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**Discourse of inculturation and decolonization  
of Christianity in KwaZulu Natal – South Africa:  
A Pentecostal Missiological erspective**

**BY**

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## DECLARATION


I, Fika Mathe, declare that this is my own work. All the sources that have been used or quoted have been acknowledged by means of complete references. This work has not been submitted before for any other degree at any other institution.

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## DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Acculturation-** Acculturation is the opposite of enculturation. Agbo (2020) defines it as a process by which, “the individual is made to imbibe new or foreign elements contrary to his/her original culture” (Agbo, 2020:114).

**Africa/African** -The definition of these terms remains a subject of intense academic debate. Melber (2014) notes that “being African has at best a geographical meaning, which in our times of global mobility is reduced even further in its relevance as a factor” (2014: vii-xvii). In this study, ‘Africa’ refers to the geographical continent by that name, which lies between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. For purposes of this study, ‘Africa’ shall predominantly refer to Northern Africa, Sub-Saharan- but north of Limpopo River- Africa, and Africa south of the Limpopo River. I also concur with Melber (2014) that the concept of ‘Africa’ or ‘African’ extends beyond this geographic entity and has ideological connotations. To this effect, Melber states that “there are several distinctive approaches among African scholars, which have little or nothing in common except the claim or definition of the authors as ‘being African’ based purely on their local/physical origin” (2014: vii-xvii).

**African Christianity** – Refers to the theological formulations and practices emanating from missions activity in Africa. This concept has developed over the different waves and phases of evangelization of the African continent. Adogame, Gerloff and Hock write: “The rapid development of African Christianity and its offshoots in the Diaspora is rooted in colonial history and resistance to oppression, exploitation and slavery” (2008:368). They assert that African Christianity provides new means of interpreting and analysing Christian activity and movements in Africa and the Diaspora.

**Amabhinca**-The traditionalist community of the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. The term is predominantly used to refer people of rural parts of the Province who have neither acquired and education nor embraced Western ways of living.

**Amadlozi** -The plural form of *idlozi*, which is understood by amaZulu as a spirit of the departed or an ancestor. It is crucial to note that this definition is a subject of debate in view of the distinction that is found in the Zulu Bible between ‘ancestors’ and ‘spirit of divination’, which it refers to as *idlozi*. However, for purposes of this study, the term *amadlozi* will be used as commonly understood in the cultural context of amaZulu.

**Amakholwa** -The community of believers of the province of KwaZulu-Natal in south Africa. The term ‘*amakholwa*’ emanates from the early days of evangelization of the province of KwaZulu-Natal, when some members of the community who accepted Christ were then referred to as ‘believers’.

**AmaZulu**-The people of descent from the Zulu Kingdom, in the present-day province of KwaZulu-Natal. The most common source of identification of *amaZulu* is their language, *isiZulu*.

**Contextualization** -In this study, this term refers to the process of interpreting Christianity, or any foreign religion, in terms of the context of the receiving indigenous culture. This term is used interchangeably with ‘**indigenization**’. Craft (2016) defines contextualization as the process by which the church becomes ‘inculturated’ in the life of a people. This process is also popularly referred to as ‘indigenization’, but now is more frequently referred to as ‘contextualization’.

**Decolonization**-The process by which a previously colonized subject reclaims its original identity and reverses the effects of the colonization and the influence of the colonial master. According to Gardinier (1968), decolonization was initially understood as a political phenomenon and later was extended to include all elements incurred in the colonial experience, whether political, economic, cultural or psychological. In her essay for the British Scholar Society, Helene von Bismarck states that, “... there is the traditionalist definition of decolonization as a process by which legally dependent territories obtained their constitutional independence and entered the world stage of international relations as sovereign states” (von Bismarck 2012:1)

**Enculturation-** The concept of enculturation, closely relating to the concept of inculturation, refers to the process by which an individual becomes inserted into his or her own culture, according to Agbo (2020:114).

**Inculturation** -In this study, inculturation means a theological process in which Christian mission adjusts itself in order to integrate and harmoniously co-exist with the receiving culture, without losing its fundamental identity or attempting to undermine or demolish the receiving culture's fundamental identity. Inculturation is the symbiotically influential interaction between mission and culture. Inculturation, according to Craft (2016), is a process by which the Christian mission becomes indigenized or contextualized into the life of a people.

**Isiko**-The conventional cultural and traditional actions and practices of amaZulu that are normally done to mark, commemorate or celebrate crucial life events and occasions. These actions are mostly ceremonial, but on some occasions may involve a 'ritual', which is spiritual or religious in nature. In plural form *isiko* is referred to as *amasiko*.

**Isintu**-The wide doctrine and practice of cultural values and norms (*Ubuntu*), and the traditional ritualistic and spiritual aspects of African culture.

**Impepho** -A plant that is burnt as incense when communicating with ancestral spirits.

**IsiZulu** -The culture, way of life and language, of the amaZulu people.

**Pentecostalism** -A Christian tradition emanating from the event of the first outpouring of the Spirit which happened on the day of the feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem during biblical times as reflected in the New Testament, after the ascension of Christ. The tradition puts much emphasis on the work and manifestation of the Holy Spirit and the charisms of the Spirit. According to Kay "Pentecostalism is a renewal movement" (2011:1). He goes on to state that it is "a continuation of a series of renewal movements that go right back to the earliest days of the church" (Kay 2011:1). Although Pentecostalism dates as far back as the early church, in its modern form it is traced to the beginning of the twentieth century in the United States. Despite the evident traces of Pentecostalism reviving mainly in the

beginning of the twentieth century, there are some elements of Pentecostalism that have been reported in the late nineteenth century mission history

**Religion** -In this study, this term refers to a systematised and institutionalised spirituality and faith. Frederick Ferre' defines religion as "one's way of valuing most comprehensively and intensively" (2013:69). Although Ferre's definition is more individually focused, religion may also be understood as an organised, structured and systematic way of expressing understanding, views, beliefs, connection and relation with the divine and supernatural realm, which may be practiced and controlled within a group or a formation that shares the same way of valuing in life.

**Ubuntu** -The African concept of being human expressed in isiZulu, and also in other Nguni languages. The concept exists in most African cultures, especially South African and is expressed differently in different languages, but fundamentally with the same meaning.

**Ukuhlola / ukubhula**-The act of consulting with a spiritist, or spiritual practitioner, or medium, who, on one's behalf, consults or communicates with the spirits of the dead to seek answers and guidance pertaining current or past incidents and events in one's life, and interpret these in view of one's current life problems, and then provide guidance regarding the possible solutions.

**Ukuthetha idlozi / ukuphahla** -The ritual of consulting with ancestral spirits in form of prayer to seek for fortune or appease and honour them with an aim of attaining a blessing. Different cultural groups in South Africa make use of different elements to perform the ritual, but fundamentally the ritual has the same meaning.

**Ukuthwasa** -The process of initiating a person with an ancestral calling into being a qualified traditional healer and seer or medium.



## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTORY OVERVIEW

### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the background and motivation for this study. It begins by looking into the definitions of mission and the theology of mission. I provide a contextual background of the study with a specific focus on the Apostolic Faith Mission, one of the oldest and very influential Pentecostal missions in KwaZulu-Natal, as a case study. This chapter will also present the problem statement, outline the aims and objectives of the study. Key research questions will be highlighted and then the research gap will be identified, and methodological approach proposed. The Pentecostal mission movement of interest within the KwaZulu-Natal context, the Apostolic Faith Mission, will be overviewed. Chapters making up the dissertation will be outlined. Lastly, I present the motivation behind the study, highlighting some of the topical discussions that are currently taking place in both scholarly and public domains pertaining to the subject of this study.

### 1.2 Background and motivation for the study

In his book, *What is Mission? Theological Explorations*, J. A. Kirk offers a tentative definition of 'theology of mission' in an attempt to guide our thought or reflection process in this regard. They write:

The theology of mission is a disciplined study which deals with questions that arise when people of faith seek to understand and fulfil God's purposes in the world, as these are demonstrated in the ministry of Jesus Christ. It is a critical reflection on attitudes and actions adopted by Christians in pursuit of the missionary mandate. Its task is to validate, correct, and establish on better foundations the entire practice of mission (Kirk 1999: 21).

Thus, according to Kirk (1999), theology of missions is systematically organized thought and action with regard to mission. Although Kirk's definition of theology of missions is tentative, and not conclusive, one can draw from it a few key characteristics about a

theology of missions, and therefore about the nature of missions, which could be accepted as fundamental to this study. Missions take place within political, socio-economic and cultural contexts in different parts of the world that together form a broader context. The same can be said about Christian missions in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, which is the specific context chosen for this investigation.

In recent years, there has been quite a significant development in the discourse of inculturation in Africa, and South Africa has not remained behind in this development. Various schools of thought have emerged; some of these are quite recent and have grown to be very influential, especially since the commencement of the twenty-first century, and are still spreading and contributing significantly to shaping societal views towards religion and, in particular, views about the Pentecostal Charismatic Christian tradition, which has challenged the system of indigenous cultural beliefs and practices in Africa more radically than did previous missions movements. One of the most prevalent perspectives in this discourse is the recently emerged concept of 'African spirituality', which emanates from the African Traditional Religions (ATR) ideology and doctrine, which characterizes itself not as a religion but as a spirituality movement, although in my view the difference is merely semantic.

This study investigates the perceptions and perspectives that have developed over the years pertaining to the arrival and spread of Christian missions in Africa and, ultimately, in South Africa. This study also explores the ongoing discussion, which commenced in the late nineteenth century and continued in the twentieth century, on the decolonization of mission in Africa, triggered by the political decolonization movement that emerged in that era. According to Munyao and Tunia, "even though mission churches in Kenya are independent of their Western counterpart in terms of leadership, Whiteness continues to drive their theology and missions" (2021:1). This observation of the church in Kenya is applicable not only to the Kenyan context but, rather, is the shared reality of the church across the continent of Africa. This demands that the church in Africa, from a position of unity, address neocolonialism on various levels; Munyao and Tunia (2021) suggest that this begins with theology. To achieve this, the church needs to decolonize its theological identity by subverting the colonial structure that has shaped the thinking of indigenous

people for many years. Munyao and Tunia (2021) argue: “This process entails identifying Whiteness in the version of Christianity that is African, overturning its narratives, and situating an African theology within the African experience (2021: 1). It is also of concern to study to investigate the contemporary issues that exist with regards to the prevalence of Christian missions in Africa in the context of the twenty-first century and how these issues impact society’s perception about the Christian faith.

### **1.3 Problem statement**

Christian mission in Africa has always faced a dilemma regarding integration with the receiving cultures. While attempts may have been made by some missionaries to, for instance, learn the indigenous languages in the early stages of their missionary work, such initiatives have always been perceived with suspicion by most African sociological, anthropological and theological scholars, who have questioned the intent behind the act.

The question in this regard is: was this effort to learn indigenous languages driven by genuine need to inculturate and integrate, or it was a mere matter of trying to find more convenient ways to preach the gospel without a language barrier? Scholarly attempts to unpack such questions have given rise to theologies such as inculturation and decolonization of mission. For Christianity – and any religion, for that matter – to survive and be empowering to the receiving culture, it needs to inculturate with an aim of genuinely integrating with the local culture in order to enrich the culture, rather than to take away or change the receiving culture’s fundamental identity.

The challenge with Christianity, however, has always been the fact that mission, in its essence, is a mandate to convert, and not necessarily to merely enrich existing cultures – although the latter is inevitable in any mission process. The question then becomes: what does one convert from, and what does one retain? It is this question that the African theology of inculturation has been battling to address over the past century.

There is another greater challenge for Christian mission to Africa. When Christianity came to Africa in the second wave of evangelization, around the sixteenth to the seventeenth centuries, it was packaged in Western culture, rather than its culture of origin – which is

Jewish and, to a certain extent, Greek and Roman, which were most influential cultures at the time of the inception of Christianity. Africa has, as a result, received more Westernization than Christianization in the process of its evangelization. This reality now confronts theologians and church leaders more than ever before, especially given the recent rise of forces other ideologically contending such as the African spirituality movement. The question also then becomes: has African Christianity – and South African Christianity, in particular – been sufficiently decolonized post the political decolonization movement of the late-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries in view of the dominant Western influence in the evangelization of Africa during the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries? It is also this question that the ongoing discourse on inculturation and the decolonization of Christianity should continue to address.

#### **1.4 Aims and objectives**

The aims and objectives of this study were as follows:

- To explore Christian missions in an African cultural context, with the South African province of Kwazulu-Natal as a specific context of interest. Some observations that I have made over some years with regards to the extent to which Christianity has, enculturated among the community of Zulu people (amaZulu) will be referred to and highlighted in this study.
- To revisit how missions came into Africa, how the African culture, specifically Zulu culture (isiZulu), received Christianity and how Christianity interacted with culture, in all its dimensions, and how these two have been interacting since their point of contact to current. This is, in essence, the continuation of the inculturation discussion emanating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when there began to be an awareness of the need to redefine Christianity in the African cultures' context.
- To continue the discourse on the decolonization of Christian mission in Africa post the political decolonization movement of the late-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. The objective in this regard is to unpack the impact of Western culture on Christian mission and, by consequence, on the African culture.

- This study also acknowledges the fact that there have been some ideological developments and shifts from the primitive ideologies and doctrines in African traditional religions and cultures, which has given birth to the contemporary African spirituality movement. This aspect of the study responds to the reality that theological and ideological development and evolution have not only been experienced on the aspect of Mission, but also on the aspect of the receiving Culture as well.

### **1.5 Research questions**

The primary and secondary research questions driving this study are as follows:

- Can Christianity harmoniously integrate and co-exist with African cultural beliefs, traditions, practices, and social values without losing its fundamental identity? and
- Has Christian mission in twenty-first century South Africa been sufficiently decolonized, post the political decolonization movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries?

To address these questions, the following sub-questions were also investigated:

1. When and how did Christian mission first come into contact with the African continent, how was it received, and how did it expand?
2. Did a relationship exist between the colonial and missionary movements in Africa; if so, what was the nature of this relationship and how did it mutually impact on Christian mission and the receiving cultures?
3. Has Christianity been sufficiently decolonized in the twenty-first century South African context; if not, what should this decolonization process look like, and how does this affect the future of Christianity in South Africa?

### **1.6 The research gap**

Much work has been done by African theologians in the area of inculturation in the African continent. However, not much emphasis has been put on South Africa as a unique case that has a unique history of systematically structured racial discrimination over and above

the colonial background shared with most of Africa, as a whole. The discourse on the decolonization of Christian mission in former colonies of the Western colonial powers, which is an extension of the inculturation discussion, has also not been sufficiently tackled, especially in the South African context. This study aimed to contribute towards narrowing these gaps in the research; albeit with an understanding that these gaps cannot be conclusively closed due to the broad and continuous nature of the inculturation and decolonization discourse.

In her paper *The Theology of Inculturation and the African Church*, Kurgat states that “[t]here is an emerging consensus that culture is a developing process in which there is and there must be a continuous dialogue between faith and culture” (2009: 90). This statement suggests a gap, or space, for further research investigating and interrogating the nature of this continuous dialogue between faith and culture. I term this dialogue ‘inculturation’. Atnet (2015) supports, to some degree, this understanding of the phenomenon of inculturation when they state that “[e]tymologically, the word ‘inculturation’ means the insertion of new values into one’s heritage and worldview” (2015: 194). If one looks at ‘heritage’ and ‘worldview’ as the spectrum on which Christian values or the new faith ought to be inserted, one can never reach a state of conclusive articulation of this interaction and integration due to the ever-evolving nature of the social dimensions at play.

In Kurgat’s (2009) view, inculturation in Africa is still a theoretical, rather than a practical, issue. This perspective suggests that there is still room for further development in as far as inculturation in Africa is concerned, especially in terms of the practical aspects of the phenomenon. Inculturation needs to move beyond being a theoretical phenomenon—a subject of academic and theological debates—to arrive at the point where it is seen and experienced.

## **1.7 Significance of the study**

This study investigated the background of Christian mission in Africa and, specifically, in the context of the South African province of KwaZulu-Natal. By building on historical

insights, the study makes a contribution to the continuation of the discourse on inculturation in the continent, as well as some critical local observations. This enriches the discourse providing perspectives on the decolonization process of Christian mission in Africa, as a formerly colonized region. The study also explored what the future of mission in South Africa might look like, with a special interest in the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement. Thus, the study provides both historical perspective and forecasting within the broad and continuous discussion on inculturation and the decolonization of Christian mission in Africa, South Africa, and, in particular, KwaZulu-Natal.

## **1.8 Methodology**

Two main classifications of research methods exist in the world of research, these are qualitative and quantitative methods. According to Daniel, "all the definitions, criticisms, arguments and counter arguments made by authors about the research approaches border only on the methods of data collection, analysis and summary of the results" (2016: 92). This study employed qualitative research methodology, in which existing literature produced in this, and related discourses was analysed.

Daniel (2016:92) states that qualitative research methodology "contains all necessary instruments that can evoke recall which aids problem-solving". On the contrary, "imperatively, quantitative research approach can be seen as being scientific in nature" (Daniel 2016: 94). A post-modern approach was used in this study, aimed at finding truth and making findings based on review of literary data (literature).

This study required the analysis of missiological practice from both historical and contemporary perspectives. The historical perspective, in the sense of applying a historical comparative methodology to an existing body of knowledge in the field of science of religion and missiology, was critical to produce new knowledge. The contemporary perspective was useful for studying contemporary issues and perspectives in Christian mission in Africa, and the specific context of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

A positionality approach was also utilised to a limited extent whereby some observations and references were made based on personal religious spiritual and cultural experiences over many years of growing up, having been born and raised in KwaZulu-Natal in a family and community that speak isiZulu and practice isiZulu culture. In qualitative research, social dimensions are generally evaluated to provide results that are rich in detail. In this study, the social dimensions of culture and religion were evaluated to generate detailed results.

### **1.9 Introductory overview of a Pentecostal Christian mission of interest in KwaZulu-Natal: the Apostolic Faith Mission**

As this study focused on mission in KwaZulu-Natal from a Pentecostal perspective, an understanding of the Pentecostal sub-movement, or church, of interest—which is the Apostolic Faith Mission in South Africa—was required. In De Wet’s direct words, “It is necessary, however, to show the historical link between the Pentecostal Movement and developments that led to the emergence of the AFM in South Africa” (1989: 12). According to De Wet (1989: 25), the ministry of Andrew Murray and the revivals that took place at the end of the nineteenth century prepared the way for the emergence of Pentecostalism in South Africa. He also acknowledges the significant role that the Christian Zionist Movement, which originated in the USA and is linked to the healing movement of John Dowie, founded on 22 February 1896, played in the birth of Pentecostalism in South Africa in the late nineteenth century. Johannes Buchler is identified by religious historians as the first missionary or official of the Christian Zionist Movement in South Africa, appointed in 1897, De Wet(1989) records.

It is historically recorded that Buchler was later succeeded as leader of the Zionist Movement in South Africa by Daniel Bryant who arrived in Durban on 22 April 1904 (De Wet 1989). Amongst those to welcome him was ex-‘Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk’ (NGK), which is popularly known as the Dutch Reformed Church in English,’ missionary P.L. le Roux who later became President of the AFM, according to De Wet (1989: 28). Bryant was somehow linked with the co-founders of the AFM in South Africa, John G. Lake and Thomas Hezmalhalch, whom he knew from Zion City in the USA.

In 1890, le Roux was sent out from Wellington by Andrew Murray, a prominent nineteenth century evangelist, as a missionary. At the age of 26 le Roux went as an un-ordained worker for a few years at a mission station in Natal, called Garden Mission, in order to learn the local language, isiZulu, de Wet (1989: 30) narrates. Le Roux later went to Greytown, a town close to the KwaMaphumulo area in KwaZulu-Natal, to work as a missionary. In 1893, he was ordained as a missionary by the NGK in the city of Pietermaritzburg in KwaZulu-Natal. Le Roux later moved to the south-eastern Transvaal, where he did most of his mission work, but still had some oversight over the work in the Kwa-Zuu Natal mission. His ministry also had elements of healing, reflecting the influence of Andrew Murray in his earlier years. De Wet recounts: "it was during this time that le Roux rediscovered the biblical truth of divine healing" (1989: 31).

When Buchler visited John Dowie in Zion City in 1902, he discovered that the Christian Catholic Apostolic Church (CCAC) in Zion City has turned into a sycophantic personality cult driven by Dowie himself. Buchler then cut all ties with Zion City upon his return to South Africa in 1903 and attempted to change the name of the church in South Africa to emphasize this change. De Wet writes, "Buchler ... tried to change the name CCAC to "The Apostolic Faith Mission", but this was refused by the Native Commissioner" (1989: 32). Concurrently to these events, le Roux came under extreme pressure from the NGK leaders who were opposed to his healing ministry. He eventually resigned from the NGK after the Boer War of 1899-1902 and continued independently with about 500 former NGK members who followed him. In 1904, he met Bryant, who baptized him and his wife after teaching them about believers' baptism and triune immersion. Le Roux became part of the Christian Catholic Apostolic Church and was ordained the same year. In May 1908, the Apostolic Faith Mission eventually officially formed, which I believe was made possible by earlier failed efforts of Buchler to re-register CCAC as AFM in South Africa but was refused by the authorities. Le Roux joined the AFM when it was eventually formed in 1908. Many black members of the CCAC followed Le Roux into the AFM because of the significant overlaps in the doctrinal articulations of the two movements. However, they insisted on retaining the 'Zion' name, and were granted permission to be the 'Zion' branch of the AFM by the AFM Council 1910, according to Kgatle (2016).

Studies on church history and growth have found that the Apostolic Faith Mission, grew significantly in South Africa—and across Africa, more broadly—during the twentieth century. According to De Wet's (1989) study, by 1989 Pentecostals represented the largest group of Protestant Christians in the world. The emergence of the AFM in Africa, in my view, contributed significantly to this development. In Africa, the AFM has always represented, and continues to represent, the lasting impact of the early 1900s Pentecostal revival and its spread to the utmost parts of the globe. When describing the AFM, Kgatle (2016) writes that the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) is an African Pentecostal Christian church founded by American missionaries John G Lake and Thomas Hezmalhach in 1908. Kgatle's description of the AFM puts some emphasis on the founders of the AFM being American missionaries, which is crucial to note in this discussion as it gives some insight into issues of western and colonial influences that would be so evident in the movement, as it grew and spread, and later lead to serious inculturation and decolonization debates that lead to some breakaways by some prominent African leaders from within the AFM movement.

