

Training of African Independent Churches Students at the Umphumulo Lutheran Theological College

Kenokeno Mashabela

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8402-4960>

University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

mashabelaj@ukzn.ac.za

Abstract

The African Independent Churches Association (AICA) holds a unique place in the contribution of South African theological education. The AICA established the AICA Theological College; however, later on it initiated a theological negotiation with the Umphumulo Lutheran Theological College (ULTC) to train its students. The African Independent Churches (AICs) are seriously concerned with theologically training their church leaders. The vision and mission of the AICs are to sustain and grow the quality of their doctrine. This is to ensure that the significant connection between theological training and their own churches' life experiences are encouraged. The role of theological training has much potential to train theological students of pastoral leadership. Thus, theological training and the church have always taken a rightful place to serve communities. This article explores why the AICs are training their theological students at the ULTC. The article focuses on four areas. Firstly, it discusses an early partnership between the ULTC and the AICs. Secondly, it offers some reasons why the AICs initiated the process of training their theological students at the South African theological institutions of the mainline churches. Thirdly, it discusses the establishment of the AICA Theological College and its success and challenges. Fourthly, it outlines the theological curriculum challenges offered to AICs theological students and the Lutheran support initiatives to the AICs.

Keywords: African Independent Churches; African spirituality; Edward Lekganyane; indigenous theology; Isaiah Shembe; Lutheran World Federation; South African universities

UNISA 
UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH AFRICA
PRESS

Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae

<https://unisapressjournals.co.za/index.php/SHE/index>

Volume 49 | Number 3 | 2023 | #14157 | 15 pages

<https://doi.org/10.25159/2412-4265/14157>

ISSN 2412-4265 (Online), ISSN 1017-0499 (Print)

© The Author(s) 2023



Published by the Church History Society of Southern Africa and Unisa Press. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)

Introduction

Theological training offers a key role in the life of ecumenical churches, such as the African Independent Churches (AICs), in South Africa. It is ecumenically important to celebrate a theological training partnership between the AICs and Lutheran Theological College. Mogashoa (2012, 176) says these churches have a fourfold of names, that is, African Independent Churches, African Initiated Churches, African Instituted Churches and African Indigenous Churches. Firstly, the name African Independent Churches means these churches are independent of the mission churches, such as the Lutheran, Methodist, Anglican, Roman Catholic and others, and their founders were previously mission church members. They are self-propagating (self-motivating), self-supporting and self-governing. Secondly, the name African Initiated Churches refers to the initiative taken by these churches, which originated from the African soil, by Africans. The leaders of these churches established them because of a calling in the form of a vision and the gift of healing people. Thirdly, the name African Instituted Churches means they were initiated by Africans with leadership, membership and theology that is African centred. The mission churches denied African leaders the right to occupy significant positions of leadership in the church (Mogashoa 2012, 177). Fourthly, the name African Indigenous Churches means these churches were established within blacks' "experiences and their expression of their Christian faith: the church services and hymns are in their indigenous languages" (Mogashoa 2012, 178). Blacks' expressions of clapping hands and dancing are very significant in these churches (Mogashoa 2012, 177–178).

For the advancement of Christianity in Africa, the AICs have brought a new dialogical theology that uncovers African ecumenical approaches. The establishment of the AICs demonstrates why establishing the church on African soil by Africans should be indigenised and decolonised to reclaim the Africans' lost true treasure of spirituality, identity and cultural heritage. The life experiences of the AICs in a changing society connect to the realities of Africans. The mission churches need to be acknowledged for their pivotal and greater role in the development of the church in South Africa. However, the AICs reconstructed the church in an African context in the service of Africans.

The article is written from the historical and theological perspectives and focuses on four areas, namely: firstly, a discussion of an early partnership between the ULTC college and the AIC; secondly, some reasons why the AICs initiated the process of training their theological students at the theological institutions of the mainline churches;¹ thirdly, the establishment of the AICA Theological College and its success and challenges; and fourthly, an outline of theological curriculum challenges offered to AICs theological students and Lutheran support initiatives to the AICs.

¹ The mainline churches in South Africa are the Anglican Church; United Congregational Church; Evangelical Lutheran Church; Conservative Evangelical Churches; Dutch Reformed Church; Methodist Church; Presbyterian Church; and Roman Catholic Church.

