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Theological Reflections and Dialogues in South Africa: God, Ancestors, and the Supernatural Powers

Hundzukani P. Khosa

The Unit for Reformational Theology and the Development of the South African Society, Faculty of Theology, North-West University, Potchefstroom 2531, South Africa; hundzukani.khosa@nwu.ac.za

Abstract

With a focus on how both traditions influence identity, memory, and lived spirituality in African contexts, this article examines the theological and cultural interactions between Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR). This study highlights the ongoing interaction between ATR and Christianity as two significant systems ingrained in African life, notwithstanding the continent's religious diversity. In Africa, religion and culture are inextricably linked, influencing social customs, moral standards, and a sense of community but also constantly changing due to personal experience. African spiritual systems were frequently disregarded by missionary Christianity in the past, which led to conflicts that still exist in modern African Christianity. The importance of ancestors, rituals, and supernatural beliefs all of which are still fundamental to the worldviews of many African Christians are areas where these conflicts are especially noticeable. This article makes the case for a positive theological approach that acknowledges ATR as an essential tool for African Christian identity rather than as a rival or subpar system, drawing on the idea of inculturation. The article illustrates how African spirituality serves as a storehouse of collective memory and identity over generations by delving into issues of ancestry, ritual, and spiritual mediation. Additionally, it offers a liberative and dialogical theological concept that promotes understanding between Christianity and ATR. Such an approach not only bridges spiritual divides but also contributes to the development of a contextually grounded liberation theology that affirms indigenous knowledge systems while remaining open to global theological discourse.

Keywords: liberation traditional religion; Christianity; ancestors; spirituality; inculturation; interreligious dialogue; African theology; cultural identity; ritual

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1. Introduction

Spirituality is inextricably linked to culture and daily life for many people who grew up in African cultures. In these settings, spirituality is a lived reality ingrained in group rituals, practices, and belief systems rather than just a personal or abstract idea. Despite their vastness and diversity, African spirituality and culture have one thing in common: the spiritual and material realms are inextricably linked. According to Principe (1983, pp. 103–31), the term spirituality's root, which comes from "spirit," is viewed as God's presence in both the Old and New Testaments. But modern views have changed, with some Christian traditions separating spirituality from religion.

In African societies, where spirituality is intrinsically communal and manifested via cultural life, this divide is especially troublesome. In the past, Christianity has frequently had a hostile attitude toward other religious traditions, such as Asian and African faiths.

Cyprian of Carthage said there was no salvation outside the Christian Church as early as the third century (Gort 2008, p. 748). These viewpoints reinforced the division between the Christian world and what was referred to as the "kingdom of darkness" by portraying non-Christian religions as "superstition" or "heathen unbelief" (Gort 2008, p. 748).

These theological stances had a major impact on missionary strategies in Africa and still have an impact on attitudes today. African Instituted Churches (AICs), which represent Christian traditions that appeal to African spiritual sensibilities, have simultaneously become significant venues for theological discussion. These churches frequently exhibit a fusion of African cosmologies and biblical teachings, especially in their conceptions of spiritual action, healing, and the Holy Spirit. While the Old Testament frequently links the Holy Spirit to specific leaders and prophets, the New Testament, particularly the book of Acts, portrays the Spirit as active and available to all believers (Acts 2).

Important hermeneutical issues are brought up by this. Because the Bible is a product of cultural contexts, interpreting it in African contexts requires interacting with one cultural framework via another. Biblical ideas, especially those contained in the Old Testament, are related to the African spiritual concept of spirit, which is commonly regarded as breath, vital force, or presence. In both faiths, healing, possession, and supernatural influence are major themes. Because of this convergence, African cultural and spiritual frameworks are essential to understanding African Christianity. Therefore, this study takes a practical theological approach to the idea of "spirit," paying special attention to African rites, rituals, and liturgical activities. It seeks to contribute to ongoing discussions on how African spirituality and Christianity can be engaged in a manner that is both critical and constructive.

