

---

# AFRICAN INSTITUTED CHURCHES PNEUMATOLOGY AND GENDER JUSTICE IN THE WORK OF GC OOSTHUIZEN: AN AFRICAN FEMINIST PNEUMATOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Chammah J Kaunda  
Christian Spirituality  
University of South Africa

Isabel A Phiri  
World Council of Churches  
University of KwaZulu-Natal

---

## Abstract

This article investigates how George C Oosthuizen dealt with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the African Instituted Churches (AICs). It argues that although Oosthuizen analysed the prominent role of the Holy Spirit in the AICs, his perspective was influenced by the missiological currents of the his time in which issues of gender justice were not recognised as missiological concerns and not perceived as problems requiring theological or missiological response. It demonstrates the significance of raising African feminist pneumatological questions in AICs studies. This perspective shows a correlation between AICs that give prominence to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and gender justice in the ministry of women and men in most of the AICs studied by Oosthuizen. In conclusion, it is argued that the theoretical framework that a scholar is using when studying the AICs could sideline or be sensitive to power dynamics between men and women in the AICs, which is a very important element in study of African Christianity.

**Key Words:** African Instituted Churches; Pneumatology; Gender Justice; GC Oosthuizen; African Feminist Pneumatological Perspective

## Introduction

African Instituted Churches (hereafter, AICs) have captivated the imagination of the academic world in their ability to creatively express Christian faith by means of an African<sup>1</sup> traditional outlook. In contemporary Africa, it is not possible to talk about Christianity without referring to the AICs.<sup>2</sup> One of the most passionate scholars in the field of AICs was

---

<sup>1</sup> Africa in this article refers to the Sub-Saharan people, who have been partakers of the same historical experiences of slave trade, colonisation, independence, neo-colonialism, etc.

<sup>2</sup> George C Oosthuizen. "Research Unit for the Study of New Religious Movements and Independent Churches." *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 20, Fasc. 3, 1990:276-278.

the South African missiologist, Professor George Cornelius (Pippin) Oosthuizen. He is described by Johannes Smit and Pratap Kumar as “one of the foremost scholars who contributed to the development and study of this phenomenon.”<sup>3</sup> In his numerous studies on AICs, Oosthuizen worked with a conviction that the AICs were laying decisive contours for new approaches to the study of African Christianity.<sup>4</sup> He saw them as a pioneering movement for authentic expressions of African Christian spirituality.

A number of scholars who have studied AICs agree with this lucid observation. Andrew Walls for instance, confirms that the indigenous expressions of Christianity within the AICs have exposed that Christianity is “culturally infinitely translatable”.<sup>5</sup> Thomas Oduro as well observed that AICs have given African Christianity a new outlook. It is not rare to read and hear scholars describing them as the “‘signature tune of African Christianity’ (Sanneh, 1989:109)” or a movement “‘indicating the trend and direction of African Christianity’ (Bediako 1995:113).”<sup>6</sup> This becomes true, especially when one looks at the status of women in these churches. While acknowledging that women are marginalised in some AICs, the majority of these churches recognise the spiritual virility or vitality operating in women who are endowed with the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>7</sup> Oosthuizen himself noted that “many [women] act as prayer persons and prophets.”<sup>8</sup>

In late modernity, a number of scholars and theologians, such as Oosthuizen, have persistently put their figures on the centrality of the Holy Spirit within the AICs. One of the most distinctive features and strengths of the AICs, it is argued, is the belief in the power and indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in all believers.<sup>9</sup> Humphrey Akogyeram concluded his article by arguing that:

The foregrounding of the Holy Spirit that we are witnessing within the global Pentecostal and Charismatic movement, as well as the orthodox churches as a means of effectively confronting African reality and appropriating the gospel of Christ, must, therefore, be recognised as something for which AICs were the trailblazers.<sup>10</sup>

Oosthuizen himself spent much of his academic energy trying to understand how the AICs conceptualised the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer and the daily operation of the churches.<sup>11</sup> Therefore this essay analyses Oosthuizen’s works on the role of the Holy

---

<sup>3</sup> Johannes A Smit and P Pratap Kumar, “GC Oosthuizen and the Study of Religion in KwaZulu-Natal”. In *Alternation Special Edition 2*, 2005:10-19, 12.

<sup>4</sup> GC Oosthuizen, “Relevance of the African Indigenous Churches for New Approaches to the Study of Christianity”. In Gerloff, Roswith (ed.). *Mission is Crossing Frontiers: Essays in Honour of Bongani A. Mazibuko*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publication, 2003:314.