Lutherans' Initial Interest in the Ecumenical Theology of the African Independent Churches

The Umphumulo Lutheran Theological College (ULTC) established the Missiological Institute (MI) as a theological research centre in 1965. The institute was established in the interests of serving missionary and ecumenical concerns and contexts. The ULTC organised the First Missiological Course to grapple with the theme “Our Approach to the Independent Church Movement in South Africa” held from 30 September – 6 October 1965 at the ULTC (Becken 1965a). The ULTC invited the other mission churches and the AICs in South Africa to participate in this Missiological Course, but unfortunately the AICs were not represented (Beyerhaus 1965a, 1). However, the First Missiological Course decided to give the AICs their rightful place to train their theological students at the ULTC (Häselbarth 1965, 15). The First Missiological Course was an in-depth study about the life experiences and theology of the AICs. The intrinsic value and respect of the AICs for their theological education became equally valid with that of the other mission churches. The theological training of AICs leaders was an ecumenical effort to dismiss the notion of undermining theological realities and new lessons offered by the AICs.

First Fruits of the Theological Training Initiated by the African Independent Churches

AICs leaders require theological training as part of providing liberating and quality services to the church and community. Theological training serves as an educational gift from God to address people's spiritual, educational, political and socio-economic issues. Moripe (1996, 164–165) captures the essence of why church leaders should be trained:

All groups of people in a society need educated leadership. The church is no exception to this rule. Throughout the history of the church, the education of church leaders has usually been an important activity of the church. The higher the quality of church leaders, including pastors, the better the members will be equipped for their witness and for the up-building of the church.

However, Moripe (1996, 165) observes that “The lack of theological education among the African Initiated Churches is a major problem”. The AICs had greater willingness to participate in the mainline churches' activities and to train its pastors at the theological institutions of the mainline churches. Theological students of the Shembe Church were trained at Sweetwaters, near Pietermaritzburg in the former Natal Province (now KwaZulu-Natal [KZN]).

Bishop Edward Lekganyane (1922–1967) was the leader of the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) from 17 April 1949 until his death. He trained for two years at the Dutch Reformed Theological School in Turfloop in the former Northern Transvaal Province (now Limpopo) (Beyerhaus 1965b, 6). Lekganyane applied to the South African government for the ZCC to be granted “fully-fledged church status”. This application

was qualified by his theological training at the Dutch Reformed Theological School in Stoffberg near the then University of the North (now the University of Limpopo) in the former Pietersburg (now Polokwane) where he completed his Higher Diploma in Theology in 1966. Furthermore, Lekganyane established the tertiary educational bursary fund for ZCC members and also had the Moria Primary School built in Limpopo (Moripe 1996, 26). Lekganyane's completion of the Higher Diploma in Theology and the church being granted fully-fledged status were growing recognition of botho/ubuntu and the relevance of the AICs for the African context. The significance of this achievement collectively demonstrates why it is important for AICs leaders to be part of the academic space. The growth and knowledge of the AICs theology should contribute to building an indigenous theological education in South Africa.

Moripe (1996, 166) states that ZCC ministers were supported to integrate their "supernatural powers" with theological education. The significance of supernatural powers in the ZCC doctrine emphasises the leaders' spirituality and healing of people. Thus, theological education was necessary to promote "self-knowledge and self-criticism in relation to other churches and Christianity in general" Moripe (1996, 166). ZCC ministers were encouraged to continue with the contribution of "Bishop Edward Lekganyane and Barnabas Lekganyane, for the development of Christianity" (Moripe 1996, 166). The ZCC was open to empowering its ministers by encouraging them to be trained theologically, even though they were spiritually gifted and called by God to serve and heal the people. African spirituality and theological education in the ZCC were integrated in the service of the church. The value and meaning of AICs theological training were rooted in the context of African spirituality as a liberating tool to provide church members with sound theological teachings. The question arises whether in the 21st century AICs pastors are being trained in sufficient numbers. The article will further explore the need for theological training of AICs theological students.

Isaiah Shembe (1865–1935) was a self-proclaimed prophet and the founder of the Ibandla lamaNazaretha (Nazareth Baptist Church), South Africa, which was the largest African Initiated Church in Africa during his lifetime. He did not receive a theological education like Lekganyane. Shembe became his own biblical scholar and studied the Catechetical Instructions at the Methodist Church, then called Wesleyans, in the district of Harrismith, in the former Orange Free State Province (now Free State). He was against European education. He learnt to read and write in Zulu by teaching his fellow migrant workers at work. He was able to read the Bible (Becken 1965b, 2). He requested to be baptised by immersion as prescribed in the Bible. However, a white Wesleyan minister refused to baptise him because the Methodist Church's baptismal practice did not emphasise immersion baptism.

