

# Christian Faith Formation and Spiritual Insecurity in Africa

Masauso Moyo<sup>1</sup> and Joseph K. Pali<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>University of the Free State, South Africa

Correspondence email: revmoyomj@gmail.com

Received: 11/11/2024

Accepted: 20/01/2025

Published: 31/01/2025

## Abstract

As early as 1930s Audrey Richards hinted at the irony that the spread of Christianity in Zambia, against all its good intentions, instead of diminishing fear, rather increased spiritual insecurity among its converts. There is scholarly evidence that the detected spiritual insecurity in the early 20th century persists up to now. The triggers of spiritual insecurity in Africa are attributed to the breakdown of traditional relationships and mutual obligation, the belief in the influence of the spirits on people for either good or bad. Spiritual insecurity shows that some of the Africans are in dilemma of Christian and African spiritual worldviews thereby struggling to fully trust the Christian approach to spiritually related challenges. This article validates the view that spiritual insecurity in Africa though highly ignored, should be taken seriously. It explores how the Church can use its faith formation system to address issue causing spiritual insecurity in Africa. Data collected through qualitative literature review and observations is engaged using the hermeneutical theory to argue for a faith formation which addresses the fissure between words about God in statements of faith and spiritual insecurity among African Christians by clarifying Christian confessions, identity and reflection.

**Keywords:** Spiritual insecurity, faith formation, African Christian, identity, confession, reflection

## Introduction

Despite over a century of the church's presence in Africa, spiritual insecurity remains a matter of concern among Christians. For example, in Zambia, the influx of European missionaries from late 19th to first half of the 20th century was mostly influenced by the writings of Dr. David Livingstone the Scottish missionary who died in 1873 at Chitambo village now known as Chitambo District in Central Province of Zambia<sup>1</sup>. As early as the first half of the 20th century Audrey Richards an anthropologist noted that Christianity had intensified spiritual insecurity instead of diminishing it<sup>2</sup>. In the 21st century Ashforth suggests listing of spiritual insecurity alongside the "seven basic components of human security, namely: economic, health, food, environmental, personal, community, and political cited by 1994 UNDP report<sup>3</sup>. He further describes spiritual insecurity as real and a source of great concern causing distress, fear and doubt affecting the flourishing of humanity. Though highly

---

<sup>1</sup> Anthony B. Tambatamba, A. M. Cheyeka. and T.C. Milingo. "From White Fathers to Black Fathers in Kasama and Mpika Dioceses in Zambia," *Zambia Social Science Journal* 7, no. 2 (2021): 15.

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Udelhoven, "The Devil of the Missionary Church: The White Fathers and Catholic Evangelization in Zambia," *Journal of Global Catholicism* 2, no. 1 (December 2017): 93, <https://doi.org/10.32436/2475-6423.1022>.

<sup>3</sup> Adam Ashforth, "Human Security and Spiritual Insecurity: Why the Fear of Evil Forces Needs to be Taken Seriously," *Journal of International Affairs* (2010): 99, 100.

ignored, spiritual insecurity should be taken seriously for it emanates from entities such as demons, evil spirits, angry ancestors, witches, or evil forces bothering Africans. Fisher and Leonard describe spiritual (in)security as a global phenomenon permeating even the so-called secular polities<sup>4</sup>. The intergenerational scholarly discourses clearly shows that the problem of spiritual insecurity in Africa predates the missionary era. Authors discuss how Christian faith formation system can address causes of spiritual insecurity in Africa. They argue for formation which clarifies Christian confessions, identity and reflection as a way of addressing the fissure between confession about God in statements of faith and spiritual insecurity among African Christians.

### Methodology

This study used qualitative approach and hermeneutical theory. Data was collected through qualitative literature review and observation of actions, lifestyle and beliefs of African Christians during and beyond the worship services in order to understand causes of spiritual insecurities. Literature research involved collection of data from scholarly journals and books. Scholarly books and journals relevant to this study were collected, organised and reviewed. Data collected from literature and observations was analysed using systemic review. Spiritual insecurity related codes which culminated into subthemes of the article were created and identified while collecting data. Lastly, authors elaborately wrote a report on the findings from literature and observations which were subjected to peer review and dissemination.

### Hermeneutical theory

According to Kim, hermeneutical theory in practical theology involves interpretive activity which attempts to understand concrete situation and discern God's will using a hermeneutical circle i.e. a back-and-forth interplay of the text and context<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, hermeneutical theory helps to construct the meaning of lived religion through conversation with other human beings and traditions that model lives<sup>6</sup>. Van Gelder states that hermeneutical theory can facilitate the development of a church that discerns and live by God's will in context<sup>7</sup>. He further adds that in discerning and living God's will, the scripture, theological and historical confessions, context, community and action are essential in the interpretive process because they shape the congregation's life, choices and practices. The other important factor is the social context of the congregation or community could be clarified and analysed through social science research methods. Lastly, is believers' strategic planning for a given situation to help reflect on the normative understanding of the scripture, insight of the context and wisdom from the shared practices within their community for transformation of contexts.

---

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Fisher and Cherry Leonardi. "Insecurity and the Invisible: The Challenge of Spiritual (In)security," *Security Dialogue* 52, no. 5 (2021): 384, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010620973540>.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen M. Sesi et al., *African Missiology: Contribution of Contemporary Thought* (Nairobi, Kenya: Uzima Publishing House, 2009), 430.

<sup>6</sup> R. Ruard Ganzevoort, "Forks in the Road When Tracing the Sacred, Practical Theology as Hermeneutics of Lived Religion," *Presidential Address to the Ninth Conference of the International Academy of Practical Theology*, Chicago (August 2009), 5.

<sup>7</sup> Craig van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 105.

In light of the above, in this study hermeneutical approach relates understanding of the scripture, traditions, confessions of the church and practical experiences of believers for developing informed theological reflection likely to transform behaviours of spiritual insecurity. Furthermore, hermeneutical approach is used to critically analyse the present spiritual insecurity, explore possibilities of identifying and adopting practices aligned to the will of God as learned from the Holy Spirit inspired interpretation of scripture.

