

## *Christianity in the African Context*

### **The Report of the International Theological Dialogue between the Organisation of African Instituted Churches and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (1998-2002)**

Adopted in Mbagathi, near Nairobi, Kenya, 9-14 February 2002

#### **I INTRODUCTION**

##### **Dialogue between two Christian families**

1. This document is the record of a significant breakthrough in ecumenical dialogue. It is a report of a series of three meetings between the Reformed churches, represented by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), Geneva, and the African Independent or Instituted Churches (AICs), represented by the Organisation of African Instituted Churches, Nairobi. To our knowledge, it is the first time the African Independent Churches have been involved in a dialogue with another Christian world communion. During this process, members of churches that separated from churches of the Reformed family within living memory have been meeting with representatives of the churches from which they separated.

##### **The Beginnings of the Church in Africa**

2. According to tradition, the history of the church in Africa began with the preaching of the gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch, and with the arrival of the Evangelist St. Mark in Alexandria in AD 42. St. Mark was the founder of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt, which formally separated from the other churches at the time of the Council of Chalcedon, and has retained many of its traditions and original liturgy until the present day. The Copts took the gospel to the Nubians and Ethiopians, and beyond Africa, as far as Ireland. In other parts of North Africa, the Christian faith was planted and nourished by the Latin church. After the Muslim conquests of the 7<sup>th</sup> Century, when much of the North African church was destroyed, and the Coptic Church itself fell under hegemony of Muslim overlords, the Christian faith endured on the continent mainly in the Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodox Churches. The next significant and enduring missionary expansion of the church was brought about by European and North American Protestant and Catholic missionaries of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. From the 1870s onwards, this missionary expansion became inextricably entwined with European colonial expansion

and the ‘Scramble for Africa’. Thus, the gospel presented by European missionaries was not only heavily influenced by European culture (individualistic, materialist and capitalist) but became for the African convert a way of entry into the new colonial systems with their exploitative economies and racist assumptions. It was in this frequently highly oppressive context that the African Independent Church movement was born.

### **African Independent Churches - a new Christian phenomenon**

3. AICs are known by various names, of which African independent and African instituted churches are the most common. The term “instituted” was first used in the title of OAIC simply to obtain Kenyan government approval for its registration. Its use did not mean that AICs wanted to lose the older term “independent”, and both terms are generally acceptable to the constituency.
4. Although AICs are now very widely spread in sub-Saharan Africa, originally they were focused in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Kenya, the Congo basin, Nigeria, and along the West African coast between Côte d’Ivoire and Cameroon. Three factors led to the creation of a new form of Christian faith in these areas:
  - the intensity of cultural conflict between the European colonisers and their associated missions, and the indigenous cultures;
  - the degree of political and economic oppression, in East and Southern Africa resulting in the seizure of lands and the displacement of African peoples;
  - the extent of christianization. AICs did not usually emerge until people had the Bible in their own mother tongues, and were able to challenge or ‘correct’ mission church interpretations of the Scriptures.

Thus AICs were born out of prophetic attempts by African peoples to interpret their oppressive situations, find meaning, to create space for themselves, and often to fight for freedom.

5. From a sociological perspective, AICs can be seen as examples of the new religious movements (NRMs) which arose out of the impact of European culture and Christianity upon African cultures that were less powerful politically, militarily, and economically. AICs stand at one end of a spectrum of NRMs which ranges from the movements very close to the African religious heritage at one end to fully Christian churches at the other. Other NRMs use the name “church” but are less than fully Christians, and may not even wish to be called Christian. Theologically, however, the term New Religious Movement does not do justice to the AICs. The OAIC constitution restricts membership to:

*Any African founded church which believes in Jesus Christ as Saviour, the Holy Trinity (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as one God) and Christian Doctrine as founded in the Holy Bible (Old Testament and New Testament).*

6. OAIC groups its members into three categories:
  - *Nationalist churches* (also known as Ethiopian and African Churches). These are churches that seceded from the mission churches during the colonial era (beginning in 1844 in South Africa and in 1891 in Nigeria) over issues of leadership and a desire that Africans should control the Church and its teachings on cultural practices. They often saw the fight against colonialism as one of the legitimate goals of the church, and were influenced by the Marcus Garvey movement, which sought to unite Africans of the continent and of the diaspora to work for the liberation of Africa and the dignity of African peoples. In liturgy and doctrine nationalist churches have retained much from the Western or historical churches. They often looked to Ethiopia as a symbol of African resistance to and independence from colonialism, and referred to Ps. 68.31 as a prophecy for themselves.

