THE ROLE OF SCRIPTURE IN THE
DEVELOPMENT OF NEW CHURCH TRADITIONS:

A CASE STUDY OF TWO
KENYAN AFRICAN INDEPENDENT CHURCHES

by

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c. Stephanie R. Douglas
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Scholars have long observed that vernacular translations of Scripture play an important role in the African Independent Church movement, with David Barrett's monumental *Schism and Renewal* providing one of the earliest discussions on the subject. Building on Barrett's work, this thesis examines the nature of this 'important' role of Scripture. Specifically, it is contended that Scripture plays a *unique* role in independency by providing schismatic groups with the authority by which to constitute a new church. The author develops this argument by comparing and contrasting Scripture's function across two types of Kenyan Independent churches: the Ethiopian *African Brotherhood Church* and the Zionist *African Church of the Holy Spirit*. Despite the marked differences between them, Scripture played a similar role in both churches by providing them with the authority for secession and for later ecclesial developments.
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CHAPTER 1

I. Introduction

The phenomenal growth of indigenous churches in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1950's created a sensation in the academic community. For scholars, these churches promised insights into the development of religious traditions in 'primal' contexts and provided important witnesses to the complicated relationship between Gospel and culture. In the flood of books and articles that followed, scholars came to refer to these Christian groups as African Independent Churches (AICs). The term was a broad one and included any church created “in Africa, by Africans and primarily for Africans.”

In the past thirty years, significant progress has been made in scholarly understanding of these independent churches. Studies have been conducted on the origins, polity, theology and praxis of individual churches. No textbook on African Christianity is now published without at least a chapter on AICs. Bibliographies have been produced in an attempt to keep track of the voluminous output of literature in this field.

One of the realities of studying relatively new phenomena is the constant need to revise and refine earlier theories and interpretations. In the 1950's and 1960's, scholars could only speak in general terms about AICs as they struggled to gain a sense of the trends in the movement. Thanks to their efforts, present-day scholars are able to flesh out these preliminary findings and draw out helpful nuances on the subject. In this thesis, the findings of one of the early, pivotal works on AICs will be re-examined and expanded upon.

A topic to which AIC scholars always devote some attention is the context for the development of independence. How and why did these AICs come about? Many articles have been written on this problem, and virtually every study of AICs treats it to some degree. In 1968, David Barrett dedicated an entire book to the topic, called Schism and Renewal. In this work, Barrett quantified the “factors” which led to separatism. He identified some

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eleven factors, which, when present in an ethnic group, indicated a high likelihood for schism from mission churches.

Scholars are agreed that one of the “factors” encouraging separatism from mainline churches was the availability of vernacular translations of Scripture. Indeed, Barrett ranked vernacular translations as one of the most important “factors” in independency. Interestingly, aside from Barrett’s work and occasional references to the role of Scripture in AICs, little has been done with this information. The goal is to build on Barrett’s findings by examining the role of Scripture in the development of new church traditions in Kenya.

II. Stating the Problem

1. General Statement

In this paper, it will be argued that vernacular translations of Scripture play a unique role in occasioning the Independent Church Movement. As noted above, scholars have long observed the important place of Scripture in the histories of AICs. Aside from underlining the significance of this “factor,” however, few scholars have examined how this factor functions relative to others. Through case studies of Kenyan AICs, it will be maintained that whereas other factors explain the reasons for African secession from mission churches, Scripture plays an additional role in providing the authority by which a schismatic group may constitute a new church.

Scripture’s unique role can easily be seen when comparing the origins and subsequent development of two different types of AICs: Ethiopian and Zionist churches. While the cluster of causes explaining the source of African disaffection varies between types, vernacular translations are invariably present as a factor in each. Additionally, while the

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4 A commonly used expression in the literature. See ibid.

5 Sundkler and Turner, in their well-known case studies of AICs, did offer thorough treatments of the use of Scripture by these churches. They did not, however, make Scripture the primary focus of their studies, nor did they enter a clear discussion of its role relative to other factors. Bengt G. M. Sundkler, Bantu Prophets in South Africa (London: Oxford University Press, 1961); Harold Turner, History of an African Independent Church, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

6 Ethiopianism was primarily concerned with nationalist issues. Zionism (also known as Aladura or Spirit churches) emphasized pneumatic experience and dealt with matters such as healing. Zionist churches also tended to centre on a charismatic figure. Sundkler is credited with coining the terms in his pivotal work, Bantu Prophets in South Africa. He used these terms since they were commonly encountered in the titles of churches of each type.
polity, worship and doctrine of these churches reflect their differing background causes, they share a common reliance on Scripture in justifying their existence to the wider world. That is, both types recognize in Scripture the authoritative text by which Christian communities measure church doctrine and practice.

In light of these realities, this peculiar role of Scripture will be highlighted by referring to it as an “occasioning” factor of schism. All other factors will fall under the umbrella of “causative” ones. The purpose in enunciating such a distinction is to draw attention to the unique role of Scripture in the development of church tradition. This differentiation is an important one, and can inform broader Church discussions on biblical hermeneutics and the implications of the principle of sola scriptura.

2. Causes, factors and Independency

There is no single list of “causes” of independency in the literature, since scholars tend to choose their own categories. While classifications may differ, there is an underlying agreement about the general range of “causes.” For simplicity’s sake, these have been clustered into related groups under the cover of missionary, political or cultural factors.

‘Missionary factors’ include missionary practices of racial segregation, missionary tendency to monopolize positions of leadership and African frustration with the missionary education system. Missionaries introduced schooling in Africa as part of their evangelistic outreach. Protestant missionaries were only concerned with providing a very basic education to Africans ~ sufficient for them to read Scripture and hence nurture a burgeoning faith. Africans found this particularly frustrating, because they saw education as their means for social advancement. Missionary reluctance to allocate resources on schooling was perceived as a sign of malicious intent. Finally, along with Taryor, Baur argued that Protestantism carried within itself the seeds for secession:

Being itself a protest movement, it offered the formal justification for protesting and leaving the mother church: “I make use of my Protestant birth right” said a parting leader, and another: “We do as Luther did on October 31, 1517” (in Sundklar, 170).

Having come to Africa in a multiplicity of different churches, often challenged by

7 The summary of causes is based on writings by John Baur, S.I. Maboea, Nathaniel Ndiokwere, and Nya Kwiawor Taryor, Sr.
reformist sects, Protestantism made a similar African pattern look normal.\textsuperscript{8}

In terms of ‘political factors,’ one finds such causes as African frustration over land alienation, taxation, forced labour and apartheid. As these issues all relate to colonial government, their link with churches may not be immediately obvious. During the colonial period, however, Africans saw missionaries as collaborating with the colonial rulers. Consequently, discontent over colonial oppression was frequently directed against missionaries. The fact that most Africans’ contact with white people was limited to missionaries explains this tendency.\textsuperscript{9}

Missionary condemnation of cultural practices like polygamy and circumcision rites, and the failure of missionaries to deal with African concerns with healing can be included under ‘cultural factors.’ Also, the foreignness of mission worship led some converts to search for more meaningful forms of Christian religious practice. Subsequently, many Christian groups across sub-Saharan Africa ‘discovered the Holy Spirit’ and abandoned themselves to charismatic forms of worship. Occasionally these groups took their Spirit theology to a level and form of expression which missionaries were unwilling to accept.

A final factor which scholars list alongside cultural, political, and missionary ones is the availability of vernacular translations of Scripture; this factor was called “Bible” by S. Maboea, and the “Publication of Scripture” by Ndiokwere. In addition, many of their other factors include references to Scripture. For example, Maboea cited as a separate cause the missionary failure to “live up to biblical principles”, while Ndiokwere treated as an individual “cause” the missionary condemnation of polygamy versus its favourable treatment in Scripture. For the purposes of this thesis, it is important to note that while none of these scholars had identical lists of missionary, colonial or cultural factors, all included the Bible as an important cause behind schism.

Indeed, “bible” is really present as an element in all the other causative factors listed


\textsuperscript{9} For helpful discussions of this phenomenon, see chapter 12 in Mark Shaw’s The Kingdom of God in Africa (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1996) and chapter 7 in Andrew Walls’ The Missionary Movement in Christian History (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996).
by scholars. It was access to Christianity's Holy Book that enabled African Christians to articulate their frustration with missionary and colonial injustices, and to protest missionary condemnation of some of their cultural practices. Prior to the publication of Scriptures in the vernacular language, the missions had absolute control over the interpretation of what the biblical texts meant. As Barrett pointed out, given this hegemony of biblical interpretation, missions were often equated with 'biblical Christianity.' To embrace the Christian faith meant accepting the whole package deal – the suppression of polygamy and circumcision, Western-style hymns and other forms of worship, and colonial structures of government. Upon the publication of the Bible in the vernacular, however, people were suddenly provided with the same standard of reference as the missionaries. It was possible, now, to see a discrepancy between God's revelation in Scripture and the work and practices of missionaries and government.

One excellent example of this is the whole issue of polygamy. Condemned by missionaries, Africans discovered to their surprise that polygamy was practised by the Jewish patriarchs. Africans concluded that the missionaries were not interpreting Scripture correctly. These discoveries had a profound effect on some African communities. For example, in 1948 the African Church of Israel in Zimbabwe broke off from the Seventh Day Adventist Mission with the purpose of allowing polygamy within the church. The Harrist church in West Africa and the Apostolic Church of Johane Maranke are other examples of AICs which dissented from missionary approaches to polygamy.

The availability of vernacular translations of Scripture had a revolutionary impact on African Christians. The growing awareness of debatable missionary practices in light of Scripture helped spark the movement towards ecclesial independency.

In 1968, Barrett's pivotal Schism and Renewal in Africa was published. In this sociological study of some 6000 independent churches, Barrett attempted to identify the basic causes behind independency through statistical analysis. Barrett aimed at providing an empirical study of independency and identifying the conditions which usually pertain when independency takes places. Barrett recognized in his introduction that scientific replication

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was not a possibility. Instead, his study was “built on a mass of pointers and clues deduced in
the process.”11

What distinguishes Barrett’s study from earlier ones is his identification of multiple
causation for independency, with a quantification of the likelihood of independency
according to the presence or absence of factors. He developed a scale of eighteen factors and
another scale measuring the “religious tension.” If eleven or more factors are present in an
area, then instances of independency are high.

While Barrett presented his scale in the form of a questionnaire (ex. ‘Did colonial
rule arrive more than 100 years ago?’), his discussion of the questions led to a list of factors
virtually identical to those mentioned elsewhere in the literature. For purposes here, it is
Barrett’s treatment of Scripture which is of interest.

Barrett points out that the availability of Scriptures in the vernacular language of an
indigenous group greatly increases the likelihood of independency.12 In the cases studied,
independency was present in 81% of those groups having entire translations, as against 26%
in groups without the Bible.13 In groups having only New Testaments, the likelihood of
schism diminished somewhat: independency was found in 67% of these groups. Barrett thus
assigned to vernacular translations a “crucial role”, citing numerous cases where
independency occurred immediately following Scriptural translation. Even more impressive
is his examination of this trend along the West Coast of Africa from Sierra Leone to
Cameroon. In that immense area, only two large14 tribal groups have resisted independency.
These are also the only two large tribal groups without vernacular translations of Scripture.

Barrett attributed this high correlation in part to the role of Scripture in the life of the
church. As noted above, vernacular scriptures provided an “independent standard of

11 Barrett, xviii.

12 In the questionnaire, Barrett distinguished between those groups having only New Testaments and those
having translations of both Testaments. He also differentiated those groups having New Testaments published more
than 60 years ago from those having more recent translations. The date of publication of the New Testament does not
figure prominently in Barrett’s interpretation of the data.

13 Barrett, 131.

14 Barrett claims independency usually only occurs in tribal groups with over 115,000 in population.
reference” for the Christian faith, by which missions could be measured and criticized.\footnote{Ibid., 128.} Africans learned that Christianity did not espouse many of the offensive practices or situations created by missionaries. It was possible to oppose the missionaries and remain a Christian.

The second explanation Barrett offered for this strong correlation regards the high profile place of Scripture in African society:

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of the Bible in African society. The portions of it that are first translated are in most cases the first printed literature in the vernacular language. Vast literacy campaigns are based on it. Ability to read a Gospel is a requirement for baptism in many Protestant churches. Africans have evinced the same readiness as people elsewhere to place unique value and trust in statements that are printed in books. Further the psychological importance of a tribe possessing the Bible in its own language...is incalculable. Several secessions...have begun because of mission decisions not to publish versions in those languages.\footnote{Ibid., 127.}

In short, one can conclude that large numbers of Africans were reading Scripture from cover to cover and on a regular basis.

A related point concerns the high confidence which newly literate groups place on the written word. Barrett suggested that when missionaries presented Scripture as God’s written word, its authority went unquestioned by many. Peter Probst intimated something similar in his study of literacy and authority in Aladura churches. In newly literate Nigeria, the written word was highly revered. Writing was seen as “a new technology that [could] contact and manipulate supernatural powers.”\footnote{Peter Probst, “Literacy and Aladura Authority,” \textit{Africa} 58/4 (1989), 486.} Probst illustrated his point with the story of an illiterate prophet. This prophet was told, in a vision, to record in book form all that he had seen. If he published, the voice told him, “I will make you a holy Apostle for the whole world.”\footnote{Quoted in ibid., 484.}

As a result of his findings, Barrett concludes that “if the scriptures had not been translated, the essential concepts leading to Christian independency would not have been
created and circulated, and the movement could not therefore have arisen." One could equally well say that had discontent not arisen, then independency would not have resulted even with Scriptural translations. One might also assume that where disaffection arose and vernacular translations were absent, then those disaffected members would have simply stopped attending the mission church. This elaboration of Barrett’s claim highlights the implications of distinguishing Scripture from other causal factors: disaffection provides the impetus to schism and Scripture the necessary authority for the founding of a new church.

There is no doubt that the literature on AICs assigns to vernacular translations of Scripture an important role in the development of new church traditions. As mentioned above, this thesis will explore the nature of Scripture’s “important role” in greater depth. Specifically, it will be argued that thanks to the Protestant principle of sola scriptura, vernacular translations offer the authority by which new churches may be constituted. In this sense, Scripture is an occasioning factor of schism.

In the following section, the methodology will be reviewed. As noted at the outset, the paper will comprise two case studies of Kenyan AICs. The importance of conducting this study of Scripture across two types of AICs cannot be over-emphasized. The fact that these otherwise different churches share vernacular translations as a factor in their origins will offer positive evidence for attributing to Scripture a unique role in independency.

III. Methodology

One of the difficulties with early treatment of “causation” was the tendency to view AICs as an undifferentiated mass. Since that time, many typologies have been developed, and scholars generally recognize two broad categories of AICs. These two types are called Ethiopianism and Zionism. Case studies show that the originating causes of these types differ. Ethiopian churches split off from mission churches over nationalist issues such as African leadership, whereas Zionist churches were excommunicated from mission churches because of divergent religious practices. Despite these differences, both types of AICs usually had vernacular translations of Scriptures available in their ethnic group prior to schism/exclusion. In both types, vernacular translations played a key role in legitimizing the

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19 Barrett, 131.
establishment of the new churches. A case study of representatives of these types will thus demonstrate the unique role of Scripture as an occasioning factor in schism.

In looking at a list of causative factors behind schism, one would logically expect to find these reflected in the subsequent development in the new tradition. Thus, for example, if one of the sources of African disaffection related to the poor quality of mission schooling, then this should find expression in some way in the new church. As it happens with the issue of education, a common reaction by AICs was to found their own schools. The African Christian Churches and School (ACC&S) in Kenya is just one such instance, with the source of discontent finding expression in the very title of the church. If Scripture plays a role in the origins of AICs, then one would likewise expect this to be reflected in their developing polity, ethics, worship and doctrines.

In sum, the study of the origins and subsequent development of two different AICs will signal the unique role of Scripture in “occasioning” new church traditions.

The African Brotherhood Church (ABC) and the African Church of the Holy Spirit (ACHS) were chosen for these case studies since they represent the main types of AICs, namely the Nationalist (Ethiopian) type and the Spirit (Aladura/Zionist) type respectively. The ACHS and ABC are also well-established AICs in Kenya. Separate chapters will be devoted to each church.

The approach in each study will be both socio-historical and theological. Given that the method requires the identification of causative factors, the first part of each chapter will be devoted to a study of the missionary contexts. The second part of each chapter moves from the descriptive to the analytical, when the causes for schism are discussed. In both cases, Scripture will be shown to play a distinctive role in providing the authority for secession. The third and final part of each chapter examines the practices, doctrines, and ethics of the church, and the manner in which they reflect their respective causative factors. Scripture will be shown to mirror its earlier function in justifying schism; that is, Scripture provides the authority for new church practices. In this sense, Scripture can be called an “occasioning factor” in the creation of new churches.
IV. Defining Terms and Introducing the Field of Study

1. An overview

Faced with the wide-ranging and often conflicting approaches to Independence, in introducing the topic one is tempted either to be so precise as to be incomprehensible, or so general as to be wildly inaccurate. In order to avoid both these fates, this section will begin with a description of early scholarly treatment of AICs. Once one has grasped the initial approaches to Independence, it becomes possible to navigate through the murky waters that is current AIC scholarship.

Interest in Independence grew in the 1960's and 1970's, following a massive output of case studies on African Independent churches. Presently, scholarship identifies the 1950's as the peak of the Independence movement, and traces its beginnings back to the 1890's. With the publication of Sundkler's crucial work, The Bantu Prophets in South Africa, scholars have recognized two main streams: Ethiopianism and Zionism. Although different in origin and in theological emphases, these two types of churches were early lumped together, for they shared "independency" as a common feature. In David Barrett's words, independency is the:

...formation and existence within a tribe or tribal unit, temporarily or permanently, of any organized religious movement with a distinct name and membership, even as small as a single organized congregation, which claims the title Christian in that it acknowledges Jesus Christ as Lord, and which has either separated by secession from a mission church or an existing African independent church, or has been founded outside the mission churches as a new kind of religious entity under African initiative and leadership.

Harold Turner offered a more succinct definition: African Independent Churches are those formed in Africa, by Africans, for Africans.

The practical upshot of this flurry of academic writing, of course, was the

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20 Portions of the text in the following section come from an article by the author, to be published in the Fall 1998 edition of Mission.


22 Barrett, 50.

23 Harold Turner, Religious Innovation, 92.
proliferation of terms describing the same and/or different phenomena. For example, David Barrett listed some forty-two terms in the literature which could be placed under the umbrella of “independency.”

It was in response to this chaos that Turner produced the first, thorough typology of African Religious Movements in 1967. Following on Sundkler, he too identified two main branches of Independent churches: Prophet-healing (ie. Zionist) or Ethiopian.

Turner’s typology indicated a growing realization among scholarship that Independent churches could not be treated as a single, undifferentiated mass. Instead, there were two recognizable kinds of churches which had come about for different reasons and whose differences were subsequently reflected in their doctrine, polity, worship and ethics. That is, Ethiopian churches tend to remain closely aligned to the doctrines of the mother church, diverging only on some issues of discipline, liturgical practices, church structure, and attitude towards the indigenous culture. By contrast, Zionist churches show often considerable theological variation from the mission churches. Although both types emphasize the authority of the Bible, the Zionist churches approach Scripture and theology from within an African world view that “lacks a historical sense.”

As John Baur has noted, many of these AICs thus fail to realize that the New Testament replaces the Old covenant, that the historical event of salvation in Christ is somehow axiomatic and not merely another moment in God’s saving works continued in the prophet, and that the new AIC, while identified positively with the New Testament community, fails to recognize issues of apostolic tradition and succession.

The division of AICs between Zionist and Ethiopian types has thus become an accepted practice in the literature. It is at this point that the picture becomes more complicated. There is, first of all, the problem of terminology. Ethiopianism was the term

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25 Baur, 357.

26 Ibid.
used to describe South African churches which split off from missions over colonial issues such as African leadership. In Kenya, the term for such churches is Nationalist. When we come to Zionist churches, the situation becomes even more complicated still. In South Africa, Zionism refers to those churches which emphasize the work of the Holy Spirit, especially as it touches on charismatic gifts and healing. In Nigeria, however, this same phenomenon is referred to as Aladura (the “praying” churches), while in Kenya, these groups are called Spirit or Roho churches. Some scholars feel that Zionist churches should not be referred to as Independent churches at all. They object to the term “Independent” since it emphasizes political and social issues which were more closely linked to Ethiopian churches. In addition, the term AIC refers to separatism and secession, neither of which are primary features of Zionism. The Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC), for example, would have Zionist churches referred to as African Instituted churches. Evidently, this is a perspective which questions whether “independency” is a significant enough point of contact to justify the continued linking of Ethiopianism and Zionism together. The debate is irrelevant to this current project, since the goal is to show the unique role of Scripture in the creation of new church traditions. Ethiopian and Zionist churches are new traditions, and different ones; if it can be shown that Scripture plays a common role across the formation of two very different traditions, the task will be complete.

Since the case studies deal with Kenyan churches, the ABC will be referred to as a nationalist church and the ACHS as a Spirit church. When discussing the general trends of independency in Africa, however, ‘Ethiopianism’ and ‘Zionism’ will be used since these are the most widely accepted terms in scholarship.

The Zionist churches have created the greatest debate when scholars attempt more detailed typologies of AICs. In some typologies, messianic and prophetic churches are distinguished from Zionist ones. Sundkler himself later introduced messianic churches as a

27 In its early days, Ethiopianism seemed creative and innovative, and its nationalist spirit inspiring. Since the colonial period, however, these have lost their radical flavour and have become established churches alongside the mainline churches. Some scholars feel they now more closely resemble indigenised historic churches than Zionist ones. See Harold Turner’s article on the “Patterns of Ministry and Structure Within Independent Churches” for a fascinating discussion of the changes in polity and relations between Ethiopian churches and mainline churches. In Christianity in Independent Africa, (London: Rex Collings, 1978).
third type alongside Ethiopianism and Zionism. There have been many attempts to offer sub-
types of Zionist churches, but the confusing and conflicting use of terminology makes these
typologies virtually useless in scholarly discussion. 28

No attempt is made here to classify the African Church of the Holy Spirit as anything
other than Zionist. To offer a more precise classification would be a thesis topic in itself. It
is, however, quite possible to speak in general terms about Zionism while recognizing the
diversity within this group.29 Following Hastings, Sundkler, Turner, Baur and Ndikwere, the
following definition of Zionist groups is proposed: Zionist churches are those 1) which
emphasize pneumatic elements (speaking in tongues, dreams, visions, prophecy, healing,
Spirit baptism), 2) which interpret Scripture from an African religious perspective30
influenced also by fundamentalist or evangelical teachings (millenialism, literalism), 3)
which lack a historical sense (ex. do not assume that the New law has overtaken the Old) and
4) which understand revelation as Spirit breathed (in Scripture, in the prophetic leader, and in
visions, dreams and prophecies). Many, but not all Zionist churches form around charismatic
leaders. Most Zionist churches came about as the result of excommunication from mainline
mission churches.

Ethiopian churches are those which separated from mainline mission churches when
their demands for improved education, greater share in leadership, sensitivity over cultural
issues, and justice in economic, social and political matters were either ignored or denied by

28 For example, Ogbu Kahl speaks of an Aladura Zionist church as distinct from Aladura vitalistic, prophetic
or evangelical churches. Obviously for Kahl, Aladura and Zionist are not synonymour, in conversation, however, he
indicated that Aladura churches correspond to Sundkler's Zionist types. One might also compare Harold Turner and
Ogbu Kahl's use of terms like vitalistic, revivalistic, messianic and Zionist to see the confusion. Turner defines these
terms along sociological lines, whereas Kahl emphasizes more the theological aspects. Ogbu Kahl, The Embattled
Religious Movements ."

29 Turner makes the helpful reminder that there are no pure types, not even between Ethiopian and Zionist
churches. He notes that some Ethiopian churches in South Africa have taken on qualities of Zionist churches
(charismatic gifts), although it could probably be argued that the Ethiopian churches have been as much influenced by
the presently flourishing Pentecostal and charismatic movements as by Zionism. Turner, "Patterns of Ministry", 104-
5.

30 This view embraces Old Testament elements which closely correspond with the traditional world view:
legalism/taboo, polygamy, instrumentalism, sacrifice etc
missionaries. As noted earlier, these churches reflect the doctrines and ethics of the churches from which they arose, and differ only in some aspects of polity and worship. What makes their worship and polity different from the historic churches tends to be the scattered borrowing from a host of different sources.

Some scholars express reluctance to rely heavily on typologies when conducting academic research. While recognizing the limitations of typologies, it is nevertheless maintained here that Ethiopianism and Zionism are useful and widely recognized types. Also, it is only once one identifies patterns in the data that interesting questions can be asked of it.\(^\text{31}\) In order to gain a deeper understanding of the function of Scripture in the development of new church traditions, one is required to commit to a position on the typologies in the literature. The failure to distinguish between Ethiopianism and Zionism would be the greater error, for it would provide misleading results.

Having defined terms and introduced the topic of independency, this thesis will now to make a few general observations about Independent churches. For the most part, AICs derive from Protestant denominations, with Catholic separatist churches being the exception. Numerically, the phenomenon is significant, with some 8,000 cases of independency identified in 1990.\(^\text{32}\) Geographically, independency is generally limited to sub-Saharan Africa.

Ethiopianism, as a phenomenon, came to an end in the 1950's and 60's; Turner reported no new cases in his review of the literature in 1967. Zionist churches continue to proliferate, although not as newly founded movements but as secessions from within. From the 1970's onwards, most African contexts have been marked by splits within Zionist AICs into smaller and smaller groups. In addition, the Pentecostal and charismatic movements have gained such widespread support that many of the newly formed bodies are marked by

\(^{31}\) Church historian William Peterson offered a similar justification of the use of models in historiography. Models, he wrote, "assist us in discerning data...aid us in the arrangement of that data into patterns that make sense...[and] help us in asking questions of the data so arranged." William Peterson, "Church in History: Minority with Mission" Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church (53) 3: 244.

\(^{32}\) Baur, 353. Numbers are notoriously difficult to estimate with independent churches, since not all churches are registered, membership is established often by guesswork, and new churches are springing up daily.
this charismatic teaching.

When discussing the Kenyan context, Baur offered a helpful time frame for thinking about the growth of independent movements. The first wave of independency he identified was of the Ethiopian type. This was predominantly a pre-World War II phenomenon. Zionist churches formed during the second wave of independency, which Baur dated from the 1920's to the 1960's. Clearly, it is slightly artificial to speak of separate “waves” of independency when there is so much overlap, but it nevertheless helps set the ABC and ACHS within the wider context of independency in Kenya.33

2. The troublesome question of factors

A cause, according to the Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, is “that which produces something and in terms of which that which is produced, its effect, can be explained.”34 The universality of causation, that is, the principle that every event has a cause, was accepted as self-evident by philosophers and historians up until recently. In the modern period, the universality of causation has been thrown into question by some philosophers, and indeed, the whole issue of causation has become a source of controversy. Despite this, scholars inevitably revert to talk of causes when attempting to explain why certain events arose; the notion of “causes” is a natural part of human discourse and of historical investigation. The goal here is not to debate the various modern theories surrounding causation. Rather, the purpose of this section is to define how the terms “causes” and “causative factors” will be used in this paper.

To begin with, it should be pointed out that David Barrett’s study is based on an understanding of the uniformity of causation. This principle asserts that the relationship between cause and effect can be expressed in terms of general laws. In his study of AICs, Barrett attempted to uncover the conditions under which independency is likely to occur. This project suggests a predictive quality behind his use of causation, despite Barrett’s

33 Ibid., 350-51.

assertion that no single factor is essential for independency. While Barrett's study has merit, it is not this aspect of causation that will be developed in the present study.

In this paper, the terms 'causes' or 'causative factors' are used in the very loosest sense of the word. The term 'causes' indicates that certain kinds of events or changes are regularly conjoined with others. No necessary connection between any cause and its effect is implied. This potentially ambiguous terminology was purposely chosen for continuity with current usage in AIC scholarship. Almost without exception, "causation", "causes" and "causative factors" are the terms employed by scholars in discussing the origins of AICs.

Before moving on to a discussion of the state of knowledge, a word should be said about the term "occasioning factor". This term is not to be confused with the occasionalism of Cartesian philosophers. This is a new term, the author's own, coined to distinguish Scripture from other causes of schism. Causal or causative factors refer to the sources of disaffection in independency. The term "occasioning factor", by contrast, identifies the ecclesial issues raised by the principle of sola scriptura. By introducing this differentiation, it is being argued that two elements are usually present in schism: 1) the source of the dispute; 2) the means for an authoritative break.

V. State of Knowledge

In 1966, A Bibliography of Modern African Religious Movements was published. In this text, H. Turner and R.C. Mitchell offered brief reviews of some 1,313 published works. Roughly half these texts were published during the period between 1960 and 1966, although Turner and Mitchell began their research with publications dating back to 1870. The 1960's marked an explosion in research on AICs, which has continued unabated to this day. In 1977, for example, Turner updated the 1966 bibliography, adding materials from the period between 1970 to mid-1976. The total articles and books listed increased to close to 2000

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35 Barrett, 142.
36 Mitchell and Turner.
37 Barrett, 39.
entries. In what follows, mention will be made only of classic works on Independence and of works whose subject matter relates immediately to the ABC or ACHS.

In terms of case studies, Bengt Sundkler’s pioneering work *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* set the standard for all subsequent treatises on AICs. In this book, Sundkler focussed on the elements drawn from traditional religiosity within Zionist churches. Another important work is Harold Turner’s two volume study on the Church of the Lord. Among other things, Turner’s study offers readers an important examination of the interpretation of Scripture by the Adurra church. David Sandgren’s *Christianity and the Kikuyu: Religious Divisions and Social Conflict* is another work deserving mention. In his book, Sandgren argued that the Arathi and AOC churches (Kenyan AICs) are a unique amalgam of traditional religiosity and Scripture. This interpretation of Zionist groups is becoming an increasingly accepted one in the literature.