When Lake and Hezmalhalch returned to the USA, and in 1913 le Roux became the first South African president of the AFM movement, which had begun as an extension of an American Pentecostal missionary movement. "From this time the AFM operated as a totally indigenous South African church, with no links to, or oversight from, any other nation" (Clark, 2005:144). According to Clark (2005), the membership of the AFM at that time consisted of people from all prominent racial and cultural groups in South Africa. The diversity that existed in the AFM at its inception, as the first Pentecostal movement—and later, denomination—in South Africa, explains its visible footprint in different parts of the country, including the province of KwaZulu-Natal. According to De Wet, when Le Roux was elected President of the AFM in 1913, things worsened rapidly. This, combined with the rising of strong indigenous black leadership amongst the Zulu Zionists, gave rise to major proliferation of the Zionist Movement into many small 'independent' groups each doing its own thing (1989: 35). Some of the small groups that broke away from the CCAC presented signs of a great interweaving of Zionism, Pentecostalism and traditional black religions (like ancestor -worship). "Doctrinally one presently finds 'Zionistic-type' churches that range from traditional Pentecostalistic, to some so syncretistic that they can hardly

be called Christian anymore”, De Wet (1989:35) opines. Christianity in the province of KwaZulu-Natal is currently, as a result of these above-explored historical development, characterized by a strong Zionist movement, made up of many small independent Zionist churches, that has mastered the art of syncretism.

Kgatle (2016) presents a similar historical narrative to that of De Wet. He states that, “whilst some of the Zionist congregation eventually followed Le Roux into the AFM, Daniel Nkonyane and 56 other people used their relative autonomy and the low-key links they had with the AFM to develop their own Zionist followers” (Kgatle, 2016: 2). According to Kgatle (2016), Nkonyane and those with him founded the Christian Catholic Apostolic Holy Spirit Church in Zion, thus developing an Africanized version of Pentecostalism. This version of Pentecostalism differed in form and intent from the movement that had originated in the United States, although it shared a belief in divine healing and Spirit-led liturgical order. Alongside this movement was the Nazareth Baptist Church, popularly known as ‘KwaShembe’—a name derived from the Shembe dynasty that founded the movement. The Shembe movement shares some of the beliefs and practices that characterize the Zionist movement relating to *amadlozi* (ancestral spirits) and other traditional practices of amaZulu. The Pentecostal movement in KwaZulu-Natal—and, in particular, the AFM— exists alongside these well-established religious movements that are very popular among amaZulu because of their syncretic nature.

## **1.10 Outline of the dissertation**

### ***Chapter 1 - Introduction***

This chapter has provided an introductory overview of the study and given a brief background to the topic. The problem statement, aims, objectives and research questions were presented, along with the research methodology.

### ***Chapter 2 - Literature review***

This chapter provides a high-level review of some of the relevant literature that exist in the fields of theology and anthropology. This includes material from earlier periods that

provide an authentic historical background to some of the critical aspects of topic under study. The chapter discusses the following topics:

- Theology of mission-general overview;
- Theology of inculturation;
- Christian mission in Africa;
- Christian mission in South Africa, with Specific Interest in KwaZulu-Natal; and
- Decolonization of Africa and Mission

### ***Chapter 3 - Expansion of Christian mission in Africa***

Chapter 3 explores the background of Christian mission in Africa. In the ongoing discourse on inculturation and the decolonization of Christianity in Africa, a reflection on the background of mission in the continent is critical. The topic of this study highlights the fact that the inculturation and decolonization of mission discourse is both historical and also progressive in nature. In approaching this reflection, we explore how Christianity came to the continent and expand on this by examining the four main waves of evangelization of the continent. These waves can also be identified as the different epochs in African church history, which may overlap with each other. After exploring the broader African context, the chapter narrows its focus to Christian mission in South Africa and southern African region, with a specific interest in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, where the isiZulu culture —the target culture in this inculturation study—is found.

### ***Chapter 4 - Inculturation in the isiZulu cultural context***

Chapter 4 is dedicated to the actual continuation of the discourse on inculturation in Africa, with focus on the specific cultural context of interest, which is the isiZulu culture, found in the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. Some reflections on personal experiences and observations are made pertaining to the interactions between Christianity and isiZulu culture in the past, as I grew up within this cultural context as a young Pentecostal Christian and thus can bring a first-hand perspective to some aspects of this discussion. Perspectives of other scholars are also reflected on with regards to the interaction between the spirituality of isiZulu and Christian doctrine and pneumatology. The interaction between isiZulu socio-cultural values and biblical-ethical values is discussed.

Some missiological perspectives on the theology of inculturation of Christianity in the isiZulu context are explored.

### ***Chapter 5 - The decolonization of Christian mission in Africa***

This chapter begins with tackling the problematic relationship between colonial and missionary movements. Various scholars have worked at length to interrogate this crucial phenomenon within missions. This subject is often a point of debate between Christian apologetics and critics of the Christian faith. This chapter aims, primarily, to unpack the question of whether there is a legitimate relationship between these two powerful historical movements and, if there is, to determine its nature and how the relationship has impacted on Christianity in Africa post the colonial era. The chapter also reflects on the process of the decolonization of the Christian faith in the post-colonial era. The response of the African church to the decolonization movement is explored, and this exploration is further narrowed to focus on the South African context and, within it, the specific context of KwaZulu-Natal.

### ***Chapter 6 - Findings and recommendations***

The sixth and final chapter will reflect on discussions that would have been held in the various chapters of this study and attempt to join all the dots and find the points of conjunction between the various sub-headings and components of the broader discourse on inculturation and decolonization of Mission in Africa. The findings of the study are summarized, and conclusions are drawn from these. Recommendations are made pertaining to the gaps in the literature that have been identified and how the discourse can be best be taken forward.

#### **1.11 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an introductory overview of this dissertation. The background and motivation for the study were presented. The main research problem and aims and objectives for conducting this research were outlined. The research questions were articulated. The gaps that exist in current research on the research topic were identified and the value of the study and its contribution towards narrowing these gaps outlined. The methodology employed to conduct this study was explained.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a broad overview of the research topic by reflecting on existing literature in this area. Several scholars have made substantial contributions to this discourse, as mentioned previously. Some of the literature explored in this paper dates as far back as 1965, which illustrates how long there has been discourse on inculturation. Some of the most recent work reviewed in this study was published in 2020. The discourse on inculturation and the decolonization of Christian mission in Africa is still ongoing.

### 2.2 Overview of the theology of mission

Oborji (2020:3) describes missiology as the science of missions. He further defines missiology in more technical terms as “a branch of theology that studies the salvation activities of God the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit throughout the world geared towards bringing the Kingdom of God into existence”. Oborji (2020:4) explains that “missiology, *ipso facto*, studies the church’s relationship with the people of other religions, cultures, the emerging situations and problems in missionary fields”. He highlights the difference between missiology, as a study of missions, and mission itself. He further highlights the difference between ‘mission’ (singular form), which he refers to as *missio Dei*, and ‘missions’ (plural form), which he refers to as *missiones ecclesiae*. Oborji (2020:4) defines *missio Dei* as God’s mission, “that is, the divine intervention in favour of all humanity at all times and in the whole world”. Oborji (2020) describes mission as God’s self-revelation and involvement in and with the world. In this self-revelation and involvement of God with the world, he explains, the church is privileged to participate as a sacrament and instrument of God in bringing salvation to all mankind.

Following from his definition of *missio Dei*, Oborji (2020:5) also takes the liberty to distinguish *missiones ecclesiae* from *missio Dei* by describing it as the “missionary ventures of the church”. In more comprehensive terms, missions – which he also refers to as *missiones ecclesiae* – involves “...undertakings by which the heralds of the gospel

are sent by the church and go forth into the whole world to carry out the task of preaching (evangelization) and implanting of the Church among peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ” (Oborji, 2020:5).

Missiology has become an increasingly prominent branch of theology, stimulated by the growth of globalization and democratization and the increasing secularization of many parts of the world. Globalization has dramatically increased the interaction between religions, cultures, and economies. As the global community interacts more intimately, trends such as democratization and secularization also intensify as they are enabled and strengthened by global pressure coming from the regions that are more advanced in these aspects. According to Oborji (2020), missiology has only emerged recently as an independent science, although theological education was born out of mission. Missiology only took root as a discipline in institutions of higher education around the world in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (2020: 3). The academic development of missiology has, in turn, contributed very significantly to the growth of mission in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

In his discussion on the growth of missiology, Oborji (2020) identifies some of the individuals – from both Catholic and Protestant backgrounds – who played a prominent role. Gustav Warneck (1834-1910) is considered the father of protestant missiology and Joseph Schmidlin (1876-1944) the father of Catholic missiology in Germany. However, Oborji (2020) also highlights that the growth of mission, and the theology thereof, has not only been the outcome of the work of theologians and the missionaries, but of the collective commitment of theologians, missionaries, and the laity to the expansion of the work of God, especially in Africa. In this regard, he emphasizes that “[t]he strength of Christianity in Africa is as a result of the active participation of the laity and their generous contribution to the growth of the Church both locally and internationally” (Oborji, 2020:1).

Schreiter (2012), in his presentation of the 10<sup>th</sup> Louis Luzbetak Lecture in March 2010, spoke about intercultural interaction and religious dialogue as a peculiar intersection in missiology. He reflected on the debates of the Second Vatican Council that revisited what the primary intent of the church’s mission to the world is. The main question in this debate was whether the primary purpose of the mission work of the church was the salvation of

souls or the instituting of the church in new locations. This was a critical reflection and contributed significantly to the direction that mission took after the Second Council – which represents a significant part of the world’s missiological history. Schreiter (2012: 276) explains that, by the end of this debate, “mission came to be seen as the action of the Holy Trinity in the world, with the church as the instrument of God’s action to achieve this new creation.”

Understanding intercultural interaction and religious dialogue in the history of missions has become increasingly important in recent decades because, with rapid globalization, there is more intercultural interaction which also opens doors for interreligious dialogue. This has been very critical in the ages whereby Christian mission is being redefined on the African continent. It is important that serious mistakes made by earlier missionaries not be repeated. For example, wrong assumptions about indigenous cultures and religions produced a theology that is obscure, is not wholesome, and does not speak fully to the needs of the indigenous people. It was only as African theologians recognised the need to redefine Christian theology in African terms – rather than in Western terms, as had been the case for centuries of Christianization across the continent – those new theologies, such as the theology of inculturation, gained a footing. It is in the theology of inculturation that the Christianization of Africa intersects with the Africanization of Christianity to produce a much longed for new form of Christian theology in Africa.

### **2.3 Theology of inculturation in mission**

One cannot finish a conversation about the theology of mission without talking to the concept of inculturation, especially in the African context. Tengtenga (2016:12) puts it in this fashion: “just as in any parts of the world where Christianity has spread, the interface of Christ and culture has always been key, make-or-break issue in the extent of its influence”. In conversing about inculturation, one also has to look at the phenomenon of multiculturalism, which dominates the post-modern age as a result of the globalization of our world. We have witnessed a significant shift in recent years from the hegemony of Euro-American cultural to a more multicultural world in which different nations and groups affirm their distinct cultural identities within the global community. To this effect, Ryan

(2000:5) writes: “The single Euro-American culture that had begun to dominate in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century is now being replaced by an acceptance of cultural self-determination by others, and openness to enrichment from other cultures”.

Ryan (2000: 5) argues that “this sense of cultural pluralism has an inevitable impact on theology” because “all theologies are products of a particular and limited historical-cultural experience”. This suggests that theology is strongly influenced by culture and, if this is the case, that cultural pluralism will product theological pluralism, even within the same religion – a perspective that Ryan (2000) affirms when he speaks of multiple theologies. This symbiotic influence between the two phenomena takes place even if practitioners are unaware of it: it is a natural and inevitable process. According to Ryan (2000), Western theology is one theology that was implicitly or unconsciously enculturated. Inculturation can therefore take place either deliberately or implicitly. Ryan (2000) further asserts that theology is enriched when it meets culture. Culture brings with it a diversity of human experiences, practices, norms, values, and traditions. In my view, theology should therefore not be threatened by culture, but rather be enriched by, it without necessarily tampering with the fundamentals of its doctrine.

For a long time, Christian theology and experience thereof has been limited to one dominant culture: the Western culture. Ryan (2000: 6) notes that African writers recognize that in the past the church has limited the Christ-experience to particular Western forms based on Western beliefs, values and systems”. This may explain why, in African context, anything African was discarded and considered demonic by the Western form of Christianity when Africa was evangelized. This has turned around to be the very challenge that 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christian missionaries in Africa –, especially those from the Pentecostal-Charismatic tradition – Africa face. Their gospel is increasingly being subjected to scrutiny through the African cultural lens in order to clearly distinguish between Westernization and Christianization – two distinct agendas that historically have been deeply entangled.

Ryan (2000: 6) defines inculturation as “the study of how Christianity relates to and becomes embodied within the rich variety of cultures of South Africa”. This definition speaks strongly to the theme of this study, albeit the study looks at a much narrower geographical context. Similarly to Ryan’s definition of inculturation, Schreiter (2012)

defines inculturation as having to do with how the gospel is brought to and received in a given culture. While Ryan's definition addresses the South African context specifically, Schreiter's is not contextually bound.

Ryan (2000) identifies several components to the theology of inculturation. A basic component is the *theology of religions*. Critical to this component is the acknowledgement that inculturation cannot exist without discerning the loving presence of God in a particular culture or group (Ryan, 2000). This component of inculturation acknowledges that God is at work in all cultures even before the establishment of the church in a particular context. Ryan (2000: 6) expresses this in more explicit terms: "God's Spirit is at work among all cultures prior to the explicit establishment of the church; later again, the Spirit is active outside the limits of the institutional church once established." Ryan goes even further, arguing that "...the variety of the world's religions are precisely the plurality of ways God saves" (2000:7). I differ with Ryan's later assertion, although I concur with him in his earlier articulation.

Christianity is a text-based religion, although it is generally accepted that not all there is to know is revealed in its holy text, the Bible. However, what has been revealed is sufficient for knowledge that leads to salvation. According to the Bible, salvation is by God's grace through Christ alone. The famous passage in John 14:6 (NIV) states: "Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me'". While the meaning of this statement may be open to various interpretations, in essence, it captures the Christian motivation for evangelizing the whole world, because without Christ the whole world is lost and needs salvation. This is the foundational doctrine of Christian missiology: without this basic conviction, there would be no mission theology and praxis in the Christian faith.

It is also important to distinguish between religion and culture when talking of inculturation as defined above. Christianity may be embodied within the rich variety of cultures that exist, but not necessarily within different religions or spiritualities. Distinguishing between culture as a way of life and religion as a form of institutionalized or systematized spirituality becomes very crucial in the conversation about the inculturation of Christianity. Inculturation is critical for the success of Christian missions in any cultural context,

including African cultures. However, co-existence with other religions or forms of spirituality in terms of practice and creed may not be the intended outcome of Christian mission as envisaged in the Holy Scriptures. Socially, Christianity may co-exist with other religions, but not doctrinally and practically. Christianity is monotheistic in nature, like Judaism, from which it originated. It is this aspect of Christianity that may have been misinterpreted by earlier Western missionaries. The fact that Christianity is not open to co-existence with other religions and spiritualities does not necessarily make it impossible to harmoniously enculturate into any culture, however.

The next component of inculturation identified by Ryan (2000:7) is “...the reformulation or re-expression of Christianity in terms of the receiving culture...” This component lies at the heart of inculturation. Ryan (2000:7) explains that “[t]he basic procedure here is to look at the richness of one’s culture and identify which of the original values of a culture are ‘seeds’ of Christianity”. The desired outcome of this process is a wholistic gospel with integrated values. Ryan (2000:7) states that “when interpreted with the essence of Christianity these seeds can become full gospel values”. The challenge, however, in this process of reformulation is that Western Christianity is rooted in a well-developed and rigid culture, which makes it difficult for the recipients of evangelization to clearly distinguish between Westernization and Christianity. Ryan notes this: “the receiving culture may not distinguish sufficiently between Christianity and its foreign cultural mediation” (2000: 7).

This trend has been witnessed predominantly in developing countries, where communities may have a very low level of confidence in their own cultural identity as a result of political, economic, technological, and other factors. For example, having grown up personally in the isiZulu-speaking community of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, I have observed that it is a dominant trend for Pentecostal-Charismatic churches to conduct their worship services in English without considering whether this is appropriate in a unilingual isiZulu-speaking community. This has been taken so far that some Christians take the practice of worshiping in English into their private devotions at home. Another example, to further elaborate this point, is that in that conservative traditionalist community of KwaMaphumulo in KwaZulu-Natal, Christians have long been identified by the Western

manner in which they dress. They do not wear the traditional cultural attire worn by the rest of the community (traditionally known as *amaBhinca*) who have not been Christianized. This is a superficial form of Christianity.

The third component of inculturation identified by Ryan (2000:8) is "...challenging people to become aware of the continuing inadequacies of their own culture and to make it increasingly liberating, in light of the gospel". Thus, according to Ryan, inculturation should equip the receiving culture in Christian mission to bring change, not only to their cultural framework, but to their whole surrounding environment. This, he asserts, was also evident in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, who used language and symbols that were relatable to the people of his time and culture but challenged them continually on aspects that were oppressive and separated them from God. This component of inculturation shows the symbiotic nature of influence between culture and Christianity, in that it is not just Christianity that needs to adapt to the culture, but that culture is, in turn, transformed by the Christian faith in valuable ways that would have otherwise never been experienced if the Gospel had not been introduced.

A fourth component of inculturation identified by Ryan (2000) is that the global Christian community – the catholic church of God – can be enriched by the inculturation experiences of local churches. Just as enculturation helps those in the receiving culture to discover unexplored elements about themselves, Christianity – and the way it is expressed – is enriched by its contact with different cultures in various localities. This experience shared with the global Christian community could be enriching for the Faith. Ryan (2000:8) explains that "[t]his component of inculturation process is accomplished when we dialogue with other local churches on their expression of Christianity and identify whatever may enrich our own tradition". In South Africa, for instance, over the years that Christianity has spread into the various indigenous local cultures, diverse forms of Christian traditions have developed (collectively known as Independent African Traditional Churches) that express Christianity in a very traditional way that is relatable to African traditionalists. The challenge with these African Traditional Churches is that they centre their worship experience and practice around traditional African spiritual beliefs, practices, and rituals to such an extent that some question whether their tradition

or formation can legitimately be considered part of the Christian church or is a form of cult. It is also through these formations of Christianity that the contemporary dominant concept of African Spirituality thrives. This is a form of spirituality that embraces the idea of God and the doctrine of the trinity – especially the component of the Holy Spirit – but in conjunction with ancestral spirits. In some instances, these groups also introduce another mediatory prophetic figure alongside the spirits of the ancestors, who are recognized as the first point of contact with the spiritual realm, in which God also exists.

The final component of inculturation explored by Ryan is the practical application. He writes: “The gospel is a call to conversion, not intellectual acceptance of a body of truths” (Ryan, 2000:9). The question here is: what does one have to convert from? This often becomes the point of conflict between Christianity and culture. The practical exercise of identifying elements of one’s culture from which one has to convert, while being mindful of certain cultural fundamentals one needs to continue to uphold in one’s interaction with the new faith, is the main challenge. Different cultures experience this dilemma differently, as do individuals. This has led to the current situation where different forms of Christianity have arisen with distinct doctrines and traditions. Ryan (2000: 9) argues that the task of the church in Southern African – and in Africa as whole – is “ultimately one of disengaging the ‘essence’ or essential core of Christianity from Western appearance and patterns it has built up over two thousand years of Western history”.

Ryan (2000:9) proposes that three critical tasks face the church governors in South Africa today:

1. deciding the extent to which the standard Western expression of Christianity should still be binding on the local church;
2. discerning if a reformulation of Christianity is faithful both to the original teaching and vision of Jesus Christ for his church and its doctrinal development down through the past generations; and
3. perceiving if a new embodiment of the Christian faith practically and relevantly responds to the real needs of the people of God in South Africa today.

Ryan (2000: 10) stresses the centrality of the local church in the process of inculturation: “only a local community can really enculturate, that is, enable Christianity to become part and parcel of their culture”.

Later, in 2012, Aylward Shorter weighed in on the subject of inculturation in Africa, putting emphasis on the significance of the role that global communication has played in inculturation. He stated that “culture is an attribute of human beings in their diversity, a fact that was more clearly realized in the mid-twentieth century than at any previous time, due to development of global communication” (2012: 99). The Roman Catholic Church, which is the largest Christian mission in the world, has led this development in the mid-twentieth century. Shorter states: “Pope Paul VI’s Synodal exhortation on evangelization in 1975 explicitly addressed the evangelization of culture, an evangelization that was to be profoundly ‘anthropological’ and not superficially semantic” (2012: 99). Shorter also stresses the fact that “human beings are enculturated in their own society by learning to ‘play the game of culture’, as it were” (2012:100). In this statement, Shorter, like Ryan (2000), also highlights the significance of a local community in the process of inculturation, which then, through global communication, develops into a global community phenomenon.

Shorter takes a bit of a different angle than that observed in Ryan’s discourse by focusing more on defining the concept of culture with the aim of bringing about a rather solid understanding of what inculturation is. In essence, Shorter takes an anthropologist approach to explaining inculturation. He states: “Culture is thus a historical tradition into which human beings enter, a tradition that usually takes its origins in the interface of a human society with a given physical environment, the interaction of a people and their land” (Shorter, 2012: 100). According to Shorter, anthropologists have an inclusive view of culture. In their understanding, it is the lens through which the human individual perceives every aspect of their life and experience. Father Luzbetak of the Catholic Church, in his discourse on mission and inculturation, speaks of ‘culture’ instead of using ‘context’, as it has typically been used. Shorter writes: “For the anthropological missiologist, the term ‘culture’ does not exclude the political and socioeconomic levels, but rather embraces all the possible cultural levels as well as a multitude of subcultures

and microcultures that are legitimate objects of missionary evangelization in the modern world” (2012:100-101).

Continuing his discourse on inculturation, Shorter (2012) also talks of multiculturalism, which is very prevalent in modern, globalized society. Multiculturalism has a significant impact in the inculturation dialogue. Shorter writes: “In contemporary Africa, the scale and rapidity of cultural interaction has been aggravated by urbanization, population mobility, and the global ecumene” (2012:103). In Shorter’s view, African inculturation was not simple in the rural culture context and is even more complex in modern, multicultural Africa. Describing the cultural diversity of the modern city environment and the element it introduces into the inculturation dialogue, Shorter writes that “the city continues to be an encounter of cultures that retain their essential identity”. He further describes the city as “an organization of diversity, not a replication of uniformity” (2012:103).

Robert Schreiter (2012) also contributed to this dialogue, mainly holding the view that inculturation was initially focused on Christian identity in non-Western cultures. However, in later years it has become a critical point of discussion in other avenues as well and has been perceived as a tool that can be utilized strategically to address how Christianity should be expressed in increasingly secular contexts. Schreiter writes: “To an extent this most recent form of inculturation blends together the identity concerns of the earlier efforts at inculturation with themes for the theologies of liberation” (2012: 278). Like Shorter, Schreiter also highlights the impact of globalization or global communication on the concept of culture as one of the critical issues in the dialogue on inculturation. Schreiter (2012) also reflects on the three major ways in which culture may be understood, which have developed over the past three centuries:

- classical: artistic, musical and literary;
- modern: linguistical, customary, and territorial; and
- postmodern (globalized): hybrid, rather than integral and integrated, identities.

