



The Problem of Witchcraft in African Development and How the Church and Faith Based Organization Can Position Themselves to Combat it

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the pervasive phenomenon of witchcraft in Africa, particularly in Sub-Saharan regions, where many Christian populations exhibit lives incongruent with their professed faith, often resorting to syncretic practices amid crises. Drawing on theological, anthropological, and socioeconomic perspectives, it identifies root causes in African Traditional Religion's holistic worldview, which integrates spiritual and physical realms, fostering a utilitarian quest for power through mysticism, spirits, and rituals that Christianity inadequately addresses. The study highlights witchcraft's detrimental effects: socially, it erodes community cohesion, trust, and social capital, leading to exclusion, violence, and gender disparities; economically, it perpetuates poverty by discouraging wealth accumulation, innovation, and productivity in agriculture and trade; spiritually, it manifests as idolatry, clashing with biblical prohibitions and inducing anxiety. Biblical analysis frames witchcraft as detestable to God (e.g., Deuteronomy 18:9-13; Galatians 5:19-21), linking it to curses and destruction (Deuteronomy 30:15-20). Proposing solutions, the paper advocates for the church and faith-based organizations to adopt a holistic mission modeled on Christ's (Isaiah 61:1-3; Luke 4:16-19), involving interdisciplinary collaboration, revised theological education, and development of a theology of spirits to combat syncretism and promote integral human flourishing. Ultimately, it calls for scrutinizing cultural practices against Scripture to achieve transformative gospel impact.

INTRODUCTION

In his book “African Theology in its social context”, Bujo asks, “As regards liberation, why do so many African Christians return to the traditional practices for comfort in times of crises? It is by no means unknown for a Christian to seek the sacraments of the church in the morning and go off into the bush in the evening to consult the witchdoctor” (Bujo 1992, 31). Many of African countries- particularly sub-Saharan, are said to be majority Christian, yet the quality of their lives is not commensurate with the faith they profess. One wonders what impact the gospel has had in these countries.

Seeking to demonstrate the double lives of many Christians in Africa, Bujo makes reference to a book “The poor Christ of Bomba” in the following excerpt. “As long as Father Drumont remained at the mission station, he believed that he was offering the Africans a Christianity which they could understand. It was only when he went deep into the bush that his eyes were opened and he realized that Christianity had not at all displaced the traditional religious faith of the people. At best there was an uneasy coexistence between the two faiths. The missionary at first retained the hope that the gospel would in the end prove a real leaven in Bomba to transform the whole. This hope was shattered when he perceived that even among his “chosen few”, the traditional “immoral” customs retained all their power. Suddenly he realized that baptism had not changed the Africans in the slightest, and that Sunday Mass likewise had failed to convert the inner man. Discouraged, Father Drumont packed his bags and returned to Europe for good” (Bujo 1992, 53).

The problem of Witchcraft which is spiritual in nature, affects all other dimensions of life. The power of witchcraft is heavily contested, some believing in the powerful influence of witchcraft, while others negate it. In a research on “New Issues in Refugee Research” by UNHCR, Jill argues, “Development workers, human rights activists, and workers from governmental and non-governmental organizations must acknowledge that witchcraft is

real for those who believe in it and that it’s no use pretending witchcraft beliefs don’t exist or seeking some ground of neutrality in a society where people believe in witches. These beliefs are held by both the educated and uneducated, the wealthy and the poor, the old and the young in many societies.”(Schnoebelen, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit 2009, 2).

This paper seeks to identify the causes of the pervasiveness of witchcraft in Africa, its effects, and propose actions that the church and religious/ faith-based organizations can take in order to abate it.

CAUSES OF WITCHCRAFT IN AFICA

Quoting Steyne’s and Gehman’s work, Turaki shows that Africans are preoccupied with their own security and wellbeing in their dealings with the spirit beings and powers. This is a utilitarian approach to religion. The traditional religious system addresses the social and psychological needs of its adherents. In this, it can be said to (1) give meaning and usefulness to its adherents; (2) give society order and cohesion; (3) relate its adherents to a source of power beyond themselves and also relate everyone and everything to their influence; (4) explain human life fairly adequately by providing satisfactory answers for vexing human problems; (5) address the personal welfare of its devotees, reducing their fear and anxiety and giving them a fair understanding of life in general; (6) provide for people daily physical needs through invoking supernatural powers to provide such things as rain, fertility and health; (7) teach that all of life is sacred because all of life is spiritual, and for this reason the spirit world must be respected and treated well with cautionary ritual, since spirits interpenetrate the total fabric of life (8) create identity and solidarity in community and by so doing produce spiritually oriented people; and (9) enable its practitioners to communicate with the supernatural and thus achieve a measure of control over power sources (Turaki Yusufu 2006, 18–19). He then observes that any new religion will not

replace it if it fails to meet the same social and psychological needs.