Hence, Shembe left the Methodist Church to join the African Native Baptist Church of Bishop William Lesheja who baptised him with his required type of baptism (Becken 1965b, 2). However, subsequently, due to theological church differences, he left this

church and established the Nazareth Movement in 1903, which later became the Nazareth Baptist Church (Becken 1965b, 2).

Establishment of the African Independent Churches Association Theological College

The African Independent Churches Association's (AICA) priority was to establish its "theological seminary and to set up a correspondence to deepen the theology of our ministers" (Ngada and Mofokeng 2001, 20). The AICA discovered that it would not be possible to productively build its seminary due to lack of funds. Due to this development, the AICA decided to enrol its theological students at any seminary. In 1967, AICs theological students were admitted to the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Seminary, known as the "R.R. Wright School of Religion" (Ngada and Mofokeng 2001, 19). In 1970, the AICA rented a building in Alice in the Eastern Cape; however, "unfortunately all the lecturers were from the mainline churches, but AICA provided its own courses. This caused many problems for the students and eventually the AICA Theological College in Alice had to close down" (Ngada and Mofokeng 2001, 20). The AICA Theological College rented space at St Peter's Catholic Seminary in Hammanskraal in the former Transvaal Province (now Gauteng). Due to the AICA leadership's various views and lack of funds, however, the AICA Theological College was unable to pay its rental at St Peter's in 1973, which led to its closure (Ngada and Mofokeng 2001, 20). However, the South African Council of Churches (SACC) helped the AICA to open its theological college at the buildings of St Ansgar's School in Roodepoort in Gauteng, with a new name, the South African Theological College of Independent Churches; but this seminary was also closed (Ngada and Mofokeng 2001, 20). Molobi (2011, 56) states: "This College did not last long because of the lack of leadership skills and lack of financial management." The AICA was passionate about having its theological students trained from the AICs theology perspective and by its own lecturers and college. The unsustainability of the AICA Theological College was weakened by the AICA's lack of common leadership and financial management. The AICA's plan of establishing its own theological college was unsuccessful but means were made available to rent space for its vision of having a theological college at these identified teaching and learning institutions. Thus, the AICA Theological College experienced a cycle of unsuccessful and sustainable outcomes for theological teaching and learning from an indigenous perspective.

In 1977, the Christian Institute (CI) was banned by the South African government and the correspondence courses offered by the AICA Theological College at the CI collapsed (Ngada and Mofokeng 2001, 20). Hence, the AICA Theological College's courses were incorporated into the Theological Education by Extension College (TEEC) programme, which led to the AICA Theological College's courses not being owned by them. However, the AICA Theological College was able to teach theological courses from "the traditions and theology of the missionary churches" (Ngada and Mofokeng 2001, 20). Ngada and Mofokeng (2001, 21) observe:

The whole experience taught us that we would have to do our own training in our own way, with our own theology and making use of our own teachers or lecturers. We had compromised our own independence and become once again dependent upon the missionary churches – this time for our theological training. The experiment was doomed to failure from the start of AICA, as a form of cooperation, simply collapsed.

The AICA Theological College contributed to South African theological education from an African spiritual, cultural and traditional perspective, although it was dominated by Western hegemonies. The AICA had no sustainable financial support to explore fully its theological education plan to identify and present a potential theological curriculum for African churches and society. The AICA's aim was to provide an accurate African theological education that was conceptualised, owned and taught by it, which was a daunting task for educational progress which was at risk because of Western hegemonies. The AICs have continued to grow in the 21st century in South Africa and Africa, thus, these indigenous churches needed to continue with their original dream to establish their own theological institution, even though some of their students studied theology at various theological seminaries and South African universities such as the University of South Africa (Unisa), University of KwaZulu-Natal, University of Zululand and University of Fort Hare. It is critically important for the AICs to mobilise their resources in order to fulfil their educational dream of ensuring that African spirituality and indigenous theology continue to live in Africa and to be pioneered by the AICs.