## **2.4 Christian missions in Africa**

The background of Christian missions in Africa is a rather more sensitive subject than it ought to be. This is mainly because of the prevalent perception that the evangelization of Africa and its colonization are synonymous. Awoh (2011), reflecting on early missionary manoeuvres in Cameroon, writes that: “the history of evangelization in Cameroon is closely related to the history of colonization” (2011: 3). He comments that “as a whole the history of colonization and evangelization went hand in hand, in fact they became two strange bedfellows from the beginning” (2011: 3). Francis Oborji, in his series of essays on African missiology, asks a critical question about the evangelization of the African continent: “do Africans have a contribution towards missiology or are they passive consumers of the mission theology and the version of Christianity developed overseas?” (2020: 2). Oborji makes a call for the rethinking of how Africa is positioned in the minds of the people post the colonial invasion of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. He asserts that this will enable the development of Afrocentric missiological models. He writes: “In developing models for Missiology in an African context, therefore, priority should be given to the question of rethinking the way Africa has been conceived in the minds of many people since the foreign invasion of the continent from the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries AD” (Oborji, 2020: 2).

A common misconception is that the Gospel first came to the continent of Africa during missionary expansion in the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, these were actually the second and third waves of evangelization in Africa; earlier attempts are traceable between the first to seventh centuries. According to Awoh (2011), “the third phase of Africa’s systematic evangelization began in the Nineteenth Century, a period marked by an extraordinary effort organized by the great apostles and promoters of the African mission” (2011: 1). Although the earlier attempts to evangelize the continent – which may be considered the first phase of evangelization in Africa – were not as successful as the later phases, as Oborji (2020:28) remarks: “a person would have to be blind not to see in Africa, the long presence of Christianity before the two centuries (15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>) missionary expansions”. The African continent thus has a longer history with Christianity than many people tend to realize – with the result that many make the mistake of understanding the evangelization of Africa as limited to the popular eras of colonization. As Oborji (2020) points out: “[t]he history of Christianity in Africa is as old as the

Christianity itself” (2020: 28). It is true, however, that the Christianization of different parts of the continent happened in different phases and at different stages.

Oborji (2020) identifies five phases of evangelization that can be traced in the history of Africa, with some overlap between them. While Clarke (1988) asserts that the development of Christianity in Africa occurred over four phases, the fact that he was writing in 1988 explains why he did not identify a fifth phase, as Oborji (2020) did. The expansion of Christian missions into sub-Saharan Africa during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries marks the second phase. This geographical expansion into sub-Saharan Africa included Southern Africa, and the southeastern and southwestern regions of the continent. Oborji explains: “Christianity began in Africa along the Mediterranean Coast of the Continent, starting from Egypt, the North Africa Maghreb region (Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia and etc), and reaching Ethiopia which shared almost the same history of Christianity with Egypt and the ancient Nubia” (2020: 29). In Oborji’s view, Christianity in modern Africa cannot be adequately understood without linking it to the early phases of evangelization of the Continent. Contrary to the predominant view that Christianity first came to Africa through the imperialists and colonialists’ movement of the fifteenth century, Oborji writes that “Christianity came to Africa in its early centuries through Mediterranean Coasts and Trans-Saharan routes” (2020: 29). The European missions, paired with imperialist and, later, colonialist movements, only came to Africa around the fifteenth century via the Atlantic Ocean. It is thus safe to say that the fifteenth and sixteenth century European trade missions, which found sea routes to India on East and West African coasts, brought with them the second wave of the evangelization of Africa. Even Reinhard Henkel concurs with this historical background; he writes that “the next Christian advance in Africa occurred in the 15<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries as a result of the Portuguese search for sea route to India” (1989: 23).

Having established the fact that the evangelization of Africa that took place in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was the second wave, in contrast to what has commonly been believed by most lay people as a result of the misrepresentation of facts pertaining to African missiology by those with an anti-Christianization agenda in Africa, the question then becomes: how early can we date the first contact between Christian missions with

the African continent? Oborji (2020) states: “According to historians of African Christianity, as far as the first phase of the evangelization of Africa is concerned it can be traced back to 62 A.D., when as a matter of fact the believers in Christ in North Africa began to organize and consolidate themselves as a Christian community” (2020: 29). Henkel concurs with Oborji (2020) that the background of Christianity in Africa dates as far back as the first century A.D. To this effect, Henkel writes that “Christianity expanded during the first centuries A.D. along the North Africa coasts, as well as in the whole of the Mediterranean area” (Henkel 1989: 23).

There has also been scholarly debate about who should be credited for the first missionary work in Africa. Historical evidence has suggested strongly that the biblical Apostle Mark pioneered missionary expansion into Africa. Oborji (2020) states that “[t]he Apostle Mark is the acclaimed founder of the Church in Egypt” (2020: 29). According to African mission historians, Apostle Mark became the first Bishop of Alexandria around 62 A.D., which marks the formal beginning of the first phase of the evangelization of Africa and the birth of the North African church. Oborji (2020) agrees with Tengtenga (2016) that the biblical Evangelist Mark played a significant role in the introduction of Christianity to North Africa and the establishment of the first Christian school in Alexandria. Thus, Christian activity in Africa has been documented as early as the biblical era and is mentioned in a few biblical passages, including the mention of a Simon of Cyrene – a place that is believed to have existed in ancient North Africa – on Jesus’ journey to crucifixion. Reference is also made to Joseph and Mary, the parents of Jesus, fleeing to Egypt when King Herod threatened to kill Jesus in his infancy. There are also several references in the New Testament book of Acts that testify to the presence of people of African descent at key events of the early Christian church, which suggest that they would have brought their new-found faith back to Africa.

According to Oborji (2020), by the second part of the second century Christianity had taken root in the northern part of the Africa – especially in Alexandria and Cyrenaica – to a remarkable extent. We also learn from Oborji (2020) that the first phase of the evangelization of Africa was also marked by the establishment of the first two theological institutions in Africa at Alexandria and Carthage. These theological schools went on to

produce some renowned theologians who contributed significantly to the growth of Christian faith on the African continent. These include Athanasius, Origen, Clement, Tertullian, Augustine, Cyprian, and many others who became bishops of various branches of the Church in their day and made significant contributions to African-Christian theology.

Despite the successful efforts of the apostolic fathers to establish the Church in the northern region of Africa, the great North African church almost saw its complete demise in the seventh and eighth centuries as a result of numerous challenges it experienced. Among these challenges were internal doctrinal conflicts and external forces such as the rise of Islamic faith in the region. According to Oborji (2020) and Shenk (1993), the strength of Islamic faith in northern Africa can be attributed to its strong inculturation. In the case of the church, however, failure to inculturate was one of the leading contributors to its demise in northern Africa (Oborji, 2020). According to Henkel, “only the Coptic Church in Egypt and the Ethiopian Church, however, survived the onset of Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century” (1989: 23). The challenge of inculturation did not only affect the first wave of the Christianization of Africa in northern Africa, but also the second wave, which focused on the eastern and western regions of sub-Saharan Africa. According to Henkel, “with the decline of Portuguese influence in Africa ... at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, Christianity virtually disappeared, mainly because it had never been integrated into African life and culture” (1989: 23). This affirms the perspective that a lack of inculturation played a significant role in the failure not only of the first wave of evangelization, as asserted by Oborji (2020), but also of the second wave, around the seventeenth century.

In South-West African coast, and in South Africa, Protestant missionaries arrived at the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth century, marking the third wave of evangelization on the African continent. Henkel (1989) writes: “After several isolated attempts by Moravian and Anglican missionaries along the West African coast and in South Africa in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, a new Protestant missionary movement began around the 1800” (1989: 23). Unlike the Catholic and earlier Protestant missions that had taken and conducted missionary work through religious and church orders, Henkel writes that “Protestant Christianity in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century expanded by means of voluntary

missionary societies” (1989: 23). We also learn from Henkel (1989) that the nineteenth century missionary movement originating from British-influenced missionary societies who sent missionaries first to South Africa and areas in southwestern Africa, and only later to southeastern areas. Henkel writes: “The interior of Southern Africa was made accessible by the journey of David Livingstone around the middle of the [eighteenth] century, this directed the interest of several missionary societies towards the area and brought about an intensification of missionary efforts in the second half of the century” (1989: 23).

Records indicate that by the late nineteenth century most Africa countries had some degree of contact with this wave of evangelization in one form or another. According to Henkel, “by 1870 missionaries had established themselves in all the present-day maritime countries of Black Africa” (1989: 24). Contrary to the view held by most anti-Christian movements and activists that Christian missions in Africa were a result of imperialistic and colonial activity in Africa, the historical record shows that the contrary is true: imperialistic interest only took root after Christian mission was well established across the continent. While it is true that most evangelization in Africa was driven by imperialistic and colonial interest, it is also important to note that “...in [some] cases, missionary settlements were established before imperialistic interests gained a footing” (Henkel, 1989:24).

Henkel (1989) writes that “only after the European colonial powers had divided up Africa at Berlin Conference of 1885 did a confessional specialization in the missions’ various spheres of work appear while Catholic missions found easier access to the colonies of Catholic countries such as France, Portugal, Belgium, and Spain, the Protestant missions were favoured in British and German areas...” (1989: 24).

With respect to indigenous cultures and how they were affected by colonial and missionary activities, Shorter (2012) asserts that missionaries had a truer understanding of the dynamic character of ethnic cultures than that of their colonial counterparts: “Although, there was plenty of room for racialist prejudice or paternalism, missionaries generally cultivated a positive appreciation of African culture” (2012: 102). Shorter (2012) thus asserts the view that missionaries’ interests were independent of those of their

colonialist counterparts, although both were of Western origin during the second and third waves of the evangelization of the African continent. Shorter (2012) elaborates: “In spite of the bad name so frequently given to them nowadays, many missionaries were as full of praise for the virtues and endowments of their people as any anthropologist participant observer” (Shorter 2012: 102). Missionaries went out of their way to acquaint themselves with the indigenous communities’ cultures, language and way of life, not only for convenience’s sake, but genuinely out of a desire to integrate.

By the mid-twentieth century, there was a strong move towards halting missions work across the colonized parts of the world (Shorter 2012). This was greatly influenced by the global shift towards political decolonization. According to Schreiter (2012), “the decolonization that was taking place in Asia and Africa led to an incisive analysis of the complicity of much of Nineteenth and Twentieth Century mission with imperial ambitions of Europe” (2012: 276). The decolonization movement of the twentieth century and its impact on mission activity in colonized regions exposed the interdependency that had, with time, come to exist between these two separate initiatives that had operated in the same territories. Mission movements after the Berlin Conference of 1885 took advantage of formal and well-resourced imperialistic and colonialist structures and intensified their mission mandates in the supported territories. This, unsurprisingly, resulted in the automatic collapse of the missionary movement when imperialist and colonialist movements declined around the mid-twentieth century.

## **2.5 Christian mission in South Africa**

Southern Africa – and South Africa, in particular – has a rich background with Christianity. However, like the rest of Africa, its rich Christian history has been diluted and mostly lost in the European imperialist and colonialist interests. To engage successfully with the discourse around inculturation and the decolonization of Christianity in twenty-first century South Africa, it is vital to examine the cultural and religious background of the native people of the land. According to Du Plessis (1965), “when Europeans first became acquainted with South Africa, they found natives of three distinct races occupying the country south of the Zambezi River. These three races were known to the early colonist

as the Bushmen, the Hottentots, and the Kafirs”. (1965:3). The Kafirs race was also known to ethnologists as the Bantu race, Du Plessis further states (1965: 3). According to Du Plessis (1965) , these three native races differed significantly from each other in terms of physique, speech, occupation, tribal custom and religion (1965). “The difference between the religion of the Bushmen and Hottentots on the one hand, and that of the Bantu on the other, may be best described by saying that the former was in the main nature-worship, while the latter was spirit-worship and ancestor-worship” (Du Plessis, 1965: 5-6). The difference that existed among these ethnic groups in terms of religion and culture is very important to highlight in this discourse. There are frequent claims by anti-Christian mission activists that Christianity came into Africa and divided the African natives in terms of culture and religion. However, history teaches the contrary in this regard: cultural and religious diversity has always existed in the continent, and in South Africa in particular.

The question of which European imperialists established themselves first in South Africa remains a topic of debate. Du Plessis (1965) informs us that “the first Europeans to establish themselves on South African soil-understanding by South Africa the country south of the Zambezi and Cunene Rivers- were not, as popularly supposed, the Dutch, but the Portuguese” (1965: 7). This knowledge becomes important to the discourse on inculturation and the decolonization of Christianity in South Africa for two reasons. First, it tells us that even the imperialist and colonist movement had its own dynamics and was not always as consistent and stable as many in South Africa have assumed it to have been. Second, the character of the establishment of imperialist and colonist power in South Africa would give an idea of Christian mission would have established itself more effectively than others, taking advantage of the formal and well-resourced imperial and colonial structures that would have supported it. While Henkel emphasizes that imperialist and colonist interests followed the missionary interest and not the other way round, as commonly asserted by anti-Christian mission advocates, missionary movements also took advantage of the imperialist and colonist structures, systems and resources in furthering their missionary mandates, as discussed above, especially after the Berlin Conference of 1885, where relations between Christian missions and imperial-colonist movements became formalized.

Du Plessis (1965) states that “from the commencement of their schemes of colonization, the Portuguese, as a Christian nation, aimed at the ultimate conversion to Catholic faith of the nations and tribes with whom they came into contact; and in this aim they were encouraged by their King, and by the authorities of the Roman Catholic Church” (Du Plessis 1965: 8). The Catholic missionary movement was, thus, the first to establish itself in South Africa and was later supported by the Catholic-Christian government of Portugal and the Roman Catholic Church. The first martyr for the Christian faith was Father Silveira, the first Portuguese missionary to South African natives, who was killed on 16 March 1561 by one of the local chiefs at the then Monomotapa area, north of Zambezi River. Father Silveira was a member of the Society of Jesus, the largest Catholic missionary society, founded in 1540 by Ignatius Loyola (Du Plessis, 1965).

Formal evangelization of South Africa commenced around the mid-sixteenth century, long before the Berlin Conference of the later nineteenth century convened. Much fruit could not, however, be reaped from the earlier efforts of evangelism in South Africa due to the quality of the evangelization work conducted. Du Plessis (1965) criticizes Father Silveira and his immediate successor who conducted missionary work in southeastern Africa for doing hasty and rushed work, resulting in no permanent fruit or conversion of the region. He writes “From such hasty and superficial work no permanent results could be expected. As far as the establishment of a Christian church among the heathen is concerned, the Jesuit mission of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century left no trace upon South-east Africa” (Du Plessis, 1965: 11).

## **2.6 Decolonization of Africa and mission**

According to Sakupapa (2020) “decolonial perspective entails a critique of both Eurocentric and so called third world fundamentalisms, colonialism, and nationalism” (2020: 17). Sakupapa (2020) further explains that decoloniality means “working towards a vision of human life that is not dependent upon or structured by the forced imposition of one society over those that differ, which is what modernity/coloniality does and, where decolonization of the mind should begin” (2020: 17-18). In the context of the Rhodes Must Fall campaign of 2015 at the University of Cape Town, Jansen commented, with regard to decoloniality, that, “as with any social science construct, there is no singular or fixed

meaning of the term, and the best one can do is try to make sense of decolonization within the contexts in which the word is used” (2017: 156). This statement highlights the significance of understanding context in any scholarly attempt to define decolonization. In the context of Christian mission, it is vital to take into careful consideration the historical background of Christian mission in former colonies to engage effectively with what the decolonization of Christianity means.

In his discourse on religion and the phenomenon of empire, Sakupapa (2020) asserts that, “Christianity evolved within the context of empire since the beginnings in the Roman Empire” (2020: 19). The concept of empire, although primitive, can be considered synonymous to the concept of colonization. Based on this perspective, one could deduce that from its inception Christianity grew and spread within a colonial modality. Therefore, modern phenomenon of coloniality has never been unfamiliar to Christian mission. While many criticisms directed have been directed at Western missionaries for partnering with, or appearing to have supported, the colonial agenda, Prill (2019) suggests a different way of viewing the relationship between colonialists and missionaries. Without necessarily defending Western missionaries, as such, Prill (2019) states that, “while some missionaries wholeheartedly supported the colonial structures, many others accepted them as a given reality in which they had to serve” (2019: 99).

Inculturation, in my view, is one of the many ways in which African culture, on the one hand, and Christianity, on the other, can be decolonized. In as much as history teaches us that Christianity came to Africa before Africa was colonized by the Western world, one cannot deny the huge influence that Western colonization had, when it eventually came, on how Africa was Christianized from thenceforth – thereby colonizing not just Africa but also Christianity itself. It was easy for Christianity to embrace the concept of colonialism because it had already been aligned with colonization, in form of ‘empire’, from its inception stage, as Sakupapa (2020) pointed out. African theologians and episcopal magisterium are therefore faced with the huge task of not only having to decolonize the context, but also the gospel itself. According to Cornelli (2018), in the present day very few Africans dare to speak about decolonization, which indicates their failure to recognize their forefathers’ attempts to undertake the huge task of decolonization. It almost seems

as though the current generation in Africa has abandoned the task the of decolonization of Africa in both secular and religious arenas.

Writing on the subject of the decolonization of African Christianity, Cornelli (2018) states that “the spirituality of individualism characterizing Christianity is detrimental to Africa and as such it has to be replaced by the spirituality of community, which is grounded in African traditions and cultures” (Cornelli, 2018:1).

Taking this discourse further, Sakupapa (2020) points to the union of Christianity and the Roman empire in the early fourth century, which changed the course of Christianity from that time onwards. He writes: “With the gradual emergence of what came to be regarded as Christendom following the Edict of Milan in 313, there was a symbiotic relationship between the Church and state leading eventually to a rise in prominence of the papacy by the Twelfth Century” (Sakupapa, 2020: 19). However, and not surprisingly, the marriage between the empire and Christianity eventually collapsed as a result of the collapse of empire, a phenomenon that has not been sufficiently explored by scholars in the field of religious history. Only recently has the scholarly world begun to engage rigorously with the phenomenon of the collapse of ‘empire’ and its impact on the course of Christian mission. According to Foster and Greenberg (2023), “only very recently have scholars begun to explore how imperialism’s formal *collapse* e impacted Christian faith, practice, and institutions, and their work thus far has largely been regionally and nationally confined” (2023:6).

Around the sixteenth century, the symbiotic relationship between state and the Church, which had been holding on the structure of ‘empire’, collapsed dramatically, predominantly as a result of the reformation movement. According to Foster and Greenberg (2023), although the focus on decolonization opens new vistas for understanding of Christianity and international history, it should be acknowledged that decolonization is not the only phenomenon that has shaped and redirected the course of Christian mission in history. The collapse of empire, the rise of the reformation movement, and the emergence of decolonization movements have all played a significant role in the divorce of the long-standing marriage of convenience between state and Christianity – what had popularly become known as ‘Christendom’ – in both the empire and the colonial

eras. Weighing in on this discourse, Sakupapa (2020) writes that “the entanglement between mission and colonialism that characterized the missionary expansion into Africa during the so-called missionary century may be seen as another phase of Christianity and empire” (2020:19).

The interdependency between state and mission during the colonial era – resembling that of the era of empire – which played a significant role in the simultaneous expansion of these movements, is evident in the specific region of interest in this study: southern Africa. Sakupapa (2020) writes that “ironically, the history of Christian mission in Southern Africa provides a key into a deeper understanding of colonialism in much of Africa” (2020:19). Prill (2019), reflecting the views of many Western scholars and their African peers, argues that “missionaries are charged with displacing indigenous cultures and supporting the political and economic colonization on the African continent and other parts of the world” (2019:81).

The second wave of the evangelization of Africa around the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, which predominantly affected the southern and eastern parts of Africa, is very difficult to detach from colonialism. As a result of this close entanglement, most anti-mission activists in Africa portray missionaries as nothing more than agents of colonialism (Sakupapa, 2020; Prill, 2019). Prill (2019) also suggests that Western missionaries came to Africa with an assumption of the supremacy of white culture and religion over indigenous culture and religion. He emphasises, however, that while Protestant missionaries typically demonstrated an inexcusable attitude of superiority towards indigenous people, it would be unfair to suggest, as some authors seem to do, that this was true of all missionaries. If this assumption was to be upheld, this would undermine the great work done by most good missionaries who laboured in the continent over the centuries.

The entanglement of mission with colonialism has had a very negative impact on the expansion and sustainability of Christian mission in Africa in the contemporary era. In this context, a new breed of African theologians and clergy is needed to drive the agenda of a ‘decolonized theology and church’. Wiredu (1998), in his article on the decolonization of African philosophy and religion, writes: “by decolonization, I mean divesting African

philosophical thinking of all undue influences emanating from our colonial past” (1998:17). This definition of decolonization provides us with a useful hint as to what the task of decolonization could essentially entail. History has already shown some of the prominent ways in which African theologians and church leaders began the enormous task of decolonization, employing tools such as theology of inculturation. Sakupapa (2020) writes: “A number of African church leaders and theologians reacted to the calls for decolonization by forging African theologies, for an example, the theology of inculturation” (2020: 20). Again, one would have to investigate inculturation as an instrument for decolonization of both Africa and mission. However, there are historians that argue that the relationship between missionaries and colonial officials was characterized predominantly by tensions. In this regard, Sakupapa (2020) writes that “the relationship between missionaries and early colonial state ranged from ‘fawning subservience to deep distrust and open disagreement” (2020: 19).

Sakupapa (2020) concludes his essay on empire and religion by reflecting on how the political decolonization of the African continent also had impact on mission in Africa. He comments: “African inculturation theology thus became a theological effort to rethink African identity”. Inculturation did not only emerge to Africanize Christianity but, in the main, to decolonize Africa and open way for a rethought African identity (Sakupapa, 2020). To this effect, Sakupapa (2020) also states that “the decolonization process, which resulted in the creation of new ‘independent states’, also had a domino effect in Christian religious landscape in Africa” (2020: 19-20).

Colonization was a chiefly political enterprise; however, like a cancer, it eventually infected all other parts of African identity, including how Africans received and interpreted the gospel. Sakupapa (2020) makes reference to prominent mid-twentieth century African theologians like John Mbiti: “Given the false assumption held by most missionaries to Africa that Africans had no religion, it is understandable why many African theologians of the generation of John Mbiti and Bolaji Idowu saw it necessary to plead for the integrity of African religion” (2020: 20). Sakupapa (2020) does, however, share the criticism of theologians John Mbiti for refusing to appreciate African traditional religions (ATRs) as valid religions possessing their own peculiar identities. According to Sakupapa (2020) ,

despite acknowledging the validity of ATRs, theologians such as Mbiti stressed the preparatory role of African religions, which suggests continuity between ATRs and Christianity. This approach, stresses Sakupapa (2020) , indicates the failure of the then theologians to recover ATRs without taking into account Christianity's influence.