Gerhardus Oosthuizen’s *Post Christianity in Africa: A Theological and Anthropological Study* does not focus on any one AIC, but rather attempts a descriptive statement on the movement as a whole. As the title suggests, Oosthuizen took a highly critical approach to AICs, an attitude which subsequent generations of scholars have been quick to condemn. Nevertheless, the work is an important one, and offers insights on AIC uses of the Old Testament, on the place and function of traditional religiosity and on AIC interpretations of the Holy Spirit.

In terms of studies on the use of Scripture by AICs, there is of course David Barrett’s sociological study. A more theological approach to the question is taken in J.S. Mbiti’s *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*. His discussion of the role of Scripture in

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39 Sundkler.


Independency relies heavily on Barrett’s *Schism and Renewal* and Turner’s *Profile Through Preaching,* most helpful are Mbiti’s brief comments on the use of Scripture by Independents to establish ecclesial authority. Finally, Lamin Sanneh’s *Translating the Message* argues that vernacular translations of Scripture nursed the nationalist cause by increasing the value of the culture.

Grant LeMarquand published a bibliography on the use of Scripture in Africa. Some sixteen articles treat the Bible as it relates to AICs, although many only in a superficial way.

**VI. Sources**

The case studies on the ACHS and ABC are based in part on personal field research conducted during a six-week period in the summer of 1996. Documents include transcripts of interviews with church leaders and members, photographs, notes and personal observations from participation in church services, photocopies of archival materials, and copies of published church documents.

For each church, the author conducted one interview with a Bishop and several informal interviews with other lay and ordained informants. With the exception of the interview with Bishop Ngala of the ABC, all the interviews were informal and recorded on paper only, due to the mechanical failure of the author’s tape machine. The interviews of first generation ABC church members were conducted by J. Kioko, and the material in these is of varying quality. There are many yes/no questions, and at times, the interviewer very clearly influenced the answers. Nonetheless, there are long passages where interviewees were allowed to reminisce, and these provide insight into their own self-understanding as church. The name of the interviewer of first generation ACHS church leaders was not indicated on the photocopied material from St. Paul’s United Theological College. It would

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45 Mbiti. See especially chapter 2.


appear, however, that the interviews were conducted under the auspices of the National Christian Council of Kenya (NCCK).

Caution must be exercised in using church constitutions and histories because of bias. At the same time, the topics addressed in these documents supply us with clues to the sources of schism. In addition, constitutions and catechetical works provide examples of theological reflection. In this respect, church biases become an asset rather than a liability. In these documents, researchers witness the AIC’s process of re-interpreting Scripture and events to world, in the same way that the early church re-interpreted Old Testament texts to justify the foundling Church.

Secondary sources for the African Church of the Holy Spirit include anthropological studies of the Abahyia, as well as articles on the political and economic situation during the period in question. Few journal articles have been published on the ACHS, but Ane Marie Bak Rasmussen wrote a monumental work on the historical development of the church. In addition, she completed a thorough study of the Quaker mission out of which the AIC arose. Rasmussen’s study of the ACHS is the product of several years’ field work, Rasmussen having lived much of her adult life in Kenya. Rasmussen based her studies on interviews with ACHS leaders and laity, on Quaker archival documents (missionary correspondence, minutes from meetings etc.) and on personal observation. Both of Rasmussen’s works appear reliable, and certainly agree with the materials collected from the ACHS and from archival material at St. Paul’s Theological Seminary.

Secondary sources for the African Brotherhood Church are fewer, with material on the ABC being restricted to a handful of published articles. These are of varying quality. Plagiarism has occurred, but it is difficult to ascertain in which direction. There are also vagaries in the dating of events, but in no case do these distinctions affect the findings.

At this point, it is time to turn to the thesis proper, with case studies of the African

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Brotherhood Church (Chapter 2) and of the African Church of the Holy Spirit (Chapter 3).
CHAPTER 2:
CASE STUDY OF
THE AFRICAN BROTHERHOOD CHURCH

I. Introduction

The church in this case study represents a Nationalist AIC. The African Brotherhood Church (ABC) was formed during the first wave of independency in Kenya (1920-1950), and the causes of schism centred on political and cultural issues. In this chapter, it will be argued that vernacular translation of Scripture played a unique role in the origins and development of the ABC. After providing a summary of the history of the movement, the paper will examine the causes of independency; the function of Scripture will be discussed, and shown to be different from other causative factors. Finally, ABC polity, doctrine, liturgy and ethics will be investigated. In this sub-section, the extent to which ABC tradition reflects its causal factors in independency will be indicated. The function of Scripture will be contrasted to the other factors, in order to highlight its role as occasioning factor in schism.

II. History

The African Brotherhood Church was founded in 1945 following its split from the African Inland Mission (AIM), a Protestant faith mission from the United States.1 While the ABC has adherents from other ethnic groups, the Kamba make up the largest percentage of its membership. Its headquarters are in Machakos, Eastern Province — primarily a Kamba region. Before recording the actual history of the African Brotherhood Church, this thesis will describe the colonial and missionary context. Given the focus on Scripture, establishing the availability of vernacular translations prior to schism will be one of the first tasks in this section.

1. Missionary Context

The first missionary to the Kamba was the Church Missionary Society’ (CMS Anglican) Johann Krapf. His base was in “Mombaz”, where he settled on his arrival to

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1 Dick Anderson, We Felt Like Grasshoppers (Nottingham: Crossway Books), 32. AIM leader Charles Hurlburt insisted that AIM missionaries trust God to provide for their needs “on a faith basis”, citing Psalm 50:12 and Philippians 4:19.
Kenya in 1844. During the period of his ministry between 1844 and 1853, Krapf undertook substantial linguistic and Bible translation work in Ki-Swahili. His first contact with the Kamba came in January 1845, when he went to Endila and lived among the Kamba immigrants who had settled there during the famine of 1836. By March 1845, Krapf had already begun Scripture translation into Ki-Kamba. This first translation work met with only moderate success. “I read to them [the Kamba] some passages of my translation of the Gospel of John,” Krapf wrote in his diary “but they could not understand me...” With only three months’ language learning under his belt, could Krapf really expect otherwise?

It was not until 1848-49 that Krapf made a series of hazardous journeys into Kamba territory. In November of 1848, Krapf received permission from the Kamba chief of Kitui to send Christian instructors who would “teach them [the Kamba] the way of true happiness through the knowledge of God and His Son Jesus Christ.” Krapf, who was more successful as a linguist and explorer than as an evangelist, tried founding stations at Yata and following that, Ukambani. Both stations were abandoned, largely as result of his own isolation, illness, and inability to cope with considerable (and active) hostility from the Kamba. Indeed, Krapf gave up any hopes of founding a CMS mission among the Kamba following a violent attack on his travelling party. The attack was by Kamba who opposed the Musungu (white man) and Kivoi, the chief from Kitui and Krapf’s main supporter. Kivoi and several other Kamba were killed during this attack, and Krapf himself barely escaped with his life. Still, despite Krapf’s less than spectacular evangelistic campaign among the Kamba, he evidently made significant progress in language learning during this time. In 1850, the CMS published the Ki-Kamba Gospel of Mark. This work of Krapf’s gave the Kamba the distinction of being

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2 There is some discrepancy in the literature on the dates given for Krapf’s arrival in Mombasa. For example, Kimambo has him arriving in Rabai, near Mombasa, in 1848. [Isaria N. Kimambo, “The Economic History of the Kamba 1850-1950,” in Hadith 2, ed. B.A. Ogot (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1970), 80.] According to Krapf’s diaries, however, he and his wife first arrived in Mombasa on March 13, 1844. Johann Ludwig Krapf, Travels, Researches and Missionary Labours, During an Eighteen Years’ Residence in Eastern Africa (London: Trubner, 1860), 128.

3 Ibid., 141.


5 Ibid., 294. Text in italics my own.
one of the first ethnic groups in Kenya to have a portion of Scripture translated into their mother tongue.⁶

After Krapf left the area, the Leipzig Evangelical Lutheran Mission took over his translation work in Kitabe, producing translations of Luke (1898), Acts (1904) and Matthew (1909) in Ki-Kamba.⁷ Aside from their translation work, the shape and impact of this mission on the Kamba remains unknown. Prior to the arrival of the Lutherans, The East African Scottish Mission, also known as the East African Scottish Industrial Mission, established itself in Kibwezi under the leadership of Dr. Stewart Lovedale in 1891.⁸ The Mission concerned itself with agricultural, educational, industrial, and medical work, incorporating evangelism as a component part of each area of ministry. Both the Scottish Mission and Leipzig missionaries eventually left the area, to be replaced by the American Protestant organization, the African Inland Mission (AIM).

Like the Leipzig Mission and Krapf before them, the AIM took a good Protestant interest in the translation of Scriptures into Ki-Kamba. G.W. Rhoad and his colleagues Nellie Rhoad, Hattie Newman, C.F. Johnston, H.S. Nixon, Rose Horton, Emma Farnsworth, Clara Guilding, Frances Johnson, and native informants Aaron Kasyoki and Jeremiah Kyeva completed the New Testament translation, which was published by British and Foreign Bible Society in 1920.⁹ According to Horace Philip, over 7,000 Scripture portions had been circulated in the area by 1936.¹⁰ Upon completion of the New Testament, AIM missionaries tackled the Old Testament, beginning with Daniel (1935) and Genesis (1936). By 1956, the Kamba had the entire Bible translated into the vernacular language. As will be seen later, the dates and availability of vernacular translations will be critical in the assessment of the causes of independency.


⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Kimambo, 86.

⁹ Mojola, 10.

In order to understand the context in which the ABC was formed, it is important to examine the AIM mission style. Founded by the American Peter Cameron Scott in the late 1800's, the AIM was a faith mission, in that members trusted God to provide their financial needs and were not associated with any particular denomination. Like many faith missions, AIM’s stated goal was African evangelism, not education: “In view of the many untouched millions, we feel called to do a thorough evangelistic work, rather than to build up strong educational centers." As another AIM leader bluntly announced: “[D]irect soul winning shall be the first consideration, in everything." AIM’s first mission station was among the Kamba, and was established in 1895. Following Scott’s death in 1896, however, the station collapsed.

One of Scott’s supporters, Charles Hurlburt, took over the leadership of the ailing mission. After some structural reorganization, Hurlburt launched a major initiative to recommence AIM’s ministry in Kenya. Hurlburt chose Kijabe as his Headquarters, which unlike the four previous Kamba stations had the strategic value of being only two miles from the new government railroad. Kijabe thus became the main station from which AIM initiated its missionary training and Bible translation work. Based on data from Horace Philip’s 1936 report on missions in Kenya, it seems the AIM set up stations in Kangundu (1896), Mumbuni (near Machakos - 1902), Mbooni (1908) and Mukaa (1909).

Sandgren, who offered a harsh assessment of the AIM work in Africa, noted that under the guidance of Hurlburt the organization continued its emphasis on evangelism while treating African education and medical care as secondary concerns. True to many evangelical organizations at the time, education and medicine were seen as means to the end.

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11 Anderson, 32.

12 Excerpt of Minutes of the First Council Meetings of the AIM, quoted in David Sandgren, Christianity and the Kikuyu (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 19.

13 Quoted in Anderson, 34.

14 Philip, 152.

of conversion. Certainly, in comparison to other mission organizations operating in the country, the AIM did not have nearly as many schools. Take, for example, the findings in Horace Philip's report. By 1936, the AIM had the largest number of stations in Kenya, and the second largest missionary population at 67 (second only to the CMS - who had 4 more missionaries). Yet whereas the CMS had 307 schools with 15,014 scholars, the AIM had only 103 schools with a student population of 4,332. An even more startling contrast comes with the American Friends Board of Foreign Missions, which had established 318 schools with 14,450 scholars - this with only a total of 11 foreign missionaries.  

Sandgren suggested that the goal of AIM mission schools was simply to expose students to the Bible, which was their main textbook. Few AIM schools went beyond the second or third grade.  

The writings of AIM historian, Dick Anderson, concur with Sandgren's assessment. Anderson recorded that the Missionary Council of 1895 asked that field efforts be directed towards evangelistic work instead of the building up of quality educational centres. As late as 1928, AIM publications had missionaries announcing that their only object in literacy work was enabling people to read the Word of God. Whereas other mission groups arranged for higher education for their brightest pupils, AIM made no such provisions.

To be fair to the AIM, when the missionaries first established schools in the area, Kamba reception of the idea of education was less than enthusiastic. J. Forbes Munro indicated that this agrarian society initially saw little value in literacy. Instruction at the AIM schools would only mean time away from productive labour like herding, child-sitting, cultivating and hunting. In fact, Munro pointed out that in 1904-5, the AIM at Kangundu and Mumbuni tried paying Kamba children to attend their schools. This scheme met with little
success, and indeed in 1905 Kamba children went on strike, demanding increased pay! By the 1920's, however, the situation had changed. Seeing, perhaps, in education the means by which to gain access to European power and privileges, Kamba were clamouring for more and better schools for their children. The AIM failure to respond to these new demands caused deep resentment among the Kamba, Christian and non-Christian alike.

Sandgren made another important observation about AIM’s missionary work: AIM missionaries tended to take a very negative view of African society. Here again, Anderson’s work agrees with Sandgren’s. Anderson wrote:

A gulf of misunderstanding separated the early missionaries from the Wakamba. In the struggle for survival they had little time for language study and mostly they lacked the higher education which could assist them in this discipline. They wrote movingly about the horrors of the pagan darkness around them but were ill-equipped to understand the Kamba way of life.

Influenced perhaps by the Puritan bent of evangelicalism that spawned the organization, missionaries demanded that converts rid themselves of all ornamentation and of their skin garments. Doctors sewed up the pierced earlobes of new believers. Missionaries required observance of the Sabbath as a day of rest, and the end of tobacco consumption, dancing and dowry payments. As will be seen later in reports from ABC members, AIM missionaries enforced other strict prohibitions, most notably in their approach to alcohol and polygamy. Even more horrifying to the Kamba was the manner in which missionaries meted out church


23 Munro, 148.

24 Anderson, 38.

25 Sandgren, 24.

26 See Munro, 106 for a complete list.
discipline. At one mission station, Kangundu, AIM members faced public humiliation on the “black seat” for sinners should they transgress any of the extensive church rules and regulations.

AIM language in describing African society suggests a degree of culture shock on the part of missionaries. Perhaps it was this sense of the foreignness of African culture that led to racist comments and actions from some missionaries. Kikuyu women, for example, were described in an AIM report as “wild, black girls of the bush.” Kamba were described as “selfish, indolent and indifferent people.” One missionary, in a letter home, called the Kamba “filthy, ignorant and deceitful,” and utterly “wedded...to their heathenish ways.” AIM also practised the colour bar, having separate services for whites and for African Christians at their mission station in Kijabe, and separate Bible Studies at the Theological Training Center in Machakos. Munro noted the subservient role of Kamba among the missionaries. Early Kamba converts lived in or around the mission stations and worked at menial jobs as domestic servants and gardeners; the missionaries acted effectively as “family elders,” demanding that the Kamba obey their rules of conduct.

In the discussion of the causes of independency in Chapter 1, mention was made of the role which denominationalism played. Numerous scholars have observed that Africans did not see anything unusual about leaving mission churches to create their own because the Protestant mission churches themselves had set the pattern of schism. Between 1848 and


28 Munro, 152.

29 A pious, evangelical fervour for the conversion of the Kamba and the need to prove the worthiness of the cause to financial supporters back home can account in part for such rhetoric. Nevertheless, these comments undeniably reflect the racism of colonial society at that time.


31 Quoted in Munro, 103.

32 Quoted in ibid., 106.

33 Ibid, 110.
schism in 1945, the Kamba witnessed the struggle of a whole series of mission groups for a piece of the Kamba mission field. Eager for converts, wave after wave of mission groups came: the CMS; the East Africa Industrial Scottish and Leipzig Missions, the AIM, the Holy Ghost Fathers, the Seventh Day Adventists and later the Salvation Army. Tensions between the AIM and the Holy Ghost Fathers were especially high, resulting at one point in a dispute over mission sites.\(^{34}\) The AIM, in addition to demonstrating deep scepticism towards other denominations\(^{35}\) also managed the dubious honour of having its own missionaries initiate schisms within the church. Significantly, George Rhoad split from the AIM over a personal dispute with another AIM missionary. He returned to the Ukambani area to found the Gospel Furthering Fellowship in 1938. Prior to this split, George Rhoad had worked for twenty years with AIM among the Kamba, and during that time had gained a very high profile as a kind of "upstart chief"\(^{36}\).

Following World War I, the Salvation Army began its work in Kamba country, openly competing with the AIM. The Salvation Army, like the AIM, stressed evangelism over education and medical work.\(^{37}\) As scholars like Turner and Barrett have noted, in many ways Protestant churches set the example for schism in their open competition for membership, in their emphasis on differences between denominations and in their acceptance of these divisions.

2. The foundation of the ABC

The founder of the ABC was a Kamba, Simeon Mulandi Kaasya. Converted to the

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\(^{34}\) Ibid., 102.

\(^{35}\) The AIM's view on disciplinary matters (no drinking, dancing, smoking) and doctrinal matters hampered attempts by Protestant missions to achieve a United Church in Kenya, most notably at the Second Kikuyu Conference in 1918. The AIM blocked further work towards unity later on. Indeed, in 1966 the AIM threatened to quit the Christian Council of Kenya (CCK) - a multi-denominational association which was the successor to the Alliance of Missionary Societies in British East Africa - because of its affiliation with the 'liberal' WCC. It only remained with the CCK because of the refusal of the Africa Inland Church - the AIM Church in Kenya - to separate from the CCK along with the missionary body. John Baur, 2000 Years of Christianity in Africa (Nairobi: Paulines Publications in Africa, 1994), 256-7. Adrian Hastings, A History of African Christianity: 1950-1975 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 163.

\(^{36}\) Munro, 105.

Christian faith by a member of the Salvation Army in 1925, he for years worshipped in that church before heading to Nairobi for training as a Salvation Army Officer. According to an ABC member’s account of the founding of the Church, Kaasya had already felt a call to found an AIC while he worked for the Salvation Army.38 This early date is confirmed by J. Kioko, who recorded in an interview with Kaasya that the idea of an AIC was in Kaasya’s mind as early as 1938. Mukote and Kioko both cited an event in this year as significant in influencing subsequent developments. It was in 1938 that the colonial government decided to confiscate the Kamba cattle due to chronic overgrazing in the Yatta Plateau.39 Under the government scheme, the Kamba cattle would be forcibly culled and sold at bargain prices to a British meat packing company or to European ranchers. For the Kamba, cattle was their equivalent to GICs and RSP’s - cattle was like currency and a guard against future hardships. Not surprisingly, the Kamba approached the Governor to protest the destocking campaign. After many delays, the Governor finally agreed to meet with the Kamba and their leaders at Kariobangi in Nairobi. The Governor asked George Rhoad, who was present at that meeting, to open in prayer. Rhoad refused, saying that the Kamba should “pray to their own God.”40 Kioko reported that Rhoad’s words left a deep impression on Kaasya and other future ABC leaders who were present in the audience. They took Rhoad’s words to mean that the Kamba could communicate to God directly, without mediation through Europeans.

38 Ibid., 147.

39 The colonial administrators had attempted a similar destocking programme in 1927, but had to abandon the plan due to effective protests on the part of the Kamba. The destocking campaign of 1938 seems to have posed a crisis moment for the Kamba at all levels of society. Indeed, the campaign prompted the organization of some of the first political opposition to the colonial government. Interestingly, many of the leaders of the anti-destocking groups, such as the Ukamba Members’ Association, were also prominent members of the mission churches. For a full discussion of Kamba land alienation and cattle crises, see Munro’s chapters on “Agrarian Distress: Population, Land and Livestock,” and “The End of Localism.”

40 R.M. Mukote, “The Growth and Development of the African Brotherhood Church in Mitaboni and Kangundo Locations, 1973-1976, in the Light of its Beginnings.” TMs [photocopy], p.4 (Archives, St. Paul’s United Theological College, Limuru, Kenya). While Rhoad’s name surfaces here and there at important moments in AIM and ABC history, no comprehensive picture is given of him in the literature. Why Rhoad took this view on African independency remains a mystery, although one may make conjectures. Many missionaries in Africa spoke positively of (eventual) indigenous leadership of the mission churches, and Rhoad obviously was one of these. His split from the AIM in this same year (1938) may indicate a falling out with the AIM about this issue. Not surprisingly, Rhoad is not one of the missionaries presented in Anderson’s history of the AIM!
Kaasya left the Salvation Army in 1941 to join George Rhoad’s Gospel Furthering Fellowship in 1942, becoming an evangelist. It was during this time that he founded the Akamba Christian Association, apparently with Rhoad’s knowledge. The stated goals of this organization were threefold: 1) to hasten the development of education programmes in Kamba country; 2) to promote unity among rival Christian denominations; 3) to encourage African leadership in the Church. All the documentation agrees that it was at this time Kaasya began sharing with close friends his vision for an AIC. Apparently during one of the Association’s meetings, Kaasya stood up and preached from Acts 17:24-28 (and possibly also Acts 10:34-35). He claimed that all people were called to seek after God, and that Africans should lead Africans and not seek help from others.41

The Association officially became a Church only in 1945. Kaasya applied to the government for a church licence and on April 8, 1945, founded the African Brotherhood Church. Standing under the ABC flag in Kariakor market with his wife and three children, Kaasya sang “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” in Ki-Swahili and Ki-Kamba. Then, Kaasya announced the founding of his new church.42

The ABC began its operation in Nairobi, but in 1947 Kaasya moved the Headquarters to Kangundo in the Ukambani area. This would seem a logical move, given that the ABC was a Kamba-initiated organization. The fledgling church would have a better chance of surviving in Kamba territory than in cosmopolitan Nairobi. Indeed, the ABC grew rapidly following this move to the rural region. The organization moved its headquarters once more in 1951, to Mitaboni near Machakos Town, and finally to Machakos Town in 1976, where it is today. The ABC remained under the leadership of Kaasya until 1951, when his nephew Ngala took over. Although the details remain unclear, Ngala apparently confronted Kaasya over a “misdemeanour” involving women. After unsuccessfully contesting his expulsion

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41 Mukote has Kaasya say: “Africans must search for God, they must feel with their hands like a blind man, until they find Him. God is present in Africa as He is in Europe, America or Asia; the African should seek God in Africa until they find Him for He is there with them - not to be helped by other people to know him.” [Mukote, 5] Mukote gathered this quote from J.K. Kioko, who conducted a series of interviews with Kaasya. Kioko does not appear to have been present at this meeting in Nairobi, being a schoolboy at the time. The article, “The African Brotherhood Church”, quoted an almost identical text, and also identified the source as Jasper Kioko.

from leadership, Kaasya left the ABC and later founded another AIC, the Church of East African Society.\(^{43}\)

By 1975 the ABC had some 75,000 members, mostly Kamba, and largely drawn from former AIC members.\(^{44}\) According to an article by R. Paul Stevens and Brian Stelck, by 1986 the church had 130, 366 members in 401 churches in Kenya and Tanzania.\(^{45}\) Thanks in part to its size and "orthodoxy", the ABC was early recognized as a "church" by the National Christian Council of Kenya (NCCK). In 1968, the ABC was even a delegate to Abidjan for the All Africa Conference of Churches, a further sign of its acceptance within the "orthodox" fold.\(^{46}\) As with other Nationalist Kenyan churches, the ABC has gained a respectability that many AICs of the Spirit-type have not.

**III. Causal Factors to Independency**

Barrett identified vernacular translations of Scripture as the single most important factor in determining the likelihood of independency in any group. Certainly, the Kamba meet the required criteria, having had the entire New Testament translated by 1920 and the entire Bible by 1956. Further, as Yves Schaaf observed in his study of the history and role of the Bible in Africa, the Bible was generally the main reading material in most of the mission schools. This was in part because the Bible was the first text translated into vernacular languages, and also because the main goal of literacy for most mission agencies was to enable believers to read the Scripture. This was unquestionably the AIM policy among the Kamba.

Scholars claim that as Africans read Scripture, they began to realize a discrepancy

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\(^{45}\) Hastings and Stelck's statistics are cited with some hesitation. It is notoriously difficult to gain an accurate count of membership of AICs, given a tendency to inflate numbers. It is not clear where Hastings and Stelck got their figures. R. Paul Stevens and Brian Stelck, "Equipping Equippers Cross-Culturally: An Experiment in the Appropriate Globalization of Theological Education," *Missiology* 21/1 (1993): 32.

between Western missions and Christianity. Previously, when the missionaries had been the sole interpreters of the Christian faith, Africans had to accept their readings as the gospel truth. Christianity was, after all the faith of the white people. As Schaaf noted, however, the Bible raised many questions for Africans about colonialism and their society, particularly in the period leading up to independence.47

To what extent did Bible translations play a role in independency in the ABC? In order to be able to properly assess this, one must first look at the other factors indicated in the literature.

1. ABC - A Call for Unity

As scholars have been quick to point out, many Africans felt uncomfortable with the denominational diversity inherited from Protestantism. Barrett noticed that many AICs emphasize love, fellowship and brotherhood, incorporating in these terms the African values of communal life and group solidarity.48 The considerable denominational diversity in the Kamba area prior to 1945 has already been indicated. The presence of Independent missionaries like Stuart Watt in Machakos, the obvious tensions between Catholics and Protestants, and the schisms from mission churches by their own missionaries – as in the case of George Rhoad - made visible the lack of unity among European and American Christians. The idea that people of (apparently) the same race could be so divided among themselves seemed surprising if not incomprehensible to the Kamba, especially as the causes of these historic divisions were a mystery to them. More troubling, however, for the Kamba, was the imposition of these divisions onto Kamba Christians. Mukote observed that the divisions among the mission churches was such that “a member of one denomination could not marry from another denomination lest he/she be excommunicated.”49 There is no question that part of the goal of the ABC, especially prior to its incorporation as a church, was the promotion of unity among believers. According to Mukote, the purpose of the Association was not to form

47 Ype Schaaf, On Their Way Rejoicing: The History and Role of the Bible in Africa. Translated by Paul Ellingworth (Carlisle, UK: The Paternoster Press, 1994), 188.

48 Barrett, 167.

49 Mukote, 3.
another church but to bring about reconciliation between the various mission churches. In
defence of this reading of events, Mukote pointed out that the money collected by the
*Association* was distributed to the churches represented by the various members. Most
mission churches refused these gifts, and it was only upon the excommunication of
*Association* members from the missions that the decision was made to split off and form a
new church.

ABC’s marked interest in bringing about unity in the Church is reflected in the very
name chosen: the African *Brotherhood* Church. It is also significant that in its Constitution,
the ABC lists as its first object the co-operation of Christians “in accord without differences
of denominations, to fulfil the commandment of the Lord Jesus Christ which he commanded
His disciples: – Matthew 28:19-20; and Acts 1:8.” Its second stated purpose is similar in
intent: “to object [oppose] the flattering of one denomination instead of praising Jesus Christ
who is worthy praise as it is written in John 17:15-26.” These emphases are observable also
in the ABC history, written in the mid-1980’s. In this pamphlet, the authors list seven
founding principles of the church. Among them, one finds the following:

4. To believe that there is only one Church the world over, among all nations. It is
founded in faith in Jesus.
5. To accept that a church accepting discrimination, division or favouritism is against
the plan of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Ironically, the one way the ABC was able to bring about unity among Kamba believers was
by splitting off from the mainline mission churches!

2. *ABC - Nationalist Church*

Hastings pointed out that the ABC is fairly representative of the Nationalist type
church. Many of the factors leading to independency can certainly be tied to
missionary/colonial rule. Among the grievances listed in the interviews and articles, one

50 “Constitution and Rules of the African Brotherhood Church.” TMs [photocopy]. Archives, St. Paul’s
United Theological College, 1.

51 Ibid. Text in italics mine.

52 *African Brotherhood Church: Miaka Arobani Ya Kazi, 8-4-1945—8-4-1985* (Machakos: Privately
discovers the following: the failure of the various missions to allow a place for African leadership; the neglect by AIM to promote education in Kamba country; AIM condemnation and excommunication of polygamists from the Christian community; and rigid AIM teachings on certain cultural matters.\(^{53}\)

\textit{African leadership:}

In the period before independence, it was inevitable that AIM missionaries should be associated to a certain extent with the colonial regime. An ABC member’s blunt assessment of the mission situation in Kamba country is probably fairly representative of the feeling in this period:

Black Africans outnumbered the whites at least one hundred to one. But Kenya was white man’s land; every department of its life was ruled by whites [...] The African Churches which the missionaries set up, like the country, were part of white man’s land with the missionaries the big men and the big voice in most major decisions.\(^{54}\)

The growing dissatisfaction among Kenyans with white rule extended, apparently, to missionary domination of the Church.

Although the ABC drew its membership primarily from the AIM church, Kamba dissatisfaction with white control of the mission churches was fairly generalized. As Munro recorded, by the 1920’s Kamba Christians began to contest American missionary domination of leadership structures. Baptisms, marriages, and Holy Communion were celebrated by missionaries alone, because no Kamba ministers had been ordained. The Kamba refused to accept, however, missionary excuses that training for ministry would be too time-consuming an affair.\(^{55}\) They suspected the missionaries of discrimination, and as time went on, their suspicions deepened. Indeed, in J. Kioko’s interviews with first generation ABC members, there is a litany of complaints directed against missionaries on this topic. Kamba like Nathan Nzioki claimed that African Salvation Army (SA) officers were offered lower pay and

\(^{53}\) It is difficult to assess, historically, the importance of these factors relative to the issue of denominationalism. As will be seen in the discussion of the role of Scripture, however, the ABC put forward the issue of unity as the "official" reason for secession.