2. Background of the Study

Several academics claim that African Independent Churches (AICs) arose in response to the ecclesiastical practices and spirituality of churches established by Western missionaries, especially in cases where African religious worldviews and spiritual needs were marginalized (Anderson 2001).

The spiritual world, the operation of the Holy Spirit, and the widely held idea in many African worldviews that spiritual reasons may underlie physical events—were frequently given scant attention by Western missionary-founded churches (Anderson 2001).

In Africa, where the AICs operate, there is a widespread idea that the material and spiritual realms coexist. According to the African perspective, there are two kinds of spirits: benevolent (good) and malevolent (wicked). Human spirits in a higher state of life are called ancestors. They continue to be members of their clans and are only able to help the clan's surviving members. An individual does not select their forebears.

African Christians still hold the belief that there are spiritual forces that can be employed to hurt people. As was the case in early religious frameworks, there must be a mechanism to discover meaning when things happen that are difficult to explain. The rise of AICs in the early twentieth century has been attributed to several factors. Several scholars argue that African Independent Churches (AICs) developed within the structures of mission churches and are frequently understood as a response to missionary Christianity (Oduro et al. 2008). Even though exclusivist viewpoints dominated Christian attitudes toward other religious traditions for over 1500 years, there were some notable exceptions.

Some intellectuals, like Pope Gregory the Great, Raymond Lull, Bartholomew de las Casas, Matteo Ricci, and Robert de Nobili, promoted a more tolerant approach to interreligious interaction (Gort 2008, p. 749). Many African academics, clergy, and political figures pushed for a reevaluation of colonial attitudes toward Christianity and African

Indigenous Religion (AIR) between 1945 and 1965, contending that religious liberty ought to coexist with political independence (Sundkler and Steed 2000).

However, it is still challenging to define spirituality. According to John Mbiti in Prayers of African Religion, spirituality includes the principles that foster a person's ability to communicate with spirits (Mbiti 1975, p. xx). As a result, the term "spirituality" can encompass a broad range of concepts, such as worldviews, religious beliefs, and approaches to the paranormal.

3. Religion and Spirituality

Some theological groups believe that African Christianity's spirituality is just a Christian manifestation of African traditional religion. From the early days of the African church to its current state, these theologians chart the evolution of the religion and its customs. According to Magesa, there has never been a true dialogue at any level between Western Christianity and African religion (Magesa 1997, p. 5). He goes on to say that rather than being a mutual exchange, the interaction between the two traditions has historically operated as a monologue (Magesa 1997, p. 5).

This disparity is frequently explained by the fact that Western Christianity was first documented and institutionalized, while African traditional religion was primarily passed down orally, with some rites being limited to private or sacred settings. Scholars stress the significance of establishing common human experiences as a foundation for meaningful engagement in interreligious discourse. According to Gort (2008, p. 756), there is a basic layer of shared human experience that permits communication and understanding despite cultural and religious differences. Existential issues like meaning, suffering, worry, and terror are among these common experiences.

Knitter (1995, p. 218) defines "liberative dialogue" within this paradigm, emphasizing mutual respect and transformative participation between dialogue participants. Rather than being prescriptive statements about what followers of ATR should do, such methods are provided in the literature as possible models for interreligious contact, including involvement with African Indigenous Religion.

In Christian ethics, interacting with adherents of African Indigenous Religion (AIR) is frequently seen as a sign of neighborly love. However, academics warn that if interreligious communication is not genuinely attentive and transparent, it could become shallow. Therefore, in dialogue circumstances, meaningful involvement necessitates humility and appreciation of the other person's viewpoint.

