

African Culture And The Christian Church: An Introduction To Social And Pastoral Anthropology

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A pastoral evaluation and responses to the challenge of spiritual insecurity in African pastoral ministry and Christianity



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This article argues that there is a form of Christian syncretism operating in African Christians' use of traditional African powers to address their spiritual insecurity challenges that arises from their former traditional African worldview of spiritual powers. It provides an overview description of the nature of the spiritual insecurity which still grips African Christians by delving into the traditional African worldview of spiritual powers (such as the notions of a Supreme Being, lesser divinities, spirits and ancestors) and the centrality of traditional powers such as diviners in addressing this insecurity. After underscoring the aforementioned, this article proceeds to demonstrate three predominant views proposed by theological scholars as a response to the spiritual insecurity of African Christians. The first stance calls African Christians to discontinue with anything that is linked to traditional African spiritual worldview because Christianity entails a complete new ontological being. The second stance disapproves African Christians' reliance on traditional African powers and then proceeds to argue that Christian ministry should identify positives within the African spiritual world system and worldview that is useful and can be imported for use in contextualising the gospel. The third position advocates for Christians' continual reliance on traditional African spiritual powers in addressing their African contextual needs. In doing this, the weaknesses and strengths of these approaches are established with the view to outline an alternative biblical theological basis to ensure biblical Christianity in the challenging African contexts of spiritual insecurity. This article concludes by drawing from various theological responses to the spiritual insecurity of African Christians to ensure Christian ministry that is thoroughly biblical and contextual in African Christianity.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This article discusses African spiritual worldview and its implications to practical Christianity. It is an interdisciplinary theological article that integrates African Christian theology and pastoral care. It contributes to the discussion on contextualising Christian practical ministry in Africa.

Introduction and background

There is spiritual insecurity among African Christians that arises from African Christians' disconnection with African traditional patterns (Banda 2005; Bediako 2004:23). African Christians have in their worldview and upbringing an approach to life, health and wellness that is linked to spiritual powers. Health, life and wellness result from harmony satisfaction and abiding by the spiritual code (Banda 2005:25; Light 2010:107; Magezi 2007:657; Mwaure 2006:137). The first code is that health and life is a result of happiness by spiritual powers, that is, Supreme Being, lesser divinities, ancestors and spirits. The second code is that evil powers, such as witchcraft and sorcerers, are kept at bay through ancestors' protection and protecting magic.

Good life, wellness and health are expected to be alright on an ongoing basis because of the balance of life forces whereby ancestors and associated spiritual beings are happy and also witches and sorcerers are kept at bay. Sickness or unhealthiness is viewed as a breakdown of this equilibrium code or balance. In such a situation (times of sickness and problems), remedy is sought through diagnoses and through resultant intervention proposed by traditional African diviners (Imasogie 1983:60; Mbiti 1989:165-174; Nakah 2006:32; Sogolo 1991:182-185). Diviners have supernatural powers to communicate with the spiritual world where they are informed of the causes of the problem and the remedy to be applied. Diviners occupy the central role in addressing African people's problems in life (Imasogie 1983:60; Mbiti 1989:165-174). They play a connecting role between the human beings and the spiritual powers (Imasogie 1983:60; Mbiti 1989:165-174). They carry the inquiries of human beings to spiritual powers for causes and remedies. In turn, they



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