This debate raises the question of what the primary aim of mission is: is mission aimed at creating relations and affirming pre-existing religions, or calling individuals and nations to repentance and conversion? If the later be true, then I agree with the position taken by Mbiti and others at that time that accepts the integrity and validity of ATRs but does not ignore the influence of Christianity. In essence, ATRs played a preparatory role for Christianity. Far from assumption of the Western missionaries to Africa that Africa had no religion, they played a significant role in creating awareness of the divine, invisible God. South African theologian Tinyiko Maluleke (1998) suggests that the dialogue between Christian theology and African religions need to be re-opened, this being a debate that never started. In this dialogue, Sakupapa (2020) further suggests a distinction be made between the Christianization of African religions and the Africanization of African Christian experience.

The question that has pondered by many theologians but still stands today, is whether decolonized African theology has successfully addressed the needs of Africans thus far. According to Sakupapa (2020), the various trends in African theology do suggest that serious effort has been put into responding to the needs of African people. Key among their issues are poverty, gender construction, and racial discrimination in apartheid South Africa. An area of focus among twentieth and twenty-first century African theologians has been interrogating the specific role of African theology in bringing transformation with regards to areas of socio-cultural and political concern. As a result, "although the Africanization debate (read: decolonization) featured prominently in theological reflections on African Christianity during the 1960s, the unfinished nature of the debate has found expression in educational discourse, theology, religious studies, and philosophy especially in Southern African context" (Sakupapa, 2020:21).

According to West (2009), the discourse on the relationship between African culture, and religion, and Christianity assumed a 'post-colonial' stance. Some scholars, such as

Edward Antonio, have created a link between inculturation and the post-colonial discourse in theology. In essence, Antonio (2006) presents African inculturation theology as being of same family, in thought, with post-colonial discourse. These developments represent Africa's effect to rethink its identity, Antonio asserts. The themes of the decolonization of Christianity, and of the African people themselves, take centre stage in Antonio's several essays on inculturations.

According to Sakupapa (2020), the call in the 1970s for a moratorium on the theological hegemony of Western theology, calling for a "shift in strategy in the decolonization of African churches", was prompted by ethical concerns about the ecclesiastical imperialism that Western theological hegemony represented (2020:22). In the conclusion to his discussion of the first wave of the decolonization of African Christianity, Sakupapa (2020) writes: "[M]y sense is that the history of African theology in its early period was a response to the colonial residue in mission just as nationalist leaders called for political liberation" (2020:22).

This chapter reviewed literature on mission without encountering work pertaining to the concept of *missio Dei*. Oborji defines *missio Dei* as God's mission: "that is, the divine intervention in favour of all humanity at all times and in the whole world" (2020:4). Oborji (2020) describes mission as God's self-revelation and involvement in and with the world. Oborji (2020) also takes the liberty to distinguish *missiones ecclesiae* from *missio Dei*, describing it as the "missionary ventures of the church". In other words, the former is God's initiative, while the latter is the Church's response to the former, in that after the faithful have responded positively to God's self-revelation, they then, in turn, partner with God in bringing the same redeeming revelation of God to the whole of mankind.

Ryan (2000) then shifted our focus to the concept of inculturation in mission. Our discussion of mission in Africa and other third-world regions would be incomplete without talking to the theology of inculturation. The globalization of the world has dramatically increased interaction between the religions, cultures, and economies of the world. In this regard, Ryan argues that "all theologies are products of a particular and limited historical-cultural experience" (2000:5). Inculturation can, therefore, take place either deliberately or implicitly, because mission always take place in a cultural context, wherever this may

be in the world. Ryan (2000) identifies five components that make up the theology of inculturation:

- the theology of religions;
- the reformulation or re-expression of Christianity in terms of the receiving culture;
- challenging people to become aware of the continuing inadequacies of their own culture and to make it increasingly liberating, in light of the gospel;
- how the global Christian community, the catholic church of God, can be enriched by the inculturation experiences of local churches; and
- the practical application of inculturation in that the Gospel is a call to conversion, and not intellectual acceptance of a body of truths.

One other aspect of the discourse on Christian missions in Africa and its inculturation and decolonization is the significance of tracing the background of Christian missions in the continent and how it expanded over different epochs of African anthropological history. There is quite an extensive range of literary work in this regard, by international and local authors, that provides diverse perspectives in this regard. According to historians of African Christianity, the first phase of the evangelization of Africa can be traced back to 62 A.D., when believers in Christ in North Africa began to organize as a Christian community (Oborji, 2020). Historical evidence strongly suggests that the biblical Apostle Mark pioneered missionary expansion to Africa. This places the African church in the first generation of the Christian church in the world.

Despite the great work done by the Apostolic Fathers in establishing the Church in the northern region of Africa, the great North African Church almost saw its complete demise around the seventh to eighth centuries as a result of numerous challenges it experienced. Among these challenges were internal doctrinal conflicts, and external forces such as the rise of Islamic faith in the region around the seventh to the eleventh centuries. According to Oborji (2020:32), the greatest downfall of the early Northern African Church was its lack of understanding of the theology of inculturation, a mistake which we also see committed the later Western Christian missions to Africa. Failure to enculturate was therefore one of the leading contributors to the demise of Christianity in Northern Africa, and later continued to be a contributing reason for struggles experienced by later mission

attempts on the Continent. In South-West African coast, and in South Africa, Christian missions arrived at the end of the Eighteenth Century towards the beginning of the Nineteenth Century through the Protestant movement, which marked the third wave of evangelization of the Continent. Despite the earlier failed attempts of the earlier Christian missions in Africa, history records that by the late Nineteenth Century most countries of Africa had been at least touched by a wave of evangelization in one form or the other.

With respect to indigenous cultures and how they were affected by colonial and missionary activities after a formal partnership had eventually been established between these two distinct movements, Shorter (2012:102) asserts that missionaries had a truer understanding of the dynamic character of ethnic cultures than that of their colonial counterparts. The decolonization movement of the Twentieth Century and its impact on mission activity in the then colonized territories exposed the interdependency that, with time, had come to exist between these two separate interests, but operating in the same territories. The Nineteenth Century Berlin Conference changes the course of history for Christian mission in Africa, when a formal partnership between colonial and missionary movements was eventually forged.

Pertaining to arrival and expansion Mission in South Africa Du Plessis (1965) writes that, “when Europeans first became acquainted with South Africa, they found natives of three distinct races occupying the country south of the Zambezi River. These three races were known to the early colonist as the Bushmen, the Hottentots, and the Kafirs” (1965:3). Du Plessis (1965:7) also informs us that, the first Europeans to establish themselves on South African soil, were not, as popularly supposed, the Dutch, but the Portuguese. As a result, the Catholic missionary movement was the first to establish themselves in South Africa and was later supported by the Portuguese government as a Catholic-Christian state, and the Roman Catholic Church authorities. Formal evangelization of South Africa commenced around the mid-sixteenth century, long before the Berlin Conference of the late Nineteenth Century convened. Despite the fact that evangelization of South Africa had commenced around the Mid-Sixteenth Century, much fruit could, however, not be reaped from the earlier efforts of evangelism due to the quality of evangelization work conducted.

Colonization was mainly political, but, like a cancer, it eventually infected all other parts of African identity, including how Africa received and interpreted the Gospel. Inculturation, in my view, is one of the many ways in which African culture and Christianity on the other hand can be decolonized. African theologians are faced with a huge task of not only having to decolonize the context, but also the Gospel itself. Tinyiko Maluleke (1998:134), a South African theologian, suggests that the dialogue between Christian theology and African religions need to be re-opened, this being a debate that never started. In this dialogue, Sakupapa (2020) further suggests a difference between Christianization of African religions, and Africanization Christian mission experience. This differentiation is quite critical to ensure that the focus of the theology of inculturation is well understood and does not change form in the course of interpretation and the broader discourse on inculturation and decolonization of African Christianity.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed some of the existing literary work contributing to the discourse on mission, inculturation, and the decolonization of Christianity in the African context. This review narrowed to focus on the specific cultural context of interest in this study, the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, where the life and culture of isiZulu in relation to the Gospel is the main topic of interest. While much literature, from various perspectives, has been published in this discourse. However, just like in any academic discourse and field of study, existing literature could never be exhaustive of all the arguments and perspectives that can be contributed to the discussion.

## **CHAPTER 3: EXPANSION OF CHRISTIAN MISSION IN AFRICA, SOUTH AFRICA, AND KWAZULU-NATAL**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter reflects on the historical background of Christian mission in Africa, South Africa, and KwaZulu-Natal as a specific context of interest. The discourse on inculturation and decolonization of Christian mission in Africa, as established in Chapter 2, is continuous in nature. However, to meaningfully continue the discourse in this study, it is pertinent to reflect on the historical background of missions in Africa.

Reflecting on the background of Christianity on the African continent provides us with a frame of reference within which to engage effectively with the topic and sub-questions emanating from the main subject of discourse. Continuing the twining discourses on inculturation and decolonization of mission within our context of interest will require reflection, first, on the background of the Christianity in the macro context, which is at the continental level, and second, on the narrower context of South Africa, and then into the specific context of KwaZulu-Natal in which the isiZulu developed and is predominantly practiced. It is this background that then enables us to fully comprehend the interplay between the abstract and broad concepts of culture and religion. What further necessitate the reflection on this background, and the contextual narrowing thereof, is the dynamic, diverse, and multi-dimensional nature of African culture. The different forms and dimensions of Christian mission, as presented by the different traditions within the Christian faith, also necessitate that we reflect on the background of Christianity in Africa and the different epochs of its interaction with the diverse cultural landscape of the continent.

### **3.2 How Christianity came and expanded in the African continent**

When reflecting on the historical background of Christian mission in Africa, one is immediately confronted by the challenging and contentious of how to define Africa – a discussion that sounds geographical at face value but is actually ideological. According

to Ngong (2017), “it is contentious not only because of the arguments relative to how the subject should be delineated but also because defining ‘Africa’ itself is highly ideological” (2017:1). In Ngong’s view, defining Africa is highly ideological because the definitions often serve specific purposes. Most people define Africa as ‘black Africa’, which excludes North Africa and the region south of the Limpopo River, which is referred to as South Africa. This definition is often used to advance a specific ideological agenda in various contexts.

In the context of Christian mission and theology, Ngong comments that “how Africa is defined seems to have a direct bearing on the delimitation of African Christian thought” (Ngong 2017:1). Validating this view, Isichei, in her book about the history of Christianity in Africa, writes: “North Africa is part of the Mediterranean world, and it is, in a sense, artificial to analyse the growth of Christianity there in isolation of developments elsewhere” (1995:13). According to Ngong (2017), there seems to be consensus currently that what African theology is seems to be limited to Christian mission and thought of the Sub-Saharan Africa, and not Northern Africa and neither further south of Africa. Despite these ideological issues around the definition of Africa – which also affect views and discussions about theology and about missions, in particular – in this study about the history of Christian missions in Africa the definition of Africa includes the entire continent. It looks at Northern Africa, Sub-Saharan- but north of Limpopo River- Africa, and Africa south of the Limpopo River.

Mission history in Africa has always developed alongside the broader history of Africa. In this respect, Strayer (1976) writes that, “from its inception, mission history has paralleled rather closely the larger tendencies of African history generally” (1976:1). The challenges experienced by scholars of Africa’s mission history are not unique to mission history, other aspects of Africa’s history share some of these challenges. As stated, key among these challenges is the issue of defining ‘Africa’.

Isichei (1995) traces the history of Christianity in Africa back to Egypt and attempts to link it with the arrival of the Greeks in Egypt. To this effect, she writes: “Greeks have lived in Egypt from the Seventh Century BC, and their history there had a great influence on the development of Christianity” (1995:13). However, although Christian history traces back

to the Greeks' arrival in Africa before Christ came, which can be viewed as having set the environment for Christian mission, later one begins to see the expansion of Christianity in Africa driven by Roman influence after the departure of Christ. South of Egypt was Nubia, which had a desert to the south. Contrary to what might have been expected – that Christianity would come to Nubia through Egypt – it came in the sixth century A.D. by missionaries from Byzantium (Isichei, 1995).

Isichei (1995) also attempts to trace the history of Christian faith in Africa to about 280 B.C., when the Hebrew Scriptures – the Old Testament – were translated into Greek and became famously known as the Septuagint. It is then deduced, from this line of thought, that the availability of Jewish Scriptures in Greek would have laid a solid foundation for the development and spread of Christianity, which had its origins in Judaism, in Egypt. Greek-speaking Jews from Egypt are also presumed to have been present at the Pentecost Feast in Jerusalem, at which the Holy Spirit first came, the Apostle Peter preached, and three thousand converted to Christianity, as recorded in Acts chapter 2 of the Bible. Isichei (1995) concurs with Oborji (2020) and Henkel (1989), that Christianity in Africa is as old as Christianity itself, having been rooted in Africa as early as the first century A.D.

As described in Chapter 2, Christianity expanded in Africa during a series of different phases – five, as argued by Oborji (2020). Aligning with Oborji's (2020) suggestion of phases *The Gospel Coalition (TGC)-Africa* editorial suggests four waves of evangelization, which ushered in the different phases in the expansion or growth of Christianity in the Continent. These waves were powered by different forces in history. Despite the opposing forces that have emerged at different stages in the history of Christianity in Africa – from antiquity to modernity – ultimately, Christian faith found its footing on the continent. The Gospel Coalition (TGC) - Africa provides a statistical picture of the culmination of this story:

Africa is one of the most dynamic centres of Christianity in the world. Africa has a significant share of the world's 2.2 billion Christians. It has about 30% of the world's evangelicals, 20% of the world's Pentecostals and charismatics, and about 15% of the world's Roman Catholics (2019).

An investigation of each wave of evangelization is important to concretize an understanding of the different phases in the Christianization of Africa.

### **3.2.1 Wave 1: Early Christianity in North Africa and Ethiopia (62-700 A.D.)**

Phiri and Werner write that “Africa is a continent where Christianity had already started by the middle of the first century” (2016: xxxvii). They state that the contours of early Christian thought were found in North Africa. Phiri and Werner comment that “major forms of ancient Christianity in Africa co-existed with Islam for centuries and present an unprecedented treasure of experience of religious co-existence” (2016: xxxvii). These claims corroborate with those of Henkel (1989) and Oborji (2020), that Christianity in Africa dates as far back as its inception. Phiri and Werner (2016) and Henkel (1989) highlight the significance of the co-existence of Christianity and Islam in North Africa in the early stages of Christianity. However, Phiri and Werner (2016) do not allude to the fact that the demise of Christianity around the seventh century was also greatly contributed to by the strengthening of the Islamic movement in the region, among other factors. Nonetheless, Tengtenga (2016), in Phiri and Werner’s editorial, does briefly allude to this fact when he highlights some of the factors that contributed to the collapse of the North African early church. He writes that, “the advent of Islam in the seventh Century was a big blow” (Tengtenga, 2016:13).

The North African region is affirmed by many scholars as the breeding ground for Christian faith in Africa. It is from this region that Christianity entered and spread to other regions in the continent until its wild spread was extinguished mostly by the rise in strength of the Islamic forces, marking the end of the first of several waves of Christianization of the continent. According to Tengtenga (2016), in ancient Roman times, Africa was a set of Latin-speaking provinces of Rome, which he later refers to as Roman Africa. He states: “Roman Africa had Jews living in it who were there as refugees or traders” (2016:13). In Tengtenga’s(2016) view, some of these Jews would have brought Christianity to Africa. According to Tengtenga (2016), until very recently, the main focus of the discourse on Christian mission in Africa has been on nineteenth century missionary activity and how it

touched the Sub-Saharan region. He states: “But until recently little was done to relate early North African Christianity to the wider story of Christianity in Africa” (Tengatenga, 2016:12). This ideological neglect resonates with Ngong’s (2017) observation that, when investigating the history of African Christianity, one is immediately confronted by the ideological challenge of defining Africa, a challenge which does not only affect the history of Christianity in Africa, but all other aspects of Africa’s history as well. It thus seems that there is an ideological stereotype that tends to focus on Sub-Saharan, or ‘black’, Africa, whenever Africa is discussed.

The ideological neglect evident in the discourse on Christianity Africa has led to the neglect of other regions, such as North Africa, where Christianity may have a rich heritage. Tengatenga (2016) asks a critical question regarding this: “Is the lack of attention Nineteenth Century mission work has some connections with the western authority over the continent and other parts of the world so that North African Christianity got little press?” (2016:12).

Tengatenga (2016) notes that when Ethiopian Christianity is mentioned, it brings to mind the story of the Ethiopian eunuch in the New Testament book of Acts. In this regard, the area referred to in the Bible – the ancient Meroe Kingdom – corresponds to modern-day Sudan. In the Bible it was referred to as *Kush*, and later, when the Scriptures were translated into Greek, as *Ethiopia*. According to Baur, “Nubia is the biblical *Kush* (‘the South’, hence the Swahili ‘Kusini’) which the Septuagint rendered a ‘Ethiopia’ (‘Land of the Sunburnt Faces’)” (1994:31). From this area, more stories are recorded that relate the story of the spread of Christianity in Africa and some of its key role players, including kings who heavily influenced the belief systems of their subjects. Tengatenga writes: “Kings and monks were the key agents of the spread of faith and its maintenance both locally and further afield” (2016:15). Baur (1994) also alludes to the Kingdom of Meroe, from which the Eunuch baptized by Philip in Acts 8:27 is believed to have come. Baur (1994) also alludes to the fact that, at the time of Christ and the biblical apostles, the Kingdom of Ethiopia (Meroe) was ruled by queens.

The early North African church played a significant role in shaping African Christianity – and not just African Christianity, but also Christianity across the world. The role of the

North African Church in Christianity and Judaism is, on the whole, far greater than ordinarily recognised by most people. Tengaenga states: “Egypt is the place where the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) was produced, probably beginning around 250 BC” (2016:13).

### ***3.2.2 Wave 2: Portuguese Catholicism (1500-1800 A.D.)***

Baur states: “Between ancient and modern Christianity in Africa, there can be traced another Christian movement which pioneered the faith of the Gospel in the lands south of the Sahara. It was Christianity brought under the patronage of Portugal, whose seafarers were the first to circumnavigate the African continent” (1994:42). This second wave of the evangelization of the continent occurred between 1500 and 1800 A.D. Although this wave of evangelization never took root strongly, it did spread significantly in Sub-Saharan Africa. Baur writes: “In their endeavours to contact the legendary King, Prester John, the Portuguese explorers came across two other powerful kings, the Mani Kongo in the West and Mwene Mutapa in the East” (1994:42). Portugal expeditors, influenced by the Ethiopian Christianity history, they were determined to meet the King, Prester John. However, in the process, they encountered two other remarkable kings from west and east, King Mani Kongo and King Mwene Mutapa, whose conversion meant the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa would be influenced by the Gospel. This Portuguese vision seemed to have been achieved by the mid-seventeenth century.

When people speak of the history of Christianity in Africa, they are often referring to this wave of evangelization. However, this not the best place to start. For one to fully comprehend African Christianity, one must trace it back to the first century in the North African Church. Perhaps the association with colonial forces draws more attention to the second wave in most discussions of African Christianity. In the Sub-Saharan region, kings also had significant influence in the spread of the Gospel. To this effect, Baur (1994) states that “the kings of the Kongo had been in friendly contact with Christianity for more than one hundred years and Mwene Mutapa, the king of Zimbabwe, had just accepted the faith” (1994: 42).

The Prince of Portugal, Dom Henrique – famously known as Prince Henry – was the key role player in the invasion of Africa by Portugal, which commenced as a series of crusades against the Muslims and pagans occupying the key territories of interest, that were sponsored and authorized by the Papal authorities. Baur (1994) writes: “In 1452 Pope Nicholas V gave the Portugues King permission to conquer Muslim and pagan territory in Africa and to ‘reduce Muslims, pagans and other enemies of Christ to perpetual servitude’” (1994:42). As time passed however, the militant crusades were replaced by commercial and missional interests, Baur (1994:47).

### **3.2.3 Wave 3: The Evangelical Era – Morden Christianity (1792-1992 A.D.)**

Baur (1994) writes:

With exception of the ancient Christian Churches in Egypt and Ethiopia and a few lost outposts along the coast, contemporary Christianity in Africa goes back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is centred on the Negro race in the sub-Saharan Africa. The conversion took place in an astonishingly short time and embraced an extremely large sector of population, resulting in over two hundred million Christians, so that it is considered the greatest epoch of conversion in the entire history of the Church (1994: 103).

The Evangelical Era, also referred to as the Morden Epoch, is a very significant period in the Christianization of Africa. This era witnessed the highest number of conversions of any era in the continent. Baur (1994) also alludes to the significant role that European explorations and colonization played in the fast-tracked evangelization of Africa during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. According to Baur (1994), the Morden Era can be sub-divided into three significant periods:

- a. 1800-1880: The first apostles of faith in the time of exploration;
- b. 1880-1960: The establishment of the church in the time of colonization; and
- c. 1960 onwards: The indigenization of the church in the time of independence.

Commencing from the late eighteenth century, Protestant missionary societies established themselves in Africa – including South Africa – although this was quite restricted to certain classes of society for at least forty years. It was only around the mid-nineteenth century (1840s) that proper missionary activity took place, with the Catholics taking the lead, followed by Protestant missions. Between 1840 and 1880, more work was done by the missionary movement to introduce the Gospel in central Africa. This was followed by the most crucial period in the history of the continent. Baur writes: “So the following eighty years (1880-1960), running parallel with the time of colonization, became the most decisive period of African Church history” (1994:103).

Obed Kealotswe (2016), in this contribution to the editorial work of Phiri and Werner (2016), argues that Christianity became a ‘colonial religion’ as early as 313 A.D. when Constantine declared Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, which had a colonial footprint across the whole of the Mediterranean World, including North Africa. Based on this perspective, Kealotswe (2016) argues that by the time Africa was re-evangelized in the nineteenth century, paralleled by the European colonial movement in Africa, African Christianity was already colonial in its make-up. Kealotswe (2016) argues that the impact of nineteenth century colonialization by European on Christian mission in Africa was no first of its kind. This era is the most misunderstood by many people in terms of the differentiation between the European colonial movement and Christian mission in Africa. According to Kealotswe (2016), “missionaries were equally victims of colonialism because their evangelization was also controlled by the colonial powers whose major interest was not Christianity but trade” (2016:45).

According to Baur (1994), the Evangelical or Morden Era was the most impactful in the history of the Christianization of Africa. However, it cannot be ignored that the great missionary work of this epoch mostly gets lost in the woes of the colonial movement when reflecting on Africa’s history. This leaves Christian theologians with the daunting task of distinguishing the great missionary work done during this era from the devastating impact of the colonial activity of the same era. As Kealotswe (2016) argues, mission agents were equally victims of the colonial powers.