Historically, Christian theology and missionary frameworks have formed a large portion of the discourse on African religions, frequently giving outsider interpretations precedence over African self-representation. African traditional religion, on the other hand, is firmly ingrained in communal life, with myths and rituals playing a crucial role in social organization and the creation of meaning. According to Setsiba (2012, p. 28), these customs are strongly linked to life-cycle events, such as death and mourning rituals, where bereaved people may be viewed as ritually vulnerable and momentarily cut off from their regular social interactions. Many of these ceremonial traditions are still important in African communities, despite the fact that social situations have altered over time.

Therefore, spirituality must be lived and articulated rather than just comprehended intellectually. It is essentially concerned with how life is lived meaningfully, regardless of whether it is associated with religious, philosophical, or other belief systems. Spirituality is a transforming force that shapes ways of being, behavior, and perception. It promotes both individual and collective transformation by allowing people to switch between different modes of understanding.

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4. African Traditional Religion

Steve Biko claims that colonial circumstances influenced the spread of Christianity in Africa, allowing it to serve as a tool of social control and dominance in some situations (Biko 1978). In this sense, it occasionally contributed to systems of control that disproportionately affected Black communities due to its alignment with colonial processes.

Therefore, it can be claimed that Christianity has occasionally been linked to oppressive systems that have harmed African communities. However, it's crucial to recognize that not all aspects of Christianity are intrinsically bad, just as not all aspects of African Traditional Religion (ATR) are intrinsically good.

By contesting interpretations that depict God as "colonized," scholars like Vuyani Vellem and Kobo have critically engaged liberation theology discourse, emphasizing Black Africans' lived experiences as a theological starting point. According to Vellem (2012), African Instituted Churches (AICs) are important theological resistance sites because they affirm African spirituality and connect with African people' socio-religious realities. In a similar vein, H. A. Mwakabana (2002) emphasizes how AICs can promote a liberating spirituality within the larger Christian framework by utilizing African cultural and religious resources.

Scholars like Cas Wepener and Mudau have added to the conversation on inculturation by examining how Christian theology and African Traditional Religion (ATR) might interact positively for the good of local communities. Therefore, the literature frequently views inculturation as a framework for promoting meaningful interaction between various theological and cultural traditions. Some academics contend that past attempts to stifle African spiritual and cultural expressions can also be seen as a contributing factor to more general disruptions of African identity formation under this interpretive framework.

According to H. M. Mwakabana (2002, p. 11), African religion (AR) is an indigenous system of ideas and practices that is completely ingrained in African culture and worldview. Despite having a variety of regional manifestations, AR has certain characteristics in common that suggest a wider continental coherence. The admission of the invisible spiritual realm and life beyond death, as well as the recognition of a supreme God as the creator and sustainer of life, are fundamental to these beliefs. According to H. M. Mwakabana (2002, p. 16), Africans, like other people, are afraid of the unknown and of not being able to anticipate or control the future.

Many African cultures have a strong bond with nature, which makes them more conscious of the risks associated with interacting with the natural world, other people, and the spiritual world. According to H. M. Mwakabana (2002), p. 17, spirituality is viewed in this context as a path toward freedom and well-being as well as a defense against negative forces. African religion accepts the existence of evil as well as the power of God. It frequently views bad luck as the outcome of unresolved spiritual dynamics, such as resentful ancestors or human jealousy.

Additionally, AR fosters an understanding of spiritual forces and their impact on human existence, both positively and negatively (H. M. Mwakabana 2002, p. 19). Because of this, people may try to interact with or control these energies through symbolic acts, rituals, and religious experts' recommended treatments. But it's crucial to refrain from making broad generalizations about African civilizations. Although there are some commonalities among communities, practices and beliefs differ greatly, and this study does not purport to be representative of all African religious manifestations.

According to Mpedi (2008, p. 106), African religious traditions are firmly ingrained in culture and have a variety of rituals that share significant similarities. Crucially, ancestors are viewed as powerful members of the extended family who have the power to influence the welfare of the living rather than as gods. Sometimes people go through initiation

procedures in response to what is thought to be a calling from ancestor spirits, especially when it comes to healing techniques. According to Van Eck, some Western theological systems have historically depicted African culture and religion as demonic or immoral (Van Eck 2006, p. 682).

