianic Movement of AICs

- ❑ The term 'Messianic' is used mostly by scholars to define certain practices in the AICs especially the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) and the Baptist NaZareth Church (Ibandla Lama NaZaretha, Shembe)
- ❑ The 'Messianic' AICs are often led by charismatic leaders who have the gift of healing and prophecy and subscribe to a hereditary leadership tradition
- ❑ According to Inus Daneel (1987: 41) some scholars have classified the so called "Messianic churches" in the same category as the "Spirit-Type churches"
- ❑ Daneel argued that the justification for this, is that they are both "largely prophetic movements, the only difference being that in the Messianic churches the leader is elevated to a messianic status" (Daneel 1987)
- ❑ The question that Bengt Sundkler (1948) raised, "who stands at the gates of heaven, Jesus Christ or the Black Messiah"
- ❑ Sundkler argued, "if it is the Black Messiah, the mediatorship of Christ is violated or superseded and the designation "Black Messianism" is applicable"
- ❑ The Zion Christian Church (ZCC) of Barnabas Lekganyane and the Baptist Nazareth Church or Ibandla lamana Zaretha (Shembe) of Isaiah Shembe are among the fast growing AICs in Southern Africa with a following estimated to be between 6 to 7 Million members in the SADC region

Messianic Movement of AICs - Shembe: Ibandla Lama Na Zaretha



Messianic Movement of AICs: Zion Christian Church (ZCC)



© IVAN MULLER photography.co

Spirit-Type Movement of AICs

- ❑ In South Africa the 'Zionist' Spirit-Type Churches were started by Zionist Missionaries from America (eg John Alexander Dowie (1907-1947 (USA) and Peter Le Roux (SA))
- ❑ In Zimbabwe these groups set themselves apart from others by adopting the popular name of *maKereke dzoMweya* (Churches of the Spirit), hence the title "Spirit-Type churches" (Daneel 1987: 39)
- ❑ In Zimbabwe the Zion Spirit-Type churches are reflected in Johane Maranke, commonly known as vaPostori (Apostles) that claim to be the original representatives of Christianity than other "Zion" type churches

Cont...

- ❑ The Johane Maranke Church (JMC) or vaPostori broke away from American Methodist Mission and has no relations with this mission church today
- ❑ Johane Maranke's Church (JMC) Spirit-Type church in Zimbabwe attracted attention with their practice of healing by prayers and water
- ❑ The church has received wide spread public criticism for discouraging the use of Western medicine in hospitals and promoting Traditional Indigenous medicines
- ❑ The primary focus of the Spirit-Type churches is healing (prayer and water) rather than evangelism (preaching the Word)

Cont...

- ❑ According to Jonathan Draper (2016: 35) the Spirit-Type churches Ama Jericho church in Swaziland emphasizes the distinction between *Umoya Ongcwele* (Holy Spirit) from *Imimoya Emibi* (Evil Spirits) that manifest through witchcraft, bad luck and poverty
- ❑ Ama-Jericho are known to pray for the manifestation of the *Holy Spirit* to cast *Evil Spirits* in Swaziland, they have a huge following because of the power of the Holy Spirit in the church
- ❑ The majority of their converts are recruited into the church the healing that come as a result of the *Holy Spirit* against *Evil Spirits*, hence the significance of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Spirit-Type churches
- ❑ The 'Spirit' is central to an understanding of the success of the Zionist churches in the religious field
- ❑ Draper argue that the 'Spirit' represents cultural capital that draws on the Zulu/Swathi rituals and practices

Bengt Sundkler mis-recognizes this as “a field of
crosses” Symbols in Spirit-Type Churches (Circle of Staffs)



Spirit-Type Movements



'Etic' Theology of AICs (JUDGE): Interpretive

- ❑ According to the dominant discourse, AICs have the 'spoken or oral theology' rather than the 'written theology'
- ❑ James Cochrane refers to the AICs "theology" as "Inchoate" or "Incipient" meaning not fully developed as a "theology" in terms of scholarship
- ❑ The classical missiological study of AICs have followed, most notably by Bengt Sundkler (1948, 1961), Harold W Turner (1967), and Inus Daneel (1971, 1974) the twofold typology of Ethiopian/African and Zionist/spiritual/prophet-healing trajectory
- ❑ The situation according to Allan Anderson is more complex today with the entrance of charismatic and Pentecostal African Independent churches (AICs) with the prosperity gospel/theology
- ❑ The traditional indigenous AICs have been described by the Western scholars as a "syncretistic" religious movement
- ❑ In Sundkler's earlier work, he described AICs as "the bridge over which Africans are brought back to heathenism"
- ❑ Sundkler (1948) Daneel (1961) Anderson (1971), have discussed the AICs and their label as "Separatist" because of the breakaway from historical churches

Cont...