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Walls, “The Gospel as Prisoner and liberator of Culture.” *Missionalia*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 1982:93-105.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Oduro, “Contributions and Challenges of African Instituted Churches in developing African Theology.” in Diane B Stinton (ed.). *African Theology on the Way: Current Conversations*. London: SPCK, 46-55:47.

<sup>7</sup> Lillian Dube-Chirairo, “Mission and Deliverance in the Zvikomborero Apostolic Faith Church.” *Missionalia*, Vol. 28, No. 2/3, 2000, 294-311:297.

<sup>8</sup> George C Oosthuizen, “Interpretation of Demonic Powers in Southern African Independent Churches”. *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. X VI. No. I, 1988:3-22, 8.

<sup>9</sup> GC Oosthuizen, *The Healer-Prophet in Afro-Christian Churches*. Leiden: EJ Brill, 1992:29.

<sup>10</sup> Humphrey Akogyeram, “African Indigenous Churches and the Ministry of the Holy Spirit.” *Journal of African Instituted Church Theology*, Vol. II, No. 1, 200:1-12, 11.

<sup>11</sup> Most of the AICs Oosthuizen studied fall in the category of what scholars have called “Spirit-type” or what we are calling Spirit-oriented AICs. The Spirit-oriented AICs largely emphasise experience, ministry and gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially healing and prophecy. The other group of AICs is called Ethiopian Churches.

Spirit in the AICs. It is divided into three sections. In the first section, we argue that although Oosthuizen analysed the prominent role of the Holy Spirit in the AICs, his perspective on gender and pneumatology in ministry within the AICs was influenced by his period of writing. In the second section we argue for the significance of raising gender questions when studying the AICs from an African feminist pneumatological perspective, which is a strand within African theology. Using this perspective, in the third section we show a correlation between AICs that give prominence to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and gender justice in the ministry of women and men in most of the Spirit-oriented AICs studied by Oosthuizen. Finally, we argue that when studying the AICs, a scholar's theoretical framework can sideline or be sensitive to power dynamics between men and women, which is a very important element in the study of African Christianity.

### **GC Oosthuizen's AICs' Pneumatology**

To begin with, Oosthuizen's understanding of the Holy Spirit and the AICs was influenced by his academic context in which the academy was still resistant to the inclusion of gender studies as an academic discipline.<sup>12</sup> The academic study of gender emerged as late as the 1960s with the third wave of feminism. In fact, prior to the 1970s, social sciences and humanities in general, theology and missiology in particular, largely ignored gender issues. Within African theology, the study of gender issues becomes more pronounced in the late 1980s with the formation of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians in 1989. Understanding this context is a crucial source of wisdom to aid a fair analysis of Oosthuizen's view of Holy Spirit and the AICs in relation to gender justice.

His perspectives could be divided into two phases. The first phase is marked by his 1958 book, *Theological Discussions and Confessional Developments in the Church of Asia and Africa* in which he was of the opinion that the AICs are unable to differentiate their understanding on the nature and the work of the Holy Spirit from that of the ancestors.<sup>13</sup> For example, he saw the continuation of the African traditional world-view within the AICs experience of the Holy Spirit as distorting people's understanding of the work and nature of the Holy Spirit.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, he argued that this "misunderstanding of the Holy Spirit"<sup>15</sup> is one of the main difficulties the AICs are facing. His analysis of the Holy Spirit and the AICs has been shared by various scholars. For instance, BA Pauw argued that there is a connection between the concepts of possession by the Holy Spirit and traditional possession by ancestors, which many AICs perceive as one and the same experience.<sup>16</sup> However, Allan Anderson rightly thinks that at the time when Oosthuizen was writing (at least his early work in the late 1950s through the 1980s), he did not understand the African spirituality on the account that it did not fit in Western theological categories with which he was accustomed.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, James Amanze's research in Botswana has demonstrated very

---

<sup>12</sup> For detailed discussion of history of women and gender studies, see Cheri Kramarae and Dale Spender. *Routledge International Encyclopedia of Women: Global Women's Issues and Knowledge*. New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2000.

<sup>13</sup> GC Oosthuizen. *Theological discussions and Confessional Developments in the Church of Asia and Africa*. Franeker: T Wever, 1958.

<sup>14</sup> GC Oosthuizen. *Post-Christianity in Africa: A Theological and Anthropological Study*. London: C Hurst, 1968.

<sup>15</sup> Oosthuizen. *Post-Christian...* 120; Oosthuizen. *Succession Conflict...* 66; Anderson. *Moya...* 4.

<sup>16</sup> BA Pauw. *Religion in a Tswana Chiefdom*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1960:209.

