



MASTER THESIS

AN ANALYSIS OF THE MEANING OF THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS CHRIST TO
BELIEVERS IN THE C.C.A.P. LIVINGSTONIA SYNOD GIVEN THEIR BELIEFS AND
PRACTICES ABOUT THE POWER OF ANCESTORS AND WITCHCRAFT OF THE
AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

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1. ABSTRACT

The powers of ancestral spirits as well as the fears of witchcraft create both religious and pastoral challenges in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Livingstonia synod of northern Malawi. In this regard, this study explores the challenges that the church encounters from the context of African Traditional Religion in light of the Western Reformed view of the Lordship of Jesus Christ with special references to Herman Bavinck, John Calvin, Richard. J. Gehman, van der Kooi and Van Den Brink, and Synopsis of Purer Theology. The research aims to make a theological contribution to understanding the roles of the Lordship of Jesus Christ over the powers of ancestors and witchcraft in the Church today.

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CHAPTERS

Chapter One: Introduction and Background.

Chapter One introduces the study through topic motivation and provides background, problem statement, research objectives, and questions, research methodology, means used in data collection, and limitations of the study.

Chapter two: Security and Protection in African Traditional Religion with particular attention to Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (C.C.A.P.), Livingstonia synod.

This chapter gives an in-depth analysis of protection and security and how ordinary believers from the context of African Traditional Religion perceive it. It aims to explore the influence and impact of ancestral spirits' powers and witchcraft beliefs on ordinary believers in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian. This will include exploring factors that make ancestral spirits and witchcraft attractive to those participating by analyzing the interviews.

Chapter Three: Security and Protection in Jesus Christ by selected African Reformed Theologians. This chapter will explore the views of African Reformed theologians on the concept of security and protection in the African Traditional Religion perspective given security and protection in Jesus Christ. These African theologians include John S. Mbiti, Joyce Mlenga, Kwame Bediako, and Vhumani Magezi.

Chapter Four: Security and Protection in Jesus Christ by selected Western Reformed theologians with special references to Herman Bavinck, John Calvin, Richard J. Gehman, Van der Kooi and van den Brink and Synopsis of Purer Theology, This chapter will analyze the roles of the Lordship of Jesus Christ giving security and protection for the believers in the church today from the Reformed theology perspective.

Chapter Five: Conversation on security and protection by Jesus Christ between African Reformed theologians and Western Reformed theologians. This chapter brings a conversation between theologians from the two contexts which will enable us to understand the concept of security and protection from the two worldviews and later bring a clear understanding of the concept from the reformed view.

Chapter Six: Recommendation and Conclusion. This chapter will bring the lesson learned from the presentation, the conclusion of the study, and recommendations to the church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Livingstonia Synod of northern Malawi.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

This thesis will analyze the meaning of the Lordship of Jesus Christ to ordinary believers in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Synod of Livingstonia given their beliefs and practices about the power of ancestral spirits and witchcraft. Many believers seem to observe ancestral spirits and continue to live in fear of witchcraft. This has affected their Christian way of life by participating in these African Traditional Religious beliefs. In some cases, when crises arise like sickness and death, many members including ordinary Christians go and consult ancestral spirits, diviners, or witch doctors for their answers. In addition, due to fear of witchcraft and other supernatural powers, they go to consult witch doctors and diviners for protective charms and other related medicine. It is against this background that the thesis wants to find out what is behind these beliefs and practices as some Christians continue with such traditional practices.

Vhumani Magezi and Christopher Magezi make their observation:

“There is a problem of foreignness of Christ in African Christianity. This results in the perceived ‘inadequacy’ of Christ in protecting African Christians from traditional religious spiritual threats such as witchcraft and angry ancestral spirits. In traditional African religion, protection from spiritual threats of this kind is obtained from charms, ancestors, and traditional medical practitioners. At conversion, African Christians are taught to relinquish reliance on these traditional spiritual powers and to trust only in Jesus Christ for their protection. However, in times of crisis such as sickness, death, or inexplicable life situations, some African Christians revert to their previously abandoned traditional forms of security, whilst continuing to believe in Christ as offering eternal salvation.”¹

Thus, they point to the ‘foreignness of Christ’ and the ‘inadequacy of Christ’s protection’. In this thesis, I would like to test such assertions and analyze what makes ATR attractive for Christians until today and how this adherence to ATR beliefs and practices relates to and affects their faith in the power and Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Regarding Church of Central Africa Presbyterian members, the participation in witchcraft and ancestral spirits’ veneration has become known during kirk sessions’ meetings where some ordinary believers have testified to have been in such practices for either months or decades. This has been largely seen through multiple cases of suspensions of some notable Christian members due to ancestral spirit veneration or witchcraft connections. As a pastor for the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian for over 18 years, these cases of suspending ordinary members for

¹ Vhumani Magezi & Christopher Magezi, An Adamic incarnational Christological framework as a theological approach contextual ministry, www.missionalia.journals.ac.za <http://dx.doi.org/10.7832/44-2-111>, An Adamic incarnational Christological framework 153

their participation in African Traditional Religious beliefs and practices raise the question that there must be something else that attracts these participants.

The participation in the African Traditional Religious beliefs and practices of witchcraft and ancestral spirits by some Christian members in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian raises more questions about the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In addition, the spiritual life of the church is in question for the coexistence of both African Traditional Religion and Christianity in one person. This belief forms an integral part of their worldview; some Africans have adopted the Christian faith largely without forsaking their indigenous notions of the Supreme Being and belief in ancestors.² Thus, an individual ordinary believer lives in both worldviews failing to stick to one worldview that centers its faith through Jesus Christ. Both forms of these beliefs will be critically looked into before we propose means of applying reformed theology teaching into such a context.

1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Reliance on the African Traditional religious beliefs and practices such as the power of ancestral spirits, divination, and witchcraft finding is the order of the day by many Malawians and among the members of the C.C.A.P. Livingstonia. It is believed that ancestral spirits and witchdoctors have some powers and capacity for those challenged with sicknesses and other spiritual threats. This calls for an analysis of the meaning of the Lordship of Jesus Christ for ordinary believers in the CCAP Livingstonia as some rely on such beliefs and practices in times of sicknesses, droughts, deaths, and many more spiritual threats.

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTION

View of the participation by some ordinary believers of the C.C.A.P. Synod of Livingstonia into the religious forms of African Traditional Religion such as ancestral spirits, divination, and witchcraft against their belief in the Lordship of Jesus Christ raises the question, “What do C.C.A.P members believe about security and protection in witchcraft and ancestral spirits in respect of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

The sub-questions

² Dumisani Thabede, JOURNAL FOR THE AFRICAN WORLDVIEW AS THE BASIS OF PRACTICE IN THE HELPING PROFESSIONS, Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk 2008:44(233), <http://socialwork.journals.ac.za/http://dx.doi.org/10.15270/44-3-237>, accessed 17 July 2023.

- i. What do C.C.A.P members believe about the protection by ancestral spirits and witchdoctors and how is this reflected in their beliefs and practices?
- ii. What do C.C.A.P. members believe about the protection by the power and Lordship of Jesus Christ and how is this reflected in their religious practice?
- iii. What are the views of African Reformed theologians about security and protection by Jesus Christ about traditional African spiritual powers?
- iv. What are the views of Western reformed theologians about security and protection by Jesus Christ about other powers?
- v. Which lesson could the C.C.A.P members draw from the conversation between African and Western Reformed theologians on the security and protection of Jesus Christ and traditional African powers?

1.4. THE RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is important to the community of the church in Malawi as it tackles theological issues in the context of African Traditional Religious beliefs and practices given the faith in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the study is related to the question of why Christians have such strong dualistic views. Thus, certain areas are denied to Jesus, as if He has no control over them and no influence over them. The study is also relevant to the pastors and teachers of theological studies as it gives an insight into what people believe in the local church.

Finally, I will also suggest, how believers of the CCAP Livingstonia can better appropriate their faith and trust in the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

1.5. OBJECTIVE OF THIS THESIS

The objective of this thesis is to unveil what is behind peoples' belief in African Traditional beliefs and practices in connection to protection and security about the meaning of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

1.6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

I used a literature review and interviews to write this thesis. Books written by the African and Western reformed theologians on the topics of salvation through Jesus Christ and the influence of fear and redemption of evil powers. In addition, journals and other articles on the internet were also used.

The interviews were conducted with the selected ordinary believers of the C.C.A.P. Livingstonia synod because it was the researcher's view to find out more about what was behind the belief and practice of African Traditional beliefs Chris among ordinary believers.

During the interviews, the respondents made their requests that their names should not be published in the thesis to which the researcher agreed. In this regard, the researcher used the first letters of their first names and surnames but data was kept for authenticity.

Some pastors were interviewed about the knowledge they have about the practice of the members of their church in African Traditional Religion.

1.7. MEANS USED IN DATA COLLECTION

In the research, two types of sources: Primary data based on phone calls including WhatsApp, and secondary data based on the literature of both African and Western reformed theologians.

1.8. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

It is not the aim of this thesis to discuss all that is related to African Traditional Religion. In this research, I focus on the powers believed to be with the ancestors and witchcraft and the influence they bring to ordinary Christian believers given the Lordship of Jesus Christ. I will try to analyze the meaning of the Lordship of Jesus Christ in the life of ordinary believers.

Chapter 2. SOME FORMS OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION GIVEN SECURITY AND PROTECTION WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION TO C.C.A.P. LIVINGSTONIA SYNOD.

2.1 THE HISTORICAL AND RELIGIOUS OVERVIEW OF C.C.A.P. CHURCH LIVINGSTONIA SYNOD IN NORTHERN MALAWI.

The church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Synod of Livingstonia is one of the oldest and biggest churches in Malawi. The church has established itself in both northern and central regions of Malawi and has extended its missionary work to South Africa and Zimbabwe. So far, it has 34 presbyteries and 260 congregations within and outside Malawi. According to 2023 data, the church has a total number of one million; two hundred and seventeen registered Christians (1, 217,000).³ The Church of Central Africa Presbyterian as the name states is a Presbyterianism that is a Reformed tradition.⁴ The missionaries of the Free Church of Scotland founded it in 1875.⁵ From 1875 to date Christianity has gained ground.

Despite the Western missionaries' critics of the African Traditional Religion beliefs, some ordinary believers in the C.C.A.P. Synod of Livingstonia continue to live in fear of these supernatural powers. This has been in the use of charms and emulates for protection and security of their life and health. In addition, many ordinary believers consult ancestral spirits and witch doctors, as they are believed to have powers that can safeguard them from spiritual threats. As a result, many professing Christians compromise their trust in the Lordship of Jesus Christ. This securing power and belief in African Traditional Religion challenges the power of Jesus Christ that he has over all evil powers.

One senior church pastor who has served more than twenty years testified that many discipline cases in the C.C.A.P. church are about witchcraft accusations and the use of charms⁶. The testimony shows the current situation in many parts of the church.

2.2. DESCRIPTION OF THE AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION CONCEPT AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE MEMBERS OF THE C.C.A.P. LIVINGSTONIA SYNOD.

In this chapter, I will give an overview of African Traditional religion and its influence on the members of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian. However, I will begin by defining the phenomenon before I embark on the influence it has brought on the members of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (C.C.A.P).

“African Traditional Religion is the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of the Africans which resulted from the sustaining faith held by the forebears of the present Africans, and which is being practised today in various forms and various shades and intensities by a very large

³ Rev Glad Kumwenda – phone interview on 18th February 2023

⁴ www.ampltd.co.uk/digital guides/livingstonia mission archives

⁵ <https://www.ccapsolinia.org>

⁶ Rev Alick Gad Mhoni – phone interview on 14th February, 2023.

number of Africans, including individuals who claim to be Christians.”⁷ African Traditional Religious beliefs are centred on the powers of ancestral spirits, witchcraft, and divination. Some African people believe that there are invisible, mystical forces and powers in the universe. It is also believed that certain human beings have a knowledge and ability of how to tap, control, and use these forces. Some have greater knowledge and skill than others; some possess the ability without knowing it, and find later that through word or ritual they can release these forces for a particular use.⁸ Some African people believe that the powers of supernatural forces and ancestors are powerful enough to protect an individual or community from danger or sickness.⁹ J.O. Awolalu observes that African Traditional Religious beliefs have influenced many Africans including Christians by giving their allegiance to Indigenous beliefs to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Mbiti argues that African Religion gives its followers a sense of security in life.¹⁰ When Africans are converted to other religions, they often mix their traditional religion with the one to which they are converted.¹¹

Harold Koenig summarizes that many scholars agree that African Traditional Religion comprises beliefs, practices, and rituals that are related to the sacred, to God, to the mystical, or the supernatural.¹² According to Koenig African Traditional Religion is not just a typical function or variable amongst other variables: it constitutes the root from which the different branches of life sprout, grow, and flourish. Furthermore, African Traditional religion concerns the deepest root of human existence and integrates human life into a coherent whole,¹³ such that when sickness and death arise in their families, many Africans consult the powers of their ancestors and diviners for both protection and interpretation of the events. In some cases, both ordinary Christian believers and non-Christian believers participate in such beliefs and practices. It is for this reason that this thesis explores why some ordinary believers in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian consult their ancestral spirits and witchcraft diviners for protection and healing when they are in crises like sicknesses instead of relying on the powers of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Mbiti argues that African Traditional Religion has been largely responsible for shaping the character and culture of African peoples throughout the centuries. Even if it has no sacred books, it is written everywhere in the life of the people. Many African people hold on to African Religious beliefs in many areas of life and continue to participate in such beliefs even if they are converted to other religions like Christianity.¹⁴

⁷ www.studiesincomparativereligion.com, J.O. Awolalu, What is African Traditional Religion, Studies in Comparative Religion, Vol. 10, No. 2. (Spring, 1976), accessed by author on 17 June 2023.

⁸ John S. Mbiti, Introduction to African Religion, Heinemann – London, 1986, page 165.

⁹ Mbiti, 72.

¹⁰ Mbiti, 13.

¹¹ Mbiti, 13.

¹² Koenig, Scriptura 114 (2015:1), pp1-20, <http://scriptura.journals.ac.za>, accessed by author on 07th June 2023.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ John S. Mbiti, Introduction to African Religion, 26.

2.3. Witchcraft belief and ancestral spirits.

Introduction

This chapter seeks to explore some forms of African Traditional religious beliefs given protection and security by many ordinary believers in the C.C.A.P. synod of Livingstonia. The chapter will focus on the powers of witchcraft belief and ancestral spirits. During the research, an interview was conducted which targeted 60 selected members within the church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Livingstonia Synod of northern Malawi. The purpose of the interview was to find out what ordinary believers of the C.C.A.P. church know and believe about witchcraft and ancestral spirits' powers given the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the researcher wanted to find out what attracted ordinary believers to the participation of ancestral spirits and witchcraft.

Witchcraft is a common phenomenon in Malawi. Some people's lives have been affected due to the influence and understanding of witchcraft. The influence of witchcraft has not spared some ordinary believers in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Livingstonia synod. Many people believe that there are invisible, mystical forces and powers in the universe. Witchcraft is a manifestation of these mystical forces that may be inborn in a person, inherited, or acquired in various ways.¹⁵ There is a belief that certain human beings have a knowledge and ability of how to tap, control, and use these forces and that some have greater knowledge and skill than others; some possess the ability without knowing it and find later that through word or ritual they can release these forces for particular use.¹⁶ In Malawi, many people live in fear of witchcraft for they believe that it is the major cause of death.¹⁷ Given in this analysis are the answers of the respondents.

2.4. Two groups of witches in Malawi.

Witchcraft in Malawi is divided in two. According to the information collected during the interview, this division comes based on the difference of their powers or forces. Thus, those who have great powers fall into their category while those who have small powers have also their group. Below is the list of witches that was given.

(a) Fwiti zichokozichoko

This is said to be the junior in their ranks.

These cannot kill but have the power to bring disorders in the body of a person like convulsions or dizziness. If a person is not careful, he can carry the problem for the rest of his life. However,

¹⁵ Mbiti, 164.

¹⁶ Mbiti, 165.