- ❑ AICs are often described as the “churches of the Spirit” with a general description
- ❑ AICs are also described as “heretic” or “Cultural” with their focus on “indigenization” of the Gospel
- ❑ AICs are also referred to as “cultic” in other parts of Africa like Uganda because of the rituals performed in those contexts
- ❑ AICs are a “Protest” movement aimed at the “Africanization” of Christianity

“Emic” Theology of AICs (JUDGE): Normative “Throwing Off the White Mask” Ngada and Mofokeng

- ❑ Ngada and Mofokeng argue vehemently that “Christian Missionaries compassed sea and land to make converts among the indigenous black people of South Africa” (2000: 1)
- ❑ According to Ngada and Mofokeng, what missionaries brought was hardly “the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” but “Western culture and Western Civilization” (2000: 1)
- ❑ The ‘White mask’ was first experienced in the issue of “dress code”, Missionaries argued, that to be a Christian, a black Christian had to “dress” like “whites” (2000: 1)
- ❑ They argue that Africans had to adopt Western ways of “eating, talking, addressing people” and most importantly Western ways of worshipping
- ❑ The worse assertion, argues Ngada and Mofokeng, is that according to Missionaries, If African did not put this Western respectability, “Africans were destined for eternal condemnation”

'Emic' Practitioner's Perspective

□ Soteriology and Christology:

- The doctrine of Salvation (Soteriology) is central to the Ethiopian Movements understanding of Christ (Christology) as the centre of Christianity
- The Ethiopian Movements of AICs adopt these theological doctrines provided they are contextualized, and are not a form of colonization or Westernization
- The Messianic Movements of AICs protests against these doctrines because of the dominant discourse or narrative of Westernized Christianity that assert a particular culture and worship style
- The Messianic Movements are a protest movement against cultural imposition and Westernization of Christianity (eg decolonized liturgies)

Cont...

□Pneumatology:

- The doctrine of Pneumatology is fundamentally important for the Messianic Movements and the Spirit-Type AICs
- This is not the emphasis in the Ethiopian Movements of the AICs because of their proximity to the historical or mission churches
- The *Umoya Oyingcwele* or the *Holy Spirit* plays a critical role in the Messianic Movements of AICs and the Spirit-Type AIC
- The emphasis in the Messianic and Spirit Type Movements of AICs is on the healing of the sick, the casting out of demons, evil spirits, witchcraft and bad luck that brings poverty
- *The Umoya Oyingcwele* or *Holy Spirit* serves to protect the righteous believers of AICs Movements from harm, assist during prophecy and prayer, and creates good fortunes

Cont...

□ Ecclesiology:

- The prescriptive liturgy is still evident in the Ethiopian AICs as a result of the association with mission churches with the exception of messianic and spirit-type churches or indigenous churches
- The doctrine of the church in the AICs serves as a reminder that the church is for 'the people' and not just 'the leadership' (liturgy - the work of the people on behalf of God)
- The communal understanding of who 'the church' is, is critical; especially in the Ethiopian Movements because of racial hegemony and polarization which led to schism
- The concept of the church as the 'bride to Christ' has theological significance, the church is at the service of Christ not visa versa
- The church is understood as the 'membership' rather than the 'leadership', it is the majority who are mostly poor and marginalized by economic and political systems that make up 'the church' not the elite in the 'leadership'

Cont...