### **3.2.4 Wave 4: Indigenous Movements, Pentecostalism- Post-Modern Christianity**

The period dating from 1960s to the present is classified by Baur (1994) as part of the third wave of evangelization of Africa, but just a sub-period. However, according to 'The Gospel Coalition' (2019), this forms part of the fourth wave of the evangelization of Africa. Baur (1994) describes this era as characterised by the indigenization of the church in the time of independence. This indigenization, which commenced towards the end of the Evangelical Era, has become the backbone of African Christianity in the Post-independence and Post-modern Era. In his article, contributing to Phiri and Werner's editorial, Hebron Ndlovu (2016) agrees with most scholars of post-independence Christianity in Africa that it is multi-faceted and complex. "Although post-colonial African Christianity is an omnibus with many shapes and roles, some of its key characteristics are as follows:

- a) diverse Christian denominations;
- b) churches engaged in developmental issues and concerns;
- c) indigenized Christianity; and
- d) church membership predominantly poor, oppressed and vulnerable" (Ndlovu, 2016:54)

Ndlovu (2016) highlights some of the critical characteristics of the church in post-modern Africa. The key characteristic, for purposes of this study, is '*indigenized Christianity*'. Ndlovu states: "The fact that much of African Christianity is predominantly coloured, directly and indirectly, by indigenous African world views, beliefs, values and traditions has been well documented by many observers" (2016: 56). Ndlovu further argues that this development in African Christianity has given rise to two main groups of responders. The first is those who welcome and embrace this development as a positive transformation following many years of Christianity having been dominated by the Western worldview and practices. The second group is those who view the indigenization as a mobilization of spiritual forces of darkness that have been in co-existence with Christianity in Africa for years and are now emerging powerfully and threatening the gospel in Africa.

### 3.3 Brief overview of Christian Mission in South Africa, with specific focus on the province of KwaZulu-Natal

Mokwena (2021) writes:

The Christian religion was introduced to South Africa by European settlers and later missionaries in the 17th century. This introduction started with the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck from the Netherlands in 1652. He was authorised by the *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC, Dutch East India Company) to establish a refreshment station aimed at replenishing food and fuel for ships travelling between the Netherlands and Southeast and South Asia (2021:1).

Jan van Riebeeck did not come to the shores of South Africa alone but was accompanied by other settlers whose need for a place of worship could not be neglected for long; as result, they were eventually granted exclusive rights to start a church called the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* (or Dutch Reformed Church) by their authorities in the Netherlands.

According to Mokwena (2021:1), “Christianity became further entrenched with the arrival of the German missionary, George Schmidt, who came to South Africa as a Christian missionary in July 1737” (2021:1). According to historical records, Schmidt founded the first Protestant mission, called the Moravian Brethren, and based it in a town known as Genadendal in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. The missionary work of Schmidt began among the Khoekhoe, also known as ‘Bushmen’, and thereafter spread to other native tribes. According to Du Plessis (1965), as briefly alluded in Chapter 2, the Khoekhoe were one of the three ethnic groups that inhabited the area that later became South Africa at the time of the arrival of European explorers. It should be noted that, as also briefly alluded to in Chapter 2, the first Europeans to establish themselves in South African soil were the Portuguese, asserts Du Plessis (1965:7), opposed to the popular view that it’s the Dutch, as also held by Mokwena (2021). This would mean that the Roman Catholic missionary movement would have been the first to evangelise South Africa around the mid-sixteenth century, an initiative that later failed as a result of the poor quality of the evangelization work conducted. This would thus have opened up the opportunity for Dutch settlers and missionaries in the seventeenth century to re-establish

missionary work as though it was new. The subsequent arrival of the German missionaries further entrenched the work of the two precedent missionary movements.

Missionary activities later spread to other parts of South Africa. In the Zulu Kingdom, which falls in the present-day province of KwaZulu-Natal, missionary work started in the small town of Hermannsburg in 1854. This is where the translation of the European Bible into isiZulu began. Mokwena writes: “The Hermannsburg Missionary Society was founded by Louis Harms, of the Saints Peter and Paul Lutheran Congregation in Hermannsburg, Germany” (2021: 1). The establishment of the Hermannsburg mission work in KwaZulu-Natal marked the start of German mission activity in South Africa, which was mostly Lutheran. Mokwena (2021) narrates that King Mpande kaSenzangakhona, a monarch of the Zulu Kingdom from 1840 to 1872, denied Hermannsburg missionaries permission to settle on his land and this resulted in the purchasing of the farm Perseverance on the edge of Zululand, near Greytown, by the Hermannsburg missionaries, where they then based their operation.

The activities outlined hereabove all mark the official establishment of Christian mission in the Zulu Kingdom and present-day KwaZulu-Natal. Christian mission in the Zulu Kingdom and among the isiZulu-speaking people in the whole of South Africa was strengthened by the translation of the European versions of the Bible into isiZulu. In 1837, the missionary George Champion translated some portions of the Bible. Later, in 1883, the whole Bible was translated into isiZulu. Mokwena reports that, in recent years, “the Jacob Zuma Foundation, established by the former South African President, Mr Jacob Zuma, had reportedly collaborated with the South African Roman Catholic Church to translate the original Greek and Hebrew Bible into isiZulu” (2021:1). This development will further entrench Christianity in Zulu culture through language, which is a critical pillar of any people’s culture.

The South African context for mission is very unique and bears its own unique dynamics, not found anywhere else in the continent. This unique context has also evolved over a period of time and is no longer the same as when it first encountered Christian mission. However, there has been consistently an above average level of interest in Christianity which has been maintained in the country over decades, despite the varying socio-

cultural, economic and political circumstances. According to Kritzinger, "the latest census figures of 1996, as tabled by Prof Jurgens Hendricks indicate that 74.1% of South African population stated their affiliation to a Christian church...this would mean that the Christian sector of the population stabilised at slightly more than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the total, as it was already 77% in 1980" (2000:95-96). Despite this well-established presence of the faith in South Africa, Kritzinger, in his publication of 1988 titled *The South African Context for Mission*, concluded that there was still a huge task for mission workers in South Africa. He highlighted and recommended three focal areas that still required attention in this regard:

- **evangelising**, which he also refers to as *kerygma*;
- **socio-economic service**, which he refers to as *diakonia* in Greek; and
- **church fellowship and liturgy**, also referred to as *koinonia*.

This conclusion and recommendation, asserted in 1988, is still as relevant a description of the South African mission context as it was then. However, Kritzinger's recommendations may have overlooked one critical aspect, which is now the greatest focal point in South African Christian mission, which is inculturation. Kritzinger (2000), does acknowledge the fact that there have been significant changes in the macro and micro contexts of mission in South Africa, as much as some aspects have remained constant. Christianity in South Africa, although it still a religion of greater influence than its counterparts, stands at risk of a collapse due to lack of inculturation. New emerging forces, such as the African spirituality movement and the growing presence of Islam, might pose a serious, but subtle, threat to the regio-cultural hegemony that Christianity has enjoyed for centuries in South Africa. Inculturation has resurfaced as a key factor in the survival of Christianity in South Africa just as it did in North African church of antiquity, in the seventh and eighth centuries.

### **3.4 Highlights of the Historical Background of Christianity in Africa**

The attempt to reflect on the historical background of Christian mission in Africa confronts one with the dilemma of how to define Africa. This is not just a geographic debate but an

ideological one. Most people define Africa as ‘black Africa’, which excludes northern parts of the continent – which are not so ‘black’. Africa south of the Limpopo River is also often excluded in the “black Africa” definition. Despite this ideological disjuncture regarding what constitutes Africa, for purposes of this study Africa is recognised as including North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and Africa south of the Limpopo River. The chapter has established that mission history in Africa has always developed alongside the broader African history, as attested to by Strayer (1976).

Isechei (1995) traces the background of Christianity in Africa to Egypt, where the Greeks arrived around the seventh century B.C. According to Isechei (1995), this interaction between the Greeks and Africa opened a doorway for Christianity to come into Africa after Christ departed, then driven by the Romans, the dominant superpower in the Mediterranean World at the time. The tracing of Christian mission to the era before Christ follows the line of thought that a conducive socio-cultural environment was established that later facilitated the spread of Christianity. One of the significant occurrences was that the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek around 280 B.C.; called the Septuagint, this was more easily accessible to non-Hebrew societies, including North Africa, where Greeks had already settled centuries earlier. Henkel (1989), Isichei (1995), and Oborji (2020) concur that African Christianity is thus as old as Christianity itself.

According to Oborji (2020) and ‘*The Gospel Coalition (TGC)-Africa*’ editorial, the expansion of Christianity in Africa took place in five different phases which were ushered-in by four different waves of evangelization, the earlier suggesting five, and the later four. Despite some difficulties experienced from antiquity to modernity, Christianity achieved a solid footing on the continent, with significant percentage shares of the world’s Christian population. The evangelization waves that the ‘*The Gospel Coalition (TGC)-Africa*’ editorial outlines, which ushered in each phase of Christianity, are:

- Wave 1: Early Christianity in North Africa and Ethiopia (62 -700 A.D.);
- Wave 2: Portuguese Catholicism (1500-1800 A.D.);
- Wave 3: The Evangelical Era (Modern Christianity) (1792-1992 A.D.); and

- Wave 4: Indigenous Movements, Pentecostalism (Post-modern Christianity) (1960s- to current).

The fourth wave, which ushered in the phase that we are currently in, is characterized by the indigenization of the church in the time of independence. According to Ndlovu (2016), the indigenization of the Church has become the backbone of African Christianity in the Post-Independence and Post-Modern Era, which is a very complex and multi-faceted Christianity, especially the indigenization aspect thereof, which is the point of interest for this study. According to Ndlovu (2016), African Christianity is predominantly coloured by indigenous world views, beliefs, values, and traditions. This development in African Christianity has been received differently in different church communities, with two main perspectives. Some welcome and embrace the indigenization as positive transformation countering the many years of Western worldview domination of the faith. Others view this development as a mobilization of evil spiritual forces that have been in co-existence with Christianity for years, but now are emerging more powerfully to threaten the gospel in Africa, especially in the South African context.

In KwaZulu-Natal, formal missionary work was begun by German Lutheran missionaries in the Hermannsburg area in 1854. This followed the spread of missionary work after the initial establishments by the Portuguese Catholic missionaries, the Dutch Reformers, and then the German Moravians. King Mpande kaSenzangakhona's (1840-1872) refusal of the request of Lutheran missionaries to settle in Hermannsburg directly caused the spread of missionary activity to other areas of the Zulu Kingdom, such as near Greytown, where the German Lutheran missionaries then settled. Missionary work in the Zulu Kingdom, and present-day province of KwaZulu-Natal, was anchored by the translation of the Holy Bible into isiZulu in 1837. According to Mokwena, these developments in the missionary history of KwaZulu-Natal reflect the impact of adoption of indigenous people's languages and way of life in the inculturation, as missions' theology and practice, a phenomenon that is explored in great length in the next chapter.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to define Africa as a geographical and ideological concept, which provides a conceptual backdrop for further discussion of the background of Christianity in Africa. The four waves of evangelization of the continent were explored, which ushered in the five phases or epochs of Christianity in Africa. The chapter discussed the concept of indigenization, which characterizes the current phase of Christianity in Africa and also reflected on how the Christian community has responded to this theological development. Specific reflections were made with reference to the South African context with a specific interest in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, which is the base of isiZulu culture that is of interest in this study. Lastly, the chapter highlighted reflections on the historical background of Christianity in African cultural context and narrowed the focus to KwaZulu-Natal as the context of interest for the study. The chapter establishes a contextual backdrop for further reflections on inculturation and the interactions of Christianity with isiZulu culture, which is the focus of the next two chapters.

## CHAPTER 4: INCULTURATION IN ISIZULU CULTURAL CONTEXT

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates the interaction of Christianity with isiZulu culture, studying how Christianity was received by amaZulu as a community with a very well-established culture, traditions, beliefs, and practices. The chapter explores how amaZulu received and integrated Christianity as a foreign religion into their way of life, customs, traditions, and belief systems. The chapter also interrogates the influence of isiZulu, as a culture, on the Christian faith and how the expression and expansion of the Christian faith has been impacted by isiZulu, both in South Africa and beyond its borders. This investigation aims to establish points of convergence and divergence as it explores whether isiZulu as a culture or way of life can harmoniously co-exist with Christianity, especially the Pentecostal form of Christianity, looking at which traditional and spiritual practices and beliefs of amaZulu conflict with doctrines of Pentecostal Christianity and which are shared by both.

### 4.2 Interaction between the spirituality of amaZulu and the doctrine and spirituality of Pentecostal Christianity

Maniraj and Ndhlovu (2019) describe the way of life – which I interpret to *mean* ‘culture’ – in traditional Africa in this way: “religion is a way of life in traditional Africa” (2019:137). This description of way of life for traditional Africa best describes ‘*amakholwa*’, a term used to describe believers in isiZulu. The amaZulu people of the Zulu Kingdom and surroundings, in what is today the province of KwaZulu-Natal, embraced Christianity with both arms. Despite being a very culturally entrenched community in terms of tradition, practices, beliefs and values, amaZulu opened their hearts and minds to the Christian gospel and made it a central part of their lives. Houle (2011) puts it this way: “[T]he message believers consumed was not static and Zulu Christians (known as *amakholwa*, or believers) transformed their faith by treating the theological foundations of the religion as an open buffet, picking and choosing what appealed to them from any number of

theological traditions and ecstatic movements that flowed through the Port of Natal” (2011:1).

Although it was easier for amaZulu to embrace Christianity in terms of the communal way of life and other social values – presumably because of the evident similarities between isiZulu and Christianity in that regard – the spirituality and belief system, in terms of the interaction with the divine world, has always been a point of contention and conflict between the two entities. The belief of amaZulu in *amadlozi* – ancestral spirits – as mediator and medium between *uMvelinqangi*, the Supreme Being, and the living, is in essence the main, if not the only, contentious point of difference with biblical Christianity and, in particular, the Pentecostal tradition. Ngcobo writes:

Through all the life stages, Africans, who are raised within African religious patterns and customs, are groomed through particular rituals to achieve a concrete and vibrant relationship with the (spiritual) world of *amadlozi* [the ancestors] as much as the (physical) world of the living (2020:1).

Belief in *amadlozi*, which is practiced through a ritual called ‘*ukuthetha*’<sup>1</sup>, which involves praying to, or consulting with, ancestral spirits, is not a belief system that is introduced to amaZulu at a particular stage of their life journey but forms an integral part of their up-bringing from the time of birth, when the ritual of ‘*imbeleko*’ – the dedication of a child to the ancestral spirits – is done. Contrary to what amaZulu are taught from infancy, Christianity teaches that the only way to commune with the divine or supreme being (God) is through Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The biblical text of 1 Timothy 2:5 states, “for there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus” (NIV).

I have made some observations about these differences in spiritual beliefs and practices from my own up-bringing as a son of amaZulu family who converted into Pentecostal Christianity at the age of 12. I was first introduced into Christianity through my mother who was part of an independent indigenous Christian church, called *amaZayoni* (Zionist church). This Christian tradition is one that embraces both biblical and *isiZulu* traditional

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<sup>1</sup> Also known as ‘*ukuphahla*’ in most indigenous South African languages.

ways of life as mutually compatible and complementary to one another, rather than conflicting. At the age of 12, I was introduced to a Pentecostal-charismatic church through my elder brother who *become 'born again' and I also became a 'born-again' Christian*. Being 'born again' is popularly known as '*ukusindiswa*', which means '*being saved*', in KwaZulu-Natal. I observed and went through all initiatory teachings and rituals, such as baptism, and fully became a 'born-again' Pentecostal Christian.

One of the first teachings I received in my newly found faith was that I needed to refrain from participating in the spiritual rituals practiced by amaZulu, such as '*ukuthetha amadlozi*', which is to pray or consult with the departed (ancestors), which is done every time there is a significant life-changing event or even an unfortunate incident in the family or in the life of one member of the family. This ritual entails the burning of '*impepho*', which is incense, and is usually accompanied by the slaughtering of an animal – usually a chicken or a goat, depending on affordability and also on the significance of the event or incident. In the event that there was such a slaughtering, as a 'born again' Christian I was required to refrain from partaking of the meat. On those occasions when a goat was slaughtered, members of the family would also be expected to wear a piece of the goat skin as a wrist band, called *isiphandla*. This wrist band would serve as evidence of the ritual having been performed and would maintain a certain level of connection with the ancestral spirits, to ensure they protected and guided you everywhere you went.

The faith I had now received was perceived as disrespectful and rebellious against the family traditions and practices, especially because my elder brother, who was the first one to be '*born again*' was not living with us anymore, as he had gone on to tertiary studies. My brother's absence meant I had to defend my faith on my own, and to the elders of the family I was too young to know anything about faith and religion to be in a position to make such decisions or choices. I was caught in an internal conflict: on the one hand, key biblical teachings told me honour my mother and father in order to have a long and blessed life (Ephesians 6); on the other hand, Christian teachings instructed me that partaking in such rituals and spiritual practices was ungodly and abominable to God. This example illustrates how the points of convergence and divergence between Pentecostal Christianity and the culture (moral values, traditions, and beliefs, and spiritual

practices) of amaZulu are not very far from each other: in this one scenario, one may find a point of convergence and a point of divergence at the same time. In terms of the moral values, the two systems share a number of commonalities. In terms of spirituality and beliefs, however, they differ significantly.

Despite these significant differences between the beliefs and spirituality of IsiZulu and Christianity, Ngcobo (2020) identifies a very crucial meeting point between the two spiritualities: the significance of rituals in expressing these spiritualities. They write:

However, this understanding of their (*AmaZulu*) worldview is also shared by Christianity, where, through rituals, Christians connect in fellowship with others, as well as the transcendent, especially during the Holy Communion. Both Africans and Christians view rituals as an expression of fellowship of the transcendent and human beings, for Christ said, 'Where two or three gather in my name, I will be there with them' (Mt 18:20) (Ngcobo, 2020: 1).

In the practice of the Holy Communion, also referred to as the *Eucharist*, Christians partake in the bread and wine, which represent the body and the blood of Christ, thereby being strengthened in unity and fellowship with one another as the body of Christ made of all believers in Christ, both those who have transcended (died) – in that they used the same ritual to affirm their faith in Christ – and those still alive and professing Christ. Similarly, Ngcobo explains, “according to the *AmaZulu*, a ritual is one which unites more than the residents of the same world (2020:2).

In my observation from my own experiences and the experiences of others who accepted the Christian faith in the community where I grew up, the main issue in the conflict between our traditional way of life as isiZulu and our new-found faith was the lack of separation between religion and culture on the part of isiZulu. In my view, there is a significant difference between religion and culture. Culture should be understood as simply as 'people's way of life'. However, one cannot shy away from the fact that spirituality or spiritual practices form part of people's way of life, which then makes it part of a people's culture in a particular context. That being said, with continuous practice of a particular spirituality, and it's passing on from generation to generation in the form of set of teachings and principles, it begins to take on the form of a religion. The spiritual

practices relating to *amadlozi* have become so well established, and well and structured over the years such that it has culminated into a religion. Although the practice does not have a set of scriptures, like Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, it is nonetheless guided by a set of spiritual and shared values and knowledge systems that ensure that those who practice the art are practicing it correctly and comply with principles that govern their spirituality.

As a result of the blending of isiZulu cultural values and norms with spiritual practices, which takes a shape of a religion, it becomes challenging for Pentecostal Christians to harmonize the dual identities that hold significance in their lives, each uniquely. This struggle has been less evident for *amakholwa* from other Christian traditions that are non-Pentecostal-charismatic. This is perhaps due to the fact that these other traditions, from the onset, were accommodative of other spiritual practices other than biblical spirituality. Separating cultural values and norms from spiritual practices, which are religious in nature, would enable Pentecostal Christianity to enculturate more easier, without constantly being in conflict with isiZulu. Those who subscribe to isiZulu traditional religious practices can do so separately, and not entangle those practices with peoples' general way of life in the form of social values and norms. This distinction would change the worldviews of both Pentecostal Christians and amaZulu towards Pentecostalism as a faith. Despite these issues, there are certain emphases in the spiritual practices of biblical Christianity, which Pentecostal Christians claim to subscribe to, and isiZulu traditional belief system. One of these areas of agreement is the emphasis on the importance of 'rituals' in communicating messages and teaching the faith. These are referred to as 'sacraments' in the Christianity context.

As a result of the similarity in ritual emphasis, amaZulu find Christianity relatable as a belief system, although differing in essence with regards to the identity of the mediator. Ngcobo (2020) writes: "In this manner, the Holy Communion, as a Christian ritual, would be more relevant and meaningful to amaZulu and other Africans" (2020:2). Ngcobo (2020)'s observation is not only true for amaZulu, but also for Christians: it is not only isiZulu that has been influenced by Christianity, but the opposite, too, has been proven true. This is emphasized by Houle when he writes that "[ama]Zulu both shared and

participated in the great transformation of the faith then underway across the globe—a project that would eventually produce the two most important religious movements of the last several centuries: Pentecostalism and Evangelism” (2011:1). According to Houle (2011) amaZulu have played a significant role in shaping Christianity and its spread across southern Africa and the globe. Houle also highlights in his book, *Making African Christianity* that “the Zulu churches quickly grew as the population responded to the carefully crafted appeals of *amakholwa* that combined access to a world religion while being imbedded into the soil around them” (2011:2). Houle (2011)’s perspective is not very divergent from that of Pauw –although Pauw (1974) uses the primitive term ‘Bantu-speakers’ to refer to amaZulu – who wrote in the ‘70s: “In these ‘tribal’ areas churches were founded and began developing before large numbers of Bantu-speakers started migrating to towns, and many features of urban church life still have to be seen against the background of Christianity in the tribal areas” (1974:426).

The manner in which amaZulu embraced and customized the Christian faith, thus producing a community called ‘*amakholwa*’, touched and influenced the other ethnic and cultural groups in southern Africa, and eventually spread across the world. Houle comments: “It is this model, the translation of the faith into local idioms over several generations, which other Christians replicated in their own ways across sub-Saharan Africa as they appropriated the faith and turned Christianity into an African religion” (2011:2). This is a reflection of a symbiotic relationship of mutual influence. This obviously could not have been achieved without any challenges or difficulties for *amakholwa*. Houle (2011) writes: “While the project of transforming Christianity into an African religion was still underway it proved a difficult task for many to find the right balance between two occasionally discordant identities” (2011:2).