First Enrolment of AICs Theological Students at the ULTC

In 1966, the first AICs theological students were enrolled at the ULTC. This happened especially with the theological education plan between delegates from the Lutheran Parish of Umphumulo and the Nazareth Congregation of Nodweni. It was unfortunate that this initiative collapsed in the following years and eventually died (Becken 1972b, 4). The first enrolment of AICs theological students was the ecumenical fruit of the Lutheran research about the AICs which was conducted from 1965–1967. This initiative was the strongest pillar for enabling AICs theological students to be theologically trained. The research on the AICs helped to unify the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the AICs from an ecumenical perspective, and moreover, to affirm the sense of Africanness. The presence of theological training at the AICs has the potential to contribute education to the life of its congregations. Considering the research on the AICs there is clear evidence to contribute to a new theological curriculum at the ULTC. Thus, there is a need for both the AICs and the ULTC to embrace each other's theology.

In 1967, Rev. Z. J. Malukhazi, the leader of delegates of the African clergy from the Eastern Cape, visited the CI in Johannesburg, Gauteng, to request Rev. Beyers Naude to ask the CI to facilitate the series of courses to be used for their Bible studies. The CI hardly offered such as a course, but they were asked why they have not approached the Bible schools or theological colleges. The delegation's reply was not definite, but the institute became an institution to be trusted. The mainline churches regarded the AICs

as inferior because their ministers were not theologically trained. The indigenous churches named their churches African Indigenous Churches (Naude 2001, vii–viii), but they were also known as African Independent Churches. The mainline churches and the AICs had a disruptive theological understanding of God and were unable to work together to lead the people to the one God. The AICs did not trust the Bible schools and theological colleges of the mainline churches because they regarded the indigenous churches as inferior. The AICs were bold enough to approach the CI to provide theological teaching material to advance the indigenous church theology.

In 1969, the AICs established the African Independent Churches Association (AICA) working together with the CI. The AICA wanted to establish its Bible school in Alice and asked the CI to support it spiritually and financially. After 1969, the AICs critically witnessed the CI's support for their African Christianity. The AICs had a unique theology to offer the mainline churches (Naude 2001, viii). The CI became a supporting spiritual home for the AICs, while the CI accepted the theological reformation offered by the AICs. The African understanding of God offered by the AICs was a transforming course for the CI and the mainline churches. Thus, the AICs became an agent of change for the church theology on African soil.

Theological Training of AICs Leaders

In 1965, at the First Missiological Course, Makhathini (1965, 3) said it was the ULTC's duty to train AICs theological students particularly when the AICs were unable to financially support their theological students. It was the duty of the ULTC and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (hereafter ELCSA²) to provide scholarships for these theological students. After their graduation they could return to serve their indigenous churches. The mainline churches originated from the European churches, such as the Lutheran, Anglican, Reformed and Roman Catholic churches, which were established by white missionaries in South Africa in the 20th century. They were planted according to their various church doctrines and traditions or backgrounds. Furthermore, ELCSA and other mainline churches were bound to accept the AICs

ministers as rightly called and rightly ordained, and welcome them to our assemblies and invite them to our gatherings of fellowship and worship. If they should run short of ministers we should be able to let them have one or more from us as a gesture of fellowship and as consciousness that they are part of us ... If they need a building why can we not help them put up a church. (Makhathini 1965, 3)

The AICs were accepted as an ecumenical church, which brought about a new theological education and conversations of African Christianity in Africa. This was precisely because the AICs theological students were financially supported to study at the ULTC and their ministers were accepted to attend any Evangelical Lutheran Church

² The name Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA) is not referring to the ELCSA which was established in 1975. The name ELCSA is used in the period of Evangelical Lutheran regional churches such as the ELCSA South Eastern Region, ELCSA Transvaal Region and others.

gatherings as equal and co-ordained ministers. The ecumenical First Missiological Course pushed for church unity in the service of God's people rather than debating church doctrines.

In 1971, the ULTC and the Paulinum Lutheran Theological Seminary in Namibia were responsible for an AICs project including the continuous enrolment of theological students training at these institutions with the support of the Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa (FELCSA) Consultation on Theological Training and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) (Nielsen and Becken 1971a, 7). From 10–11 November 1971, the ULTC Governing Board accepted theological students from the AICs and other denominations to enrol at the ULTC for the 1972 year and also approved their scholarships. After their graduation, the theological students were expected to return to serve their respective churches (Nielsen and Becken 1971b, 7). The ULTC, Paulinum Lutheran Theological Seminary, FELCSA and LWF embraced the theological training of AICs theological students. The ULTC was a committed ecumenical institution for all denominations; thus, its policy of expecting all theological students to return to serve their respective churches was a profound decision in the service of those churches.