¹⁷ Handwell Yotamu Hara "Reformed Soteriology and the Malawian context", Kachere Series, Zomba, 2005, page 136

many are the times when people are healed from such disorders upon consultation with the witch doctors.¹⁸

(b) Mthakati

This is said to be the senior rank in the line of witches in Malawi. It is believed that this group has both powers of bringing disorders in the bodies of persons and animals and killing persons at their wish. According to the information collected during the interview, many women fall under the second category as they are categorized to have no mercy when comes to sending a spell of harm to someone.

It is better that you bewitched with “fwiti” because you can try to go around in search of healing charms or medicine but not with “Mthakati”. This group’s main target is to get rid of people in the community. They have no mercy at all.¹⁹

It is believed that some witches and wizards can knock on the door during the night as if they want to enter the house, and when the owner of the house happens to open the door he finds nobody.

They come at night and begin knocking at the door. When you happen to open the door, you find nobody. Sometimes they can call you by name as if he or she is in a physical form. There are some nights when we get bored with such situations. The most vulnerable houses are those that have no staff to be protected from witchcraft.²⁰

The respondents expressed great fear of such acts during the night. The community knows both types of witches. Witch doctors are believed to have the power to deal with these witches.

2.4.1. Types of witchcraft

The following are categories of fearful practices of witchcraft found in Malawi given by the respondents

(a) Roko

According to the respondents, this is a deadly witchcraft that is most feared in the community. This witchcraft derives its name from the English word “rock” which has the meaning of “sealing”.

¹⁸ GN 2nd June 2023

¹⁹ GN 2nd June 2023

²⁰ MM (respondent on 13 June 2023)

This type of witchcraft is that which affects the throat. If this type of spell is cast on a person, the person can hardly eat. The person may die in a few days if the effect of this craft is not quickly recognized. This kind of act may also affect animals like cows, goats, and sheep.²¹

“Roko” witchcraft is most feared among the people and is believed to be commonly practised during land disputes. Since land disputes are common in most areas many people opt to seek protective medicine as one way of preventing or blocking when such cases arise. It is most common among the elderly. Everyone in the community, who is experiencing throat pains or problems, especially the old men, is suspected to have been witched by this spell.

(b) Mtemakamo

Another type of witchcraft that was revealed during the interview was “Mtemakamo”. It was captured during the interview that when the witch or wizard orders the spell of mtemakamo on somebody in the morning, then on the same day before sunset the person is gone. It is believed that this spell works when the witch or wizard changes into a deadly snake.

Many old men and women have this gun (referring to the spell) in this community. They use it when you differ from them. I tell you mtemakamo is more deadly like “the nkhome snake” which kills a person with one bite. Usually, when the witches or wizards want to use this spell, they change themselves into a snake. In 1998, we lost two men who were great farmers in this community through this kind of witchcraft. They both died in the same month after being beaten by these human snakes. Human beings can change into snakes at any time. When he changes into a snake, he calls the person he wants to kill through magic. When the victim responds by going that route, this human snake beats him or her to death. We only thank the witch doctors around us who help us with charms so that these spells get repelled.²²

So many people live in fear of mtemakamo witchcraft in the communities. Anyone dying in the community after a snakebite, the suspicion of witchcraft becomes alarming hence the use of protective charms or medicine against it.

(c) Leza

Some respondents gave another type of witchcraft that is feared in their everyday lives. This is called “Leza” according to their knowledge. In English translation, this witchcraft is better understood as lightning. It was said that some witches in the northern part of Malawi are believed to possess ‘Leza powers’ and when they wish to kill somebody they send these forces to strike the intended person. It said that this spell is not only dangerous to man’s life but also to termed animals or properties.

²¹ MM (respondent on 13 June 2023)

²² EN – respondent 12 June 2023

“Leza” is dangerous witchcraft in the sense that witches or wizards hide in the natural lighting. The complexity of this witchcraft is that it has no time limit; it can be affected even during summertime when there is no rain. How can this happen?²³

The respondents expressed fear of “Leza witchcraft” for their lives. It was gathered during this interview that for everybody who died due to lightning, the cause of the death was attributed to witchcraft.

Below is the diagram, which shows how the interview was conducted. The researcher targeted age groups from 18 years to 75 years, the youth (both married and unmarried) and the elderly. The questions were uniform.

2.5. Excursion

In one scenario, the researcher visited the home of the medicine man (ng’anga) in Karonga to interview those people who come to seek medicine or charms. The interview was centred on the question “What brings them to the witch doctor; To make it simple the question was to find out what they were looking for from the witch doctor. It happened that the researcher met with three women and one man with their children. Two of these three women were C.C.A.P. Christian members. When the researcher tried to find out what they were doing, they came straight to say that they were looking for special medicine that could protect their bodies and children from the spell of witchcraft that was a problem in their village. In addition, when they were asked why they did not go to church for prayers to Jesus Christ for intervention, the respondent pointed out that it is not harmful to use African protective medicine as a Christian. She believes that God helps those who help themselves. In her own words, she added, “You do not play with witches or wizards. These people never count whether you are a Christian or not. In their testimony, they said that African protective medicine is quicker than prayers through Jesus Christ” (EC – respondent on 14th June).²⁴

2.6. AREAS THAT ARE PRONE TO RECEIVE PROTECTION FROM THE FEAR OF WITCHCRAFT AND SORCERY.

Introduction

Having looked at the groups of witches and the types of witchcraft believed to be common in Malawi, now we will look at how the ordinary believers categorize groups of individuals who usually seek protection from the powers of witchcraft. According to the information gathered these groups of people and areas even though they trust in the Lordship of Jesus Christ feel more secure when they consult witch doctors against fears of witchcraft. The list of these people and

²³ IK - respondent on 12 June 2023

²⁴ E.C. respondent on 14th June 2023

areas includes pregnant women, new marriages, business areas, Land, and general life. Various groups of people gave different answers to the question. Below are the groups and their answers

(a) Pregnant women.

The first category of women mentioned how dangerous witches are to pregnant women. They believe that if the pregnancy is not protected from the powers of witchcraft it can disappear. Even if they are converted Christians, they feel like the power of Jesus Christ alone cannot protect them from the powers of witchcraft.

Witches can feed on the baby who is in the womb of her mother at the time of pregnancy if the family is not careful in protecting the pregnancy from the powers of such evil people. Believing in Jesus Christ alone is not a guarantee of protection from witchcraft. Several witch doctors and medicine men have the skills to help pregnant women in the area. In case of pregnancy complications, witch doctors, and medicine men are there for help. If there is power from Jesus Christ, it is an additional force to the protection, and together the pregnant woman is assured of protection.²⁵

Asked why they do not maintain their trust in Jesus Christ alone, the respondents said that they are not sure of Jesus Christ's protection. It was further revealed during the interview that pregnant women wear some protective charms that they get from the witch doctors. Again, when the baby is born, the family goes to the witch doctor or medicine man for protective charms of the newly born baby. In case a newborn baby gets sick, his or her parents immediately consult a medicine man or diviner to find out the cause of the sickness and take the necessary measures to cure the trouble.

(b) Young men and women who have just entered into a marriage

Marriage is taking place everywhere in this world. Additionally, the reasons for marriage are also many. In this part, the researcher asked those who had just been married after the data collected during the interview showed that many groups at this level consult witch doctors and medicine for charms or traditional medicine to protect their marriages from breaking. This is even the case with ordinary believers who claim to trust in Jesus Christ. They agreed to use these charms to support their marriages.

Of course, I wedded last year with my husband. The pastor who blessed our marriage advised us to put our trust in Jesus Christ for all the blessings. However, you know this world is cruel; if you do not care, someone can win your husband. So I thought of fetching some traditional medicine to help stop other women from seducing my husband. Moreover, the medicine man helped me. I felt like the power of Jesus Christ alone was not sufficient to protect our marriage from outside forces. The pastor tells us that Jesus is powerful but I have never seen his powers before. I do not

²⁵ K.T. respondent on 18 June 2023

feel ashamed to be a Christian and trust the works of medicine men or witch doctors. These people are vital to the community. Here now I enjoy marriage because of their help.²⁶

According to the interview, marriage is seen as a stage of success between husband and wife in the Malawi context and needs to be always protected. Even if that marriage is prayed for and blessed through Christ the general perception of some ordinary believers is to add some traditional medicine to be sure of experiencing real love.

(c) Protection of crops and animals.

Because farming is important in Malawi and people depend on farming for both business and food; the research established that many farmers including Christians use charms to protect their gardens from the powers of witchcraft. The researcher asked some ordinary believers how they perceive this in connection to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. During this exercise, it was discovered that farm crops and animals receive special attention as far as protection from witchcraft is concerned.

“A good farmer protects his farm crops or animals. We apply charms to our farms just to protect them from evil people like witches and thieves. Some thieves use magic to steal your crops while some witches can use their powers to bring diseases either to your crops or animals. Even if we believe in Jesus Christ that is not enough”.²⁷

The response shows how some ordinary believers value the powers of charms more than the powers of Jesus Christ. There is a general picture that these protective charms are effective enough for some individuals.

“If it were not for charms, my cassava would have gone last year. I applied some medical stuff in all four corners as per the advice from the medicine man. Barely two days I found a certain man in my garden who failed to find his way out. Of course, I am a Christian but this is not the result of the power of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the power of Jesus Christ alone could not do this.”²⁸

It was highlighted that the protective charms work as repel and if someone insists on going on into such a protected field he or she remains in the garden until the owner redeems him or through the instruction from the diviner or medicine man.

(d). Business protection

Many people have their businesses in communities. Some are church members while some are not. The research established that many business people use charms for protection and to win more customers. The researcher interviewed some ordinary members about the use of charms in

²⁶ MJ respondent on 4th June 2023.

²⁷ J. N. respondent on 13th June 2023

²⁸ J.N. respondent on 13th June 2023

their shops given the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Out of four businesspersons that were spotted, they all agreed to have known the influence of witchcraft and two admitted having used charms in their business for the fear of a collapse of their businesses and losing money through magic

I consulted a witch doctor after a bad experience in my shop. On that day, I can remember that I made a good amount of money. When I closed the shop to count down how much was sold that day, I only found a little money on the plate. It gave me a headache. I suspected someone who tampered with my money. It was for this reason that I approached a witch doctor who helped me. Now my money is protected. In such situations, I feel like Jesus Christ alone cannot help and I believe that issues of witchcraft can only be dealt with by doctors.²⁹

It is believed that the medicine or charms given protect money from stealing through magic. There is a belief that there are some evil persons who have the power to get money or items through magic. Hence, they believe that the power of Jesus by itself is not sufficient in such situations.

(e). General protection of life

The fear of witchcraft by many people has contributed to seeking traditional medicine for protection. It was revealed during an interview that some ordinary believers despite their trust in the Lordship of Jesus Christ admitted having used and applied charms to their bodies. They acknowledged their trust in Jesus Christ but doubted his sufficiency if he had powers that could help in times of witchcraft forces.

We are happy with the gift of life from God but we are living in a dangerous world. People are jealous and some are not happy to see you prospering from one point to another. We do not deny Jesus Christ but the powers of Witchcraft are great. Jesus Christ alone cannot do it, therefore, it is important to use charms. You cannot just sit down and wait for Jesus Christ. You need to bring something to your body and Jesus Christ will add his power.³⁰

According to the respondents, they do not see any problem in trusting in both the powers of Jesus Christ and their traditional African beliefs. However, many feel more protected by the powers of traditional beliefs.

2.7. Summary

The research findings show that the fear of witchcraft is common among many ordinary believers in C.C.A.P. Livingstonia. In many cases, the power of the Lordship of Jesus Christ is in doubt, as they seem to trust powers from charms that they obtain from witch doctors and their ancestors than the powers of Jesus Christ alone. In this case, it shows that many ordinary believers seek

²⁹ G.K. respondent on 17th June 2023.

³⁰ MN respondent on 17 June 2023

additional protection as they admit to knowing the powers of Jesus Christ around them. It appears that many ordinary believers doubt that the powers of Jesus Christ do or cannot handle evil powers. From the responses, one can easily see that their trust in the powers of traditional charms and ancestors is mixed with trust in Jesus Christ. In other words, some ordinary believers take for granted in believing in the Lordship of Jesus Christ, as they are not sure about his powers that he can protect and heal them from their sicknesses and other calamities.

2.8. Belief in ancestral spirits.

Belief in the powers of ancestral spirits is more common in many ordinary members than in the Lordship of Jesus Christ, as will be shown in the literature research in the next section. It was also very clear in one of the interviews I conducted.

This chapter seeks to understand both the powers and roles of the ancestral spirits given the Lordship of Jesus Christ in the context of protection or security in Malawian, particularly in the C.C.A.P. of Livingstonia synod. The researcher interviewed to find out what was behind the belief in ancestral spirits from some ordinary believers in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian. Below are some of the respondent's views on the understanding of ancestral spirits.

2.8.1. Types of the Spirits

According to the research findings, there are three types of spirits that many ordinary believers know about. These spirits are classified according to their ranks or office, which depends on the duties and responsibilities they render to the individual member or community at large.

Some Spirits are very high in their rank especially those that were once chiefs in our kingdom. It is our tradition that we must go through other ancestral spirits to reach them as a matter of respect. While some spirits like the family spirits are close to us such that we can interact with them at any time. We respect both of these ancestors because they have a great responsibility of watching over us.³¹

(a) Territorial Spirits.

According to the information gathered, these spirits belong to the highest office of the land like the kings, chiefs, and their juniors. These spirits are different from other spirits because of the task they were given in taking care of the whole kingdom by the time they were alive on earth. In addition, these spirits are said to have powers over the life and affairs of the kingdom. That is why they are called "territorial" as they were given a task to look after a territory or kingdom.³²

³¹ J.K. respondent on 3rd June 2023.

³² J.K. respondent on 3rd June 2023.

The fact that they have joined the living dead does not stop them from caring and protecting us from all sorts of evil. The territorial spirits have huge powers to bless or curse the kingdom. The ancestral spirits' powers are equally important to what we receive from Jesus Christ. That is why we ask for their powers every time we need them. They built a big kingdom with their power. Likewise, Jesus Christ protects us because that is his nature. In this case, we depend on both powers from the ancestors and Jesus Christ.³³

Since the territorial spirits are believed to be dead chiefs, they are believed to have special powers for the public welfare.³⁴ At the same time, the people need the powers of Jesus Christ. This is confusing because it shows that they belong to two religions, thus, Christianity and African Religion.

(b) Lineage or family Ancestral Spirits.

According to research findings, Lineage spirits being considered members of the family and clan are closer to their descendants than Jesus Christ. In this view, their powers are believed to be closer to the family members than the powers of Jesus Christ.

We do not deny the fact that Jesus Christ is powerful but our ancestors are from our blood and they know exactly what their family members are passing through. For this reason, we believe that the powers of our ancestors are closer to us than the powers of Jesus Christ.

The information gathered in the interview showed that there is a stronger belief in the powers of lineage spirits than in the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Many people believe that death may bring change in the condition of existence but relationship, status, and interaction transcend the physical and biological limitations imposed by death, hence a father remains a father to his son even after death.

My father died in 2002 but he visits members of our family many times. He offers some advice that we follow as a family. Sometimes when a member of the family gets sick, we consult him for the healing of the sick person. The point that we are Christians who believe in the power of Jesus Christ cannot block my father from visiting and protecting his family. We trust that through his power we are protected.³⁵

This shows that the departed ancestor is believed to revisit his relatives, participating in their welfare, and advising them on family matters. Family members have a bigger focus on their ancestors than on Jesus Christ when it comes to understanding of power for protection. This

³³ J.K. respondent on 3r June 2023.

³⁴ J.K. respondent on 3rd June 2023.

³⁵ J.K. respondent on 3rd June 2023.

close association of the ancestral spirits with the living creates a religious atmosphere where the spirit world's presence is continuously felt in the families. In addition, to continue the cordial relationship between the two parties, family members develop a feeling of not offending these ancestors for fear of punishment; hence, family members are trying all they can by adhering to the advice from their ancestors.

2.9. Pastors' views

During the research exercise, 20 pastors were asked about the influence and powers of both witchcraft and ancestral spirits. Below are their responses.