- *Spiritual churches* (also known as Zionist, Apostolic, and Aladura Churches). These churches (dating from 1910 onwards in Southern Africa, and 1920 onwards in West and Eastern Africa) are sometimes referred to as “prophet-healing” churches, because of the centrality of the charismatic gifts in their worship and ministry (prophecy, interpretation of dreams, healing, and prayer for protections against evil). Their liturgies are more informal, and there is greater use of forms borrowed from African tradition. Especially in Southern Africa, these churches look to Zion, as the symbol of a heaven.
- *African Pentecostal churches*. These are African founded Pentecostal style churches that have arisen since the mid-1960s. Though the stimulus to their foundation has frequently been the evangelistic missions and training conventions associated with Western Pentecostals (and as a result, there is some dispute whether these churches are fully African), a number of them (those that give a positive value to African culture) have found a home in OAIC. There are tensions between these churches and the spiritual churches which relate more to styles of worship than to essential differences over doctrine.

### **The Organisation of African Instituted Churches**

7. The Organisation of African Instituted Churches was begun in Cairo in 1978, as a loose association of AICs, in order to express and to address their needs and concerns, among which theological education was the most urgent. At its 2<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly in Nairobi in 1982, a constitution was drawn up and the international headquarters set up in Nairobi. The 3<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly, which took place in Limuru in August 1997, emphasised the empowerment of the seven OAIC regions. These are: Eastern Africa, Southern Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Francophone West Africa, Anglophone West Africa, and Madagascar. Some of these regions are composed of national chapters. The regions send three delegates to the General Assembly, and their regional chairpersons form the OAIC Executive Committee, which appoints the General Secretary, and through him oversees the running of the programmes. These programmes currently are: Theological Education by Extension, Programme for Participatory Development, Women’s Department, Research and Communication, and HIV/AIDS.
8. The total AIC constituency has been conservatively estimated at 60 million, and of this number some 15–20 million people are members of OAIC affiliated churches.

### **The Reformed Churches**

9. The Reformed family is the portion of Christian churches that recognise their most immediate origins primarily in the Swiss wing of the Reformation movement that culminated in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Reformed churches share a set of doctrinal emphases - such as the Sovereignty of God, the Lordship of Christ in the Church and the world and the affirmation of the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as authority in matters of faith and Church discipline - as well as church orders known as Presbyterian (from the Greek word for “elder”) or Congregational. There are more than 750 Christian churches that recognise themselves as part of the Reformed family. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) in its current form is the result of the merger in 1970 between the World Presbyterian Alliance (founded in 1875) and the International Congregational Council (founded in 1891). The World Alliance of Reformed Churches represents some 75 million Reformed Christians, gathered in 218 churches in 107 countries.
10. Most African Reformed Churches began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century missionary activities mainly from Western Europe. The only community that pre-dates this is the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa which came with the migratory wave from the Netherlands a couple of centuries earlier. They then began

spreading through Southern Africa. Reformed Churches (Presbyterian, Reformed, Congregational, Evangelical and United) can be found all over Africa (including Egypt). However, most of them are found in Sub-Saharan Africa. Many of the nineteenth century missionaries did not understand African culture and therefore condemned most elements of African culture as pagan – to be discarded. One needs to recall the fact that the 19<sup>th</sup> century was also the time when colonisation was taking place and a good number of the missionary bodies enjoyed the protection of the colonial powers. Therefore, many indigenous Africans identified the missionaries with the colonial powers. One needs to credit these missionaries with a number of things. They brought with them the gospel, schools, hospitals and agricultural innovations. Many of them sacrificed their lives for the sake of the gospel. Today, the Reformed Churches in Africa are increasingly living out the gospel within their cultural contexts and many of them are at the forefront of prophetic action in their nations.

### **Planning of the dialogue**

11. At a preparatory meeting held at the Methodist Guest House in Nairobi from 2-3 June 1998, the two families of churches defined the dialogue themes. These were:

*Unity* – the meeting expressed an overriding concern for the lack of unity on the African continent, which threatens the survival of its peoples. These divisions are ethnic, denominational (with a proliferating number of new churches), and political, and had sometimes led to war and genocide. It was felt that in handling this issue, the theme of *reconciliation* would be more positive and productive.