\(^{54}\) "The African Brotherhood Church," 146.

\(^{55}\) Munro, 152.
different uniforms from their European colleagues. Missionary officers always supervised the Africans. Furthermore, the finances of the SA were not open to scrutiny by the Kamba membership, which left the SA open to charges of mismanagement. Another Kamba, Timothy Muinduko Dulu, left Rhoad's Gospel Furthering Fellowship church for the ABC precisely because the ABC offered Africans meaningful positions of leadership. Additionally, Dulu claimed that he did not feel "foreign" to the ABC because members were kept informed of church and administrative and financial matters. AIM members felt the same dissatisfaction over their exclusion from all decision-making on AIM policies and financial practices: AIM's general practice of discrimination against Africans has already been noted.

Again, this frustration with AIM treatment of Kamba leaders has echoes today in the recently written history of the ABC. In the list of the founding principles of the church, the ABC authors noted:

6. It will always acknowledge that everybody deserves respect by following the word of God.
7. It will always acknowledge that an individual will find salvation thanks to their faith in Jesus Christ and will find recognition equal to their acts.

Interestingly, this call for equal and fair treatment is listed alongside doctrines such as the lordship of Christ and the authority of Scripture. Clearly, AIM discrimination was keenly resented by Kamba Christians.

Expressing dissatisfaction with the lack of African leadership was one thing — actually contemplating a split from the missions was another matter entirely. Ironically, it seems it was from the missionaries that Kamba Christians found the initiative to start up a new

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56 See for example comments by Nathan Makola. Kioko, Interviews, 47.
57 Timothy Muinduko Dulu. Ibid, 37.
58 Nathan Makola. Ibid., 47.
59 Horace Philip’s report on the mission situation in Kenya in 1936 provides interesting insight on the AIM view of African workers. AIM had 142 "native workers" to its 67 missionaries. The CMS, by contrast, employed some 922 Africans (to its 71 missionaries) and the FAM some 520 (to its 11 missionaries). Philip, 151.
60 African Brotherhood Church: Miaka Arobaini Ya Kazi, 11. Italics mine.
church.\textsuperscript{61} For example, the same Nathan Nzioki who complained of lack of African leadership in the SA, also claimed that it was SA Major Brotton in Nanyuki who first convinced him of the possibility of an African-led church. Apparently, Major Brotton “prophesied” that the time was coming when African would lead the church. Brotton’s words left a deep impression on Nzioki: in 1945 the latter joined the ABC, believing it to be the fulfilment of these hopes.\textsuperscript{62} Several articles found in the archives at St. Paul’s also make much of the Kamba Cattle crisis of 1938. As already mentioned, George Rhoad refused the Governor’s request to open the gathering in prayer. Instead, Rhoad said that the Kamba should pray. One of the Kamba leaders, Paul Maingi, is reported to have prayed: “God of the Africans, who gave us this continent in which we are being persecuted, save our cattle.”\textsuperscript{63} Kamba like Kaasya were greatly impressed by these words of Rhoad, taking them to refer positively to African leadership in matters of faith.

\textit{Education in Kamba Country:}

As noted earlier in the discussion of the missionary context, the AIM was not known to put considerable emphasis on its education or medical programmes in the area. At the same time, the Kamba eagerly sought after education for their children. The Kamba saw education as the means by which they and their children could improve their standard of living. The Kamba were frustrated when the AIM ignored their demands for a better education system. They took the lack of missionary interest in improving AIM schooling as a deliberate intent to thwart Kamba progress.\textsuperscript{64}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{61} Aside from citing such cases of missionary “support” for independency, early ABC members had very few positive things to say about missionaries. In interviews, the (occasional) missionary support of indigenisation of the churches was seen less as a mark in favour of the missionaries than as testimony to the validity of independency. Such unequivocal condemnation of missionaries by first generation ABC members should not come as a surprise. During the interviews by Kioko, ABC members were obviously seeking to justify their secession and not to present an ‘objective’ account of events.
  \item \textsuperscript{62} Nathan Nzioki Makola. Kioko, “Interviews,” 47.
  \item \textsuperscript{63} As reported in Kioko, “The Foundation and Development of African Brotherhood Church (1942-1968),” 7.
  \item \textsuperscript{64} AIM historian Dick Anderson noted that Kamba Christians were deeply suspicious of missionary motives in the education question, believing that missionaries refused them better education in order to hinder their progress. In Machakos, Kamba Christians demanded that the missionaries leave “for lack of interest in Africans’ welfare.”
\end{itemize}
This frustration with the AIM over its neglect of Kamba education is seen over and over in interviews with ABC members. Bishop Ngala recounted, for example, the case of the 1946 Mukaa school conflict between missionaries and Kamba elders. Parents of children attending the Mukaa school were dissatisfied with the quality and level of education being offered. At their own expense, they employed an ex-Form II teacher—a certain Mr. Wellington Mulwa Kituri. This (unauthorised?) hiring for the schoolchildren led to a direct conflict with the AIM missionaries. Kituri was eventually taken to court by a missionary named Guilding, and Kituri was fined for trespassing on mission property. It is not clear from the documents what exactly Kituri’s job involved. Was he to act as rival to one of the mission-chosen teachers, or was he teaching a new level? Perhaps Kituri simply acted as a tutor, teaching the children after school hours. It is not possible here to establish the relative guilt or innocence of either party. This incident does serve, however, to point out the level of discontent of the Kamba. So unhappy were they with the education system that they pooled their resources to hire their own teacher! Additionally, as far as the Kamba were concerned, Guilding’s actions confirmed suspicions that the missionaries were “trying to keep the Akamba behind.” Whether true or not, this was the commonly held belief at the time.

While one may have a certain level of sympathy with the school administration, on the whole AIM missionaries appear to have taken a recalcitrant and unpopular approach to the issue of education. Kioko recorded in interviews that some AIM missionaries taught it was “un-Christian” to be educated. If one was able to read Scripture, then surely this was enough—or at least, so reasoned many AIM missionaries. In the late 1920’s, when Kamba demands for education became stringent, AIM missionaries grumbled about the allocation of money to

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Anderson, 84. Munro quoted from the report of a provincial commissioner, who had observed the tendency of the more “materially-minded” Kamba to abandon AIM schools in favour of government run ones. They made this switch to “help them on the road to progress.” Munro, 156. See Munro for an extensive discussion of Kamba frustration with the educational system, particularly during the 1920’s. Chapter VIII: School and Church.


66 J. Kioko, “General Comments (on the ABC Church),” TMs [photocopy], p.3. Archives, St. Paul’s United Theological College, Limuru, Kenya.
such “secondary affairs” when spiritual needs were so high. Additionally, AIM carried its prejudices against other denominations over to the area of education. A former AIM member, Simion Kiliku Mbili, reported that he was excommunicated from the mission church when he sent one son to the Government School at Machakos, and another to the Holy Ghost Mission at Kabaa. AIM members informed him that sending a “Christian” boy to a Roman Catholic school was simply unacceptable. This kind of rigid, exclusivist approach was bound to be a source of contention between missionaries and the Kamba Christians.

In light of these findings, it is hardly surprising that one of the initial goals of Kaasya’s Akamba Christian Association was the development of education programmes in Kamba country. Again ABC’s constitution lists as one of its objects the opening of new schools and the education of (Kamba) children. The formation of AICs over the issue of education was not unusual in Kenya during this period. The Kikuyu ACC&S is yet another example of this.

Polygamy and Cultural Practices:

Missionary condemnation of polygamy and of other cultural practices like female circumcision have long been noted as a major cause of independency. In the Kamba region, the AIM was quite clear on its teaching on polygamy: polygamists could not become church members and any Christian who became a polygamist would be excommunicated. Indeed, as a condition for baptism, converts had to promise not to marry more than one wife. Since polygamy was widely practised in the Kamba region, this teaching led to the exclusion of a large proportion of the population, including of course many elders in the community.

Simeon himself claimed that one of his reasons for starting the ABC was to minister to polygamists excluded from the church. In an interview with Kioko, he related this pastoral concern, noting that the polygamists were “left outside in the cold, like sheep without a

67 Munro, 153.
69 Constitution, 1.
70 Anderson, 39.
shepherd." He claimed that these men were good people who needed the Gospel message as much as any other; the AIM was wrong to withhold Christianity from them. Simeon believed that change could be better effected from within the prevailing structure, rather than from without. ABC member Timothy Muinduko Nduu, formerly of the Gospel Furthering Fellowship (GFF), also cited the missionary stance on polygamy as one of the main reasons he left the GFF to join the ABC. Nduu rightly spoke of the painful consequences of the dissolution of polygamous marriages. The disinherited children and former wife(ves) were left without any provisions. Nduu questioned whether such teaching could possibly Christian, as it involved abandoning the wives and children for whom one had taken on responsibility.

Kioko recorded that during this interview, Nduu quoted Scripture (passages not noted in transcript), from which he deduced that "God wants you to come to Him as you are when he calls you." Missionaries were accused of lack of cultural sensitivity in this area, and their dogmatic approach to the question of polygamy was unquestionably one of the causes of schism. To this day, ABC allows polygamists to become members of their church, although they may not take on positions of leadership. The ABC does not allow its married members to take on a new wife once they have joined the church.

Perhaps a less glaringly obvious problem related to the missionaries' rigid and legalistic approach to a number of side issues. As mentioned earlier, the AIM tended to frown upon anything African, and also to manifest a narrow puritanism (ex. No piercing of earlobes, no dancing, no drinking). Thus, the Kamba Christians were told by missionaries that it was wrong to grow sugar cane since beer was made from it. AIM Christians were not permitted to grow millet because it meant chasing the birds away on Sundays. This kind of legalism was incomprehensible to most Kamba, and indeed, sounds strange to modern Western ears. The Kamba, of course, had not experienced the Western evangelical Revivals, and could not know all the reasoning behind these prohibitions. These cultural gaps lent a

72 Timothy Nduu. Kioko, Interviews, 37.
73 As reported by Simion Kiliku Mbili, a Kamba ABC member who was with the AIC from 1926-46. Ibid.
foreign air to the mission church. When it came down to problematic issues like polygamy and annoying restrictions on cultural or agricultural practices, schism became an attractive alternative.

**Colonial Injustices:**

This last causal factor is not one ever identified by ABC members. It is, however, frequently observed in the literature. African Independent Churches, especially of the Nationalist type, are often presented as protest movements which attempted to meet social needs either through a millennial emphasis on heavenly rewards and relief from suffering (as with the Spirit type churches), or by seeking to ameliorate current social conditions, usually through education.

In an article by Lonsdale, one finds a particularly intriguing view of AICs as effective organizers of social and political discontent. Lonsdale suggested that in the period between 1918 and 1939, AICs were able to harness African protest to colonial government in a way that secular political and welfare associations were simply unable to do. Lonsdale’s argument is convoluted, but seems to hinge on two elements: 1) the tendency for missions to produce the most educated, articulate leaders; 2) the Kamba Christians’ willingness to accept Western elements which presumably would bring more power to their people.

To list all the Kamba grievances against the colonial government would take pages. Land alienation, taxes, forced labour, cattle destocking, violent punitive measures in cases of disobedience or unrest, and cultural imperialism of various forms all served to heighten Kamba anger towards the colonial government. As has been noted time and time again, frustration with the government was often directed towards the missionaries, who were fully

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75 Cheryl Townsend Gilkes made a similar argument, noting that it was logical that the first African rebellions should be religious ones. She argued that the “African perception of the biblical text was often determined by those apocalyptic texts that promised the social and cultural healing that Africans so desperately wanted and needed.” Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, “Colonialism and the Biblical Revolution in Africa,” *The Journal of Religious Thought* 41 (1985): 59-75.

76 Kimambo noted that by 1928 there were 280 settlers in the Machakos area alone. Kimambo, 89. Munro wrote in great length about the government tendency to succumb to settler pressures to sell “native” land - even the so-called un-alienated lands - at bargain basement prices.
identified with the colonial rulers. Munro cited an example from the Holy Ghost mission at Kabaa, when local elders went to the mission station to ask for licenses to run sugar-mills. The father in charge, recalling the incident, wrote in exasperation: "Really! People seem to see the Fathers as the Lords of this country!"77 Of course, this perceived collusion with the government was verified, in Kamba eyes, when missionaries conducted themselves as though they were the Lords of the country. One notable example was Peter Scott's first encounter with the Kamba, as recorded by Dick Anderson. When the Kamba, tiring of the missionaries' un-invited occupation of their land, began to threaten them with a show of arms, Scott "promptly told them that since they treated the white man so shamefully, 'I now command every one of them to clear out.'"78 Doubtlessly, these bold words showed great courage of Scott's part, but also demonstrated little sensitivity to the land rights of the Kamba.

Whether consciously or no, the formation of the ABC can be also seen as a protest movement against some of the very real injustices of the colonial period.

3. *Assessment of Scripture in Relation to Causal Factors*

In the case of the African Brotherhood Church, as with most AICs, one is dealing with multiple causation behind schism. In the constitution, the reasons given for the formation of the African Brotherhood Church are essentially twofold: the ABC was created for the purposes of encouraging unity among the different denominations and for the development of medical and educational services in the Kamba region. As discussed earlier, other causal factors cited by informants include such things as the missionary failure to provide for meaningful African leadership in the mission churches and the missionary insensitivity to Kamba traditions and social practices. These elements are also ones mentioned in the ABC history, *African Brotherhood Church: Miaka Arobani Ya Kazi, 8-4-1945–8-4-1985*.

It is difficult to assess directly the role of Scripture in the formation of the African Brotherhood Church. It has been shown that vernacular translations in Ki-Kamba pre-dated the ABC schism from the AIM. Further, not only was the Bible translated into Ki-Kamba, but as the primary textbook in the AIM schooling system it received wide distribution. It has also

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77 Cited in French in Munro, 104. My translation.

78 Anderson, 22.
been demonstrated that in good Protestant form, the AIM taught Kamba believers that the Bible is the authoritative book of the Christian faith. From it, Kamba believers learned, individuals could discover the divine rule by which they were to live. That the Kamba fully seized this principle of *sola scriptura* is evident from the ABC constitution, where belief in the bible as the “Holy Book Divine of God” was cited as the first item of belief. The second item followed from the first: “and that all the words therein should be believed and done by all who believe on Jesus Christ.”79 In what sense, however, have these findings furthered our understanding of the role of Scripture in bringing about the foundation of the ABC?

To begin with, one can argue that while the causes for schism appear to have been over issues of unity, education, leadership and cultural values, the *validation* of these causes found their basis in Scripture. Scripture showed Kamba Christians that the injustices they experienced in the mission churches were not an integral part of the Christian faith. To be “Christian” did not require their being a part of a white church. Rather, in Scripture they found the authority with which to question mission practices and to contest for change.

It is perhaps not insignificant that one of the two required texts to be read on the anniversary date of the founding of the church is Acts 10:34-35. The passage reads as follows: “Then Peter began to speak to them: ‘I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.’”80 It was from this passage that Simon Kaasya found inspiration and justification in establishing the ABC; it was this passage that he expounded to fellow Kamba Christians in Nairobi in 1942. Kaasya’s interpretation of this passage took a decidedly independent streak: “Africans must search for God, they must feel with their hands like a blind man until they find Him. God is present in Africa as He is in Europe, America or Asia; the African should seek God in Africa until they find Him for He is there with them - not to be helped by other people to know Him.”81 The very principle of independency, then, was justified before fellow Kamba

79 Constitution, 1.
80 Acts 10:34-35. NRSV.
81 Quoted in Mukote, 5.
believers from Scripture. While Kaasya admitted that the idea of independency came to him originally from AIM missionary George Rhoad, it was the text in Acts which allowed this germ of an idea to flourish.

When drafting its Constitution, the ABC authors wanted to list the reasons which justified the creation of a new church. In the eyes of ABC leadership, the strongest argument for founding a new church was the AIM's failure to meet the biblical mandate of unity. Thus, the ABC Constitution put as its first goal the fulfilment Christ's command to "go into all the world" (quoting Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8), "without differences of denominations".\(^2\) Note that the ABC thus took over from the Whites the prerogative of "missionary work." The ABC's second stated object was to "object [oppose] the flattering of one denomination instead of praising Jesus Christ who is worthy praise as it is written in John 17:15-26."\(^3\) The passage referred to, which is a lengthy one, speaks about the unity desired by Christ for his church:

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.\(^4\)

Although the AIM was not specifically mentioned in the Constitution, the inference is clear: in trying to promote disunity among Kamba Christians, the AIM actively worked against Christ's calling for his church. The ABC was formed to fulfil this biblical mandate, and to succeed where the AIM had failed.

In more general terms, the tendency of church members to cite scripture in defending schism, African leadership and the acceptance of polygamists\(^5\) shows that the Kamba recognized in Scripture the book by which they could justify their existence to the wider

\(^2\) Constitution, 1.

\(^3\) Ibid.

\(^4\) John 17:20-23. NRSV.

\(^5\) See for example Kioko, Interviews, 37.
Christian Community.

While the Bible doubtlessly played a role in enabling Christians to articulate the legitimacy of their complaints, this disaffection would probably have been felt even in the absence of vernacular translations. Kamba tribal unity was such that they doubtlessly would have found any divisions imposed from the outside as offensive. Denominational differences, with their mysterious origins in Europe, would have been a puzzle even without Scriptural passages pointing to the need for unity among believers. The Bible was not needed for Kamba to feel frustration at the squelching of their aspirations for positions of leadership and for better education. Again, what Scripture did allow for was the powerful validation of these feelings of dissatisfaction. In their quest for independency, the Kamha found in Scripture the means by which they could defend themselves before the wider Christian community.

In sum, vernacular translations provided the Kamba Christians with the same authoritative text appealed to by missionaries. When change was not forthcoming, schism was deemed a possible alternative since the Kamba now possessed the book which gave them guidelines on how to form a 'true' church. The role of Scripture in independency is thus subtly but significantly different from other causative factors. For this reason, vernacular translations of Scripture might be called an 'occasioning,' rather than a causal factor of schism.

IV. The Shape of the African Brotherhood Church

At the outset, it was claimed that the difference between Scripture as occasioning factor and disaffection as causal factor should be detectable in the development of the new church. At this point, then, Baur’s observations about the theological orientation of Nationalist churches will be revisited. Baur noted that Nationalist churches like the ABC tended to remain closely aligned to the doctrines of the mother church, diverging only on some issues of discipline (ex. Admission of polygamists), liturgical practices, church structure, and attitude towards the indigenous culture. Given that the causes for independency were largely over colonial issues, it is not surprising that Nationalist churches should differ from the historic Western ones only in minor matters of doctrine or practice. Indeed, it was predicted that the causal factors leading to schism would shape the kinds of
changes witnessed in the new churches. Scripture, as the occasioning factor, would set the boundaries and offer the authority for any changes. As will be seen in the next section, this has certainly been the case in the African Brotherhood Church.

In this section, the unique characteristics of the African Brotherhood Church will be outlined. This section will begin with a description of the membership, institutional structures, practices and doctrines of the African Brotherhood Church. Following this, the extent to which these features could be predicted from the causal factors will be assessed. A special focus will be the role of Scripture in the development of these new traditions.

1. Membership

Given that the AIM had the largest missionary presence among the Kamba and that the ABC was an ethnically-based Kamba initiative, it comes as no surprise to learn that the ABC drew the vast majority of its membership from AIM churches. In this sense, the ABC is rightly considered a breakaway from the AIM church. As noted in the history of the church, however, the ABC appealed to Christians of many denominational colours. The Akamba Christian Association, from which the ABC grew, included among its members those Kamba believers from other churches. The founder himself was officially from the Salvation Army. Other churches from which the ABC drew its membership include the Imperial British East African Church, the Salvation Army, the Church Missionary Society (Anglican), and Rhoad’s Gospel Furthering Fellowship. The denominational diversity of the ABC reflects a desire for unity among believers, a desire which was one of the causative factors behind schism.

It is important to note that Kamba pastors were among those Christians leaving mainline missionary churches to join the ABC. Pastors in particular would have been familiar with the practices, ecclesial structure and theologies of their originating churches. Bishop Ngala, for example, was a former AIM pastor. As will be seen in the case study of the ACHS, the large number of educated leadership in the ABC provides a marked contrast to the trend in Zionist churches, where the membership and leadership is drawn primarily from the uneducated, poor classes.

The influence of these other mission churches can be seen in the dress, titles, leadership structures, theology and practices of the ABC. The structure of the church follows
AIM hierarchy, although the titles given to church leaders were borrowed from the CMS (ex. Bishop, Archdeacon, Canon). The dress of the ABC leadership drew its inspiration from the CMS and Roman Catholic churches. The ABC includes a “sisterhood,” which counts among its numbers both married and single members. In an interview, Bishop Ngala freely admitted to borrowing the concept from the Roman Catholic Church. The ABC sisters mirror their Roman Catholic counterparts in their dress and title, although the possibility of their marrying is obviously unique. ABC sisters are encouraged to serve for at least five years as singles before contemplating marriage. Sisters, however, cite I Corinthians 7:8 as justification of celibacy as the preferred state.

The order of worship is similar to the AIM services, with an altar call at the end. The Salvation Army’s influence has been clearly felt in the area of music, with the choirs in the ABC enjoying a place of prominence in the services.

The conscious willingness on the part of the ABC to adopt titles, structures, and dress from the mainline churches comes as no surprise. Ecclesial structures were never an issue leading to schism from the mission churches.

2. Positions of Leadership

One of the main concerns of the founders of the ABC was the failure of the mainline churches to include Africans in meaningful positions of leadership. In terms of developing a hierarchy of leadership, the ABC took a pragmatic approach: according to official account, the ABC “carved out its ministries from...felt needs and the word of the Bible.” The ABC happily admits to having borrowed whichever structures seemed useful to the Kenya context ~ even if there was no biblical basis for the position. They readily concede that their “elders” do not correspond to the historic use of the word. The ABC simply adopted this title

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86 In the Constitution, there is included a careful description of the dress to be worn by the various leaders in the ABC church. Taking as our example the ABC Bishop, we are told that he “will have one collar attached to a black cloth, and another with red piece of cloth. A black robe and a white cloth worn over it and a red cloth worn around the neck and a long red belt with a blue seam, a hat, a sceptre and a cross.” Constitution, 4.

87 Nathan Ngala, Bishop of ABC. Interview by author, June 1996, Machakos. Tape recording.


“because it is the right word in Kenya.” The number of elders chosen, however, never exceeds seven. This, apparently, is “based on the passage in Acts 6:3ff in which the early Church elected seven elders capable of leading the Services...” The primary concern of the ABC was to verify that whatever positions it did create were filled by Africans. This desire for an African-led church was one of the causative factors behind schism.

At the head of the church is the Bishop, and under the bishop is the Archdeacon, who assists with administrative duties. The church itself is divided into pastorates supervised by canons. Pastors look after individual pastorates and deacons assist at the sub-pastorate level. The pastorate or sub-pastorate is comprised of congregations watched over by evangelists. At the congregational level, it is the Lay leader who heads up the ministry, assisted by the Elders (see next page):

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90 Ibid.

92 Created with reference to "The African Brotherhood Church," 159.
A number of criteria are placed on the leadership. First, any member of the ABC who has taken on a second wife since becoming a Christian is excluded from positions of leadership. Second, anyone in a position of political leadership is denied leadership in the ABC church. This negative view of politics is not uncommon in AIC’s of various types.

It is understood that ministry personnel will have received some sort of “calling” by God. According to the Constitution:

Personnel will be appointed by God by means of a spiritual call of the Holy Spirit. There will be no difference between men and women.... If he is considered fit, he will be accepted to be trained (in) the word of God, and after the completion of the course he will be posted to work in accordance with the posting regulations in regards to ranks.... The leader who is appointed by God cannot have his services terminated except by death or refusal of God’s laws or backsliding from the character of Christianity.93

There is thus a clear sense of the leadership being “set-apart” for ministry. All leaders must undergo a period of training, the assumption being that they need a trained clergy with a Biblical and doctrinal formation. The ABC Divinity school in Mitaboni was founded to meet this need in the church community.94

Interestingly, while the ABC itself arose from a split from the mainline mission church, the church emphasizes unity within. It is in fact an item in the constitution, that the “ABC WILL NEVER SPLIT.” Any person, leader or otherwise, will be expelled if he or she attempts to initiate a split from within the church.95 Expulsion for the sake of unity seems an odd concept; however it does highlight the ABC desire for unity among believers.

3. Practices

The author attended and preached at a service at the African Brotherhood Church in Makadara district, Nairobi, during the summer of 1996. This was the English service, which was followed by a Ki-Swahili service. The author had participated in an ACHS service only the week before, and the contrast between the two kinds of AIC worship styles was marked.

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93 Constitution, 4.

94 In the history of the ABC, the authors list the founding of a Bible school as one of the “missions” of the ABC. African Brotherhood Church, 11.

95 Ibid., 7.
Where the ACHS seemed unfamiliar and very charismatic, the ABC service was similar to the services one might expect to find in a Western evangelical church. The most striking difference from Western church services was the *harambee*.96

In 1955 the ABC developed a form of worship which is still followed by its churches today. In this way, members can attend any ABC church and enjoy a familiar programme of service. The Sunday service is laid out as follows in the ABC Programme of Worship Manual:

*The Procedure:*

1. Hymn and prayers while standing and end with the Lord’s Prayer
2. Hymn while seated, and first reading of part of the Bible selected by the Preacher
3. Hymn while standing
4. While seated, the leader say requests for prayers.
5. Prayers said by two people.
6. Hymn while standing, sit, followed by announcements.
7. Hymn while standing and say the Apostles’ Creed.
8. The Sermon and thereafter the leader to ask those who wish to believe on Christ or those who wish to confess their sins. Those stand and one elder pray for them.
9. Hymn for offerings.
10. Hymn No. 33
11. Kneel down and pray.
12. Stand and sing Hymn No. 41 one verse and disperse.

As with most evangelical Protestant churches, the sermon is the focal point of the service. According to Sundkler, this is characteristic of Ethiopian churches more generally.97 The ABC does not follow the lectionary. Instead, a passage from Scripture is chosen by the preacher and called the “first reading.” The preacher, who may be a man or a woman, is thus not constrained by lectionary readings but is “free to preach as he is led by the Holy Spirit.”98

After the sermon is delivered, the worship leader reviews the main points of the sermon and

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96 A *harambee* is a fundraising event common to both churches and secular organizations in Kenya. During public gatherings, people are encouraged to give towards a certain need (new roof, new church building etc.). Gifts of food, cloth and other items are auctioned off, and mock “giving” battles are staged between various groups in the church to see who will give the most.


98 Mangaya, 3.
ends by inviting people to believe on Jesus and confess their sins. Those simply wanting prayer are also invited to stand. This “altar call”, with its emphasis on the importance of a personal relationship with Christ, derives from ABC’s AIM and SA inheritance.

According to ABC members interviewed, the ABC form of worship follows closely on that of the AIC (the AIM church) Nevertheless, while the AIM and SA appear to have had the greatest influences on the style and structure of the services, there is evidence of borrowing from the Anglican and Catholic churches. A form of the grace is said\(^99\), for example, at the end of the service of Holy Communion Further, the ABC blesses new buildings, which is a uniquely Anglican and Catholic practice. Again, as noted earlier, the Anglican and Catholic churches have had considerable influence on the dress adopted by church leadership.

The ABC worship book is produced conjointly by the ABC and AIC, and is mostly composed of American Gospel Hymns translated into Ki-Swahili or Ki-Kamba.

4. Theology

Hastings noted that the older “Ethiopian” type churches like the ABC show a tendency to:

tone down their more eccentric customs, to produce doctrinal statements of unblemished Protestant orthodoxy, to introduce communion services where these were not formerly known, and in general to conform increasingly to one or another model of the western ecclesiastical and clerical image.\(^100\)

The ABC essentially kept the same doctrines and theology as conservative Protestantism, very much along the lines of the African Inland Mission and the Salvation Army. Under “Belief and Objects” in the Constitution, one finds the following doctrinal statements:

(l) **Belief:** ABC will always believe in the Holy Book Divine of God, that it is the true book written for the need of God under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit
(ii) And that all the words therein should be believed and done by all who believe on Jesus Christ.
(iii) To believe that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour of all those who wish to

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99 May the Love of God our Father, and the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and forevermore. Amen.

enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

(iv) To believe that the Church is one all over the world and it is built on the faith of Jesus Christ.

(v) and believing that the Church to have differences and contentions is enmity (contrary) to the fellowship of God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The ABC obviously follows evangelical Protestant mission churches with their heavy accent on the authority of Scripture. It also agrees with AIM in its eschatological focus. As one ABC member observed, the hymns place an overwhelming emphasis on the theme of Christ’s return. Following the leadership of Bishop Ngala, the ABC also has kept the evangelistic thrust of the AIM. The motto of the ABC is Mark 16:15-16: “Jesus said Go ye into all the world.” Indeed, this evangelistic emphasis was seen in its 27.25 percent growth among “people making first-time professions of faith,” during the period from 1982-1985. Stelck recorded that one ABC student “won two hundred people to Christ” during his three-year period of study at Divinity school.

Given this evangelistic focus, it is not surprising to find a high christological emphasis in the church. The ABC understanding of the uniqueness of Christ is not a given in AIC’s. The Zionist churches, for example, are known for their low Christology and high pneumatology.

5. Sacraments

In terms of the sacraments, the ABC practices baptism, although this is “faith” and not infant baptism:

When a person shows that his faith is true after he has been taught for a period which would enable the leader and elders of his church to bear witness on him, he would be baptized through a complete immersion in water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, with exception of person with reasons such as sickness, over age or lack of water; such baptism should be done by way of pouring water over the forehead in a form of the cross in the name of (God) the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. And this would

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102 As quoted by the ABC in their motto and in church documents.
103 Stevens and Stelck, 32.
104 Ibid., 33.
proceed according to the Baptism Worship Programme. Baptism means believing the death of Jesus and His resurrection from the dead which he did to overcome sin.  