“The belief in witchcraft and ancestral spirits is common. I remember at one parish; forty members were suspended due to witchcraft connections. Lessons and sermons about the Lordship of Jesus Christ have been delivered at some point to address such challenges. However, the practice and participation are worrisome.”³⁶

“It is about having faith in Jesus Christ. I trusted these beliefs before I received Jesus Christ. I consulted many witch doctors and ancestral spirits so that I could benefit from them, but nothing changed in my life. Therefore, I found out that it was about your trust and how you understand it. I have been telling church members about having trust in the Lordship of Jesus Christ through sermons and bible studies but it looks that they are not convinced because many continue to live in fear of witchcraft while some consult their ancestors.”³⁷

“The problem is that belief in witchcraft and ancestral spirits are inherited from the previous generations. This being the case the belief is not only in the church but also in all communities. I believe that all pastors can begin to sensitize community members that they should be praying to Jesus Christ whenever they are hit by sicknesses and death. As a church, let us tell them that Jesus Christ is more powerful than any other evil force. This approach can yield something, unlike the current approach that only focuses on the Christian members. Nevertheless, the church is not at peace with these traditional beliefs.”³⁸

From the responses, pastors indicated that witchcraft and ancestral spirits belief is real in the church. While they are aware of the negative impact of beliefs on members of the church, they continue teaching about the Lordship of Jesus Christ. As pastors, they take it crucial to preach and teach about the Lordship of Jesus Christ so that members of their church know the powers of Jesus Christ in all areas of life. Some pastors indicated to have used Ephesians 1:21 which talks about Jesus' authority, power, and dominion over all spiritual powers.

2.10. Communication between the ancestral spirits and the living.

The issue of communication between the ancestral spirits and the living remains crucial in Malawi. Some ordinary believers also value and trust communication from the dead through

³⁶ A.H. respondent on 18th June 2023.

³⁷ A.G. respondent on 18th June 2023.

³⁸ K.B.M. respondent on 18th June 2023.

dreams and visions. Sometimes they join the community in visiting their ancestors from the graveyard for the interest of the family or community. Being members of the church and indeed followers of Jesus Christ, they were asked why they were doing that, but, in their response, they indicated that they were afraid of being punished by the powers of their ancestors.

“Communication from our ancestral spirits is very important. If you do not respect their communication, you are punished by their powers. I do not see any problem with trust in Jesus Christ because our ancestors are our parents and we have to respect them. They visit us through dreams and visions.”³⁹

This shows that any communication said to have come from the ancestral spirits receives respect and quick attention from an individual, family, or community at large, This is because other communications carry a message of warning and any delay to such a message can result in problems. It is believed that the family or community can receive a message of warning for protection from evil people or sicknesses. In such cases, the family or community is asked to follow conditions from the ancestral spirits to succeed.⁴⁰

2.11. Summary of the chapter

In this chapter, I paid attention to the views of the ordinary believers in C.C.A.P, Livingstonia regarding the belief in the powers of witchcraft and ancestral spirits given by the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The research has established that there is tension between African Traditional Religious beliefs and Christianity. Because of the fear of witchcraft, many people consult their ancestors and witch doctors who are believed to have powers to protect them. The information gathered from the interview shows that ordinary believers have greater trust in supernatural and ancestral powers than in the powers of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. They have an understanding that supernatural powers are stronger than the powers of Jesus Christ. On ancestral spirits, they indicated that they are the blood members of the family hence they are directly connected. In addition, they believe that their ancestors are closer to them than Jesus Christ. This makes them feel secure and trust in the powers of their ancestors rather than Jesus Christ.

They also believe that Jesus Christ takes time to respond to their request and that the power of Jesus Christ is not sufficient for their spiritual threats. As a result, they mix up their trust in Jesus Christ and their ancestral spirits as well as witch doctors. In this dilemma, they feel more secure and protected by the powers of their ancestors and charms from witch doctors.

The part of pastors indicated a big concern for the spiritual life of the church. However, pastors indicated that the message about the Lordship of Jesus Christ is being taught in various forms. For example, some pastors mentioned that in their sermons they preach about the power of Jesus Christ over all evil powers. They cited like making quotes from Colossians 2:15 that describe the victory of Jesus Christ over all spiritual powers that enslave humanity. Other pastors indicated that they organize bible lessons that focus on the reign of Jesus Christ over the authority and

³⁹ H.B. respondent on 5th June 2023.

⁴⁰ H.B. respondent on 5th June 2023.

powers of the devil. They pointed out that they were doing that to empower the Christian community that as believers in Jesus Christ they are more than conquerors.

CHAPTER 3

SECURITY AND PROTECTION IN JESUS CHRIST BY SELECTED AFRICAN REFORMED THEOLOGIAN.

3.1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we look at the views of African Theologians on the concept of security and protection by Jesus Christ given the powers of witchcraft and ancestral spirits. We will look at the selected ones like John S. Mbiti, Joyce Mlenga, Kwame Bediako, and Vhumani Magezi. These theologians have written on the influence of African Traditional Religion on Christianity on various topics. In this chapter, we will look at how some African theologians have presented their views on the concept of protection and security by Jesus Christ given African Traditional Religious beliefs.

3.1.1. John S. Mbiti on the power and influence of Spirits.

There is a general belief among many Africans that there is a mysterious power in the universe, and that it comes from God.⁴¹ They believe that this power is available to spirits and certain human beings. Mbiti observes that those who practice traditional medicine, magic, witchcraft, and sorcery use these mystical powers. Furthermore, it is believed that those who perform healing miracles and magic get their powers from these mystical powers.⁴² There is a strong belief in many African societies that this mystical power is used to help other people in healing, protection, security, rain-making, finding the cause of misfortunes and troubles, to bring luck or harm. When it is used harmfully, it is regarded as evil magic, witchcraft, or sorcery; and it may be used in curses.⁴³ Ordinary people do not know much about this mystical power. In some cases, the ability to use this mystical power is simply inherited or passed on without the conscious intention of those concerned.⁴⁴ It is believed that some spirits help diviners, mediums, oracles, and medicine men in their work. These are consulted as the need arises. They are more or less the tools of their users.⁴⁵ On the other hand, the spirits that cause misfortunes, sickness, and even death may be used to do these things by human beings who have the power to do so, most often by witches, sorcerers, or bad magicians.⁴⁶ Mbiti mentions three offices of religious leaders in the context of African Indigenous beliefs who depend on the possession of mystical powers to perform. These religious leaders are:

Diviners

Mbiti argues that diviners often get their power in touch with spirits directly or through the help of mediums who often work with them. Diviners normally work also as medicine men. They can

⁴¹ John. S. Mbiti, *An introduction to African Religion*, Phillips Academy-Heinemann Educational books Ltd, 1975, 37.

⁴² Mbiti, 37.

⁴³ Mbiti, 37.

⁴⁴ Mbiti, 37.

⁴⁵ Mbiti, 75.

⁴⁶ Mbiti, 75.

be either men or women.⁴⁷ They deal with the question of finding out why something has gone wrong. They tell who may have worked evil magic, sorcery, or witchcraft against the sick or the barren. They find out which spirit may be troubling a possessed person, what it wants, and what should be done to stop the trouble.⁴⁸ For their work, the diviners use divination. According to Mbiti, this is a method of finding out the unknown, using pebbles, numbers, water, animal entrails, reading the palms, throwing dice, and many other methods. It is generally believed that diviners know how to use some of the unseen forces of the universe.⁴⁹

Mediums

Mediums are people who are also believed to get their powers in touch with the spirit world. They are often women, and they are attached to medicine men or diviners. They can get in touch with the spirits at will.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, this is brought about normally by ritual drumming, dancing, and singing until the person becomes possessed, when she often falls without being aware of it.⁵¹ Under that possession, she may jump about, beat herself, bang her head, walk on fire and thorns, and do other things that she would not do when in her normal self. It is during such possession that she communicates with the spirit world.⁵²

“Most of the communication through a medium comes from the spirit world to human beings; people rarely have messages to deliver to the spirit world. The medium tells where to find lost things, who may have bewitched the sick person, what types of ritual and medicine are necessary for the cure of people's troubles, whether an intended journey will be a success or not, which of the living dead may have a request to make and of what kind and many other things.”⁵³

Seers

Seers can receive information through forces or powers from the spirits and they usually foresee events before they take place.⁵⁴ Mbiti says that seers are often people with a sharp capacity for both foresight and insight into things. It is also possible that some of them receive revelations through visions and dreams, in addition to being able to use their intuitions.⁵⁵

⁴⁷ Mbiti, 155.

⁴⁸ Mbiti, 156.

⁴⁹ Mbiti, 156.

⁵⁰ Mbiti, 156.

⁵¹ Mbiti, 156.

⁵² Mbiti, 156.

⁵³ Mbiti, 156.

⁵⁴ Mbiti, 157.

⁵⁵ Mbiti, 157.

3.1.2. John S. Mbiti on Witchcraft, sorcery, and evil magic

Mbiti defines witchcraft as a manifestation of some invisible, mystical forces and powers in the universe.⁵⁶ These powers are believed to be inborn in a person, inherited, or acquired in various ways. For some people, it is said to function without their being aware of it, or having control over it.⁵⁷ Furthermore, those believed to use these forces or powers are suspected to have knowledge and ability to tap, control, and use these forces for ill intentions and are commonly called witches, wizards, or sorcerers. Some have greater knowledge and skill than others; some possess the ability without knowing it, and find later that through word or ritual they can release these forces for a particular use.⁵⁸

Mbiti argues that witchcraft, sorcery, and magic are believed to be the enemies of society in many parts of Africa.⁵⁹ Many African people ask themselves what or who has caused things to go wrong in the form of sickness, misfortune, barrenness, accident, death, and so on. They believe that even if there are physical explanations of how an accident has taken place there is also a major question of who made these things happen.⁶⁰ Mbiti believes that it is against this background that many African people are asking questions on how to put things right and prevent them from going wrong again; the questions are raised mainly in connection with the enemies of persons and families.⁶¹ The answer to who makes things go wrong is in every case a human agent and sometimes a spirit agent. This is where the matter of bad magic, sorcery, and witchcraft comes in.⁶² When something goes wrong in the welfare of the individual or his family, he immediately wonders who has caused it to happen and in most cases, he will suspect that someone has used evil magic, sorcery, or witchcraft against him or his household, animals, and fields.⁶³ Once a person believes that someone has used evil powers against him, he goes on to establish the identity of the suspected offender.⁶⁴ Many other times, the offender is someone in the family, in the neighbourhood, or among relatives and associates at work.⁶⁵

About Sorcery, Mbiti says that it takes on the form of spells, poisoning, or other physical injury done secretly by someone to someone else or his crops and animals.⁶⁶ Witches, evil, and sorcerers are the most hated (and often feared) persons in their communities. People fear to associate with them, to eat at their homes, or even to quarrel with them in case they may bewitch them. In every African community, there are endless stories and conversations about the use of magic, sorcery, and witchcraft.⁶⁷

⁵⁶ Mbiti, 165.

⁵⁷ Mbiti, 168.

⁵⁸ Mbiti, 167.

⁵⁹ Mbiti, 164.

⁶⁰ Mbiti, 164.

⁶¹ Mbiti, 165.

⁶² Mbiti, 164.

⁶³ Mbiti, 167.

⁶⁴ Mbiti, 167.

⁶⁵ Mbiti, 167.

⁶⁶ Mbiti, 167.

⁶⁷ Mbiti, 167.

3.1.3. John S. Mbiti on prayer and protection

John S. Mbiti observes that many Africans believe in prayer. However, their prayer requests are channelled through ancestral spirits, as they are believed to have some powers to connect peoples' prayer requests to God. Because of the powers the ancestral spirits are believed to have, they are expected to receive both offerings and sacrifices and when they are happy with them, they relay people's requests to God.⁶⁸ In most cases, their prayers cover protection from danger, safety in travelling, and security for their lives and property. Furthermore, Mbiti observes that many of the practical expressions of African religion, all over the continent, are salvatory. These are particularly prayers, offerings, and sacrifices made towards God and sometimes towards other spiritual realities.⁶⁹ They arise out of the feeling of man's need for help which comes from outside of his abilities. African religion is rich in these acts. The majority of prayers in African Religion are petitions, requests, and intercessions, for health, healing from disease and barrenness, success in undertakings, and protection from harm and danger or death; others are for peace and blessings.⁷⁰

Mbiti observes this to be a challenge to the Christian faith, which believes in the power of Jesus Christ. He argues that even if the spirits remain an integral part of the religious heritage of Africa, their belief in ancestral spirits' powers affects their outlook and experiences in life for better and for worse.⁷¹ Both Christian converts and non-Christian converts ask for their aid through prayer and ceremony, in some cases, they mention names of the dead just because they are believed to have powers to influence their requests to God.⁷² It is against this background that John S. Mbiti argues that Christianity still appears to be foreign to many African Christians amid attempts to bring Christian character. In addition, he observes that this foreignness is a drawback to Christianity because it is kept on the surface and is not free to deepen its influence in all areas of African life and problems.⁷³

3.1.4 John S. Mbiti on the power of Jesus Christ.

Mbiti in one of the articles, "Our Savior as an African Experience" observes that the traditional African life of God's acts of saving people from calamity, danger, or death are commonly applied to their African Christianity. In their understanding, God is the final resort, to whom people turn when all other means of help are exhausted and also appreciate his 'saving' response when the danger is over.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Mbiti, 60.

⁶⁹ John. S. Mbiti, Some reflections on African experiences of salvation today, accessed by author on 9th September, 2023.

⁷⁰ Mbiti, *ibid.*

⁷¹ Mbiti, 76.

⁷² Mbiti, 72.

⁷³ Mbiti, 76.

⁷⁴ John S. Mbiti, Our Saviour as an African experience, accessed by author on 9th September, 2023.

The acknowledgement of the power of God and Jesus Christ is evidenced in several ways, such as catechisms, prayers, hymns, and the names of some African independent churches. Their names imply the power of Jesus and God, which is the power to 'save' principally in a physical rather than spiritual dilemma.⁷⁵ The power of God is experienced in one's commitment to Christianity. This power of God causes no problem since in African religion it is one of the chief attributes of God. Therefore, to become a Christian is in effect to commit oneself to the almighty power of God and implicitly of Jesus; one does not lose by embracing the new faith.⁷⁶ Indeed the power of God, which is traditionally acknowledged, is, through faith in Christ, transformed or extended to be not only a creative and governing power but also a 'saving power'. God is then not only the almighty and powerful God, but also the saving God since this is what he has demonstrated in and through Jesus, and since this is also the central message of Christianity as brought to us.⁷⁷ Similarly, Jesus is our Saviour as well, not so much because of the cross but because he is linked up with the God who, by his almightiness, can and does rescue or save the needy. It is as if the almightiness of God becomes personalized at the level of 'saving' and 'rescuing' the individual. Without this personalization of the power of God, 'Saviour' would otherwise be meaningless except as an attribute of admiration.⁷⁸ It seems that Jesus is the one who facilitates or mediates this personalization of God's mighty power, and the personalization is experienced in terms of rescuing or saving individuals who subsequently constitute a particular independent church group. The experience of God or Jesus as our Saviour means not only being rescued but also being protected. This idea parallels the African traditional notion that when all other help has failed, the needy are committed to God.⁷⁹ The difference may only lie in the fact that, whereas in traditional life people turn to God as the final resort to rescue or save them, in the Christian experience the Saviour is both the first and final resort. Therefore, in the Christian experience, one may enter through faith into a relationship with God or Jesus (or both) which guarantees an abiding and undiminishing state of rescue and protection. A Christian is, therefore, a member of those who have been 'rescued' and constitute a 'safe', flock which nothing can threaten since it is under the protection of personalized mightiness of God.⁸⁰

CONCLUSION

Mbiti observes that the belief in the powers of witchcraft and ancestral spirits is common in Africa. Many Africans including Christians believe that protection and healing from diviners and medicine comes from these powers. In a related article, Mbiti observes that some African Christians believe that God can rescue them from their calamities of any kind through the power of Jesus Christ. He argues that this is commonly seen in many independent churches through

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

their hymns, church names, etc. This means that many African Christians trust in both the powers of their ancestors and the power of Jesus Christ.