<sup>17</sup> Anderson. *Moya...* 4.

clearly that the AICs make a clear distinction between the nature and the role of the Spirit and the ancestral spirits.<sup>18</sup>

The second phase of Oosthuizen's understanding of the Holy Spirit and the AICs is marked by his 2003 article entitled: "Relevance of the African Indigenous Churches for New Approaches to the Study of Christianity". In this article, one notices a shift in Oosthuizen's conception of the Holy Spirit and the AICs. For example, Oosthuizen acknowledged that the categories derived from Western philosophical and theological context do not count in the Spirit-oriented AICs' understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit.<sup>19</sup> Cogently, for the AICs the all-pervasive and all-immanent Spirit is involved in every aspect of a person and the faith community, and particularly evident in the person of the prophetic leader, who is pre-eminently a person of the Spirit.<sup>20</sup> Oosthuizen's shift echoed the work of Marthinus L Daneel who argued that much of the inspiration in the lives of the leaders in the AICs is derived from the Holy Spirit.<sup>21</sup> Oosthuizen went further to acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit also in the spirituality of the ordinary members. Thus, the Holy Spirit among the AICs is conceptualized as the driving force, the invisible power that empowers and preserves the Church.<sup>22</sup> Oosthuizen observed that this same Holy Spirit is "interpreted in terms of possession, as a state of mind" which is experienced by every member of the community of faith with no exception.<sup>23</sup> Yet, being possessed by the Holy Spirit is not just "a state of mind" but also an experience that brings about a special sense of God's reality in an individual's life. It is after this experience that leaders and some laity are empowered to perform healing, prophesy, exorcise and do other miraculous signs. Thus, Oosthuizen is right in stressing that for the AICs being possessed by the Holy Spirit means the Holy Spirit is working among them.<sup>24</sup> On this basis, Oosthuizen concludes that in the AICs the concept of Spirit possession has found a new expression in the general feature of the African indigenous world-view.<sup>25</sup>

In relation to the Holy Spirit and women, in *The Healer-Prophet in Afro-Christian Churches*, a work published in 1992 when the study of gender issues had started finding room in academy, Oosthuizen argues that seniority within the AICs is based on "the gifts bestowed on a person by the Holy Spirit."<sup>26</sup> He noted:

Prayer women and prophetesses have a respected status and influence recognised by many in the 'historic' churches and by traditionalists. Because of the status acquired through their talents and personality, women acquire leadership roles in AIC more frequently than in the 'historic' churches. The position as healer which women had in traditional society has not been lessened in AIC. In traditional society, healing in a holistic sense takes precedence with regard to the activities of diviner, who are

<sup>18</sup> James Amanze. *African Christianity in Botswana: The Case of African Independent Churches*. Gweru: Mambo Press, 1998:116.

<sup>19</sup> Oosthuizen. "Relevance..." 314.

<sup>20</sup> Oosthuizen. *Post-Christian...* 129; GC Oosthuizen. "Isaiah Shembe and the Zulu World." *History of Religions*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 1968:1-30, 6, 23; Anderson. *Moya...* 4.

<sup>21</sup> Marthinus L Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches*. Vol. 3. Gweru: Mambo Press, 1988:390.

<sup>22</sup> Oosthuizen. *Succession Conflict...* 66.

<sup>23</sup> Oosthuizen. *Succession Conflict...* 66.

<sup>24</sup> Oosthuizen. *Divine-Prophet...* 175.

<sup>25</sup> Oosthuizen, *Post-Christian...* 134.

<sup>26</sup> Oosthuizen, *The Healer-Prophet...*32.

mostly women. Healing remains in close association with the supernatural forces and herein women play a significant role as they are the 'bridges'. The 'historic' churches neglected such healing activities and stultified an important function of women in the religious context. As prayer healers and prophetesses, women have the same status as men who are prayer healers and prophets.<sup>27</sup>

