

The African Initiated Churches as an embodiment of the moratorium debate

Lessons for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, Central Diocese

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Abstract

The African Initiated Churches pose a challenge to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa/Central Diocese, regarding living up to the challenges of moratorium debate in missions in the 1970s. Among other things, the moratorium debate was advocating for values of autonomy such as; self-governing, self-support, self-propagating and self-theologising (Bigambo, 2001; Kendall, 1978 & Wagner, 1975). In its original sense, a full moratorium meant the cessation of all activity on the part of missionary personnel as well as financial assistance brought to the African churches from Europe and North America. It also means that the missionaries were to return to home from Africa for a period of five years Uka (1989:193). In this article, I do not align myself fully with this definition *per se*, however I firmly believe that certain aspects of the moratorium debate illustrated by the African Initiated Churches in this article warrant attention in relation to Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa/Central Diocese.

Keywords: moratorium, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa/Central Diocese, African Initiated Churches

1. Introduction

It is indeed a great privilege to contribute a piece in honour of Rev Professor Nico Botha to whom I consider myself fortunate for having become closely acquainted to. In missiological circles, Professor Botha is known, among other things, for his commitment to issues of social justice. In my conversations with him, we often touched on the controversial yet prescient call for moratorium debate on western missionaries and finances on the continent of Africa, which according to him is a justice issue. To express my deep appreciation to Professor Botha's scholarly contribution, I saw it befitting to revisit this topical subject in relation to the African Initiated Churches (AICs) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa/Central Diocese (ELCSA/CD).

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This article attempts to look at the moratorium debate as a phenomenon of its own time and whether issues around this debate impinge the ELCSA/CD. In this connection, the article aims to answer the following key question: As an autonomous church has ELCSA/CD lived up to the challenges of the moratorium debate in mission as demonstrated by the AICs? The ELCSA/CD was formed in 1977 as predominantly autonomous self-reliant black church. However, it seems that after forty-one years of existence, the ELCSA/CD continue to grapple with questions of autonomy as they were raised in the moratorium debate. As a member of the ELCSA/CD through conversations and meetings I attended, the question of autonomy of the ELCSA/CD always came under the spotlight and often generated heated discussions. The author contends that the AICs, in their quest for autonomy, have become a model of how to live up to the challenges presented by moratorium debate and the ELCSA/CD can draw valuable lessons out of their experience. This article will give a brief historical survey of the moratorium debate, as well as tracing historical roots of both the ELCSA/CD and the AICs. The last section of the article will highlight three areas as a case in point of how the AICs have been successful in meeting certain demands, which were linked to the proposal for moratorium debate and discuss lessons that the ELCSA/CD can draw in their quest for autonomy. The paper ends with a conclusion summarising its key argument.

2. The Call For A Moratorium

In the early 1970s, a new challenge to mission co-operation between African and Western Christians came from Africa. The Africans challenged the Westerners² to retreat for a period of time, from the mission field and withdraw funds and missionaries from the churches they had started and patronised in Africa and elsewhere (Mugambi, 2017:24). The crux of the problem was that patronage through disbursements of money and the deployment of personnel was hampering the growth of the beneficiary churches instead of enabling them to stand on their feet, both ecclesiastically and economically. It is against this background that the proposal for a moratorium on Western missionaries and funds was to be put forward as an effort to find the means to create a balanced relationship between African and Western churches.

Although the moratorium issue was discussed in all Third World countries, this paper deals only with the moratorium on Western missionary activity in Africa. Nevertheless, the discussions of a similar moratorium on other continents have been used as a point of reference to the extent that they contributed to the awakening

² In this article, the term "Westerners" is used in its traditional sense, to refer to the sending agent churches in Europe and North America. As they provided the mission service, they are referred to as subjects of mission.

of the activating African debate. As far as the moratorium on Western missionary activity in Africa is concerned, John Gatu was the central figure in the controversy, the first to focus sharply on the issue in a larger gathering.

John Gatu first called for such a moratorium in 1971 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (U.S.). Shortly thereafter, different countries continued to discuss the issue, above all (Switzerland) in Chouilly, Bangkok (Thailand), Lusaka (Zambia) and Lausanne (Switzerland). Several Church leaders argued against it before the World Council of Churches (WCC) of the Fifth Assembly in Nairobi. In view of the intensity of the challenges to the Westerners to retreat from African mission activity, the conferences saw the need to find a solution to the problems in mission co-operation.

In 1975, the controversy over the proposal for a moratorium came to a conclusion without being formally resolved, as other, less radical, means were found to deal with conditions, which had led to it.

2.1 Gatu's speech and the reasons behind the issuing a call for moratorium at the mission festival in 1971 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (U.S.)

The Reformed Church in America (RCA) sponsored a mission festival in October 1971 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (Wagner, 1975:166). According to Schwartz (1991:15), at that time John Gatu was taking a year's sabbatical to study in the United States, no doubt, financed by Western funds. Wagner (1975:17) points out that it was at this mission festival that Gatu first proposed a moratorium on missionary personnel and financial assistance being brought to African churches from Europe and North America. It seems the delegates at the mission festival were "caught off guard" when Gatu raised the thorny issue of moratorium, maybe they even regretted why they invited him because for many participants this controversial issue "was a reality which still haunted them". Wagner (1975:166) reports: "Gatu caused a major stir when he brought up this moratorium proposal in a gathering called "Mission Festival 71" sponsored by the Reformed Church of America in 1971". Even so, it was more surprising that the major Christian denominations did not see the signs of discontent sooner. For indeed, at least with hindsight, we can now see clearly that the challenges being made to colonial political and economic structures were bound to have implications for the Church.