3.1.4. Joyce Mlenga on the powers of ancestral spirits

Joyce Mlenga in her book ‘Dual Religiosity’ observes that there is a close relationship between the departed spirits and the community among the Ngonde people of northern Malawi. It is believed that the spirits have special powers to interfere in the affairs of their descendants.

The living had to ensure that the ancestral spirits were happy all the time, failure to do so could lead to disaster. Abasyuka (spirits) had powers to bring calamities on the living if, and whenever they were not pleased with them. Whenever this occurred, it became imperative to offer sacrifices to appease them. Each of the families constructed its shrine where sacrifices were made by the leader of the family in the event of calamities that occurred at the family level.⁸¹

In this case, the ancestral spirits were respected and feared in the daily life of the community members. For example, Mlenga points out that at the community level, the chief ancestors had a great role in the kingdom as a whole such that the spirits of the dead chiefs were believed to form one divine company, the anger of any one of whom had terrible effects, and both living and dead were placated with offerings.⁸² Ancestors did determine what kind of life people would live depending on how they treated them. Mlenga further observes that even today, there is a strong belief in abasyuka (ancestral spirits). When something goes wrong in the community or at the family level, people feel forced to look around to find the cause, and in many cases, ancestral spirits are the culprits.⁸³ The spirits feel very important and honoured when the living pay attention to them. The ancestral spirits return to the community in many ways through illness or other misfortune that overtakes the living. According to Mlenga, ancestral spirits are believed to have the power to bless, curse, or punish somebody depending on the situation.⁸⁴

“Again, when one's life is believed to have been "darkened" (wamupelile ngisi), he is taken to the grave of one of the ancestors so that the elders can talk to the spirits. One's life is said to have been darkened when it is surrounded by misfortunes: cannot be employed, business not running properly, cannot marry, things just do not work! At this point, one is taken to the grave of father, mother, or grandparent to settle issues”.⁸⁵

At the community level, Mlenga observes that the ancestors, especially Kyungus who were believed to be divine, could display their anger through terrible effects. Their anger could result in droughts, sicknesses, sudden deaths, etc.⁸⁶ Thus when drought hit the village, the immediate

⁸¹ Joyce Mlenga, *Dual religiosity in Northern Malawi – Ngonde Christians and African Traditional Religion*, Mzuni Press, 2016, 18.

⁸² Mlenga, 18.

⁸³ Mlenga, 18.

⁸⁴ Mlenga, 19.

⁸⁵ Mlenga, 20.

⁸⁶ Mlenga, 21.

reaction was to allege that one of the Kyungus was angry, either the living or a dead one. Following this, a ritual could be organized to appease that particular Spirit (Kyungu).⁸⁷

In addition, ancestral spirits are believed to play an important role in the lives of traditional healers. Mlenga observes that some traditional healers appear to have started their occupation through communication with the dead, whom they normally call misyuka (ancestral spirits). In this regard, the ancestral spirits are believed to have communicated to them about their calling, and what their problems were (for those who were suffering or spirit-possessed) and showed them the types of medicines they needed to give to their patients.⁸⁸

3.1.5. Joyce Mlenga on the existence of the spirit world

Mlenga further observes that many African people believe in the existence of spirits other than ancestor spirits.⁸⁹ The spirits are believed to dwell in places such as graveyards, forests, caves, and on mountains or hills. People who had to climb steep hillsides made offerings to them.⁹⁰ Mlenga argues that since the spirits were invisible, their dwelling place could just be a matter of speculation. People believe in these spirits but they cannot not tell with precision as to where these spirits come from.⁹¹ Furthermore, Mlenga observes that, unlike the ancestral spirits, these spirits have never existed in physical form. The priority areas that the spirits paid much attention to in the context of the people of northern Malawi were health, wealth, and the fertility of the land and the people. Whenever there was an epidemic or natural disaster such as locusts, all the senior elders of the land met at one place where they prayed and made offerings to the spirits in the form of flour and chicken.⁹²

3.1.6. Joyce Mlenga on the belief in witchcraft

The belief in witchcraft is alive today in many parts of northern Malawi as it used to be in the past. It is believed that there are impersonal supernatural forces or powers that certain people can control and manipulate to achieve certain results. These powers are mysterious and hidden from the ordinary man.⁹³ Many people fear it, and many are likely to employ it at some time in their lives. This is usually done to get back at someone or because of jealousy.⁹⁴ Mlenga argues that belief in witchcraft fills the whole outlook of the common people such that if one is persistently ill, and medicines do not cure him, he suspects someone of practising against him; if children die one after the other, both parents cannot escape suspicion, one or other is guilty; if cattle do not give a normal quantity of milk, someone has bewitched them.⁹⁵ There is not a house in all

⁸⁷ Mlenga, 21.

⁸⁸ Mlenga, 21.

⁸⁹ Mlenga, 26.

⁹⁰ Mlenga, 26.

⁹¹ Mlenga, 27.

⁹² Mlenga, 27.

⁹³ Mlenga, 30.

⁹⁴ Mlenga, 30.

⁹⁵ Mlenga, 29.

heathen that is not, in one way or another, or many ways, protected by charms and medicines against the power of witchcraft.⁹⁶

Mlenga observes that the natural world is capable of being spiritually manipulated and people can interfere with it whenever they want to. There is a strong belief that witches can hold the rain, cause accidents, cause electrical faults, stop a car from moving, and many more.⁹⁷ There is also a belief in medicines, that is, in a mystical power residing in certain material substances that are used by those who have the necessary knowledge. In addition, there is a belief in witchcraft, that is, an innate power to harm others exercised by certain individuals and in the mystical power of fellow villagers to punish wrongdoers.⁹⁸

The power of witchcraft is believed to be inherited and rarely acquired, but the power of defence is both inherited and increased by drinking medicines.⁹⁹ Mlenga further observes that many people constantly live in fear of being bewitched and nearly many are caused by the works of witches and wizards who interpret every sickness, death, or misfortune.¹⁰⁰ When someone gets sick, the sufferer with the help of a diviner will be keen to identify the witch. It is believed in many parts of northern Malawi that natural sicknesses and natural deaths are rare, but most of them are caused by witchcraft and that is why people have to visit traditional healers when sickness, misfortune, or death strikes.¹⁰¹

Conclusion

Mlenga analyses the belief in witchcraft and ancestral spirits in the Ngonde area of northern Malawi. She observes that the belief in the powers of ancestral spirits and witchcraft has affected many people including those converted to Christianity. According to her analysis, many Christians believe in both Christian and traditional African beliefs. She suggests that Christianity must do something for its members so that they remain faithful to one religion which is Christianity.

3.1.7. Kwame Bediako on Jesus Christ in African culture.

Kwame Bediako observes why many African Christians treat Jesus Christ as not belonging to them but rather belonging to the people from the West. He discusses why many African Christians seem not to have trust in Jesus Christ. In his book “Jesus in Africa”, he points out that

⁹⁶ Mlenga, 29.

⁹⁷ Mlenga, 30.

⁹⁸ Mlenga, 30.

⁹⁹ Mlenga, 31.

¹⁰⁰ Mlenga, 31.

¹⁰¹ Mlenga, 31.

many African Christians feel that Jesus Christ has been presented to give answers to the white man and not an African¹⁰².

Christ has been presented as the answer to questions a white man would ask, the solution to the need that Western man would feel, the saviour of the world of the European worldview, the object of adoration and prayer of historic Christendom.¹⁰³

According to Kwame Bediako, he observes some shortfalls in the way the gospel was presented to the African community in what he calls the “general character of Western missionary preaching and teaching”.¹⁰⁴

Bediako also observes that the nature of the presentation of the gospel by the Western missionaries is a contributing factor to some African Christians who look at Jesus Christ as someone who belongs to people from the West. For this view, many African Christians are failing to trust Jesus Christ for protection and other spiritual needs. He says the approach raises a question that must be faced by African churches and African Christians of today who are convinced that Jesus Christ, as the universal saviour, is the saviour of the African world, and who feel that the teaching they have so far received is inadequate.¹⁰⁵ After noting this, he, however, argues that the approach by Western missionaries must not be exaggerated but rather we need to look at the impact of “hearing” the word to the people at large for he believes that the Holy Spirit was there to interpret the word of God the hearers.¹⁰⁶

Accepting Jesus as ‘our saviour’ always involves making him at home in our spiritual universe and in terms of our religious needs and longings. So an understanding of Christ about spirit-power in the African context is not necessarily less accurate than any other perception of Jesus. The question is whether such an understanding faithfully reflects biblical revelation and is rooted in true Christian experience.¹⁰⁷ Biblical teaching clearly shows that Jesus is who he is (Saviour) because of what he has done and can do (save), and also that he was able to do what he did on the cross because of who he is (God the Son) (Colossians 2:15ff).¹⁰⁸

Bediako, therefore, argues that the blood's un-relatedness with Jesus Christ in an African context is an obstacle to many African Christians tracing from their African Traditional Religious background that stresses the bond between the living community and the ancestral spirits.¹⁰⁹

In his presentation, he argues that for an African Christian, a reflection about Jesus Christ must speak or address the questions according to the African worldview as they think and trust their ancestral spirits. In addition, he analyses the belief in ancestral spirits from an African Traditional Religion point of view, as some African Christians value their ancestral relations, as

¹⁰² Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in Africa – the Christian Gospel in African history and experience*, Regnum, 200, 20.

¹⁰³ Bediako, 20.

¹⁰⁴ Bediako, 20.

¹⁰⁵ Bediako, 22.

¹⁰⁶ Bediako, 22.

¹⁰⁷ Bediako, 20.

¹⁰⁸ Bediako, 20.

¹⁰⁹ Bediako, 22.

such, he proposes how it would work to bring Jesus Christ's power to their attention as their great ancestor. Bediako argues that Jesus Christ is the only real and true Ancestor and Source of life for all mankind, fulfilling and transcending the benefits believed to be bestowed by lineage ancestors.¹¹⁰

Bediako argues that the cult of ancestors provides the basis for locating in the transcendent realm the source of authority and power in the community and gives leadership itself a sacred quality. Yet the essential point is that ancestors have no existence independent of the community that produces them.¹¹¹ While the humanity of Jesus and his atoning work on the cross are in the background Jesus is taken to belong essentially to the more powerful realm of divinity, the realm of Spirit-power. Thus, he can do all things, to save in all situations, to protect against all enemies, and is available whenever those who believe may call upon him.¹¹²

Nevertheless, if Jesus has gone to the realm of the spirits and the gods, so to speak, he has gone there as Lord over them in the same way that he is Lord over us. He is Lord over the living and the dead, and over the living-dead, as ancestors are also called. He is supreme over all gods and authorities in the realm of spirit, summing up in himself all their powers and cancelling any terrorizing influence they might be assumed to have upon us.¹¹³

3.1.8. Kwame Bediako on Jesus Christ as Lord and the divine conqueror

Kwame Bediako describes the Lordship of Jesus Christ as unique. Bediako quotes the words of apostle Paul from 1 Corinthians 8:5-6, "For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords", yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom they exist, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist." In the apostle's statement, the very affirmation that there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ, is made about the other "so-called many lords". In other words, affirmation or uniqueness has meaning as it relates to alternative claims. Accordingly, the affirmation of the unique Lord Jesus Christ arises from how he is perceived in his relation to other "lords".¹¹⁴ Bediako further argues that by their very nature, Christian affirmations about the uniqueness of Christ arise from their relationship to the claims and presuppositions that are made by persons of other faiths for theirs.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, he argues that Jesus Christ does not only offer salvation that is longed for in the traditional religions but also Christ saving and liberating from the fears resulting from the traditional view and experience of reality.¹¹⁶ The same can be said about the confession of Jesus as the only Lord. If this confession can only be meaningfully

¹¹⁰ Kwame Bediako, How is Jesus Christ Lord – aspects of an Evangelical Christian Apologetics in the context of African Religious Pluralism, accessed by author on 08th September, 2023.

¹¹¹ Bediako, Jesus in Africa, 22.

¹¹² Bediako, 20.

¹¹³ Bediako, 20.

¹¹⁴ Bediako, How is Jesus Christ Lord

¹¹⁵ Bediako, How is Jesus Christ Lord

¹¹⁶ Benno van den Toren, Kwame Bediako's Christology in its African Evangelical context, accessed by author on 08th September 2023.

made if Jesus can be compared in significant ways with other lords, the lordship of these others is at the same time forcefully contested.¹¹⁷

In addition, Bediako argues that Jesus is seen above all else as the *Christus Victor* (Christ Supreme over every spiritual rule and authority).¹¹⁸ This perception arises from Africans' keen awareness of forces and powers at work in the world that threaten the interests of life and harmony.¹¹⁹ Jesus is victorious over the spiritual realm, particularly over evil forces and so meets the need for a power protector. Bediako makes this argument about what he previously observed that many African Christians view Jesus Christ as foreign to them as they rely on the powers of their ancestors and witch doctors whenever they are in spiritual threats.

Conclusion

Kwame Bediako discusses three points in response to how some African Christians view Jesus Christ. First, Bediako discusses the reasons surrounding some African Christians who feel that Jesus Christ does not belong to them as he is not blood-related to them. He argues that this is seen as many African Christians trust in the powers of their ancestors and he further discusses possible options to make Jesus Christ at home to many African Christians.

Second, Bediako discusses the Lordship of Jesus Christ. He stresses the point that Jesus Christ is the Lord over all. The point he makes is that Jesus Christ as Lord in heaven and earth has powers over all powers.

Third, he argues that Jesus Christ must be related to Spirit power because it is this understanding that speaks or addresses the African worldview of ancestral spirits' belief; Jesus must be understood as victorious or supreme over all gods and authorities in the realm of the spirit.

3.1.9. Magezi and Myambo on the Ngozi spirit.

Magezi and Myambo have written something about the existence of the Ngozi spirit in Shona land in Zimbabwe. Ngozi spirit is believed to be the spirit of a dead person who was mistreated during his/her lifetime and who now seeks revenge on individuals or their families until compensation for the mistreatment is made.¹²⁰ It is believed that if the spirit is neglected, it can cause calamities and that in many instances among the Shona people, misfortune is attributed to the Ngozi spirit.¹²¹ The writer observes that there is a great fear whenever the ngozi spirit is

¹¹⁷ Benno van den Toren, Kwame Bediako

¹¹⁸ Bediako. *Jesus in Africa*, 22.

¹¹⁹ Bediako, 22.

¹²⁰ Magezi, V. & T. Myambo, *Pastoral challenges and responses to fear of avenging spirits (Ngozi) in Africa. A biblical evaluation and response: a case study of the Shona people*, accessed by author on 9th September, 2023.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

perceived to be operating in a family. It is further believed that only an experienced witch doctor is capable of solving the Ngozi crisis. If Ngozi strikes, each member of the affected family is expected to participate in appeasing the angered spirit to avoid further attacks.¹²² Moreover, preventative measures are taken to protect all the blood relatives of the afflicted persons against any future attacks. In this situation, Christians experience tension when they refuse to participate in these traditional ways of appeasing the Ngozi spirit. Their family members may accuse them of being directly or indirectly responsible for the misfortunes happening in the family, which in this case, is associated with the angered Ngozi spirit.¹²³ The upbringing of the Shona people in African Traditional Religion (ATR) challenges the church leaders to guide believers to depend on the Lord Jesus and detach themselves from all the practices of the African traditions (like appeasing the ngozi spirit), which are incompatible with biblical teachings.¹²⁴ The Shona people believe that illnesses that are not easily treated at hospitals are due to the active intervention of an agent, like a witch, a ghost, an ancestor, or an evil spirit. The causes of these illnesses are believed to be of direct consequence to the breaking of taboos and offences against God or ancestral spirits.¹²⁵

In the views given above, however, the writers suggest that an alternative be found to provide a sound and contextually relevant response. Failure to do so will inevitably lead church members to seek traditional African solutions, which the writers call “oscillating between two worlds”, namely Christianity and African traditional beliefs.¹²⁶

3.1.9.1. Vhumani Magezi on the concept of security/protection in Jesus Christ.

Vhumani Magezi argues many African Christians view Jesus Christ as foreign to their faith as many continue to rely on witch doctors and ancestral spirits especially when they are hit by sicknesses and other spiritual threats.¹²⁷

According to Magezi, dependence by some Christians on the powers of ancestral spirits and witchdoctors for their reasons shows the “inadequacy of Jesus Christ”. To ordinary believers, the power of Jesus Christ seems not enough to address their spiritual problems.