He contends that colonial endeavors frequently aimed to destroy African traditional systems prior to installing Christianity, a view that still shapes attitudes today. Van Eck does, however, warn that while not all cultural customs are impervious to criticism, it is also false to write off African culture as fundamentally wicked. Lastly, Mwakabana recognizes that AR is essential to preserving social cohesiveness and communal integrity (H. M. Mwakabana 2002, p. 17). However, some cultural customs might need to be critically examined, especially if they continue injustice or harm. This necessitates a well-rounded, contextually aware strategy that upholds the significance of African spirituality while remaining receptive to introspection and change.

5. Rituals as Rite of Passage and Ancestral Worship

Ceremonies or rituals commemorating important life phases, such as birth, the journey from infancy to maturity, marriage, and death, are known as rites of passage. According to Senn, rituals serve both theological and biological purposes (Senn 2016, p. 93). From a biological standpoint, regardless of the ritual being carried out, the body and brain react to activities like prayer and meditation in a similar way. From a theological standpoint, rituals are seen as manifestations of humanity's natural propensity to communicate with God, implying that ritualization is a way for people to interact with the divine.

The idea of ritual is applicable to all religious and cultural traditions, not just African customs. Rituals can also be found in Christian customs including burial ceremonies, birthday celebrations, and home blessings. Senn goes on to emphasize that rituals are repetitive behaviors that, when repeated, become formative, molding people in accordance with the ideals of the communities that engage in them (Senn 2016, p. 94). Additionally, he warns that rituals that are detached from history run the risk of losing their significance or efficacy (Senn 2016, p. 96).

Meaningful communication between Christianity and African Indigenous Religion (AIR) is desperately needed, especially considering AIR's ongoing influence among African Christians. Since many followers of the missionary style of Christianity continue to follow customs, particularly in times of crisis, it has sometimes been criticized for being inconsistent. This implies that lived experience is still profoundly impacted by AIR (Mercado 2005, p. 104).

According to Panikkar (1975, pp. 407–9), religious conversation is defined as the sharing of ideas and perspectives based on common understanding with the goal of enhancing mutual knowledge while recognizing both differences and complementarities. In its most basic form, dialogue is a discussion or sharing of ideas between people (Adamo 1989, pp. 82–88). Rituals related to death and sorrow in African contexts highlight the significance of this kind of conversation. To purge mourners of ritual impurity and reintegrate them into society, community members take part in rites (Setsiba 2012, p. 20). Although mourning is a universal human experience, it is mediated by religious and cultural frameworks.

These frameworks, which give meaning to loss, include common beliefs, traditions, spiritual practices, and behavioral expectations (Maloka 1998). Although fields like anthropology have frequently shied away from evaluative judgments, Grimes observes that ritual criticism goes beyond theology to include viewpoints from social sciences (Grimes 2010, p. 13). The customs surrounding widowhood are one area where cultural differences are most noticeable. In many African countries, a widow is viewed as someone who needs protection during a vulnerable time, whereas in Western contexts, she is usually defined in

social and legal terms. According to Daber (Daber 2003, p. 30), widows may be viewed as ritually polluted, and avoidance behaviors are meant to shield the larger group from the perceived consequences of death.

Certain ritual cleansing rituals, like those in some parts of Ghana, may involve contentious rites meant to elevate a person's social and spiritual standing.

In African spirituality, ancestors continue to play a crucial role. They are revered and remembered through ritualistic acts, such as the giving of animals in ceremonies that commemorate lives well lived. These customs serve as manifestations of collective memory and identity and support the link between the living and the dead.

