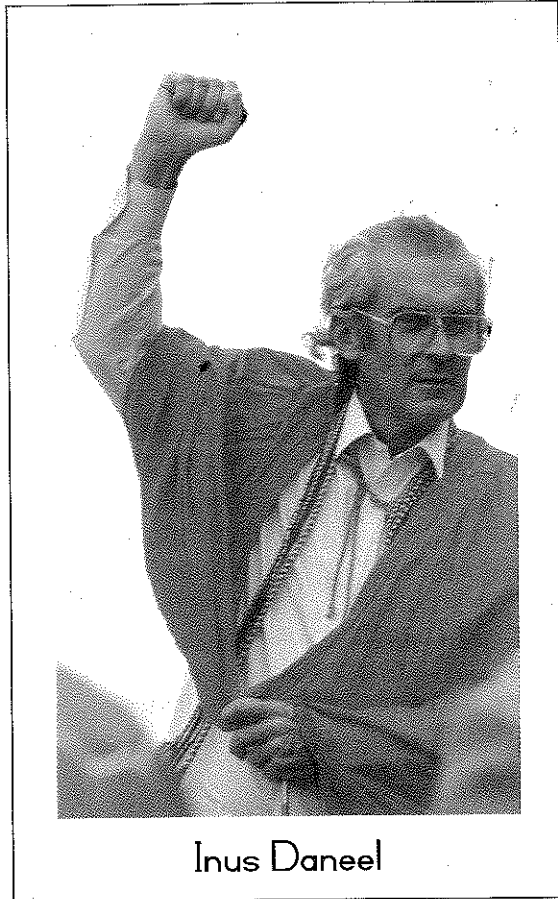


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Frontiers of
African Christianity



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SERIES PREFACE

Literature on Christian mission in Africa has been biased toward the activity of Western-oriented mission. White missionaries, Western mission policies and the relationship of mission to European imperialism have dominated the discussion of African missions. Little or no attention has been paid by scholars to African initiatives in Christian mission, nor have missiological studies been made from the perspective of the so-called recipients. Yet the phenomenal growth of Christianity in Africa has occurred in the twentieth century, much of it after the independence of the continent from outside control. The series 'African Initiatives in Christian Mission' represents an attempt to address the reality that the spread of Christianity in Africa, its shape and character has been the product of African Christians, both in the 'Mission Churches' and the 'African Initiated/Independent Churches (AICs).¹

Mission Churches and AICs are the two primary ecclesial contexts in which African initiative has occurred. Mission Churches are those that have evolved directly from the outreach of Western denominations, and still represent the collegial traditions concerned. African Initiated Churches are churches begun by Africans in Africa primarily for Africans. AICs have consistently asserted their own leadership autonomy and religio-cultural contextuality free from the immediate control of influence of Western-oriented church leaders. These classificatory terms are somewhat misleading in that AICs are missionary churches par excellence, and the Mission Churches, by virtue of the missionary contributions of their members from the beginnings of their history, could be characterised as African Initiated Churches. Nevertheless the distinction between the two families of churches remains important for historical and sociological reasons.

This series seeks to overcome some of the limitations in previous studies of missions in Africa. Mission Churches have been analysed primarily as denominational institutions, with a focus on educational work, or else as participants in political processes such as nation building. Less attention has

1 Nomenclature varies on the two groups of African churches. 'Mission Churches' have also been called 'Historical or Established Churches'. The acronym 'AICs' originally stood for African Independent Churches, a term which is still preferred by many scholars. In recent years the World Council of Churches has tended to use the term 'African Initiated Churches'. In this series, different authors are free to use any of the three they choose. But in the introduction to the series the editors generally refer to 'African Initiated Churches' because the term resonates with the title 'African Initiatives in Christian Mission'.