In explaining Gatu's proposal to the Reformed Church, Sundkler and Steed (2000:1027) note that Gatu challenged the missions in the West in words of prophetic seriousness. Presumably, when he was invited to speak, he prepared his remarks, knowing full well that he would challenge the missions of the West with his proposal. Feeling confident that he had chosen the perfect time to voice his proposal, Gatu made the following appeal:

"The time has come for the withdrawal of the foreign missionaries from many parts of the Third World, that the Churches of the Third World must be allowed to

find their own identity and since the continuation of the present missionary movement is a hindrance to this selfhood of the Church" (Gatu quoted in Sundkler & Steed, 2000:1027).

According to John Gatu, the proposal for a moratorium was to help the younger churches find their own identity and feet. This prophetic call was contrary to the popular belief that people, and the nations need to be served with the gospel by co-operating with western personnel. In other words, Gatu wished the Christian church to go forward in Africa, but in his opinion; it could not do so because the missionaries acted as an obstacle to its development, and their withdrawal was the means by which the Church in Africa could regain her self-identity. Sundkler and Steed (2000:1027) indicate that Gatu proposed that the missionaries should withdraw from the Third world for a period of at least five years.

In defending the authentic selfhood of the Church in Africa, John Gatu told the mission festival how the Third World's dependency on Western support could be ended. According to Gatu (quoted in Uka, 1989:192), the Church of Africa was to be built on its own natural resources that are with people and money obtained in Africa and not on foreign funding:

"We cannot build the church in Africa on alms given by overseas churches, nor are we serving the cause of the Kingdom by turning all bishops, general secretaries, moderators, presidents, superintendents into good enthusiastic beggars, by always singing the tune of poverty in the churches of the Third World".

Gatu's speech had three main ideas. Firstly, he was of the opinion that the church in Africa could not be called African if her growth depended on foreign assistance. Secondly, Gatu rejected any arrangement that required African Church leaders to beg from the West. In other words, Gatu wanted the African Church leaders to be home fundraisers rather than to beg for funds and services from the Western countries while money and people were available in Africa. If this were successful, there would be no need for the Africans to continue depending on Western resources. Lastly, Gatu demanded that mission activity be universal and not only from the West to the Third World. In other words, Gatu demanded two-way mission activity, which was nothing else than reciprocity between different parts of God's one Church. Gatu's remarks in Milwaukee amounted to no less than a full-fledged rejection of the imperialistic attitude as it was reflected in Western missionary control on the life of the Church in Africa. "The imperialistic attitude of the West [...] must be challenged. This imperialistic attitude, which had prevailed in other countries throughout the mission era, had to be fought because it continued to victimise the churches in Africa" (Gatu quoted by Bigambo, 2001:9).

Gatu also reacted against the common assumption of Westerners concerning the weak status of Christianity in Africa. Gatu cited the example of Bishop Neill, who had maintained that in certain places in Africa, Christianity could not survive without a large-scale presence of Western missionaries. Kendall (1978:88) notes that unashamedly, Neill had also argued that as African Christianity was not deeply rooted, a constant flow of foreign missionaries was necessary. Gatu (Kendall, 1978:88) responded to such an assumption by stating:

“Bishop Neill cannot see an African Church surviving without missionaries from the West. He sees the role of missionaries as helpers in areas as administrators, treasurers, accountants, theological teachers, etc. The question one prefers to ask is: “What administration, what accountancy, what theological training? I am sure I can mention churches in Africa that have most of these posts filled by Africans. However, where this is not the case as yet, we must request missionaries to resign in order for Africans to take fill these job positions”.

2.2 Contextual Interpretation of Gatu’s speech and the closing of the mission festival gathering

In the light of this background, it can be said that the purposes of the moratorium are found in the general framework of the relationships between the African and the Westerners in connection with missionary enterprises. John Gatu called for the moratorium so that the local churches in Africa would no longer be dependent on missionary funds and personnel from the mission boards of North America and Europe. He also wanted African churches to attain their selfhood and self-identity by becoming self-reliant and by fighting against the dependency syndrome. Gatu envisaged that the churches in Africa were to be run by their own indigenous personnel and not under the patronage of Westerners.

In Gatu’s view, Africans were victims in the mission enterprise. The relationship between the Africans and Westerners was imbalanced as a result of having been on the tacit assumption that the Church in Africa would always be dependent on Western support for its very existence. While the Westerners became the rulers and were financially powerful, the Africans were poor and economically powerless. As a result, the relationship between the Africans and the Westerners was created in such a way that the economic inequalities would perpetuate Western dominance and African dependence.

The framework for Gatu’s demands was not only ecclesiastical and theological in nature. Indeed, the cultural imperialism that was being exercised by the Westerners over African culture contributed to Gatu’s challenge, for he saw Western missionary activity within the context of Western imperialistic attitudes. According to Uka, Gatu protested against the Western cultural chauvinism that made the

Westerners discredit African culture, with its religious beliefs and practices, which were attacked as devil worship, superstitions and magic. Thus, by extinguishing cultural chauvinism, Gatu wanted “to restore the cultural integrity of the African so that the authentic African religious beliefs and worldviews could be respected” (Uka, 1989:192).

The withdrawal of missionaries aimed at Africanising the Church. The process of making themselves indigenous, according to Gatu, was a primary need and right of the African churches. In fact, selfhood and indigenisation are not only characteristics of African churches but can also be recognised as the need and the right of every church in the world. From this point of view, whenever churches are frustrated or impaired by foreign domination, a change in relationship has to be made. On the other hand, Gatu’s call for a moratorium can be recognised as a vehicle for reconstructing and restructuring the imbalanced relationship in mission co-operation.