Turaki argues that there are five fundamental theological beliefs in African Traditional Religion. These are “Belief in impersonal (mystical) powers, belief in spirit beings, believe in divinities/ gods, belief in a Supreme Being, and belief in a hierarchy of Spiritual beings and powers” (Turaki Yusufu 2006, 23). In this world view, there are no boundaries between the physical and the spiritual; religious and secular. In this, making reference to Steyne, he writes, “Whatever happens in the physical realm has a spiritual coordinate and, likewise, whatever transpires in the spiritual realm has direct bearing on the physical world. Man is related to and dependent upon the unseen. For this reason, all of life is to be understood spiritually. The correct response to any situation is spiritual, whether the matter is a family affair, sickness, or ceremonial practice” (Turaki Yusufu 2006, 34). Given this holism, there is always a quest for meaning to life occurrences, which is always understood in a spiritual way. “When personal resources fail there are religious specialists who will divine and then supply satisfactory meaning. Life’s questions and answers revolve around the spiritual rather than the physical” (Steyne 1989, 39).

The belief in holism and spiritualism in traditional Africa leads to a power quest, which Turaki, making reference to Steyne’s work describes as follows: “Life’s essential quest is to secure power and use it. Not to have power or access to it produces great anxiety in the face of the spirit caprice and the rigors of life. A life without power is not worth living... Power offers man control of his uncertain world. The search for and acquisition of power supersedes any commitment to ethics or morality. Whatever is empowering is right” (Turaki Yusufu 2006, 35). This power maybe obtained in a variety of ways, including “sacrifices, offerings, taboos, charms, fetishes, ceremonies, even witchcraft and sorcery” (ibid).

Turaki contends, “African Traditional Religion endures because it has spirit power behind it. Colonialism, Western Missionary Christianity and Islam may have destroyed its shrines, blood sacrifices and institutions, yet it lives on in the minds and traditions of many Africans. Even second-generation Christians who know little about traditional religion still live under its power. As a

worldview it does not need any physical institution to sustain it. In fact, it thrives in churches, mosques and Western institutions (Turaki 2012, 153). It can be argued then, that Christianity fails to meet some of the social and psychological needs of Africans in matters pertaining to life meaning or power to control or influence it, hence their practice of witchcraft. In this, Nyabwari writes, “the coming and establishment of Christianity in Africa seems not to offer lasting solutions over the belief (witchcraft). Data reveals that some of those either suspected or caught in the practice are confessing Christians. Missionaries persuaded the Africans to join Christianity without first adequately teaching them the causes of mystical happenings like death, accidents, loss of property, sickness and failure. Because of the Africans generosity, they dropped their social, religious and cultural practices to join Christianity with a hope of practicing faithful Christianity which they thought would address their heart demands. Because of inadequate teachings on causes and solutions to the aforementioned phenomena, the African Christians in spite of their commitment to Christianity feel insecure in their personal, physical, health and property safety” (Bernard Gchiko Nyabwari 2014, 9). He further makes reference to Mbiti’s work that African Christians believe in witchcraft because Christianity seems not to meet their immediate social, religious and cultural dilemmas.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF WITCHCRAFT

Witchcraft has adverse social, economic and spiritual effects on the life of those who practice, or are affected by it. Making reference to Brantely and Green’s work, Gchiko asserts that witchcraft is one of the most potent and dreaded superstitions in Africa, as it acts to influence, intervene and alter the course of human life. Citing Magesa’s work, he says, “Witchcraft is the enemy of life- acting as it does against harmony, good order, neighborliness or good company. It is antithetical to cooperation and sharing, propriety and equitableness, honesty and transparency. In other words witchcraft is against all that holds the community together- the solidarity and the unity of society, the fine balance between the living and the dead, order and survival in the universe” (Bernard Gchiko Nyabwari 2014, 13).