### Definition of spiritual insecurity

Spiritual insecurity in this article means the feeling of uncertainty, having as sense of insufficient or inadequate protection against possible harm from the spirit world. According to Ashforth, spiritual insecurity involves one's sense of danger, vulnerability, doubt, and fear arising from efforts to manage relations with invisible forces<sup>8</sup>. Additionally, Ashforth says it is "an existential condition marked by epistemic anxiety produced by ignorance of, uncertainty about, and/or disagreement among relevant authorities over the proper and effective modes of managing relations with agencies deemed capable of causing harm as well as those considered responsible for their subjects' safety and well-being." It also emerges from fear of the so-called malicious people assumed to possess power of manipulating invisible forces and spiritual beings to cause suffering or harming others.

### Causes of spiritual insecurity

Spiritual security remains a matter of concern, possibly occupying the highest level in the ladder of need in Africa. Africans believe that diseases, sicknesses and atrocities causing spiritual insecurity have supernatural, natural and human causation<sup>9</sup>. Supernatural causes refer to the Supreme Being, ancestors or spirits. Fisher and Leonard cite fears of divine retribution, demonic possession or other evil spirits as bases of spiritual insecurity<sup>10</sup>. Ashforth says, spiritual insecurity comes from invisible forces. Meanwhile natural causation refers to natural disasters and pandemics like Covid 19 and HIV/AIDS.<sup>11</sup>

Human causation refers to crises or atrocities induced by people on others. This seems to be categorised into two. The first, as denotes by Ashforth comprises of malicious people such as witches, wizards and sorcerers capable of inflicting suffering, harm, hurt and misfortunes. It is believed that they have power to communicate, consult and cast spells using evil spiritual beings such as the devil and demons to cause specified effects on the targeted spiritually unprotected individuals or object<sup>12</sup>.

The second human causation of spiritual insecurity is discord among interpretive authorities such as pastors, traditional healers, soothsayers etc., who claim to speak the truth about how the world and human relationship with the invisible forces or powers work<sup>13</sup>. Due to variances in beliefs and background, interpretive authorities confuse people with varied interpretations on spiritual issues and healing. Ashforth asserts that spiritual insecurity occurs

---

<sup>8</sup> Ashforth, "Human Security and Spiritual Insecurity," 133, 134, 136.

<sup>9</sup> Vhumani Magezi and Christopher Magezi, "A Pastoral Evaluation and Responses to the Challenge of Spiritual Insecurity in African Pastoral Ministry and Christianity," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 38, no. 1 (2017): 5, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v38i1.1734>.

<sup>10</sup> Fisher and Leonard, "Insecurity and the Invisible," 383.

<sup>11</sup> Ashforth, "Human Security and Spiritual Insecurity," 136.

<sup>12</sup> Ashforth, "Human Security and Spiritual Insecurity," 134.

<sup>13</sup> Ashforth, "Human Security and Spiritual Insecurity," 136.

when interpretive authority seems to lose persuasiveness<sup>14</sup>. Onyii accuses some of the Christian denominations of causing spiritual insecurity for they communicate fear, horror and terror thereby affecting one's perception of God and social relations. For example, Onyii cites the spirit of capitalism stressed by Pentecostals and some Christian films particularly Nigerian insinuating the wrath of God or gods as the cause of misfortune, illness and poverty. This is likely to create confusions, fear, horror and terror among Africans. Authors also observed that some prophecies accused congregants' family members as causers of their misfortune or suffering. Such accusations, eventually breaks down family bonds and cause reluctance to help one another.

However, Ashforth further states that even interpretive authorities in the church have made many African Christians experience mounting spiritual insecurity because of the superfluity of competing claims to possess capacity to communicate and manage the invisible forces responsible for harming or protecting humanity. So, the demand for superfluity claims result to emergence of spiritual entrepreneurs who exploit the unsuspecting struggling to manage invisible forces affecting their lives. Although African believe in human and natural causation, they also uphold that both are not totally independent of spiritual influence.

#### Nature of spiritual insecurity

Spiritual insecurity is experienced individually and collectively, locally and globally with a wide variety of social forms<sup>15</sup>. In traditional African community an individual's illness has a communal dimension, affecting the family and community. For example, we observed that the BaSotho and BaTswana in South Africa do not slaughter an animal during burial of the deceased if one of the family members is very ill out of fear that the sick person may die as well. In the African concept of ubuntu, the whole community may suffer spiritual wrath because an individual member provoked spirits. The intertwine of individual's action to social spiritual consequences enforces communal spiritual responsibility<sup>16</sup>.

Besides, spiritual insecurity is related to, but not reducible to, other forms of insecurity such as poverty, violence, disease, oppression, to name but a few listed components of human security in UNDP 1994 report<sup>17</sup>. Fisher and Leonard bemoan the peripheral treatment of spiritual insecurity in contemporary critical security scholarship regardless of its global effects, affecting individuals, societies and state relations<sup>18</sup>. They assert that even the affluent and comfortable, developing and developed nations have their own forms of angst. Mostly, spiritual insecurity occurs in matters of life and death, where the seriously feared harm involves invisible and unknown agencies. For example, Letšosa stated that there were a lot of conspiracy theories from both African and Western countries about the cause of Covid-19, and implementation of vaccines and 5G technologies that triggered fear of both physical and spiritual harm on the people<sup>19</sup>. Moreover, authors observed that spiritual insecurity is one of

<sup>14</sup> Ashforth, "Human Security and Spiritual Insecurity," 136.

<sup>15</sup> Ashforth, "Human Security and Spiritual Insecurity," 136.

<sup>16</sup> Masauso Moyo, "Christian Faith Formation and Culture: A Theological Study of the Nsenga People" (PhD thesis, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, 2023), 208, <https://doi.org/10.38140/at.v43i2.7792>.