The ABC thus copies the AIM and Salvation Army in practising baptism by immersion and by refusing infant baptism. Instead, children up to the age of twelve can be dedicated to God. In those exceptional cases where an individual cannot be immersed, the sign of the cross is traced on the forehead - a practice similar to that of the Anglican church. According to Mukote, the ABC does not baptize children because they are too small to understand the vows being taken on their behalf. Infants are incapable of understanding the significance of the event taking place.

Baptism is preceded by a period of catechism, ranging from nine months to a year. In this class, catechumens are taught about baptism, the “laying on of hands”, dedication of children, Holy Communion, and the basic tenets of faith. Following this class, the catechumens are examined by the pastor and elders of the church. Successful passing of this test leads to promotion to the Kilasi kya Keli, or second class, which lasts for three months and immediately precedes baptism.

The service of baptism involves a public witnessing on behalf of the catechist to the readiness of the catechumens for baptism. After this testimony, the leader asks the congregation whether there are any “who can forbid any one of these water not to be baptized?” The congregation responds appropriately, and then the pastor turns to the catechumens and questions them:

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105 Constitution, 8.

106 Mukote, 6.

107 According to the Service of Worship, the testimony is as follows:
1. Since they believed on Jesus Christ they have shown that they have really abandoned sin.
2. Because they do not fail to attend the catechism and meetings, they are concerned.
3. They offer their treasure for the work of God, and have surrendered the strength of their bodies to build up God’s work.
4. They understand well the lessons they were taught, and I am their witness in all those before you and before God. I hand them over to the Baptist to baptize them.

“Programme of Worship - African Brotherhood Church.” TMs [photocopy], p.4-5. African Brotherhood Church, Machakos, Kenya.

108 Ibid., 5.
Just as you have shown an outstanding righteousness before you were baptized, will you continue with the teachings of the Bible as Christ said and walk in newness of life?  

The catechumens then enter the baptismal font one by one, and to each one the pastor asks:  

"Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?" When the catechumen replies "yes," the pastor then says:  

For your witness I baptize you in the Name of (God) the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.  

The catechumen is then immersed in the water by the pastor.  

Again, like Western evangelical Churches, the ABC obviously assumes that faith is a requirement for water baptism, and that baptism does not by itself confer saving faith or the Holy Spirit. Water baptism appears to be an outward sign, a public witnessing to the believer’s intention to "continue with the teachings of the Bible." Nowhere is baptism presented as a requirement for salvation, nor is it understood as the moment at which the Holy Spirit is conferred upon the believer. In all of this, the ABC’s understanding of baptism is theologically in line with conservative evangelical Protestant churches from the West. The tripartite baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit also brings the ABC in harmony with the historic Church’s theological understanding of the Godhead.

The ABC has also, from its inception, practised Holy Communion. It states in the Constitution that Communion is for baptized believers of any denomination. Members can, however, be suspended from participating in communion "due to certain sins." The ABC understanding of Communion is not clear. In the Constitution, the authors described their understanding of Communion as follows: "Believing that Bread is the body of Christ and

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109 Ibid.
110 Ibid.
111 Ibid.
112 Ibid.
113 Mukote, 6.
Wine is His blood which He shed down for the cleansing of sins.”114 In the service of Communion, a version of the words of institution (Luke 22:14-22 or I Cor.11:23-32) is read, and a prayer is said for the bread and cup. Again, the theological understanding of the Eucharist, as either symbol or sacrament, is unclear.

6. Unique practices and theological perspectives

The ABC diverges from AIM and Salvation Army practices in allowing polygamists to become church members without divorcing one of their wives. It tacitly maintains the evangelical Protestant disapproval of polygamy, however, in forbidding Christians to take on a second wife. Those Christians who do marry more wives while they are still Christians cannot be baptized. They can, however, repent of their actions (not divorcing their wives) and be offered the “hand of fellowship.” This allows them to continue worshipping and fellowshipping in the ABC church.

As already mentioned in the discussion of leadership, the sisterhood is one of the unique practices developed by the ABC. The sisterhood has an important ministry in the church in the areas of education, training, and administration.

7. Ecumenism

The ABC is a member of the National Christian Council of Kenya (NCCK) and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), both of which are important ecumenical organizations. In its early years, the ABC was not always open to joining these groups. Bishop Ngala frankly admitted that when he was first approached about joining the NCCK in 1962, he was far from enthusiastic. Ngala feared putting his church under the dominance of another organization whose intents were unclear, particularly given the tense relations between the ABC and its former mission churches. At one point, the NCCK also demanded that a church from the same area sponsor the ABC. The other church operating in Kamba region was none other than the AIM! According to Kioko’s account, AIM used delaying tactics to try to boycott ABC’s application; in the end, the ABC was sponsored by the Presbyterian Church of East Africa.115

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114 Constitution, 8

While the ABC has shown itself to be very open to relations with other churches, a measure of suspicion persists towards missionary-dominated churches. The memory of racism and exclusion is still too fresh in the minds of the older leaders of the ABC. As Bishop Ngala said, ecumenism is great so long as other churches cease the "old pernicious practice of preaching ill of the others."116

8. Education

The ABC opened five schools soon after its registration as church. According to Kioko, the ABC had five schools: Kathityamaa, Karumbu, Enzai, Muua and Kiatineni. The creation of a scholarly system reflects one of the early concerns of Kamba Christians in seceding from the AIM.

During the State of Emergency, however, their schools were taken over by the Government. Only the Mitaboni Divinity School (ABC), which was opened in 1950, continues its operations.

9. Scripture

In the discussion of the theology of the ABC, its high view of Scripture was mentioned. The very first article of belief in the ABC Constitution pertains to the authority of the Bible: "ABC will always believe in the Holy Book Divine of God, that it is the true book written for the need of God under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit."117 Its second article states that "all the words therein should be believed and done by all who believe on Jesus Christ." The ABC places the authority and normative nature of Scripture even before mention of Christ, as though the authority of the latter depended upon the former. The Bible is clearly viewed as the guidebook by which the believer lives. Indeed, in terms of the "acts" of the members, ABC requires its members to perform all the works that "are written in the Bible and those laid down by HQ."118

Like the Anglican Church, the ABC allows for the development of new traditions.

116 Ibid., 11.
117 Constitution, 1.
118 Ibid.
While holding to the authority of Scripture, it is understood that the Bible does not offer comprehensive rules by which the church and believers can order their lives. When issues arise which are not addressed by Scripture, it is the responsibility of the chairman to guide the discussion. As outlined in the Constitution:

If a matter causes a dispute, being a case which do[es] not have any judgment in the Bible, the committee should vote and by voting end the dispute. But if the item has judgment in the Bible then the chairman should pass the resolution in this manner, ‘Just as it is written in the Bible, let it be so’ and after the reading of the passage this matter gets up.”

In popular conception, however, it is probably maintained that church members live solely according to the precepts of Scripture. For example, an ABC member recounted the crisis which occurred when guitars were introduced into the service. “Fortunately,” the member wrote, “somebody knew his Bible well. Reaching back into the Psalms (Psalm 144:9), he quoted: ‘I will sing a new song to thee, O God; upon a ten-stringed harp.’ The door was open. In streamed tambourines, sticks, drums, guitars and accordions.”

The important place of Scripture in the life of the ABC church can be seen by a quick look at the Programmes of Worship. In the service of Baptism, the catechumens vow to “continue with the teachings of the Bible as Christ said and walk in newness of life.” In the ceremony for Holy Marriage, the main part of the ceremony is the testimony of the bride and bridegroom who “accept the Scriptures.” What follows is a series of questions, each of which is accompanied by its support in Scripture. For example, the Bridegroom is asked:

(i) Do you believe the law of God which says that a husband and wife are one flesh? Matthew 19:3-6
(ii) Do you believe the law of God which says that a man shall leave father and mother and cleave to his wife, Matthew 19:3-6
(iii) Do you believe the law of God which says, let no man divorce his wife? Matthew 5:32
(iv) Do you believe the law of God which says that he that divorceth his wife and

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119 Ibid. The text in italics is mine.
120 “The African Brotherhood Church,” 156.
121 Constitution, 4.
122 Programme of Worship, 8.
marry another, committeth fornication? Luke 16:18
(v) Do you believe the law of God which says that man should love his wife as he loveth himself? Ephesians 5:21-33?123

Despite the official, constitutional recognition of the Bible’s silence on many issues, there is nevertheless a tendency among many ABC members to approach Scripture as God’s law book, containing rules for living the Christian life.

The important place of Scripture in the life of the ABC is also seen in the demands that elders receive Bible training prior to taking office.124 Evangelists, deacons and pastors alike must all receive some official Bible training.

The Bible is clearly presented as the authority by which doctrine, practices and church life in general are governed. All doctrinal beliefs are supported by a series of bible references, especially where contentious issues are at stake. For example, the ABC defends its refusal to baptize infants with a series of Scriptural references (Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 2:22; 18:15-17).125 The plethora of Scriptural references even beside generally accepted practices in mainline, historic churches suggests a high consciousness of Scripture as the means by which one legitimizes church tradition in the wider Christian community.

V. Summary of Findings

In the previous discussion, the present shape of the ABC church was examined. The ABC has very clearly borrowed from the mission churches, particularly in its ecclesial structure, dress and titles, in the form of its worship services, and in its sacraments and doctrines. These similarities come as no surprise, as they were not contentious issues prior to schism.

The issues which led to ABC’s creation concerned African leadership, education, and unity. The longing for meaningful positions of leadership was fulfilled almost immediately upon the formation of the church. The desire for unity stood in tension with the latter

123 Ibid, 9.

124 Mangaya, 25.

125 Ibid., 6
aspiration, however, for many ABC members feared the intrusion of missionaries into the affairs of the church. If mission groups became involved with the ABC, might not Africans be relegated to menial positions? The ABC's gradual inclusion as a member of the NCCK and AACC suggests that to a certain degree, these tensions have been resolved. Indeed, though a foreigner, the author was warmly welcomed into the ABC church by sisters, pastors and Bishop. During those visits, the author learned that the ABC church has developed strong links with the Canadian Baptist Overseas Mission Board, and accepts assistance with personnel and finances. The Baptist missionaries, however, are assigned no titled positions of leadership in the church. In any case, current ABC practice certainly reflects its interest in unity within the church.

The third causal factor for independency, that of education of children, was initially addressed by the ABC. As already mentioned, however, during the State of Emergency the control of the ABC schools passed to the government. ABC's interest in education is evidenced in its demand for educated leadership, and in its continued management of the Mitaboni Divinity School.

The findings in this study concur with Baur's observation on Nationalist churches. That is, churches of the Nationalist type tend to show little deviation from the doctrine and worship of the mainline churches in the West. Theological questions were not the cause of schism initially, unlike the case of the Spirit-type churches. The issues were primarily ones surrounding the colonial situation, and could be addressed without diverging too much from the inherited traditions from the West.

Clearly, however, the understanding of the normative nature of Scripture has given the ABC a strong sense of its own legitimacy as church. The authority of Scripture as the Word of God was placed as one of its primary objects of belief. The primacy of this belief in the ABC can probably be explained by the high value of Scripture in the AIM and the important place Scripture played in the educational system.

The ABC does not purport to derive all of its practices and traditions directly from Scripture, but allows for the development of new elements provided they do not contradict the biblical witness. Thus, for example, it created a sisterhood with no purported basis in
That said, in practice the church tries to defend its doctrines and practices from Scripture. This was seen most evidently in the marriage and baptism services in the ABC Order of Worship. There, each element in the service had beside it a Scripture citation to show the biblical origins of the teaching in question. This suggests that Scripture is seen as the means by which one measures the faithfulness of a church’s doctrine and practice. Indeed, in an interview, Bishop Ngala tied Scripture closely to “orthodoxy.”

When speaking of the increase of charismatic influences on the church, the Bishop expressed some concern over certain theological elements promoted by this group. As Pastor Timothy Ndambuki translated: “We don’t want to preach heresy; we want to concentrate on the Bible.” Because it is a “biblical” church, the ABC also claims legitimacy within the wider Christian community. Although the ABC arose from among the Kamba, the Bishop does not see the church restricted to that ethnicity. Rather, since the church “preaches what is in the Bible”, there is no reason it should not be well received among other ethnic groups.

Scripture is the guardian of “true faith” and the standard by which “true churches” are recognized. For this reason, ABC leaders must be firmly grounded in the Scriptures. This can account for the development of the ABC Mitaboni Divinity School, despite the cost of running the centre. That even the elders must undergo a period of Bible training further illustrates the respect with which Scripture is treated. Leaders are expected to be governed by Scripture, and not the other way around. When asked about political involvement of church members, the Bishop explained that while members could join political groups, pastors were forbidden. “Pastors must stick to their Bibles,” he said, “and forget about politics.”

In sum, this study has accomplished two things. First, it showed that vernacular

\[126\text{ Ngala, Interview by author.}\]
\[127\text{ Ibid.}\]
\[128\text{ Ibid.}\]
\[129\text{ Ibid.}\]
translations played an important role in the foundation and subsequent development of the African Brotherhood Church. Second, this study demonstrated that the role of Scripture was different from that of the so-called “causal” factors. While the “causal” factors created feelings of dissatisfaction that made the Kamba ripe for schism, it was Scripture that provided legitimacy to their secession. Though the Kamba Christians gave loud voice to their complaints around the issues of education, African leadership, church unity and missionary prejudices, they were always careful to indicate the Scriptural passages which supported their demands. Scripture provided them with the authority needed to found their church, and placed the ABC on an equal footing with the mission churches.

In Chapter 3, the role of Scripture in the foundation and development of the ABC will be compared and contrasted to a church of the Zionist type: the African Church of the Holy Spirit.
Bishop Nathan Ngala and author at ABC Headquarters. Machakos 1996

ABC sisters and author. Nairobi 1996

ABC Makadara church (note the traditional structure)
CHAPTER 3:
CASE STUDY OF
THE AFRICAN CHURCH OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

I. Introduction

The church in this case study represents a Zionist AIC. The story of the African Church of the Holy Spirit (ACHS) is actually the shared story of several churches. Through a complex series of internal schisms, the ACHS is one of the four Zionist offsprings of the Lyahuka or Spirit movement in Western Kenya, Kakamega District. The ACHS itself was not founded until 1957, comparatively late to the 1927 Kaimosi Revival which gave it impetus. Given this complicated history, much of this chapter's discussion of the causal factors of schism will focus on the story of the Spirit people. Only later, when treating the subsequent development of Holy Spirit traditions, will the thesis focus be narrowed relative to the ACHS case.¹

The ACHS and its sister churches came into being during the early period of independency in Kenya. Unlike the ABC, the Spirit groups arose because of serious theological differences with their mission church. The differences centred on pneumatology and the place of charismatic experience in worship. In this chapter, it will be argued that Scripture played an important and unique role in the foundation and development of the Spirit churches. Specifically, Scripture as an 'occasioning factor' will be distinguished from ‘causative factors’ of schism.

For the sake of clarity, this chapter will be developed along the same lines as the case study on the ABC. In the first section, the history of the movement will be reviewed. The causal factors of schism will be analysed and their role contrasted to that of Scripture. Next, ACHS polity, doctrine, worship and ethics will be described. It will be shown that the causative factors in schism also explain its new developments in tradition. Particular attention will be paid in this section to the role of Scripture in creating these traditions. In the same way that Scripture provided the authority for secession, so Scripture serves as the

¹The selection of the ACHS over the other Spirit churches was purely circumstantial; the author had contacts with ACHS leadership and easy access to ACHS materials.
authoritative means by which new traditions are justified.

II. History

Although members of the ACHS date the formation of their church back to 1927, the African Church of the Holy Spirit was not officially registered until 1957. The Church came about following a split from the Friends Africa Mission (FAM), an evangelical Quaker group from the United States. The membership of the ACHS is primarily Abaluyia, the majority ethnic group in Kakamega District (Western Kenya), where the church began. The headquarters of the ACHS is in Lugala, East Isukha Location in Kakamega. Before relating the actual history of the ACHS and its sister churches, the missionary background will be described. As with the case study on the ABC, an overview of translation work in the region will form an important part of this discussion. Establishing the availability of vernacular translations of Scripture prior to ACHS’s secession is imperative, given the focus on Scripture.

1. Missionary Context

The General Situation in North Kavirondo:

When describing the first missionary contact with the Kamba, one could legitimately speak about “the Kamba” as a coherent, unified group. Linguistically, the Kamba spoke one

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3 A fair representation of Meru can be found in ACHS congregations, however. In 1961, a group of Meru “prophets” received a vision directing them to go to Kakamega, where they would “find someone - a Man of God - who would help them get a Licence.” [Lawford Ndege Imunde, “An Assessment of the Historical Background Leading to the Formation of the African Church of the Holy Spirit in Meru District, 1971.” TMs [photocopy]. p. 38. Archives, St. Paul’s United Theological College, Limuru, Kenya.] Once in Kakamega, the prophets were led to the home of then ACHS High Priest, Kefa Mavuru. Following discussions, Mavuru agreed to register the Meru party as a branch of the ACHS. The history of the Meru branch up until its incorporation into the ACHS is complex. The Meru prophets were originally members of the Church of Scotland Missionaries (CSM- Presbyterian) church, but left over frustration with missionary control of the church, and over missionary condemnation of polygamy and female circumcision practices (the “Kirore” crisis of September 1929). The Meru Christians who left the CSM were a loosely-knit group, and eventually split between a charismatic, “prophetic” group, and a non-charismatic group. The prophetic group closely resembled Zionist types, with their emphasis on the Holy Spirit and their disinterest in secular matters such as education. The non-charismatic group, by contrast, followed more along the lines of the Ethiopian or nationalist type churches, with a strong emphasis on political issues. During the furor over the Mau-Mau, the government of Kenya became suspicious of any Independent groups. In order to avoid persecution, the Meru prophets had to be legally constituted, and found this avenue cut off from them via the usual routes. Hence, they decided to join the ACHS, whom they took after in theology and worship. Lawford Ndege Imunde’s paper offers a polemical discussion of the formation of this branch of the church.
language, and identified themselves as a single race standing over and against other groups. Not so with the Abaluyia. In his comprehensive study of the Abaluyia, Gunter Wagner named four distinct tribes or clans: the Vugusu; the Wanga; the Hayo, Marach and Holo; and finally the Logoli. Each clan had differing genealogies, spoke sometimes mutually unintelligible dialects, and often had distinct cultural and religious practices. Rivalry between various groups was ferocious; this rivalry and ethnic diversity presented a challenge to the various missionary groups working in the area.

The first missionary contact with the Abaluyia came before the turn of the century, when the CMS Bishop of Eastern Equatorial Africa, Bishop James Hannington, travelled through Wanga territory on his way to Uganda. Although supported by the powerful Wanga chief, Mumia, Bishop Hannington nevertheless met a sudden and violent end on October 29, 1885. Bishop Hannington’s short-lived mission probably had little or no impact on the south-eastern Abaluyian clans, which is this paper’s area of interest.

The arrival of mission groups in North Kavirondo began in earnest following the completion of the railway to Kisumu in 1901. The situation in Kavirondo was a classic case of mission and colonial government working hand in hand. The British governors were interested in Kavirondo as part of an important line of communication between British Uganda and the coast. The Friends of Africa Mission arrived in Nyanza in 1902, and with

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4 One can speak of a dialectic continuum when describing the Abaluyian language, where dialects at one end of the continuum are unintelligible to those at the other end of the spectrum. As will be seen in the discussion of Bible translations, this sort of linguistic situation is a translator’s nightmare, since it requires choosing the dialect which will be most widely understood (and accepted, given inter-clan rivalries) by the various communities.


7 Ibid., 20.

the help of the government, acquired land for its first station in Kaimosi. The Mill Hill Mission (Roman Catholic) began its work in 1905 among the Wanga. Mill Hill stations soon followed at Kakamega among the Isukha and at Eregi among the Idakho. The CMS had begun its work among the Abaluyia as early as 1894 in Elgon. Its southern station at Maseno was established in 1906, and it was here that it founded the famous CMS Maseno school. The Church of God mission arrived in 1905, and had a station in Kima. The Pentecostal Assemblies of East Africa, a Canadian mission which was to play a role in the schism of Maragoli, Idakho and Isukha Christians from the Friends Mission, did not begin its work in Nyang’ori until 1921.

All this demonstrates that the mission situation among the Abaluyia was as diverse as the tribal situation itself. In the early 1900’s, the mission groups tended to stay within their respective “spheres of influence.” Although the work of the FAM among the eastern Abaluyian groups forms the background to the history of the Spirit churches, it is important to keep the wider missionary context in mind, in order to understand all the factors leading to schism.

_The FAM Among the Eastern Abaluyia:_

**Bible Translation Work**

As already noted, the FAM started their ministry among the Abaluyia in 1902, with the foundation of their first mission station in Kaimosi. The British district commissioner in Kisumu helped settle the new missionaries in their chosen site, and it was here that the missionaries began their ministry in education, medicine and industrial work. Since the Bible was to be the primary textbook at the FAM schools, translation work on Scripture became a priority. FAM missionaries Emory Rees and his wife established a station in

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9 In order to maximize resources and avoid competition for adherents, the various mission boards would divide regions into ‘spheres of influence.’ When it came to Catholic or Protestant regions, both groups tended to ignore the spheres principle. This is hardly surprising, given the mutual animosity between Protestants and Catholics in this period. Later, mission groups spread into other spheres as their adherents moved from one area to another. Sangree, for example, described how the Salvation Army ended up in Tiriki under Chief Amani in the 1930’s, although this was previously an FAM sphere of influence.

nearby Vihiga, South Maragoli in 1906. Much of Rees' work was given over to Bible translation work. Consequently, it was the dialect of South Maragoli ~ Luragoli ~ which became the language for the first FAM translations of the New Testament. Rees worked alongside Luragoli speakers Akhonya, Yohana Amugune, and Joel Litu, and by 1928 the entire New Testament had been printed in five portions, and in 1929 as an entire collection. The dating of the publications of the New Testament texts will be important in the assessment of the causal factors of schism.

At this point, something must be said about the impact of the choice of Luragoli as the dialect for Bible translation. Evidently, since all teaching texts and Scripture portions were produced in Luragoli, this dialect became the favoured one among FAM missionaries for years. The tension persisting between various Abaluyian tribes has already been noted; the use of the Luragoli dialect would not have been well received everywhere. Indeed, Sangree suggested that one of the reasons the FAM struggled to establish themselves among the Tiriki was the choice of the "foreign" Luragoli over Lutiriki. Sangree indicated that Luragoli was foreign to the Isukha and Tiriki, although at the time of his writing (1956), Luragoli was easily understood by all southern Abaluyian tribes. Wagner described the Maragoli as

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11 There is a fair amount of variety in terms of the date of the founding of the various mission stations. Osogo had FAM missionary work in Vihiga starting in 1903, while Wagner, Rasmussen and Sangree listed it as 1906. Given that Emory Rees and his wife did not arrive in Kenya until 1904, the 1906 date seems the more likely one.


14 Sangree, 124.

15 Ibid., 191.
having friendly relations with the Idakho. In this sense, there might not have been the same resistance among the Idakho to using the Luragoli translation. As for the Isukha, they had warmly received the FAM missionaries into their midst, and as a result perhaps had the motivation to overcome any troubles with dialect.

The Holy Spirit movement sprang up primarily among the Idakho, Isukha, and Maragoli. It has already been shown that prior to the Revival in 1927, vernacular translations of Scripture were available to the Maragoli in their own dialect. Even if one were to argue that the Isukha and Idakho were unable to comprehend the Luragoli translation, vernacular translations were soon available in Luhanga (Luhanga is one of the dialect clusters of which Luisuxa and Luidaxo are a part). The CMS published the Gospel of Luke in Luhanga in 1916, followed by the other Gospels in 1922. The entire New Testament was printed in 1939, so presumably portions continued to be published as they were completed. Again, it is important to note that unlike the Tiriki, the Isukha and Idakho were receptive to the Gospel. Since the FAM missionaries communicated first in Ki-Swahili and then in Luragoli, it seems likely that the Isukha and Idakho would have availed themselves of the Luragoli translations, especially as these would have been used in the FAM schools and churches. Certainly, the dialect differences between Luragoli and Luisuxa and Luidaxo were not significant enough to prevent a keen convert from reading and comprehending the Bible. In short, by 1927, the Abaluyian tribes involved in the Spirit movement had access to Scriptures in the vernacular—they did not need to rely on missionaries to relate to them the content of these sacred

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16 Wagner, 27.

17 A similar situation occurred in the Bwamu-speaking area where the author worked in Burkina Faso, with Wycliffe Bible Translators. There were clusters of so-called contiguous dialects, where the differences were primarily phonological (the vowels, tones, and some consonants varied), and not lexical, morphological, or syntactic. Communication between people of various dialects was not seriously impeded by these differences. Wagner indicated that a similar situation pertained among the Abaluyian dialects. He included linguistic data which shows that the Abaluyian dialects follow regular phonological patterns of change. The differences would not appear to seriously hamper communication between the various groups. One is, after all, dealing with dialects and not distinct languages:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Hanga (including the cluster for Luisuxa and Luidaxo)</th>
<th>Luragoli</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My flour</td>
<td>ovusie vuandje</td>
<td>Ovusie vwangje</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My small hut</td>
<td>axasimba xandje</td>
<td>Akasimba kangle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My big cow</td>
<td>ogugombe gwandje</td>
<td>Ogugombe gwange</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ibid., 26.

18 Mojola, 21.
writings.

**The Nature of the FAM Mission**

In order to understand the background to the formation of the Holy Spirit churches, something more must be said of the missionary organization out of which they sprang. As already mentioned, the FAIM was a Quaker missionary group from North America. The Friends Africa Industrial Mission Board (FAIM) was started up by a number of students at the Friends Bible Institute in Cleveland Ohio, in 1901. The goals of the FAIM did not differ substantially from those of other evangelical mission agencies at the turn of the century. Their primary concern was “the evangelization of the heathen...” They proposed to accomplish this task through a threefold thrust on education, industrial training and development, and direct evangelism through preaching and teaching.

Not every Abaluyian tribe responded with equal enthusiasm to the FAM missionary overtures, nor was the response immediate. In 1914, there were only 43 converts among the Abaluyia. Still, it was among the Maragoli that the missionaries seem to have had the greatest success. As Sangree noted, the missionaries at Kaimosi (in Tiriki territory) recruited the vast majority of their students, evangelists, household servants and teachers from the Maragoli tribe. The Idakho and Isukha clans ran a close second. Given that the FAM work began among the Tiriki and that the headquarters were in Kaimosi, one might have expected the early converts to have come from among the Tiriki. Sangree suggested that most of the Tiriki resistance to the mission work was over missionary condemnation of their initiation

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20 The name was eventually changed to Friends Africa Mission.


22 Quoted in ibid., 3.

23 Sangree, 122.

24 Ibid., 125.
rites, and to the disreputable character of the early converts. Among the Maragoli, by contrast, the FAM benefited from the support of the Maragoli chief, Ichivni. In addition, Rasmussen has proposed that it was the strong colonial presence in Maragoli that rendered this group more amenable to Christianity. That is, Rasmussen interpreted their acceptance of Christianity as the result of feelings of social dislocation. In a time of bewildering change, the Maragoli found in Christianity a faith which spoke to their struggles. Not all would agree with Rasmussen's approach, although discerning motivation in religious conversion is a notoriously difficult task.

As with many mission groups, it was through the education system that the FAM gained most of its converts. Unlike the Kamba, the Abaluyia did not need to be coerced into sending their offspring to the FAM schools. Perhaps the strong colonial presence among the eastern Abaluyia early awakened them to the value of education in gaining access to the new power structures in their society. In any case, the FAM quickly set up a rapidly expanding school system. The first school was in Kaimosi, and opened in 1903. Many Abaluyia were converted through their years in the schooling system; these converts were then trained as evangelists and teachers, and sent out to establish "out-schools." Rasmussen and Sangree both described the effectiveness of these African evangelists in preaching the gospel to their

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25 As with many other missionary groups, FAM willingly gave shelter to suspected witches, to runaway boys and to girls escaping unwanted marriages. These marginalised groups formed the core group of early Abaluyian converts, much to the disgust of Tiriki elders.

26 Rasmussen, Modern African Spirituality, 11.

27 Ibid.


30 Rasmussen, A History of the Quaker Movement in Africa, 47.
own people. These teachers-cum-evangelists would travel around various areas on Sundays to preach the gospel to whoever would come and listen.

For the FAM missionaries, the primary purpose of education was evangelism. This explains the religious focus of most of the FAM classes. As one missionary put it, they were "teaching them [the Abaluyia] the love of God first, accepting Christ as their Saviour, and the study of the Bible." Teaching students to read was an especially important task, since this skill would enable them to study Scripture. Scripture was the primer in FAM schools, which accounts for Emory Rees' devotion to the translation task. As another missionary, Arthur Chilson explained, "The Bible is used as a Text book in the schools continuously. In every session there is a Gospel service in which Bible truth is presented and sinners urged to seek forgiveness of sins."

The FAM hope was that educated converts would fill the leadership positions in the local congregations. As already mentioned, these former students would themselves become evangelists, and so further the mission of the church. The FAM goal of "ultimately establishing a self-supporting native Christian Church" would thus be partially realized through a simple programme of Reading, Writing and Arithmetic.

The availability of Scriptures and their constant use in the school curriculum is an important point which will be returned to later.

Unique Doctrinal Emphases

Up to this point, the FAM has closely resembled the AIM in its missionary method. There were, however, among the FAM missionaries those who held dearly to certain religious experiences not universally encountered in evangelical missions.