Magezi observes that the foreignness of Christ arises from the central traditional African ancestral worldview that requires a blood-related ancestor to address the needs of Africans.¹²⁸ This un-relatedness of Christ with Africans is an obstacle for some African Christians because they see Christ as unable and insufficient to meet their various African contextual needs.¹²⁹ In light of this observation, Magezi argues that the belief in Jesus Christ is shallow in many African Christians because of the general feeling that Jesus Christ is unable to offer answers to their daily

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

problems. Many African Christians believe that the powers of their ancestral spirits are with them in their daily endeavours rather than Jesus Christ. They need a religion that addresses their existential needs and one of these is security/protection. In this view, they value this physical life to the point that they need to live long on earth hence the need to be saved from all dangers.

Magezi observes that at the time African Christians were declaring their faith in Jesus Christ, they said that their protection would come from Jesus Christ but when sickness and other crises hit them, they turned to their ancestors and witchdoctors, hoping to be secured and protected with their powers.

At conversion, African Christians are taught to relinquish reliance on these traditional spiritual powers and to trust only in Jesus Christ for their protection. However, in times of crisis such as sickness, death, or inexplicable life situations, some African Christians revert to their previously abandoned traditional forms of security, whilst continuing to believe in Christ as offering eternal salvation.¹³⁰

Considering that African people's life is intertwined with the spiritual world, conversion means one breaks away from his or her worldview and experiences. In doing so, one is abandoning what is familiar to embrace what is unfamiliar with the family, community, and entire environment of the converted person being influenced by a spiritual worldview. Christianity has a challenge to provide an alternative system of care that replaces the abandoned one.¹³¹

According to Magezi, there is an ambiguity in African Christianity in the sense that many African Christians do not do what they claim and declare at the time they are joining Christianity. In his argument, many African Christians seem to belong to two religions, Christianity and indigenous traditional religion because they believe in both the powers of their ancestors and Jesus Christ.

In a related article, "A pastoral evaluation and responses to the challenge of spiritual insecurity in African pastoral ministry and Christianity", Magezi 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 arise from their former traditional African worldview of spiritual powers. African Christians have in their African traditional worldview and upbringing an approach to life as they link health and wellness to spiritual powers.¹³²

He observes that African people believe that health and life are a result of happiness by spiritual powers, that is, lesser divinities, ancestors, and spirits. In addition, they believe that evil powers, such as witchcraft and sorcerers, are kept at bay through their ancestors' protection and protecting magic.¹³³ Good life, wellness, and health are expected to be all right on an ongoing basis because of the balance of life forces whereby ancestors and associated spiritual beings are

¹³⁰ Ibid..

¹³¹ Magezi, A pastoral evaluation and response to the challenges of spiritual insecurity in Africa pastoral ministry and Christianity, accessed by author on 9th September, 2023.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

happy and witches and sorcerers are kept at bay.¹³⁴ Sickness or unhealthy is viewed as a breakdown of this equilibrium code or balance. In times of sickness and problems, the remedy is sought through diagnoses and resultant intervention proposed by traditional African diviners, as diviners are believed to 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 play a connecting role between the human beings and the spiritual powers. They carry the inquiries of human beings to spiritual powers for causes and remedies. In turn, they bring responses from the spiritual world to the living. This means diviners play a central role in answering the why question regarding the happenings in life.

According to Magezi, Christianity appears to be guesswork that is divorced from concrete solutions to African people's challenges. The two systems' worldviews of Christianity and traditional African powers create tension within an African person. On one hand, one is a product of a familiar worldview with its clear positives and negatives, whereas, on the other hand, a new worldview is introduced to replace the old one. That is, African believers reflect 'a religious syncretism that is suitable to their social requirements, going to church on Sundays, but consulting the traditional religious priests during the weekdays.'¹³⁵

He observes that many Africans believe that most of the things humans need fall within the sphere of the authority of lesser spiritual beings, there is no need to go to God or bother him unless the lesser beings prove inadequate when it comes to providing powers, needs, purposes, and security. In this same respect, because God does not have direct interaction with the physical world, it is not usual for him (God) to be viewed as the fundamental agent of African people's misfortunes.¹³⁶ Regardless of this, in the traditional African worldview, God's existence is acknowledged, yet he commands less fear than the lesser spiritual powers. It is claimed that spiritual divinities will cause multifaceted diseases, sicknesses, and misfortunes in the lives of human beings.¹³⁷

However, regardless of the protection that people can obtain from traditional African practitioners, Africans also believe in the powers of their ancestors. Ancestors are those blood-related members of the family, clan, or tribe, who have lived an outstanding life during their lifetimes and who have presupposed acquired supernatural powers after death, which enables them to function as both guardians and protectors of their living descendants¹³⁸ In the traditional African worldview, the ancestors are the most respected and feared spiritual powers. Therefore, ancestors are believed by Africans to be a dominant category among the spiritual powers. The ancestors are believed to be the dominant spiritual category because they are the closest spiritual powers to living people.¹³⁹ The ancestors are regarded as protectors and guardians of the living, they can still bring curses upon living people in the form of 'suffering, instability, poverty, misfortune, sickness and even. In this instance, the ancestors are constantly watching over the

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

living but any human deviance from ‘the inherited traditions’ incurs curses, whereas the opposite (i.e. compliance with traditions) brings blessings to the living.¹⁴⁰ Magezi further observes that many African people believe in the supernatural causes of diseases and sicknesses through witchcraft and sorcery. The misfortunes that witchcraft can cause are unbounded: illness, death, unemployment, car accidents, divorce, and family discord are all within their capacities. On the contrary, sorcerers or magicians are people who can control supernatural forces through inventing various mechanical means.¹⁴¹

CONCLUSION

In concluding the views of Vhumani Magezi, he focused his debate on two areas. First, he stressed how African Christians view Jesus Christ as foreign in their African religious context. Second, he wrote about African peoples’ belief, especially Christians, in the powers of the ancestral spirits and witch doctors when they are hit by spiritual threats. According to Magezi, this shows that they have little trust in the powers of Jesus Christ.

3.1.10. Summary of the chapter

In the first place, all four African theologians agree that the belief in the powers of ancestral spirits and witchcraft is common in many African societies. These spirits are believed to have powers to protect, heal sicknesses, and even take peoples’ prayer requests to God. Mbiti observes that the conception and understanding that there is an existence of powerful Spirits in the universe, both natural and human, has negatively contributed to Christianity as many African Christians rely on them.

In addition, Mbiti states that African Christians’ dependence on the powers of their ancestral spirits can mean that their conversion to Christianity does not mean abandoning all their former religious ideas and traditions.¹⁴²

Mbiti further writes that the trust in ancestral spirits’ powers is because of the influence of African Traditional Religion.

African Religion gives its followers a sense of security in life. Within that religious way of life, they know who they are, how to act in different situations, and how to solve their problems. It has supplied the answers to many of the problems of this life even if these may not have been the right answers in every case. Because it provides them with answers and direction in life, people are not willing to abandon it quickly; otherwise, they would feel insecure afterwards unless something else gave them an additional or greater sense of security.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² John. S. Mbiti, *An introduction to African Religion*, 30.

¹⁴³ Mbiti, 13.

When Africans are converted to other religions, they often mix their traditional religion with the one to which they are converted. In this way, they think and feel that they are not losing something valuable, but are gaining something from both religious systems.¹⁴⁴

Mbiti argues what appears to be an obstacle to many African Christian converts who find protection and security from the powers of their ancestral spirits and witch doctors.

Joyce Mlenga observes that there is a strong belief in natural and ancestral spirits' powers by many people in northern Malawi. According to Mlenga, the belief in supernatural powers and ancestral spirits has had a great impact on many individuals including Christians.¹⁴⁵ These powers are believed to be tapped by certain individuals either to cause illness or to heal depending on the user.

Kwame Bediako agrees with his fellow African theologians that the belief in ancestral spirits is real. According to Bediako, many African Christians believe that ancestral spirits have the power to protect and save them from their spiritual threats. However, Bediako argues that this can mean that there is a perceived 'inadequacy' of Christ in protecting African Christians from traditional religious spiritual threats as many African Christians seem not to recognize Jesus Christ's powers which they are hit by sicknesses and other related problems.¹⁴⁶ In other words, many African Christians have little hope in the protection of Jesus Christ as they claim at their conversion.

Bediako argues that protection or security in the traditional African world is understood given the realm of spirit-power and its effects upon the physical and spiritual dimensions of human existence. In addition, ancestral spirits are believed to be deceased blood-related members of the family or clan who supposedly acquire supernatural powers to guard, protect, or bring misfortune to their living descendants.¹⁴⁷

After his critical analysis of the influence and powers of ancestral spirits, Bediako proposes that Christianity must find ways and means of relating Jesus Christ to the African way of understanding an ancestor but it must be emphasized that Jesus supersedes all ancestral spirits.

Finally, Bediako points out that Jesus Christ must be seen above all else as the Christos Victor (Christ Supreme over every spiritual rule and authority).¹⁴⁸ He argues that this perception is already from Africans' keen awareness of forces and powers at work in the world that threaten the interests of life and harmony.¹⁴⁹ Jesus is victorious over the spiritual realm, particularly over

¹⁴⁴ Mbiti, 13.

¹⁴⁵ Mlenga, *Dual religiosity in Northern Malawi*, 47.

¹⁴⁶ Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 20.

¹⁴⁷ Bediako, 20.

¹⁴⁸ Bediako, 22.

¹⁴⁹ Bediako, 22.

evil forces and so meets the need for a power protector. With this approach, Bediako believes that African Christians can understand that Jesus Christ is Lord.

In the same line of thought, Vhumani Magezi agrees with his fellow African Reformed theologians that trust in the powers of ancestral spirits and witchcraft is common in Africa. Magezi observes that this is also true with those converted to Christianity. He argues that the participation by many African Christians in seeking powers from ancestral spirits and witch doctors shows ‘foreignness’ as many African Christians continue to give their allegiance to this African Traditional Religion.¹⁵⁰ Magezi further observes that many African Christians seem not to see the power of Jesus Christ in addressing their spiritual threats.

However, Magezi observes that the foreignness of Christ arises from the central traditional African ancestral worldview that requires a blood-related ancestor who is believed to have powers and connections in addressing the affairs of his descendants. This blood-unrelatedness of Christ with Africans is an obstacle for some African Christians because they see Christ as unable and insufficient to meet their various African contextual needs.¹⁵¹ Magezi therefore argues that many African Christians believe that the powers of their ancestral spirits and witchcraft are in much control of their daily endeavors than the powers of Jesus Christ.

¹⁵⁰ Magezi, “An adamic Incarnational Christological framework as a theological approach for African contextual ministry” www.missionalia.journals.ac.za, <http://dx.doi.org/10.7832/44-2-111>, accessed 17th June, 2023.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR

UNDERSTANDING SECURITY AND PROTECTION BY JESUS CHRIST BY WESTERN REFORMED THEOLOGIANS.

4.1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we look at the views of some Western Reformed theologians on the view on security and protection in respect to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We will bear in mind what the respondents contributed to their understanding of the term “security or protection” in line with the powers of ancestral spirits and witchcraft given the Lordship of Jesus Christ in C.C.A.P. Livingstonia.

Given this, we will look at protection and security in the context of evil powers, especially how it is understood by Western reformed theologians in line with the Lordship of Jesus Christ with special references to John Calvin, Synopsis, Herman Bavinck and van der Kooi and van den Brink. This approach will take us to analyze how Western reformed theologians understand the Lordship of Jesus Christ in the reformed tradition.

4.2. JOHN CALVIN ON THE KINGSHIP OF JESUS CHRIST.

John Calvin argues that the kingship of Jesus Christ is a fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies as it was prophesied that there would be a future king who would rule over the heavens and earth.¹⁵² Furthermore, Calvin argues that God promised that through the hand of his son, he would be the eternal protector and defender of his church.¹⁵³ Therefore, whenever we hear of Christ as armed with eternal power, let us remember that the perpetuity of the church is secure in this protection. Hence, amid the violent agitation with which it is continually troubled, amid the grievous and frightful storms that threaten it with unnumbered calamities, it remains safe.¹⁵⁴ Calvin states that no matter how many strong enemies plot to overthrow the church, they do not have sufficient strength to prevail over God’s immutable decree by which he appointed his son eternal King. For this reason, it follows that the devil with all the resources of the world can never destroy the church founded as it is on the eternal throne of Christ.¹⁵⁵

In addition, Calvin says that we are furnished as far as God knows to be expedient for us with the gifts of the Spirit which we lack by nature. Then relying upon the power of the same Spirit, we shall always be victorious over the devil, the world, and every kind of harmful thing.¹⁵⁶ Jesus

¹⁵² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, volume xx, Philadelphia – Westminster Press, 1536, page 497.

¹⁵³ Calvin, 497.

¹⁵⁴ Calvin, 497.

¹⁵⁵ Calvin, 498.

¹⁵⁶ Calvin, 499.

Christ as our king will never leave us destitute but will provide for our needs until our warfare ends and we are called to triumph.¹⁵⁷

Such is the nature of his rule that he shares with us all that he has received from the Father. Now he arms and equips us with his power, adorns us with his wealth. These benefits then give us the most fruitful occasion to glory and also provide us with the confidence to struggle fearlessly against the devil, sin, and death. Finally clothed with his righteousness, we can valiantly rise above all the world's reproaches; and just as he freely lavishes his gifts upon us, so may we, in turn, bring forth fruit to his glory.¹⁵⁸

Calvin argues that the noblest triumph that God ever gained was when Christ, after subduing sin, conquering death, and putting Satan to flight, rose majestically to heaven, so that he might exercise glorious reign over the church.¹⁵⁹ No ascension of God more triumphant or more memorable will ever occur than that which took place when Christ was carried up to the right hand of the Father, that he might rule over all authorities and powers, and might become the everlasting protector of his people.¹⁶⁰ By the kingdom of Christ, Calvin sees Christ's kingly power demonstrated in his dominion over his enemies.¹⁶¹

In addition, Calvin says that the Father has given all power to the Son that he may by the Son's hand govern, nourish, and sustain us, keep us in his care, and help us. Jesus Christ has his possession of the whole power of God's dominion for God wills to rule and protect the church in Christ's person.¹⁶² Scripture usually calls Christ "Lord" because the Father set Christ over us to exercise his dominion through his son;¹⁶³ for the same reason, the Father has appointed him over us for the express purpose of exercising his government through him.¹⁶⁴

Calvin further argues that although there are many lordships celebrated in the world (1 Corinthians 8:5), "for Christians there is one God, the Father from whom are all things and we in him, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and we through him (1 Corinthians 8:6), says Paul.¹⁶⁵ From this, we duly infer that he is the same God who through the mouth of Isaiah declared himself king and lawgiver of the church (Isaiah 33:22). For even though (the son) consistently calls all the power he holds "the benefits and gift of the Father", he merely means that he reigns by divine power.¹⁶⁶ Jesus Christ enriches his people with all things necessary for the eternal salvation of souls and fortifies them with the courage to stand unconquerable against

¹⁵⁷ Calvin, 498.

¹⁵⁸ Calvin, 499.

¹⁵⁹ Charles A.M. Hall, with the spirit's sword, - the drama of spiritual warfare in the theology of John Calvin, P.G. Keller, 1968, page 200.

¹⁶⁰ Hall, 200.

¹⁶¹ Hall, 200.

¹⁶² John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, volume xx, Philadelphia – Westminster Press, 1536, 500.

¹⁶³ Calvin, 500.

¹⁶⁴ <https://www.ccel.org> –Calvin-institutes. Iv.xvi.html. accessed by author on 17 August 2023.

¹⁶⁵ John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, volume xx, page 501.