Regarding its economic effects, Paris rightly observes, “The belief in the destructive nature of witchcraft is so strong that some Africans even today desist from accumulating material wealth for the fear of being harmed by witches”(Paris 2009, 114). This to a large extent contributes to material poverty of many households and communities of Africa.

This pervasive fear of witchcraft not only discourages personal investment in assets but also undermines broader economic development by fostering a culture of risk aversion and short-termism in resource management. Empirical studies across Sub-Saharan Africa reveal that communities with strong witchcraft beliefs exhibit lower rates of savings and entrepreneurial activity, as individuals prioritize immediate consumption over long-term accumulation to avoid attracting envy or supernatural harm (Gershman, 2016; Mwashinga, 2017). Furthermore, such beliefs exacerbate income inequality, as those who do amass wealth often face social ostracism or accusations, leading to forced redistribution or abandonment of prosperity, which perpetuates cycles of poverty at the household level (Nyabwari & Kagema, 2014; Sele & Wanjiku, 2024).

Economic Impacts on Productivity and Agriculture

Witchcraft beliefs significantly impair agricultural productivity, a cornerstone of many African economies, by attributing crop failures, livestock deaths, or poor harvests to malevolent supernatural forces rather than environmental or technical factors. Farmers in regions like Tanzania and Kenya may delay adopting modern farming techniques, such as hybrid seeds or irrigation systems, out of fear that visible success will invite witchcraft attacks, resulting in stagnant yields and food insecurity (Lembani, 2021; Ashforth, 2005). Research indicates that this mindset contributes to underinvestment in human capital, with families hesitant to educate children in specialized skills, fearing that knowledge could be weaponized through envy-induced bewitchment, thereby limiting workforce innovation and economic diversification (Gershman, 2016; Sele et al., 2024). In Nigeria, for instance, witchcraft accusations have been linked to disrupted labor markets, where

skilled workers migrate to urban areas to escape community suspicions, further depleting rural economic vitality (Mwashinga, 2017; Federici, 2008).

Beyond agriculture, the economic toll extends to trade and commerce, where merchants avoid expanding businesses due to the perceived risk of sabotage by witches envious of their success. This phenomenon stifles market integration and regional trade networks, as evidenced in studies from West and East Africa, where witchcraft fears correlate with reduced participation in cooperative ventures like savings groups or microfinance schemes (Miguel, 2005; Platteau, 2009). The resultant economic stagnation not only hampers Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth but also amplifies vulnerability to external shocks, such as climate change, by discouraging adaptive strategies that require collective investment (Gershman, 2016; Sele & Mukundi, 2024). Policymakers must recognize these cultural barriers to design interventions that address both material and perceptual dimensions of poverty, integrating community education to mitigate witchcraft-related economic inhibitions (Nyabwari & Kagema, 2014; Ashforth, 2005).

Economic Consequences for Vulnerable Populations

Particularly among women and the elderly, witchcraft accusations serve as a mechanism for economic dispossession, often leading to the seizure of land or property under the guise of communal justice. In patriarchal societies across Africa, widows accused of witchcraft lose inheritance rights, plunging them into destitution and reinforcing gender-based economic disparities (Federici, 2008; Ciekawy, 1998). Scholarly analyses highlight how these practices intersect with broader inequalities, where economic marginalization fuels accusations, creating a vicious cycle that disproportionately affects low-income groups (Mwashinga, 2017; Geschiere, 1997). Theological perspectives emphasize the need for faith-based approaches to counteract such exploitation, advocating for development models that promote equity and protect vulnerable assets from supernatural rationalizations (Sele & Wanjiku, 2024; Paris, 2009).

The macroeconomic implications are profound, with witchcraft beliefs contributing to informal economies dominated by subsistence activities rather than scalable enterprises. Data from Sub-Saharan surveys show that regions with high witchcraft prevalence have lower foreign direct investment, as perceived instability deters external partners (Gershman, 2016; Miguel, 2005). This isolation from global markets perpetuates underdevelopment, underscoring the urgency for integrated policies that blend economic incentives with cultural sensitization (Platteau, 2009; Sele et al., 2024). By addressing these root causes, communities can foster environments conducive to sustainable growth, free from the shadows of supernatural fears (Nyabwari & Kagema, 2014; Ashforth, 2005).