One characteristic of early FAM missionaries was their apocalyptic, millennial bent. In the millennialist outlook, which in fact had fair currency among evangelical groups,

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31 Sangree, 122; Rasmussen, A History of the Quaker Movement, 46.
32 Quoted in ibid., 40.
33 Quoted in ibid., 47.
34 Quoted in ibid., 21.
salvation was a matter of the soul; it was an otherworldly affair of present urgency.
Rasmussen reported that missionary Edgar Hole, one of the main FAM evangelists, preached often on the Second Coming of Christ. Following Christ's return, said Hole, "Satan would be bound for a thousand years." It seems that the FAM missionaries brought with them the millennialist debates in North America. With their fundamentalist readings of Scripture, the FAM outlook was decidedly pre-millennialist. This concern with the End Times was mirrored later on in the Spirit churches. Indeed, millennialist concerns are common in churches of the Zionist type, at least at the beginning stages.

Less common were some missionaries' emphasis on the indwelling of the Spirit, through so-called "Spirit Baptism." The main proponent of this teaching was Arthur Chilson, a vigorous FAM preacher. Chilson's story was not unlike that of many North Americans influenced by the revivals and missionary fervour of the late nineteenth century. Responding to an altar call at a Quaker revival meeting, he "converted" at sixteen years old. Soon after, he felt called to become a missionary to Africa. Although Chilson dated his conversion back to that experience as a youth in 1889, he did not receive the Spirit in all fullness until three years later. There, after conversation with his pastor, Chilson was baptized in the Spirit. As Edna, Chilson's wife, wrote years later, on that day Arthur "received the blessed Holy Ghost in all His fullness. From that day - from that hour - the Holy Ghost was a definite, real personality to him." Chilson, and a few like-minded FAM missionaries, believed that while all Christians received the Holy Spirit at conversion, there was a fuller experience of spiritual living yet possible. This was called the Baptism in the Spirit. As Rasmussen has clearly shown in her book on Quakerism in Africa, there appeared to be a distinction drawn between justification and sanctification. Justification involved one's salvation, and related to the free, unearned forgiveness of one's sins through the blood of Jesus Christ. Sanctification, however,

35 Ibid., 44.

36 Chilson's experience was characteristic of the "Holiness" Quakers in North America, and not of other branches of Quakerism.

37 Edna Chilson, quoted in Rasmussen, A History of the Quaker Movement, 42.
concerned the ongoing work of the Spirit in the life of the believer. For this, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit was required.

Chilson’s experience of Spirit Baptism had been transformative and he wished to share this with Africans. It comes as no surprise, then, to learn that as early as 1909 Chilson and his wife were teaching Abaluyian converts on a weekly basis about baptism in the Spirit. Chilson prayed fervently for an outpouring of God’s Spirit on the Abaluyia while there was still only a handful of converts. Eventually, the revival did come, but not with the results the Chilsons expected.

2. The Revival of 1927 and the Origins of the Holy Spirit Churches

The ACHS dates the formation of the church back to the Kaimosi Revival of 1927. Secondary sources which treat the Spirit churches either in detail or in passing all talk about missionary Arthur Chilson and the dramatic events of 1927. From Rasmussen’s two books on the FAM and from interviews conducted with early “converts” to the ACHS, one gains the clearest picture of the events in Nyanza in the late 1920’s.

As mentioned in the previous section, Arthur Chilson and his wife had been teaching on Spirit Baptism since 1909. The firstfruits of their efforts were not witnessed until the mid-twenties, however. By this time, a yearly Native Prayer Conference had been put in place by the FAM. This Conference drew together all the Abaluyian Christians from the FAM areas for a period of a few days. It was at the annual Prayer conference that the first signs of revival came. Rasmussen has quoted from various missionary letters describing the event; it was a time when “confessions were made, tears shed, prayers made and hearts won to Christ...” There was an altar call, to which many responded, and teaching on heaven and the second coming. Significantly, forty-four Abaluyian believers claimed to have sought baptism in the Spirit.

Things continued pretty much in the same vein at the annual conferences for the next few years. Chilson was greatly encouraged, and prayed all the more eagerly for a revival. In

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38 See for example Fitzjoji, “African Church,” 1.

39 Quoted in Rasmussen, History of the Quaker Movement, 59.
September 1927, Chilson’s prayers were answered.

The 1927 yearly meeting took place in September, at the FAM headquarters in Kaimosi. Chilson was leading the sessions, and taught on Pentecost and the desirability of Spirit Baptism. People could receive the Spirit, according to Chilson, by first openly confessing their sins, and then praying for forgiveness. The assembled people knelt down and began to pray. After some time, Chilson stood up, and with his hands raised above them prayed that God might send the Holy Spirit on them. No sooner had he said this, than people “were crying, everything was shaking and many began to speak in tongues.” Chilson then read from Acts 2:1-4, to show the Abaluyia the biblical basis for what they had experienced.

A similar revival occurred soon afterwards among Chilson’s pupils at the Kaimosi school. To them, Chilson preached the same message, and many of the boys experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Chilson left on furlough in January of 1928, but by then the movement had taken on a life of its own. The people present at the Prayer Conference brought back the news of the revival to their respective homes. Likewise, during their school breaks, the boys from the Kaimosi school went about teaching others what they had learned from Chilson. Thanks to the preaching of these Spirit converts, the revival spread to FAM village meetings.

It was in South and North Maragoli that this teaching met the greatest response. Perhaps this is not surprising, since the FAM stronghold was in that area. Joseph Buluku, one of the leaders of the FAM monthly meetings, played an important role in spreading the teachings around Vihiga, in South Maragoli. At the monthly meeting in January 1928, several hundred believers were present, rejoicing in their new life in the Spirit. In Mbale, revivalists met on the 18th of every month to pray for unity. Unity was becoming an issue of growing concern, because even at this early stage, the revival was creating dissension in FAM ranks! In North Maragoli it was a woman, Enis Kadali, who is credited with spreading the flames of revival. Endeli, her home town, soon became a centre for those who had joined the revival. In Isukha and Idakho, it was much the same story as in North and South Maragoli.

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40 Quoted in ibid., 60. For further discussion, see also Rasmussen, Modern African Spirituality, 12; Fitzjoi. “African Church,” 1.
Those who had been present at the 1927 revival spoke openly about their wonderful experiences and taught about Spirit Baptism. The movement spread throughout the area.

When Arthur Chilson left on furlough, the missionaries staying behind did not share his charismatic bent. Troubled by the noisy behaviour of the revivalists, Alta and Fred Hoyt tried to curb the “fanaticism” of the group. The missionary in charge of evangelism in the area, Jefferson Ford, joined the Hoyts in discouraging the charismatic worship of the revivalists.

It seems that African FAM leaders, realizing the missionaries were not well disposed towards the revivalists, began actively opposing the groups. They formed a committee and the school boys from Kaimosi were called before them. The elders warned the boys against teaching further on Spirit baptism, and menaced them with expulsion if they disobeyed. Given that the FAM ran the only schools in the area, this was an ominous threat. The African FAM elders also alerted the FAM congregations to the danger of this divisive ‘new’ Spirit teaching, and demanded that the Spirit people temper their charismatic worship. The congregations in Bukoyani and Muhanda, however, refused to deny their experience of the Holy Spirit. Eventually, they were called before the elders’ committee. The elders asked them to stop their shouting, speaking in tongues, and public confessions. When the Bukoyani and Muhanda groups turned down this request, the elders deleted their names from the mission’s membership book. The expelled members’ names were circulated to the FAM meetings, with the order that none of these individuals be welcomed into the FAM fellowship.

In North Maragoli, Isukha and Idakho, the same events were repeated over and over. Threats and beatings were not uncommon, with segregation and other forms of social pressure applied to try and coerce the Spirit people into conforming to FAM customs. Nevertheless, the Spirit people held firm to their beliefs. Expulsion followed for the Spirit

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41 Quoted in Rasmussen, Modern African Spirituality, 62.
42 Ibid., 18.
43 Ibid.
people in North Maragoli in 1930 and by 1932, FAM leadership agreed that any person affiliated with the Spirit movement must be denied membership in the church.

The story of Petro Isiaho, an Idakho schoolboy at the time of the Revival, is illustrative of the kinds of challenges faced by the Spirit people. In 1927, Petro was attending an FAM service in his home village of Masiyne. A visiting preacher, a student from Kaimosi, taught them about baptism in the Spirit. Isiaho related:

This student preached with such valor as I had never heard before and then he asked us to kneel down and pray, a thing which was rather unusual because we always prayed seated. I prayed louder than I had ever done before and in this time of meditation I had a strange experience, I felt my whole body shake and a voice talked to me. I went home frightened and every time I prayed the same thing was repeated.  

People told the American Headmaster about Isiaho's strange behaviour. Petro was called into the Headmaster's office, where he was asked to explain himself. At the end of the meeting, the Headmaster warned Isiaho to shape up, and then put the boy under supervision. Eventually, Petro was expelled, although not because of his charismatic behaviour. Petro, an orphan, decided to marry young in order to fit in better in his village. While he had gained permission from his elders to proceed with the marriage, the American Headmaster was appalled, and expelled the youth from the school.

On his return to his village, Petro joined a group who were holding private prayer meetings. That night, Petro recounted:

...while we were praying, we were attacked and beaten. The group which did so included members of the Friends Church as well as catholics and pagans. I was seriously injured in the fight and was ill for several weeks afterwards. That same month we were sent out of the Friends church.  

Petro went on to relate that, finding itself sprung loose from its mission moorings, the little group struggled to find its footing. The story of the development of the various Spirit churches will be the subject of the following section.

Petro's story is typical of the experience of revivalists. His conversion was the result

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of preaching by a mission boy from Kaimosi. Petro’s loud praying and odd behaviour in worship earned him the suspicion of both African and missionary alike. He experienced the threats and persecutions of those who felt uncomfortable with this new kind of charismatic worship. As with the majority of people who decided to stay with the Spirit movement, Petro was a marginal member of society - a young man, an orphan, and with little education.

3. The Formation of the Spirit Churches: Splits

Upon finding themselves expelled from the FAM, some of the Spirit people were inclined to associate themselves with other mission churches. The most obvious match was with the Pentecostals. The Pentecostals had encouraged visions and speaking in tongues in their congregations during the 1920’s. In fact, Sangree wondered whether their teachings had not further fed the flames of revival in the FAM congregations.46 Additionally, the churches in South Maragoli were close enough geographically to the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada in Nyang’ori to consider joining the church. Many Spirit people indeed found a temporary home among the charismatic Pentecostals. Eventually, however, the group left the church. Rumour had it that the Pentecostals disowned the group because its worship was getting “out of hand.”47 Still other Spirit people joined the Salvation Army, which had begun work in Kisumu; apparently the banners, marching and uniforms were attractive to the Spirit people, although the form of worship was more restrained.48

For those Spirit people who remained unassociated to a mission, the development of formal church structures was a low priority. Of more pressing concern was prayer, because the Holy Spirit people firmly believed the End Times were near. Remembering the period, one member said: “their hearts were only in heaven.”49 Many hours were spent in prayer, Bible study and worship. Meanwhile, the persecutions by the FAM continued, and there were

46 Sangree, 172.


48 Ibid., 24.

49 Quoted in ibid., 29.
reports of beatings as late as 1936.\textsuperscript{50} The FAM called the Spirit people the Lyahuka, meaning the “break-aways”, a title which indicates the low opinion they had for the group.\textsuperscript{51}

Arising out of this persecution and its strong sense of being set-apart, the Holy Spirit people withdrew from society. In their concern for spiritual purity, they refused even to shake hands or share meals with others for fear of being contaminated by their sins.\textsuperscript{52} It was during this period of isolation that many of the practices of the Holy Spirit people developed.

Interestingly, it was thanks to the government that the Holy Spirit people officially became a church. Government officials had always been anxious about the apparent ‘fanaticisms’ of the Spirit people, but only in the mid 1930’s did they begin to act on their concerns. Rasmussen reported that in 1936, Eliam Keverenge Atonya was put into prison for having illegally put up a church building.\textsuperscript{53} The Government was at this time pushing for all Independent groups to register themselves, in order to have official representatives who would be accountable for the group’s behaviour. By registering independent groups, the government also hoped to maintain a measure of control in the area. Part of the government’s concern doubtlessly stemmed from its experience with the highly political Dini Ya Roho church among the neighbouring Luo.

In any case, in 1939 the district commissioner met with leaders of the Spirit people from the various regions. The commissioner asked who was the head of the group. Representatives indicated the leaders from their own areas, and it soon became apparent that there was no overall structure or leader uniting the regional groups. The commissioner dismissed them, having failed to achieve his goal: registration.

By 1940, however, the group from Bukoyani (South Maragoli) decided to comply with the wishes of the government. In that year, the Bukoyani group was formally established as a

\begin{footnotes}
\item[50] Ibid., 30.
\item[51] Outsiders referred to them in Ki-Swahili as the Dini Ya Roho (the Spirit People). Ibid., 33.
\item[52] The belief that evil can be physically passed on derives from traditional religiosity; this refusal to shake hands is one result of this way of thinking, and is a practice found in other Zionist churches. For discussion, see Nathaniel I. Ndikwere, \textit{Prophecy and Revolution} (London: SPCK, 1981).
\item[53] Rasmussen, \textit{Modern African Spirituality}, 35.
\end{footnotes}
church. The other regional groups did not join them at that time because of a dispute over the correct day for worship. The Bukoyani group believed that God had given them clear directions to move their day of worship from Sunday to Saturday. The other Holy Spirit groups refused to accept this change. The Bukoyani group registered as a legal body in 1952 under the name of the Holy Spirit Church. Eventually, the name was changed to the Holy Spirit Church of East Africa.

In 1946 the Holy Spirit people in North Maragoli, Isukha and Idakho also bent to government pressure and elected two leaders who would be officially responsible for the “organization”. In 1955, they at last chose a name for their loosely knit group. At least, they accepted the name given to them by government officials: the African Church of the Holy Spirit. Their leader, Kefa Ayub, became the “High Priest” of the organization - again, a title assigned by a government official. In 1957, seventeen years after the Bukoyani group was established as a church, the African Church of the Holy Spirit was registered under the Societies Act.

One would think that at this point, the history of the origins of the African Church of the Holy Spirit was at last complete. The story does not end here, however, for the African Church of the Holy Spirit was to undergo several more divisions in the 1960's and 1970's. As with the division between the Buyokani and the Northern Maragoli groups, the reasons given for the creation of the Gospel Holy Spirit of East Africa church and the Lyahuka Church of East Africa seemed quite superficial. One suspects that in both instances, ethnic rivalry and personal ambition were the underlying causes.

The Gospel Holy Spirit of East Africa was registered in 1964, and was comprised primarily of supporters of Enis Kadali and her family. Enis Kadali had been one of the main players in bringing the Holy Spirit movement to Endeli in 1927. In fact, it was largely thanks to her leadership that Endeli became one of the centres of the Spirit Movement. Until the

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54 Ibid., 40.

55 Dares have always been a source of contention in the church, it seems. Ibid., 37; ACHS Interviews, 7

registration of the church in 1957, the various “centres” functioned more or less independently. Kefa Ayub, then High Priest, held as much sway over the centres as a Canadian Anglican Bishop does over the daily running of a parish. With the move of the headquarters to Ikuvu in 1946 and with the creation of official leadership structures in 1957 (from which Enis Kadali and her family were excluded), Endeli saw its central role decrease. The desire to see Endeli returned to a place of prominence moved Kadali to persuade her son to register a new church - the Gospel Holy Spirit of East Africa church.

The Lyahuka Church of East Africa was officially created in 1971. Its leader, Keverenge Atonya, was from North Maragoli, and was dissatisfied with his place in the leadership of the ACHS. Keverenge had briefly discussed with Enis Kadali the idea of creating a Spirit Church for North Maragoli, separate from Isukha and Idakho. When Keverenge discovered Kadali’s plan to have her son placed in the top leadership position, Keverenge changed his mind. He would remain with the ACHS. At this time, Keverenge was the quarterly-meeting leader in North Maragoli, and was recognized by all as the leader of the Spirit churches in that region.

In 1970, however, ACHS headquarters decided to develop a new system of administration. “Areas” would be set up, and each would have several quarterly meetings. The quarterly-meeting leaders would report to the area superintendent, who would in turn report directly to HQ. Keverenge expected to be appointed superintendent of Vihiga, which included all of North and South Maragoli, Tiriki and Bunyore. Another man was preferred to Keverenge. Keverenge decided to break away, and a year later, the Lyahuka Church of East Africa was created. Officially, the reason Keverenge gave for the schism related to a difference in dates for the monthly meetings; Isukha and Idakho had long opted for the 20th of the month, whereas the Maragoli preference was for the 30th of the month. As Rasmussen shrewdly observed, however, this longstanding difference between the groups had never been a source of division before. She speculated that the “real reason behind the final break was that Keverenge Atonya wanted to stand as the top leader of north Maragoli, and he

57 Rasmussen, Modern African Spirituality, 57.
was unwilling to remain in a Church in which he could no longer hold that position." 

So by 1970, the Holy Spirit people had split into four distinct churches:

- Spirit Movement
  - Holy Spirit Church (1940)
    - Holy Spirit Church of East Africa
  - African Church of the Holy Spirit (1957)
    - Gospel Holy Spirit of East Africa (1964)
      - Lyahuka Church of East Africa (1971)

Although these churches share the same origins and many of the same emphases, they actually have very little to do with one another. Ironically, it was the FAM who first began trying to bring the different groups together. These efforts have met with little or no success. 

III. Causes for the ACHS Schism from the FAM

In the case of Nationalist churches, researchers are unanimous in describing the causes of schism: these groups separated over issues such as African leadership and education. Nationalist churches were essentially protest movements - attempts to contest colonial injustices particularly as experienced in relation to the Church. In the case of Zionist churches, however, the identification of the causes for schism is not quite as straightforward. Researchers are divided in their opinion as to why these groups seceded. Taking a

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58 Ibid., 59.

59 Ibid., 61.
sociological approach to the study of religious groups, researchers such as Lonsdale have interpreted these groups as protest movements among the marginalized in society. Certainly, as Rasmussen noted, those who joined the Holy Spirit movement tended to be less educated and hence without easy access to the changing power structures. Educated Christians generally remained within the FAM, and later formed “secular” movements of protest such as the Young Kavirondo Movement (CMS originated). Like Lonsdale, Rasmussen described the Spirit churches as a passive protest movement which rejected the newly shaped society by withdrawing from it.

Conceiving of AICs as protest movements is helpful, but only to a point. The weakness of this approach lies in its comprehensiveness. In this view, any church in the history of Christianity which seceded from a mother-church because of differences (social, political, liturgical or theological) could potentially be termed a protest movement. Lumping Zionist and Ethiopian churches together under the umbrella of “protest movements” risks obscuring their fundamental differences in origins and in subsequent development. John Baur, by contrast, avoided the whole discussion of “protest” by focussing instead on the “religious and social African heritage” evident in Zionist churches. He claimed that it was primarily the new converts’ enduring ties to the traditional religion and culture that led to the creation of Zionist groups. The mission brand of Christianity, propounded from a Western world view and celebrated in Western trappings, did not resonate with all Africans. Mission Christianity failed to answer the basic religious questions that concerned Africans. So it happened that some groups sought more “African” expressions of their Christian faith. This led to a borrowing and blending of traditional religious forms and ideas with Christianity. As E. Obeng explained, the Spirit churches “aimed at giving Christianity an

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60 See also Bryan Wilson’s article, “Becoming a Sectarian: Motivation and Commitment,” for a discussion of religious and non-religious factors in the joining of ‘sectarian’ groups.


African imprint, so that the African’s emotions, his intense yearning to see God through African based forms and formalities would be realised." Obeng and Baur’s approach does not exclude a “protest” interpretation of Zionist groups. Instead, it more narrowly defines Zionist churches by contrasting them with Ethiopian types.

To highlight the fundamental differences between the origins of the ABC and the ACHS, the ABC causative factors will be applied one by one to the Abaluyian context, and rejected. While showing the differences in origins between the ABC and ACHS, this exercise will also draw out the common role of vernacular translations.

1. Causes for Discontent

Call for Unity:

The diversity of Protestant missions is often presented as problematic for African groups; many scholars argue that the Protestant missions carried within themselves the model for schism. In the case of the Abaluyia, there was certainly considerable diversity in the mission groups working in the area. While the FAM’s sphere of influence took in most of the Abaluyian territory under consideration, by the early 1920’s contact with rival denominations such as the Pentecostals and the Salvation Army had already occurred. Certainly, the Pentecostal encouragement of charismatic expression such as glossolalia strengthened the Spirit people’s conviction of the legitimacy of their forms of worship. In this sense, Protestant denominationalism encouraged the Spirit people’s secession from the FAM, since they found support for their stance from at least one other “legitimate” Christian group.

Unlike the Kamba, however, it is doubtful that the Abaluyia were greatly troubled by the diversity in the mission groups. Certainly, in view of the history of the Abaluyian peoples, rivalry between groups of the same race would have appeared quite normal. The Abaluyia were a people loosely knit together by language and cultural practices. Inter-clan battles were as common as inter-ethnic ones. In no way can the formation of the Spirit churches be seen as a protest against Western-exported divisions, nor as an attempt to bring about tribal “unity” among believers. The history of ACHS splits along clan lines clearly rules out any such interpretation.

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African Leadership:

The ABC listed the exclusion of Kamba from leadership positions as one of the causes of schism from the AIM. There is no mention in the literature of any such dissatisfaction on the part of the Holy Spirit people. Certainly, there was undoubtedly racism expressed by missionaries towards their African colleagues. Prior to his furlough in 1927, Chilson feared there were not enough missionaries to carry on the work - ignoring, of course, the more significant contribution already being made by Abaluyian evangelists. Judging from the missionary reports to North America, the FAM missionaries as a whole undervalued the work of the African Christians.

That said, it seems that the Abaluyia had a measure of autonomy never known by Kamba Christians. The considerable territory encompassed by the FAM sphere can probably account for this difference. FAM missionaries relied heavily on African evangelists to spread the Gospel to remote village locations. The linguistic diversity in the area further demanded that missionaries build their ministry on the skills of Abaluyian converts. Indeed, in 1936 the ratio of missionaries to “native workers” was striking: for 11 FAM missionaries, there were 520 employed Abaluyian workers. By contrast, the AIM engaged only 142 “native workers” alongside its 67 missionaries, during the same period.64

Secondly, in the case of the ABC, many of the leaders of the new group were disenchanted pastors and elders. These individuals had worked closely with the missionaries and had experienced first hand the inequalities in the mission church. As indicated earlier, however, the Holy Spirit people included few if any leaders from the FAM church. Most were uneducated laity on the periphery of FAM power structures. In Rasmussen’s view, it was precisely this lack of experienced church leadership that explains the rather disorganized state of affairs that long persisted among the Holy Spirit people.

In sum, then, there is no evidence in the literature to suggest that the ACHS seceded from the FAM in order to meet unfulfilled leadership goals. Instead, all the documentation indicates that the Spirit people were unprepared for and largely uninterested in the running of an organized religious institution.

64 Philip, 151.
Education

With the Kamba, dissatisfaction over the quality of A1M education was a definite factor leading to the formation of the ABC. Indeed, one of the first acts of the newly formed church was the creation of ABC schools. In the case of the Holy Spirit people, however, such motivation is difficult to discern.

FAM education in the Abaluyian territory receives mixed reviews in the literature. In terms of numbers of schools, the FAM compares favourably to the A1M. In 1936, while the A1M had a total of 67 missionaries, it only maintained 103 schools. The FAM, by contrast, could claim 318 schools with a missionary population of only 11.65 In terms of the quality of FAM education, however, it seems it proved no better than the A1M schooling system. During the mid-twenties and early thirties, there was an explosion of interest in education among the Abaluyia.66 In order to meet the new demand, the FAM was obliged to hire poorly trained graduates as teachers. Village schools offered only two years of education, often from teachers with only four years of training.67 Some of the concerns over the quality of FAM schooling were addressed by the Education Department, which the Government set up in 1911 to supervise the various African Schools.68 The FAM missionaries, however, resented the growing demands on their limited resources. The increasing cost of education meant there was less to put towards direct evangelism.69

Was the poor quality of the FAM education system a contributing factor to schism? ACHS members have never listed dissatisfaction with mission schools as a reason for their split from the FAM. Indeed, in the early years, the Holy Spirit people did not send their children to school. A strong apocalyptic outlook characterized the Spirit people at that time, and as Rasmussen noted, there was little logic in educating one’s children if the world was

65 Ibid.
66 Rasmussen, A History of the Quaker Movement, 50ff.
67 Ibid.
69 Rasmussen, A History of the Quaker Movement, 51.
about to end. Unlike the ABC, which immediately started up its own schooling system, the ACHS has never troubled itself with such concerns.

Judging from Lonsdale’s reports on the “secular” organisms of political protest, Abaluyian dissatisfaction with the FAM education system was neither widespread nor strongly felt. What dissatisfaction there was seems to have been limited to the educated elite. Education was not a major issue for the marginalised groups that made up the Holy Spirit people.

Cultural Issues:

Throughout sub-Saharan Africa, missionary condemnation of practices like polygamy and initiation rites was a source of contention among African believers. Indeed, one of the causes of Kamba disaffection with the AIM was its harsh treatment of polygamists. ABC members listed missionary insensitivity on this matter as one of the reasons for leaving the AIM. In Kakamega District, missionary approaches to Abaluyian culture was not without controversy. Perhaps the source of greatest contention surrounded male circumcision rites among the Tiriki. Sangree offered a detailed description of the uproar created in this southeastern clan over FAM attempts to change this rite. In surrounding FAM areas, including Maragoli, Isukha and Idakho, missionary teaching on this matter generated less controversy. Indeed, it was the “foreign” Maragoli, Isukha and Idakho living in Tiriki who encouraged the minority Tiriki Christians to oppose the initiation practices. Why were the Tiriki so resistant to change in this area, in contrast to the Maragoli, Isukha and Idakho Christians? Sangree speculated that the Tiriki customs were more elaborate than in other Abaluyian clans, and formed a central part of their understanding of what it meant to be a Tiriki. Interestingly, although its Headquarters were in Tiriki location, the FAM had little success in drawing converts from among this group.

Like the AIM, FAM missionaries brought along with them some of their Western, evangelical codes of morality, and imposed them on the Abaluyia. The missionaries forbade “smoking, dancing, drinking alcohol and sexual offences, especially polygamy.”

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71 Rasmussen, A History of the Quaker Movement, 54.
caught committing these ‘crimes’ faced discipline by village church leaders. To be restored to the community, the guilty party was required to publicly confess his or her sins.

It is difficult to assess, some seventy years on, how the Abaluyian Christians received these new moral rules. The silence in the literature on this topic suggests that the new ethical code did not create the uproar one would expect. In fact, Rasmussen implied that not only did the Christian Abaluyia accept the new ethical teachings, but went on to add their own, more strict standards of conduct. For example, Christian women would refuse to brew beer for their non-Christian husbands - even though brewing beer was traditionally the woman’s job. As a result of their refusals, women would often face beatings by their outraged husbands. Another example was the eating of chicken and eggs by women and girls. Chicken and eggs were traditionally taboo for women, and were said to cause infertility. The Abaluyian Christians saw the violation of this taboo as a testimony to the superiority of the Christian faith over that handed down by the ancestors. Finally, some Christians would deliberately divulge secret initiation rites to missionaries as a way of demonstrating Christ’s power over the ancestors.

Although many Zionist churches wished to continue polygamist practices, this does not seem to have been a major issue for the Holy Spirit people.

Colonial Injustice:

As frequently noted in the literature, Africans viewed missionaries as part of the colonial system of government. Thus, instances of colonial injustice cannot be ignored when discussing the causes of schism by the Spirit people.

In the case of the Abaluyia, they had plenty of reason to be angry at the colonial regime. Around the turn of the century (1895), the Abaluyia unsuccessfully tried to repel the British advance into their territory. The Babukusu put up the greatest fight, but resistance also had to be forcibly quelled in the “Abaluyian sections of Maragoli, Kakamega (Isukha and

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72 Sangree, 135. Eventually, traditionalists were prohibited from forcing their Christian wives to brew beer. Sangree wondered whether the sudden influx of women into the church around that time is related to the fact that beer brewing was an incredibly time consuming job that women were glad to be rid of!

73 Rasmussen, A History of the Quaker Movement, 55.
Idakho), Tiriki and Bunyore."

No sooner had the British set up shop, than they imposed a much despised "hut tax" (1900). These taxes were collected by the British-created Wanga chieftains. The Wanga are a northern Abaluyian clan, who gained considerable influence with the British government. The Wanga were installed as chiefs over various Abaluyian clans in the region, and were deeply resented. Following close on the heels of these changes came the introduction of cash crops and the settlement of European farmers beginning in 1910. With the introduction of a monetary system, many Abaluyia were left with no choice but to work as labourers for the European settlers. The government constructed roads in the region by instituting forced labour. During the first World War, the government drafted Abaluyia into the Carrier Corps as porters. This latter experience led to increasing distrust of the Europeans, especially among the returning war veterans. Finally, there was the case of further land alienation with the discovery of gold in Kakamega in 1931.

While undoubtedly the Holy Spirit people felt the weight of these injustices to the same extent as FAM adherents, it is hard to see the formation of the new churches as a conscious protest against colonial society. Even Rasmussen, who labelled the Spirit churches as protest movements, conceded that the "Holy Spirit people had not thought of setting up their own Church; they regarded their movement as a revival within the Friends Africa Mission." The fact that many of the Spirit people sought to associate themselves with other missions confirms this statement. The highly a-political nature of the church throughout its early years, with its tendency to retreat from society, weakens Lonsdale and Rasmussen's thesis.

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74 Were, 167.

75 Barker, 23.


77 Rasmussen, Modern African Spirituality, 25. Rasmussen cited this as a factor explaining the Holy Spirit movement - although the rather late date of the discovery of gold in Kakamega makes this a tentative thesis at best.