Theological students from the AICs, Lutheran and other mainline churches enrolled at the ULTC not only for the Diploma in Theology but also the Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Theology degree, which was partly taught in 1962 at the Oscarsberg Lutheran Theological College (OLTC). After its closure, it moved to the Umphumulo Teachers Training College and was replaced by the ULTC later in 1962 (Pakendorf 1962, 2). The OLTC and the Department of Divinity at Unisa pioneered the establishment of the BA in Theology (Loken and Sandner 1969, iv). AICs theological students were also qualified to enrol for the BA in Theology as a sign of producing theological students at a university level. The ULTC training of AICs theological students at a university, along with students obtaining a university degree, dethroned the historical discrimination and inequality of the AICs by the mainline churches. The ULTC created a common emerging and growing theological education for students from all churches at universities and theological institutions.

The ULTC had already been a home for the AICs theological students. Hence, the AICA Theological College requested to rent the ULTC building to teach the AICs theological students in 1972. The AICA Theological College was ready to pay rental, and the ULTC Governing Board acknowledged the AICA Theological College as an ecumenical institution (Nielsen and Becken 1972b, 3–4). The ULTC continued to support the AICA Theological College at a time when it needed to rent the ULTC building. The interest in AICA theological training revealed that the AICs theology would contribute to the ecumenical church in South Africa. This was a defining moment in the AICs contributing a sound theology in Church history. It is equally important to note that the AICs brought an African theology rather than the Western theology that was being taught in mainline church theological training institutions. The AICs theology

influences the theological curriculum of mainline church theological institutions to teach theology as an investment, which is developed from an African aspect.

The ULTC's Awareness of Promoting and Protecting an African Theological Curriculum

The ULTC was strategically aware that the theological curriculum should be relevant for the ministry in Africa. The ULTC Annual Report (Beyerhaus 1964) revealed that overseas textbooks were not relevant to the African context. The lecturers spent a lot of time producing lecture notes that were relevant to Africa. The Association of Southern African Theological Institutions was established in 1963 and was inaugurated in 1965 to develop a proper theological training curriculum for effective ministry in Africa (Beyerhaus 1963, 1). Many Christians from the Western-oriented churches undermined the Zionist intellectual theology of the AIC. According to the Zionist understanding and application of the Bible is authentic because these indigenous churches view it as their biblical foundation and “would not mind to learn more about it” (Moripe 1996, 165). The AICs were only interested in theological education that would embrace and advance their theological needs and traditions, without an education that would disrupt their theological content (Moripe 1996, 165). AICs ministers were taught in any South African theological training institution where Christian theology was rooted in Africa by “an African and for the people of Africa” as it responded to the fears and hopes of Africans. This Christian theology was biblically centred as it addressed the actual African needs and challenges. This theology would clearly enable Africans to hear how Christ engages them (Moripe 1996, 166). Masuku (2019, 207) states that AICs theological training is

a course in the area of ministry studies with content that introduces students to the whole range of pastoral work; management of a congregation, homiletic, liturgy, counselling, caring, house visits, hospital ministry, etc. from African cultural perspective. Church management and financial administration form part of this package.

The concern of the functions of AICs theological training is more holistic from an African perspective of spiritual leadership and management. Western theological education was never appreciated by Africans that is why lecturers at the ULTC spent time producing relevant lecture notes and hence on the AICs as well as dismissing such unproductive theological education. Western theological education is productive for the Western world and disruptive from the African world. African theological education occupies African spirituality and liberating cultures and traditions to enhance the spirit of the belonging community. The AICs advocate for an African indigenous theological education designed by Africans for theological training institutions, such as the ULTC and others, to listen and implement the biblically-centred and liberating approach that would meet the spiritual, cultural and socioeconomic needs of Africans. This African theological curriculum approach requires theological institutions and universities in Africa to seriously encounter the theologically-centred and liberating call of the AICs.

The ULTC conducted research about the AICs from 1965–1967. This research was aimed at understanding the AICs through a living dialogue in a context that the AICs are a unique Christian church. The ULTC found it difficult to study the AICs as a whole, but this was briefly studied from approaching individual leaders, congregations and by “participating in their worship and community life” (Becken 1972b, 2, 4). This was critically important for ULTC to understand forms of AICs worship, sermons, leadership, ordination and sacraments. These forms would assist in providing a theological curriculum that was relevant to independent churches. An African historical background of AICs is important to produce a theological curriculum that is rooted from this church. This type of an African theological curriculum offers an opportunity for Lutheran theological students to also learn the AICs theology. The Lutheran theological curriculum at the ULTC also provides an opportunity for the AICs theological students to learn it.