<sup>17</sup> Ashforth, "Human Security and Spiritual Insecurity," 136.

<sup>18</sup> Fisher and Leonardi, "Insecurity and the Invisible," 2.

<sup>19</sup> Rantoa Letšosa, "What Has the Beast's Mark to Do with the COVID-19 Vaccination, and What is the Role of the Church and Answering to the Christians?" *HTS Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (2021): 1, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.6480>.

the reasons for xenophobic violence against African migrants in South Africa under the conspiracy theories associating them with use of spiritual powers to protect themselves and harm others.

### Spiritual Insecurity in Africa

Health, illnesses, misfortunes or harm in traditional Africa are believed to result from spiritual, natural and human causation. They are considered to be indicators of human struggles with spiritual agencies that seek to do good or harm individuals, family or society.<sup>20</sup> According to Onyii illness, misfortunes and harm in Africa are blamed on those suspected to use mystical powers or evil spiritual agencies to harm others.<sup>21</sup> Illness, more especially the incurable is dreaded in traditional Africa because there is no place for the notion of such diseases under natural causation. Incurable diseases are considered to be spiritual in nature. The view of diseases being insolvable problems because their causes are invisible to the naked eye, undetectable and untraceable through laboratory tests, frighten many Africans.

### Effects of Spiritual Insecurity in Africa

Spiritual insecurity affects Africans at individual and communal level in many ways. This article highlights the following effects of spiritual insecurity:

*a) Hinders personal and communal development*

Among some of the Africans, spiritual insecurity hinders community development or individual prosperity due to mutual suspicion where the community fear the wealthy and the wealthy fear the community. In some African communities building a good house or acquiring wealth triggers jealous and risks of being bewitched hence the rich are compelled to seek protection against evil spiritual forces<sup>22</sup>. Meanwhile, in some cases the community suspects rich people of acquiring and maintaining wealth through witchcraft. This kind of belief suggests that both the community and the rich are afraid of exposure to spiritual harm. The fear of exposure or desire to be secured necessitates the seeking of protection against either spiritual or physical harm, even both.

*b) Social cohesion of interest groups and fragments suspicion entities*

Spiritual insecurity in Africa is like a double edged sword for it has potential to fragment the community into small groups clustered around people sharing common security interest. These fragmented communities intensify social cohesion in their effort to survive together against the perceived spiritual harm. Unfortunately, these fragmented entities can suspect each other thereby increasingly severing cohesion of the entire community. Mainly, suspicions of witchcraft practices or invoking evil spirits to harm others leads to lack of trust, breakdown of relationship and even physical harm on the perceived perpetrator. For example, authors noticed that those suspected of practicing witchcraft suffer stigma, discrimination, excommunication, mob justice or death in some cases. Alienation or victimisation also affects creature such snakes, cats, hyenas and owls which are suspected to be used in witchcraft.

---

<sup>20</sup> Ashforth, "Human Security and Spiritual Insecurity," 137.

<sup>21</sup> E. Onyi Enzenweke, "Pentecostalism and the Culture of Fear in Contemporary African Communities: A Paradigm Shift," *American International Journal of Contemporary Research* 3, no. 5 (2013): 102.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Mutune Ndisya, "An Analysis and Response to the Fear of Evil Spiritual Forces Among Kamba Christians in the Light of Biblical and Ellen G. White Teachings," (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2015), 86, <https://dx.doi.org/10.32597/dissertations/1587>.

c) *Weakens the resolve to fight against injustice*

Spiritual insecurity affects individuals and society who think their existence is threatened<sup>23</sup>. This triggers the instinct for survival which may be evident through avoiding confrontation with sources of insecurity by being passive or escapism. In passivity, authors observed, that the feeling of having insufficient spiritual insecurity paralyses the act against violent and oppressive individuals out of assumptions that they are too fortified with strong charms or evil powers to be challenged. In escapism, as cited by Ndisya, some of the Africans, due to fear of being bewitched or exposing families to evil powers migrate from their ancestral homes to safer environments such as cities or diaspora<sup>24</sup>. In such cases, spiritual insecurity contributes to brain drain in African countries or villages.

d) *The motive behind the worship of God*

The level of spiritual security has a bearing on the reason, purpose and way God is worshipped. Epistemological crises caused by the discord of interpretive authority increases spiritual insecurity and affect the way God is worshipped. Onyii alleges that some of the Pentecostals' motive for worshipping God is ruined by the spirit of capitalism which has led to generation of fear, horror and terror amongst members of the community<sup>25</sup>. This is an example how denominations cause Theo-phobia by creating an impression that God is wrathful but also too complicated to impress unless one sows a seed, fasts, prays, tithes and comes to church in a right way. Such notions reduce worship to an attempt to impress God or draw favours from him. A sense of failure of having done enough to impress or draw sufficient favour from God warranting safety intensifies spiritual insecurity. In such moments of uncertainty or lacking assurance of the warranted God's protection and fear of being harmed spiritually, some of the Africa Christians opt for syncretism by returning to African traditional powers<sup>26</sup>.

Kroesbergen claims that some of the Africans offer prayers as means of involving God in almost every activity in response to world insecurity<sup>27</sup>. The linkage of prayer to insecurities of the world leaves us with two 'foods for thoughts. The first is, do Africans pray out of the insecurities of the world rather than faith in God? If this is the case, then, religious enthusiasm is deemed an attempt to as access enough power to manage evil forces causing or likely to cause suffering<sup>28</sup>. The second is, do they pray because their faith in God gives them courage to pray against forces causing insecurity in respective contexts? This entails that Africans' prayer to confront causes of insecurities at social and personal level are motivated by faith in God. It is difficult to rule out any of the two. Moyo claims that some of the Africans struggle to fully trust the safety of the Christian spiritual security especially when the life threat at hand is considered spiritual in nature<sup>29</sup>. Although missionaries forbade all allegiance to African religious activities, Tambatamba et al. indicate that converts mixed the two for it was "a nonstarter for them to caste away their religion and fully embrace Christianity"<sup>30</sup>. Up to

---

<sup>23</sup> Fisher and Leonardi, "Insecurity and the Invisible," 2.