78 Ibid., 23.
Few, if any Holy Spirit people would indicate colonial injustices as a factor behind succession from the FAM church. Their explanation would instead focus on the theological differences arising from their experience of the Holy Spirit.

2. Factors Behind Schism: As Viewed by the Spirit People

The literature is unanimous in identifying the Revival of 1927 as a pivotal moment in the history of the Holy Spirit movement. Certainly, ACHS members begin the narration of their history with the story of the Revival. At a service attended by Sangree in 1956, the High Priest Kefa Mavuru offered a brief history of the Holy Spirit churches, commencing with the Revival and missionary rejection of their charismatic practices.

According to interviews with members of the Spirit groups, it was specifically the Revival’s charismatic practices which drew converts to the movement. As Petro Isiaho explained, “I did not in any way despise the Established Churches but I was attracted to Dini ya Roho because I was in closer communication with God.” Indeed, so powerful was this new experience, that faced with a choice between “abandoning the Spirit” and being welcomed by the mission, the Spirit people preferred expulsion. When Abaluyian elders threatened the Bukoyani and Muhanda Spirit groups with excommunication unless they toned down their worship, the Holy Spirit people stood their ground. The elders told them to leave the church, and the Spirit people went out singing this hymn from the Friends’ Luragoli hymn book:

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\begin{align*}
\text{When I will be sent before the court} \\
\text{My heart will be in peace} \\
\text{When I have His righteousness,} \\
\text{Now I want Jesus himself}\end{align*}
\]

Clearly, the Spirit people saw themselves as upholding Gospel truth. For them, the churches came about because of missionary rejection of Spirit Baptism. This perspective concurs with the previous overview of the history of the church. Interestingly, Sundkler has pointed out that within modern Protestantism in North America, differing views on the Holy Spirit have been the most common cause of secession. That similar divisions should have arisen in

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79 Petro Isiaho. ACHS Interviews, 5.

80 Rasmussen, Modern African Spirituality, 19.
Africa is only to be expected.  

Diverging worship practices as the originating factor for the ACHS agrees with Baur’s assessment of the source of Zionist churches. A charismatic form of Christianity resonated with Abaluyian Christians in a way that the formal, FAM kind did not. As former High Priest Kefa Ayub complained, the missionaries only offered the “dry message from the Bible without the Spirit.” Unfortunately, this search for forms of Christian worship which spoke to the Abaluyian soul brought the Spirit people into conflict with Western worship practices.

Of course, while scholars like Baur would explain the strong attraction of charismatic worship practices by referring to the traditional religious and cultural background, the Spirit people would probably refuse any cultural explanations. Most likely, the ACHS and its sister churches would simply underline the power and validity of their experience of Spirit Baptism. A cultural explanation for these theological developments, however, seems valid. The fact that the Spirit people were unable to remain with the Pentecostals, who shared their pneumatological focus, is significant. Despite their common valuation of charismatic experience, the Pentecostals and Spirit groups clashed. Doubtlessly, this is because the Spirit people were still working from an Abaluyian, and not a Western world view. As a result of an indigenous reading of Scripture and of the distinctively Abaluyian questions being asked of their faith, the Spirit churches gradually began to develop forms and structures of worship which differed in dramatic ways from all the mission churches.

Earlier, the merit of terming Zionist groups as “protest movements” was questioned. This was not merely an academic exercise. Such generalizations veil the substantial differences between Zionist and Ethiopian churches. For the purposes of this thesis, it is important to appreciate that different factors led to the formation of the ABC and the ACHS. Once these differences have been seized, the unique role of Scripture across the types becomes clear.

3. Assessment of Scripture in Relation to Causal Factors

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82 Complaints reminiscent of George Fox, the founder of the Quaker movement! Quoted in Rasmussen, Modern African Spirituality, 20.
As with the ABC, the ACIIS does not list ‘Scripture’ as one of the factors behind schism. Indeed, the experience of Spirit Baptism was so powerful that one might argue that it, in itself, provided the authority to secede. Had Scriptures not been translated, would the Spirit churches been formed? This is an unanswerable question, although if one were to follow Barrett’s scale of religious tension, the answer would probably be ‘no.’ What can be examined, however, is the Spirit people’s use of Scripture during the period of expulsion and prosecution.

To begin with, it is important to consider the context in which Scripture was used. In the FAM, Scripture was presented as the Holy Book of the Christians. It was the authoritative text from which church doctrine and practice were derived. The use of Scripture as the textbook of FAM schools further underlined its central place in the life of the church. Through the schooling system, Abaluyian Christians became familiar with the biblical texts and with the principle of supporting religious teachings from Scripture.

During the revival in 1927, Chilson justified Spirit Baptism by reading aloud the Pentecost account from Acts 2:1-4. Even today, ACIIS documents highlight this verse in the narration of the origins of their church. The passage in Acts provided the Spirit people with scriptural justification for their movement and aided them in resisting FAM discipline. The Spirit people found in the early church a kindred spirit. If theirs was the shared experience of Jesus’ first disciples, what then was there to fear from missionary condemnation?

From the very beginning, Scripture played an important role in the life of the Spirit people. When asked how early leaders were chosen, Petro Isiaho replied: “At first, whoever could read the Bible took the lead of the gathering...”。 Literacy appeared to be the only requirement for leadership, which is an indication of the importance ascribed to Scripture by

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81 The Tiriki present an interesting case study. No Spirit groups formed among the Tiriki, although the Revival of 1927 took place in their midst. Could the absence of vernacular translations in anything but the ‘foreign’ Luragoli be a factor explaining both their resistance to the FAM and to the Spirit people?

82 As suggested by their fundamentalist approach to Scripture [Rasmussen, A History of the Quaker Movement, 14-16] and Chilson’s exposition of Scripture to support Spirit Baptism.

83 As, for example, with Chilson’s defence of Spirit Baptism during the Prayer Conferences.

84 Petro Isiaho. ACHS Interviews, 24.
the Spirit people. Rasmussen’s interviews uncovered a similar interest in Scripture among the early leaders of the Bukoyani group. Japhet Zale Ambula described the worship, prayer and enthusiasm of the early meetings. He added: “When you were standing, reading the Bible, you did not want anybody else to stand and read. You wanted just to continue and continue and continue.” Although this does not tell us how Scripture was used in the community, it does demonstrate that in practice, Scripture was included as an important element in worship services. That Scripture should figure so prominently in ACHS circles follows from the central place assigned to Scripture in FAM congregations and schools.

Sangree’s account of his visit with Kefa Ayub Mavuru offers interesting insight into ACHS understanding of the authoritative role of Scripture in the church. Mavuru and his elders, during the interview, asserted that dreams and visions must be tested against Scripture to verify whether they are from God or Satan. While this view of Scripture’s authority obviously dates to a later stage of development in the church’s history (1950’s), it is confirmed earlier in the developing tradition. The custom of indicating biblical references beside descriptions of church practice testifies to the ACHS appreciation of Scripture as the authoritative book of the Christian faith.

In summary, the ACHS recognized in Scripture the primary authority by which one measures the faithfulness of church practice. When defending themselves before the FAM, they appealed to Scripture, claiming their worship was true to that of the early church. In this sense, Scripture was an occasioning factor in schism, for in legitimizing the Spirit people’s experience, Scripture effectively gave them needed ammunition against their detractors.

Interestingly, unlike the ABC, the ACHS did not search for biblical texts justifying the principle of independency. This makes sense, when one recalls that the Spirit people never intended to form an African-led church. Rather, they viewed themselves as a legitimate revival group within the FAM. Theirs was more a case of expulsion than schism. Only when

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88 Sangree, 186

90 See Section IV.
asked to abandon their forms of worship did trouble arise.

Perhaps because of their forcible eviction, one does not find in ACHS documents extensive reflection on the biblical grounds for secession. What Scriptural reflection there is focuses on demonstrating the legitimacy of Spirit Baptism. In the case of the ACHS, the importance of Scripture in legitimizing the formation of the group can best be seen in the subsequent development of its traditions.

IV. Shape of the African Church of the Holy Spirit

As with the case study on the African Brotherhood Church, the purpose of the following section is not to provide a comprehensive picture of ACHS polity, worship, ethics and doctrine. Rather, the first goal is to demonstrate that the coordinating factors in schism influenced the subsequent shape of the church. As a corollary to this, it will be argued that the difference in causative factors explains in part the differences between the Zionist ACHS and the Nationalist ABC. The second goal in this survey of ACHS traditions is to examine the church’s use of Scripture. It will be shown that the ACHS, like the ABC, appeals to Scripture as the authority by which new traditions are justified; in this, vernacular translations continue the role they had in occasioning schism.

I. Membership

The membership of the ACHS is predominantly Abaluyia, with a minority group of Meru.90 As with all AICs, it is hard to be certain of numbers. An article written in 1971 estimated the membership at 40,000 members. Twenty five years later, a journalist claimed for the ACHS some 500,000 adherents across Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania.91 Bishop Magomere Fitzjoji of Nairobi (ACHS) also figured ACHS membership at 500,000, when spread across 15 centres in East Africa.92

As previously noted, the membership of the ACHS was originally drawn from the poorer, less educated classes of Abaluyian society. In 1971, High Priest Kefa Mavuru earned

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90 N. Magomere Fitzjoji, Bishop of Nairobi, ACHS. Interview by author, June 1996, Nairobi.


his living as a farmer, cultivating "26 acres of fertile land". Of course, in a land hungry nation, Mavuru's 26 acres made him a comparatively wealthy man. The point is, however, the church has never been able to afford to pay its leaders for their work. Few have received formal theological training. Through sacrificial giving by members and with the support of the National Christian Council of Kenya, the ACHS recently put two women through the divinity programme at St. Paul's United Theological College in Limuru. Both women subsequently looked for work in mainline denominations when their church was unable to support them financially in ministry. In a frank discussion with Bishop Magomere of Nairobi, the author learned of the church's struggles to find outside funding for the training and support of ACHS leaders. The ACHS has been drawing greater numbers of educated leaders, but the bulk of the laity consists of the poor and working classes. This tendency for Zionist churches to attract marginalized groups has been noted elsewhere in the literature.

The lack of formal bible training explains in part the church's hermeneutics. As is typical of Zionist churches, the ACHS approaches Old Testament texts as though independent from the New. That is, the Old Testament emphasis on law and covenant is accepted without obvious reference to the understanding of covenant in the New Testament.

To be a member of the ACHS, according to Bishop Magomere, one must agree to church doctrine and ethics, and submit to church discipline. Furthermore, members are expected to wear church dress to worship, pay church dues and be in regular church attendance. Political involvement by ACHS members is discouraged.

2. Positions of Leadership

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93 Omolo, 2.

94 Bishop Magomere is himself a professor at the University of Nairobi.


96 See for example Baur, 355.


98 Omolo, 2.
As already noted, leadership positions in the church are voluntary. The organizational structures roughly follow those of the FAM, with village, monthly, quarterly and yearly meetings. According to Rasmussen, at each level one finds a meeting leader or chairman, a secretary, a treasurer and a priest. Since the time of Rasmussen’s writing, the titles of the positions have varied somewhat, as have the titles of the meetings. Most notable are the addition of positions such as Bishop, and the creation of administrative units like Dioceses. These Anglican/Catholic titles were added later; the reason for this borrowing is unknown. The official head of the ACHS is called the High Priest - a title originally assigned by the government and accepted by the church. Ndiokwere noted that Zionist churches like the ACHS in general lean toward hierarchical structures, with careful attention to “rank and insignia.” Citing Sundklær and Turner, he suggested that these concerns stem from African culture.

ACHS parishes operate with a fair degree of autonomy from Headquarters. Local leaders are nominated by congregations. Most positions in the church are elected, although it is understood that these elections take place under the “dictates of the Holy Spirit”. Bishop Magomere explained that in earlier periods, the will of the Holy Spirit was discerned through dreams and visions. Noticing, however, that the Holy Spirit was offering contradictory advice, the church has introduced the concept of an elected High Priest. This gradual institutionalization of the charismata is a recognized phenomenon in Pentecostal groups in the United States as well as in AICs. Barring any personal misdemeanour, the High Priest is appointed for life.

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100 Fitzjoji, Interview.
101 Ndiokwere, 124.
102 Sangree, 188.
103 A phrase used over and over in the proposed amended constitution.
104 Fitzjoji, Interview.
Women are able to serve in various offices similar to those for men. Positions for women include Quarterly Meeting Woman Leader and Village Meeting Woman Leader.

A document published by the ACHS provides interesting material on ACHS requirements for leadership. For the position of chairperson, the following qualities are demanded:

a) The leader must take care of himself and obey God's commandments as it is in Ex. 18:21-27; Acts 6:3-6; Romans 13:1-10; Matthew 22:15-22; Titus 3:1-6; I Pe.2:-13-17; Eph.2:14-32 and 4:8-17; I Cor.9:13-15; I Tim.3:2.

b) He must know both the New and Old Testaments, how the Holy Spirit leads and must be able to prophesy what is right. Eze. 3:1-8; Jere.23:16-40, Isaiah 5:18; Ezekiel 22:23-31.

c) He must be a respected man who can bring peace in all the churches and the politicians of the government.

d) One who can stand the position of a High Priest.106

The requirement that leaders have the gift of prophecy is typical of Zionist churches.107 The important place of dreams and prophecies in the traditional religion is often put forward as the explanation for this trend in Zionist churches. In Abaluyian traditional religiosity, dreams certainly featured prominently. Indeed, among the Logoli there was a small class of religious leaders called the dream-prophets, who were blessed with the art of dream interpretation and prophecy.108 While dreams and 'prophecy' are present in the traditional culture, the ACHS finds Scriptural defence for their high valuation of the gift of prophecy.

Interesting also is the demand that the ACHS leader know "both the New and Old Testaments." On the whole, ACHS documents prefer the expression "New and Old Testaments" to the more general "Scripture" or "Bible". Bishop Magomere, for example, explained that the church's mission was to promote the Gospel by teaching people "from the


107 See for detailed studies Ndiokwere, 80ff; Sundikler, 58ff.

108 See Wagner, 212 ff.
New and Old Testament books of the Bible.” Even in this expression, one finds evidence of a fragmented view of Scripture.

Another section in this document treats the generic qualities desired in ACHS leaders. These requirements include knowledge of church doctrine, worship, and practices:

*What a Leader Must Know:*
1. Remove the shoes before entering chapel - Ex.3:5; Joshua 5:15
2. Singing and praising the Lord in the chapel by clapping and drumming - Psalms 47:1-7; 150:1; Isaiah 38:20; Ex. 15:20
3. To put on a turban - John 20:7; Zechariah 3:5.
4. To put a sign of a cross on each clothing which is worn while going to chapel. Luke 14:27, 9:23; Matt.16:24-27; Mark 8:34; Matt.10:38.
5. Know about robbery of God’s property - read Acts 5:1-6
6. Fasting and purifying those who have different problems, to bless those people. One can fast for one week, one day, according to the grace of the Lord. John 13:2; 16:20-22; Isaiah 58:4-12; James 4:7-10; Matt.17:21
8. Difference between the baptism in Jesus’ name and Holy Spirit - Read Acts 10:44-48; 1:16; Mark 1:7; Luk 3:16.  

In this list one finds many of the features which set the ACHS apart from the mainline churches, both in outward signs (dress), in style of worship (removal of shoes in worship, use of traditional instruments) and in doctrine (Spirit baptism, purification and exorcisms). Again, all of the elements listed above are typical of Zionist churches, with the exception perhaps of item number 5; the reason for its inclusion in the list is hard to discern. Also typical is the proof-texting of church practices.  

Unlike the ABC, African leadership was never a causative factor in ACHS schism. Upon the registration of the ACHS, however, the gradual process of institutionalization began; the creation of formal positions of leadership was a part of this. While some of the leadership structures were borrowed from the missions, the qualities sought in ACHS leadership were distinctly their own. Some of the leadership characteristics derived from the

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110 Tsiruma, 5ff.

traditional religiosity (ex. ability to interpret dreams), but were re-interpreted through the lens of the Christian faith (ex. dream interpretation as the quality of a biblical prophet).

Many of the leadership qualities appeared to be knowledge of specific church practices. Some of these church practices are new developments, arising from an indigenous reading of Scripture (ex. wearing of turbans, removal of shoes). This indigenous reading favours the Old Testament books and allows for the identification of biblical ‘mandates’ without consideration of the historical context of the selected texts, and without reference to New Testament writings. Many of the texts chosen reflect aspects of the Abaluyian culture and world view (ex. recognizing sacred spaces in some way - as seen in the ACHS practice of removing shoes). All these changes can be expected from a group whose primary goal was to seek meaningful forms of Christian worship.

Throughout the discussion, Scripture's occasioning role was seen primarily in the proof-texting of leadership qualifications. This indicates that the ACHS recognizes Scripture as the authoritative book by which church doctrine and practice are justified. The fact that leaders must know ‘both the Old and New Testaments’ suggests that their authority rests in part on their apprehension of this authoritative text.

3. Practices

Place and Order of Worship:

In the ACHS book of church practice, the main requirement for places of worship is accessibility. They must also be situated in locations where an office, “house of purification” and latrine can be built. On the whole, ACHS churches are sparsely furnished. There are no pews, and men and women sit separately on the floor. The reason for the lack of pews appears to be a pragmatic one. During the services, there is much celebratory jumping and dancing, and occasionally bouts of Spirit possession when worshippers are thrown to the ground. In such a worship context, pews would present a serious hazard.

At the ACHS service attended by the author, the congregation rented a room from

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112 Tsiruma, 5.

113 Personal observation. See also Wafula, 10.
another church.\textsuperscript{114} By the time the author’s group arrived, ACHS members had already pushed the wooden benches against the walls. At the front of the room, there was a table on which a large black Bible was placed. Leaders sat on chairs behind this table. Drums were laid on the floor in front of the table, and were played as accompaniment to congregational singing. The announcements and sermons were given from the front of the room, by the table.

Not all ACHS services are indoors. Services will occasionally take place outside, particularly for evangelistic meetings. Typically, ACHS groups will meet in the market where crowds are likely to be attracted by the bright banners and vibrant music. The church banners are raised on poles outside places of worship, and serve as a rallying point for the people.\textsuperscript{115}

The ACHS purify their buildings for worship. That is, they ‘cleanse’ the worship space from evil spirits. Windows are closed at the beginning of the service, in a literal application of Matthew 6:6.\textsuperscript{116} While the congregation stands facing the open door, a leader begins to recite the following in Ki-Luyia:\textsuperscript{117} “The evil ones who were causing us to sin, we cast them away.”\textsuperscript{118} The people respond in kind: “We cast them away!” While the leader is talking, there is vigorous and rhythmic clapping of hands and stamping of feet. A similar procedure is followed at the end of the service. An informant explained that the ACHS believes the world is peopled with spirits, and that Christians must defend themselves against

\textsuperscript{114} Informants explained that few congregations actually own church buildings. Rooms are often rented for worship.

\textsuperscript{115} On the day of a visit to an ACHS church in Nairobi, the author learned how immensely practical the banners could prove. The regular place of worship had been taken over for meetings of the ACHS leadership, and so, with the vaguest of directions, worshippers were sent off to find another church. Thanks to the flags and distinctive dress of the ACHS, it was easy to locate another group.

\textsuperscript{116} Rasmussen, Modern African Spirituality, 75.

\textsuperscript{117} Translation offered by Kaburu, in Interviews.

\textsuperscript{118} Rasmussen learned that the expression “Gi twulidzwe”, meaning “may it be taken away”, is derived from Ephesians 4:31. Modern African Spirituality, 70.
Evil spirits can possess Christians if they have not properly repented of their sins. Hence, each service begins with a purification rite where the building and members are cleansed from evil spirits. When asked why members clap their hands and stamp their feet, ACHS member Sarah Kaburu quoted Ezekiel 6:11, which reads: “Thus says the Lord God: ‘Clap your hands and stamp your foot and say, Alas!’ for all the vile abominations of the house of Israel.”

Although the ACHS claims the meetings are directed by the Spirit, a certain structure is discernible in the service. The following provides a rough idea of the pattern of worship in ACHS churches:

- Prayers of the people (vocal prayers in which people purify themselves by repenting of sins)
- Music (2 or 3 choruses)
- Announcements
- Congregational recitation of Psalm 1:1-6 (prayer of confession); Psalm 23:1-6; the Apostles Creed; and the Ten Commandments
- Binding of Spirits
- Prayers for the offering and general prayers
- Lord’s Prayer (said three times at least)
- Visions and dreams: the leaders will interpret them if they are relevant to the service
- Choruses
- Sermon(s)
- Binding of Spirits
- Lord’s Prayer

While there is some variation from church to church, they all follow the general pattern of confession, recitation of Psalms, binding of Spirits, recitation of the Lord’s Prayer, and preaching.

Grant LeMarquand, a New Testament scholar who attended an ACHS service,

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119 Kaburu, Interviews.

120 Ibid. Ezekiel 6:11a. NRSV.

121 The order of service differs somewhat between the Meru and Abaluyian congregations. This order of service was constructed from an ACHS service in Nairobi, from descriptions by Sarah Kaburu, and from Tsiruma, 21-22. Again, churches vary in the exact ordering of the elements.

122 In the ACHS documentation and according to informants, the Creed is regularly recited as part of the service. Rasmussen never heard it said, however, and neither did the author.
wondered whether the psalms and the Lord’s Prayer were being used in a magical way. The frequent repetition of the Lord’s Prayer in a drone-like tone, at an increasing pace, is a frequently noted phenomenon in Zionist AICs. Harold Turner and David Adamo have both written on this topic, and suggested that the practice might derive from the use of incantations in traditional religiosity. When asked why church members recited the Lord’s Prayer three or more times, Sarah Kaburu replied that this was simply the way people purified themselves.

ACHS places of worship do not conform to the traditional mission pattern, with pews, pulpits, crosses and ornamentation. Instead, the churches suit the ACHS worship style. There are no pews, since space is needed for dancing, jumping, and Spirit possession. In any case, seating arrangements are not a major issue when it comes to church buildings; of far greater concern is the cleansing of the site for worship. The purification practices of the ACHS reflect their traditional world view, with its anxiety over the presence of evil spirits. Since the FAM did not address these concerns, the ACHS had to look elsewhere for answers. From Scripture, they developed a new rite of exorcism (from texts in Matthew and Ezekiel). That the ACHS should have developed a ritual so different from anything seen in the FAM comes as no surprise; as seen in the discussion of causal factors, this is the result of the ACHS’ concern for finding Christian forms which resonate with the Abaluyian worshipper.

Manner of Worship:

As with most Zionist churches, the services in ACHS churches are notable for their enthusiastic singing, dancing, and public speaking. Sangree offered a striking description of a service he and his wife attended in the 1950’s:

As we entered the darkness of the church interior, the sound of singing, clapping, hiccoughing and babbling almost overwhelmed us [...]. On the hard-packed earth floor

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123 Grant LeMarquand, Interview by author, June 1998, from Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry, Pennsylvania. E-mail.


125 Kaburu, Interviews.

126 See Sundkler, 190ff for description of worship in South African Zionist churches; see Ndiokwere, 83ff.
several dozen long-robed kerchiefed women were writhing, jumping and dancing, more or less in rhythm with the singing and clapping...the gyrations of the women consisted mostly of short, fairly rapid hops done with both feet at once while nodding and throwing the arms up over the head in a jerky fashion. At any given time about a dozen of the dancers...were apparently in or near a state of dissociation, hiccupping, uttering nonsense syllables, and staggering unsteadily as they jumped about [...]. Once fallen to the ground such a woman sometimes was successfully pulled to her feet by other dancers and continued to dance herself; but in other cases she was unable to rise again even with help and simply lay twitching and trembling while the other dancers sidestepped and swirled about her.\textsuperscript{127}

At the service attended by the author, while the state of enthusiasm was not as high, there was still plenty of jumping, clapping, dancing, and speaking in tongues.

Women generally start off the singing in ACHS services. No hymn books are used. The congregation joins in after the first few lines of the chorus, accompanied by enthusiastic drumming. The throbbing beat of the drums, the rhythmic clapping and dancing, and the loud singing create an air of celebration in worship. The ACHS tunes provided quite a contrast to the fifteenth-century English hymns and pump organ music the author had heard earlier at an Anglican service.

When asked about the choruses, Sarah Kaburu explained that many of the songs had been given to the church by the Spirit. Oftentimes, song leaders are “inspired” during worship, and share the new tune immediately with the rest of the congregation. Grant LeMarquand observed this phenomenon during an ACHS service on May 17, 1998:

\textit{...during this period of the service [of ecstatic singing and dancing] the singing shifted from singing choruses which people already knew, to singing a ‘spiritual song’ (as Francis [an ACHS pastor] called it - obvious allusion to Ephesians there) which emerged from...the congregation. Francis told me that these were sometimes remembered and used again later. The song consisted basically of one short phrase set to one line of music which was repeated over and over.}\textsuperscript{128}

Sometimes, Kaburu said, the lyrics will simply consist of a phrase from Scripture.

Dancing is a ‘religious’ activity in traditional Abaluyian culture. Boys dance at their

\textsuperscript{127} Sangree, 179.

\textsuperscript{128} LeMarquand, Interview. Text in brackets mine.
initiation rites, and there are dances at funerals to appease the deceased person’s spirit. \(^{129}\) Dancing is characteristic of Zionist churches, and is said to be a sign of Spirit possession. \(^{130}\) Sundkler suggested that dancing is actually a part of “a variety of Christianized possession,”\(^ {131}\) while Oosthuizen claimed that in traditional Africa, dancing is a means for obtaining power.\(^ {132}\)

While dancing, clapping, and the use of drums in services may be important elements in Abaluyian society, the official reason given for their use in the ACHS is biblical. In the Order of Service, Psalms 47:1-7 and 150:1, Isaiah 38:20 and Exodus 15:20 are given as the justification of these practices.\(^ {133}\) That even worship styles and instruments need biblical justification serves as an indicator of ACHS’ view of Scripture as regulator of church life.

Congregational participation is active throughout the services, even during the sermons. In the style of southern Baptists, the preacher will pepper his or her sermon with loud “Hallelujah’s”, to which the congregation responds in kind. As Rasmussen noted, the style of preaching in ACHS churches in no way resembles the subdued, reflective sermonising in FAM churches.

The style of preaching is theme, rather than text-based. Instead of preaching from a single biblical text, the preacher chooses a topic and cites Scripture to support each point in the developing sermon. More often than not, ACHS preachers will either quote Scripture from memory or will ask a person standing beside them to read the passages aloud. According to Rasmussen, this latter practice is to avoid embarrassment on the part of illiterate preachers.\(^ {134}\)

ACHS posture in prayer differs from that of the FAM, with ACHS members kneeling

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\(^ {129}\) See Wagner for discussion.

\(^ {130}\) Ndiokwere, 85; Turner, *History of an African Independent Church*, 118.

\(^ {131}\) Sundkler, 200.


\(^ {133}\) Tsiruma, 5ff.

while praying. ACHS prayers are vocal and very repetitive, which serves to heighten the emotional intensity in the services. Indeed, Sundkler claimed that the most characteristic feature of Zionist prayer "is the fact that all take part in it at the same time, everyone seemingly attempting to outdo his or her neighbour in shouted supplications to God." Confession forms an important component of ACHS prayers. This is hardly surprising, given the central place of repentance in ACHS theology.

From this brief survey, one learns several things. First, it is evident that Abaluyian culture influences many aspects of ACHS worship. This follows from the causative factors of schism — that is, from their desire to find meaningful (African) forms of Christian worship. The ACHS music is traditional, and the services lively with dance; noisy, enthusiastic and charismatic, ACHS worship differs substantially from that of the FAM. Second, it is clear that Scripture serves a different function from culture in the articulation of practices. Thus, while scholars might account for differences between the ACHS and FAM by referring to the traditional culture, the ACHS appeals to Scripture as the justification for their worship practices.

_Dress for Worship:_

As with many Zionist churches, the ACHS has specific rules for dress at worship. Members wear distinctive white robes with red crosses sewn on the front. Men's heads are covered with white turbans and women's with white headdresses. Small red crosses are often stitched onto the fabric. Originally, members were expected to wear the robes at all times, but now only the turbans and headdresses need be worn outside of worship. According to informants, the ACHS dress was revealed to them by the Holy Spirit. Sundkler noted that sacred dress is frequently imparted to Zionist churches in dreams; he tentatively suggested links between Zionist dress and sacred robes in the traditional religion, particularly where

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135 See Ibid., 74 ff for a discussion of prayer in the Spirit churches.