We have quoted this passage at length because it illustrates beautifully how Oosthuizen's AICs' pneumatology had shifted over time to embrace the role of the Holy Spirit in creating opportunity for gender empowerment within AICs. In actual fact, this perspective resonates with Isabel Phiri's research on churches founded by women, in which they are accorded the same status and respect as male founders of churches.<sup>28</sup> This may explain why there are also a good number of the Spirit-type churches which are founded and led by women even among Zulus, despite being patriarchally oriented societies. As a practical consequence AICs pneumatology symbolically critiques gender injustice as the Holy Spirit does not segregate according to gender. This bears an affinity with traditional African spirituality that forms the foundation of the human imperative to search for balance or equilibrium of all forces. African spirituality of maintaining harmony or balance of forces is the substratum for sustaining all social relationships between God and human beings; female and male; and humanity and the rest of creation. Thus spirituality has always been the ground for promoting social, ecological and gender justice within the community of life. This "is the most important spiritual-ethical responsibility for humanity and it forms an individual moral character."<sup>29</sup> Oosthuizen's observation that the Holy Spirit does not just play a decisive role in the calling of the prophetesses and prophets but is the very power that controls and directs the activities of the AICs has everything to do with the African quest to maintain balance within spiritual dimensions of reality.<sup>30</sup> In these churches the Holy Spirit guides them in the establishment of the new spiritual communities, where there is healing, sharing things in common, and freedom to pray, fast, shout, dance, clap and sing. In African thought systems, all these aspects have to do with maintaining harmony or equilibrium. Thus, within AICs, Oosthuizen argues, the Holy Spirit is so significant that the people believe that they cannot do without the Holy Spirit.<sup>31</sup> Oosthuizen observed that within the Spirit-oriented AICs, "healing and power are associated and the Holy Spirit is the symbol of power,"<sup>32</sup> meaning that a person who receives the Holy Spirit is endowed with supernatural power and authority – balancing effect. Oosthuizen made a stunning conclusion when he argued that it is the Holy Spirit who gives the AICs a sense of spirituality without which this kind of Christianity is inconceivable.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Oosthuizen, *The Healer-Prophet...* 32.

<sup>28</sup> See Isabel A Phiri. 'The Church as a Healing Community: Women's Voices and Visions from Chilobwe Healing Centre' in *Journal of Constructive Theology* Vol. 10, No. 1, 2004:13-28 and "African Women in Mission: Two case Studies from Malawi." In *Missionalia* Vol. 28, No. 2/3, 2000:267-293. This article appears also in a book edited by ML Daneel, *African Christian Outreach* Vol. 1 Pretoria: 2001:267-293.

<sup>29</sup> Laurent Magesa. *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997:73.

<sup>30</sup> Oosthuizen, *The Healer-Prophet...* 29.

<sup>31</sup> GC Oosthuizen. "Divine-Prophet Parallels in African Independent and Traditional Churches and Traditional Religion" in GC Oosthuizen and Irving Hexham (eds.). *Empirical Studies of the African Independent/Indigenous Churches*. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992:163-194, 172.

<sup>32</sup> Oosthuizen. *Divine-Prophet...* 176.

<sup>33</sup> Oosthuizen. *Relevance...* 314.

The third significant contribution of Oosthuizen in the theology of the AICs is that there is a danger of emphasising the Holy Spirit at the expense of Jesus Christ. He gave an example of the *iBandla lamaNazaretha* (The Church of the Nazarites) who seem to be largely a unitarianist of the Spirit.<sup>34</sup> He argued that in the AICs of this type, very little attention is given to Jesus because everything floats around the Holy Spirit.<sup>35</sup> In fact, he observed that their theology of the Holy Spirit come out of lived experiences. Thus, he concluded that it is difficult to understand the AICs without taking pneumatology seriously.<sup>36</sup> This means that the Holy Spirit is an interpretive framework for understanding the AICs and it is significant to understand how they articulate the concept of the Holy Spirit before one can make generalised conclusions.

From the foregoing discussion, one could see the two major areas of Oosthuizen's focus. First, there is no clear distinction between the Holy Spirit and the spirit of ancestors. Second, he shifted from this perspective to a view that one cannot understand AICs without focusing on the nature and the role of the Holy Spirit. Third, Oosthuizen also cautioned that there is a danger of overemphasising the pneumatology at the expense of Christology. These struggles also raise fundamental challenges of utilising Western-informed theological methods to analyse African religious phenomena. Yet, Oosthuizen must be applauded in that though not explicit, by arguing for the centrality of the Holy Spirit in the AICs of the Spirit-type, he unconsciously linked the AICs' pneumatology with liberative anthropology that undergirds gender justice in leadership and exercising of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is a focus on this that interests African women when focusing AICs.

### **AICs in the Light of an African Feminist Pneumatological Perspective**

In the work of Oosthuizen, women are depicted as playing crucial roles in leadership but sometimes as complementary to men. African women scholars of the AICs and some male scholars on the AICs have shown concern about the lack of focus on the Holy Spirit as a resource for gender justice. African women theologians who use gender as a tool of analysis raise significant gender questions such as: How do women in the AICs experience the Holy Spirit? What is the link between women's experience of the Holy Spirit with the role of women in the AICs? In what ways do openness to the leading of the Holy Spirit promote gender justice in the AICs of the Spirit type? Does the experience of the Holy Spirit empower AIC women to seek gender justice in the church and society?