From 4–5 September 1973, the ULTC Governing Board informed churches that theological students were expected to study three years for theoretical studies and one year for advanced and practical studies, which was required for the ULTC Diploma in Theology (Becken 1973b, 1). This programme was required to ensure the quality of education of theological students. The ULTC programme outcomes ensured that teaching and learning practices were appropriate to student learning according to the South African quality education level.

In 1972, the ULTC allowed the Presbyterian Church to offer its refresher studies to its pastors (Nielsen and Becken 1972a, 4). Refresher studies were vital resource to capacitate pastors to understand and address the emerging spiritual, political and socioeconomic society. This training provided capacity to pastors to creatively train congregations to mobilise resources to respond to realities of their context. Refresher studies were a compulsory action necessary for all churches for their workers and congregations to achieve a particular goal such as social justice.

Funding of African Independent Churches Students’ Theological Training by Churches and Organisations

In 1965, the Theological Education Fund funded the training of AICs leaders to study at the ULTC (Beyerhaus 1965b, 6). Evangelical Lutheran churches, such as the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Hanover and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD), were among the funders together with Lutheran theological institutions in Africa (Nielsen and Becken 1973, 4). Churches, such as the Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa, VELKD, and institutions such as the LWF and Evangelische Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Weltmission, funded the ULTC (Becken 1973a, 4). The Church of Sweden Mission Society scholarship fund was provided for three years to theological students who studied at ULTC to cover institutional fees for tuition, accommodation, books and other academic needs. ULTC was responsible for identifying theological students who qualified for the scholarship. For the Bachelor of

Arts (BA) degree, theological students would be funded in 1974 and each church appointed one theological student. The BA degree was offered at the ULTC (Becken 1973b, 2). The central part of funding theological training was to support the plight of the AICs theological students. This ecumenical training was an organised educational effort of these churches and institutions. The phenomenal success of AICs theological training was central to benefit indigenous churches.

African Independent Churches Understanding of the Holy Ministry

In the mainline churches, the holy ministry was instituted and designed by God for the purpose of God's word and holy sacraments. These churches believe that God calls some people to the office of the ordained ministry. "The claim to be called by God in some way is the basic premise for consideration for ministerial training" (Buthelezi 2011, 1, 3). Their understanding of the holy ministry is that pastors are set apart within the priesthood of all believers' ministry. They are part of the church ministry as servants of God.

The AICs developed their understanding of the holy ministry from the root:

African thinking, independent Bible Study and Christian missionary proclamation of the Gospel. The use of traditional ecclesiastical designations and titles of office bearers in the independent hierarchy is no reason for categorizing the ministry according to the Western types. The African Independent ministry constitutes a new type, the Healer, with the threefold function of preaching of the Gospel, intercession for the sick and performing of burial rites; this is a wholistic [sic] concept of the church leadership meeting the religious needs of the world of Africa. (Becken 1972a, 1)

The AICs understanding of the holy ministry differs from that of the mission churches, from which the AICs broke away. The leader is more divine and empowered by the Holy Spirit to heal the sick. African spirituality plays a central role because the leader is an intercessor and a Spirit-led human being. The leader is appointed as a healer who is spiritually called by God according to his charismatic ministry. The healer prepares for his ordination through reading the Bible and according to his endowed charisma. This ordination or anointing is accepted by the church and the healer's wife is also ordained simultaneously. The holy ministry is sacred and elevates the healer over the laity and is linked with the congregation (Becken 1972a, 1–2). According to Moripe (1996, 15–16), the AICs leaders "elevated the position of African women, who later played a significant role as Healers or Prophetesses in these churches". The healer is ordained or anointed according to his endowed spiritual gift from God. He is a leader who prays for the church and heals the sick through prayer. Women's participation is necessary but it should not be used to empower women in connection with their husbands. Women are independent gifted people of God who should be treated as equals with men. The role of women in the church is an important factor of church contribution and a necessary purpose in any analysis of church action.