<sup>24</sup> Ndisya, "An Analysis and Response," 86.

<sup>25</sup> Enzenweke, "Pentecostalism and the Culture of Fear," 99, 101.

<sup>26</sup> Magezi and Magezi, "A Pastoral Evaluation and Responses," 1.

<sup>27</sup> Hermen Kroesbergen, *The Language of Faith in Southern Africa Spirit World, Power, Community, Holism* (Durbanville, South Africa: AOSIS, 2019), 36, 59.

<sup>28</sup> Ashforth, "Human Security and Spiritual Insecurity," 134.

<sup>29</sup> Moyo, "Christian Faith Formation and Culture," 186.

<sup>30</sup> Tambatamba, Chiyeka, and Milingo, "From White Fathers to Black Fathers," 12.

now, due to lack of total trust in spiritual security of the Christian faith, some of the congregants still consult African religion mediums, wear emulates and fetish as an alternative source of personal and social wellbeing<sup>31</sup>.

### Scholars' approaches to spiritual insecurity

There are various scholarly suggestions on approaches to spiritual insecurity in Africa. However, Magezi V and Magezi C cite three scholarly responses to spiritual insecurity<sup>32</sup>. The first response requires "African Christians to discontinue anything linked to traditional African spiritual worldview because Christianity entails a complete new ontological being." This implies that one must totally disconnect with the traditional African spiritual powers because African and Judeo-Christian spiritual worlds are antithetical and mixing the two is practicing syncretism. Magezi V and Magezi C critique this scholarly position of not providing alternatives solution to African Christians and depicting Christ as foreign to Africans while demonising everything linked to traditional African worldview or belief system.

The second response disapproves African Christians' reliance on their traditional powers but urges the Church to identify positives, strengths, advantages and opportunities in the African spiritual system or worldview which are useful and importable for contextualising the gospel<sup>33</sup>. Ndisya suggests the teaching of new converts to change only cultural beliefs and practices that go against biblical principles. This encourages upholding of the identified good elements of African culture like "ubuntu", respect for environment and harmonisation of the spiritual and material world.<sup>34</sup> The bible should be allowed to shape and influence African worldviews so that all the values are aligned to its principles. The transformed worldview will help African Christians practice healing within the Biblical principles, experience spiritual protection in Christ, avoid living a dual lifestyle and grow into Christ-like life.

The third response advocates for the continued reliance on African traditional spiritual powers<sup>35</sup>. It argues for identification of weaknesses and strengths in both African traditional and Christian approaches and outlining alternative theological bases for tackling causes of spiritual insecurity. It alleges that African spiritual powers and God work synergistically for the common good of the Africans. Ndisya terms this position as dual allegiances to African tradition and Christian spiritual beliefs.<sup>36</sup> It creates an impression that Africans facing spiritual battle can adopt one or mix the two depending on context and required solutions. Ndisya further states that dual allegiance breeds spiritually weak congregants and compromises Christians' spiritual protection against evil power especially amid fears of witchcraft.<sup>37</sup> The danger of this position is that some of the African Christians may not distinguish the two and continue looking to both Christ and their ancestors for spiritual security<sup>38</sup>.

### Spiritual Security in Jesus Christ

---

<sup>31</sup> Moyo, "Christian Faith Formation and Culture," 186.

<sup>32</sup> Magezi and Magezi, "A Pastoral Evaluation and Responses," 7.

<sup>33</sup> Magezi and Magezi, "A Pastoral Evaluation and Responses," 2.

<sup>34</sup> Ndisya, "An Analysis and Response," 65-66.

<sup>35</sup> Magezi and Magezi, "A Pastoral Evaluation and Responses," 2.

<sup>36</sup> Ndisya, "An Analysis and Response," 83.

<sup>37</sup> Ndisya, "An Analysis and Response," 85.

<sup>38</sup> Magezi and Magezi, "A Pastoral Evaluation and Responses," 9.

In Christian faith, Christ's redemptive work as an act that disarmed harmful spiritual powers is essential for spiritual security<sup>39</sup>. Meanwhile Moyo and Pali opine faith as the means of figuring out how to live life live in contexts, Theo-centrally. It influences perceptions and interpretations of the world.<sup>40</sup> If faith effects perceptions, interpretation of the world and the way life is lived then, understanding the disarming and triumphing death of Christ over powers and authorities is critical for spiritual security. This entails that in Christianity, spiritual security comes from interpreting life and the world from the perspective of Christ's supremacy. Magezi V and Magezi C base their discourse on Colossians 2:15 where the supremacy of Christ is discussed as "having disarmed the powers and authorities making them a public spectacle, triumphing over them by the cross"<sup>41</sup>. This description of the cross inverses the ancient Roman Empire's view that crucified criminals were executed painfully and shamefully. Christ's death on the cross changed the narrative for it accomplished firstly, the task of disarming oppressive powers and authorities and secondly triumphing over them.

Despite confessing with awareness of God's triumph and disarming powers and authorities in Christ's crucifixion in prayers, songs and statements of faith, some of the Christians in Africa are still spiritually insecure. Ndisya attributes the confession and spiritual insecurity fissure to missionaries' presentation of a western Christian faith deemed void of answers to Africans' spiritual challenges.<sup>42</sup> Ndisya opines that some of Christians in Africa still find safety in wearing amulets and fetishes for spiritual protection because they feel spiritually naked and vulnerable without visible and tangible things to counter act destructive spiritual forces. Magezi V and Mangezi C, state that the modern church has a challenge of providing alternatives or system to the forbidden African traditional spiritual care perceived to have offered healing framework and answers to why things happen<sup>43</sup>.