136 Sundkler, 193.

137 See for example Ibid., 213ff.

138 Fitzjoji, Interview; Kaburu, Interviews.
colour is concerned. 139

ACHS members are to don white robes and turbans, just like the Israelite priests. In explaining the origins of ACHS dress, informants quoted Zechariah 3:1-8. In this passage, Zechariah was dressed in clean garments and a turban after the Lord had cleansed him from sin. In Israel, however, only the priests wore robes. In the ACHS all members are to don robes since all are called to ministry, 140 and presumably, because all have been cleansed from their sins. Former High Priest Kefa Ayub gave a somewhat different interpretation of the origins of the ACHS dress, indicating that it drew its inspiration from the “vision the disciples had when Jesus was lifted to heaven.” 141 Whichever interpretation is correct, both rely on Scripture to justify the practice. Indeed, in one ACHS document, there is a section on “clothing” with no explanation other than a list of verses, including Genesis 3:21; Matthew 6:31-32; I Peter 3:3-4; Numbers 8:21-22; Exodus 19:10-11; and James 3:2. 142

At the service the author attended in Nairobi, many of the men removed their turbans to reveal a mass of uncut hair. Rasmussen’s informants explained that ACHS men remove their turbans in obedience to I Corinthians 11:4 and 7. 143 The prohibition against cutting one’s hair comes from Scripture; members refer to the story of Samson to account for this practice. 144

Before entering the church, members remove their shoes. In the ACHS document, Historia na Taratibu ya Mi Kutaho ya Kanisa la African Church of the Holy Spirit, it states that the holiness of the sanctuary demands that one enters barefoot. 145 As mentioned earlier, the traditional religion clearly saw some places as more sacred than others. Sacrificial sites

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139 Sundkler, 212.
140 Kaburu, Interviews.
141 Quoted in Sangree, 180.
142 Tsiruma, 15-16.
143 Rasmussen, Modern African Spirituality, 64.
144 Kaburu, Interviews.
145 Tsiruma, 21.
or shrines were especially thought to be dangerous. This is because the spirits invoked during sacrificial rites were said to come and inhale the smell of sacrificed meat and beer.\footnote{Wagner, 282. See also his discussion of 'shrines', ritual purity and amulets.} The ACHS maintain the traditional concept of "holy places," which are filled with the presence of the divine. They find ample justification for this concept of "holy place" in Scripture. Additionally, the church discovered in Scripture models for responding to this sense of the sacred. The biblical response to sacred space, according to the ACHS, is the removal of one's shoes. This practice is derived from the story of Moses' removing of his sandals before the burning bush. Interestingly, the removal of shoes for worship is a practice found in numerous other Zionist churches, with the same scriptural justification given.\footnote{See Sundkler, 190; Oosthuizen, \textit{Healer-Prophet}, 191.}

It is important to note that the distinctive dress of the ACHS and the removal of shoes for worship are practices foreign to the FAM. It is also significant that across Africa, Zionist churches almost universally develop forms of "sacred dress" and recognize sacred spaces through practices like the removal of shoes. This pattern suggests that the ACHS practices are somehow an expression of a traditional religious mind set. If this is so, such new developments come as no surprise, given the causative factors in schism.

The fact that the church developed many of these practices from Scripture serves as an indicator of their high valuation of the Bible; namely, they understand Scripture to regulate church practice and doctrine. Their frequent proof-texting from Scripture appears to be an attempt to legitimize the developing church tradition before their membership and the wider church community.

\textit{Prayer on Hills and Mountains:}\footnote{See Sundkler., 199; Oosthuizen, \textit{Post-Christianity}, 182 for discussion of similar phenomenon in other Zionist churches.} 148

This is an important, though rare observance in the ACHS church. The High Priest will ascend a hill or mountain for prayer at moments of crisis or when led by the Holy Spirit. Bishop Magomere Fitzjoji gave Luke 6:12-16 as justification for this practice.\footnote{Fitzjoji, Interview.} Rasmussen
noted, however, that the ACHS selection of mountains for prayer follows a tendency in African traditional religions to view mountains and hills as holy places. She also pointed out that the Logoli (an Abaluyian clan) would make half-yearly sacrifices on a mountain. Only two sacrificial priests were allowed to make the journey up the sacred hill. In a similar way, the ACHS limit mountain prayers to the top leadership: to the High Priest, and in exceptional cases, to priests. Again, it is characteristic of Zionist churches to view mountains as holy places. As Oosthuizen pointed out, Zionist churches find a similar vision of sacred places in the Old Testament.

4. Theology

It hardly seems fair to attempt a survey of ACHS theology in seven or eight pages, but again, the purpose here is to gain a sense of the degree to which the “causal factors” influenced the developing theology of the church, and the manner in which Scripture was used in this process. In the following sections, some of the distinctive of ACHS doctrine such as healing and Spirit Baptism will be touched on. To begin with, however, the church’s catechesis will be examined with an eye to uncovering the general shape of ACHS theology.

What the author has called the ACHS ‘catechesis’ is actually the ACHS baptismal requirements. The ACHS does not baptize with water, so ‘baptism’ refers either to the laying on of hands (also called ‘infant baptism’) or to the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The following is the translation of the catechesis:

One must know the following before being baptized
1) To be saved. Read Isaiah 55:6-7 and Matthew 11:28-30
2) Repent of your sins and be baptized by the Holy Spirit. Read Psalms 32:5-6; Acts 2:38
3) Teaching of the Holy Spirit. Acts 8:14-17; I Timothy 4:14-16

There are several notable things in this list. First, there is the ongoing use of Old Testament passages alongside New Testament ones. Take, for example, points number 1) and 2). In

150 Rasmussen, Modern African Spirituality, 104ff.
151 Oosthuizen, Post-Christianity, 182ff.
152 Tsiruma, 6-7.
many church traditions, only New Testament texts would be supplied in a catechesis treating the topics of salvation and repentance.\textsuperscript{153} For the ACHS, however, the New Testament does not enjoy a privileged status in articulating the tenets of the Christian faith.

A second point of interest is the ACHS’ choice of scriptural references on the topic of salvation. None of the texts selected include a description of Jesus as Saviour. Instead, these passages focus on humans and their responses to God. In the Isaiah text, for example, the subject is repentance while in Matthew the issue is obedience to Christ. This particular choice of texts reflects the ACHS tendency to emphasize the individual’s role in working out his or her salvation.\textsuperscript{154}

As will be shown later, for the ACHS confession of sins leads almost automatically to personal salvation. The emphasis on confession derives in part from the FAM concern with sin and personal guilt.\textsuperscript{155}

Another expected Zionist emphasis in this list is Spirit Baptism.\textsuperscript{156} Indeed, Christ is esteemed primarily for his role in bringing about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on God’s people.\textsuperscript{157} In the process, Christ’s salvific work is often obscured. Indeed, Rasmussen recorded occasions where ACHS members referred to the Holy Spirit as Saviour, or as the “ticket to heaven”.\textsuperscript{158}

In the following sections, the pneumatic elements identified here will be discussed in greater detail, all the while relating them to the causative factors behind schism.

\textit{Spirit Baptism:}

As Rasmussen observed in her study, Spirit baptism is \textit{“the} basic phenomenon in the

\textsuperscript{153} The ABC service book has no Old Testament readings, save for the occasional Psalm.

\textsuperscript{154} For example, in a sermon in High Priest Timotheo Hezekia Shitsimi called people to confession, exclaiming “Save yourself”. Rasmussen, \textit{Modern African Spirituality}, 130.

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 134.

\textsuperscript{156} For examples: Turner, \textit{History of an African Independent Church}, 128ff; Ndiokwere, 88ff.

\textsuperscript{157} See Rasmussen, \textit{Modern African Spirituality}, 150ff for extended discussion.

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 127.
Holy Spirit churches." Rasmussen attributed this in part to the traditional religion, with its emphasis on dreams and visions and its active, physical styles of worship. The charismatic emphasis of Spirit Baptism doubtlessly struck a chord with the Abaluyian Christians. At the same time, the ACHS did not merely transpose traditional beliefs onto Christian forms. Instead, such phenomena as dreams and visions continued in the ACHS, but with a totally new, Christian interpretation. For example, in traditional religiosity God was perceived as fundamentally distant and indifferent to humans. In moments of divine imminence, however, God posed a serious threat to humanity. The Holy Spirit churches, however, see the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as a sign of God’s nearness and love. Indeed, Gilbert Lijina described the celebratory air that comes from Spirit possession, noting that “One does not need to go to a disco after our evening prayer meetings.” Or again, in the traditional religion, dreams and visions served to reveal the ways in which humans had offended the Ancestors. The Holy Spirit churches, however, understand dreams and the gift of prophecy as a sign of God’s loving guidance in the lives of believers. Indeed, one ACHS member spoke of the welcome relief provided by the obvious guidance of the Spirit in every aspect of his life.

The Holy Spirit is said to come down during prayer. To an outsider, there is something vaguely mechanistic about the ACHS approach to Spirit baptism. In the ACHS Order of Service, the Holy Spirit’s arrival is scheduled right after the Lord’s Prayer and the prayers for the congregation. In another section of this same document, one finds a “how-to” guide to Spirit baptism:

159 Ibid., 128.

160 The traditional religion is one where dancing may have religious significance, where spiritual powers are seen to act in concrete ways (withholding or sending rains, curing or causing illness etc), and where one responds to the demands of ancestors through physical actions like sacrifices.

161 Rasmussen, Modern African Spirituality, 127.

162 Quoted in Wafula, 10.

163 Ibid.

164 ACHS Interviews, 4.
After one is saved and has been taught on how to repent of his sins, he must continue praying without ceasing. Pray that the Lord gives you the Holy Spirit. This can only be possible when one repent of his sins before witnesses without fear.

Luke 9:26. One must have the baptism of the Holy Spirit and be able to speak in tongues. This is the baptism which comes from above. Acts 19:6

Those who have not received the Holy Spirit should pray without ceasing, doing what is right every time so that they may also receive the Holy Spirit. Without the power by the Holy Spirit how will they teach the church the baptism of the Holy Spirit? Matthew 7:4-5. 165

As this text suggests, there is intense pressure on members to demonstrate Spirit Baptism by speaking in tongues. Indeed, as with many Zionist churches, glossolalia is the basic sign of Spirit possession in the ACHS. 166

For the ACHS, repentance is key in bringing about Spirit possession. Those who are unable to speak in tongues have probably not repented sufficiently of their sins. In the text above, it indicates that ‘right-living’ also plays a factor in Spirit Baptism. The Holy Spirit comes to holy people, and not to the unrepentant sinner.

Rasmussen, Sangree and Welbourn are all agreed in their assessment of Spirit-baptism as a new phenomenon in Abaluyian society. 167 There were certainly religious experts who would dream dreams and prophesy, but no group “Spirit cults” as such. In this sense, while there are links between ACHS Spirit possession and traditional religiosity, Spirit Baptism is a uniquely Christian practice. 168

*Dreams, Visions and Prophecy:*

According to Bishop Magomere, the Holy Spirit offers guidance in three ways:

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165 Tsiruma, 8.

166 See Rasmussen, *Modern African Spirituality*, 112ff, for a lengthy discussion of glossolalia; for Zionist churches in general, see Sundkler, 247ff.


168 Interestingly, it is usually the women who demonstrate the most dramatic signs of Spirit possession ~ with trance-like states and wild flailing of the arms during worship. Sangree suggested that socially, this is because women are not expected to be able to control the power of the Holy Spirit as easily as men. [Sangree, 185] An ACHS pastor, on observing the wild gyrations of a woman during a service, noted that the woman was a new convert. He said that she had not yet learned how to control the extreme movements of the Holy Spirit, but would learn in time. [LeMarquand, personal conversation]
through dreams, visions and prophecies. These gifts are available to all believers, but leaders are the interpreters, and test dreams and visions against Scripture. In general, Zionist churches regard dreams and visions as important means of ongoing divine revelation.

Bishop Magomere Fitzjoji distinguished dreams from visions, noting that visions are what take place when one is awake. Dreams and visions were an acknowledged means of divine communication in the traditional religion, and are accepted today as a legitimate source of revelation in the ACHS. This is particularly so when it comes to church traditions. As proof of this, Rasmussen cited the practice of growing beards. Through visions, the Spirit told ACHS men to let their beards grow. Some scoffed, but cut themselves whenever they shaved. The Holy Spirit people “interpreted it as a command from God that they should no longer shave their beards.” Although today, one sees many smooth-cheeked men in the church, for a time the practice of allowing one’s beard to grow was upheld in the community. Only later did the practice fall into disuse.

Individual and corporate sins are also said to be revealed in dreams. It is for this reason that dreams and prophecies are related during the church services. The purpose of sharing these dreams is to bring about repentance and an appropriate change in conduct.

Visions and dreams can also play important roles in the lives of individuals. Nathaniel Igutwa related that it was because of a vision that he joined the ACHS. This ‘calling’ of new adherents in dreams is not an infrequent occurrence in the ACHS and in other Zionist churches. In fact, Sundkler has indicated that guidance through dreams is a

169 Sangree, 188.
170 See Ndiokwere, 80ff for discussion.
171 Rasmussen, Modern African Spirituality, 115
172 Drawn perhaps from Levitical passages?
174 Ibid., 116.
175 ACHS Interviews, 40.
phenomenon common even to mainline churches in Africa. In his analysis of dreams, Sundkler observed that the same symbols appear in the dreams of Zionists, mainline church adherents, and practitioners of the traditional religion.

Prophecies may come in the form of dreams, visions, or words. As noted earlier, prophecy is considered a necessary gift in leadership. Over the years, the ACHS understanding of prophecy has changed. Rasmussen contended that prophecy was earlier seen as predicting the future. Since that time, however, there has been a shift in their understanding of prophecy as predictive to prophecy as admonishing and edifying the community. This, apparently, is not an uncommon change to occur within Pentecostal groups.

In interviews with the High Priest and with other leadership, Rasmussen learned that as with dreams, prophecies are judged against Scripture. This practice developed as a result of a case of 'false prophecy' in an ACHS congregation. A prophet claimed that the Holy Spirit was calling ACHS men to abandon their wives and marry young girls. Many of the members obeyed the prophet's teaching. In order to guard against similar scandals, prophecies are never accepted unless they are in accordance with Scripture. Indeed, the ACHS considers the danger of false prophecy so serious that it devoted a section to this in one of its documents. Specifically, it warns members to take care "concerning the evil spirit":

One must know that there are false prophets. Leaders of this church must pray to protect themselves against this. Read I Kings 13:11-30; John 4:1-3; I Thessalonians 5:19-24; John 2:18-20; I Cor. 10:11-12; Jer. 23:24-26; Deut. 13:1-5, 18:18-22; Job 33:14-15; II Cor. 11:12-13; Eccl.5:7; Hebrews 12:28-29; Deut.10:8; 2:5. A certain danger is attributed to this phenomenon, which explains why leaders are advised to pray for protection.

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176 Sundkler, 265ff.
177 Rasmussen, Modern African Spirituality, 120.
178 Ibid., 121.
179 Tsiruma, 23.
Rasmussen drew parallels between the diviners of the traditional religion and the prophets of the Holy Spirit churches. In Abaluyian religiosity, a diviner was identified by his or her possession of ancestral spirits and by the dreaming of dreams. This religious leader was gifted with the ability to identify agency in illness and death, to detect ritual violations and to prescribe "treatments" for illnesses and ritual impurity. The ACHS prophet, too, is someone who dreams dreams and interprets visions. The ACHS prophet also reveals hidden things as they affect the wider community. Specifically, through prophecy God reveals the individual or communal evil which may be having a nefarious effect - by causing illness, demon possession, job loss or infertility. Prophesying new church practices is an additional role of ACHS prophets. Different, however, are the traditional and ACHS remedies for evil. In the ACHS, the remedy for evil and its effects is repentance on the part of the sinner. Scripture passages cited in this regard include Isaiah 58:4-12 and James 4:7-10. Unlike the traditional religion, the ACHS do not seek to appease the divine by offering sacrifices; for forgiveness, God requires only a broken and contrite heart.

In terms of authoritative sources of revelation, it is evident that unlike the ABC, the ACHS recognizes in prophecy, visions and dreams a viable source of divine revelation. In practice, prophecy was probably initially considered a basis of revelation alongside Scripture. Over time, however, the church has clearly placed Scripture as the authority over all other kinds of revelation. This was articulated by leadership in interviews with Rasmussen and with the author. Indirectly, this is indicated by the proof-texting so prevalent in all ACHS documentation.

In sum, the ACHS has continued the traditional emphasis on dreams, visions and prophecies. These traditions, however, have been re-interpreted in light of the Bible.

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180 Obeng made similar observations about the function of prophecy in Spirit churches in West Africa. Obeng, 111; and Sundikler in South Africa, 257ff.

181 Wagner, 243.

182 See Wagner, 220ff for extensive discussion of role of diviner.

183 Rasmussen, Modern African Spirituality, 120 ff.

184 Tsiruma, 5ff.
particularly as apprehended through the Old Testament texts. The result has been the
development of 'biblical' forms with strong Abaluyian roots. This is a kind of change
predicted by the causative factors in schism.

Confession of sins and purification:

Repentance, public confession of sins, and purification are tied in with the ACHS
view of salvation and Spirit Baptism. As already seen, public confession of sins figures
prominently in ACHS services. With good reason, for it is through confession that

Satan's spirit...may lose its hold over the person and then, through contrite and sincere
supplication of the Lord, the Holy Spirit may be brought to fill the person's heart.\textsuperscript{185}

Part of this emphasis on confession derives from FAM teachings. The FAM presented
righteousness and repentance as requirements for salvation. Chilson in particular taught this,
and the Spirit churches adopted this as an important principle of faith. The ACHS quotes
Mark 1:14-15 as the proof of the centrality of this practice:\textsuperscript{186} "Now after John was arrested,
Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled,
and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'"\textsuperscript{187}

Unlike the FAM, however, the ACHS requires vocal confession. Oosthuizen has
interpreted the Zionist phenomenon of public confessions as an instance of group solidarity,
where in humility individuals abandon themselves to the care of the group.\textsuperscript{188} The ACHS also
departs from the FAM in terms of the role repentance plays in salvation. Salvation and Spirit
Baptism are conditional upon complete confession of one's sins and a repentant spirit that
leads to changed conduct (with references to Isaiah 55:6-7; Matthew 11:28-30; Psalm 32:5-6;
and Acts 2:38).\textsuperscript{189} As one member put it, "you can't say you are saved fully, and yet you are a

\textsuperscript{185} Sangree, 186.

\textsuperscript{186} Rasmussen, 130.

\textsuperscript{187} Mark 1:14-15. NRSV.

\textsuperscript{188} Oosthuizen, Post-Christianity, 193.

\textsuperscript{189} See "catechism" in Tsiruma, 6-7.
Interestingly, though the ACHS claims to practice public confession, one does not see this happen at regular church services. That need has been met by the individual time of prayer at the beginning of the service. These prayers are vocal, but as the entire congregation is praying together at once, there is little danger of people overhearing the sordid details of one’s life.

Rasmussen and Wagner discussed at length the role of purification in Abaluyian culture. Ritual purity featured prominently in the traditional religion, particularly as it related to violations of taboos and to offenses against the Ancestors. In light of this, it is not surprising that FAM teaching on righteousness would have resonated with the Abaluyian converts. Unlike some Zionist churches, however, the ACHS did not carry over traditional rites of purification. Instead, the ACHS teaches that repentance and confession of sins are sufficient for forgiveness. Although the concern for purity mirrors that of Abaluyian society, the ACHS teaching on prayer and confession is distinctly Christian.

The influence of the traditional religiosity on ACHS practice can be seen elsewhere. The exorcisms at the beginning and end of services reflect a traditional Abaluyian world view. Following traditional religiosity, the ACHS envisions the world as peopled by a multitude of spirits who can turn against humans at any moment. They find scriptural support for this view in John 13:2: in this passage, a disciple of Christ (Judas) is possessed by an evil spirit. In this sense ACHS understanding of evil differs from that of the FAM. Evil is not limited to moral transgressions, but takes on bodied form. Again, however, the ACHS condemns the traditional modes of protection against evil spirits. No sacrifices are made, no amulets carried, no protective medicines bought. The Holy Spirit alone defends believers from the wiles of malicious spirits. All Christians have to do is believe, confess, and repent.

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190 Kaburu, Interviews; E. Adeolu Adegbola, in his insightful chapter “The Theological Basis of Ethics,” pointed out that for the African, the “ontologically good is the ethically good.” In light of this, Sarah’s comments make even more sense. In Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1969), 118.

191 See especially Wagner, 95ff.

192 Tsiruma, 5ff.
The clapping of hands and stamping of feet in the cleansing rite, as though the congregation were “scaring” the spirits away, found its inspiration in Scripture (Ezekiel 6:11). Given the very loose connection between the verse and the practice, however, one suspects that the impetus for creating such a rite came from the Abaluyian belief that spirits can be controlled by physical actions or objects. Oosthuizen has pointed out that “action is basic to the African religion,” and stems from a desire to experience religion in a powerful way. This desire leads to the creation of vivid new rites, whose symbolism speaks to the Abaluyian soul.

Some might argue that the ACHS clapping of hands and stamping of feet is a new form of ritualism, which merely replaces protective amulets and remedies prescribed by diviners. Certainly, the practices are conceptually similar in expecting physical actions, noises, or smells to have an effect on the spiritual realm. Even with this concession, however, the ACHS rituals are still conceived within a Christian framework. That is, there is the underlying understanding that through the Holy Spirit, humans are free to reject evil and live holy lives. This is seen in the liturgy of the word that accompanies the actions: “The evil ones who were causing us to sin, we cast them away!” The development of this practice from an Old Testament text exhibits ACHS’ desire to be a biblical church. It is yet one more indication that the ACHS recognizes in Scripture the authoritative text by which legitimate Christian traditions are created.

The complex rites of confession and purification in the ACHS church reflect varied influences from mission teachings, the Abaluyian traditional world view, and Scripture. The result is a uniquely ACHS creation of Christian traditions with strong indigenous links. Such an outcome is expected, given the causative factors in schism.

Healing:

Healing is an issue closely related to the activity of evil spirits in the world. In the

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193 Oosthuizen, Post-Christianity, 139.

194 Some Western theologians might prefer the phrase “through Christ” over “through the Holy Spirit.” This debate is beyond the scope of this thesis, however.

195 Kaburu, Interviews.
traditional Abaluyian perspective, disease, misfortune and death were never accidental affairs. Instead, such things were blamed on spirits. These were said to be punishing humans for violating taboos or displeasing the Ancestors in some way. ACHS Timotheo Hezekiah Shitsimi echoed this traditional view in interviews with Rasmussen. He explained that all diseases were caused by demons. If a Christian falls ill, it is therefore an indication that they are weak in faith. Healing will come the moment the malicious spirits are chased away.196 Contrary to traditional Abaluyian practice,197 however, prayer is the only ACHS remedy for illness. Nothing more is required, so long as the patient has faith.198 Again, this is a frequently found perspective in Zionist churches. Some scholars explain this tendency by the fact that “medicine, magic and religion are closely related” in African traditional religions.199

In the early days, the Holy Spirit people forbade members from seeking medical help (this included help from traditional medicines). Police and government officials reacted by dragging injured or seriously ill ACHS members to the hospital against their will.200 Now, the ACHS permits members to go to hospital. As High Priest Hezekiah Timothy Shitsimi told Rasmussen: “[T]oday, members weaker in faith are allowed to seek medical care.”201 Despite official church permission, however, the obvious stigma attached to Western medicine makes it awkward for ACHS members to seek out such medical care.

The rejection of Western medicine is a feature of many Zionist churches. AICs will generally appeal to Scripture in justifying their refusal of medical help. Commonly cited

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196 Rasmussen, Modern African Spirituality, 132.

197 See Wagner, 178.

198 Members are forbidden from seeking traditional remedies, as well.

199 S.G.A. Ose Onibere, “The Phenomenon of African Religious Independency,” Africa Theological Journal 10/1 (1981): 16. Onibere goes on to write: “Among the independents the traditional causes of illness are unquestionably accepted; they only differ with regard to the method of effecting cures. The indigenous churches believe very strongly in the power and efficacy of prayer. If the problem is not solved, it is the fault of the petitioner.” See also Obeng, 111; Sundikler, 22ff.

200 See Omolo and Wafula, 10 for examples.

201 Wafula, 10
passages include Mark 16:17ff, Luke 4:18ff, Luke 10, and James 5:13ff. As one Zionist leader said, “[T]he great Doctor is there, Jesus Christ.” That healing is the divine plan in all cases of illness is not contested; Independents point out that Jesus healed while on earth and called upon his disciples to do so likewise.

When the ACHS rejected a Western, purely “scientific” approach to healing, they had to look elsewhere than the mission for a solution to their problems. In Scripture, they found their answer. The Bible presented them with a world view similar to that of the Abaluyia, in that sickness and health have both spiritual and physical causes. Scripture provided them with a new set of power structures and remedies for evil. Through their reading of Scripture, they discovered that healing comes not through sacrifices or ritual purification, but through submission to God’s Spirit in an attitude of repentance and faith.

The ACHS approaches to the issues of healing developed from within an African world view transformed by the Gospel. These new developments are explained by the causative factors in schism. That is, the ACHS view of healing come from Abaluyian believers asking “Abaluyian” questions of the Christian faith.

5. Sacraments

Like the FAM, the ACHS does not practice water baptism. The ACHS regards water baptism as unbiblical, quoting from Matthew 3:11 and John 1:33. Members note that while John baptized with water, Jesus’ baptism was in the Spirit. The ACHS diverges from the typical Zionist profile in this. Baptism, and water more generally, usually play important roles in Zionism.

The ACHS has, however, introduced something called “infant baptism.” The practice

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202 Ndiokwere, 115.

203 Quoted in Sundikler, 227. Sundikler also reported that in Issiah Shembe’s church, vaccination was regarded as the “Mark of the Beast.” Ibid.


205 Rasmussen, Modern African Spirituality, 93.

206 See for example Sundikler, 202ff.
is detailed as follows:

1. When a child is born, a church elder is called to purify the mother and the child and pray for her before she starts breastfeeding the child.
2. If it is a baby boy, he will finish 7 days and on the 8th day he is baptized and if it is a girl she will finish 13 days and be baptized on the 14th day.
3. This is what should be followed:
   (I) The pastor and the church leaders should go to the home of the child at 8:00am.
   (II) The ladies who are church elders will go to the bedroom to dress up the mother and the child after which they will bring them to the sitting room where the pastor will be.
   (III) The pastor takes the child and starts to bind all the evil spirits. He reads Mark 10:13. Then the parents will kneel and the congregation will surround them.
   (IV) The pastor will say the Lord’s Prayer three times and hold his right hand on the head of the child: Then he says: I baptize you in the name of the Holy Spirit. After this the congregation will sing and the pastor will read from the book of Leviticus 12:1-5.
   (V) The next Sunday the child is to be brought to the church and the church leader will take the child and read Luke 2:22.

Rasmussen held that this service of “blessing” replaced the traditional naming ceremony. This seems a reasonable proposal. In Abaluyian practice, a child would be given the name of an Ancestor. If the spirit was pleased, it would hopefully protect the child. At the very least, the parents could rest assured that the spirit would never harm its namesake. The child would be given its name by a male family member, while the mother stood or sat in the doorway of her hut; this might explain why the ACHS service takes place in the family home. Like the traditional naming ceremony, the ACHS service aims to place the child under the care of one in the spiritual realm. In the ACHS case, however, the one named is always the Holy Spirit.

The binding of the spirits (III) follows from general ACHS practice in worship. The passage in Mark 10:13 refers to Jesus’ welcome of children: “People were bringing little

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207 Tsiruma.

208 For discussion of naming rites, see Wagner, 313ff.
children to him in order that he might touch them." Thus far, the rite presents no surprises. In (IV), however, one finds a startling deviation from the tripartite confession used in water baptism; the ACHS baptize in the name of the Holy Spirit alone. While for an outsider, it is jolting to hear this change to a historic formula, upon further reflection one realizes that the modification is an expected one. It concurs with observations elsewhere in the literature on the centrality of pneumatic experience in Zionist churches like the ACHS. There is, after all, only one baptism for the ACHS, and this belongs to the Holy Spirit.

Another interesting element in this service is the reference to Leviticus 12:1-5. The passage refers to the timing of male circumcision and to the woman’s period of uncleanness following childbirth. The Abaluyia observed a similar period of uncleanness; although it only lasted two days if the child was a girl, and three if a boy. It seems probable that the Leviticus text was selected primarily as an explanation for the ‘presentation’ of a child to the Holy Spirit (and ‘biblically’, on the *eighth day* for a boy). Is it possible, however, that the text was also chosen in reference to this period of uncleanness after childbirth? ACHS women do have to observe Old Testament regulations on menstruation, so this would not be an unreasonable speculation to make. In any case, this is yet another example of the creative use of Scripture and traditional practices in the development of new traditions.

The creation of distinctive Zionist practices to replace traditional ones follows from the causative factors of schism ~ namely, the Abaluyian desire to find Christian forms of worship that speak to Africans.

6. *Ecumenism*

Unlike the ABC, the ACHS originally withdrew from society, refusing to eat with

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209 NRSV, Mark 10:13a.

210 The Church of the Lord has a similar naming service, and also makes reference to the text in Leviticus. Turner, *History of an African Independent Church*, 183.

211 Wagner, 302.

non-members or even greet those outside their community.\textsuperscript{213} Rasmussen attributed this withdrawal to the strong millennial expectations of the group. Christ would soon return to inaugurate his kingdom, and the Spirit people would be ready and waiting for the Bridegroom’s arrival. Millennialist expectations are notoriously difficult to sustain over extended periods, however. Over time and out of necessity, the loosely-knit groups regulated their practices, articulated doctrine and developed organizational structures. Concomitant with these changes, the Spirit people began extending gestures of welcome to the surrounding Christian community. Jotham Eshera, in an interview with Rasmussen, claimed that the church’s reading of I Corinthians 13 led to the thawing of icy relations with outsiders.\textsuperscript{214} The Spirit people interpreted this text to mean that all Christians were brothers and sisters, despite differences in practice.

In his “Short History” of the ACHS, Bishop Magomere stated the church “believes in being Ecumenical by being a member of OAIC [Organization of African Instituted Churches], NCCK [National Christian Council of Kenya], AACC [All Africa Conference of Churches] and WCC [World Council of Churches].”\textsuperscript{215} The last three groups mentioned are ecumenical bodies with a heavy representation of mainline churches. The membership of the OAIC comprises largely of AICs of the Zionist type.

Unlike the ABC, unity among Abaluyian Christians was not a factor in the ACHS’ secession. Nevertheless, the ACHS has arrived at a place where it is interested in links with the wider Christian community. Zionist groups in general are expressing a desire to establish relationships with mainline churches, and especially to receive Bible training. These feelings were unanimous among representatives at a recent WCC consultation with African Instituted Churches.\textsuperscript{216}

7. \textit{Education}

\textsuperscript{213} That is, members were not supposed to shake hands with non-members, believing as they did that the impurity of non-members could be passed on in this manner.

\textsuperscript{214} Rasmussen, \textit{Modern African Spirituality}, 38.