The Lutheran World Federation's Interest in African Independent Churches Theology

The Fifth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation held in Evian, France, from 14–24 July 1970, from an ecumenical commitment, resolved that:

The Extension of our Ecumenical Encounter–Independent Christian Movements in Latin America and phenomenal proliferation of similar groups in Southern Africa and Western Africa and elsewhere, present an unavoidable challenge to the Lutheran Church and the ecumenical family of churches as the whole. Various attempts have been made to find the basic cause of the origin and development of these movements. The study programs on the history, structure, and present life of these independent Christian movements should be initiated. (Becken 1972b, 1)

The LWF as an ecumenical institution is committed to AICs theology that is more of an indigenous theology and spiritual life. The AICs are recognised as the church that could not be unavoidable because of its African spirituality, indigenous theology and Indigenous Knowledge Systems that are already considered equal as Christianity to Africans and Latin Americans. The AICs preserved all the spiritual realities of Africans, which dismiss any Western Christianity that denies an African to live as African. AICs theology converted the LWF to regard independent churches as ecumenical. This reveals that AICs doctrine is the spiritual truth and legitimate to Africans because of its very African spirituality and indigenous theology. The LWF views the AICs theology as an interesting teaching for the Evangelical Lutheran Church and ecumenical churches. Thus, the LWF is committed to learn theology that is new to Western Christianity from the AICs. Thus, African spirituality and indigenous theology are considered to be the turning point for the reformation of Western churches.

The LWF Fifth Assembly resolved that local parishes and churches should established partnership with AICs congregations for mutual benefit. This was a way of creating an ecumenical dialogue. The assembly also decided that AICs theological students were to be accepted at Lutheran theological colleges and seminars without prejudice (Becken 1972b, 1–2). From 12–16 February 1971, the FELCSA Consultation on Theological Training resolved that the Paulinum Lutheran Theological Seminary and ULTC should continue with their research on the independent Christian movements in Southern Africa (FELCSA 1971). The ecumenism of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the AICs create an everlasting universal church for community development. The AICs theology and their theological students' training at Lutheran theological institutions play an everlasting influence to ensure the quality of AICs pastors. This reveals that AICs congregations need to be taken seriously in their services as an African perspective effort.

Conclusion

This article has explored the historical background of the AICs spiritual and theological education in the South African landscape. The AICA established its Theological College for two reasons, namely: to train its theological students by itself; and to teach from its African theological, spiritual and cultural perspective in service of Africans. The AICA Theological College provided valuable understandings of African realities for academic achievements in African Christianity and theology. The article has also pointed out the need for the ULTC, the CI, as well as other churches and institutions to support the AICs. In the 21st century, South African mainline churches and their theological institutions, universities and the South African Department of Education are called to support the project of decolonising the church and theological education, which was a historical contribution of the AIC. These education institutions and Department of Education must support the AICs to build their own theological colleges.

The objective of the article was to trace an important phenomenon of theological training of the AICs leaders. An effort was made to investigate the rationale behind the Lutheran support for training the AICs leaders. Furthermore, the article emphasised the importance of relevant theological training for all South African churches' theological students.

References

- Becken, H-J. 1965a. "Foreword." In *Our Approach to the Independent Church Movement in South Africa: Lectures of the First Missiological Course of the Missiological Institute at the Lutheran Theological College, Mapumulo from 30th September to 6th October 1965*, edited by H-J. Becken. Pietermaritzburg: Lutheran Theological Institute (LTI) Archives.
- Becken, H-J. 1965b. "The Nazareth Baptist Church of Isaiah Shembe." In *Our Approach to the Independent Church Movement in South Africa: Lectures of the First Missiological Course of the Missiological Institute at the Lutheran Theological College, Mapumulo from 30th September to 6th October 1965*, edited by H-J. Becken. Pietermaritzburg: LTI Archives.
- Becken, H-J. 1972a. "The African Independent Churches' Understanding of the Holy Ministry." Pietermaritzburg: LTI Archives.
- Becken, H-J. 1972b. "Lutheran Theological College, Mapumulo, Department of Missiology Research Project: African Independent Churches in South Africa." Pietermaritzburg: LTI Archives.
- Becken, H-J. 1973a. "Lutheran Theological College: Rector's Report for 1972." Pietermaritzburg: LTI Archives.
- Becken, H-J. 1973b. "Masters from the College Board of Lutheran Theological College/32, 7 September 1973." Pietermaritzburg: LTI Archives.