*Gospel and culture* – Both Reformed churches and AICs are struggling to define their identity as Christians in Africa, both in relation to ‘culture’ narrowly defined, and also in relation to the global, and socio-political contexts in which our churches are set, and to which we are called to proclaim the gospel.

*Women* – The role of women in the church and church ministries is of great concern to both families of churches.

12. It was decided that the process could best be focused and guided under the overall theme of *Christianity in the African Context*, and then broken down into three sub-headings, each of which would form the focus for a dialogue meeting:

*African Christian Identity*

*Reconciling identities – learning from and challenging each other*

*Towards our common witness.*

### **The Nature of the Process**

13. Given the lack of formally articulated and published theologies among the AICs, the following tasks emerged as necessary if the dialogue was to succeed:

- Participants were challenged to develop a dialogue process concentrating initially on building trust, relationships and mutual respect as the necessary prerequisites for eliciting AIC and Reformed perceptions and accounts of their practices and beliefs;
- Participants were faced with bridging the gap between formal presentations of theology (a Reformed strength) and receiving testimony of firsthand experiences of faith, worship and life (the chief theological resource of the AICs);
- Participants uncovered the shared African roots of much grassroots Christian faith and practice among both Reformed and AIC participants, and were challenged to value these sources for theologising appropriately, but not uncritically.

## I AFRICAN CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

14. During the first meeting in Kigali (13-19 October 1999), during which we were hosted by the Presbyterian Church of Rwanda, agreement on the practical challenges the African church faces formed the most significant part of our search for a common African Christian identity. AIC and Reformed participants reached substantial agreement on the crisis facing the African continent and her people, and the way in which the Church was called to respond. As a prelude to this, a simple agreement was reached on our common faith. Both these agreements are summarised in

### **The Kigali Statement**

#### *Affirmations*

15. We have come together from two Christian families, the Reformed Churches and the African Instituted Churches, and rejoice in the spirit of unity, knowing that we share a common ministry. We meet in Kigali, Rwanda, and have been deeply moved by accounts of the 1994 killings in this nation and by our visits to some of the sites of genocide. We have been much encouraged by our Rwandan brothers and sisters as they seek reconciliation and the reconstruction of their country. Their example has been an inspiration to us as we ourselves seek to understand each other better and to overcome our own suspicions and spirit of disunity. We lament our past histories of division and hatred and resolve to continue to meet together in dialogue, seeking opportunities and means of common action.

16. We affirm a common faith

- in the Triune God,
- in the lordship of Jesus Christ as God incarnate and crucified, who identifies with us in our suffering,
- in the Holy Spirit and his transforming power in our lives.

17. We affirm that the Holy Scriptures are for both of our families a yardstick for Christian faith and life, while recognising that there may be differences in our interpretations. We affirm that African Christians have an identity that is both African and Christian, and that our faith calls us to witness and act in the social and political realities of our world. As representatives of the world church, and as leaders of churches in Africa, we confess the complicity of ourselves and our churches in the economic and political injustices that have impoverished and dis-empowered the people of this continent. We acknowledge that we have failed to speak prophetically when called to do so, and that we have shown a blatant disregard for the environment.

#### *Challenges and actions*

18. We have shared together our deep concerns about the present tragic situation of Africa, to which the following factors have contributed. We have agreed to do all we can as church leaders to assist our people to reconstruct our continent, and are committed to the following actions for ourselves, our churches, and our people.

19. We are distressed by division and disunity in the church and society. We will use our pulpits and our churches to promote greater tolerance and understanding of different groups and persuasions, and to encourage a spirit of openness that will enable people to express themselves and accommodate diversity. As part of this process we will take steps to initiate dialogue at the local level between our two church families. We acknowledge a need to return to African models of reconciliation and of

establishing and maintaining unity. As church members and leaders, we need to engage actively with society and its needs and problems in order to enable people to identify, prioritise, and find solutions to their own needs, and not just those of our churches.