\textsuperscript{215} Fitzjoji, “African Church” 1. Text in brackets mine.

\textsuperscript{216} Consultation, 13.
Unlike the ABC, the ACHS does not have any schools of its own. Education was never a cause in schism, which accounts for this difference. Like many Zionist churches, however, the ACHS is now interested in theological training for its leadership.

8. Scripture

View of Scripture:

Like the ABC, the ACHS assigns to Scripture a central place in the life of the church. Indeed, the ACHS motto is “The Spirit and the Bible.”

This biblical emphasis is seen elsewhere, in the ACHS mandate to promote the “full gospel of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God in the world by teaching from the New and Old Testament books of the Bible.”

While the intention is there, does this make the ACHS a “bible-centred church”?

Judging from interviews, the Spirit seems to have a greater impact on the daily lives of believers than does Scripture. In worship, too, it is Spirit possession and not the sermon that becomes the focal point. Nevertheless, the ACHS places Scripture as the authority over the ongoing revelations of the Spirit when it comes to church doctrine and practice. As noted earlier, the ACHS fears false prophecies, and recognizes that there are many voices claiming to announce words of truth. Scripture, as God’s word, is the authoritative text against which doctrine and practice are measured. That which is truly from the Spirit must necessarily accord with Scripture. As ACHS pastor Levi Akhura said, Scripture is “the supreme rule of faith and life.”

That Spirit Baptism is tied by some leaders to Scripture is a further indication of the power and authority of the Bible in ACHS life. Rasmussen recounted an ACHS service where people were told to “Confess and believe in the Bible.” The leader went on to say: “You will never see the Holy Spirit without seeing the holy Scriptures... After you have believed in the scriptures, they will lead you to the Holy Spirit.”

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217 Wafula, 10; and Kaburu, Interviews.

218 Fitzjoji, “African Church,” 2.

219 Consultation, 12.

220 Quoted in Rasmussen, Modern African Spirituality, 131.
this order, one illiterate ACHS pastor claimed that upon receiving the Holy Spirit, he was suddenly able to read Scripture. That the Spirit should miraculously bestow this *particular* gift almost suggests a divine hand of blessing on literacy. Literacy does not appear to be a requirement for leadership, since many preachers quote passages from memory; nevertheless, knowledge of the Bible is considered of great importance. According to ACHS documents, a leader “must know both the New and Old Testaments, how the Holy Spirit leads and must be able to prophesy what is right. Eze. 3:1-8; Jere.23:16-40, Isaiah 5:18; Ezekiel 22:23-31.”

While Scripture may have little impact on the daily lives of the laity, nonetheless the membership seems to appreciate the authoritative function of Scripture in the life of the church. In ACHS documents and in interviews, proof-texting is part and parcel of explaining church practice. Some of the proof-texting listed in previous sections include:

1) *Church dress:* turbans and robes (John 20:7; Zechariah 3:5) with crosses (Luke 14:27, 9:23; Matt.16:24-27; Mark 8:34; Matt.10:38);
2) *Removal of shoes in worship:* Exodus 3 (Moses and the burning bush)
3) *Prohibition against cutting hair:* Judges 13 (Samson)
4) *Drumming and charismatic worship:* Psalms 47:1-7, 150:1; Isaiah 38:20; Exodus 15:20
5) “*Cleansing*” of places of worship: Clapping and stamping practice (Ezekiel 6:11); the danger of possession by evil Spirits (John 13:2)
6) *Spirit Baptism:* Acts 2
9) “*Infant Baptism:*” Leviticus 12:1-5
10) *Ecumenism:* I Corinthians 13

This list provides only a sampling of the kinds of proof-texting found in the literature and in interviews with ACHS members. The manner in which biblical texts are used above might cause raised eyebrows among Western biblical scholars. Yet though its hermeneutics may

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221 Reported in ibid., 124.

222 Ibid., 79.

223 Tsiruma, 5ff.
differ from mission churches, the proof-texting shows that the ACHS has a firm grasp of the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*.

**Biblical Hermeneutics and the Creation of Tradition:**

As suggested earlier, some ACHS practices were innovations borrowed neither from the FAM nor from the traditional religion. Instead, they were a new creation, derived primarily from Scripture. The distinctive ACHS dress and the “cleansing rite” are two such examples. While both may have found their underlying inspiration from an Abaluyian world view, the church turned to Scripture to piece together these meaningful new practices.

The fact that the church uses the Bible to create new traditions sheds further light on its understanding of Scripture. Namely, for the ACHS, Christianity is apprehended through Scripture. When seeking for answers to pressing questions arising from their traditional religious outlook, they turned first to Scripture for answers. In the case of protection from evil spirits, the result was a new, ACHS ritual of exorcism, with elements drawn from the book of Ezekiel.

That many of the ACHS rites and practices developed from the Levitical holiness code and from other Old Testament texts suggests that in its hermeneutics, the church takes an a-historical view of Scripture. That is, the ACHS does not view the Old Testament through the light of New Testament covenant. This might be what Andrew Walls means when he refers to the Zionist “indigenous” reading of Scripture.\(^{224}\) It is a literalist approach to biblical texts which assumes that since all of Scripture comprises God’s divine word, any passage may therefore be applied ‘literally’ to the modern context (as seen earlier, even with narratives from Israel’s past, such as the story of Samson). Of course, the ACHS does tend to select those passages which most reflect their indigenous culture, with its legalism and taboos. In this sense, Luther’s *sola fide* does not appear to be the hermeneutical key for Zionist churches like the ACHS. Instead, as Sundkler explained, the Old Testament “forms the foundation of belief of these churches.”\(^{225}\)

This indigenous reading of Scripture is the most significant difference between the

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\(^{224}\) Walls, 92.

\(^{225}\) Sundkler, 277.
ACHS and the mainline churches, as far as hermeneutics go. Nevertheless, it was the ACHS' firm grasp of the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura* which led to this creative mining of the Bible for new traditions.

There are signs of change, however, in ACHS hermeneutics. One sees this particularly when examining so-called 'biblical’ practices which have subsequently been overturned. For example, Bishop Magomere related that during the early period members were forbidden to wear perfumes or oil since they were “biblically forbidden.”

Now, he explained, only when attending church services must members refrain from wearing oil and perfume. In a similar fashion, food regulations (i.e. abstaining from pork) and rules against cutting beards have been relaxed. This may signal a shift in ACHS understanding of Old Testament law in relation to the New. Indeed, in a remarkable statement, the Rev. Levi Akhura announced that “the church is aware that some of the old observances are outdated and that it must adapt to the rapid changes in society.”

This remark came as a self-conscious commentary on his explanations of ACHS menstrual regulations for women. It seems that as the ACHS's understanding of biblical hermeneutics change, so do its traditions.

It was suggested elsewhere in Section IV that still other ACHS practices were a reinterpretation of traditional practices through the lens of Scripture. Interesting examples are provided by ACHS funeral rites. In the traditional religion, the Abaluyia had a hair-shaving ceremony, as a kind of ritual purification for all who have come into contact with a dead person. The ritual would take place three days after the death. The FAM rites, by contrast, were limited to a funeral service only. The ACHS reclaimed Abaluyian practice by introducing an additional service three days after the death of a member. The church, however, has re-interpreted these borrowed rites through the lens of Christianity. The service is a celebration of the resurrection of the deceased, remembering that after three days Jesus too resurrected from the dead.

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226 Fitzjoji, Interview.

227 Consultation, 13.

resurrection are offered at this service. The ACHS memorial service provides another example of ‘renovated’ traditional practices. The service takes place 40 days after burial. The ACHS say that just as Jesus ascended to heaven forty days after his resurrection (quoting Acts 1:1-11), so the deceased will go to heaven at this time. Rasmussen pointed out that the memorial service corresponds to the Abaluyia rite that takes place around three months after a death. At this time, the first sacrifice is offered to the dead, establishing the person as an ancestor. Rasmussen suggested that the ACHS service mimics the traditional one in that “the dead person’s status in heaven is thought to become established on this occasion.”

ABC and ACHS - A Comparison:

When comparing ACHS practice with that of the ABC, the similarities in their uses of Scripture become evident. In both, Scripture is recognized as the authoritative book of the Christian faith, by which church practice and doctrine are measured. As with the ABC, when describing church matters to outsiders, ACHS leadership is careful to defend its practices by quoting Scripture. The ABC and the ACHS thus see Scripture as the means by which the church justifies itself to the wider Christian community.

As already mentioned, the churches do differ hermeneutically in their approaches. The ACHS does not differentiate between the Old and New covenants in the same way as the ABC. In ACHS documents, Old Testament texts appear almost as often as New Testament ones. In ABC materials, by contrast, Old Testament references are rare. The ACHS focus on the Old Testament is typical of Zionist churches. Many explanations have been offered for this phenomenon. The similarity between the African and biblical world views is the most cogent argument proffered thus far. Interestingly, Oosthuizen has suggested that any “reversions” to African traditional practices in Zionist churches have been due to the

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229 Ibid., 97.

discovery of parallel practices in the Old Testament.  

A difference, however, concerns the frequency of proof-texting by the churches. The ACHS cites scriptural texts with far greater frequency than the ABC. This may be a defensive reflex — a sign of the harsh criticism received by the ACHS from mainline churches. Indeed, the author witnessed the teasing of an ACHS student at St. Paul’s United Theological College; the ABC divinity student, by contrast, was treated as though a member of a mainline church. Certainly, the ABC has had to struggle less for recognition as a “church among equals.” This is probably because its doctrine follows so closely on that of the AIC and other former mission churches. Alternatively, Turner argued that this Zionist practice of proof-texting is “a cultural reaction on the part of a people whose pagan background is devoid of literature, and who desire to assure themselves and the world that they have passed fully into the new way of life based on writing and the book.”  

Turner’s approach might explain why the ABC, with its educated Kamba leadership, has tended to rely less on proof-texting than the ACHS. Turner’s comments would imply, however, that a Zionist church’s reverence for Scripture is primarily attributable to its concern for literacy. Certainly, newly literate groups tend to imbue the written word with power. One would not like to lose sight of the fact, however, that in the case of the ACHS, the tendency for proof-texting also arises from an understanding of the Bible’s authority in church life.

Sundkler has compared the Ethiopian use of Scripture from Zionist ones by looking at the use of the Bible in worship services. At Ethiopian churches, members bring their Bibles with them to services, and look up the passages referred to by the preacher. By contrast, Sundkler knew of few Zionist churches where anyone except the preacher had a Bible. In these groups, a command of Scripture meant knowledge of verses — but only on topics with which the church was concerned, such as healing, Spirit-baptism and taboos. These observations apply to the case of the ABC and ACHS to a certain degree. General

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231 Oosthuizen, Post-Christianity, 170.
232 Turner, History of an African Independent Church, 83.
233 Sundkler, 275ff.
observations about the ACHS do suggest a more fragmented vision of Scripture. Preaching in the ACHS follows a thematic, rather than a text-based approach. That is, the preacher selects a theme, and as the sermon develops, cites Scriptural passages which support each point. In ABC services, by contrast, the preacher generally chooses a single passage for exposition, and this first passage is read in its entirety before the congregation. The ABC emphasis on Bible training also means that its leadership has a more comprehensive understanding of the biblical texts; the ACHS desire for Bible training, however, is a sign of its willingness to modify its hermeneutical practices.

V. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In the case study of the ACHS, it was shown that the main cause behind secession related to the charismatic experiences of the Spirit people. The Spirit Baptism preached by Chilson met a deeply felt need among Abaluyia for 'African' forms of worship. Transformed by this experience, the Spirit people refused to tone down their enthusiastic worship. This refusal led to a gradual disintegration in their relationship with the FAM. Indeed, prior to expulsion, the Spirit people faced active persecution by the FAM.

What was it that gave the Spirit people courage to resist the FAM? Doubtlessly, the radical experience of Spirit Baptism provided many with strong evidence of the rightness of their movement. Scripture also played a significant role, however. The Pentecost account in Acts convinced them that Spirit Baptism was not only legitimately Christian, but a gracious gift from God. With the text from Acts ever in their minds, there was no persuading the Spirit people that their charismatic conduct was unacceptable. Scripture validated the Spirit people's experience of the Holy Spirit, and enabled them to defend their views before critical Quaker elders and missionaries. In this sense, Scripture was an occasioning factor in schism, and by this authoritative function differed from causative factors in schism.

Having been expelled from the FAM, the Spirit people devoted themselves to prayer, fasting and worship as they awaited the coming Kingdom of God. When the expected return of Christ was slow in coming, the Holy Spirit people questioned their isolation from the wider Christian community, citing I Corinthians 13 as the reason for this change. They established themselves as a church, and began to reach out to other Christian groups in their vicinity.
Once registered as a church, the process of institutionalization began. The free movement of the Spirit in worship became an item of church "practice"; the services themselves settled into an observable pattern. Church leadership structures became increasingly complex, as they introduced into the basic FAM system their own innovations.

Unlike the ABC, whose theology and worship forms followed that of its mother-church, the ACHS' developing doctrine and practice differed from the FAM in significant respects. As seen in earlier sections, some of the practices continued emphases already present in the Abaluyian religious world view. This was the case with the ACHS exorcism rites, which followed from the traditional Abaluyian concern with the spiritual and bodily threats posed by demons. Other practices were borrowed from the Abaluyian traditional religion but were re-interpreted in light of the Gospel, as in the case of the ACHS funeral rites. Still other practices came primarily from Scripture, although the traditional religiosity might explain the ACHS' predilection for Old Testament passages. That is, in a culture hedged in by Ancestral regulations and sanctions, the appeal of legalistic Old Testament practices would be strong. Finally, the ACHS maintained some of the doctrines and practices of the FAM. Such was the case with the ACHS refusal to baptize with water.

As predicted in Chapter 1, many of the ACHS practices reflected the causative factors in schism. When the Spirit people accepted the Gospel message, they did not sever themselves from their Abaluyian roots. In their quest for meaningful forms of worship, they therefore brought Abaluyian and not Western expectations to the Bible. That the result should be distinctly un-Western church practices comes as no surprise.

What was the role of Scripture in the development of these traditions? Like the ABC, the ACHS clearly recognized the authority of Scripture in the life of the Church. This was not only reflected in the motto of the church, the 'Spirit and the Bible,' but in church documents. More so than the ABC, the ACHS defended all of its practices with numerous Scripture citations. Almost no aspect of church doctrine or practice was without biblical justification, right down to the church dress. In this sense, the ACHS appeared to assume that

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234 As Walls pointed out, "if the gods who underwrote the sanctions on such prohibitions were being abandoned, it was necessary to know what the new God demanded in such matters." Walls, 91.
Scripture would regulate all aspects of the religious life. This is not entirely unheard of in Zionist churches. A Kenyan Arathi pastor, in conversation with the author, contended that all of his church's doctrines and practices were derived from Scripture. Everything, he explained, must have some biblical basis, or it cannot be done. In any case, the ACHS tendency to quote Scripture at every occasion when discussing church practice or doctrine showed that they recognize in Scripture the authoritative book of the Christian faith.

Despite the differences in origin and practice between the ABC and the ACHS, certain trends are discernible. First, Scripture played an occasioning role in schism for both the ABC and the ACHS. Scripture passages pointed out the legitimacy of their positions, and empowered them to contest missionary opposition. Second, the causal factors leading to schism predicted in part the subsequent shapes of the churches. The ABC built schools, welcomed polygamists and clearly enunciated principles which safeguarded the dearly cherished concept of African leadership. The ACHS continued its charismatic worship and developed meaningful new rites which arose from a complex interplay between Scripture and Abaluyian culture. Third, while the differing causal factors naturally led to very different churches, the ABC and ACHS both relied on Scripture to justify their practices to the wider Christian communities. In this, Scripture continued the 'occasioning' role it played in secession.

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235 Author's notes. The conversation took place at St. Paul's United Theological College, Limuru.
Sarah Kaburu (left) and friends

The ACHS at worship outdoors

Bishop Magomere Fitzjoji (holding drum)
CHAPTER FOUR

This chapter reviews the findings from the ABC and ACHS case studies. The purpose of this overview is to highlight the difference between vernacular translation of Scripture as occasioning factor and other causative factors in independency. Scripture's 'occasioning' role derives from the Protestant principle of sola scriptura. The Bible provides the authority by which new churches are constituted, and it is this function which makes vernacular translations a unique influence in the AIC movement.

In chapter 1, the literature on causation in independency was reviewed. It was noted that while scholars differed in their inventory of causes, Scripture was invariably listed as a factor. Indeed, scholars agreed that Scripture was one of the most significant factors in independency. David Barrett argued this convincingly in his sociological study of AICs, Schism and Renewal. Despite this scholarly consensus, however, few have thoroughly examined the nature of Scripture's 'significance' in secession. In chapter 1, the author proposed to do so by comparing and contrasting Scripture's function across two types of Independent churches. A working thesis was then developed: namely, it was argued that Scripture plays a unique role in the creation of new church traditions, in that it provides the authority by which a schismatic group may constitute a church. The author referred to this peculiar role by labelling Scripture as an 'occasioning' factor in schism.

In both case studies, this occasioning role was demonstrated by highlighting the 'authorizing' function of Scripture in secession and in later ecclesial development. The fact that the ABC and ACHS represent two different types of AICs formed an important part of the argument. That is, it was first demonstrated that while different causative factors spawned these churches, vernacular translation of Scripture was a unifying factor across these two types. Second, although these AICs differed in their hermeneutics, they shared a common reliance on Scripture as the authority which legitimized their new traditions. This similar appeal to Scripture despite otherwise marked differences underlined the 'occasioning' role of vernacular translations.

I. Scripture and the Origins of Zionist and Nationalist AICs

The two case studies confirmed Barrett's claim that vernacular translations are an important factor in bringing about independency. Indeed, the availability of vernacular
translations aside, the origins of these churches were very different. The African Brotherhood Church seceded due to dissatisfaction over lack of African leadership, an inadequate education system, missionary insensitivity to Kamba cultural practices, and the introduction of unacceptable religious divisions between people of the same ethnic group. The African Church of the Holy Spirit, by contrast, was expelled from the FAM over its refusal to abandon a charismatic form of worship.

Nevertheless, the churches are alike in important ways. In establishing their identities as separate from the mission churches, the ABC and the ACHS relied on Scripture to justify their positions. For the ABC, there were two main Scriptural passages to which they appealed. The first Scriptural passage (Acts 10:34-35) was interpreted as giving license to the foundation of churches by non-whites. It is important not to underestimate the radical import of this exegesis. During the colonial period Christianity was viewed as the “White’s religion”, especially since missions were tied to the colonial regime. That Africans could assume top leadership in the white man’s religion was a liberating idea. A second Scriptural passage was used to level a strong critique against the Protestant missionary churches. Referring to John 17:15-26, the ABC accused the AIM and other missionary groups of failing to fulfil Christ’s call to unity. The ABC justified the foundation of an African-led church by claiming to rectify this error.

In the case of the ACHS, it was in the Pentecost account in Acts that the Holy Spirit people found needed ammunition. Their initial experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit left them confused and uncertain. Chilson quickly reassured them that theirs was identical to the experience of the early church. Far from being a problem, this baptism was a divinely ordained blessing on believers. When FAM elders and missionaries criticized the charismatic worship of the Spirit people, the Spirit people returned to this passage to assure one another of the legitimacy of their experience.

In sum, while the sources of disaffection were different in the case of this Nationalist and Zionist church, the role of Scripture was the same. That is, Scripture allowed both groups to contest the missionary brand of Christianity while still calling themselves “church”.

II. Scripture and Ecclesial Development of AICs
A unique aspect of these case studies was the examination of the impact of causal factors on subsequent ecclesial developments. In chapter 1, it was argued that the causative factors in schism should be reflected in some way in the new traditions. Since the ACHS and ABC causative factors differed in each case, it was only natural that the churches should differ in doctrine, polity, liturgy and ethics. By this same logic, one would also expect Scripture to continue the role it played in helping to bring about independency. Thus, despite their varying traditions, it was predicted that both churches would rely on Scripture to justify their new customs and teachings.

In the case of the ABC, it was shown that its doctrines and worship do not differ markedly from that of its mother-church. This came as no surprise, since the church was not created over theological disputes. Instead, many of the ambitions driving secession were realized simply by the formation of the church. By creating their own church, ABC members ‘condemned’ Protestant denominationalism and restored unity among Kamba Christians. By forming an African-led church, the Kamba believers fulfilled their desire for meaningful positions of decision-making within a church. By creating their own schools (albeit a short-lived venture), they met their demands for better education. By allowing polygamists to worship in their churches, they offered a clear critique of and alternative to the missions’ hardline against their Kamba cultural heritage.

The African Church of the Holy Spirit, by contrast, diverged markedly from the theology, worship, and ethics of its mother-church. Dissatisfied with the staid worship of the FAM, the Holy Spirit people introduced drums, dancing and clapping, and Abaluyian-style music. Unlike the FAM, ACHS preaching is lively, with dynamic inter-play between preacher and congregation. Prophesies, visions and dreams form an important component of ACHS life, and inform church decision making in a way unheard of in the FAM. The exorcisms and purification rites which form such a basic part of ACHS services were foreign to the FAM. Glossolalia and other ‘signs’ of Spirit possession, which once generated such dismay in the FAM, are a given in ACHS services. What is described in the ACHS as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was called ‘fanaticism’ by the FAM. Even Arthur Chilson and
the Pentecostals were unable to reconcile themselves to the Spirit people's worship.\(^1\) As for the ACHS understanding of salvation, it differs from FAM teaching in subtle but substantial ways. The role of Christ in salvation has been accorded a secondary place to that of the Holy Spirit. Salvation, which in the FAM was God's gift bestowed upon repentant believers, has become an object to be earned through earnest and repeated confession and repentance. The elaborate ACHS purification rites are testimony to this change. From theology down to the very dress of church members, the ACHS forms a dramatic contrast to churches like the FAM and the ABC.

It was shown that ACHS liturgy, doctrine and ethics reflect the causative factors in schism. These causative factors related to the Spirit people's desire for meaningful forms of worship in the Holy Spirit. The ACHS traditions developed from within an Abaluyian cultural and religious mind set informed by Scripture and transformed by a radical experience of the Holy Spirit.

Despite their widely variant traditions, the ACHS and ABC are united in their reliance on Scripture to justify church practice. Scripture, an 'occasioning' factor in secession, plays a similar role in the ongoing development of church doctrine and structures of governance. The ABC and ACHS's common appeal to Scripture in defending their liturgy or theology demonstrates a shared recognition of Scripture as the authoritative book of the Christian faith. In sum, Scripture plays an occasioning role in ecclesial development, for it is the authority by which Christian groups are constituted and recognized as true Church.

III. The Use of Scripture by the ACHS and the ABC

As noted above, the main similarity between ABC and ACHS' approach to Scripture is their recognition of the authority of Scripture. In both churches, one observes frequent 'proof-texting' of church doctrine and practice. Whatever one thinks of this as a hermeneutical practice, it does indicate the ABC and ACHS' appreciation of Scripture as the authority which legitimizes new church traditions. This was the thesis developed in Chapter

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\(^1\) Many of the Spirit groups left the Pentecostal Assembly because they wanted to worship in a different way; Chilson, in a letter he wrote prior to furlough, wondered whether the Holy Spirit people were getting out of hand in their enthusiasms.
1, and the reason for which Scripture was termed an ‘occasioning’ factor in schism.

In the process of examining ABC and ACHS traditions, differences in their use of Scripture were uncovered. Most of these differences related to hermeneutics, although there were also important nuances in their understanding of the scope of Scripture’s authority. For the ABC, while Scripture is the primary authority, it allows that not every aspect of church practice need find its justification within Scripture. This was seen in its approach to leadership structures such as the sisterhood. The ABC does insist, however, that all church practices be tested against Scripture. If outlawed in the Bible, then the ABC will not allow the change. In practice, the ABC treats the Bible as a rule book, expecting it to address most aspects of Christian living – including the introduction of guitars into worship services.

For the ACHS, the Holy Spirit and Scripture are the authorities by which the church is governed. Revelation from the Holy Spirit can only be recognized by verifying visions, prophecies and dreams against Scripture, however. In a practical sense, then, the Holy Spirit functions as an authority under Scripture. Indeed, the scope of Scripture’s authority is wide. As a quick look at any church document will show, the ACHS seems to expect that all of its practices and doctrine will have biblical origins.

In terms of hermeneutics, the ACHS and ABC also show marked differences in their method. The ABC takes a more conventional approach by allowing the New Testament witness to interpret the Old. Old Testament law is not adopted by ABC members, as there is a clear sense of the historical development of God’s saving work in the world. The New Covenant replaces the Old, and the ABC interprets Scripture with this understanding.

By contrast, the ACHS tends to see the Old and New Testaments as standing independent from one another. That is, their internal integrity and authority as God’s divine Word allows them to be apprehended without submitting texts to a wider, canonical reading. There is thus no interpreting of Old Testament texts through the lens of the New. In fact, there is every indication that the ACHS prefers the Old Testament to the New. Part of the attraction of Old Testament texts doubtless relates to their similarity to the Abahyian worldview, with its emphasis on taboos and laws.

These differences between ABC and ACHS uses of Scripture were not ones predicted
in chapter 1. Nevertheless, they do not contradict the thesis of this paper. These findings simply indicate that while the ACHS and ABC share an understanding of Scripture’s authority in church life, they differ in their exegesis of biblical texts.

IV. Value and Limitations of the Study

1. Primary contribution

The demonstration of the distinctive role of Scripture in independency is the most important contribution made by this paper. While scholars have long observed the crucial role of Scripture in the AIC movement, this thesis clearly articulates the nature of this role. That is, it was argued that Scripture has a peculiar function in providing the authority by which ecclesial change is effected.

Of course, the use of Scripture to authorize church traditions has certainly been noted previously in the literature. This study is unique, however, in comparing and contrasting Scripture to other causative factors and assigning to it a distinctive role because of this ‘occasioning’ function. The paper also performs the rare service of 1) demonstrating the authorizing role of Scripture across two types of independent churches, and 2) of examining this ‘occasioning’ function both in the origins of schism and in subsequent ecclesial developments.

This study has shown that these particular churches relied on Scripture to justify the constitution of new Christian bodies and practices. It is not possible, however, to conclude that vernacular translations are therefore imperative for schism. Indeed, Barrett showed that there are cases where independency occurred in the absence of vernacular translations of Scripture.

Also, while this study has focussed on Scripture’s function in authorizing schism and

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ecclesial change (its ‘occasioning’ role), it does not deny that Scripture also has a ‘causative’ role. That is, the ACHS and ABC did not merely go foraging about in Scripture to find texts that would justify their positions. Scripture also had a transformative impact on these groups, by opening their eyes to injustices and enabling them to critique their own culture.

2. Secondary Findings

In the course of demonstrating this paper’s central thesis, several results turned up which confirmed findings already in the literature:

*Causal factors in schism:*

The originating factors in the ABC and the ACHS agreed with the general pattern of causation identified in the literature. In particular, the history of the ACHS lent credence to Baur’s thesis that Zionist churches originated over the “religious and social African heritage.”

*Zionist Hermeneutics:*

The case study on the ACHS confirmed observations by Sundkler, Oosthuizen and Turner that Zionist churches tend to favour Old Testament texts. Many of the ACHS practices derived from the Old Testament (ex. removal of shoes for worship, wearing of robes and turbans and food prohibitions) are characteristic of Zionism. The fragmented proof-texting evident in the ACHS also has parallels in other Zionist churches. Finally, the case study on the ACHS verified scholarly opinion that a church’s hermeneutics affects the shape of its tradition.

This paper has only briefly touched on some of the implications of the ACHS’s hermeneutical approaches to Scripture. It was suggested that its tendency to create legalistic practices like menstrual regulations results from a literalistic and fundamentalist approach to the Bible. As a result of its fragmentary view of Scripture, the ACHS has little sense of

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salvation history and of the relationship of the New covenant with the Old. Aside from these general observations, however, little was done with these findings. This would be an exciting area of research, particularly for those interested in biblical hermeneutics and ecumenical work.

V. Concluding Remarks

David Barrett is not the first scholar to notice the parallels between the role of Scripture in African Independency and its role in the Protestant Reformation. Indeed, the Reformation principle of sola scriptura, with its assumption of the openness of Scripture to individual interpretation, effectively provided Africans with the tool by which they could justify their secession from the Protestant mission churches. Without question, the principle of sola scriptura contains within itself a "democratising element that inevitably challenges any clerical meritocracy that tries to establish itself as the custodian of the truth and to supervise a correct interpretation of the scripture."  

From the perspective of church unity, then, the principle of sola scriptura is a liability. On the other hand, as Sanneh noted, it was precisely this principle which allowed Africans to apprehend the Gospel without first running it through Western filters. In terms of benefits, a truly indigenous reading of Scripture also challenges the wider church community with fresh insights into the Gospel. Thus, for example, Adegbola spoke of the value of the African concept of sin which refuses the easy Western separation between person and praxis. Oosthuizen saw many benefits to the Zionist emphasis on the Old Testament, despite the dangers of excesses. Many of the younger churches in Africa emphasize the New Testament to the point that the authority of the Old suffers. As Oosthuizen rightly observed, however, "The Old Testament...gives perspective to the New Testament, and to people's religious experience, which should have a historical grounding in election, promise and fulfilment." These are just a few examples of the gains one makes from an open reading of Scripture. While this 'open' approach to Scripture

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6 Probst, 489.

7 Sanneh, 172ff.

8 Oosthuizen, Post-Christianity, 162.
certainly runs the risk of producing ‘unorthodox’ practices, at least these will be “indigenous excesses rather than Western ones.”

Scripture as an ‘occasioning’ factor in independency ~ is it a blessing, or a curse? Whichever view one takes, one thing is for sure: the availability of vernacular translations of Scripture is one of the most influential factors shaping Christianity in Africa.10

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9 Sanneh, 203.

10 Mbiti, 28.
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