To sum up, Gatu’s speech called for the withdrawal of the Western missionaries and funding and recommended that there should be a five-year cooling off period to allow both the church in Africa and Western mission activity time for review, reflection and reassessment of the old system of mission. As massive support from Europe and North America had eroded the foundation of selfhood of the African Church’s self-identity and self-reliance, growth from within had been stunted. This had entrenched the African Church in dependency on the Westerners. Gatu was determined to make the African Church grow using her own resources. One could say that by the end of the mission festival, the Westerners may have heard enough and thus feared sending missionaries and funds to churches in Africa. This did not mean that they decided to stop sending personnel and funds to mission field. However, it increased their fear of the consequences of their continued service. It was true that the proposal for the moratorium by Gatu shocked the audience, for it was a radical signal to the old traditional structure of the churches and mission agencies of the West that their model of mission was questionable, and thus no longer acceptable. They were called upon to be accountable and faithful to the mandate for world mission inherent in the gospel.

The proposal for a moratorium at Milwaukee launched an on-going controversy in the next four years on missionary ecclesiology in the ecumenical movement. Unquestionably, from this time on, the call for a moratorium began to be a burning issue in mission co-operation between Africa and the Western donor organisations.

2.3 Westerners Response to the Proposal for a Moratorium

According to Mugambi (2017:24) the moratorium proposal became a bone of contention across polity spectrum of Christian denominations. For instance, the evangelical mission leaders, formulated a response to Gatu’s call for a moratorium in 1971, as an attempt to craft the best model for the structure of the mission activity of the church.

In their discussion, they did not consider at all the possibility of withdrawing or reducing the number of their missionaries to be a viable means of resolving the issues that the proposed moratorium sought to address (Uka 1989:215). This gives the impression that the Evangelical Mission leaders were against Gatu's proposal for a moratorium. In their opinion, withdrawing or reducing missionaries and money was not desired.

The two most articulate western critics of the moratorium proposal were Luzbetak the former President of the American Society of Missiology and Anderson. According to Uka (1989:23), Luzbetak argued that the word moratorium was misleading, and spoke instead of the need for the international and mutual enrichment. Here, Luzbetak expressed opposition to the proposal for a moratorium but he also called for increased international interaction. The second critic of the moratorium proposal, Anderson (1974:137), argued that "the accumulated problems of nearly two hundred years of missionary relationships could not be solved by going into isolation, nor would the New Testament allow this". Anderson insisted on co-operation and not separation in spite of problems in relationships. In other words, problems might unite people to look for solutions, rather than separate them.

Undoubtedly, the Westerners believed that they still had a lot to do in common with their fellow Africans because the task of evangelisation everywhere was unfinished (Matthew 28:19), what they had in common was, in their opinion, much more important than anything that would divide them.

Gatu's proposal caused divided opinions. While some understood the concern behind Gatu's demands, others were critical. However, certain Westerners responded negatively to the proposal but this does not mean that they did not see the value or importance of the proposed moratorium. They recognised the proposal for a moratorium as a new challenge coming from Africa in criticism of the old tradition of cross-cultural international mission activity that had been conducted on the African continent. In addition, the Westerners perceived the proposal for a moratorium by Gatu as an issue that needed amendment. Accordingly, the Westerners also wished for the dominant/subordinate relationship to be changed, for it jeopardised the mission enterprise. The primary objective was to work toward international and mutual enrichment that could enable both Africans and Westerners to participate in Christian mission service on an equal basis.

3. The implications of the moratorium debate for the ELCSA/CD

The ELCSA was formed on 18 December 1975 in Tlhabane Rustenburg, as a predominantly black autonomous church. It was constituted of four Dioceses, namely; The Cape Orange (present day Western Cape, Free State and Northern Cape provinces respectively), the Southern-Eastern (present day Kwazulu-Natal), the North-

ern (present day Limpopo Province) and Western (present day North West Province), which were organised along the ethnic lines to follow the pattern of Lutheran mission societies which laboured among indigenous people. Each Diocese was to retain its autonomy under the leadership of an elected bishop. The ELCSA structure is constituted of Dioceses, circuits, parishes and congregations, as well as three administrative bodies: the General Assembly; which meets triennially, the Church Council; with a full-time Treasurer, and General Secretary and the Presiding Bishop.

The Central Diocese was formed on 12 December 1977 in Eersterust, Pretoria, as the fifth Diocese of the ELCSA, owing to the high level of ethnic diversity in the present-day Gauteng province (Highlights of the Thirty Years of the Central Diocese 1977-2007:1). Presently, the Central Diocese covers the entire Gauteng province, including certain parts of Mpumalanga and North West Province respectively. One of the erstwhile Black Theologians, the late Bishop Dr Manas Buthelezi, was elected as the first bishop of this Diocese in 1977, he was succeeded by Bishop Dr Ndanganeni Phaswana (2000–2015), and the present incumbent is Bishop Dr Makabe Rakuba 2015–).

3.1 Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa/Central Diocese and Africanisation

Africanisation of the church was one of the central and fundamental issues underlying the call for moratorium. Opoku (n.d.:241) has observed that the church in Africa, particularly in the Sub-Saharan areas, came into existence as part of the European expansion into Africa therefore, argue that it still carries the marks of its parentage. In this connection, Conradie (2013:17) points out that questions of identity since colonial times have not escaped the so-called mainline churches in Africa as they have their distinct theologies, liturgies and forms of governance largely "imported" from the Western world. The ELCSA/CD is no exception, hence the two previous; Bishops Manas Buthelezi and Ndanganeni Phaswana, made an appeal to have an African dimension "of liturgy in the Diocese" which would still bear "the marks and characteristics of Lutheranism".