¹⁶⁶ Calvin, 501.

all the assaults of spiritual enemies.¹⁶⁷ Christ as king founded his kingdom, defended his church against all enemies, and ruled all things in heaven and on earth.¹⁶⁸

4.3. CHARLES HALL COMMENTARY ON JOHN CALVIN

This section gives an analysis of Charles A.M. Hall on the views of John Calvin about Christ's power over evil. Hall has cited several issues about Christ's power but I will just mention a few.

4.3.1. JESUS CHRIST IN SPIRITUAL WARFARE.

Hall argues that Jesus Christ's victory progressively appears as a Head in the fellowship of the body (church) in the communication of his life and strength to it.¹⁶⁹ Being grafted into Christ we are delivered from the miserable necessity of sinning common to all sons of Adam, not that by and by we cease altogether to sin but that at length we become victors in the fight.¹⁷⁰ Christ's historical work is like a mighty power station, transmitting spiritual energy to those united with him.¹⁷¹ Christ continues to triumph in the world through the body, joined to him by the spirit which empowers the members and these victories of Christ are continuous with those he gained in his flesh they are largely the result of them¹⁷² Calvin can give full sway to the exalted Christ, give full credit concerning the elect, to Christ's glorious victory. He supplies all possible benefits to his people and fully protects them from evil. He now reigns in full.

Calvin further illuminates the eschatological tension and its relation to history when he visualizes Christ as finally destroying the Antichrist at the eschatological restoration that Christ will previously put to fight the darkness of the Antichrist's reign.¹⁷³

4.3.2. WEAPONS OF WARFARE

According to Hall, Calvin states while we wage war under the banners of our Christ, and fight with the weapons of his warfare we shall be unconquerable. It becomes increasingly clear that in spiritual warfare, the Christian does not fight alone, since it is God's warfare not only do we fight for God with weapons he provides, but God himself is also actively engaged in the struggle.¹⁷⁴ In addition, Hall argues that the one, who leads us into a battle, also repeatedly arms us with the necessary weapons and teaches us to use them. Nevertheless, beyond that, the Spirit brings to the Christian soldier the benefits of the word of God, that sword of the Spirit that is one of the most powerful of his weapons and the source of many others.¹⁷⁵ Moreover, Christ who is

¹⁶⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, volume xx, Philadelphia – Westminster Press, 1536, page 498.

¹⁶⁸ <https://www.ccel.org> – calvin-institutes.iv.xvi.html accessed by author on 17 August 2023.

¹⁶⁹ Charles A.M. Hall, *with the spirit's sword* 127.

¹⁷⁰ Hall, 127.

¹⁷¹ Hall, 127.

¹⁷² Hall, 127.

¹⁷³ Hall, 129.

¹⁷⁴ Hall, 161.

¹⁷⁵ Hall, 161.

exalted to the right hand of the Father is so closely united with his members that he reigns for them than for himself both internally and externally. From this, it follows that it is impossible for the devil, with all the assistance of the world, ever to destroy the church that is founded on the throne of Christ.¹⁷⁶

Just as the Spirit speaks not of himself but of Christ, so behind Calvin's Christ stands the all-mighty, all-knowing, all-determining God, who acts like the First Person understood as the Old Testament God of glory. This God furthers and promotes the kingdom of his son, so that a few men unarmed, furnished with no garrisons, do show forth more power in their voice alone than all the world by raging against them. The role Calvin's God most often plays in the actual spiritual warfare he assigns his children is that of Protector.¹⁷⁷

Hall argues that Calvin's weapon of confidence in God took a theologically more concrete form in his confidence in Christ as the Head of his body.¹⁷⁸ Since the faith that overcomes the world is a real apprehension of Christ, Calvin holds that only he who rests solely on Christ's power can conquer Satan and the world, and not succumb to his flesh.¹⁷⁹ Thus if we are to win, firmness in Jesus Christ must support us under the pressures of battle. The Union with Christ as members of his body provides an additional weapon.¹⁸⁰ Christ's royal banner assembles believers under his dominion. So great is the power of God's grace which bestows faith that when the Christian is struggling with his weakness, and presses toward faith in the moment of anxiety, it is already in large part victorious.¹⁸¹ Hall further observes that in one passage, John Calvin makes the source of our weapons to consist in the forgiveness of sins; but ordinarily, he turns to Holy scripture as the source of the Christian's armaments, because out of it come faith, hope, love, wisdom, patience and all the virtues with which we are to withstand the attacks of the enemy until we win victory.¹⁸²

4.3.3. THE CERTAINTY OF VICTORY

Hall further presents Calvin's views on the certainty of victory in case Christians whom he calls "soldiers of Christ" can encounter evil forces. When Satan combats and fights under Christ's banner, Jesus Christ girds on their armour and draws them into the battle.¹⁸³ Hall observes that a Christian's certainty of victory depends on the guarantee of God's power that assures an invincible munition that Calvin challenges that no danger may not be successfully met by the power of God.¹⁸⁴ Secondly, Christians can rely on God's immutability that is the fact that God cannot lie to his people that is a clear ground against which no contrivance of Satan can prevail.

¹⁷⁶ Hall, 161.

¹⁷⁷ Hall, 162.

¹⁷⁸ Hall, 162.

¹⁷⁹ Hall, 162.

¹⁸⁰ Hall, 162.

¹⁸¹ Hall, 167.

¹⁸² Hall, 166.

¹⁸³ Hall, 194.

¹⁸⁴ Hall, 195.

Thirdly, Calvin gains assurance of victory from God's protection as it is observed that under the banner of Christ Christians only battle as victors so that they triumph in trusting in this protection.¹⁸⁵ Calvin views that all those that are united to Christ will remain to the end safe from all danger for what is said to the body of the church belongs to each of its members since they are one in Christ.¹⁸⁶ Furthermore, Calvin as a good Trinitarian theologian connects the Holy Spirit with the warrior's certainty for the Spirit powerfully regenerates the Christian and is thus the guarantor of victory.¹⁸⁷

Calvin's soldier of God, after realizing the necessity of fighting the good fight of faith, after receiving his training in the nature and use of the Spirit's sword, bends every effort in the fight, but always in the hope of God's sure triumph in which he shares as a member of the body of the victorious Christ.¹⁸⁸

It is this hope that the Christian soldier must battle as long as he has breath and that the God of battle must reign triumphant over all his foes.¹⁸⁹

4.4. SYNOPSIS OF PURER THEOLOGY ON THE OFFICE OF JESUS CHRIST AS KING

According to the Synopsis Jesus Christ as king, is the only Head who governs the church that was purchased with his blood. Furthermore, Synopsis argues that the glory of Christ as Head is not merely in name only, but is also accompanied by power and rule.¹⁹⁰ With this, as king and Ruler over all things, he effectively keeps it safe and guards it against the world and Satan and he does so until he will triumph completely over all his enemies.¹⁹¹ Jesus Christ powerfully guards the church against every enemy within and without and with his guidance, he equips the church with suitable weapons as she battles in the arena of this world so that when at long last she is made partaker of the victory he promised, she celebrates in heaven with him an eternal triumph over her defeated enemies.¹⁹²

This actual power and rule are demonstrated by a comparison of Psalm 110:1 and 1 Corinthians 15:25 "Sit at my right hand until I shall make your enemies a footstool for your feet," are given by the apostle thus as an equivalent substitute: "for he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet" (1 Corinthians 15:25). Therefore, also Matthew 26:64 and Mark 14:62 call it "the right hand of God's power", and Matthew 28:18, "all power in heaven and on earth".¹⁹³

¹⁸⁵ Hall, 195.

¹⁸⁶ Hall, 196.

¹⁸⁷ Hall, 196.

¹⁸⁸ Hall, 196.

¹⁸⁹ Hall, 196.

¹⁹⁰ Synopsis of a Purer Theology, Brill Leiden Boston, 2016, 173.

¹⁹¹ Synopsis, 173.

¹⁹² Synopsis, 127.

¹⁹³ Synopsis, 173.

For only Christ stands out far above all the members of his mystic body in this unique and boundless way, he does so by the worthiness of his rank and his power to rule, enliven, and preserve her.¹⁹⁴ Every day the church experiences the fruits and effects of the Kingship of Jesus Christ; and the enemies of Christ, including even Satan himself marvel at it and tremble. For Christ gathers, his church by his Word and Spirit, while they vainly resist; he preserves it against the tyranny of the whole world and the gates of hell, and he destroys the Antichrist by the spirit of his mouth.¹⁹⁵ It is further observed that Christ's church has a twofold state, the one of grace in this age and the other of glory in the future. He argues that for this life Christ rules his church through the intervening agencies of ecclesiastical administration by protecting all forces of evil.¹⁹⁶ In the life that is to come Jesus will rule it directly without the external support of that kind and by the divinity he shares with the Father and the Holy Spirit so that together with them he may be all things to every member of the household of faith, whom he shall cause to rejoice in beholding him and communicating with him most closely and happily from their fear of the enemy.¹⁹⁷

4.5. HERMAN BAVINCK ON JESUS CHRIST AS AN ETERNAL KING.

Christ's kingship is rooted in the Church's teaching on the Incarnation. Jesus is fully God and fully man. He is both the divine Lord and the man who suffered and died on the Cross. One person of the Trinity unites himself to human nature and reigns over all creation as the Incarnate Son of God.¹⁹⁸ Bavinck observes that Jesus Christ is our eternal king who rules us by his word and Spirit and equips us to be victorious over sin and Satan.¹⁹⁹ Bavinck also defines Jesus Christ as the ruler of the kings of the earth, the king of kings, and the Lord of Lords, who with the Father sits on the throne, and has power honour, and glory. Clothed with such power, he rules and protects his church and will one day triumph over all his enemies.²⁰⁰ However, as a king, he rules not by the sword but by his Word and Spirit: mighty in speech and action as a king and full of grace and truth in his royal rule.²⁰¹

His kingship was also as real as his anointing, of which that of the Old Testament was only a shadow. The theocratic Davidic kingship was only a weak prefiguration of it and received its true fulfilment in the kingship of Christ. Christ is king in a greater, much truer sense than David and Solomon. Since Israel's kings did not conform themselves to this royal law, prophecy expected

¹⁹⁴ Synopsis, 173..

¹⁹⁵ Synopsis, 173.

¹⁹⁶ Synopsis, 127.

¹⁹⁷ Synopsis, 127.

¹⁹⁸ <https://www.google.nl/> Bavinck on Jesus Christ as king, accessed by author on 17 August 2023.

¹⁹⁹ Herman Bavinck, Reformed dogmatics – Sin and salvation in Christ, Volume three, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2006, page 421.

²⁰⁰ Bavinck, 424.

²⁰¹ Bavinck, 369.

another and better king who, himself the anointed of the Lord and servant of God, would govern his people by truth and righteousness and conquer his enemies.²⁰²

He was all this not just from eternity and in the days of the Old Testament and during his sojourn on earth but still this today and will be to the end of the ages. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Indeed, he is this now in the state of exaltation in a much richer sense than he was in the state of humiliation and in the time that preceded it.²⁰³ Granted, he had from eternity been anointed king and exercised this office, along with that of prophet and priest, immediately after the fall and up until his death on the cross; but because of his humiliation, God highly exalted him and gave him a name above every name.

Bavinck describes Jesus Christ as just, victorious, meek, a king riding on a donkey; as king, he is not proud of his power but sustained by God (Jer. 33:17, 20, 22, 26; Zech. 9:9f.), a king whom the people call and acknowledge as “the Lord our righteousness” (Jer. 23:6—cf. 33:16, He will be a warrior like David, and his house will be like God, like the angel of the Lord who at the time of the exodus led Israel’s army (Zech. 12:8; cf. Mal. 3:1). He will reign forever; found a kingdom of righteousness, peace, and prosperity; and extend his domain over the Gentiles to the ends of the earth.²⁰⁴ Jesus Christ is the king who preserves and protects his own and to that end has been clothed with power in heaven and earth. He is king in a much more authentic sense than any secular ruler. He is not only according to his divine nature but also according to his human nature. The human Christ has been exalted to sit at his Father’s right hand. By his resurrection, he was declared with power to be the son of God, became Lord, received all power in heaven and on earth, and now reigns until he has completed the kingdom and put all his enemies under his feet.²⁰⁵

Furthermore, Bavinck argues that the kingship of Christ is about having power (Psalms 2:8-9; 72:8; 110:1-3; Mathew 28:18; 1 Corinthians 15:27; Ephesians 1:21-22; Philippians 2:9-11; Hebrews 1:6; 1 Peter 3:22; Revelations 17:14).²⁰⁶ so that Christ may truly be king over his people, the king who redeems, protects, and preserves them, he must have power in heaven and on earth, over Satan and the world. It is a kingship of power, subordinate to and means for his kingship of grace.²⁰⁷ Bavinck observes that based on Christ’s perfect obedience, God has granted him the right and the power to gather his people together out of the world, to protect them against all their enemies, and to completely subdue those enemies themselves.²⁰⁸ In the event of

²⁰² Bavinck, 366.

²⁰³ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics volume 4: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2008, 371.

²⁰⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed dogmatics – Sin and salvation in Christ, volume three*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2006, page 244.

²⁰⁵ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics volume 4: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2008, page 371.

²⁰⁶ Bavinck, 371.

²⁰⁷ Bavinck, 372.

²⁰⁸ Bavinck, 372.

Christ's exaltation, the Father recognized his son and appointed him as the heir of all things (Hebrews 1:2).²⁰⁹

4.6. VAN DER KOOI AND VAN DEN BRINK ON JESUS CHRIST AS VICTOR.

Van der Kooi and Van Den Brink argue that the earliest view regarding the saving significance of Christ's work was that Christ fought against and conquered the evil powers that enslave humankind, the tyrants of sin, the devil, and death. God in Christ thus reconciles the world with himself (2 Corinthians 5:19).²¹⁰ Van der Kooi and Van den Brink further say that salvation must be defined in terms of victory rather than as a satisfaction, we have to render to God or as a moral transformation in us.²¹¹ Thus, Christ conquered the powers that held the world and humanity in their grip and so became their Liberator.²¹²

In Jesus's ministry, we see how the powers that destroy human life, in body and spirit, flee when Jesus comes close. His proclamation of the kingdom is no empty word, as Jesus demonstrates in his power over the evil spirits e.g. (Mark 1:21-28 and 5:1-20).²¹³ Wherever Jesus appears and makes the kingdom a present reality, these powers must recede and they know. Whenever God comes, they are close to destruction and disappearance.²¹⁴ Surprisingly, the entire New Testament testifies to this conquering power. In Luke 10 we notice that the evil spirits are even subject to the disciples who have been sent out, and in a vision, Jesus sees the devil fall from heaven (v.18). In brief, where Jesus appears, the powers of evil must depart.²¹⁵

Jesus Christ delivered his people from all powers of illnesses and through his death and resurrection was victorious over the powers of the devil.²¹⁶

On Golgotha, the burden of sin as estrangement from God is laid on Jesus and is conquered through the power of the Spirit, who at this moment of highest tension is the connecting link between Father and Son.²¹⁷ By God's act, the entire condition of human estrangement is accumulated in Christ. In faith, we open ourselves to his already having died for us and thus to our being able to share in the salvation he accomplished.²¹⁸

²⁰⁹ Bavinck, 371.

²¹⁰ Van der Kooi and van den Brink, *Christian Dogmatics*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2017, 453.

²¹¹ Van der Kooi and van den Brink, 453.

²¹² Van der Kooi and van den Brink, 453.

²¹³ Van der Kooi and van den Brink, 454.

²¹⁴ Van der Kooi and van den Brink, 454.

²¹⁵ Van der Kooi and van den Brink, 454.

²¹⁶ Van der Kooi and van den Brink, 454.

²¹⁷ Van der Kooi and van den Brink, 481.

²¹⁸ Van der Kooi and van den Brink, 483.