However, Lukken notes that some people may view rituals negatively, viewing them as inflexible, formulaic, or even manipulative (Lukken 2005, p. 133). These criticisms imply that rituals may be utilized to uphold power hierarchies or to mask authenticity. In a similar vein, Ela contends that African Christians still doubt whether the Bible sufficiently captures the realities of African life (Ela 2001, p. 2). This highlights the need for contextual biblical interpretation that considers African people's lived realities. As a result, the Bible must be interpreted in a way that speaks to African reality while simultaneously being read within its historical and theological context. This requires a balance between maintaining the integrity of the biblical message and engaging critically with the socio-cultural contexts in which it is received.

6. Theology of Inculturation

According to Kurgat (Kurgat 2009, p. 9), inculturation is the continuous conversation between religion and a particular cultural setting. He goes on to say that as people belong to specific social groups that are influenced by cultural traditions, evangelization is intrinsically linked to culture (Kurgat 2009, p. 92). Therefore, it is impossible to spread the gospel without considering people's cultural backgrounds. According to Duncan, there is a lack of conceptual clarity because the idea of inculturation is frequently applied variably across religious traditions, especially within Roman Catholicism (Duncan 2014, p. 1). He goes on to say that inculturation which is defined as adaptability, innovation, and reflexivity occurs in African contexts out of necessity and reflects African communities' increasing self-awareness.

According to Du Toit, an inculturation hermeneutic that takes African culture and religion seriously as theological resources is necessary for the formation of an authentic African theology (Du Toit 1998, p. 374). This entails critically analyzing issues of identity, customs, and cultural practices as well as what it means to be African. African identity as a theological issue must thus be addressed by African theologians involved in liberation discourse. According to Wepener and Meyer (Wepener and Meyer 2011, p. 6), liturgical inculturation is a process of critical and reciprocal interaction between worship practices and culture that leads to mutual enrichment. Liturgy forms that are both theologically significant and contextually relevant result from this interaction.

Wesley and Kurewa note that major misconceptions, such as the notion that Africans had no religion at all, influenced early interpretations of African religion (Wesley and Kurewa 2000, p. 24). Scholars like John Mbiti later refuted this notion by illuminating the richness and diversity of African religious systems. Previous categorizations, like E.B. Tylor's "animism," frequently fell short of capturing the depth of African spirituality.

As a theological reaction to poverty, oppression, and social injustice, liberation theology first appeared in Latin America in the middle of the 20th century, especially in the 1950s and 1960s. Since then, scholars have applied its emphasis on liberation from structural and systemic inequality to a variety of global contexts, including Africa, where it has been used to affirm African people's religious and cultural identities in relation to both Christianity

and African Traditional Religion. Its use in African Christian discourse is still debatable in some theological circles, nevertheless.

According to Wiliga (2013, p. 237), inculturation is a genuine and intentional attempt to make the gospel of Christ relevant in various cultural situations. According to H. M. Mwakabana (2002, p. 22), the decline of human-centered and communal ideals derived from African religious traditions is a contributing factor in the serious social challenges that modern Africa is facing.

These crises manifest in forms of injustice, oppression, violence, and social fragmentation. Competing interpretations of such challenges often emerge within religious discourse, with some attributing them to a turning away from God, while others interpret them as a loss of African identity and spiritual heritage. According to Bassis, Celles, and Levine, stories, customs, rituals, and shared experiences are how culture is passed down through the generations (Bassis et al. 2012, p. 20). All cultures have fundamental components including beliefs, values, conventions, symbols, and language, even when cultural expressions differ. This transmission encompasses both traditional and Christian religious systems in African cultures. Many Africans embrace the God of the Bible while also believing in ancestors, whose authority comes from collective memory and lived experience rather than from written writings.

