1. Introduction

"Joyfulness" as a theme does not feature regularly in missiological or ecumenical circles. Moreover, it is often a neglected issue in missiological or theological discourses, whether on the Pentecostals, or similar Christian enthusiasms across the world. This is particularly true of church movements in Africa generally described as African Independent Churches.

With reference to the conference's theme: "New World - New Creation: Mission in Power and Faith," the focus on "joyfulness" as a feature in mission and worship is quite relevant and insightful as well. Perceiving "joyfulness" as a Christian disposition, one assumes the fact that the Christian confidence, assurance and/or satisfaction necessary for a dynamic Christian living and which, in effect, will produce newness in or out of a decadent world (Gn 1:1,2) should be present in a substantial proportion as change-agents.

In this way, the choice of AICs as the context in which to illustrate the fact that God's Spirit in man can transmute life and transmit the new life across the world of men and things is motivated by several factors. First is the thinking that informed the theme of this Conference and that of Workshop VII: "Popular Religiosity and the Faith of the People - New Religious People's Movements." Second is the fact of my intimacy with and research interest in one of the AICs from Nigeria. Third is that this paper is a response to a specific request from the organizers of this Workshop.

Apparently, some of the intriguing things about the AICs in general are their recency vis-à-vis their biblical roots, prevalence, variety, self-assertiveness, vibrancy, exuberance and dynamism.

Yet, Africa's ICs seem queer because of the appearance of both the old and the new within its form of Christianity. It is almost the case of the "new wine" in the "old wine-skin," invariably resulting in an encounter between conservation and creativity. While the end product of such an encounter could be originality, the risks attached to it due...
to the charges and dangers of syncretism are far too great. Eventually, some of these churches have been badly entangled, some have totally succumbed. Others, remaining puritan, continue to pose a serious challenge to what they consider a moribund Christianity.⁸

Of course, Africa and Africans have a lot to contribute to Christianity for its enrichment, enlivenment and continued relevance both for their own advantage and for the rest of the world, as others before them have done. Furthermore, Africa and Africans have every legitimate right to endow Christianity with the best in their cherished traditions, which explain something fundamental about the nature of the Supreme Being, the universe and also man's relational obligations. Indeed, an African experimentation with Christianity, given such a diverse background, would open areas of further and intense explorations. This could enrich African interpretation and contextualization of the Christian message and ensure that they are authentic, relevant and affective.⁹

Pursuant of this aim, one can speak of the legacies and legitimacy of African Christianity. For instance, most of the AICs trace their roots and mandate to the bible, some terminating with the Old Testament,¹⁰ while for most others this extends to the New Testament.¹¹ Consequently, according to Professor John Mbiti: "the independent church movement is a channel of Christian creativity in the African setting, an African opportunity to mess up Christianity ... to do with Christianity as they wish ...,"¹² however in a positive and constructive manner.


2. A Resume of AICs' Evolution¹³

2.1. Perccussors

The emphasis of this paper is on the second category of AICs which relate to Spirit, Spirit-led, spiritual, prophet faith-healing or revival movements that have engulfed Africa south of the Sahara in recent times.