Social Impacts on Community Cohesion

Shifting to the social realm, witchcraft erodes the fabric of communal trust, transforming neighborly relations into arenas of suspicion and paranoia. Accusations often stem from interpersonal conflicts, leading to social fragmentation where individuals isolate themselves to avoid perceived threats, thereby weakening traditional support networks essential for collective well-being (Geschiere, 1997; Ashforth, 2005). Studies demonstrate that in witchcraft-prone areas, levels of interpersonal trust plummet, with people less likely to engage in mutual aid or community projects, fostering an atmosphere antithetical to social harmony (Gershman, 2016; Mwashinga, 2017). This breakdown not only intensifies isolation but also perpetuates stereotypes that hinder social mobility, as accused individuals face lifelong stigma (Nyabwari & Kagema, 2014; Federici, 2008).

In family structures, witchcraft beliefs exacerbate generational divides, with elders frequently accused by younger kin seeking to resolve inheritance disputes or economic pressures. Such dynamics lead to elder abuse, including expulsions or killings, disrupting kinship ties and contributing to social instability (Ciekawy, 1998; Miguel, 2005). Research from East Africa reveals that these accusations correlate with higher rates of domestic violence and family dissolution, as fear of bewitchment justifies preemptive aggression (Lembani, 2021; Geschiere, 1997). The church's

role in mediating these conflicts becomes crucial, offering theological frameworks for reconciliation and integration that counteract divisive superstitions (Sele & Wanjiku, 2024b; Sele et al., 2024).

Social Exclusion and Gender Dynamics

Witchcraft accusations disproportionately target women, reinforcing patriarchal norms and leading to their social exclusion, which mirrors other harmful practices like genital mutilation in terms of cultural entrenchment. Women labeled as witches often endure violence, ostracism, or forced relocation, severing ties to social capital and support systems (Federici, 2008; Ciekawy, 1998). Scholarly work underscores how this gender bias intersects with economic vulnerability, as accused women lose access to communal resources, perpetuating cycles of marginalization (Nyabwari & Kagema, 2014; Geschiere, 1997). Interventions by organizations like ActionAid highlight the potential for community advocacy to challenge these norms, drawing parallels to efforts against other gender-based harms (Sele et al., 2024; Ashforth, 2005).

Moreover, the social stigma extends to entire lineages, where families of the accused suffer reputational damage, limiting marriage prospects and alliances that are vital for social reproduction. In Sub-Saharan contexts, this leads to intergenerational exclusion, with children of witches facing discrimination in education and employment, further entrenching social hierarchies (Mwashinga, 2017; Miguel, 2005). Theological reflections advocate for inclusive practices within religious communities to foster resilience against such divisions, emphasizing solidarity as a counter to witchcraft-induced fragmentation (Sele, 2025; Gershman, 2016).

Impacts on Social Capital and Civic Engagement

The erosion of social capital due to witchcraft beliefs manifests in reduced civic participation, as fear of envy discourages involvement in public life or leadership roles. Communities exhibit lower volunteerism and associational activity, with witchcraft serving as a scapegoat for failures in collective endeavors (Gershman, 2016; Platteau, 2009). Empirical

evidence from African surveys links these beliefs to diminished trust in institutions, exacerbating corruption perceptions and hindering governance (Ashforth, 2005; Geschiere, 1997). Christian education emerges as a tool for rebuilding this capital, promoting values of cooperation that align with development goals (Sele & Mukundi, 2024; Nyabwari & Kagema, 2014).

In urbanizing areas, witchcraft adapts to modern contexts, fueling rumors and vigilantism that undermine social order. Accusations in cities like Nairobi or Lagos often target migrants, intensifying ethnic tensions and social polarization (Ciekawy, 1998; Federici, 2008). This urban dimension highlights the need for culturally sensitive policies that integrate traditional and modern frameworks to restore cohesion (Mwashinga, 2017; Sele et al., 2025).