Over a period of time, *amakholwa* managed to create an identity of their own that encompassed both their isiZulu identity and their Christian identity. This new form of community and identity became appealing to most traditionalists who wanted a ‘better’ life with a greater sense of purpose, which was offered by the Christian faith. According to Houle, “only when they created a Christianity, they could truly call their own did evangelization efforts begin in earnest—and met with success among traditionalist Zulu

(2011:4). The conversion of *amabhinca*, who were generally understood to be rigid traditionalists in amaZulu communities, was a true testament to the adaptation of Christianity into a more localized religion that could be part of people's daily way of life – although the expectation that amaZulu change their way of dress remained contentious for some decades among scholars, as it raised the question of whether *amabhinca* were converting to Christianity, or to Westernism. Houle writes: “The nature of this success was replicated across Africa as Africans first came to terms with their adopted faith only when they had adapted it to local needs and only then did aggressive evangelization begin in interest” (2011: 4). According to Houle (2011), *amakholwa* built their identity from a set of practices generally approved by the mission, and which linked them to the colonial state. However, *amakholwa* actively maintained connections to *amabhinca*, neither wanting nor pursuing full separation from their past; instead, they aggressively built a profitable middle ground which depended on carefully balancing their newly acquired Western identity with their older, *isiZulu*-based identity

A typical example of the controversies and dynamics that can arise when Christianity, African culture, and African traditional spirituality intersect is the recent coronation of the king of amaZulu, uMisizulu kaZwelithini. According to the narrative given by Phalatsi-Shilubana et al (2024:2), the long-awaited coronation of King Sinqobile Misuzulu kaZwelithini, which was held at Moses Mabhida Stadium on 29 October 2022 attracted thousands of South Africans who either attended the ceremony in person or through television and other telecommunication mediums. According to Phalatsi-Shilubana's report, the dignity of this momentous event was compromised by the act of a biblical ordination ritual that was performed on the King by the Archbishop of the Anglican Church in Southern Africa, following the request by the late Prime Minister of the Zulu Kingdom, Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi who was a bonified Christian and member of the Anglican Church. The controversy in this event emanated from the fact that King Misizulu KaZwelithini is a member of a traditionalist 'Christian' church, Nazareth Baptist Church, popularly known as *Ibandla lakwaShembe* or *LamaNazaretha*, which is strongly founded on the traditional spiritual practices of amaZulu, with the incorporation of some biblical doctrines. The other controversy was that this was a public traditional and cultural event that was aimed at displaying and upholding the culture and traditions of amaZulu, and yet

a foreign religious practice was then performed in it. The performance of an Anglican-Christian ritual on such a significant occasion was perceived to be undermining the culture and spirituality of amaZulu, and also that of the Nazareth Baptist Church and its Leader, Prophet Mduduzi Shembe.

Reflecting on the details of this event, Professor Musa Xulu, founder of a think tank focused on reaffirming traditional Zulu culture called *Indonsa Yesizwe*, stated that the ritual was degrading and resembled an attempt to recolonize the Zulu nation, Phalatsi-Shilubana et al (2024) records. According to Phalatsi-Shilubana et. al (2024), Prince Managosuthu Buthelezi responded and defended the Anglican Church's participation, arguing that the ritual was justified because King Misuzulu himself is a Christian, although he belongs to *Ibandla LamaNazaretha*, which is the second-largest African Initiated Church (AIC) in South Africa. The leaders of *Ibandla LamaNazaretha* also expressed their great disappointment and unhappiness with the involvement of Anglican Bishop in the actual coronation ceremony, which sidelined them, stating that this undermined all the 'real' spiritual rituals which their leader and Prophet, Mduduzi Shembe, had already performed leading up to the coronation. Phalatsi-Shilubana et al. (2024) pose several questions arising from this incident:

Can one belong to a Western religion and practice African culture? Can an African traditional monarch belong to a Western religion, in particular Christianity? What are the implications of mixing indigenous culture with foreign religion in our society? What are the decolonial boundaries between African religion and Christianity? Can there be a healthy interplay between indigenous culture and Christianity? Can African Christianity be tamed into an indigenous cultural expression? (2024:2).

In essence, this paper aims to contribute to answering at least some, if not all, of these questions.

#### **4.3. Inculturation in KwaZulu-Natal seen through the lens of the Apostolic Faith Mission**

According to Clark (2005), the AFM was constitutionally divided into four sections following the break-away of a large Black group – now known as the Zion Christian Church – in 1919 as a result of racial tensions between Afrikaner and Black members of the Church. The four sections of the church were mainly determined on racial lines: Whites, which became the mother church; Blacks, Coloureds (mixed-race), and Indians. Clark explains: “The Black church consisted of many different components, ordered primarily by language and region” (2005: 145). Although the different sections of the church were governed constitutionally, the White church assumed an authoritative role over the other sections such that, although there were great cultural differences between the White church and the Black church, the White ministers regularly were assigned to go preach at the Black congregations, but the opposite was never the case. Clark reports: “Contacts with the Blacks tended to be very ‘top-down’, and many White members would preach regularly in Black townships or mine hostels” (2005:145). According to Clark (2005), the perceptions of the White church towards the Black church remained very ‘mission’ oriented and was always occupied with the idea of needing to invest resources for mission towards ‘the salvation of souls in Africa’ – implying Blacks, including those in the Black section of the church. At face value this might have seen honourable, yet it was based in Whites’ deep-seated negative perceptions about African people, especially Black Africans, as ungodly and needing to be evangelized: even when they had converted to Christianity and were members of the church, it seemed their ‘salvation’ remained under question.

The idea that Blacks needed to be saved but Whites did not perpetuate some serious racial and cultural divides within the AFM. This was a sign of resistance to the idea of inculturation. It seems, looking back into the history of missions, to be a tendency of Westernized missions to demonize the ‘receiving’ indigenous people and their cultures while they, as the missionary movements, are not prepared to undertake the crucial task of enculturating in mission. It was the lack of racial and cultural acceptance within the AFM – perpetuated predominantly by the Afrikaner section of the church, which had assumed a ‘mother’ church role – that led to a breakaway by some of the Black members to form various sorts of Africanized forms of Pentecostalism, which came to be known

popularly as 'Zionism'. Most of these still exist and continue to grow in KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, and other provinces of South Africa.

According to Kgatle (2016) "in the years between 1912 and 1920 Nkonyane, the most impressive among the early Zion leaders, introduced certain elements into worship which have remained visible hallmarks of Zionism to this day: white robes, bare feet, holy sticks, and Old Testament symbolism" (2016:2). Zionism – which is now referring to the Africanized form of Pentecostalism that was born out of the Apostolic Faith Mission movement – resonated strongly with the cultural and traditional beliefs and practices of the people of KwaZulu-Natal. This made it easier for most amaZulu to convert to this enculturated form of Christianity, rather than the more Western form of Pentecostalism that was preached and practiced by the Apostolic Faith Mission, which was not willing to enculturate to the extent that the Africanized Zionist Christianity did.

Through the doctrinal lens of the AFM, the new form of Pentecostalism preached and practiced by the Africanized Zionists was heretical and syncretic and, as such, needed to be rejected. This perspective still prevails to this very day. Asserting this view, Mzondi, writes that "syncretism in the African section of South African Pentecostalism followed the emergence of the Ethiopian movement" (2023:1). Mzondi (2023) also asserts that the emergence of the Ethiopian movement promoted the syncretization of Christianity and African culture and practice in the name of '*Ubuntu*', which then latter manifested within the Black section of the Apostolic Faith Mission – the Christian Catholic Church in Zion (CCCZ) branch in Wakkerstroom – following the departure of Reverend Pieter le Roux to the Johannesburg assembly of the AFM. The departure of le Roux from the Wakkerstroom branch of the CCCZ opened room for doctrinal deviation from the original teaching that founded the branch. Mzondi (2023) also states that "this form of syncretism later permeated subsequent sections of African Pentecostalism in the Apostolic Faith Mission, resulting in the emergence of two categories of African Pentecostalism in the church: namely, those who accept this phenomenon and those who abandon it" (2023:1).

Inculturation of Christianity in South Africa, from a Pentecostal perspective, therefore, has two lenses through which it may be perceived: one being the 'Zionist' lens (Africanized Pentecostalism) and the other being the 'AFM' lens (Westernized Pentecostalism). While

the former perceives inculturation as embracing the practice and principles of *Ubuntu* in Christianity, the latter perceives it as practicing syncretism. Earlier in this study, the distinction was made between African cultural values and norms, summarily known as *Ubuntu*, and African Traditional Religion or the African Spirituality Movement, which is based on the belief in *amadlozi*, which is the cult that seeks to connect with the divine being (*uMvelinqangi*) through ancestral spirits. From a reflection on the perspectives discussed here arises a critical factor in this discourse: the need for differentiation between inculturation and the syncretization of Christianity. Based on other earlier arguments in this regard, it remains a considered view of this paper that not all form inculturation is syncretic, although, one cannot deny the thin lines and overlaps that may at times exist between the two phenomena.

In the province of KwaZulu-Natal, Christian mission has been a largely successful endeavour over the decades of evangelization since the arrival of American missionaries at the Port of Natal during the reign of King Mpande KaSenzangakhona, as alluded to in earlier chapters. However, where Pentecostal missions have had serious challenges has been around the issues pertaining to inculturation and the existence of these two divergent perspectives in this regard: one embracing fully the practice of *isintu* – which entails both cultural values and other traditional ritualistic or spiritual *elements of isiZulu* as a culture – and the other rejecting completely the embrace of *isintu*. The former form of Pentecostalism, as a result of its deeply enculturated nature, although also syncretic became more popular among amaZulu, who received the Christian faith and became popularly known as *amakholwa*. The latter form of Pentecostalism remained popular mostly among the educated, most of whom were already detached to some extent from some of the traditional cultural practices into which they were born. It is this dynamic that further perpetuated the view that the AFM form of Pentecostalism was for the learned. This was further exacerbated by its strong emphasis on the use of English in liturgical practices, even in African congregations.

#### **4.4 Interaction between isiZulu socio-cultural values and Biblical principles**

Socio-cultural values of amaZulu and socio-biblical values are the main point of convergence between isiZulu culture and Christianity. Biblio-Pentecostal Christianity puts much emphasis on the concept of ‘holiness’, which speaks to a life lived in full alignment with biblical social and moral values. Similarly, on the other hand, isiZulu also upholds high social and moral values that are passed on from generation to generation through different traditional mediums of communication such as poems (*izinkondlo*), proverbs (*izaga*), hymns (*amahubo*), fairy tales (*izinganekwane*), and music (*umculo*). When these two entities, Christianity and isiZulu interact, they harmoniously integrate and affirm each other if light is shone on this area of convergence and similarity. Maniraj and Ndhlovu highlight several African customs and values that are very prevalent *among amaZulu*: “Within its systems, Zulu culture encompasses customs and values like Ubuntu, respect for elders, love for community and solidarity, parents-child relationships, fellowship, hospitality, sense of the sacred and many others” (2019:138). These customs and values are common across African cultural groups and communities; however, they are particularly central to isiZulu daily way of life. These social and moral values represent the points of intersection between isiZulu and Christianity, even more so Pentecostal Christianity. These are discussed in this section.

#### **4.4.1 Ubuntu**

South African theologian Micheal Jarvis (2009) states that late Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu defined ‘*ubuntu*’ as “the essence of being human”. He explains that “it speaks of the fact that my humanity is caught up and is inextricably bound up in yours” (Jarvis, 2009: 5). This definition of *ubuntu* is echoed by Maniraj and Ndhlovu (2019). Nussbaum (2003) explains that “*ubuntu*, an *Nguni* word from South Africa, speaks to our interconnectedness, our common humanity and the responsibility to each other that flows from our deeply felt connection” (2003:2). In isiZulu culture, this social value is the central pillar of all other social values that are upheld by amaZulu and drive interaction between people on daily basis. *Ubuntu* is not just upheld by amaZulu communities, however, but is a universal African value: it may be called by different names in different languages and countries, but the essence of the concept remains the same. African culture is very communal in nature, and this sense of community is upheld by the social ‘glue’ of *ubuntu*.

#### **4.4.2 Solidarity**

According to Maniraj and Ndhlovu (2019), “it has been observed that Africans are looking for a church home where they can experience solidarity with their fellow church members as family members” (2019:140). Solidarity, especially in family structures, is held up high as a very significant value among amaZulu and has influenced how amaZulu identify as members of a Christian congregation or denomination. To amaZulu, and other Africans, belonging to a church congregation is perceived similarly to belonging to a family structure, and members apply the same principle of solidarity that they apply in their family units and structures. This cultural value resonates deeply with the biblical emphasis on the value of solidarity and unity among Christian brethren, indicated in the Apostle Paul’s letters to the churches of Galatia (Gal 3:28) and Corinth (1 Cor 1:10), and in many other portions of Scripture.

#### **4.4.3 Respect for elders**

According to Conton, “Africans generally have deep and ingrained respect for old age, and even when we can find nothing to admire in an old man, we will not easily forget that his grey hairs have earned him right to courtesy and politeness” (1966:21). In Biblical terms, children are told to obey their parents in order to earn the blessing of long life (Ephesians 6:1-3). The emphasis on respect for elders – and not only one’s biological parents – is held high in *isiZulu* culture as a key to a long and prosperous life, just as it is in the Bible. This is one of the most prominent points of convergence between Christianity, regardless of the tradition or denomination, and African culture, touching both social values and beliefs system.

#### **4.4.4 Humility**

Humility is another virtue that amaZulu uphold in their culture and that resonates strongly with the biblical principles that a true believer in Christ is expected to live by. Humility is deeply entrenched in the teachings of Christ. Often, humility is mistaken for weakness, but it is actually a strength. African people, in general, show humility, especially when interacting with those in authority. This is not because they feel weak, but because they understand the godliness behind the principle. To this effect, Maniraj and Ndhlovu (2019)

state: “African people openly and unashamedly show humility to the elderly, husbands and wives and mostly to God” (2019:141). This is one of the virtues that has enabled Christianity find footing among amaZulu, as the Christian value resonates with the culture in which they were raised.

#### **4.4.5 Music as a family therapy and bond**

According to Parcutt, (2009) “one of music’s many functions is to bring people together and give them a common identity which evidently helps social groups to function efficiently” (2009: 120-121). Music is a central aspect of African life. Every event and activity in the isiZulu culture is accompanied by song, be it a sad or joyful occasion. AmaZulu are also well known for their good sense of rhythm. There is a practice called ‘amahubo’ , which mean ‘hymns’, which is very significant in the life and customs of amaZulu. Every family or clan has its own hymns that are sung on special occasions to affirm the spiritual connectedness and emotional bond that exists among members of the family. Some families believe that these hymns connect them to their ancestral spirits. These hymns are treated as sacred and are sung on very specific occasions, such as funerals and weddings, and at very specific points of the occasions. Yende (2024) explains: “*Amahubo* have their roots in ancient times, often linked to the very beginning of Zulu history, tracing back to the emergence of the first Zulu people from the bed of reeds” (2024: 2). Yende (2024) also highlights the significant events in which *amahubo* are sung: “weddings, the funerals of kings, chiefs, induna, and deputy chiefs, as well as wartime and other commemoration ceremonies, are among the important events at which they are performed” (2024:3).

Music is also of immense significance in the Christian tradition and draws many of its inferences from the Old Testament book of Psalms. Music is thus another area of convergence between African culture and Christian tradition.

#### **4.4.6 The sacredness of life**

Maniraj and Ndhlovu write: “From an African perspective, the shedding of human blood is abhorred” (2019:143). Throughout the Bible, both the Old and the New Testament, shedding of human blood, especially of the innocent, is a serious offence to God and

brings about a curse on the perpetrator, their family, and their nation. These examples demonstrate the seriousness with which human life is valued in both Christianity and African culture. This is another crucial point of convergence between the two traditions.

#### ***4.4.7 Parent-child relationships***

According to Maniraj and Ndhlovu (2019), there are parallels between the way parents and children are expected to relate in Christianity and in African culture. Both traditions teach about the inherent authority bestowed by God on parents over their children. The responsibility to submit and honour one's parents is consistent between the Christian tradition and African tradition and is especially emphasised in the isiZulu culture. This commonality between the two traditions makes Christian teachings easier for amaZulu to embrace.

#### ***4.4.8 Sense of community***

African culture is communal in nature. As noted in the discussion of *Ubuntu*, the African way of life is centered around a 'we' narrative, rather than an 'I' narrative. The good of the community is always valued and upheld over individual good. This is one area where African culture conflicts with Western culture. In this aspect, African culture is more closely aligned with biblical or Christian tradition than is the European way of life. This is evident even in the book of Genesis, which narrates the story of human origins. The Bible articulates that God stated that "it is not good for a man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). This clearly depicts that when humans were created, they were created to be with each other and for each other.

#### ***4.4.9 Extended family***

According to Shorter, in the African context the concept of family "usually includes one's direct parents, grand and great grandparents, brothers, sisters, uncles, and aunts, cousins, nieces and nephews" (1975:98). This contrasts with the concept of nuclear family in Western culture. In the Christian or biblical context, family is described in terms that are similar, or even broader, than the African understanding of family. The Bible refers to fellow congregants as 'brethren', which affirms the African view of family. The value placed by African culture on extended family, both those who are related by blood and

others with whom one has a close bond, affirms the inherent connection between Christianity and the African way of life.

#### **4.4.10 Mediator**

According to Maniraj and Ndhlovu, “in the African culture, mediation like in the Bible is a common practice” (2019: 147). In African culture, ancestors are perceived as mediators between the living and the Almighty, *uMvelingqangi*. Christianity is fundamentally founded on the principle of mediation through Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Reference may be made to the pastoral epistle of the Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 2:5, which articulates that there is one mediator between God and mankind, that is Jesus Christ. AmaZulu traditionally believe that those who have departed do not die but continue to live as spirits who interact closely with the Creator and intercede for their living loved ones remaining on earth. This connection and mediation are also facilitated through the sacrifices of animals and burning of incense. The sacrificing of animals and burning of incense is also a prevalent practice in the Old Testament of the Bible. Although differing in terms of who the mediator is or should be, African culture and Christianity both value the role of a mediator between themselves and the Almighty God.

These are not the only values held in common between Christianity and isiZulu culture. Another example is the value of sexual self-preservation or ‘purity’ before marriage, which is prevalent among amaZulu and is upheld mostly for young girls who are continuously taught principles of self-preservation and are tested for virginity regularly.

According to Maniraj and Ndhlovu, (2019) “as Christian workers, it is vitally important for us to understand African customs and values because it is the basis of numerous cultural beliefs and practices which can enhance missionary endeavours among the African people” (2019:137). The social values and principles that are upheld *in isiZulu culture* are very relatable to the ethical values promoted in biblical Christianity. This is thus one area that provides a significant overlap between the two lifestyles.

Both Christianity and isiZulu culture promote the value of love and respect for your neighbour or fellow human being, which is equivalent to the concept of *Ubuntu* in isiZulu culture as the central principle and pillar around which all other social and religious values

stand. The passage of Scripture in Mathew 22: 34-40 speaks of the 'love' commandment as the greatest of all commandments people should live by to be godly. Among the core values and customs that *isiZulu* culture upholds the same principle of love, either for family or another person, is emphasized. Maniraj and Ndlovu are of the view that Christian missionaries should acquire a better understanding of these values and principles in order to effectively evangelize African people, in particular amaZulu, pointing out that "African customs and values consistent with biblical principles could be significant in contributing to missionary endeavours" (2019:138).

In an article addressing the challenge of xenophobia in the world and in Africa, in particular, Koenane (2018) investigates the principle of *Ubuntu* as one of the key remedies to this world crisis. Koenane describes a person with *Ubuntu* in this way: "[A] person with *Ubuntu* is welcoming, hospitable, warm and generous, and willing to share" (2018). He further states that "such people are open and available to others, are willing to be vulnerable, are affirming of others and do not feel threatened that others are able and good, for they have a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that they belong in a greater whole" (2018:2). The social value of *Ubuntu* encompasses many other values that express godliness, if considered from a biblical and Christian perspective. Godliness simply describes a state of likeness to God, which is the ultimate goal and pursuit of Christian faith. Koenane (2018) further states that "in traditional African societies, people lived their lives in accordance with certain *botho* or *ubuntu* principles of which the key elements are summarized as follows: love, compassion, kindness, caring, generosity and sharing" (2018:5). Similarly, when one looks at the principles of the Bible, from whence Christianity draws its values, they emphasize care, love, and generosity towards others over self-interest. Koenane (2018) also states that "the Judeo-Christian principles encouraged values that govern against self-interested love and promoted the awareness that other people deserve to be treated with friendliness and empathy. This moral principle discouraged intolerance and promoted tolerance of other people" (2018). These perspectives provided by Maniraj and Ndhlovu (2019), and Koenane (2018) establish that there is significant overlap between *isiZulu* culture and Christianity in terms of the social values that govern these two ways of life. Both *isiZulu* and Christianity

continue to influence each other on the basis of their socio-cultural and religious values, which makes the co-existence of these two identities possible despite their other significant differences.

#### **4.5 Highlights of the discourse on inculturation in the isiZulu culture**

We have just reflected on inculturation in the context of isiZulu as a culture, which is well established in terms of its traditions and spiritual practices, and also in terms of its norms and moral values. Inculturation always takes place within a cultural context, and the context could either be enabling or disabling to this process of inculturation. For Christianity to effectively enculturate, it requires a broad understanding of the receiving culture which, in this case, is isiZulu. This study has distinguished between the spiritual aspects and the social aspects of the culture, considering the spiritual aspects as religious and the social aspects as the people's way of life, or norms and values.

AmaZulu welcomed and embraced the Christian faith under the leadership of King Mpande kaSenzangakhona around the mid-nineteenth century. This was after some failed attempts by the white settlers and their missionary counterparts in earlier years under the reign of King Dingane, the elder brother of King Mpande. Missionaries were confronted with the huge task of integrating Christianity into the life and culture of amaZulu. In some respects, they managed to enculturate successfully, while in other aspects they failed dismally. The translation of the Bible into isiZulu around 1837 contributed greatly to the inculturation process. Language plays a significant role in any contextualization and enculturation process.

However, Christianity, and especially the Pentecostal tradition, failed to enculturate effectively with regards to the traditional practices of the culture of amaZulu. For example, those who converted were required to stop dressing in traditional attire and were required to wear Western clothing. This was specifically evident in the community of KwaMaphumulo in KwaZulu-Natal, where the community began to be segregated into two social groups, *amakholwa* (believers) on one side and *amabhinca* (traditionalists) on the other. This kind of missionary approach introduced a superficial form of Christianity,

one obsessed with outward transformation rather than sincere inward transformation and conversion, which is more life-affirming and sustainable.

This chapter has highlighted some points of convergence and also some areas of divergence between the two lifestyles, especially from the perspective of Pentecostal Christianity, which is more radical than the earlier traditions of Christian mission. The issue of *ukuthetha or ukuphahla* – consulting with ancestral spirits for guidance and blessing for the family is one area of significant conflict and disagreement between isiZulu culture and Pentecostal Christianity. Other Christian traditions, such as Independent Traditional Christian Churches, mainline Protestants, and Catholics, seem to have integrated this aspect of the culture into their Christian spirituality in some way, while Pentecostals have not been unable – or unwilling – to do so.