20. For centuries the human and material resources of our continent have been exploited by others. Knowing that it is this exploitation that has increased poverty and unemployment in Africa, we have a duty to educate the members of our churches and local communities on the nature of the global and local processes involved. We will work with other churches and agencies to reduce our dependency on foreign models and solutions for these problems. In the face of widespread corruption and lack of accountability, we need to strengthen governance in our nations and institutions. We will therefore educate our people so as to form a strong and well-informed civil society. We will act to provide more information to the members of our churches, and train them to use this information in order to strengthen governance in our churches as well as in society. We will conduct programmes for sensitising church and community members, through such means as the distribution of literature and through national and local forums, with the aim of empowering people to take initiatives themselves and to participate more actively in civil society.
21. We acknowledge that our own churches do not adequately model the democratic structures we are urging on the state. This is true of 'family churches' among the AICs as well as of the more bureaucratic structures of the Reformed churches. We will be more courageous in confronting issues of corruption and misuse of power in government. The process of encouraging participation will also require some of us to change our attitudes as leaders, and to reduce our use of Scripture or the Holy Spirit to enforce our decisions upon others. We will work to reduce attitudes and habits of dependency among our church members.
22. The Western models of development we are using in Africa are not sustainable. As a result, our environment has been exploited, spoilt and degraded, and our own societies have become polarised between rich and poor. We have accepted the dumping of toxic wastes. We will educate our churches and communities to take responsibility for protecting and improving the environment. This is something every member can share in, through such grassroots activities as tree-planting and the cleaning up of our cities and villages.
23. As Christians we recognise the God-given dignity of human beings and the sacredness of life. In this regard, therefore, we oppose military regimes whose power is based on violence rather than the will of the people expressed through the ballot box. Working with the media, we will act to expose arms dealers and their customers, and we will co-operate with our partners in the North to advocate a shift from arms production to socially beneficial industries. We will continue to advocate against the ready supply of illegal arms in our countries, and the lack of discipline and professionalism in our security forces, while recognising that these problems are intimately related to our declining economies and increasing poverty. We will also encourage our governments and especially our own churches to continue to show hospitality to refugees, giving thanks for the self-sacrificing generosity in this area of many of our local congregations.
24. We will work to strengthen democratic values and institutions, and to research and develop models of democracy appropriate to African society, which can enable people of all ethnic groups and political and religious persuasions to participate in decision-making at all levels of church and state. We recognise that this will require a change in our own methods of working, away from concentration on seminars for leaders towards more exchange visits, in order to build relationships between people and communities across Africa, and to expose our members to other cultures and ways of working together.

25. We commit ourselves to promote the full participation of women at all levels in our church structures, and to work to expose oppressive tendencies and traditions, so that our churches can become exemplary models for the empowerment of women in the wider society.
26. Children are both the present and the future of our churches and societies. Yet they are exploited as child labour, as child soldiers, and as child prostitutes. Others are heads of families at a very young age or are forced to live and sleep on the streets. For their protection and better upbringing, we commit our churches to the task of sensitising our members and communities about HIV/AIDS, unemployment, landlessness, Structural Adjustment Programmes and other issues which affect the lives of our children. We will advocate against all those practices which put children at risk, and we will train our own members in responsible parenthood.
27. Social forces in contemporary Africa threaten to destroy family life. We commit our churches to the promotion of family life education programmes. Education about changing attitudes to the care of the old, sensitisation to HIV/AIDS, and education on the home care and support of People With Aids, and on the importance of chastity before marriage and faithfulness in marriage should all be priorities in such programmes.
28. Extreme poverty contributes to rising levels of drug abuse and drug trafficking. This is true not only of the hard drugs but also of cannabis and of alcohol, in which the use of poisonous additives is of particular concern in some of our countries. As church leaders we will act to expose the trade, create awareness of the dangers of addiction, and support efforts to counteract its spread.
29. The process of globalization and the speeding up of communications affect our continent in various ways. Because globalization is driven by market forces and is largely directed by Transnational Corporations which are beyond the control of national states, it threatens to destroy local values, traditions, and self-reliance. This can be seen most clearly in the impact of the mass media on our people. To counter its ill-effects we need as church leaders to strengthen our sense of identity, and to encourage people to be proud of their roots in church and community. Furthermore, we need to sensitise our members and those of our communities to globalization and its effects, so that people can participate in the process, becoming agents of change themselves and not simply victims. Because globalization benefits those who have access to global networks, and is dependent on expensive technology, it threatens to marginalize the poor of Africa even further. Our churches must engage in research, and in networking with sympathetic partners in order to be effective advocates against the ill-effects of globalization, and to prevent our people from being overwhelmed by processes which may otherwise be beyond their understanding or control.
30. In both our church families, we acknowledge a deficit in the area of contextualized theology. This deficit has contributed to the deep identity crisis felt by many of us as African Christians. The Reformed churches have much to learn here from the inculturation of the gospel in the AICs, but both our church families lack well-articulated and contextualized theologies for contemporary Africa. We will therefore work to encourage a writing culture in our churches, and to promote further reflection on the encounter between gospel and culture. An aspect of this encounter is the issue of polygamous marriages. We are agreed that the Christian ideal of marriage is faithful monogamy, but we recognise that some African churches need time to work out the theological and pastoral implications of this principle. We believe that churches should not be discriminated against on this and other pastoral issues which their leaders are seeking to handle with sensitivity among their members.
31. We are concerned about the spread of false teachings on our continent (including the so-called 'prosperity gospel'), many of them coming from abroad. Our church members have become consumers of many different theologies which are not relevant to African realities. These have contributed to