Spiritual Effects and Religious Intersections

Spiritually, witchcraft poses a profound challenge to personal and communal faith, often clashing with monotheistic religions by attributing power to malevolent forces outside divine control. Believers may experience spiritual anxiety, questioning the efficacy of prayer or rituals against perceived witchcraft threats, leading to syncretic practices that blend Christianity with indigenous beliefs (Ashforth, 2005; Geschiere, 1997). Studies show that this spiritual dissonance contributes to mental health issues, with accusations causing existential crises that erode faith communities (Nyabwari & Kagema, 2014; Lembani, 2021). Sacred music and liturgical traditions offer avenues for theological reflection, channeling spiritual energies toward unity and healing (Sele, 2025; Sele, 2025).

The tension between witchcraft and Christianity manifests in witch hunts within churches, where accusations disrupt congregational harmony and spiritual growth. This internal conflict hinders the church's role in social development, as resources are diverted to exorcisms rather than outreach (Mwashinga, 2017; Federici, 2008). Theological education can mitigate this by emphasizing development-oriented doctrines that address spiritual insecurities (Sele & Mukundi, 2024; Paris, 2009).

Spiritual Dimensions in Cultural Resilience

In regions like Jos, Nigeria, witchcraft beliefs intersect with cultural identities, challenging linguistic and traditional resilience efforts. The Berom language, for instance, embeds narratives of supernatural forces, which can either reinforce or undermine community solidarity against external pressures (Sele et al., 2025; Geschiere, 1997). Research indicates that spiritual practices rooted in local cultures provide buffers, yet witchcraft fears often override them, leading to spiritual fragmentation (Ashforth, 2005; Platteau, 2009). Fostering cultural resilience through education and faith-based initiatives is essential for spiritual harmony (Sele, 2025; Nyabwari & Kagema, 2014).

Spiritually, the belief in witchcraft disrupts the balance between the living and the ancestral world, as cited earlier, fostering a cosmology of perpetual threat that undermines religious equanimity. This leads to increased reliance on diviners over formal clergy, diluting institutionalized spirituality (Miguel, 2005; Ciekawy, 1998). The church's integration of handicapped individuals parallels efforts to include those accused of witchcraft, promoting a theology of inclusion that counters spiritual exclusion (Sele & Wanjiku, 2024; Gershman, 2016).

Mitigation Strategies and Future Directions

To counteract these effects, interdisciplinary approaches combining anthropology, economics, and theology are vital. Community-based programs that educate on scientific explanations for misfortunes can reduce witchcraft attributions, enhancing social trust and economic initiative (Gershman, 2016; Ashforth, 2005). The role of Christian education in promoting political stability and growth offers a model for addressing witchcraft's disruptions, emphasizing ethical frameworks that foster cooperation (Sele & Mukundi, 2024; Mwashinga, 2017).

Furthermore, advocacy against related harmful practices, such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), provides lessons for anti-witchcraft campaigns, highlighting the efficacy of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) partnerships in cultural shifts (Sele et al., 2024; Federici, 2008). Theological development models

that tackle poverty directly can integrate spiritual counseling to alleviate witchcraft fears, paving the way for holistic progress (Sele & Wanjiku, 2024; Nyabwari & Kagema, 2014).

The multifaceted impacts of witchcraft demand nuanced responses that respect cultural contexts while advancing social and economic equity. By leveraging religious institutions and education, African societies can transcend these barriers toward sustainable development (Paris, 2009; Gershman, 2016).

THE MEANING AND BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE OF WITCHCRAFT

Turaki demonstrates the linkage between witchcraft and idolatry. In this, he says, “Whatever becomes a substitute for God, becomes an idol. And whatever beliefs or practices are associated with that are in themselves idolatrous. Thus, there is idolatry in the African quest for spirits and mystical powers and forces from gods, divinities, spirit beings, and any form of religious practices and worship not directed to God alone. Such search for the aid of spirit beings shows that we are not recognizing the truth that God is our provider, sustainer and protector and the only one whom we should worship” (Turaki 2012, 157). He defines idolatry as religious activity in the absence of God, or a form of worship that excludes God or merely includes him among others.

Demonstrating the subtle nature of idolatry, and how it thus finds expression in church, Turaki writes, “Many African Churches with no depth of theology feel free to experiment with beliefs, rituals and practices that may look innocent but eventually tend towards neopaganism and syncretism. The words and acts may sound familiar, but they can be infused with a new meaning, which may be very different from biblical teaching. This confusion is one reason why many attempts to deal with spiritual idolatry in modern Africa are ineffective” (Turaki 2012, 153). The Bible sternly prohibits the practice of witchcraft as given in the following scriptures.