□ Eschatology:

- The doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ is central to Ethiopian Movements, because of the theological significance of the Trinity, Christ as the way to God after death
- Some of the Messianic Movement express their eschatological beliefs through their ancestral traditional belief systems rather than through Christ
- The Cross of Christ is central to the understanding of the Second Coming in the Ethiopian Movements, the Eschatological hope of resurrection after death, this is not the case in the Messianic Movements

African Scholarship on AICs

- ❑ Simon Maimela (1985: 71), (and others like Ngada and Mofokeng, Mosala, Mofokeng) argued that “African Christians felt that the church was not interested in their daily misfortunes and concrete problems” of Africans
- ❑ Maimela argued that the “greatest attraction of AICs was an invitation to Africans to bring their anxieties about witches, sorcerers, evil spirits, bad luck, poverty, and illness”
- ❑ Maimela argued that “Syncretism” is misunderstood and refers to “Contextualization or Inculturation” of the Gospel by AICs
- ❑ Maimela challenges the “Westernization” of “Christianity” in different contexts in the world
- ❑ The Ethiopian churches embraces the Bible, especially the New Testament, while the Messianic churches appreciate the Old Testament (eg Polygamy, Dowry, Sacrifices, Jewish law on the Sabbath etc)

Symbols in AICs (ACT): PRAGMATIC

- ❑ White Robes (eg *Iminazaretha*, Repentance & Baptism) for the believers
- ❑ Staffs (eg *Izikhali*, casting out of evil spirits and bad luck) and protection of believers
- ❑ Bare foot (eg *Ethempeleni*, Tabernacle, holy place of God), respect for Holy places of God by believers
- ❑ Forbidden food (eg *Ingulube*, Pork), that affect the spirituality of believers
- ❑ Western medicine (eg *Amakhambi*, herbs), reinforces colonial power and herbs are protest against this notion by believers
- ❑ Water (eg *Isiwasho*, healing the sick), a form of healing power that is uncontaminated by herbs (*Abathandazi*, intercessors)
- ❑ Hair & Beard (Izinwele nentshebe) is associated with a NaZarite (eg Samson) whose power was his hair, this is common in Messianic (Shembe) and Spirit-Type AICs (eg Judges 16: 17 and Numbers 6: 5)

Ujamaa and AICs: (ACT)

- ❑ Building theological leadership capacity among the AICs in KZN and EC (eg People's Theology)
- ❑ Building economic leadership capacity among the AICs in KZN and EC (eg Bread Theology)
- ❑ Building citizenship and governance leadership capacity among the AICs in KZN and EC (eg Public Theology)
- ❑ Building leadership capacity on gender justice among the AICs on in KZN and EC (eg Body Theology)
- ❑ Building leadership capacity on environment and land among the AICs in KZN and EC (eg Earth Theology)

AICs in Post-colonial 'development': (ACT)

- ❑ Musa W Dube (2000: 15) argued that: the term Postcolonial describe modern history of imperialism, beginning with the process of colonialism, through the struggles for political independence
- ❑ She cites the popular quote: “when a white man came to our country; he had the Bible and we had our land. The white man said to us, “let us pray”, after the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the Bible”
- ❑ The critical issues raised by Dube are (1) Land dispossession (2) Racial superiority (3) Power struggle which also relates to the struggle faced by the AICs in postcolonial era
- ❑ The AICs are predominantly black, working class and traditional in their approach, and challenges the dominant narrative/discourse on ‘practices’:
 - **Land:** the AICs have no access to land taken by white settlers in 1652 and later formalized by the Land Act of 1913
 - **Race:** the AICs have no relations with white missionary churches for support, especially Messianic and Spirit Type
 - **Power:** the AICs have no political power to engage with the authorities on injustices because of polarization
- ❑ **AICs in Political Formation and Development**
- ❑ Participation in Active Citizenship; Religion and Democracy: (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (Cogta))
- ❑ Participation in Voter Education, Election processes and strengthening of democracy: (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (Cog

AICs and Government Programmes: Pragmatic (ACT)

- ❑ According to Barbara Bompani (2010: 320) “the Post-Apartheid period can be considered as an era that puts emphasis on socio-economic development”
- ❑ Bompani (2010: 320) argues that the “AICs appear to offer important answers that ought to be considered within the broader socio-economic development” in the SADC region
- ❑ **AICs in Social Cohesion, African Renaissance and Development**
 - Postcolonial Intercultural projects to unite Black and White communities (Department of Arts and Culture in South Africa)
 - People-Centre Development in agricultural rural community, Land Reform and Rural Development: (Department of Land and Rural Reform)
- ❑ **AICs in Economic and Social Development Projects**
 - Participation in Construction Development: (Department of Economic Development and Public Works)
 - Participation in Social Security benefits, (through the grants system): (Department of Social Development)

Question:

☐ What do you think of the AICs?