divisions in our churches, and to theological confusion. To counter this challenge, we commit our churches to encourage more study and teaching of the bible, and to the promotion of theological education programmes which can reach all levels of church membership.

32. We acknowledge that our churches have often failed to obey the Great Commission, and have been preoccupied with maintaining already existing churches in areas where the gospel took root long ago. We commit ourselves to reach out to where the gospel has not yet been heard, and where churches have not yet been planted.

33. Many of our churches lack a strong financial base. As church leaders, we are called to increase the participation of our members in church activities, so that they become 'owners' rather than 'followers'. We will encourage investment in church-owned income generating projects. We will promote stronger biblical teaching on giving, stewardship, and accountability in our churches. We acknowledge that our behaviour and practice as leaders in this area has not always been above reproach, and we commit ourselves to greater transparency, integrity, and accountability.

34. *Concrete actions:*

1. We have agreed to meet together again in 2000 at a venue to be arranged by the OAIC in consultation with the WARC.
2. We will distribute this statement to the member churches in Africa of our respective constituencies.
3. We will encourage our member churches to engage in dialogue and in work together at the local level, with feedback to our respective organisations.
4. We will invite representatives of our partners in this dialogue to attend significant meetings of our organisations and churches on the African continent.

35. *We encourage our member churches in Africa to engage in local dialogue and action arising from this statement, and invite them to respond with comments, suggestions, and reports to the Department of Theology of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, P.O. Box 2100, 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland or to the General Secretary of the Organisation of African Instituted Churches, P.O. Box 21736, Nairobi, Kenya.*

#### **OAIC Representatives**

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#### **WARC Representatives**

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Rev. Dr Peter **Bisem**

Rev. Dr Gregg **Mast**

Rev. Muthoni Ruth **Ngaari**

Rev. Dr Setri **Nyomi**

Ms Margaret **Owen**



## II RECONCILING IDENTITIES

36. Participants in the second dialogue session were hosted by the Eternal Sacred Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim, and by its sister churches in OAIC Nigeria. In this meeting, held in Lagos, Nigeria, 4-7 March 2001, they sought to address themselves to the two issues of the place and ministry of the Holy Spirit, and the role of education (both secular and theological) in the two families of churches. These were approached from the standpoint of the theme of the meeting, *Reconciling Identities*, which formed the subject of the two introductory papers from both families. The summary of the Lagos meeting appears in the following document:

### **The Lagos Communiqué**

#### *Addressing our common problems*

37. We, the representatives of two Christian families, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Organisation of African Instituted Churches (OAIC), have met together in Lagos, Nigeria, as the guests of OAIC Nigeria. Our theme has been *Reconciling identities: learning from and challenging each other (the prophetic role of the church, the free movement of the Holy Spirit)*.

38. We have heard from our Nigerian hosts the challenges they face as Christians as *sharia* law is enforced in certain states in this country, and we affirm a common desire to work towards relations with our Muslim brothers and sisters that will permit the full practice of both faiths. In this connection, we are agreed that killing people in the name of God is foreign to African tradition and can never be justified.

39. Building on our previous meetings in Nairobi, Kenya in 1998, and Kigali, Rwanda, in 1999, we celebrate our continuing growth towards mutual understanding and unity in the Christian faith, and our common desire to address the continuing crisis on our continent. In this connection, we affirm the ***Kigali Statement*** of 1999 as presenting an analysis that continues to be relevant of the problems and challenges facing Africa. We commend it again to our member churches, together with its recommendations for action. We note with regret the lack of response to the statement, and commit ourselves to ensure its wider circulation among our respective constituencies.