Onyii claims that the increasing stress on fear, horror and terror type of religion affects one's perception of God and social relations among Africans. God is emphatically portrayed as an angry God who punishes at any slight provocation or act of omission<sup>44</sup>. Again, God is described as contrast of being a powerful creator, owner of the universe and possessing all the glory on one hand but painted as a weak God who has lost all created things to satan and his agents. There is also a portrait that it is cumbersome to be secured by God. Believers have to fast, tithe, give seed, buy mediums of faith and so on, while evil spiritual forces and the devil are depicted to be ravaging people at will. This accentuates the need for responsible formation of a faith which firmly assure spiritual security in Jesus Christ.

### **Faith Formation as a Solution to Spiritual Insecurity in Africa**

The church in Africa needs to understand its mandate of addressing contextual material, spiritual realities and deepest fears or insecurities. It has the task of forming a steadfast faith in Jesus and assurance of God's care and protection. As discussed above, spiritual insecurity

---

<sup>39</sup> Chandra Han, "Christ's Supremacy: Colossians 1:15-20 and Its Implication in Education," *Diligentia: Journal of Theology and Christian Education* 1, no. 1 (September 2019): 477, <https://doi.org/10.19166/dil.v1i1.1887>.

<sup>40</sup> Masauso Moyo, and Khamadi J. Pali, "Faith Formation in the Tension Interplay of Tools, Processes and the Course for Social Transformation," *Acta Theologica* 43, no. 2 (2023): 172.

<sup>41</sup> Magezi and Magezi, "A Pastoral Evaluation and Responses," 1.

<sup>42</sup> Ndisya, "An Analysis and Response," 17-25.

<sup>43</sup> Magezi and Magezi, "A Pastoral Evaluation and Responses," 2.

<sup>44</sup> Enzenweke, "Pentecostalism and the Culture of Fear," 102.



in Africa is mainly seen through syncretism or dual allegiance to Christianity and African tradition. Causes to spiritual insecurity are cited as the way European missionaries presented the gospel in Africa, fear of the spiritual world and portraits of God as wrathful by some of the Christian interpretive authority. The problem of spiritual insecurity predates missionary era. Audrey Richards, as early as 1930s, hinted on the increase of spiritual insecurity among Christian converts.<sup>45</sup>

Ndisya attributes causes of spiritual insecurity to failure of western secularised and scientific Christian worldview introduced by the missionaries to answer African's quests and fears.<sup>46</sup> The western Christianity did not fully grasp the scope of God's mission in Africa. For example, Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15-17 are often quoted as guides for the missional role of the church but excludes healing (Mark 16:18) which resonate with African contexts. As a result, churches in Africa, particularly those established by missionaries struggle to address spiritual insecurities around incurable diseases. In other words, Christianity received from the western missionaries struggle to engage African spiritual system on life and death thus perpetuating spiritual insecurity in some of the Christians.

The continued reliance on Jesus and ancestors for spiritual assistance displays epistemological crisis and practice of syncretism. This reveals lack of knowledge that ancestors interfere with mediatory role of and draws attention away from Jesus. Besides, the continued reliance on ancestors by African Christians denies and hinders God's unique revelation. This highlights the importance of a formation which does not only clarify but also promotes congruency of Christian faith confessions, identity, reflection to Christo-centric competence in order to address the fissure between confession of God in statements of faith and spiritual insecurity among African Christians.

### **Formation of contextual Christian confession of faith**

Confession in this article refers to accounting for the owned convictions and commitments publicly as an externalisation of faith in God in words and deeds. By convictions this article implies the state of a decisively persuaded heart and mind about the content of belief about God. By commitment this article means dedication to faith expressed in the way of life resulting from owned convictions about God. Commitment is expression of the hidden convictions or beliefs by living out the upheld faith sacrificially. Accounting for a combination of conviction and commitment reveals that confession is more than mere recitation of memorised contents of the Christian faith. Christian confession is externalising the language of the heart which has experienced the love and grace of God, in Christ under the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Christian confession is declaration of the Church's convictions and commitments attesting about the triune God to the body of Christ itself and the community.

Barth objected the idea of one worldwide confession of faith. He argues that confessions of faith are statements formulated spontaneously and publicly by a particular Christian community at a particular time and place as a way of witnessing Jesus Christ. Confessions of faith, therefore, are linked to a church in a specific time and geographical space.<sup>47</sup> In this case, time does not only refer to measurable sequences as determined by the clock or era but also

---

<sup>45</sup> Udelhoven, "The Devil of the Missionary Church," 93.

<sup>46</sup> Ndisya, "An Analysis and Response," 25.

<sup>47</sup> Dirk J. Smit, "Confessing Church Today?" *Acta Theologica* 43, No. 1 (2023): 195, <https://doi.org/10.38140/at.v43i1.7393>.

situations or circumstances. The relation of confessions to time and place of the local church emphasizes the value of contextualising statements of faith bearing in mind that Christian faith has never existed as separate entity from culture but has always been translated in all culture. Therefore, the process of contextualisation cannot neglect culture. In this case confessions of faith attest Christ to the church itself and its cultural context using the Word under the illumination of the Holy Spirit in response to questions arising from particular conditions, circumstances or crises in time and place.<sup>48</sup>

### Formation of contextual Christian identity

Togarasei states that identity is very central to human existence for it shape individual self-understanding and behaviour.<sup>49</sup> The phrase ‘central to human existence’ shows that identity provides the criteria or basis for values, norms, lifestyle and survival. This suggests that the behaviour of spiritual insecurity exhibit African’s self-understanding, especially in relation to their self-perceived place in Christ Jesus. Spiritual insecurity highlights the need for intensifying formation of Christian identity for enhancing congregants’ understanding of their place in Christ. Christian identity concerns knowing oneself as a Christian and assimilating Christo-centric values, beliefs and lifestyle.<sup>50</sup>