4.7. RICHARD J. GEHMAN ON COMMUNION WITH THE DEAD ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES.

Richard J. Gehman believes that a fellowship with the dead is what the Christian church has defined as the "Communion of Saints."²¹⁹ However, he does not agree with the primary meaning found among Roman Catholics who understand the term "communion of saints" as the spiritual union existing between each Christian and Christ, and so between every Christian, whether in Heaven, purgatory or on earth.²²⁰ In his argument, Gehman agrees with the reformers who believed that the Communion of Saints in the Apostles' Creed was an expansion of the preceding phrase, "the Holy Catholic Church."²²¹ Furthermore, Gehman argues that the reformers limited the "communion" to the fellowship between believers and Christ and the fellowship between Christians living on the earth. This is reflected in the Protestant creeds and catechisms.²²²

"All saints that are united to Jesus Christ their head, by his Spirit and by faith, have fellowship [communion] with him in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: and being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce [contribute] to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man."²²³

Having agreed with the reformers' view on the understanding of "communion of saints", Gehman says that there is no surprise that the Protestant commentaries are silent on any communion of saints with departed believers. The sharing is among the living and not between the living and the dead.²²⁴

From the New Testament teaching, Gehman argues that "communion among the saints" carries the idea of "participation" and "fellowship," a specially close bond. There is a two-way relationship between giving and receiving in communion.²²⁵ Fellowship is either with the living saints or with God. Fellowship with God is a common emphasis (I Corinthians 1:9; 2 Corinthians 13:13; Philippians 2: I; 3:10; I John 1:3b, 6).²²⁶

Gehman observes that in the Old Testament, a koinonia kind of fellowship was never used in our relationship with God. The emphasis among the Hebrews was the holiness and majesty of God.²²⁷ It is distinctively Christian (a New Testament emphasis, not an Old Testament teaching) for John to say, "that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ" (I John 1:3). There can be no koinonia fellowship with

²¹⁹ Richard. J. Gehman, "Communion with the Dead according to the Scriptures: African Journal of Evangelical Theology, 25th January 2006, <https://biblicalstudies.org.uk>, accessed by author on 17th August 2023.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

man apart from the primary fellowship with God.²²⁸ The Bible teaches that our communion (fellowship) with the saints depends on our communion with God. Unless God has forgiven our sins and reconciled us (brought us together) with Him, there can be no real koinonia between men and women.²²⁹

4.8. SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

John Calvin argues that the kingship of Jesus Christ is a fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies about the future king who would rule the heavens and earth. Calvin therefore, urges the church that whenever it hears of Christ as armed with eternal power, it must remember that the perpetuity of the church is secured and protected. Hence, amid the violent agitation with which it is continually troubled, amid the grievous and frightful storms that threaten it with unnumbered calamities, it remains safe.²³⁰ Furthermore, he asserts that no matter how many strong enemies plot to attack or destroy the church, they do not have sufficient strength to prevail over God's immutable decree by which he appointed his son eternal King. Calvin emphasizes that the devil with all the resources of the world can never destroy the church founded as it is on the eternal throne of Christ.²³¹

He points out that by relying upon the power of Jesus Christ the church shall always be victorious over the devil, the world, and every kind of harmful thing. Jesus Christ as the king will never leave his church destitute but will provide for her needs until the warfare ends because it is called to triumph.²³²

Calvin argues that the noblest triumph that God ever gained was when Christ rose majestically to heaven so that he might exercise glorious reign over the church.²³³ No ascension of God triumphant or more memorable will ever occur than that which took place when Christ was carried up to the right hand of the Father that he might rule over all authorities and powers, and might become the everlasting protector of his people.²³⁴

Finally, Calvin argues that Jesus Christ fortifies his church with the courage to stand unconquerable against all the assaults of spiritual enemies.²³⁵

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, volume xx, Philadelphia – Westminster Press, 1536, page 497.

²³¹ Calvin, 498.

²³² Calvin, 498.

²³³ Calvin, 200.

²³⁴ Calvin, 200.

²³⁵ Calvin, 498.

Charles A.M. Hall observes that Jesus Christ's victory appears as a Head in the fellowship of the body (church) in the communication of his strength to it.²³⁶ Hall argues that Christ's historical work is like a mighty power station, transmitting spiritual energy to those who are united with him by giving them protection and security against evil powers.²³⁷

He argues that while we wage war under the banners of our Christ, and fight with the weapons of his warfare we shall be unconquerable. It becomes increasingly clear that in spiritual warfare, the Christian does not fight alone, since it is God's warfare. Not only do we fight for God with weapons he provides, but God himself is also actively engaged in the struggle.²³⁸

Hall observes that a Christian's certainty of victory depends on the guarantee of the power of Christ, which is a sure and invincible munition that assures all believers that no danger may not be successfully met, by the power of Christ. He observes that under the banner of Christ Christians only battle as victors so that they triumph in trusting in this protection.²³⁹

The Synopsis conquers with fellow theologians that Jesus Christ as king, he is the only Head who governs the church that was purchased with his blood and that this glory of Christ as Head is not merely in name only, but is also accompanied by power and rule. With this, as king and Ruler over all things, he effectively keeps it safe and guards it against the world and Satan and he does so until he triumphs completely over all his enemies.²⁴⁰

Furthermore, the Synopsis argues that for this life Christ rules his church through the intervening agencies of ecclesiastical administration by protecting all forces of evil.

Herman Bavinck describes Christ's kingship as being rooted in the Church's teaching on the Incarnation. Jesus is fully God and fully man. He is both the divine Lord and the man who suffered and died on the Cross. Bavinck observes that Jesus Christ is our eternal king who rules us by his word and Spirit and equips us to be victorious over sin and Satan. Bavinck also defines Jesus Christ as the king of kings and the Lord of Lords, who with the Father sits on the throne, has power, and with that power, he rules and protects his church and will one day triumph over all his enemies.²⁴¹

Bavinck argues that the kingship of Christ is about having power (Psalms 2:8-9; 72:8; 110:1-3) that protects and preserves his people. Bavinck further observes that based on Christ's perfect obedience, God has granted him the right and the power to gather his people together out of the

²³⁶ Charles A.M. Hall, *with the spirit's sword, - the drama of spiritual warfare in the theology of John Calvin*, P.G. Keller, 1968, 127.

²³⁷ Hall, 127.

²³⁸ Hall, 161.

²³⁹ Hall, 195.

²⁴⁰ *Synopsis of a Purer Theology*, Brill Leiden Boston, 2016, 173.

²⁴¹ Bavinck, *Reformed dogmatics – Sin and salvation in Christ*, Volume three, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2006, 424.

world, to protect them against all their enemies, and to completely subdue those enemies themselves.²⁴²

Van der Kooi and Van den Brink argue that the earliest view regarding the saving significance of Christ's work was that Christ fought against and conquered the evil powers that enslaved humankind. He observes that Christ conquered the powers that held the world and humanity in their grip and so became their Liberator.²⁴³

According to Kooi and Brink Jesus' proclamation of his kingdom is no empty word, as he demonstrates in his power over the evil spirits e.g. (Mark 1:21-28 and 5:1-20). Jesus Christ delivered his people from all powers of illnesses and through his death and resurrection was victorious over the powers of the devil.²⁴⁴

Richard Gehman argues about the wrong understanding and interpretation of the term "communion of saints". Gehman believes that a fellowship with the dead is what the Christian church has defined as "Communion of Saints."²⁴⁵ However, he does not agree with Roman Catholics' understanding as "the spiritual union existing between each Christian and Christ, and so between every Christian, whether in Heaven, purgatory or on earth."²⁴⁶ In his argument, Gehman agrees with the reformers who believed that the Communion of Saints in the Apostles' Creed was an expansion of the preceding phrase, "the Holy Catholic Church."²⁴⁷

Gehman says that there is no surprise that the Protestant commentaries are silent on any communion of saints with departed believers. The sharing is among the living and not between the living and the dead.²⁴⁸

From the New Testament teaching, Gehman argues, "communion among the saints means fellowship with either the living saints or with God. Fellowship with God is a common emphasis (I Corinthians 1:9; 2 Corinthians 13:13; Philippians 2: I; 3:10; I John 1:3b, 6)."²⁴⁹

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, Western reformed theologians have given an in-depth analysis of the Lordship of Jesus Christ in relationship to the evil forces. The points are as follows: First, Jesus Christ is an eternal king who rules by his word but also equips his church, as he is victorious over sin and Satan. Second, Jesus Christ fortifies his church with the courage to be unconquerable against all

²⁴² Herman Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics volume 4: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2008, 372.

²⁴³ Van der Kooi and van den Brink, Christian Dogmatics, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2017, 453.

²⁴⁴ Van der Kooi and van den Brink, 454.

²⁴⁵ Richard. J. Gehman, "Communion with the Dead according to the Scriptures: African Journal of Evangelical Theology, 25th January 2006, <https://biblicalstudies.org.uk>, accessed by author on 17th August 2023.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

sorts of spiritual threats. Third, Jesus Christ's proclamation of his kingdom demonstrates his power over evil spirits.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONVERSATION ON THE CONCEPT OF SECURITY AND PROTECTION BY JESUS CHRIST BETWEEN AFRICAN REFORMED THEOLOGIAN, RESPONDENTS' VIEWS AND WESTERN REFORMED THEOLOGIAN.

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter brings a conversation between theologians from the two contexts that will enable us to understand in-depth the concept of security and protection given the Lordship of Jesus Christ as it is perceived from the two worldviews. However, before we engage in such a conversation we will first look at the comparison between chapters two and three just to crosscheck the correlation between the two chapters, and then we will look at the perception of the respondents about the same concept of security and protection in Jesus Christ from the Malawi context. The idea of conversation is to get to the right understanding of the concept of security and protection in Jesus Christ that can be meaningful and applied to the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Livingstonia synod. Later, the researcher will give the lesson drawn from the conversation that ordinary believers from the C.C.A.P. can apply to their Christian life given the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

5.2. COMPARISON BETWEEN LITERATURE AND THE VIEWS GATHERED DURING THE INTERVIEW

This chapter analyses the views gathered during the interview and those read from the literature. Many areas from the interview agree with the literature.

First, the respondents from the interview showed that there was a strong belief in the existence of supernatural powers in the universe. In addition, the respondents believe that the mystical powers in the universe can bring both sicknesses and healing depending on the use and application. This is in agreement with what John S. Mbiti and Joyce Mlenga observe in their literature. Some ordinary believers admitted that these mystical powers could do more than the powers of Jesus Christ. They trust in both the powers of their ancestors as well as Jesus Christ. It is for this reason that Mbiti observes that some African Christians are not willing to abandon their African Traditional Religious beliefs; otherwise, they would feel insecure afterwards unless something else gave them an additional or greater sense of security

Second, from the interviews, it was gathered that some ordinary believers trust the powers of their ancestors because they are their blood relatives, as such they are believed not to abandon their descendants in that regard. Kwame Bediako makes the same observation in his literature that many African Christians have doubts about the Lordship of Jesus Christ, as they believe he is not blood-related to them. In his writings, he argues that many African Christians value blood relations as they expect that such relations be there for protection. Bediako observes this to be a challenge to their trust in Jesus Christ as he is not blood-related to them hence little trust in Jesus.

Third, some ordinary believers expressed their feeling they have the powers of their ancestors, especially those who once were chiefs or kings for the protection of their wide territory or

community. Mlenga has this in her literature that there is a general belief among many people from the north that the spirits of the king were powerful in protecting their people. This understanding overshadows many ordinary Christians to have their trust in the powers of Jesus Christ.

Fourth, some ordinary believers doubted if the powers of Jesus Christ were sufficient to deal with their spiritual threats as they believed that the powers of their ancestors and indeed the charms they got from witch doctors had great power to protect and heal them. Vhumani Magezi makes it clear from his literature that some African Christians have a feeling of 'inadequacy' of Jesus Christ. By inadequacy, he says that many African Christians feel like Jesus Christ is not sufficient for their spiritual problems. According to Magezi, this prompts many to cling to African beliefs as they have little trust in the powers of Jesus Christ.

On the same note, Mbiti observes that when Africans are converted to other religions, they often mix their traditional religion with the one to which they are converted.²⁵⁰ This is true with some ordinary believers in the C.C.A.P. Livingstonia as they continue relying upon the powers of their ancestors despite their trust in the Lordship of Jesus Christ. This comparison confirms that the information read from the literature is found on the ground. All that is required is to emphasize the need to know the powers of Jesus Christ that are above all spiritual powers.

5.3. AFRICAN THEOLOGIANS ON THE BELIEF OF WITCHCRAFT AND ANCESTRAL SPIRITS GIVEN SECURITY AND PROTECTION BY JESUS CHRIST.

5.3.1. Powers from ancestral spirits and witchcraft

There have been a lot of debates about the belief in witchcraft and ancestral spirits in chapter three. The debates centred not only on their existence but also on the powers that many people are believed to have acquired from them for their use. Based on such studies, John S. Mbiti and Joyce Mlenga agree that many African people including Christians believe in such powers especially when they are in crises of sickness, drought, childbearing, etc.

Mbiti and Mlenga observe that there is a belief in some African communities that ancestors and witchcraft possess powers that can cause or prevent misfortune. It is believed that this power can be used to reward the obedient individual or communities or to bring sickness depending on the use or motive of the user. The general understanding of the ancestors and witchcraft as they relate to the community is that of the power they are believed to be able to possess. The belief in the power of ancestors and witchcraft by many African people also means the growth of trust in the same ancestral spirits. Both theologians observe that the participation of many African people has affected their Christian outlook (those converted to Christianity), as they tend to depend on the powers of their traditional beliefs than Jesus Christ. John S. Mbiti observes that even if many Africans are converted to another religion like Christianity, they do not completely abandon their traditional religion immediately: it remains with them for several generations and

²⁵⁰ John. S. Mbiti, *An introduction to African Religion*, Phillips Academy-Heinemann Educational books Ltd, 1975, page 13.

sometimes centuries.²⁵¹ The study has shown that for this reason many African Christians still cling to their ancestral spirits' belief for security and protection despite their confession to Christianity through Jesus Christ.

It is for this reason that John S. Mbiti argues that African Traditional Religion makes Christianity foreign to many Africans who are converted to Christianity. This foreignness is a drawback to Christianity because Christianity is kept on the surface and does not deepen in the lives of many Africans.²⁵²

Another African theologian Vhumani Magezi observes that there is a perceived 'inadequacy of Christ' in protecting African Christians from traditional religious spiritual threats such as witchcraft and angry ancestral spirits. He observes that the practice of seeking protection from charms, ancestors, and traditional medical practitioners by many African Christians against their spiritual threats is common. His views come from the perception that many African Christians tend to rely on charms, and ancestral spirits whenever they are in crisis or sickness. According to Magezi African Christians at their conversion to Christianity are taught to relinquish reliance on these traditional spiritual powers and to trust only in Jesus Christ for their protection. However, in times of crisis such as sickness and other inexplicable life situations, some African Christians revert to their previously abandoned traditional forms of security, whilst continuing to trust in Christ.²⁵³ This practice shows a lack of trust in the powers of Jesus Christ because if they had trust in the powers of Jesus Christ they should not have reverted to the powers of their ancestors and witchcraft.

On the other hand, Kwame Bediako observes the trust by many African Christians in the powers of their ancestral spirits from the central traditional African ancestral worldview which requires a blood-related ancestor to address the needs of Africans.²⁵⁴

Bediako argues that this un-relatedness of Christ to Africans is a stumbling block for some African Christians because they see Christ as someone who is not related to them hence he cannot meet their African contextual needs.²⁵⁵ Thus, many African believers are uncertain about how the Jesus of the church's preaching saves them from the terrors and fears that they experience in their traditional worldview.²⁵⁶

²⁵¹ John. S. Mbiti, *An introduction to African Religion*, Phillips Academy-Heinemann Educational books Ltd, 1975, page 13.

²⁵² Mbiti, 76.

²⁵³ Vhumani Magezi, 153.

²⁵⁴ Bediako, *Jesus in Africa- the Christian Gospel in African history and experience*, Regnum Africa, 2000, 22.

²⁵⁵ Bediako, 26.

²⁵⁶ Bediako 26.

5.3.2. Respondents' views on protection and security given the powers of ancestral spirits and witchcraft.

According to the research findings, many ordinary believers indicated that they live in fear of the spirits and witchcraft. Witchcraft is believed to cause sicknesses and many more problems; as a result, many seek charms that are believed to have powers to protect them from all sorts of danger. In addition, many ordinary believers indicated to have trust in the powers of their ancestral spirits.