African feminist pneumatology is able to raise such questions because it falls between the intersection of feminist and African theology. In this sense, African feminist pneumatology shares the same sources for doing theology with African theology and feminist

<sup>34</sup> Oosthuizen had also accused Shembe of usurping the place of Jesus and essentially taking the position of God; see his two earlier works respectively. GC Oosthuizen, *The Theology of a South African Messiah: An Analysis of the Hymnal of The Church of the Nazarites*. Leiden: Brill, 1967; "Isaiah Shembe and the Zulu world view." *History of Religions* 8.1, 1968:1-30. This is the same view as was taken by Bengt Sundkler in his earlier work though in a more moderate way. See his *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*. London: Lutterworth, 1948. For a critique of this position see Absolom Vilakazi with others who use symbolic hermeneutics to critique Oosthuizen. See, *Shembe: The Revitalization of African Society*. Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1986.

<sup>35</sup> GC Oosthuizen. *Succession Conflict within the Church of the Nazarites*. Durban: Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Westville, 1981:66.

<sup>36</sup> Oosthuizen, *Relevance...* 314; Allan Anderson, *Moya: The Holy Spirit in an African Context*. Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1991:1.

theology.<sup>37</sup> There are many different voices writing and thinking about the Holy Spirit among African women even if this is not done in a sustained and systematic way. At the core of African feminist pneumatology is emphasis on intersectionality of African cultures, women's experiences, spiritual empowerment and the Holy Spirit. Perhaps this is the biggest contribution of African feminist pneumatology to the study of African theology. Phiri highlights that "African women theologians use the global feminist theories that identify patriarchy as a cause of women's oppression and apply it to analyse all the sources of African theology."<sup>38</sup> In fact, all the sources of African theology are treated with suspicion because of their potential to perpetuate a patriarchal ideology, which is the root cause of women's oppression. It can be argued that African feminist pneumatology stresses women's experiences of the Holy Spirit, thereby increasing their agency and subjectivity and empowers them for resistance against unjust relations of power in the church, by empowering them equally with spiritual gifts to function in equality with their male counterparts. Phiri argues that "it emphasises the need for liberation of African women from multiple oppressions of sexism, classism, racism, colonialism, and imperialism."<sup>39</sup> She affirms that although generally all African people share all other forms of oppression, only women experience sexism.<sup>40</sup> We therefore argue that the experience of the Holy Spirit in the AICs must be underpinned on its liberating power in bringing about gender justice for women and men.

With the above questions in mind, we chose to do interviews in order to understand the significance and ascertain the role of the Holy Spirit in creating opportunity for gender justice within the AICs. In order to validate the hypothesis that the Holy Spirit empowers women for gender justice, the interviews were conducted with twenty women from various AICs in rural Inanda in Durban and in Kokstad. The interviews were done with elderly laypeople and ministers who have substantial experience in the AICs. The interviews were conducted in isiZulu in Inanda and in Xhosa in Kokstad. All interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed into English.

## **The Holy Spirit and Gender Justice in AICs**

Using the African feminist pneumatological perspective to analyse the interviews that were done on the Holy Spirit and gender justice in the AICs, we discovered that the majority of the people interviewed were in agreement that the Holy Spirit is a gender justice Spirit within the AICs.

First, it is clear from the interviews that the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit within the AICs helps to deal with the question of authority. God is the one with authority. Through the Holy Spirit God decides on who would be empowered for leadership and manifestation of the Holy Spirit. This is confirmed by what one woman said. She explains that women and men "*experience the Holy Spirit in the same way because it is God who sends the Holy*

---

<sup>37</sup> The sources include the following: the African primal religion and culture (traditional prayers, fables, proverbs, metaphors, riddles, myths, songs and folktales); the Bible; Christian tradition; African social, economic and political history and experience; the history of missionary enterprise in Africa; the African Instituted churches and African pluralism. See Isabel A Phiri, "African Theological Pedagogy in the Light of a Case Study on Gendered Violence". *Journal of Constructive Theology*, Vol.14, No. 2 & 15, No. 1, 2008/2009:109-124, 114.

<sup>38</sup> Phiri, *African Theological...* 115

<sup>39</sup> Phiri, *African Theological...* 115

<sup>40</sup> Phiri, *African Theological...* 115

*Spirit*". This inclusive operation of the Holy Spirit creates an atmosphere of "all are one in Christ".<sup>41</sup> Another woman explains that "we know that the Holy Spirit does not choose according to gender and so men support women even though our culture stipulates that men and women are not the same". Here we see that even cultural constraints that have been imposed on women do not mean anything when a woman receives the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit seems to immunize women from the cultural obligations of a woman in African society. Writing in a Kenyan context, Philomena Mwaura has also observed that a critical look at the activity of the Holy Spirit in empowering women and men for a variety of ministries in the AICs reveals that there is a connection between the role of the Holy Spirit and gender justice.<sup>42</sup> Another woman from the study emphasised that this connection can be seen in the fact that women receive "the same power available to men". We therefore argue that the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit is not neutral; it has social and political implications in the emancipation of women for leadership roles within the AICs. It is significant to see that the women interviewed placed much emphasis on freedom. For instance, one woman said, "the Holy Spirit has set people free to regard men and women as equal". Therefore, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of female emancipation within Spirit-oriented-AICs.