In his consecration sermon as the second Bishop of the CD, Bishop Phaswana posed the following question: "Will parishioners feel alienated if a culturally grounded liturgy is developed which bears the characteristics of Lutheranism but uses African lyrics, drums and marimbas?" (Challenge Magazine, 2000:23). In a similar vein, to mark the 20th anniversary of the Diocese the first Bishop of the CD Dr Manas Buthelezi, lamented the absence of African dimension of worship with the following words: "What about us today? Unfortunately, in our existing traditions of worship there is a lot of artificiality. Expressions and feelings of excitement, joy and wonder have been driven out of the houses of the worship of God. You only find them in places where people can be true selves: in weddings, football stadiums and

beer drinking parties. We have been made to believe that we are honouring our God most deeply when we look dull, sombre and expressionless". It is clear for me that both bishops are advocating for liturgy and worship that must shed its Eurocentrism and be informed by the African experience and character.

A black staff member, Rev M. Molale³ (not his real name), who teaches at Lutheran Theological Institute, Pietermaritzburg (where the CD send prospective-ministers for pastoral formation) confessed in our interview on 13 September 2015 that African Theology, for instance, is not taught as one of the main subjects in their curriculum, but "somehow we have to smuggle it". This is a worrying factor because it suggests that our "theological curriculum in ELCSA" does not effectively prepare or equip our prospective ministers in dealing with some of the complex African problems.

In his informative book *Mission through Music: A South African Case Study* (2007), published as part of his doctoral thesis in Missiology at UNISA, Claudio Steinert, a German Lutheran pastor goes at length to show the value of adding an African touch to liturgy and music based on the extensive experience he has in this particular Diocese. Although using the ELCSA/Western Diocese as a case study, some of the issues he raised were relevant to the CD). Steinert (2007:2) argues that the pulse of the music to be experienced in church must be capable of keeping pace with the heartbeat of modern African life. Most importantly, and rightfully so, Steinert (2007:3) believes that this is one of the ways we can make the Christian message a truly African heritage and the African Christians the real owners of their church.

One is not trying to undervalue earlier efforts by mission societies such as Hermannsburg and Berlin who contributed zealously to Bible translation in African languages. However, despite their commitment to the African languages, Lutheran missionaries and often some of the black clergy tended to be hostile to African worldviews and African practices in Christian worship and spiritual life. It seems the CD is no exception. The calls for "Africanisation" by Bishop Manas Buthelezi and Phaswana, respectively in a way confirm this "daunting task".

I interviewed one the senior ministers in the CD, Rev D. Langa⁴ (not his real name), on the 23 February 2016. He pointed out that an adult seeking baptism must first reject ancestor veneration (as well as rituals connected to this practice), failure to do so reduces one's chances to be baptised. I interviewed another minister, Rev P. Pheyeha⁵ not his real name, in the same Diocese on 20 June 2015 who strongly maintains that

³ 3. This article relies as well on primary sources obtained in the main through individual interviews. Due to the sensitivity of the subject, I have chosen pseudo-names for most of the informants. (Rev M. Molale, personal communication, September 13, 2015).

⁴ 4. (Rev D. Langa, personal communication, February 23, 2016).

⁵ 5. (Rev P. Pheyeha, personal communication, June 20, 2015).

members of his church are not allowed to consult "dingaka tja Sesotho (African traditional doctors/healers)". These two cases are classical examples of these negative attitudes towards African practices even when there are calls for indigenisation by two most prominent heads of the CD. I am not trying to imply that all ministers in the CD share these negative sentiments when it comes to African Cultural practices, I'm sure that one will find certain ministers in the CD who would hold a progressive and liberal stance moreover, even attempt to integrate "African style of worship in their churches" but it seems generally that this is not the case. One of the questions in the questionnaire circulated to the ELCSA/CD members pertaining to the future of theological education in the ELCSA is: What can ELCSA learn from the AICs with regard to, among other things, freedom of expression in worship and enculturation (Nürnberg-er, 2000:41)? However, at the moment there is nothing concrete in this connection.

Lastly, I am not trying to suggest that our old Lutheran hymns and liturgy in the CD are not valuable, I love to sing this music with "ample gusto". However, my concern is the church people in the CD, particularly those who find the "Eurocentric" style of worship boring and failing to live up to the complexities of the present African world. Granted that students and pastors have to study the theology of justification, incarnation, grace, and two kingdoms, as advocated by Luther, however these concepts can at times put religion beyond the reach of ordinary people and can create an apparent barrier between the worshipper and God and as a result become meaningless in addressing African issues of the 21st century. It is a time for innovative ways of developing, writing and articulating what Lutheran theology in Africa is about.

3.2 The ELCSA/CD and its Partners

The ELCSA/CD has for a long time, and understandably, had a long-standing partnership at different levels with agencies and churches of founder missionaries from the North, in particular Germany. This is not surprising or a historical accident as Scriba and Lislerud (1997:173) rightly point out that missionaries from Germany and elsewhere brought the Lutheran faith in South Africa. Often, the form of relationship between the ELCSA/CD and its partners depended on the type of needs of respective congregations in the Diocese. For instance, the CD has partnered with certain Lutheran mission agencies abroad for various projects. One of the big projects in the CD deserving a special mention is the HIV/AIDS project, which is funded by Lutheran partners in America.

It was only launched in 2003 and workshops on how to prevent this pandemic and counsel victims of HIV/AIDS are conducted among the clergy and lay people in the Diocese. I must mention that this project is fraught with power dynamics, personnel conducting these workshops are American church volunteers and, in some cases, this has irked certain members and clergy in the CD alike. I interviewed one

female minister in the CD, Rev M. Tokollo⁶ (not her real name), on 2 April 2016 and she stated: “We requested them to fund the project, referring to the HIV/AIDS project, now they bring their personnel. Is it because they don’t trust us with their money, who said Africans don’t know how to control budgets?” One of the American church volunteers, Rev E. Dalson⁷ (not his real name), I interviewed on 22 July 2015 mentioned that they have had experiences in the past whereby handling of project funds in the ELCSA/CD leaves much to be desired, hence they bring their own personnel to manage the funds of this HIV/AIDS project.