Despite the divergences observed in spiritual aspects of these two lifestyles, there is an area of prominent convergence: social and moral values. In Christianity – in all its varying traditions – there is strong emphasis on respect and love for others (one’s ‘neighbour’) just as isiZulu, and other African cultures, emphasise the concept of *ubuntu*. The moral values and norms of isiZulu culture are similar to those of Christianity, which served to facilitate the inculturation process. This demonstrates that Christianity and isiZulu culture can co-exist harmoniously on the social level. However, they are not able – or, at least, have not yet been able – to harmonize isiZulu traditional spiritual practices with Pentecostal-charismatic Christian spiritual practices and doctrines. Despite this significant difference between the two ways of life, both spiritualities recognize the significance of rituals in expressing and exercising their spiritual beliefs and communicating and connecting with the transcendent and the Divine.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the interaction between the spirituality of amaZulu, and Pentecostal Christianity’s doctrine and spirituality, which is the main point of divergence between the two traditions. Despite the differences in spirituality, social and moral values of the two entities were identified as a point of convergence. The chapter narrowed the

discourse to focus on inculturation in KwaZulu-Natal, through the lens of the Apostolic Faith Mission, which was identified and examined as one of the oldest and most influential Pentecostal movements in KwaZulu-Natal. It was found that AFM's influence, although remarkable, it has been limited by the lack of willingness to fully enculturate and rid itself of colonial traits. The dynamics present in the interaction between isiZulu socio-cultural values and biblical principles were explored. It was found that socio-cultural values of amaZulu do blend harmoniously with doctrine and ethical values of Christianity, which makes the two entities relate well in that aspect, despite the differences in spiritual practice and articulations. Finally, the chapter reflected backwards and looked into some of the highlights from the reflections in the discourse of inculturation within the cultural context of amaZulu.

## CHAPTER 5: DECOLONIZATION OF CHRISTIAN MISSION IN AFRICA

### 5.1 Introduction

In many socio-political debates and discussions, the question arises of whether a relationship existed between the colonial and missionary movements between the sixteenth and the twentieth centuries. And if such a relationship did fundamentally exist, what was its nature? It is this two-fold question that this chapter aims to discuss. The spread of Christianity between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries historically coincided with the rise of European imperialism, which later took the form of colonialism. Etherington remarks that:

the explosive expansion of Christianity in Africa and Asia during the last two centuries constitutes one of the most remarkable cultural transformations in the history of mankind. Because it coincided with the spread of European economic and political hegemony it tends to be taken for granted as a reflex of imperialism (2005:1).

One could rephrase Etherington (2005)'s words to say that a relationship between Christian missions and Imperialism did exist but was coincidental in nature rather than intentional, at least in the beginning. As a result of the relationship that existed between these two distinct movements, any shift in the colonial movement would have inevitably had an effect on the missionary movement, and visa-versa. In this context, this chapter reflects on the wave of political decolonization across Africa and its unintended, yet consequential, impact on the decolonization of Christianity in Africa.

### 5.2 The problematic nature of the relationship between colonialism and missions in Africa

Some scholars do suggest that the relationship between missions and colonialism was collaborative, rather than coincidental. For example, Neill write: "It is now widely taken for granted that, whatever may have been the beneficent intentions of the missionaries, they were in fact the tools of governments, and that missions can be classed as one of the

instruments of western infiltration and control” (1966: 12). As also briefly alluded to in Chapter 3, the sixteenth century evangelization of Africa was not the first, but the second, wave of evangelization. This implies that the first wave would have paved the way for the Christianization of the continent before the imperial, and later colonial, movement swept across the continent. Neill explains the distinction between imperialism and colonialism, which are often conflated:

[T]he term ‘colonialism’ appears to be a recent arrival in the languages of Western World, taking the place of the older and more familiar ‘imperialism’...as generally used, the term seems to be applied only to the extension of European and American power in the non-western world during what is now commonly referred to as the Vasco da Gama era (1492-1947)” (1966:11).

In contrast to Neill’s (1966) position that Christian missions was an instrument of the European imperial movement, Etherington emphasizes the independence of mission as a bigger and wider movement than the narrow, short-lived European imperial movement: For historians of religion, missions in the era of European imperialism constitute only a small chapter in a 2000-year-old narrative of the expansion of Christianity—a story that is much more than a British or even European enterprise (2005: 2). This emphasizes the existence of a relationship between these two remarkable historical movements which each, in unique ways, changed and redirected the destiny of the African continent. However, it is not often emphasized in this discourse that Christian missions began independently and preceded imperialism and colonialism, which carried different agendas altogether. Christian mission was always far reaching in its interests, while the European imperial and colonial interests which were only focused on extorting economic resources and seized political power to better secure their economic interests.

Imperialism and colonialism were aggressive and dehumanizing in nature. They constituted an economic and political system built on forced exercise of authority and the oppression of one human by another. In contrast, the gospel came in with an agenda of peace, salvation and the extension of the love of God to all mankind. Neill (1966), highlights that all the West has done tends to be interpreted in terms of aggression. This aggression came in several forms:

- Political aggression – resulted in the disappearance of ancient indigenous kingdoms;
- Economic aggression – resulted in the destruction of old and carefully-balanced systems of organisation;
- Social aggression – upset the old order of relationship between the sexes, and between parents and children; and
- Intellectual aggression – paralyzed creativity by subjecting great nations to alien education systems and imposing religious missions in a manner that threatened the foundations of ancient cultures.

Thus, although the two movements are often coupled together in social and scholarly debates, they fundamentally differ in terms of what they represent, stand for, and aimed to achieve.

Etherington (2005) makes the point that Christianity is much older than Western economic and political hegemony: “Christianity originated in Palestine and spread through the Middle East and North Africa before it reached Scandinavia and eastern Europe” (2005:2). Thus Africa and Asia, who later became prominent victims of Western colonial aggression, received the Gospel before the West through the missionary and evangelical activity of the early church. It would be naïve of any scholar, therefore, to limit Christianity and its mission to evangelize the world to the narrow interests and shorter era of the Western colonial movement. Etherington (2005) makes this even clearer: “[T]he religion (Christianity) flourished in Tunisa, Ethiopia, Sudan, and South India before there was a British Empire” (2005:2).

The colonial movements of the sixteenth to twentieth centuries attempted to forge mutually beneficial relations with the missionary movement. Elbourne explains: “From the late 1790s onward, Christian missionary activity preceded large-scale white colonization in many areas of the empire, including South Africa” (2002:13). This collaborative relationship between the colonial and missionary movements was strengthened by the Berlin Conference of 1885, when the Colonial Principal met to discuss the division of Africa for imperial extortion. It was at this same gathering that missionary leaders were

brought on board with an attempt to forge a partnership – a relationship which could not last due to conflicting interest and offerings, although the target recipient was the same.

Over a period of time, most missionaries took a firm and vocal stand against colonial aggression. The role of missionaries in advancing the imperial agenda of the colonialists diminished, as a result. Elbourne (2002) writes: “The shifting role of missionaries in the British imperial project and changing popular views in Britain itself of the role of Christianity in colonialism were part of some real changes in the relationship between Christianity and British imperialism” (2002:8). Elbourne asserts that the relationship that existed between the colonial and missionary movements was not the intention of the missionaries – in fact, most missionaries were opposed to the idea of colonialism: “Missions did not cause white colonization, and many individual missionaries opposed settler and trader interests” (2002:13). However, the partnership benefited the interests of the colonial movement which, consequently, continually solicited the missionary leaders for partnership.

### **5.3 Colonial and missionary movements in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa**

King Mpande kaSenzangakhona assumed power in the Zulu empire in 1840, after overthrowing his brother Dingane KaSenzangakhona, and governed until 1872” (Shamase, 2015:1). Mpande was also the brother of the famous Shaka kaSenzangakhona who was known for his great military power and ability to consolidate the smaller neighbouring kingdoms into amaZulu empire. Shamase (2015) writes: “At the height of his power Mpande, unlike his predecessor, welcomed Christian missionaries from the Natal Colony to the Zulu empire” (2015:1). Shamase (2015) also notes that, while the missionaries were not formally imperial agents, they acted as informants on affairs within the empire for the benefit of the British colonial establishment in Natal. Shamase (2015) continues: “It is imperative, however, to note that when Mpande granted the Christian missionaries’ admission to the empire, the Zulu people had already been in continual contact with European people who had settled in and about Port Natal for nearly three decades” (2015:1). The arrival of missionaries in the Zulu Kingdom under the

rulership of Mpande was the beginning of many decades and centuries of symbiotic influence and interaction between the culture of amaZulu and Christianity. This is where the concept of *amaKholwa* emanated from, when the people of the culture of amaZulu embraced the gospel and became believers.

Even in this example of amaZulu nation the dynamic relationship between mission and colonialism was becoming evident. Shamase (2015) highlights that the arrival of missionaries among amaZulu was preceded by some interactions between amaZulu and the European colonialists who had settled in the land to advance their imperial interest.

#### **5.4 Decolonization of Christian mission in Africa**

Colonialism was not to last long as it was, in all respects, unsustainable. Ward writes: “Between the Congress of Berlin of 1885 and the early years of the Twentieth Century, most of Africa was partitioned against its will by European aggressors” (1999: 216). It is abundantly evident in the history record that, although the colonial system could not last very long, its negative effect on the African continent and other colonized regions was devastating, and the effects of this devastation are still felt even to this very present day. Ward describes it in this fashion, “as profound as the colonial takeover was to be, for most Africans it was just one of a whole host of crises to convulse Africa at the end of the nineteenth century: crises in the ecology, in medical pathology, in society and in the increasing incorporation of Africa into a global capitalist economy” (1999:217). After many years under colonial regimes, Africa – and other parts of the world – had to undertake the daunting task of reclaiming its original identity through the process of decolonization. Peter White, in his article ‘Decolonization of Western missionaries’ mission theology’, assists our comprehension of the concept of decolonization by providing this definition: “[D]ecolonization is the meaningful and active resistance to the forces of colonialism that perpetuates the subjugation and the exploitation of our minds, bodies, and land” (2017:2).

The emergence of the United States and the Soviet Union as the new superpowers in the early to mid-twentieth century and the new international climate of decolonization after

1945 encouraged the colonies to make a bid for independence. Political-economic decolonization took place in two phases, with the first lasting from 1945 to 1955, mainly affecting countries in the Near and Middle East and South-East Asia. The second phase started around 1955 and mainly affected North African and Sub-Saharan African countries. According to Smith and Nothling (1993), by 1945, when the Second World War ended, Africa had only four independent states. Fifteen years later, in 1960, the continent had no fewer than 23 independent states; during the 1960s another 17 countries followed suit. Portugal, however, held on to its colonies a bit longer, perhaps because it could not afford to decolonize for one reason or the other. In fact, as Smith and Nothling explain, “[i]n contrast to Britain, France and Belgium, who loosened their ties with their African colonies from about 1955, Portugal tightened its hold on its African possessions” (1993: 408). Until around the 1960s, Portugal was not willing to change its stance despite the increasing pressure from the other former colonizers.

The twentieth century wave of political decolonization could not have happened without impacting Christian mission, given the interdependent relationship that had developed between these two distinct movements over the years, and specifically during the third wave of the Christianization of the African continent. This study explores the impact of political decolonization on Christian mission in Africa and how mission, thereafter, undertook its own process of decolonization as a result. The broader discussion of inculturation undertaken by this paper thus cannot conclude without touching on the aspect of decolonization. Inculturation at the introductory stages of Christian missions would have enabled missions to have even a greater and broader impact and be more sustainable; but colonization was one a strong force resisting the inculturation of Christianity – and not only on the African continent.

## **5.5 The African church’s response to the decolonization movement**

Around the year 1900, approximately ten million of the world’s professing Christians were African. Walls, in 2017, ventured an ‘educated guess’ that this number may have risen to around 350 million. This explosive growth of Christian mission in Africa was the opposite of what was happening in Europe during the same period. Walls states that “with the rapid

de-Christianization of Europe over the same period, Africa has been steadily moving into the place once occupied by Europe in the Christian world” (2017:79-80). Observing such a dramatic reversal of positions between Africa and Europe, one is tempted to ascribe this to the decolonization of Christianity and its increased inculturation in Africa. Tracing back to the collapse of Christian mission in Africa in the seventh century, which can be attributed to a large extent to a lack of inculturation, one can assume the opposite to be the reason for the recent exponential growth of the Christian faith in Africa. The line of argument to support this is that the more decolonized Christianity becomes, the more appealing it becomes to decolonized Africans.

The relationship between the missionary movement and the colonial movement has always been problematic – so much so that it was even labelled the “the problematic relationship”. Wickeri writes: “The link between the modern missionary movement and imperialism is generally recognised, despite the efforts of revisionist historians of mission to down-play the importance of this relationship” (2005:482). Wickeri (2005) explores the work and perspectives of Roland Allen, an early twentieth century theologian and missionary, and highlights that Allen had what today might be called a de-constructionist or post-modern understanding of the Christian world mission – a viewpoint that was considered scandalous by the missionary movement of his times and continues to be viewed as problematic by many churches in our own.

According to Wickeri (2005), Allen had some supporters and advocates during his lifetime – those associated with the World Dominion movement, missionaries from various churches, church leaders in China, India and Africa, and some of the Anglican bishops who welcomed his counsel – but, for the most part, he remained an outsider, and his ideas were rejected or ignored. Allen played a significant role in exposing the problematic nature of the relationship which the colonial principals were determined to forge between their imperial and colonial interests and missionary interests. Where they were successful in doing so, the results were devastating, not only for the receiving cultures and communities, but for mission, as well. To this day, Christian mission is suffering reputational damage caused by this problematic relationship over the late eighteen to early twentieth centuries.

According to Boje (1999:192), “the decolonization of African church history necessitates its decontextualization in European terms and its contextualization in terms of Africa”. Ward asserts that “in contrast to the indigenous character of the traditional religion and the enculturated nature of Islam, African Christianity has often been presented as alien to the continent, the religion of the West, of European missionaries” (1999:192). This speaks to the widely held view that Christianity is a despiser and destroyer of African cultural heritage. This view has been promoted mainly due to the association of missionary Christianity with the colonial movement of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries. Despite these widely held views, religious history does record that there was a significant number of influential missionaries who were opposed to the idea of colonialism and the colonizers’ attempt to form a partnership between colonial and missionary movements to advance their colonial and imperial interests in Africa and Asia. In this regard, Ward writes that:

even in the period of high colonialism, there were individual missionaries who were prepared to be extremely critical of colonial policy, especially in areas where the interests of African populations seemed to be subordinated to those of white settler community demanding economic privilege and political rights for itself (1999:226).

Over and above the protest of missionaries such Roland Allen against the colonial policies of their fellow Europeans, there was a growing number of educated African Christians who were standing up to oppose the colonial system. Prominent among these were the Samkange family of the then Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), under the leadership of Thompson Samkange, who was a Methodist Minister.

Individuals like Max Warren of the Church Missionary Society also played a crucial role in mobilizing and interpreting the anti-colonial movement in Africa to the British government after the World War. In Uganda, John Taylor played a similar role to that of Max Warren in South Africa, helping the African church to adjust to the changes brought about by the anti-colonial movement. The transformation did not only affect the Protestant tradition, whose clergy was in the forefront of the anti-colonial movement –the Catholic Church eventually joined the movement as well. Ward writes: “In 1939 Masaka, Uganda, became the first Catholic diocese in Africa entirely to be staffed by African clergy, with an

African bishop, Joseph Kiwanuka.” (1999:228). About eight years later, the Anglican Church in Uganda followed suit by consecrating Aberi Balya, an African, as an assistant bishop.

Ward (1999) also alludes to the argument made by Lamin Sanneh, a West African historian and theologian, that Christianity in modern Africa can be seen as a movement that affirmed and preserved local culture. In advancing this argument, Ward (1999) also highlights missionary effort to translate the Gospel into indigenous African languages for evangelism and worship as commendable for affirming African culture. Ward writes: “The emphasis on the vernacular in evangelism and worship as well as in transmitting the faith is complemented” (1999:192). Ward thus depicts how Christianity in modern Africa has been decolonizing itself over the years. Ward (1999), and other religion historians, also highlight the prominent role that missionaries played in opposing the colonial policies and subsequently contributing to the decolonization movement in the African continent and in other regions. According to Ward, “the rapid decolonization process which took place quite suddenly in the late 1950s and 1960s effectually handed over government in many parts of Africa to mission-educated elite” (1999:228).

## **5.6 The decolonization of the church in South Africa, with specific focus on KwaZulu-Natal province**

According to Boje, “because white rule in South Africa has inhibited such a reorientation, the nineteenth century missionary movement is here considered in its wider African context with a view to applying insights *mutatis mutandis* to the South African situation” (1991:34). Boje (1991) notes that efforts to decolonize Africa went through various stages. He asserts that, initially, the colonizers were perceived by many as agents of historical change. However, later they were seen for who and what they really were: that is, exploiters and oppressors of the African people. Boje (1991) explains: “With the rise of nationalism a role was ascribed to certain African actors as heroes of resistance to colonialism” (1991:34). Ward (1999), closely aligned with Boje’s (1991) view, states that there was a strong element of religious idealism in the political ideologies of many first-generation post-colonial African leaders. For example, for Nyerere of Tanzania,

Catholicism was an important element of his African Socialism; for Kaunda of Zambia, his Presbyterian Christian background greatly influenced his African Humanism. Boje writes: “In the early 1960s church historians emphasized the initiative of African pioneers in evangelizing their people, whereas the efforts of these outstanding figures are now seen in the context of the response to Christianity of African societies as a whole” (1991: 35).

Boje also raises a critical factor in the process of decolonization of mission in African context: the interaction of Christianity with African traditional religions. According to Boje, “nationalist historians stressed political, economic and social factors in the spread of Christianity, its discontinuity with traditional culture; important developments in the field of African religious history suggest that the expansion of Christianity in Africa had popular religious roots within traditional culture” (1991:35). This revelation resonates strongly with the reality of Christianity witnessed in South Africa, especially in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. According to Boje (1991), several studies have revealed the absence of any significant breach between mainline Christianity and African traditional beliefs and practice, especially the emphasis on the idea of the existence of a ‘supreme being’ – God. The same could be said about independent African churches. However, with regards to Pentecostal Christianity, this is slightly different due to its stronger criticism of traditional belief and practices, compared to the other Christian traditions.

According to Boje (1991), “in South Africa such thorough-going indigenization is characteristic of the African independent churches” (1991:59). Independent African churches accounted for about fifteen million Christians in South Africa by 1982. This was significant, pointing to the decolonization of Christian mission in South Africa as represented by independent African churches. The emergence of independent African churches played a significant role in the decolonization of Christianity in Africa, particularly in South Africa. The decolonization of Christianity opened door for the further Christianization of South Africans, including those from isiZulu culture.

## **5.7 Decolonization of mission within the Apostolic Faith Mission movement**

According to Kgatle (2023), Pentecostalism has many expressions that have taken different forms: classic Pentecostalism, neo-Pentecostalism, and other charismatic groups. Kgatle writes: “There are African independent Pentecostal churches that were started by African pastors for Africans” (2023:539). In Kgatle’s view, the indigenization of the Pentecostal movement is a relevant vehicle for the decolonization of the Westernized Christianity that came through the missionary movement.

According to Morton (2017), South Africa has a large African Pentecostal constituency that dates back to the early days of the second wave of Pentecostalism in the early 1900s in the United States of America. There is, however, very little of it that has been documented. Speaking of the early years, Morton writes: “Concentrated in such groups as the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) and the Full Gospel Church, African Pentecostals found themselves relegated to second-class status by these white-run bodies soon after the initial fervor of conversions was completed” (2017:2). Morton states that the African section of the Pentecostal movement was so marginalized by their white parent bodies that they were given less funding than their white counterparts.

In the years between 1910 and 1920, South Africa witnessed a great emergence of independent African churches resulting from racial tensions within the Christian church and, in particular, within the Pentecostal movement. According to Morton, “during the 1910s and 1920s the founders of most of South Africa’s major independent churches were AFM members who like, Oliphant and Mahlangu, went out on their own - Edward Lion, Paul Mabiletsa, Engenas Lekganyane, Chistina Nku, and Isaiah Shembe” (2017:7). In Morton’s view, had the AFM supported its talented African evangelists and not marginalize them on the basis of their skin colour and culture, there would be more Pentecostals in South Africa than Independent African Churches or members of the Zionist movement. The challenge of racism in colonial missions became one of the greatest sources of divisions in the African Christian church and could potentially have collapsed the missionary movement. This challenge culminated in a lack of willingness on the part of the missionary movements to enculturate. The AFM Pentecostal movement is, to this day, still faced with the challenge of decolonizing itself and successfully

enculturating, years after independence and even more years after the arrival of democracy in South Africa.

## 5.8 African Spirituality movement in South Africa

In recent years, KwaZulu-Natal, and South Africa at large, has witnessed a tremendous rise in the popularity and embrace of the 'African' spiritual practices known as *ukuthwasa*, and *ukuthetha idlozi* or *ukuphahla*, especially among the youth and educated professionals. This is part of the widespread movement that has grown to be known as 'African Spirituality'. Although African spirituality is slowly institutionalising, it remains mostly characterised by ambiguity and inconsistency in its expressions, and to this effect Steenkamp-Nel writes: "...although African spirituality seems to be full of ambiguity and fragmentedness, incongruent and inconsistent, it is not stagnant, a quick fix and definitely not permanent" (2018: 7). Most practitioners of this tradition reject the labelling of the movement as a 'religion', although most theologians concur that the extent to which the spiritual practices, beliefs, and doctrines are being systematically organized warrants it to be classified as a religion.

African Spirituality falls within the wider category of African Traditional Religions or Indigenous African Religions – two names that are largely used interchangeably. Olupona defines indigenous African Religions as "the indigenous or native beliefs of the African people before the Christian and Islamic colonization of Africa" (2015: 2). Because of the diversity of cultures, customs, beliefs and traditions across the continent, the expression of African Spirituality varies from community to community. In the province of KwaZulu-Natal, African Spirituality is fundamentally expressed through the spiritual beliefs and practices of *ukuthwasa*, *ukuthetha idlozi* or *ukuphahla*, and *ukubhula* or *ukuhlola*. These spiritual beliefs and practices are then integrated into the culture and societal norms that constitute the way of life of the community. According to Olupona, "African spirituality simply acknowledges that beliefs and practices touch on an inform every facet of human life, and therefore African religion cannot be separated from the everyday or mundane" (2015:2).

Namanzi Choongo Mweene Chinyama, an African feminist who was embarking on a journey of *ukuthwasa* at the time of writing in 2017, provides a detailed picture of what this entails:

I am currently in training (*ukuthwasa*), to become a traditional healer (also known as a *Sangoma*), as practiced in southern Africa, particularly South Africa...my training as a traditional healer has involved a host of elements, rituals, ceremonies, dream interpretation, working with plants and herbs, divination, the throwing of bones, and much conversation and dialogue” (2017:111).