Second, the experience of the Holy Spirit by the community of faith within the Spirit-oriented AICs brings about disintegration of every system of domination and subjugation. One woman said, "the Holy Spirit discourages discrimination ... it shows people that all, whether it's men or women, are equal before God". She further clarified that "the Holy Spirit inspires all to respect one another". The Holy Spirit leads women "in the church to work in a powerful way ... to set them free that they can feel that God loves them just like men". The domination, which prevails in relationships between the sexes, is nullified through the inclusive bestowment of spiritual gifts on all members of the faith community regardless of gender. Thus, women having experienced the power of the Holy Spirit emerge with no fear of intimidation because they realise that they are speaking on behalf of God and therefore their words now command attention. The women from the study believe that in the AICs "there is no discrimination ... the Holy Spirit is available to all in the same way". Consequently, the full acceptance of women as equals in the Spirit by men becomes inevitable. This may explain why Teresa Okure, who was writing from the context of Nigeria, observed that currently the number of women founders and co-founders of churches is ever-increasing within the AICs.<sup>43</sup> Lilian Dube-Chirairo, writing from the context of AICs in Zimbabwe also stated that although most women do not hold leadership positions in the political decision-making structures, nevertheless, they have tremendous influence over their churches as prophetesses or prayer-healers.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, the experience of the Holy Spirit is a framework for maintaining gender balance.

Third, the priority of the gifts of the Holy Spirit provides a foundation for gender justice within the AICs. In the Spirit-oriented AICs, greater emphasis is placed on the operation and working of the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts (gifts of grace) as a criterion for ministry and religious leadership in the church. The demography of the women in our study revealed

<sup>41</sup> The Apostle Paul (Galatians 3:28,NIV) warned that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

<sup>42</sup> Mwaura. *Gender and Power...* 422-434; Daneel. *AIC Women...* 316-317.

<sup>43</sup> Teresa Okure. "Invitation to African Women's Hermeneutical Concerns." *African Journal of Biblical Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 2003:71-95, 73.

<sup>44</sup> Dube-Chirairo. *Mission and Deliverance...* 297.

that not only are women playing vital leadership roles in Church administration at the same level with men, sometimes even higher, but also the Spirit-oriented AICs have in fact produced women founders, preachers, evangelists, prophetesses, pastors, etc. One woman said that “*the Holy Spirit sets people free ... so that women do not see themselves as inferior to men ... so in our church there are women prophets and ministers just like men*”. Similar to Oosthuizen’s contention that the prophetesses are respected and enjoy the same status as the prophet,<sup>45</sup> Daneel, who has studied the Spirit-oriented AICs extensively in Zimbabwe, argues that in the eyes of their followers these prophetesses may obtain a similar position of leadership to their male counterpart.<sup>46</sup> This is also in line with the majority of women interviewed in this study. For instance, one woman emphasised that women and men “*can be the same ... if women are able to do things it means they are equal like men*”. Thus, women through the experience of the empowering and working of gifts of the Spirit, acquire a new status that gives them power and authority to transcend gender barriers within the AICs. Another woman said, “*what unifies is love ... the Holy Spirit equips both men and women for the work of God*”. Mwaura argues passionately that “*women, just like men ... experience the Holy Spirit and are endowed with the ability to dream, see visions, prophesy, preach, teach, exorcism and even healing.*”<sup>47</sup> For instance, from our study sample, Pastor Dora Nokusa Mhlongo, in Matikwe, Inanda village outside Durban, is a founder and overseer of the Galilee Apostolic Church in Zion. Studies on AICs in South Africa have singled out the work of Mama Nku of the St. Johns Apostolic Faith Mission who left a thriving church when she died in 1982.<sup>48</sup> The function of women in AICs through the “*principle of co-dependency*”, where a woman holds the position of leadership authority because of their husbands’ positions as bishops, confirms the findings of Mwaura in the case of the Kenyan context. In this kind of leadership, based on her spiritual gifts, the woman functions as the permanent head and a man may exist as nominal head.<sup>49</sup>

In fact, even in the AICs that are predominantly male in their leadership structures, scholars have found a paradox. Jules-Rosette, cited by Norman Thomas, in her study of the women’s leadership among the Apostles of John Maranke made a shocking discovery. On one hand, she observed a clear exclusion of women from administrative structures of leadership. On the other hand, she noted that prophetesses exerted enormous authority and influence, so that they were able to challenge the decision made by the councils of male elders and be obeyed.<sup>50</sup> Norman Thomas asserts that “*the key to understanding this kind of a paradox of male hierarchical dominance yet pervasive expressive female leadership*” is found in the authority and power of the Holy Spirit that is bestowed upon both women and men.<sup>51</sup>

As already highlighted, it is the Holy Spirit that balances and helps to overcome the female-male dichotomy – because both females and males experience the Holy Spirit the same way. These women believe that when people experience the Holy Spirit there is a

---

<sup>45</sup> Oosthuizen. *The Healer-Prophet...* 35.