In late 20th century Bediako calls for the “Integrity of African Christian identity and selfhood” in the quest to enculturate Christianity in Africa<sup>51</sup>. Unfortunately, the formation of integrity of Christian identity and selfhood in Africa remains a challenge for the church and scholarly debate. For example, Togarasei claims that ethnicity, region, race, and other identities influence people’s identity formations more than Christianity because the church in Africa has been caught in ethnocentrism.<sup>52</sup> Moyo speaks of complexity of Christian identity formation as it occurs in specific African cultural contexts, with both contentious or complimenting assertions of meanings, values, concepts, relationships, norms, beliefs and lifestyles considered to be vital for the wellbeing of humanity<sup>53</sup>. However, there is an emphasis that as followers of Christ, faith in Christ should define African Christianity.<sup>54</sup>

Formation of Christian identity, in respective ethnic backgrounds requires shaping clear understanding of who is Jesus Christ to African Christians and who African Christians are to Jesus Christ. According to Bediako African Christian identity may be achieved through the process of “integration of the African pre-Christian religious experience and African Christian commitment”<sup>55</sup> which carefully avoids degeneration into syncretism. Mokhoati proposes the consideration of the overlooked essential proponents from both Christian and African traditional religions yet critical for contextualizing Christianity. This requires a critical and

<sup>48</sup> Smit, “Confessing,” 195.

<sup>49</sup> Lovemore Togarasei, “Rethinking Christian Identity: African Reflections from Pauline Writings,” *Perichoresis* 14, no. 1 (2016): 101, <https://doi.org/10.1515/perc-2016-0006>.

<sup>50</sup> Sondra Higgins Matthaei, “Rethinking Faith Formation,” *Religious Education* 99, no. 1 (2010): 57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344080490269399>.

<sup>51</sup> Kwame Bediako, “Understanding African Theology in the 20th Century,” *Themelios* 20, no. 1 (1994): 14.

<sup>52</sup> Togarasei, “Rethinking Christian Identity,” 110.

<sup>53</sup> Moyo, “Christian Faith Formation and Culture,” 46-47.

<sup>54</sup> Eduardus van der Borgh, “Christian Identity an Introduction,” In *Studies in Reformed Theology* vol. 16, ed. Eduardus van der Borgh (Leiden, The Netherlands: BRILL, 2008), 11, <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004158061.i-514.4>.

<sup>55</sup> Bediako, “Understanding African Theology,” 14.

conscious identification of essential proponents crucial for enforcing African Christian identity<sup>56</sup>. He cites the pragmatic nature and methods of healing in African culture among many as examples of proponents, worthy consideration. Meanwhile, Moyo suggests the theocentric and contextual reading of Scriptures with an aim of shifting the understanding of self-identity, power and freedom from anthropocentric to theocentric<sup>57</sup>. This implies that Africans like the Bereans (Acts 17:11-12) should by, with and for themselves, critically and consciously analyse issues of self-identity, power and freedom theocentrically in the complexity of contentious and complimenting views in their cultural contexts. In short, the quest for authentic African Christian identity that would bridge the gap between confessions of God in statements of faith and spiritual insecurity should clarify on who Africans are in Christ and who Christ is to Africans in their cultural contexts. It also calls for clarification on the significance of relating to Christ and his salvific work in respective African contexts.

### Formation of Contextual Christian reflection

Reflection in this article refers to theological contemplation on what the relationship with Christ and his salvific work mean to Africans in their cultural contexts. Mostly, reflections on spiritual insecurity in Africa are power and triumphalism oriented. For example, Christ's redemptive work on the cross is referred to as an act of disarming and triumphing over spiritual powers causing insecurity<sup>58</sup>. Texts such as Matthew 28:18, 1 Corinthians 15:24-28, 1 Peter 3:22 confirming Jesus' supremacy and dominion over all powers are used. Ndisya suggests the need for power evangelism, exorcism, healing and revivals for Christians to be aware of the working of the two powers." It is expected that power scriptures expressing the supremacy and dominion of Christ shared through power evangelism, revival, healing and exorcism would bring a sense of spiritual security and total trust in Christ.<sup>59</sup>

The triumphalism and power approach signifying Christ's domination over malicious spiritual world has been used from the missionaries' era but some of the African Christians still feel spiritually naked and vulnerable without emulates or fetish assumed to protect them against the feared invisible powers. The continued spiritual insecurity even after a century of using triumphalism and power approach confirms that Africans need more than just knowing the supremacy of Christ. This may require Africa's own unique scriptural theological reflection on the meaning of confessing Christ, his salvific work and the implication of being identified with him in the midst of issues causing spiritual insecurities.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, Christian formation needs to intentionally provoke deep reflection and interpretation for deepening understanding of the significance of one's relationship with God.<sup>61</sup> To understand the significance of their place in the triune God, Africans need critical, conscious and contextual

---

<sup>56</sup> Joel Mokhoathi, "From Contextual Theology to African Christianity: The Consideration of Adiaphora from a South African Perspective," *Religions* 8, no. 12 (2017): 1, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8120266>.

<sup>57</sup> Moyo, "Christian Faith Formation and Culture," 73.

<sup>58</sup> Han, "Christ's Supremacy," 477.

<sup>59</sup> Ndisya, "An Analysis and Response," 78.

<sup>60</sup> Ndisya, "An Analysis and Response," 83.

<sup>61</sup> Masauso Moyo, "Inducting the Socratic Method of Forming Faith in African Contexts," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies (ERATS)* 10, no. 10 (2024): 331, <https://doi.org/10.38159/erats.202410101>.

theological reflections on the meaning of Lordship of Jesus Christ, his mediatory role and indwelling of the Holy Spirit in their quest for spiritual securities.

*Reflection on the meaning of Lordship of Jesus Christ*

Even if humility on the cross counters the imperial power concept of God<sup>62</sup>, some of the teachings on the meaning of the Lordship of Jesus Christ picture God as imperialist demanding uttermost impressive effort from congregants in exchange for spiritual security. With such teachings congregants become insecure with God himself and worship becomes an attempt to impress God so as to attain favour and spiritual security from him.