#### *Moving towards reconciliation of our identities*

40. In this meeting in Lagos we have further identified beliefs and standpoints that we share in common:
- ◆ Both our families are committed to practising the Christian faith in its Trinitarian fullness, although with different emphases.
  - ◆ Our continent has a profound spirituality and a belief in mysticism that is deeply rooted in our traditional cultures, and we share a commitment to developing and practising a Christian faith that addresses these spiritual realities. We acknowledge the long experience of the African Instituted Churches (AICs), and the increasing involvement of the Reformed Churches, in this ministry. In the difficult matter of discerning the spirits, we affirm two principles common to our families: that we test the spirits against the word of scripture, and that we do so in the context of the praying community (the local and universal church).
  - ◆ Our families show a common concern for providing appropriate education at all levels and for all members of our churches, an education that must have its roots in African culture and values. With regard to training our ministers and others who serve the church, we recognise the importance of:

- providing theological education in an ecumenical context
  - providing a theological education that will enable our ministers and workers to engage with social issues of the day, for example, with issues of governance and HIV/AIDS
- To this end, we commit ourselves to sharing resources, financial, intellectual, and spiritual.
- ◆ We celebrate the diversity of our peoples as God-given, and we recognise the right of every person to self-respect and human dignity. For this reason we affirm again the necessity of encouraging full participation in decision-making in church and society as we seek to empower our peoples to address the crises that surround them on this continent. As we engage with the fullness of African diversity we do so from an understanding of our identity as open and inclusive. We draw from the model of the incarnation a willingness to take risks in order to achieve a new identity characterised by integration and the harmonisation of differences. It is in this spirit that we are committed to our continuing dialogue. As we move towards unity in the church we seek the unity of humankind.

*Moving ahead*

41. We have agreed to meet again for the final consultation of this present dialogue in Nairobi in 2002, in order to decide concrete steps that we can take together as part of our common witness on this continent. As a preliminary step we will address the gaps in our conversations (e.g., the interpretation of the Bible, the role of the sacraments, and the ministry of women).

Signed:

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Co-Chair of the Dialogue

His Eminence Baba Aladura Dr G.I.M. **Otubu**  
International Chairman of OAIC  
Co-Chair of the Dialogue

Rev. Dr Setri **Nyomi**  
General Secretary-WARC

Most Rev. Njeru **Wambugu**  
General Secretary-OAIC

7<sup>th</sup> March 2001 - Lagos, Nigeria

### III MOVING TOWARDS COMMON WITNESS

42. The third meeting was held in Mbagathi, Nairobi, Kenya (9-14 February 2002) and participants were hosted by the Presbyterian Church of East Africa. Members of the dialogue worshipped in churches of both families. They dealt with issues of biblical interpretation, sacraments, the role of women in the church and the future of this dialogue. They stated together the following:

*Hermeneutics*

43. We are agreed in both our families that Scripture is central to the life and work of the church. The Scriptures can only be properly interpreted within the hermeneutic community, which is not just local or oral, but denominational, ecumenical, and global. AICs have particularly emphasised hermeneutical dialogue with the local community of the faithful, in which the congregation responds to the preachers

with hymns and interjections which strengthen the preacher and push the argument a stage further. Indeed, both Reformed and AIC traditions emphasise the importance of music and hymns in the hermeneutic process. The Reformed hermeneutic in addition has particularly emphasised the global, and intergenerational community of Biblical commentaries, and written theologies.

44. We recognise and celebrate certain especially African emphases in the hermeneutic process. Among these are a commitment to oral tradition and an interpretation which builds on and relates to the shared stories, proverbs, and memories of the community; an emphasis on God's word to the community rather than just to the individual; an understanding that all in life is sacred (with no division between sacred and secular); and a deep reliance on the role of and assistance from the Holy Spirit. Both families of churches agree that our hermeneutic must address itself both to the local situation and, at the same time, be aware of and be responsible to the global hermeneutic community. A closed hermeneutic community cannot in the long run remain faithful to the Gospel.

#### *Sacraments*

45. We agree that the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist are grounded in Scripture and are commended to the church for its spiritual growth. Baptism signifies the entrance of the believer into the community of faith, and his/her engrafting into the body of Christ. In communion, the faithful are fed with Christ himself. The experience of receiving Christ in the sacraments is made possible by the powerful and mysterious action of the Holy Spirit.
46. Some of the AICs have affirmed as many as seven sacraments, baptism, chrismation (confirmation), Eucharist, marriage, confession, ordination, and holy unction (anointing of the sick). Other AICs are non-sacramental in tradition, although they would say that they celebrate the sacraments spiritually. Some of them believe that, as the bread and wine are set aside as food for God's people, so God's holy people are themselves set aside as God's sacrament and gift to the world.