<sup>46</sup> Daneel. *AIC Women as Bearers...* 318.

<sup>47</sup> Mwaura. *Gender and Power...* 422.

<sup>48</sup> Norman E Thomas. “Images of Churches and Mission in African Independent Churches.” *Missiology: International Review*, Vol. XXIII, No. 1, January 1995:17-29, footnote 6.

<sup>49</sup> Mwaura. *Gender and Power...* 441.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas. *Images of Churches...* 19-20.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas. *Images of Churches...* 20.

change of attitude and affirmation of gender equality. One woman stressed “*the Holy Spirit changes attitudes and actions of people so that they don’t treat other people as inferior ... the Holy Spirit guides and leads people into all truth*” about gender. This means that the change of attitudes about gender in AICs led to action or praxis that affirms gender justice. This bestowment itself is a space for gender justice and equality. Therefore, although there are some restrictions even within the Spirit-oriented AICs as to the leadership roles of women, because of the pervasive and all-embracing role of the Spirit, Spirit-oriented AICs provide unrestricted opportunity for women to exercise full function and responsibility even in directing political decision making of the church. As already observed, Oosthuizen also recognised the fact that the Holy Spirit works amongst women by empowering them with gifts that give them access to specific leadership positions that they could never have achieved otherwise. However, Oosthuizen would also be in agreement with the view that there are some restrictions as to the leadership roles of women in these churches which are located predominantly in patriarchal societies such as the Zulu, where his study focused. While perhaps not articulating the issue of gender justice as clearly as some would wish, we acknowledge that Oosthuizen paid attention to issues of gender that most of his contemporary white missiologists perhaps did not. It could be argued that within Oosthuizen’s AICs pneumatology, the issue of gender justice was at least implicitly present.

## Conclusion

In this article, we have attempted to demonstrate the relationship between the AICs whose central belief floats around the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and the prominence gender justice in ministry of women and men in most of the churches that Oosthuizen studied in South Africa. We have argued that the inclusive bestowment of spiritual gifts on all believers within the faith community of AICs allows free participation of women in church leadership. Based on that, we can argue that as scholar’s theological framework can marginalise or be sensitive to the power dynamics between women and men, an element significant to the study and understanding of Christianity in Africa. We further argue that since the Holy Spirit inclusively bestows gifts on both women and men, the Spirit also draws them equally to participate in God’s mission in the world. Finally, we have demonstrated that the Spirit of God has functioned as a resource of empowerment for women in their resistance against patriarchy. Since Oosthuizen had already begun making some comparisons between mainline Protestant church and AICs on the role of women, a future project could focus on comparative studies between the role of the Holy Spirit in empowering women in AICs and mainline Protestant churches in relation to gender justice.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> Mia Brandel-Syrier’s book, *Black Woman in Search of God* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1962) provides the foundation for drawing a comparison between mainline Protestant and AICs in the role of the Holy Spirit in understanding gender justice.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Akogyeram, Humphrey 2006. "African Indigenous Churches and the Ministry of the Holy Spirit." *Journal of African Instituted Church Theology*, Vol. II, no. 1:1-12.
- Amanze, James 1998. *African Christianity in Botswana: The Case of African Independent Churches*. Gweru: Mambo Press.
- Anderson, Allan 1991. *Moya: The Holy Spirit in an African Context*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Brandel-Syrier, Mia 1962. *Black Woman in Search of God*. London: Lutterworth Press.
- Daneel, Marthinus L 2000. "AIC Women as Bearers of the Gospel Good News." *Missionalia*, Vol. 28, no. 2/3, August/November: 312-327.
- Daneel, Marthuns L 1988. *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches*. Vol. 3. Gweru: Mambo Press.
- Daneel, Marthuns L 1974. *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches*. Vol. 2. The Hague: Mouton.
- Dube-Chirairo, Lillian 2000. "Mission and Deliverance in the Zvikomborero Apostolic Faith Church." In *Missionalia*, Vol. 28, no. 2/3:294-311.
- Kramarae, Cheris and Dale Spender 2000. *Routledge International Encyclopedia of Women: Global Women's Issues and Knowledge*. New York, NY and London: Routledge.
- Magesa, Laurent 1997. *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*. Maryknoll: Orbis.
- Maluleke, Tinyiko S 1997. "Half a Century of African Christian Theologies: elements of the emerging agenda for the twenty-first century". *Journal of Theology in Southern Africa*, 99:4-23.
- Mbiti, John Samuel 1998. "African Theology." In Maimela S in *Initiating into Theology the Rich Variety of Theology and Hermeneutics*. Maimela, Simon S and König Adrio (eds.). Pretoria: JL van Schaik: 141-157.
- Mwaura, Philomena N 2005. "Gender and Power in African Christianity: African Instituted Churches and Pentecostal Churches." In Kalu, Ogbu (ed.). *African Christianity: An African Story*. Pretoria: University of Pretoria: 410-445.
- Oduro, Thomas 1997. "Contributions and Challenges of African Instituted Churches in developing African Theology." in Diane B Stinton (ed.). *African Theology on the Way: Current Conversations*. London: SPCK: 46-55.
- Okure, Teresa 2003. "Invitation to African women's Hermeneutical Concerns." *African Journal of Biblical Studies*, Vol. 19, no. 2:71-95.
- Oosthuizen, GC 1992. "Divine-Prophet Parallels in African Independent and Traditional Churches and Traditional Religion." In Oosthuizen, GC and Hexham Irving (eds.). *Empirical Studies of the African Independent/Indigenous Churches*. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press: 163-194.
- Oosthuizen, GC 1967. *The Theology of a South African Messiah: An Analysis of the Hymnal of the Church of the Nazarites*. Leiden: Brill.
- Oosthuizen, GC 1988. "Interpretation of Demonic Powers in Southern African Independent Churches". *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. X VI. no. I:3-22.