In her description of *ukuthwasa*, Chinyama refers to the practice of divination (*ukuhlola*) and throwing of bones (*ukubhula*) as part of the art she is learning as a traditional healer in training. The practices of *ukuhlola* and *ukubhula* are closely related and achieve the same goal, which is to enquire from the ancestral spirits for direction and guidance regarding one’s problems or issues and receive and interpret their spiritual messages. Both practices are quite fundamental to the belief system, doctrine, and practice of African Spirituality in South Africa, and they link directly with the practice or phenomenon of traditional healing, which is *ubungoma* (state of being isangoma) and *ukuthwasa* (which is the training process thereof).

In the practices and belief systems of African Spirituality in South Africa, we also find the practice of *ukuthetha idlozi*, as famously known in KwaZulu-Natal, or *ukuphahla*, which is a term mostly used in other provinces – especially in Gauteng, which is a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-lingual province. Berglund (1972) makes a critical distinction between cultural practices (*amasiko*) that do not necessarily involve religious or spiritual activities related to communing with ancestral spirits (what he terms ‘shades’), on the one hand, and those rituals that take a religious or spiritual form and relate to communion with the dead through the practice of *ukuthetha idlozi* or *ukuphahla*. “An *isiko* (singular form of *amasiko*) is a conventional and traditional action which does not of necessity involve religious engagement” (Berglund, 1972:27). He goes on to say that “behind *amasiko* stand conventional forms of behavior, not necessarily sanctioned by the shades” (Berglund, 1972:27).

Berglund (1972) explains that *amasiko* often find their expression in sentimental ceremonies such as weddings, funerals, puberty rites, births, and other critical life occasions. Some of these celebrations involve ritualistic elements, others are ceremonial with no ritualistic elements. Rituals, in this context, generally refer to ceremonies that aim to celebrate or commune with those who have departed. According to Berglund, “although in theory the distinction between that which is ceremonial and that which is ritual is clear, in practice a great overlapping must be allowed for” (1972:27-28). I concur strongly with Berglund in his attempt to make a distinction between *amasiko*, which are merely conventional ceremonies marking critical events and occasions in the lives of amaZulu, and *ukuthetha idlozi*, which is more of a religious or spiritual ritual involving communion with the ancestors. And indeed, as alluded to earlier, there is, in practice, an overlap as amaZulu perceive their whole lives through a spiritual lens and tend to want to invoke the ancestral spirits (*amadlozi*) for every occasion in order to seek blessings for whichever momentous occasion is taking place, even if that occasion in itself is not a ritualistic occasion, but merely ceremonial.

This distinction between *ukuthetha idlozi* – ancestral ritual – and *isiko* – cultural ceremony – is very significant to this study as it engages both the points of convergence and divergence between Pentecostal Christianity and the isiZulu culture. Pentecostal Christianity initially did not understand the distinction or appreciate the need for such a distinction and, as a result, rejected all cultural and traditional beliefs and practices of amaZulu and labelled them ‘demonic’. Today, however, there is a growing awareness and appreciation among Pentecostal Christians of the need for this distinction between the ritualistic and conventionally ceremonial practices of amaZulu in order to be able to identify points of convergence and divergence between their faith and culture. As alluded to earlier in this study, Pentecostal Christianity brutally criticizes communion with the dead as result of its understanding and belief in biblical teachings in this regard, while other earlier and more liberal Christian traditions are open to the idea of communion between the living and the dead.

## **5.9 Highlights of the discussion on decolonization of mission in Africa**

While it has been established that a coincidental relationship existed between the colonial and missionary movements, it should be recognised that there are strong arguments for the position that the relationship between the two interests was, rather, collaborative and mutual. Neill (1966) argues, from this position, that Christian missions can be classed as one of the instruments of Western infiltration and control. Counter arguments, such as that of Etherington (2005) holds that the missionary movement was bigger and wider than the narrow and short-lived European imperialist movement, and Christian mission was more far reaching in its interest than the imperial and colonial movements that were focused on extorting economic resources and seizing political power.

There were fundamental differences between these two movements, despite their co-existence. The colonial movement was aggressive and dehumanizing, while the missions movement was peaceful and lifesaving in nature. According to Neill (1966), the aggression of the colonial regime took political, economic, social, and intellectual forms. Elbourne (2002) strongly asserts that the relationship between the colonial and missionary movements favoured the colonial powers more than their missionary counterparts; also, history records that some individual missionaries strongly opposed the extortion and aggression practiced by the colonial movement toward the native people.

In the Zulu Kingdom, now known as the province of KwaZulu-Natal, the colonial and missionary movements gained access during the reign of King Mpande KaSenzangakhona who, unlike his predecessor and brother Dingane, welcomed the foreign settlers into his land. According to Shamase (2015), missionaries worked hand in hand with the colonial powers to consolidate their mutual activities within the Kingdom. The arrival of missionaries to the Zulu Kingdom under the reign of King Mpande marked the beginning of an ongoing interaction and relationship between amaZulu (the Zulu people) and Christianity, which gave birth to the new community of amaKholwa (the believers) among the broader community of amaZulu. Even in this instance, the dynamic relationship between colonial activity and missionary activity is quite noticeable.

After the African continent had been partitioned against its will following the Berlin conference of 1885, colonialism was not to last long as it was unsustainable on many levels. However, its devastating effects continued. As a result, Africa, and other regions

that fell victim to the colonial system, are faced with the huge task of reclaiming their identity through the process of decolonization. The emergence of the United States and the Soviet Union as the new superpowers in the mid-twentieth century created a conducive environment for the decolonization movement around the world, and in Africa in particular. Political and economic decolonization took place in two phases between 1945 and 1960. Portugal was the last to relinquish colonial power among its peers. This great wave of political and economic decolonization affected all socio-cultural aspects of society and, in particular, religion. Colonization contributed significantly to the inability of Christianity to enculturate in Africa. The demise of colonialism thus opened the door to inculturation. As the Christian faith is decolonized, it gains appeal to decolonized Africans. This explains the exponential growth that Christianity has been experiencing since the decolonization movement of the mid-twentieth century. According to Lamin Sanneh, a West African historian and theologian, Christianity in modern Africa can be seen as a movement of affirmation and preservation of local culture, in contrast to the earlier colonial form of Christianity that was disempowering and dehumanizing to indigenous people and their cultures.

## **5.10 Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on the broad and lengthy discourse on the decolonization of mission in Africa. The engagement with this discourse highlighted certain focal areas. The problematic nature of the relationship between colonialism and Christian mission in the continent was reflected on. The background and interaction of colonial and missionary movements in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, was investigated. Attempts were also made to unpack what the decolonization of mission in the African context should entail. The chapter explored how the church in Africa has responded to the broader decolonization movement to date. The decolonization of mission in the South African context – and more specifically, in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, where the isiZulu culture originated – was given special focus. The Apostolic Faith Mission, a specific Pentecostal denomination that was identified as a movement of interest for the purposes of this study was also discussed in the context of the discourse on the decolonization of

mission. Concluding this discussion, the emerging concept and movement of African Spirituality in South Africa was considered.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 Introduction

The first chapter of this paper outlined the purpose of the study alongside the problem from which the research question emanates; this was to continue the discourse on the inculturation and the decolonization of Christianity in the African cultural context, with particular consideration for the Pentecostal experience. The chapter provided an overview of the study as it endeavoured to engage with pertinent issues arising in the broader discourse on the inculturation and the decolonization of mission in Africa – with the South African province of KwaZulu-Natal as a context of specific interest. This final chapter, then, reflects on the discourse that has been explored in this study, highlights the findings that were made in the study, and draws some conclusions. Recommendations are made for taking the discourse on the inculturation and decolonization of Christian mission in Africa forward into the future.

### 6.2 Findings

Presented in the sub-sections below is the various areas of findings and the high-level reflection on what was found in this areas of discourse.

#### ***6.2.1 Theology of mission and inculturation***

This study reviewed key literary works in the discourse on mission, inculturation, and the decolonization of Christianity in the African context. The study then narrowed to focus on the specific cultural context of the life and culture of amaZulu in KwaZulu-Natal in relation to the gospel. While the existing literature reflects a range of arguments and perspectives, the published literature does not exhaust the depth of the discourse on this topic, which is ongoing.

A review of the literature on mission necessarily includes work pertaining to the concept of *missio Dei*. Oborji (2020) defines *missio Dei* as ‘God’s mission’. He describes mission as God’s self-revelation and involvement in and with the world. Oborji (2020) distinguishes *missiones ecclesiae* from *missio Dei*, describing it as the ‘missionary

ventures of the church'. In other words, the former is God's initiative, while the latter is the Church's response to the former.

Ryan (2000) shifts the focus to the concept of inculturation in mission. A discussion of mission in Africa and other regions in the Global South would be incomplete without talking to the theology of inculturation. The globalization of the world has dramatically increased interaction between the religions, cultures, and economies of the world, a view that Ryan (2000) upholds firmly. Inculturation can therefore take place either deliberately or implicitly, because mission takes place in a cultural context, wherever this may be in the world. Ryan (2020) puts forward several components for the theology of inculturation: the theology of religions; the reformulation or re-expression of Christianity in terms of the receiving culture; challenging people to awareness of the pitfalls of their own culture and to make it increasingly liberating, in light of the gospel; how the global Christian community, the catholic church of God, can be enriched by the inculturation experiences of local churches; and lastly the practical application of inculturation in that the gospel is a call to conversion, and not intellectual acceptance of a body of truths.

### ***6.2.2 Background of Christian Missions in Africa***

Another aspect of the discourse on Christian missions in Africa, and its inculturation and decolonization, is the significance of tracing the background of Christian missions in the continent and how they expanded over different epochs of African anthropological history. There is quite an extensive range of literary work in this regard, some of it from international authors, and some from local authors. According to historians of African Christianity, the first phase of the evangelization of Africa can be traced back to 62 A.D. This was the era in which Christians in North Africa began to organize and consolidate themselves as a Christian community (Oborji, 2020). According to multiple corroborating historical records, the biblical Apostle Mark was the pioneer of missionary expansion to Africa. This implies that the African Church originated during the first generation of the Christian Church. Thus, mission in Africa is as old as Christianity itself.

Despite the work done by the Apostolic Fathers to establish the Church in the northern region of Africa, the North African church almost saw its complete demise around the seventh to eighth centuries as a result of the numerous challenges it experienced. Among

these challenges were internal doctrinal conflicts and external forces such as the rise of the Islamic faith in the region. The lack of inculturation theology was found to be one of the key factors in the downfall of the early North African church.

On the southwest African coast and in South Africa, Christian missions arrived at the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth century through the Protestant movement, which marked the third wave of the evangelization of the continent. Despite the failed attempts of the earlier Christian missions in Africa, history records that by the late nineteenth century most countries in Africa had been at least touched by a wave of evangelization in one form or another.

The expansion of Christianity in Africa occurred in different phases which were ushered-in by four different waves of evangelization. Despite some difficulties experienced from antiquity to modernity, Christianity has established a solid footing on the continent, with Africans representing a significant percentage shares of the world's Christian population. Below is an outline of the four ways of evangelization of Africa, which have been discussed at length in earlier chapters of the study:

- Wave 1- Early Christianity in North Africa and Ethiopia (62 -700 A.D.);
- Wave 2- Portuguese Catholicism (1500-1800 A.D.);
- Wave 3-The Evangelical Era (Modern Christianity) (1792-1992 A.D.)
- Wave 4- Indigenous Movements, Pentecostalism (Post-modern Christianity) (1960s to current)

### ***6.2.3 Christian Missions and Coloniality in Africa***

With respect to indigenous cultures and how they were affected by colonial and missionary activities, it is evident that after a formal partnership had eventually been established between these two distinct movements, missionaries had a truer understanding of the dynamic character of ethnic cultures than that of their colonial counterparts. This clearly depicts a picture of marriage of convenience between the two movements, rather than an honest and sincere partnership. The decolonization movement of the twentieth century and its impact on mission activity in the then colonized

territories exposed the interdependency that, with time, had come to exist between colonial and missionary movements. The Berlin Conference in the nineteenth century changed the course of history for Christian missions in Africa, when a formal partnership between colonial and missionary movements was established after several attempts, having faced resistance from some prominent leaders of the missionary movement.

#### ***6.2.4 Christian Missions in South Africa***

Pertaining to the arrival and expansion of mission in South Africa, when Europeans first arrived in South Africa, they found native societies of three distinct ethnicities occupying the country south of the Zambezi River. The first Europeans to establish themselves on South African soil were not, as popularly supposed, the Dutch, but the Portuguese. As a result, the Catholic missionary movement was the first to establish itself in South Africa and was later supported by the Portuguese government and the Roman Catholic Church. Formal evangelization of South Africa was witnessed around the mid-sixteenth century, long before the Berlin Conference convened. Despite the fact that evangelization of South Africa had commenced around the mid-sixteenth century, much fruit could not be reaped from that wave of evangelization due to the quality of evangelization work conducted.

#### ***6.2.5 Decolonization of mission in Africa***

Although colonization was mainly political, it eventually affected all aspects of African identity, including how Africans received and interpreted the gospel. Due to colonization, Christianity arrived in Western packaging and, as a result, it became difficult to distinguish between Christianization and Westernization, a struggle that still persists even to this current generation. Inculturation, therefore, is one of the many ways in which Christianity in Africa can be decolonized and Christians in Africa can rediscover their African-Christian identity. African theologians are faced with a huge task of not only having to decolonize the context, but also the gospel itself. Sakupapa (2020) distinguishes between the Christianization of African religions and the Africanization of Christian mission experience. This differentiation is quite critical to ensure that the focus of the theology of inculturation is well understood and does not change form in the course of interpretation and in the broader discourse on inculturation and decolonization of African Christianity.

### **6.2.6 Mission and Definition of Africa**

The study's reflection on the historical background of Christian mission in Africa raised the dilemma of how to define Africa. This is not just a geographic debate but an ideological one. Most people define Africa as 'Black Africa', which excludes the northern parts of the continent; also Africa south of the Limpopo River often gets excluded in the "black Africa" definition. Despite this ideological disjuncture about what Africa is, this study and found that mission history in Africa has always developed alongside the broader African history.

### **6.2.7 Indigenization of the gospel in Africa**

The fourth wave, which ushered in the post-independence phase is characterized by the indigenization of the gospel. Indigenization has produced a multi-faceted and very complex form of Christianity. According to Ndlovu (2016), African Christianity is coloured predominantly by indigenous world views, beliefs values and traditions. This development in African Christianity, has been received differently in different Church communities, with two main camps: those who embrace indigenization as a positive development, and those who utterly reject it as an attack to the truth of the gospel.

### **6.2.8 Christian mission and inculturation in KwaZulu-Natal**

In KwaZulu-Natal, formal missionary work was begun by the German-Lutheran missionaries in Hermannsburg area in 1854. This followed the spread of missionary work after the earlier establishments by the Portuguese-Catholic missionaries, the Dutch-Reformers, and then the German-Moravians, which did not take-off very successfully. Missionary seeds in the province of KwaZulu-Natal had already been planted and cultivated by the translation of the Holy Bible into *isiZulu* in 1837. The adoption of indigenous language for in mission proved to be an effective driver of inculturation theology.

Inculturation always takes place within a cultural context, and the context could either be enabling or disabling to this process of inculturation. For Christianity to effectively enculturate, it requires broad understanding of the receiving culture, which in this case is

*isiZulu*. In this paper we have taken an approach that distinguishes between the spiritual aspects and the social aspects of culture. We have referred to the spiritual aspects as religious, while on the other hand we have referred to the social aspects as the people's way of life, also as moral values.

Despite the great work done by earlier missionaries in terms of local language integration into Mission, missionaries failed to enculturate effectively with regards to the traditional practices of the culture of amaZulu; for example, those who converted into the faith were forced to put away their traditional attires and were introduced to Western attire in the name of Christianity. This point again reflects on the earlier finding that there was lack of distinguishing between Westernization and Christianization in the course of earlier evangelization of Africans. Despite some failures and shortcomings on the part of missionaries in terms of inculturation, *amakholwa*, who were the actual converts into Christianity, played a significant role in the inculturation of Christianity within the context of *isiZulu*. A new form of Christianity was forged by *amakholwa* which still had to live side by side with *amabhinca*, and still feel a sense of being part of the broader community of amaZulu. In this study, *amakholwa* have shone some light on the significance of the role of the recipients of Christianity in the effective inculturation of the gospel.

### **6.2.9 Pentecostalism and inculturation in KwaZulu-Natal**

We have highlighted some points of convergence and also some areas of divergence between the two lifestyles – *isiZulu* and Christianity – especially from the perspective of Pentecostalism, an extremely critical form Christian mission than earlier Christian traditions. We have observed that *ukuhlola and ukuthetha idlozi*, which refers to consulting with ancestral spirits and praying for guidance and blessings for any special occasion or critical life events and seeking luck and fortune for an individual or a family, is the main point of divergence between Pentecostalism and *isiZulu*. This is one area of great conflict and disagreements between *isiZulu* culture and Pentecostal Christianity. Other Christian traditions, such as Independent Traditional Christian Churches, Mainline Protestants and Catholics seem to have integrated this aspect of the culture into their Christian spirituality in some way, although not fully or officially so.

Despite the divergences observed on spiritual aspects of these two identities, social values remain as the point of convergence and area of common interest. In Both Christianity, in all its varying traditions, and in isiZulu, there is strong emphasis on values of kindness, compassion, respect and love for self and others (which is popularly known as love of neighbour in Biblical terms). In isiZulu, these social values are commonly referred to as *Ubuntu*. The social values and norms of isiZulu are similar to those of Christianity, which is one dimension of interaction between the two identities that made the inculturation possible despite the other dimensions of interaction where there is emphasis of divergence. This simply shows that Christianity and isiZulu culture can co-exist harmoniously at a social dimension, however, they are not able to or at least yet have not been able to harmonize their traditional spiritual practices and doctrines. Despite this significant difference in the spiritualities of the two identities, they both recognize the significance of rituals in expressing and exercising their spiritual beliefs and communicating and connecting with the transcendent and the Divine.

#### ***6.2.10 Decolonization of Christianity and Africa***

Colonization of Africa was formally institutionalised after the African continent had been partitioned against its will at the Berlin Conference of 1885. Colonialism could not last long due it being unsustainable in nature. However, its devastating effects would last for centuries thereafter. Africa, and other regions in the Global South are now faced with a huge task of reclaiming their identity through the process of decolonization. The decolonization movement took foot more effectively following the emergence of the United States and the Soviet Union as the new superpowers in the mid-twentieth century. The political and economic decolonization took place in two phases between 1945 and 1960. Portugal was the last to relinquish colonial power among its peers. The decolonization of Christianity movement in former colonies was powered by the socio-political decolonization wave that had already swept across the world. Colonization had a great impact on the inability of Christianity to enculturate in Africa. Therefore, the demise of colonialism would surely open a doorway for inculturation. The more Christianity became decolonized, the more it became appealing to decolonized generations of Africans, which explains the exponential growth that Christianity has been experiencing

since the decolonization movement of the Mid-twentieth Century to date. As a result, Christianity in modern Africa can be seen as a movement of affirmation and preservation of local culture, rather than the earlier colonial form of Christianity that was disempowering and dehumanizing to indigenous people and their cultures.

## **6.3 Recommendations**

### ***6.3.1 Pillars of Mission activity and inculturation***

Some critical recommendations have been identified from this study, which could make a significant contribution to the practice of mission theology in African. Some of these provide direction for key topics for scholarly discourse. Kritzinger (1988) recommends that, in the discourse of inculturation and decolonization, emphasis should be put on the aspects of evangelising, socio-economic service, and church fellowship and liturgy. Although I do concur with the recommendations from Kritzinger, I am however, of the view that the inverse is actually more required. The conversation on evangelism; socio-economic service; and church fellowship and liturgy should put emphasis on inculturation. It is inculturation that seems to be lacking in the discourse on these above-mentioned pillars of church mission.

### ***6.3.2 Critical component of the theology of inculturation***

Ryan (2020) suggests five components that make up the theology of inculturation. Among these components, two actually recommend courses of action that mission leaders could take into account:

- challenging people to become aware of the continuing inadequacies of their own culture and to make it increasingly liberating, in light of the gospel; and
- how the global Christian community, the catholic church of God, can be enriched by the inculturation experiences of local churches.

The later recommendation by Ryan suggests that the real impact of inculturation is found at the local church level, rather than at the macro church level, a reality that is often ignored in this discourse.

According to Baur (1994), the Evangelical Era was the most impactful in the history of the Christianization of Africa. However, this great historical heritage of Christian mission tends to get conflated with the history of colonialism. It is therefore recommended that Christian theologians pay careful attention to this reality and undertaking the task of distinguishing the work of missions from colonial activity during this era.

### ***6.3.3 Religion, Spirituality and Culture***

More often the concepts of religion, spirituality and of culture get conflated and easily get intertwined. It is my considered view that a lot of confusion in the inculturation and decoloniality conversation emanates from lack of clear distinction between these concepts, which are interconnected in some way, however, should be clearly distinguished if a fruitful conversation on inculturation is to be held.

With respect to the inculturation of Christianity, there is great need to distinguish clearly between the spiritual and ritualistic elements, and the socio and moral values aspects of culture. This becomes crucial in the identification of points of convergence and points of divergence between Christianity and African culture.

Religion, and in particular Christianity, and culture evolves. It is therefore always crucial to consider the background of things before tackling current and futuristic aspects of the interaction between the two entities.

### ***6.3.4 Decolonization of Christianity***

Christian mission and the colonial movement have mostly been perceived by many as collaborative and even palatable. It is recommended, therefore, for mission leaders to clearly understand and take cognisance of this unfortunate background and preconceived perception in their mission endeavours. It is recommended for mission leader to also clearly distinguish between Westernisation and Christianization in order to not perpetuate the already existing assumption that Christian mission is collaborative partner with the colonial movement.

## **6.4 Further Research**

The discourse on inculturation and the decolonization of mission in Africa continues and further scholarly contributions would enhance the discussion. There is an important opportunity for further research and intellectual contribution in the study of the co-existence of Christianity – especially Pentecostalism – with African indigenous cultures, in both their religio-spiritual and socio-ethical dimensions. Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity is growing exponentially in Africa – while the African Spirituality movement is growing significantly too. There is on-going debate in this regard on both mainstream and social media platforms.

The growing trends of *ukuthwasa*, especially among celebrities, and the counter trend of Christian conversions marked by public performance of the sacrament of baptism, have been quite topical on social media platforms recently. These developments all point the academic community to a ripe opportunity for further investigation into the co-existence of the lifestyles of African spirituality and Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity. Very crucial in this expedition is the need to redefine what African culture is, especially in the South African context. This is in view the African culture being so diverse and broad. Globalization and migration of people within the African continent and within the globe has also added other dynamics that may have not been existent previously in this regard.

In this study, aspects of African spirituality and its prevalence in the entertainment industry would be enriched if conducted in the province of Gauteng, which is the hub of the entertainment industry in South Africa and also is made up of diverse ethnic groups and cultural groups that come from all of South Africa's provinces.

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