

Dress as a Mark of Differentiation The Religious Symbolism of Dress in African Initiated Churches

Elizabeth Vengeyi & Canisius Mwandayi

Introduction

Researching on African Initiated Churches (AICs) in Zimbabwe is admittedly not venturing into new waters as there has been a proliferation of works dealing with that subject matter. Much of the research that has been done so far, especially by western scholars, tends to focus on issues of the historical development, particularly the terminology, emergence and dogma of AICs (Sundkler, 1964, Daneel, 1987, Jules-Rosette 1979ca.) Responding to the work of western authors on AICs, Tinyiko Sam Maluleke notes that 'AICs were seen by white male researchers such as Oosthuizen, Anderson, Sundkler and others as 'uneducated and therefore dangerous challenges to historic missionary churches... AICs studies were not about the AICs at all but about the researchers and their churches.'(Maluleke, 2003:179). This has seen Zimbabwean scholars such as Chitando, Togarasei and Mukonyora among others, publishing works on various aspects which include, regional integration, HIV and AIDS and gender respectively (Chitando, 2004; Togarasei, 2011; Mukonyora, 2007). The work that has been published so far hardly paid attention to the forms of ecclesiastical dress used in AICs. It is the goal of this research to fill this gap. To address the issue in a profound manner, the paper shall address the twin aspect of the adaptation of some of the various forms of ecclesiastical dress used in mainline churches and the incorporation of indigenous elements by AICs as both an expression of their discontentment and a marker of differentiation from mainline churches and from each other. Aiding the progression of this research are questions such as: What form of dressing is used in mainline churches? What type of dressing is commonly used by AICs and why? How do AICs use the aspect of the dress code in their worship? What is the role of the dress code in AICs? How has the issue of dressing influenced, or, been influenced by African culture? Has modern technology influenced the dress code in AICs?