Van Eck criticizes the propensity of some theological traditions to present African religion in a bad light, frequently portraying it as something that must be corrected (Van Eck 2006, p. 682). Attempts to "fix" Africa through incorrect biblical readings have been aided by such viewpoints. African theology has responded by creating new hermeneutical strategies that aim to address African reality within the context of the gospel (Van Eck 2006, p. 688). These realities include socioeconomic difficulties, where many people struggle to survive, which influences their religious priorities and behaviors. Mwakabana emphasizes the importance of death in this context as a moment that connects the past, present, and future (H. M. Mwakabana 2002, p. 47). Burial rituals become performative spaces in which communal memory, spiritual belief, and cultural continuity are enacted, often with the intention of securing harmony between the living and the dead.

7. Inculturation and African Theology

Inculturation is the continuous conversation between faith and a particular culture, according to Kurgat (2009, p. 9). He goes on to say that those who are firmly ingrained in cultural traditions and who belong to specific social groups are involved in evangelization (Kurgat 2009, p. 92). As a result, the gospel must be shared through people who are culturally placed rather than being spread independently of cultural contexts. According to Duncan (2014, p. 1), there is ambiguity in the meaning and application of the notion of inculturation because it is frequently understood differently among religious traditions, especially within Roman Catholicism. He goes on to say that inculturation which is defined as adaptation, creativity, and reflexivity arises out of necessity, especially in African environments where self-awareness and cultural identity are important.

According to Du Toit (1998, p. 374), traditional African religion and culture are essential components of an African theology. He also emphasizes that African theologians who are involved in liberation rhetoric had to consider what African identity means. This raises important issues regarding whether race, ritual, tradition, or a mix of these factors determine Africanness. Liturgical inculturation, according to Wepener and Meyer (2011, p. 6), entails a critical-reciprocal connection between culture and liturgy that leads to mutual enrichment. They refer to this dynamic interplay as an "inculturated liturgy," in which religious practices and cultural expressions influence and transform one another. African religious academics have always found it difficult to understand African belief systems,

according to Wesley and Kurewa (2000, p. 24). Early Western viewpoints frequently believed that Africans had no religion at all. Scholars like John Mbiti later questioned this view by pointing out past anthropological errors. For instance, African religious rituals were described using Tylor's (1871) definition of "animism," which reflects a narrow and frequently reductionist perspective. Wiliga (2013, p. 237) defines inculturation as a sincere effort to make the gospel of Christ meaningful and accessible across diverse cultural contexts, both locally and globally.

8. Liberation Theology and Socio-Cultural Realities

According to H. M. Mwakabana (2002, p. 22), Africa is experiencing severe societal crises that stem from the continent's long-standing communal and human-centered worldview. Injustice, oppression, exploitation, human rights abuses, ethnic conflict, and political instability are all manifestations of these crises, which frequently lead to displacement and civil unrest. Similar worries are voiced in daily conversation in modern-day South Africa. For example, perceptions of social issues like violence and moral collapse are sometimes linked to either a loss of African identity and cultural roots or a spiritual detachment from God.

According to Bassis et al. (2012, p. 20), social behaviors, games, rituals, oral traditions, and storytelling are ways that culture is passed down through the generations. Common components of culture include language, symbols, conventions, values, and beliefs. Although these components vary throughout nations, their structural existence is universal. Africans frequently embrace both biblical Christianity and traditional beliefs, navigating a dual religious consciousness. This cohabitation reflects a larger cultural framework that views spiritual realities as intertwined with daily reality.

According to Van Eck (2006, p. 682), conventional biblical readings have occasionally perpetuated unfavorable perceptions about Africa, resulting in interpretive strategies that try to "correct" or modify African identities using outside frameworks. To engage African realities within their own sociocultural contexts, he adds, African theology has created a new hermeneutical method (Van Eck 2006, p. 688). The importance of death in African cosmology is further highlighted by H. M. Mwakabana (2002, p. 47), who points out that burial customs serve as symbolic locations where the past, present, and future converge. These customs aim to preserve the continuity of relationships between the living and the deceased in addition to being commemorative.