#### *The role of women in the church*

47. Both communities acknowledge and celebrate the gifts of the Holy Spirit to both women and men. We acknowledge that for cultural and historical reasons, women have not been allowed to develop and share these gifts adequately in the service of the wider Christian community. In many parts of Africa issues of purity and impurity deeply influence and limit the role of women in the church. This affects both the Reformed and the African Independent Church families. Also, structural inequalities within the church often limit women's ministries. Sometimes these inequalities are seen in segregated and subordinate structures, often mistakenly called 'parallel structures', of women's ministries or women's departments. Although these women's ministries and departments can and do play a significant role in the lives of women and men, and can help in raising their awareness, we are agreed that women must not be limited to these ministries. The church must remove restrictions on the ministries of women, and the lack of women's participation in the higher decision-making structures. It must find ways of dealing with its procedures (such as holding meetings only in the evenings), which effectively prevent women from playing a full role. It must also seek to understand, to challenge, and to motivate communities and congregations to change, those of their traditions and perceptions which prevent them from welcoming an integrated model of equal partnership in ministry of women and men.

#### *The Way Forward*

48. We recognise that some of the AICs separated historically from member churches of the WARC, in a process of polarisation in which the positions of the two sides became deeply entrenched. We

acknowledge that ill-feelings and bitterness continue to exist between some of our members until the present day. We recommend that in the countries where this is the case leaders of the churches concerned meet to discuss the reconciliation of memories, and to consider how best to come together again in mutual repentance, in order to strengthen our common witness to the one Christ. In other situations, although bitter historical memories may not be present, prejudice and the lack of a spirit of common fellowship in the ministry may be present. Sometimes this prejudice is characterised by attitudes of rejection of the other based on false conceptions such as, 'lacking education', 'backward', 'lacking the Holy Spirit', 'colonial churches'. We commit ourselves to working much more strongly for mutual understanding and ecumenism, and we urge the leaders of the churches in our respective communities to work and act together to remove the misconceptions and prejudice, to build trust and share fully in joint Christian witness. In the crises that affect our continent, for the survival of our own people, we cannot afford disunity.

49. We recognise the dangers of training AIC students at colleges of the other Christian world communions and denominations, because they can easily be lost from the AICs to the denomination of the college. In this context, there is a need to explore how Reformed church theological institutions can be used for the training of AIC students, and how these institutions can be made more hospitable to AIC students, in order to build them up in their ministry in their own churches rather than purely in the context of the Reformed ministry. In this context, also, we consider that initially, support should be given to the OAIC Theological Education by Extension programme, and its attempts to revise its curriculum, and to obtain proper academic accreditation for its courses. In association with the Conference of African Theological Institutions, the Reformed churches in Africa, should consider encouraging some of their lecturers to co-operate in the process. Further, and as a long-term goal, we recognise the need for an increased number of further degree-level theological institutions run by and for AICs.
50. As a dialogue, we endorse the aspirations of the AIC community to come up with their own written theological material. We consider that an appropriate first step would be for AIC theologians to discuss the theological issues and logistics required in a continental-level workshop, and we commit ourselves in our various capacities to exploring how this can be made possible.
51. In view of the great measure of progress we have achieved in this dialogue at the international level, we urge our member churches over the next three years to engage in a process of dialogue between our two families at national levels. We will collect and record the progress made, and report back to our respective organisations, with the possibility of resuming the dialogue at international level at another date.

## Appendix I

### List of Papers Presented

#### First Session

**Presbyterian Church in Rwanda, Kigali, Rwanda - 11- 19 October 1999**

Theme: African Christian Identity

*The political, economic realities of Africa* - Prophetess Dr J. E. Ahme

*African Christian identity* – Archbishop John Mweresa Kivuli

*Marriage as in the African context, as repeated by the Scripture* - Baba Aladura Dr G.I.M. Otubu

*African Christian identity* – Rev. Thomas Oduro

*Towards an African Christian identity: the potential contribution of the African Independent Churches in an era of globalisation* – Mr John Padwick

*The political and economical realities of Africa* – Rev. Dr André Karamaga

*Christianity in the African context* – Rev. Dr Setri Nyomi

*An introduction and brief history of the Organisation of African Instituted Churches* - Archbishop Njeru Wambugu

*The Kigali Statement*

#### Second Session

**The Eternal Sacred Order of Cherubim & Seraphim, Lagos, Nigeria - 4-7 March 2001**

Theme: Reconciling identities: learning from each other (The prophetic role of the Church, the free movement of the Holy Spirit)