3.3 Foreign and Local Personnel in the ELCSA/CD

Although I do not have the exact figures, the last time I checked with Rev Professor O.A. Buffel, the previous executive secretary of the ELCSA/CD from 2003-2006 there were very few foreign missionaries working in the ELCSA/CD and I am of the opinion that even now they are just a tiny minority⁸ as compared to local personnel. That being the case one still observe disparities of different forms between the local personnel and foreign missionaries whether they are of German origin etc. A case in point is unjust inequitable stipends between local ministers in the CD and their foreign colleagues.

A local minister in the CD at entry level, in this day and age, still gets a paltry R4000.00 a month. While, according to minister Rev P. Matsapola⁹ (not his real name), interviewed on 20 April 2015, his white foreign national colleague working in the CD is paid ten times better by his mission agency. If resources were to be shared, equally would it not be fair for these mission agencies to agree with the CD that the salaries of their workers should go to one “pool” and be shared equally with the local ministers in the CD? Here, again, I am not trying to suggest that local congregations in the ELCSA/CD must abdicate their responsibility of paying salaries of their local ministers to a mission agency abroad, that would be tantamount to dependency. My proposal is merely one of the ways which can be explored to remedy a situation where there is a “widening gap” in salaries between local ministers in the CD and their fellow foreign white national colleagues.

Like Duncan (2007:57), I am longing for the return to the early Church principle with the “all things held in common” (Acts 2:44) principle that churches would help each other from a common pooled resource. The same pastor I interviewed

⁶ 6. (Rev M. Tokollo, personal communication, April 2, 2016).

⁷ 7. (Rev E. Dalson, personal communication, July 22, 2015).

⁸ 8. Correct figures and statistics in most cases are difficult to come by in African churches since records are not well kept and the ELCSA is no exception.

⁹ 9. The responsibility of the salaries of Lutheran German missionaries serving in the ELCSA/CD often lies their mission agencies of their country of origin. More often, their salaries are better than their ELCSA/CD colleagues. (Rev P. Matsapola, personal communication, April 20, 2015).

decried the fact because, at times, some of their white foreign national colleagues in the CD earn better salaries and often undermine them by turning them into beggars.

There were instances where preference for certain key positions, such as the treasurer, of the CD would be occupied by a foreign missionary while there are local members with the same expertise. One pastor I interviewed on 8 August 2007 stated: “In the CD we tend to underestimate the gifts and skills of our members, we have accountants, lawyers, architects etc., do we really have to import these skills from Germany or elsewhere abroad?” The question by this local pastor is worth pondering for the simple reason that in certain cases it would seem to me that the ELCSA/CD has not exploited the resources she has at her disposal.

In certain cases, white expatriates in the CD seem to find it difficult to take authority from a black pastor. There have been cases in the Diocese where foreign missionaries resign in the Diocese before their term comes to an end because of “irretrievable break down” working relationship with a fellow black pastor, particularly if the black minister is his/her superior. At times, the missionary expatriate will hide behind the poor education and “inferiority complex” of a black minister, rightly so in certain cases, but it is clear that in certain instances it is purely “sheer white supremacy”. In my interview with Rev Selabe¹⁰ (not his real name) on 26 July 2015, he related how a fellow white colleague of German origin who had just arrived in his congregation with very little or no experience of African culture, immediately saw himself as an expert, qualified to make important pronouncements about how certain aspects of African culture must be integrated in liturgical worship. Therefore, I concur with Mpako (2000:17) that some of the white missionaries need to undergo a fundamental transformation in the way they relate with local African ministers in the CD. They need to see their fellow “black ministers” as equals when executing pastoral duties and that would go a long way in cultivating a spirit of “collegiality” between white and African pastors in the CD. It can be painful to learn to relate in different ways as Duncan (2007:61) has correctly observed, because it simply means trying out, opening up and letting go. However, although “letting go” is a tall order, it results in maturity.

4. The AICs as agents of moratorium debate lessons for the ELCSA/CD

Before I attempt to demonstrate how the AICs¹¹ in their quest for autonomy have lived up to certain demands of moratorium debate, it is equally important to explain the acronym “AICs”. The “A” denotes that these movements are *African* in

¹⁰ 10 Interview with Rev E. Selabe, Roodepoort, Johannesburg, 26 July 2015

¹¹ I am aware that there are several variations of the acronym “AICs”, for the sake of uniformity “AICs” in this article refers to African Initiated Churches, since this term emphasises the creative initiative of African Christians in establishing and developing their own churches.

their own right and the “C” simply implies that they must be respected and seen as *Churches*. However, the cause of disagreement has been the “I” because there are many interpretations attached to it. For instance, the “I” is synonymous with “Independent”, “Initiated”, “Instituted” or “Indigenous.” It is therefore common to call these churches “African Independent,” African Initiated”, “African Instituted,” or “African Indigenous” Churches.

One needs to point out that members of these churches have developed creative ways of defining them, terms such as *amabandla amaAfrika (in Zulu)* and *dikereke tsa ma-Afrika (in Sotho)* are commonly used to show the African character of these churches. On the one hand, certain leaders of the AICs, like the late Paul Makhubu and Archbishop Kenosi Mofokeng (two notable South African AICs leaders), felt extremely uncomfortable with this description. These words by Makhubu (1988:23) succinctly confirms this point: “People can call us what they want, judge us, and put us in a pigeon hole if they wish. We exist and are growing fast.”

Turner (1979:12), an eminent researcher of the AICs has defined an African Initiated Church as “a church which has been founded in Africa, by Africans and primarily for Africans”. As much as I agree that the forebears of the AICs are Africans, however, I share the sentiments of Oduro (2002:17) that it is inadequate asserting that they are founded ‘primarily for Africans’ as if churches founded by Westerners in the west are primarily for Westerners. The origins of a church and the race of the founders does not always exempt people of other races from the membership of that church. For instance, the missiological activities in Africa of churches founded in the West attest to this fact.