The central question in the interview was to find out from them as ordinary believers “what they believe about the protection and security by the ancestral spirits/witch-finders and Jesus Christ and how this is reflected in their religious practice”. I have captured some of the responses as follows:

“I remember that our Sunday school teacher taught us about trusting in the power of Jesus Christ. I attended all classes as demanded by the church up to the time I was baptized. I have been in the church for twenty years now but have never seen the power of Jesus Christ. I hear it from the pastor that he is powerful. However, I cannot tell if to have seen his power on me. Many times when I get sick, I either go to the medicine man or ask my ancestral spirits for their intervention. Now if Jesus has ever helped me in one of these circumstances then what I am seeking from the medicine men is an additional power. With that, my life has been easy. I have seen their wonderful power in my life. I enjoy being a member of this Christian church and a member of a choir group.”²⁵⁷

“To be honest, I am a dedicated church member, and I read the bible almost every evening with my family. I trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. However, you know that the world is so cruel that you cannot solely depend on Jesus Christ for evil threats. In this case, I also consult witch doctors and ancestors when things go out of hand. I remember that when my second-born son suffered from convulsion, it took the initiative of witch doctors to cast out the spell of a witch. Of course, I doubted if Jesus Christ had sufficient power to deal with witchcraft. In this case, if I only relied on Jesus Christ I would have lost my son. Therefore, with me, there is no problem with trusting in Jesus Christ and witch doctors.”²⁵⁸

“I feel like Jesus Christ takes a long time to answer my prayers. I do not know why. I guess it is because he does not know me. What is surprising is that when I ask my ancestral spirits for help of any kind, they come to my rescue. For this reason, I feel closer to my ancestral spirits than to Jesus Christ. The goodness of the ancestral spirits is that they live with us and they know all our life experiences. They are our parents who have known the difficulties of life from all angles. In this case, they cannot smile to see their blood suffering. They have been protecting us from all threats. I have tried in the past to pray to God through him but I could not see the answer. Jesus,

²⁵⁷ MN respondent 18th June 2023

²⁵⁸ JG respondent on 18th June 2023.

he is living very far away. I do not doubt that this is the reason he is not responding to my prayers. Nevertheless, I believe that he is the son of God as it is usually taught in the church.”²⁵⁹

Some believers indicated that they did not deny the power of Jesus Christ by trusting in the protection of African traditional beliefs but rather they needed additional power. In the same vein, some ordinary believers expressed doubt about the powers of Jesus Christ. According to this group, they felt like the powers of Jesus Christ were not sufficient to address their spiritual threats. Another group of ordinary believers indicated the blood relationship that existed between descendants and their ancestors that were not there between Jesus Christ and themselves.

From the responses gathered, it is clear that some ordinary believers have trust in both their traditional beliefs and Jesus Christ. They trust that the powers of witch doctors and their ancestors can protect them faster than the powers of Jesus Christ. This summary can mean two things: First, ordinary believers do not have sufficient knowledge from their pastors or churches about the reign of Christ. With this view, it means a lot must be taught about the reign of Jesus Christ. Second, it can mean that they doubt that the power of Jesus Christ is sufficient to address their spiritual threats. On this view, the church must find a mechanism to bring more lessons about the authority of Jesus Christ over evil powers.

5.3.3. Western Reformed theologians on the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

John Calvin assures the church that Jesus Christ who is an eternal King is the protector and defender of his church. Calvin argues that despite frightful storms that threaten to destroy the church, it remains safe and secure. He gives an assurance to the church that despite forces of evil that are meant to destroy the church they will never succeed for the sake of the Kingship of Christ. He argues that Jesus' resurrection and ascension to heaven are clear proof that he is a victor over Satan and king of kings respectively. He ascended into heaven that he might rule over all authorities and powers, and might become the everlasting protector of his people. According to Calvin, the kingdom of Christ is about Christ's kingly power and dominion over his enemies.²⁶⁰ Calvin urges the church to always rely on the Holy Spirit for it shall be victorious over the devil, the world, and every kind of harmful thing. In his argument, Jesus Christ as king will never leave the church destitute but will provide it with needs until the warfare comes to an end.

Jesus Christ conquered Satan and his angels through his resurrection and rose to heaven to exercise his glorious reign over the church; that he might rule over all authorities and powers, and might become the everlasting protector of his people.²⁶¹ This means that Christ continues to triumph in the world through the body, joined to him by the spirit that empowers the members,

²⁵⁹ JC respondent on 14th June 2023.

²⁶⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, volume xx, Philadelphia – Westminster Press, 1536, page 499.

²⁶¹ Charles A.M. Hall, *with the spirit's sword, - the drama of spiritual warfare in the theology of John Calvin*, P.G. Keller, 1968, 200.

and that these victories of Christ are continuously manifested in the world; He supplies all possible benefits to his people and fully protects them from evil. He now reigns in full.

On his part, Hall states that Christ who is exalted to the right hand of the Father is so closely united with his members that he reigns for them than for himself and that both internally and externally it is impossible for the devil, with all the assistance of the world, ever to destroy the church which is founded on the throne of Christ.²⁶² He further challenges the church that it is only those who rest on Christ's power that can conquer Satan and the world, and not succumb to their flesh; thus if they are to win, their firmness in Jesus Christ supports them under the pressures of battle.²⁶³

The Synopsis agrees with his fellow theologians, he emphasizes the point that Jesus Christ is king and Ruler over all things, he effectively keeps the church safe and guards it against the world and Satan and he does so until he triumphs completely over all his enemies. He points out that Jesus Christ equips the church with suitable weapons as she battles in the arena of this world against Satan.²⁶⁴

On his part, Bavinck states that Jesus Christ is the divine Lord. He observes that Jesus Christ is an eternal king who rules his church by his word and Spirit and equips it to be victorious over sin and Satan.²⁶⁵ According to Bavinck, Jesus Christ is the ruler of the kings of the earth, the king of kings, and the Lord of Lords, who with the Father sits on the throne, has the power to rule and protect his church and will one day triumph over all his enemies.²⁶⁶

Van der Kooi and Van den Brink argue that Christ fought against and conquered the evil powers that enslave humankind. Thus, Christ conquered the powers that held the world and humanity in their grip and so became their Liberator.²⁶⁷

5.3.4. Summary of the conversation

According to African theologians, the belief in witchcraft and ancestral spirits is high in many African communities. This witchcraft and ancestral spirits' belief has affected even those converted to Christianity as many African Christians seek the protection and security of their lives from witch doctors and ancestral spirits in times of crises and sicknesses. According to Magezi, this has been perceived as an 'inadequacy of Jesus Christ' in protecting them from

²⁶² Hall, 161.

²⁶³ Hall, 161.

²⁶⁴ Synopsis of a Purer Theology, Brill Leiden Boston, 2016, page 127.

²⁶⁵ Herman Bavinck, Reformed dogmatics – Sin and salvation in Christ, Volume three, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2006, page 421.

²⁶⁶ Bavinck, 424.

²⁶⁷ Van der Kooi and van den Brink, Christian Dogmatics, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2017, page 453.

traditional religious spiritual threats.²⁶⁸ Thus, many African Christians do not have full trust in the powers of Jesus Christ which is why they go out to seek additional power for their protection and security from their traditional priests. Mbiti observes that many African Christians do acknowledge the power of God through Jesus Christ, however, they understand it in the context of what Mbiti calls “save” from the physical point of view and not a spiritual one. He observes that this is because of the influence of African Traditional Religion that has made Christianity not penetrate deep into the lives of many African Christians.

On the other hand, an analysis of the responses taken during the interview agrees with the African Traditional Religion literature in the sense that many ordinary believers in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Livingstonia Synod have also their trust in ancestral spirits and medicine men for protection and security. The responses indicated that their trust in the power of Jesus Christ for protection and security is not ruled out but they need additional power as some believers feel that the power of Jesus Christ is not sufficient to address their spiritual threats. The part of Western reformed theologians, each bring an in-depth descriptive view of who Jesus Christ is and why should followers put their trust in him. The Western reformed literature review has portrayed Jesus Christ as the only **eternal King who is the protector and defender of his church.**²⁶⁹ In addition, Jesus Christ is portrayed as a victor over all evil, thus, he conquers the power that holds the world and humanity.²⁷⁰

5.3.5. Lesson drawn from the conversation on the security and protection by Jesus Christ and traditional African powers?

Having looked at the views of both African Traditional Religion and Western Reformed theologians on the security and protection of Jesus Christ and traditional African powers, the researcher has drawn a lesson that can help the spiritual life of the C.C.A.P. members in the synod of Livingstonia. Regarding Christ’s kingly office, he is the eternal Son of God whose throne is firmly established in heaven and on earth (Psalm 103:19).²⁷¹ The Christian members must also learn that Jesus Christ is a victor over all evil forces and that He conquers the power that holds the world.²⁷² They are to trust in the power of Jesus Christ who is powerful and they believe in witchcraft and ancestral spirits. Jesus Christ is close to them at any time and he is ready for their spiritual needs. Believers in the C.C.A.P. Livingstonia must know that the kingdom of Christ is about Christ’s kingly power and dominion over his enemies and that by putting their trust in him; they shall be victorious over the devil, the world, and every kind of harmful thing.

²⁶⁸ Vhumani Magezi www.missionalia.journals.ac.za | <http://dx.doi.org/10.7832/44-2-111> An Adamic incarnational “Christological framework, page 153.

²⁶⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, volume xx, Philadelphia – Westminster Press, 1536, page 499.

²⁷⁰ Van der Kooi and van den Brink, *Christian Dogmatics*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2017, page 454.

²⁷¹ <https://www.bibleref.com-Psalms-> Psalms 103:19 - Accessed by author on 19 July 2023.

²⁷² Van der Kooi and van den Brink, *Christian Dogmatics*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2017, page 454.

Chapter Six

6.1. Conclusion

Ancestral spirits and witchcraft belief is common in Africa. The belief is borne from African Traditional Religion. The belief affects both Christians and non-Christians up until today. The C.C.A.P. church, Livingstonia, in Malawi facing this challenge as some of its members believe in the powers of ancestors and witchcraft. They do not see any problem in believing in African Traditional Religious beliefs. This study was able to examine why ordinary believers get attracted to ancestral spirits and witchcraft beliefs. The study also examined Western reformed theological views on the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The examination and analysis were done as a means to understand the Lordship of Jesus Christ in view of ancestral spirits and witchcraft beliefs. Given the analysis from African theologians and Western theologians, we were able to develop some theological reflections and frames of reference that are consistent with the Reformed tradition's teaching on the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It is hoped that these theological reflections will be of considerable significance to ordinary believers of the C.C.A.P.

Livingstonia, in understanding and application about the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Chapter one introduced the study of the topic by providing the background information and the need for the research, which was to give an analysis and meaning of the Lordship of Jesus Christ given the powers of ancestral spirits and witchcraft as believed by some ordinary believers in C.C.A.P. Livingstonia, in Malawi. Chapter two looked at how ordinary believers from the context of African Traditional Religion perceive security and protection from Jesus Christ. It specifically explored the influence and impact of ancestral spirits' powers and witchcraft beliefs.

Chapter three dealt with the understanding of the African theologians on the concept of security and protection in the African Traditional Religious perspective. Chapter 5 explored the Western Reformed understanding of the analysis of the Lordship of Jesus Christ with particular reference to Herman Bavinck, John Calvin, Richard J. Gehman, Van der Kooi and Van den Brink and Synopsis of Purer theology. These teachings of the Reformed theology on the analysis of the Lordship of Jesus Christ are rooted in Scripture and the consistent interpretation of the Scripture alone. The outcome of the analysis from the Western theologians yields the coherent conclusion that Jesus Christ as Lord is more powerful than all spiritual forces ordinary believers can face. In this view, it is clear to note that trusting in ancestral spirits' powers and witchcraft is contrary to the Scripture and the Reformed tradition. Chapter five delved into a trio-conversation between African theologians' views supported by field interviews and the Western reformed views. The conversation shows the impact and influence of African Traditional Religion on the life of ordinary believers concerning the belief in the powers of ancestors and witchcraft. However, the views given by the Western theologians that are biblically based, point to the frame of reference that can help the C.C.A.P. Livingstonia to understand the Lordship of Jesus Christ over and above ancestral spirits and witchcraft powers. The chapter proposes theological and pastoral approaches for the Church in C.C.A.P. Livingstonia to harmonize its teachings for her ordinary believers. In addition, the study has established that the supernatural and ancestral spirits that are

believed to manifest power are evil. This conclusion is based on the observation that believers should not speak with the dead because their source is unholy or evil.²⁷³ According to Western reformed theologians, Jesus Christ, Lord, is victorious over His enemies. He is reigning in triumph over His enemies, who are now “under His feet” (Ephesians 1:19-22 cf. Psalm 110:1). Satan and his forces have no actual legal authority over the believer. Despite his claims and how much he may take advantage of their sin, unbelief, weakness, or fear, he is disarmed.²⁷⁴

Furthermore, to have an effective pastoral ministry to C.C.A.P. Livingstonia, an appropriate and relevant pastoral intervention should start with people who live in fear of the influence and impact of ancestral spirits and witchcraft. An appropriate and relevant pastoral intervention should start from a realization that a church is a sub-community within the larger community where people experience the realities of life, hence, the ordinary Christians in C.C.A.P. Livingstonia, are affected by the fears of witchcraft and ancestral spirits like any other person in the community. For that reason a pastoral intervention is needed to sensitize the Christian community to put their trust in the Lordship of Jesus Christ in any case of such fears and beliefs (Psalm 18:2). Moreover, because of their fears, some people have a traditional tendency to seek solutions for their spiritual and physical problems. They believe that by doing so they are secured and protected. On the other hand, the Western reformed theologians based on biblical analysis level have emerged that Jesus Christ, as Lord is above all spiritual powers and their influences. Since the people of God are forbidden to consult powers from evil spirits, they should seek power from God through the Lordship of Jesus Christ as demonstrated in the Scriptures. For that reason, the Christians in addressing their spiritual threats should not employ the traditional method.

Despite the ongoing spiritual battle, ordinary Christians in C.C.A.P. Livingstonia must remain vigilant in Christ Jesus and trust in His power (Colossians 2:15). Though evil spirits are everywhere Jesus, Christ has all authority over them. “He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” When Christ commands the devil, the devil obeys (Mark 1:27).

The study concluded therefore that the kingship of Jesus Christ is divine and that He rules his church by His word and Spirit; He equips His church to be victorious over sin and Satan. Thus, ordinary believers from C.C.A.P., Livingstonia should find their spiritual security in Christ's power, as He has disarmed the spiritual powers of darkness through His death and resurrection (Col 2:14). By doing so, they can protect themselves from their fears and insecurities emanating from traditional spiritual forces.

However, the challenge of the persistent existence of spiritual insecurity which still grips C.C.A.P. Livingstonia, which arises from the spiritual powers such as the notions of witchcraft and ancestors gives room for theological research to find a response to this spiritual challenge, especially on how ordinary believers can discontinue relying on the powers of their ancestors and witchdoctors.

²⁷³ Richard. J. Gehman, “Communion with the Dead according to the Scriptures: African Journal of Evangelical Theology, 25th January 2006, <https://biblicalstudies.org.uk> , accessed by author on 17th August 2023.

²⁷⁴ <https://reformedbaptistdaily.wordpress.com>, 2013/04/09, accessed by author on 10th September 2023.

6.2. Recommendation

Having discussed the analysis of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, I would like to recommend to C.C.A.P. Livingstonia ordinary believers to discontinue anything that is linked to traditional African spiritual worldview; thus reliance on the powers of ancestral spirits and witchcraft because Christianity entails a completely new worldview of total allegiance on the power of Jesus Christ. Instead, they should embrace a new worldview of total reliance on the powers of Jesus Christ. By doing so, they can battle any satanic forces that may oppress or harass them, using the name and authority of Jesus, the Christ, who has made a footstool for all His enemies in spiritual dimensions (Psalm 110:1-2). This can only be achieved by making the word of God at work in their hearts. In other words, they should put the word of God into action because this is what God requires of them (Deuteronomy 10:12).

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