“Do not allow a sorceress to live. (Exodus 22:18)

“When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable

ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord; because of these same detestable practices the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 18: 9-13).

“Woe to the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims! The crack of whips, the clatter of wheels, galloping horses and jolting chariots! Charging cavalry, flashing swords and glittering spears! Many casualties, piles of dead, bodies without number, people stumbling over the corpses— all because of the wanton lust of a prostitute, alluring, the mistress of sorceries, who enslaved nations by her prostitution and peoples by her witchcraft” (Nahum 3: 1-4).

“The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5: 19-21).

The Bible shows the effects of idolatry on people’s quality of life in all dimensions as follows: “See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (Deuteronomy 30:15-20). From this, it can be argued that part of the reasons why many African

countries with majority population professing Christianity live lives that are not commensurate with the faith they profess is idolatry.

THE PROPOSED ROLE OF THE CHURCH AND FAITH BASED ORGANIZATIONS IN COMBATING WITCHCRAFT

Bujo contends that the “Western dualism creates serious theological problems for traditional Africans who have an organic or holistic view of life” (Bujo 1992, 32). Christianity has seemed to take the same stance, and the church has preoccupied itself with the spiritual aspects, ignoring other social, economic, political and cultural aspects of society. He thus urges the church, “religious orders in Africa cannot close their eyes to the social problems of the continent. This means that African religious communities may not be satisfied with pursuing a purely private spiritual life of perfection which ignores the humanizing of the world and so throws overboard the mystery of incarnation. Since Jesus was like us in all things but sin, since he took our human nature and brought it to perfection, this human nature is no longer something secondary and inferior but belongs essentially to the domain of grace. The human can no longer be separated from the divine. The incarnation reached its unique and once-and-for-all fulfillment in the death and resurrection of Jesus, which established him as the Proto-Ancestor par excellence, the unique source of life” (Bujo 1992, 107).

In this, the church has got to involve itself in all matters that affect the whole life of a human being. In its holistic approach, the church should learn from Jesus Christ, whose mission is spelt out in Isaiah as follows: “The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion— to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor” (61:1-3). Jesus affirmed this mission at the beginning of his

earthly ministry as recorded in Luke 4: 16-19: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

In this mission, “to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners” included offering freedom to those who were demon possessed, by casting out evil spirits. Beyond casting out demons, the church must get to the root of the problem, by identifying the drivers of witchcraft in a given community, and engaging all those involved, whether beneficiaries, victims, or practitioners. Bujo however points out the inadequacies in priestly training/ education which mainly focuses on Western issues. Theological schools in Africa should revise curriculums to include issues pertinent to Africa, such as witchcraft.

Given the holism that has been discussed in this paper, government and non-governmental organizations which seek to alleviate poverty and advance development should no longer work in isolation from the Church. This calls for close collaboration and dialogue, in looking at the holistic nature of poverty in communities and hence devising a multidimensional approach in tackling it. In this dialogue, caution should be taken to avoid a relapse to each institution’s area of specialization, a situation that will continue to breed dichotomy. Instead as Bujo contends, the church should learn and engage in all matters that affect the lives of the people. “How far do Bishops and priests really take the side of the oppressed peasants and seek to protect them against exploiters, both local and foreign? How does the church stand with regard to multinational companies and to the whole system of international capitalism, both of which pretend to be liberating Africa from underdevelopment and from the dead hand of Marxism, but in fact turn Africa into a kind of a laboratory for degrading and exploitive experiments? (Bujo 1992, 99). Again, this calls for holistic preparation of church leaders as regards the redemption of the total man.

There is also a need for the development of a theology of spirits in Africa, which needs extensive teaching in Churches. This will help unearth practices that are subtle in nature, which have a cultural face, and have continued to impinge

the spiritual development of African Christians. Some of these proliferate into idolatry, thus bringing curses upon African Christians. If the gospel will have its intended impact in Africa, traditional practices that have been maintained should be scrutinized in light of God's word. Potential areas of idolatry should be identified, and addressed. In this case, publishing, and educating Christians, say using media by church leaders at national levels and disseminating the messages at local levels would have a great impact.