Critical to spiritual insecurity is Africans' struggle to trust Christian teachings on spiritual powers perceived to harm humans. This highlights the importance of theological reflections on the implication of the Lordship of Jesus Christ and his salvific work, especially on the cross as God's divine self-exegesis or self-explanation revealing attributes of love, humility/vulnerability, power, wisdom, and righteousness/justice of God<sup>63</sup>. Reflections should delve meditatively on the divine love revealed in the radical self-giving of Jesus Christ who is a rare combination of Lord and Saviour. African Christians should have a conviction that out of love, Jesus Christ their Lord humbled himself becoming as vulnerable as they are to purchase and save them for himself from all evil spiritual powers. The word purchase, mostly with the blood of Jesus Christ shows that Africans are God's highly treasured hence their protection is assured.

*Reflecting on the meaning of the mediatory role of Jesus Christ*

The message in the Hebrews epistle with its emphasis on the mediatory role of Christ, is cardinal for African Christians who share spiritual traumatic experience with its audience.<sup>64</sup> Both Africans and audience of the Hebrew epistles need the message of the supremacy and finality of Christ the self-sacrificed High Priest in spiritual insecurities inducing the faltering of faith. Jesus Christ is portrayed as a rare combination of the one offering the sacrifice, the High Priest and the Sacrifice for humanity. The trustworthiness of Christ for spiritual security is vivified through an imperceptible act of sacrifice on the cross manifesting his unwavering dedication to humanity. Christ's tripartite mediatory role appeases divine anger against transgressors while simultaneously turning the wrath into passion for their transformation.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, the emphasis is not on venting anger on sinners but their transformation.

*Reflecting on the meaning of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit*

Reflections on the indwelling, should stress on the Holy Spirit's role of divine guidance to the truth, affirming that Africans who believe in Christ are adopted children of God thereby eliminating Theo-phobia and fear of other spiritual powers or entities (John 16:13, Romans

---

<sup>62</sup> Michael J. Gorman, "The Cross as God's Self-Exegesis: Some Contributions from Paul and John," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 76, no. 1 (2022): 24, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00209643211051125>.

<sup>63</sup> Gorman, "The Cross as God's Self-Exegesis," 15.

<sup>64</sup> Khamadi J. Pali, "Christ as Once for All Sacrifice: A Cultural Reading of Hebrews," *Acta Theologica* 34, no. 1 (2014): 151, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/actat.v34i1.9>.

<sup>65</sup> Desmond T. Osei-Acheampong, "A Priestly Christology: A Biblical-Theological Investigation of Christ's Priesthood," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies (ERATS)* 10, no. 5 (2024): 174, 176, . <https://doi.org/10.38159/erats.20241055>.

8:15-17). The Holy Spirit is God in the lives of African Christians enabling them to discern God's way in complexity of spiritualities and spiritual insecurities.<sup>66</sup>

### **Forming congruency of identity, reflection, confession to Christo- competence**

By Competences, this article refers to the practice of upholding Christian confession; identity and reflection by practically living spiritually secure lives in Christ among spirits and powers inducing dual allegiance. Congruence means the harmony or reconciliation of confession, identity and reflection. Ashforth states that the central issue for some of the African Christians is understanding faith in Christ among beliefs in ancestors and other spirits upon whom well-being seem depends on<sup>67</sup>. This calls for a faith formation process which harmonise Christian confession, identity, reflections and competences with a view of tackling the problem of spiritual insecurities.

The harmonising of Christian identity, reflection and confession of faith is crucial in the process of handling the problem of spiritual insecurity in Africa. The term harmonisation suggests that one of the major causes of spiritual insecurity in Africa is dual allegiance and parallelism. Ndisya quoting Healey and Sybertz stress that enculturation of the gospel is necessary to "overcome and break down the dualism and parallelism of Christianity and African traditional religion."<sup>68</sup> Bosch (2011:384, 385) advocates that Africans and the Holy Spirit should lead the process of enculturation so that Christianity is incarnated in their cultural systems, influencing the micro, meso and macro levels of the society as well as transforming social, economic, political, religious and education sectors.

### **Conclusion**

We affirm the supremacy of Christ. The message of power evangelism, healing and revival proclaiming Christ's dominion over witchcraft and evil spirits should empower congruency of Christian confession, identity, reflections and competence for Christian faith to permeate every sphere of African society. Enculturation and inculturation have to facilitate harmonisation of confession, identity, reflection and competent practice of Christian faith in solving the problem of spiritual insecurities. Some of the Africans struggle to harmonise their Christian faith in lived reality because they were not given an opportunity to examine and own Scriptures in dealing with their old beliefs. The article emphasizes on in-depth reflection on the meaning of Lordship and mediatory role of Jesus Christ as well as the significance of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Africans should examine the Scriptures themselves for authentic enculturation and inculturation of the gospel in Africa so that they own responses to spiritual insecurity<sup>69</sup>. Solutions to spiritual security should come from indigenous' interpretation of life and the world from the perspective of the supremacy of Christ.

---

<sup>66</sup> Kees Waaijman, "Discernment - The Compass on the High Sea of Spirituality," *Acta Theologica* 17 (2013): 13, <https://doi.org/10.4314/actat.v32i2S.2>.

<sup>67</sup> Ashforth, "Human Security and Spiritual Insecurity," 136.

<sup>68</sup> Ndisya, "An Analysis and Response," 83.

<sup>69</sup> Ndisya, "An Analysis and Response," 92.