In this regard, I find the definition of African Initiated Churches by Oduro (2002) refreshing and more importantly, it resonates the with moratorium debate. He defines African Initiated Churches as: “*congregations and or denominations planted, led, administered, supported, propagated, motivated and funded by Africans for the purpose of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ and worshipping the Triune God in the context and worldview of Africa and Africans*” (Oduro, 2002:17). In other words, even though African Initiated Churches in their worship attempt to locate *Triune God* within the worldview of African evangelisation, it is not only restricted to Africans and equally so, Westerners cannot claim monopoly over evangelisation even though there are many traces of western worldview and philosophy in the life of western-founded churches, including those in the non-western world.

There are various factors attributed to the emergence of the AICs and some of them are in line with the ideals of the moratorium debate. The following arguments advanced by Claasen (in Masuku, 1996:444) capture this argument succinctly:

African believers questioned the condemnation by missionaries of the ancestor cult, circumcision and polygamy. European scepticism, with respect to spirit-pos-

session, alienated black church members who found Biblical evidence for their view of world and life. Their accommodation of African culture made the AICs attractive. The lack of opportunities for African leadership and Western denominationalism were other causes. The emergence of the AICs represented a reaction to conquest, a reaction to European domination in politics, economics, social and church life. Africans sought to create their own institutions free of white control.

It is clear from this statement that the confluence of factors similar to moratorium debate played a role for the emergence of the AICs. For the practical purposes, I will now proceed to identify three areas I believe the AICs have lived up to the challenges of the moratorium debate and what lessons the ELCSA/CD can draw from this experience. The three areas I have identified are, namely; enculturation, community development, and how the AICs handle the phenomenon of urbanisation.

4.1 The AICs and enculturation

Daneel (1987:90) states that one of the most significant features of the AICs, and specifically of the spirit-type churches, is the way in which they have applied the Christian faith to an African setting. By doing so, according to Masuku (1996:450), the AICs have somehow made great strides than the so-called “mission churches” on matters of the enculturation of Christianity in African societies. The phenomenal growth of the AICs among other things can be attributed to their successful attempt to make Christianity home in Africa and Africa home in Christianity.

The example of Father Martin Maduka an Igbo Catholic priest in Nigeria as related by Salamone in Masuku (1996:450) is a classic case of how to ease the conflict between Christianity and African culture. He fostered an integration of Christianity and the local traditions by doing, among other things, playing music that reflected the religious tradition of the locals. He preached that Africans should do away with Western priestly garments and unwaveringly referred to Jesus Christ’s drawing on his Jewish background and images of preaching (Salamone in Masuku, 1996:450). Father Maduka further believed that if Jesus had been an Igbo man, he would have used yams instead of unleavened bread for the sacrament like the Last Supper. Bediako (1995:4) rightly pointed out that such creative attempts were often met with criticism and Father Maduka was no exception after he was repudiated by the Catholic Church. However, after the Vatican 2, during the mid-1960s the Catholic Church hailed Maduka as the champion of enculturation and change.

From cases such as the one by Father Maduka, the ELCSA/CD can benefit a great deal, for instance in an attempt to have an African dimension of liturgy as was advocated by Bishop Phaswana (Challenge Magazine, 2000:23).

4.2 The AICs and traditional religion

Masuku (1996:452) notes that the AICs provide us with a picture of how an African can address the question of traditional religion when is out of the cocoon of the Western religious framework. Efforts by the AICs in negotiating the indigenous African values and customs with the gospel in many respects have been worthwhile. I will only mention two tenets of the indigenised ethos of the AICs, namely; ancestor veneration and salvation to illustrate how these churches have displayed the theological creativity needed to provide Christian answers to African questions.

4.2.1 Ancestor Veneration

Pato (1980:73) indicates that since the beginning of the Christian missions in Southern Africa two centuries ago, the African practice of communication of the living with their own dead has been misinterpreted as “ancestor worship” and treated as participation in idolatry. Part of the problem is that missionaries saw their faith as identical with European ways of life. Thus, they preached against the traditional African ways. Pato (1980:73) has identified two chief assumptions underlying the rejection of the African ideas about the ancestors, namely; “ancestor worship” is the very religion of Africa and secondly the Africans had no knowledge of God before the coming of Christianity. However irrespective of these assumptions, some of the AICs, in contrast to many historical churches, have assimilated this traditional with religious customs more or less intact. Arguments advanced for the inclusion of this African practice among the AICs vary, the most two notable ones are Christian concept of communion of saints and the biblical fifth commandment about honouring your Mother and Father which is applied to the dead as well. It is against this context that the double existence and guilt conflict on the part of the AICs in relation to this practice is a non-issue.

Mayer (in Pato, 1980:75) has observed that many Christians, including full Church members, are often committed to ancestor veneration. Although some admit it openly, others try to conceal it for fear of being labelled as heathens or termination of church membership. Members of the ELCSA/CD, of whom the majority happen to be blacks, are no exception. If we take a leaf out of the AICs book with special reference to *ancestor veneration*, the Christian concept of saints, if properly understood, can allow members of the ELCSA/CD to relate to their own dead in a real and meaningful way.

Is the Father of reformation Martin Luther after all not our ancestor even though he died centuries ago, and was not even African but German? We still subscribe to his teachings, theology and even the songs he composed. Therefore, I advocate that space should be open in the ELCSA/CD for members to communicate with their own dead and thereby avoid the dangers of inner conflict. Moreover, the relationship

between the living and the dead enrich the church to nurture the memory of its predecessors who are still influencing our own lives by their contributions made to the welfare of the church when they were still alive.