- Beyerhaus, P. 1963. "Report on Inquiry into Theological Training at South African Seminaries." Pietermaritzburg: LTI Archives.
- Beyerhaus, P. 1964. "Lutheran Theological College: Annual Report 1964 presented at the CCLF Eleventh Meeting, March 2–3, 1965." In *CCLF Minutes 1965. Minutes of the Council of Churches on Lutheran Foundation Eleventh Annual Meeting held in Cape Town, March 2–3, 1965*. Pietermaritzburg: LTI Archives.
- Beyerhaus, P. 1965a. "A Letter on Missiological Institute Written to Dr. S. Nielsen, 29 June 1965." Pietermaritzburg: LTI Archives.
- Beyerhaus, P. 1965b. "The African Independent Church Movement as missionary challenge." In *Our Approach to the Independent Church Movement in South Africa: Lectures of the First Missiological Course of the Missiological Institute at the Lutheran Theological College, Mapumulo from 30th September to 6th October 1965*, edited by H-J. Becken. Pietermaritzburg: LTI Archives.
- Buthelezi, M. 2011. "The Nature of the Ordained Ministry and Present Theological Crisis." Unpublished paper.
- FELCSA (Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa). 1971. "Minutes of the Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa Consultation on Theological Education held at Roodekrans, Johannesburg, February 12–16, 1971." Pietermaritzburg: LTI Archives.
- Häselbarth, H. 1965. "The Zion Christian Church of Edward Lekganyane." In *Our Approach to the Independent Church Movement in South Africa: Lectures of the First Missiological Course of the Missiological Institute at the Lutheran Theological College, Mapumulo from 30th September to 6th October 1965*, edited by H-J. Becken. Pietermaritzburg: LTI Archives.
- Loken, A., and P. Sandner. 1969. "Minutes of the 12th meeting of the Governing Board of the Lutheran Theological College, Swedish Hall, Hancock Street Johannesburg, October 7, 1969," Pietermaritzburg: LTI Archives.
- Makhathini, D. L. 1965. "Our Relationship to the Separatist Churches of the Ethiopian Type." In *Our Approach to the Independent Church Movement in South Africa: Lectures of the First Missiological Course of the Missiological Institute at the Lutheran Theological College, Mapumulo from 30th September to 6th October 1965*, edited by H-J. Becken. Pietermaritzburg: LTI Archives.
- Masuku, T. 2019. "We Want to Speak for Ourselves ...! The Agenda of African Initiated Churches on Decolonised and Transformative Theological Education in Southern Africa." *Missionalia* 47 (2): 193–211. <https://doi.org/10.7832/47-2-344>
- Mogashoa, H. 2012. "African Independent Churches in South Africa". In *Introduction to the Study of Church History. Only Study Guide for TIC1502*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

- Molobi, M. 2011. "Power Struggles, Poverty and Breakaways in the African Independent Churches in South Africa." *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 37 (2): 51–65.
- Moriye, S. 1996. "The Organisation and Management of the Zion Christian Church." PhD thesis, University of Durban-Westville.
- Naude, B. 2001. "Foreword." In *African Christian Witness: The Movements of the Spirit in African Indigenous Churches*, edited by N. H. Ngada and K. E. Mofokeng. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.
- Ngada, N. H., and K. E. Mofokeng. 2001. *African Christian Witness: The Movements of the Spirit in African Indigenous Churches*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.
- Nielsen, S., and H-J. Becken. 1971a. "Minutes of the 15th Meeting of the Governing Board of Lutheran Theological College, held at Johannesburg, March 24–25, 1971." Pietermaritzburg: LTI Archives.
- Nielsen, S., and H-J. Becken. 1971b. "Minutes of the 16th Meeting of the Governing Board of Lutheran Theological College, held at Mapumulo, November 10–11, 1971." Pietermaritzburg: LTI Archives.
- Nielsen, S., and H-J. Becken. 1972a. "Minutes of the 17th Meeting of the Governing Board of Lutheran Theological College, held at St. Olav's Church, Durban, March 8–9, 1972." Pietermaritzburg: LTI Archives.
- Nielsen, S., and H-J. Becken. 1972b. "Minutes of the 18th meeting of the Governing Board of the Lutheran Theological College, Doornfontein Church Centre, Davis Street, Johannesburg, October 13, 1972." Pietermaritzburg: LTI Archives.
- Nielsen, S., and H-J. Becken. 1973. "Minutes of the 19th Meeting of the Governing Board of Lutheran Theological College, held at Doornfontein, Johannesburg, March 14–15, 1973." Pietermaritzburg: LTI Archives.
- Pakendorf, P. 1962. "Report of Chairman CCLF: 1962." In *Council of Churches on Lutheran Foundation (CCLF) Eighth Annual Meeting Held at the Swedish Lutheran Church, Johannesburg, March 29, 1962*. Pietermaritzburg: LTI Archives.