9. Ancestral Beliefs and Mediation

Many Africans, according to McVeigh (1974, p. 109), view God as transcendent and distant, which influences their religious practices. Because of this, ancestors are frequently used as a conduit for connection with the divine. Ancestors serve as go-betweens, communicating to God the needs and requests of the living. Many African traditional religions acknowledge this mediating role (McVeigh 1974, p. 115). According to Brown (2004, p. 136), witchcraft and mysticism are still common in many African civilizations and continue to have an impact on modern religious and cultural customs.

According to Adamo (2011, p. 4), ancestors are those who have passed away and are revered by their descendants. It is thought that they continue to play active roles in the family lineage, providing blessings, protection, or punishment based on their link with the living. Additionally, ancestors are seen as moral role models whose lives serve as a model for moral behavior. They continue to be a part of the community's social and spiritual life through ceremonies, rituals, and social events (Adamo 2011, p. 6). According to Brown (2004, p. 158), ritual communication and interpretation are necessary since ancestor spirits' intentions are frequently seen as mysterious. Furthermore, because outsider viewpoints

could miss the inherent logic of belief systems, comprehending African ontologies necessitates a thorough cultural immersion (Brown 2004, p. 160). According to Beyers (2010, p. 6), ancestral devotion is a fundamental tenet of African religion and is frequently understood in terms of families, much like parent–child bonds. It is thought that ancestors continue to be a relational presence in the family, strengthening continuity between generations.

10. Clash Between Christianity and African Traditional Religion

Manala (2013, p. 1) contends that while Christianity brought some moral and social advantages to Africa, it also played a role in the marginalization of African cultural identities. Indigenous customs were suppressed or rejected because of missionary attempts that were frequently in line with imperial aims. Like this, Crafford (1993, p. 165) observes that Western missionaries often had a negative attitude toward African culture and frequently demanded that converts embrace both Christianity and Western cultural standards. Theological conflict and cultural dislocation were exacerbated by this strategy.

African theologians have responded by delving deeper into the connection between cultural identity and Christian faith. A properly incarnated African church, according to Crafford (1993, p. 166), must be true to the central message of Christianity while expressing itself through culturally understandable practices, symbols, and doctrines. Kato emphasizes that African culture must be assessed in the context of Scripture while upholding the significance of Christ's dominion (as reported in Crafford 1993, p. 166). Western Protestant theology, which advocates for a total rupture with indigenous belief systems, has frequently emphasized the discontinuity between the gospel and traditional religion (Crafford 1993, p. 166).

According to Crafford (1993, p. 171), early missionaries frequently disregarded African existential issues including ancestor devotion, witchcraft, and sorcery. African Independent Churches, which aimed to contextualize Christianity within African cultural frameworks, emerged because of this exclusion. Indigenous Christian expressions are currently greatly influenced by African Independent Churches. To prevent syncretism while preserving authenticity, they must, nevertheless, manage the conflict between doctrinal integrity and contextual relevance. African spirituality integrates spiritual and material reality and is intrinsically communal and comprehensive. Religious expression revolves around rituals, dreams, visions, and group worship. These components show how the spiritual world actively engages with daily existence.

11. Conclusions

Many groups throughout South Africa and the larger African continent continue to have strong ties to African spirituality in their daily lives. It reflects an integrated worldview in which God, ancestors, and the community dwell in harmonious relationships and includes both religious belief and cultural history. Mission-oriented churches urgently need to accept contextualized African expressions of Christianity and transcend Western norms. African theology and liberation theology both advocate for an indigenous church that represents African people's struggles, realities, and cultural identities. Additionally, culturally appropriate hermeneutics that meaningfully engage African contexts should be given priority in African biblical interpretation. The African church must create methods that are both loyal to the gospel and resonate with local experiences rather than importing Western interpretive frameworks. In the end, the goal of this conversation is to support a contextualized theology that honors cultural identity while accurately interpreting Christian teaching within African reality, not to encourage a return to African traditional religion.

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