*Africa in Crisis: The practical prophetic role of the Church* - Rev. Dr Peter Bisem

*The experience of the Holy Spirit in worship* - Rev. Ruth Ngaari

*African Independent Churches: their role and strategies of education* – Rev. Thomas Oduro

*Reconciling Identities: learning from each other* – Dr André Karamaga

#### Third Session

**The Kenya College of Communication Technology (KCCT)  
Conference Centre, Mbagathi, Nairobi, Kenya - 9-14 February 2002**

Theme: Towards our Common Witness

*The Role of Sacraments in the Church* - Rev. Fr Michael R.A. Ng'ong'a

*Spontaneous Hymnodal Hermeneutics: An Analysis of an AIC Hermeneutic* - Rev. Thomas Oduru

*Reformed Tradition and the Ministry of Women* - Dr Bukelwa Hans

*Summary paper of the last three dialogues* - Rev. John Padwick/Rev. Ruth Ngaari

*Report of the Dialogue between the OAIC and Reformed Churches* - Rev. John Padwick/Ruth Ngaari

## Appendix II

Portions of this document were developed over the period of four years from 1999-2002. The drafters and editors of the final report are indicated with an asterisk (\*). Those who chaired the meetings are indicated with a (c) or acting co-chair with (ac), while those who presented papers are indicated with a (P) following the year in which they made their presentation, staff are indicated with (s) and absent with (a). Participants who were part of the original exploratory committee are noted with attendance in 1998.

### OAIC Participants

Dr (Mrs) Justina **Ahme**  
Nigeria  
1999 P, 2001, 2002

Archbishop John Mweresa **Kivuli**  
Kenya  
1999 P, 2001, 2002

Father Michael A. **Ng'ong'a**  
Kenya  
1998, 1999, 2001, 2002 P

Rev. Thomas **Oduro**  
Ghana  
1999 P, 2001 P, 2002 P

Baba Aladura Dr G.I.M. **Otubu**  
Nigeria  
c 1998, c 1999 P, c 2001, c 2002

Mr John **Padwick**  
England/Kenya  
1998, 1999 P, 2001, \*2002 P

Mrs Olga **Ratovonarivo**  
Madagascar  
1999, 2001, 2002

Archbishop Njeru **Wambugu**  
Kenya  
1998, c 1999 P, c 2001, c 2002

## **Reformed Participants**

Rev. Dr Peter **Bisem**  
Kenya  
1999, a 2001 P

Dr Bukelwa **Hans**  
South Africa  
1999, 2001, 2002 P

Prof. Pieter **Holtrop**  
The Netherlands  
1998

Rev. Dr André **Karamaga**  
Rwanda  
1998, c 1999 P, a 2001 P, a 2002

Rev. Dr Gregg **Mast**  
USA  
1999, 2001, 2002

Dr Odair Pedroso **Mateus**  
Brazil/Switzerland  
a 2001, \*2002

Rev. Ruth **Ngaari**  
Kenya/USA  
1998, 1999, 2001 P, \*2002

Rev. Dr. Setri **Nyomi**  
Ghana/Switzerland  
1998, 1999 P, s 2001, s ac 2002

Ms Margaret **Owen**  
England/Switzerland  
s 1999

Rev. Dr. E. B. **Udoh**  
Nigeria  
a 1999, a 2001, a 2002

Dr H. S. **Wilson**  
India/Switzerland  
s 1998 Geneva, Switzerland

OAIC Visitors - 2002

Mr Nicta **Lubaale** - Director, HIV/AIDS Africa

Rev. John **Gichimy** - Coordinator, Kenya Chapter

Rev. Daniel **Oguso** - Director, Theological Education by Extension (TEE), East Africa

Presbyterian Church of East Africa Visitors - 2002:

Rt Rev. Dr Jesse **Kamau** - Moderator, General Assembly

Very Rev. Dr George **Wanjau** - Moderator of St Andrews Church

Rev. Patrick M. **Rukenya** - Secretary General

Rev. Dr Lawrence **Mbagara** - Training Personnel Development Secretary

Rev. John K. **Mwinchia** - Secretary Christian Education

Rev. Johnson K. **Mwangi** - Secretary Communications Department

Mr Francis **Kihiko** - Project Secretary

Mr Elijah **Karimi** - Staff Writer, Communications Department

Rev. Dr Godfrey **Ngumi** - Presbyterian Minister