## Bibliography

- Ashforth, Adam. "Human Security and Spiritual Insecurity: Why the Fear of Evil Forces Needs to be Taken Seriously." *Journal of International Affairs* (2010): 99-106.  
<https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/geojaf11&div=16&id=&page=>.
- Bediako, Kwame. "Understanding African Theology in the 20th Century." *Themelios* 20, no. 1 (1994): 14-20. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/understanding-african-theology-in-the-20th-century/>.
- Enzenweke, E. Onyi. "Pentecostalism and the Culture of Fear in Contemporary African Communities: A Paradigm Shift." *American International Journal of Contemporary Research* 3, no. 5 (2013): 99-104. [http://www.aijcrnet.com/journals/Vol\\_3\\_No\\_5\\_May\\_2013/13.pdf](http://www.aijcrnet.com/journals/Vol_3_No_5_May_2013/13.pdf).
- Fisher, Jonathan and Cherry Leonardi. "Insecurity and the Invisible: The Challenge of Spiritual (In)security." *Security Dialogue* 52, no. 5 (2021): 383-400.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010620973540>.
- Ganzevoort, R. Ruard. "Forks in the Road When Tracing the Sacred, Practical Theology as Hermeneutics of Lived Religion." *Presidential Address to the Ninth Conference of the International Academy of Practical Theology*, Chicago (August 2009).  
[http://www.ruardganzevoort.nl/pdf/2009\\_Presidential.pdf](http://www.ruardganzevoort.nl/pdf/2009_Presidential.pdf).
- Gorman, Michael J. "The Cross as God's Self-Exegesis: Some Contributions from Paul and John." *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 76, no. 1 (2022): 15 -26.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00209643211051125>.
- Han, Chandra. "Christ's Supremacy: Colossians 1:15-20 and Its Implication in Education." *Diligentia: Journal of Theology and Christian Education* 1, No. 1 (September 2019): 1-14.  
<https://doi.org/10.19166/dil.v1i1.1887>.
- Kim, Hyun-Sook. "The Hermeneutical-Praxis Paradigm and Practical Theology." *Religious Education* 102, no. 4 (November 2007): 419-436.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00344080701657873>.
- Kroesbergen, Hermen. *The Language of Faith in Southern Africa Spirit World, Power, Community, Holism*. Durbanville, South Africa: AOSIS, 2019.  
<http://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/376854>.
- Letšosa, Rantoa. "What Has the Beast's Mark to Do with the COVID-19 Vaccination, and What is the Role of the Church and Answering to the Christians?" *HTS Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (2021): 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.6480>.
- Magezi, Vhumani and Christopher Magezi. "A Pastoral Evaluation and Responses to the Challenge of Spiritual Insecurity in African Pastoral Ministry and Christianity." *Verbum et Ecclesia* 38, no. 1 (2017): 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v38i1.1734>.
- Matthaei, Sondra Higgins. "Rethinking Faith Formation." *Religious Education* 99, No. 1 (2010): 56-70. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344080490269399>.
- Mokhoathi, Joel. "From Contextual Theology to African Christianity: The Consideration of Adiaphora from a South African Perspective." *Religions* 8, No. 12 (2017): 1-14.  
<https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8120266>.
- Moyo, Masauso. "Christian Faith Formation and Culture: A Theological Study of the Nsenga People." PhD thesis, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, 2023.

- Moyo, Masauso, and Khamadi J. Pali. "Faith Formation in the Tension Interplay of Tools, Processes and the Course for Social Transformation." *Acta Theologica* 43, no. 2 (2023): 167-83. <https://doi.org/10.38140/at.v43i2.7792>.
- Moyo, Masauso. "Inducting the Socratic Method of Forming Faith in African Contexts." *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies (ERATS)* 10, no. 10 (2024): 328-339. <https://doi.org/10.38159/erats.202410101>.
- Ndisya, Joseph Mutune. "An Analysis and Response to the Fear of Evil Spiritual Forces Among Kamba Christians in the Light of Biblical and Ellen G. White Teachings." PhD diss., Andrews University, 2015. <https://dx.doi.org/10.32597/dissertations/1587>.
- Osei-Acheampong, Desmond T. "A Priestly Christology: A Biblical-Theological Investigation of Christ's Priesthood." *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies (ERATS)* 10, no. 5 (2024): 167-181. <https://doi.org/10.38159/erats.20241055>.
- Pali, Khamadi J. "Christ as Once for All Sacrifice: A Cultural Reading of Hebrews." *Acta Theologica* 34, no. 1 (2014): 145-172. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/actat.v34i1.9>.
- Sesi, Stephen Mutuku, Henry Mutua, Alemayehu Mekonnen, Steven Rasmussen, Mark Shaw, Josephine Mutuku Sesi, and Caleb Chul-Soo Kim. *African Missiology: Contribution of Contemporary Thought*. Nairobi, Kenya: Uzima Publishing House, 2009. <https://archive.org/details/africanmissiolog0000sesi/page/n7/mode/2up>.
- Smit, Dirk J. "Confessing Church Today?" *Acta Theologica* 43, no. 1 (2023): 193-210. <https://doi.org/10.38140/at.v43i1.7393>.
- Tambatamba, Anthony. B., A. M. Cheyeka, and T. C. Milingo. "From White Fathers to Black Fathers in Kasama and Mpika Dioceses in Zambia." *Zambia Social Science Journal* 7, no. 2 (2021): 11-33.
- Togarasei, Lovemore. "Rethinking Christian Identity: African Reflections from Pauline Writings." *Perichoresis* 14, no. 1 (2016): 101-114. <https://doi.org/10.1515/perc-2016-0006>.
- Udelhoven, Bernard. "The Devil of the Missionary Church: The White Fathers and Catholic Evangelization in Zambia." *Journal of Global Catholicism* 2, no. 1 (December 2017): 70-109. <https://doi.org/10.32436/2475-6423.1022>.
- Van Gelder, Craig. *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007.
- Van der Borght, Eduardus. "Christian Identity an Introduction." In *Studies in Reformed Theology* vol. 16, edited by Eduardus van der Borght, 1-15. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2008. <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004158061.i-514.4>.
- Waaijman, Kees. "Discernment – The Compass on the High Sea of Spirituality." *Acta Theologica* 17 (2013): 13-24. <https://doi.org/10.4314/actat.v32i2S.2>.