4.2.2 Salvation

Daneel (1987:77) notes that missionaries often proclaimed a *superficial, impoverished gospel*. The preaching of the Word was not often geared towards many facets of the life or struggle of the African. This can be attributed to the fact that majority of missionaries were shaped by the Pietistic revival in Europe and America, and/or of Puritanism. Bosch (in Daneel, 1987:251) notes that Western mentality is conditioned by a dichotomous, dualistic anthropology, which divides man into two separable entities: “soul and body”. Hence to them according, to Daneel (1987:78), salvation meant saving souls. Their Puritan background led many of them equating sin with things such as sex, pleasure, carnal indulgence, etc. The result amounted to “gospel” of do’s and don’ts.

As a result, the holistic approach to man’s physical needs, daily struggle for existence and human requirements, did not receive sufficient attention by missionaries (Daneel, 1987:78). In other words, a human being was not regarded as a whole, but as of parts. This deficiency was conspicuous in the sphere of *illness*; resulting in the sick soul being treated in church and the sick body in hospital without any real integration of the two. For instance, many mission agencies provided medical services with the specific aim of “winning souls” as a result the healing of the body, and salvation of the entire person, fell outside the missionary purpose. Hence, as Daneel (1987:79) has rightly observed, for Africans there was a silent, yet inarticulate yearning for a religion which could embrace all of life and would fill the whole.

The AICs take the African problems seriously. They present Christ as one who can overcome evil as it is understood and experienced in an African setting. The AICs followed traditional and biblical view of a man and the world which, according to Daneel (1987:251), is more intuitive and partly a reaction against dualistic view as a piece of conscious systematisation. In this way, they have adopted a holistic approach. In some of the AICs, the prophet embraces, the entire spectrum of activities performed by a traditional *nyanga* and combine them pastorally and medically in the context of the church. This comprehensive approach becomes valuable in addressing salvation in its totality (i.e., sin, disease, sorcery, evil spirits or other economic activities). In this respect, the prophets in the AICs have a ministry, which the ELCSA/CD would do well to note. Although certain clergy in the ELCSA/CD might not have some of these gifts, I am sure lay people who possess such gifts could be encouraged to use them for the benefit of the church and should be encouraged to do so rather than suppressing these gifts. After all, Martin Luther believed in priest-

hood of all believers that for me means everyone bringing their God given talents, including traditional healers, for the sake of building the church.

In his 2008 speech entitled: 'My Church my responsibility: A theological and ecclesiological understanding', the presiding Bishop of the ELCSA, J.M. Ramashapa, in his address to the ELCSA/CD synod, among other things, lamented the fact that membership in the ELCSA family has dwindled dramatically for the past five years. It is a pity the Presiding Bishop in his speech did not offer reasons behind this state of affairs. However, one former member of the ELCSA/CD who agreed to be interviewed on condition of anonymity on 23 July 2015 cited the failure of this church to adopt a holistic approach to ministry as one of the reasons she decided to terminate her membership. She confessed painfully to me that as a practicing "sangoma", frequently disagreed with her pastor over this issue and the AIC denomination she had joined accommodated this practice.

4.3 The AICs and Community Development Projects

Molobi (2004:118) suggests that the AICs should be seen progressively in the view of total economic and structural development of the entire South Africa. Social maladies such as joblessness, sickness, homelessness, poverty, and pandemics such as HIV/AIDS are of deep concern among the AICs. Often communities face insurmountable challenges in attempting to address some of these challenges due to lack of resources and funds. However, according to Molobi (2004:119), the AICs have proven to us that such challenges can present opportunities for churches to be self-reliant without necessarily relying, for instance, on external funding. *The Tirelo Setshaba*, initiated by Rev Professor Molobi and certain members of the AICs in the township of Atteridgeville, west of Pretoria, and the Zimbabwe Institute of Religious Research and Ecological Conservation (ZIRRRCON), pioneered by Professor Inus Daneel with some of the AICs leaders in Zimbabwe deserves a special mention in this regard.

Molobi (2004:118) indicates that Tirelo Setshaba Community project in Atteridgeville started as a support group comprising of grassroots that included the AICs bishops and ministers, who initiated self-help schemes for job creation to many disadvantaged members of this township. People were empowered with methods of how to start small farming, recycling, cleaning operations, etc. The results of this project are phenomenal, for instance, some community members are buying vegetable products at a reasonable price but more importantly, jobs are created. The annual celebrations such as Arbor day are intended to strengthen bonds between members of the project and the community. In an unrecorded conversation with Professor Molobi at UNISA on 18 September 2016, he indicated to me that since its inception in 1996 until now, the project has been sustainable, without funding

from external donors. He went on to stress that part of the reason why the project has been growing from strength to strength is due to the fact that members have ownership over it.

The ecological emphasis among the AICs in Zimbabwe through Professor Daneel's initiative remains an outstanding link of the AICs to the environment (Molobi, 2000:64). Since the birth of ZIRRRCON in 1988, the tree planting initiative of the AICs in Zimbabwe has not gone unnoticed even internationally. Through this project, the AICs have been challenged on the basis of their Christian faith to become engaged in tree planting activities. According to Molobi (2000:63) in an unrecorded interview he had with Professor Daneel at UNISA in June 1998, this project has generated jobs among certain members of the AICs and the individuals have managed to generate income for themselves. Some members of this project are encouraged to hone their skills in modern agricultural techniques so that they start small farming.

The ELCSA/CD has for a long time, and understandably, had a long-standing partnership at different levels with agencies and churches of founder missionaries from the North. Some of the projects with partner churches in the ELCSA/CD have not yielded positive results for the simple reason that at times there is control from external parties and members are often repelled to take ownership of such projects. I believe that is in an area that the ELCSA/CD can benefit from the AICs as we have seen with the two models mentioned above. Through such initiatives, as demonstrated by the AICs, the ELCSA/CD can learn to use whatever little in its possession to sustain herself as Jesus (Matthew 15:32-39) reminded his disciples with seven loaves and a few small fish, that one can make a difference in the lives of the needy.