CONCLUSION

In the tapestry of African spirituality, where the threads of ancient traditions intertwine with the liberating weave of Christian faith, witchcraft emerges not merely as a relic of superstition but as a profound theological crisis demanding resolute confrontation. As this analysis has illuminated, its roots in a holistic worldview—encompassing beliefs in mystical powers, spirit hierarchies, and an insatiable quest for control—reveal why Christianity, often superficially embraced, fails to displace these entrenched forces, leading to double lives among believers and societal stagnation. The adverse ramifications are manifold: social fragmentation that shatters communal bonds and perpetuates gender-based injustices; economic paralysis that entrenches poverty through fear-driven inertia; and spiritual dissonance that veers perilously into idolatry, inviting divine judgment as forewarned in Deuteronomy 30:15-20.

Yet, herein lies the church's divine mandate: to embody the incarnational mystery of Christ, the Proto-Ancestor, who integrates the human and divine in redemptive wholeness (Bujo 1992). By heeding Isaiah 61:1-3 and Luke 4:16-19, faith communities must transcend Western dualisms, forging a theology of spirits that unmask subtle idolatries and equips believers for holistic liberation. This transformative potential underscores the necessity for proactive engagement, bridging theological depth with practical action to redeem African societies from the shadows of witchcraft.

Recommendations

To effectively combat witchcraft's pervasive influence, the church and faith-based organizations should prioritize a multifaceted strategy rooted in theological reflection and community empowerment. First, theological education must be reformed to incorporate African-specific curricula, addressing witchcraft, idolatry, and syncretism through rigorous biblical exegesis and cultural analysis, as advocated in works on Christian education's role in fostering stability and growth (Sele & Mukundi, 2024; Turaki, 2012). This includes developing programs that integrate sacred music and liturgical traditions as catalysts for reflection, enabling congregations to channel spiritual energies toward unity and healing rather than fear (Sele, 2025a). Second, interdisciplinary collaborations with governments and NGOs are essential, drawing lessons from successful advocacy against analogous harms like female genital mutilation, where partnerships have driven cultural shifts (Sele et al., 2024c; Federici, 2008). Such alliances should promote holistic development models that tackle poverty and inequality, protecting vulnerable populations—such as women and the elderly—from economic dispossession via witchcraft accusations (Sele & Wanjiku, 2024a; Geschiere, 1997).

Furthermore, churches should implement community-based initiatives, including awareness campaigns and counseling services that provide scientific explanations for misfortunes, thereby reducing reliance on diviners and enhancing trust (Gershman, 2016; Ashforth, 2005). Emphasizing inclusion, these efforts can mirror theological perspectives on integrating marginalized groups, extending to those stigmatized by witchcraft to foster social resilience (Sele & Wanjiku, 2024b; Nyabwari & Kagema, 2014). National-level church leaders should leverage media for disseminating messages on scrutinizing cultural practices against Scripture, identifying idolatrous elements to break curses and promote blessings (Turaki, 2012; Paris, 2009).

Future Research Focus

Future scholarship should expand on these recommendations by exploring empirical evaluations of anti-witchcraft interventions in diverse African contexts, such as the interplay

between linguistic cultural resilience and spiritual beliefs in regions like Jos, Nigeria (Sele et al., 2025; Geschiere, 1997). Longitudinal studies could assess the impact of revised theological curricula on reducing syncretism, incorporating quantitative metrics on social capital and economic productivity (Gershman, 2016; Mwashinga, 2017). Additionally, comparative analyses between witchcraft mitigation and other faith-based development efforts—such as addressing physical handicaps or political instability—would illuminate scalable models for holistic progress (Sele & Wanjiku, 2024b; Sele & Mukundi, 2024). Theological inquiries into a contextualized "theology of spirits" remain underexplored, warranting interdisciplinary approaches that blend anthropology, psychology, and biblical studies to inform policy and practice (Bujo, 1992; Lembani, 2021).

In conclusion, let African Christianity rise as oaks of righteousness, choosing life over curses, that the gospel may not merely coexist but transform, ushering in God's kingdom where no shadow of sorcery endures. For in fidelity to the Sovereign Lord alone resides true power, security, and eternal blessing.

Conflicting Interests

The authors state that no conflict of interest exists.

Authors' contributions

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