- Oosthuizen, GC 1968. "Isaiah Shembe and the Zulu World." *History of Religions*, Vol. 8, no. 1:1-30.
- Oosthuizen, GC 2003. "Relevance of the African Indigenous Churches for New Approaches to the Study of Christianity". In Gerloff, Roswith (ed.). *Mission is Crossing Frontiers: Essays in Honour of Bongani A Mazibuko*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publication.
- Oosthuizen, GC 1990. "Research Unit for the Study of New Religious Movements and Independent Churches." *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 20, Fasc. 3 October: 276-278.
- Oosthuizen, GC 1968. *Post-Christianity in Africa: A Theological and Anthropological Study*. London: C Hurst.
- Oosthuizen, GC 1981. *Succession Conflict within the Church of the Nazarites*. Durban: Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Westville.
- Oosthuizen, GC 1992. *The Healer-Prophet in Afro-Christian Churches*. Leiden: EJ Brill.
- Oosthuizen, GC 1958. *Theological Discussions and Confessional Developments in the Church of Asia and Africa*. Franeker: T Wever.
- Pauw, BA 1960. *Religion in Tswana Chieftdom*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Phiri, Isabel A 2008/09). "African Theological Pedagogy in the Light of a Case Study on Gendered Violence". *Journal of Constructive Theology*, Vol. 14, no. 2 & 15, no. 1:109-124, 114.
- Phiri, Isabel A 2000. "African Women in Mission: Two Case Studies from Malawi." *Missionalia*, Vol. 28, no. 2/3:267-327.
- Phiri, Isabel A 1997 . "Doing Theology as an African Woman." In Parratt, John (ed.), *A Reader in African Theology*. London: SPCK: 45-56.
- Phiri, Isabel A 2004. "The Church as a Healing Community: Women's Voices and Visions from Chilobwe Healing Centre." *Journal of Constructive Theology*, Vol. 10, no. 1, July:13-28.
- Phiri, Isabel A & Nadar Sarojini 2006. "What's in a Name? – Forging a Theoretical Framework for African Women's Theologies". *Journal of Constructive Theology*, Vol. 12, no. 2, December:5-24.
- Smit, Johannes A & P Pratap Kumar 2005. "GC Oosthuizen and the Study of Religion in KwaZulu-Natal". *Alternation Special Edition 2*:10-19.
- Sundkler, Bengt 1948. *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*. London: Lutterwoth.
- Thomas, Norman E 1995. "Images of Churches and Mission in African Independent Churches." *Missiology: International Review*, Vol. XXIII, no. 1, January: 17-29.
- Vilakazi, Absolom with others 1986. *Shembe: The Revitalization of African Society*. Johannesburg: Skotaville.
- Walls, Andrew 1982. "The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture". *Missionalia*, Vol. 10, no. 3:93-105.