4.4 The AICs and the phenomenon of urbanisation

Daneel (1987:134) distinguishes between urban congregations of the AICs which are extensions of a 'primarily rurally oriented movement' and those which are not extensions of a predominantly rural phenomenon, but movements that originate and grow in the city. With the latter, one finds that in such a context, the churches are more specifically urban churches ministering to urbanites. Despite these distinctions, what is clear is that the AICs in an urban setting have become a place to *feel at home* in the midst of the upheaval and insecurity that accompanies city life. According to Daneel (1987:80), their creation of comforting support systems for alienated individuals is the manifestation of the ongoing *quest for belonging*. West (1975:21) points out that in the city, a heterogeneous mass of people are concentrated in a limited area. He further observes that the kinship structure which shapes the social order in rural communities is absent and new criteria for a satisfactory social structure is needed. This is where the AICs make a valid contribution because they become "reorientation centres" in their own right and certain characteristics

of *ubuntu* are manifested. This can be depicted in their *fellowship* whereby individuals refer to one another as “*amaqabane*”, a Zulu word for “*comrade*”. Such expressions for Molobi (2004:117) show a sense of communalism and solidarity. The sense of extended family is also expressed in the common use of the terms “brother and sister” even between people who are not necessarily related by blood.

Daneel (1987:134) notes that through *social networks* the AICs provide a scope for forming networks. In the impersonal metropolis, there is a great need to form strong social bonds with a network of friends where the individual can receive recognition and feel at home. The problems of urban life can be unbearable therefore such networks are important to help the individuals cope. The AICs offer protection to those in the midst of urban life, which is fraught with competitiveness and uncertainty. For instance, Daneel (1987:135), in reference to certain parts of urban areas of Zimbabwe points out that Zionist and Apostle prophets are constantly giving advice and help in business matters on how to find jobs and the like. In this regard, witness and proclamation are interwoven, in which God’s help, protection and healing become central to people’s daily lives.

The AICs have played an important role in the urban areas in maintaining *social control* which tend to be lacking due to the absence of the kinship structure and tribal authorities (Daneel 1987:135). Discipline is maintained by means of regular pastoral interviews or by church council. It seems the AICs have made inroads in ministering in a complex diversified urban context. West, in Daneel (1987:136) has for example, noted that the AICs in Soweto are not predominantly run on ethnic lines and thus provide an opportunity for people of different languages and cultural backgrounds to get to know one another and associate at a meaningful level. The contribution of the AICs in this arena is crucial given the impersonal nature of the urban environment.

The AICs have often played a critical role in providing *information service and mutual aid* to newcomers from elsewhere. At church services, new members are provided with useful information such as the working of the transport system and where to apply for housing. Daneel (1987:136) indicates that in addition to spiritual assistance, members are given material help, for example: food for the unemployed and help with funeral expenses. One of the chief aims of *Manyano* (*Women’s Association*) in the AICs is to reach out to those who need help and provide relief.

Most churches which fall under the ELCSA/CD are concentrated in urban areas, therefore are urban in orientation. This is where I think the AICs with the wide-ranging activities of this nature have a lot to offer to the ELCSA/CD in discovering and developing new avenues of being a church in an urban setting. I am not by any means trying to underscore some of the initiatives by certain congregations and groups in the ELCSA/CD in integrating some of these activities of the AICs in their

ministries, however I still have a sense that compared to the AICs this Diocese is still lagging behind. In most cases, these activities fall outside the scope of many congregations in the ELCSA/CD.

5. Conclusion

The proposal for a moratorium signalled the dawn of a new era. It was clear that the structures and attitudes that perpetuated dependency had to change for the sake of mission and the selfhood of the churches in the so-called Third World. This article attempted to look at the moratorium issue as a phenomenon of its own time. The moratorium debate was geared towards mature relationships, mutuality in mission and internationalism in future mission work, not to do harm to the work and funding in Africa by sincere and effective Christian missionaries. Africans in the world mission movement were relegated to a subordinate position; as a result, they were dependent on aid from the Westerners. The Africans began to subject the existing patterns of relationship of their European and American benefactors to scrutiny. Their goal was to advocate for a revolutionary change at all costs, in the hope that in a new era, a changed pattern of relationship would emerge and create balance and reciprocity in the mission activity of Christians all over the world (Bigambo, 2001:86). It was hoped through moratorium that the African Church would be able to gain her selfhood, indigenisation and self-reliance. The moratorium proposal was advocating for alteration of power relationships between Africans and Westerners by implementing new models of mission so that African and Western denominations would share equally in the mission work of their churches.

It seems to me that although the ELCSA/CD is an autonomous church, it is still entrapped under paternalistic legacies structures of mission societies, which gave its birth. This can be attributed to patterns established by missions in South Africa over two hundred years ago whereby, control and power still lie with mission churches and organisations. Secondly, local churches have internalised a dependency syndrome to an extent where it blinds them of their potential to take their own initiatives. These two patterns can only be broken through a moratorium.

I identified three examples to demonstrate how the AICs have become agents of the moratorium debate and valuable lessons that the ELCSA/CD can draw from this experience. Some might misconstrue me that I am trying to imply that ELCSA must now cease her “Lutheranism” and become the AIC completely. As much as ELCSA is rooted in “Lutheranism”, and there is nothing wrong with that, I believe that by learning from the AICs in certain areas this Diocese can rise to its full potential. Finally, I am not blind to the fact that the AICs have had a fair share of their own flaws and shortcomings, but which church has not? I maintain that irrespective of

such inadequacies the AICs have really lived up to the challenges of the moratorium debate and the ELCSA/CD can learn from these churches.

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