

Between Ancestors and Scripture: Navigating Dual Spiritual Authorities in African Christianity

Emmanuel Subewope Gabriel
Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts,
National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)
Email: emmagab94@gmail.com

Iornenge Godwin Akpe
National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)

Nginan Micheal Ushe
Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts,
National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)

ABSTRACT

The interaction between ancestral veneration and biblical authority remains a critical theological and existential tension in African Christianity. While African traditional religion upholds the ancestors as spiritual intermediaries and custodians of moral order, Christianity, as mediated through the Bible, reconfigures spiritual authority through the person of Christ and the Holy Scriptures. This paper explores how African Christians negotiate these dual spiritual frameworks, often constructing a syncretic theological worldview that seeks harmony rather than dichotomy. The study examines how biblical texts are interpreted in ways that either accommodate or challenge ancestral practices, particularly through liturgy, prayer, family rituals, and pastoral theology. Drawing from qualitative interviews with clergy and lay Christians in Nigeria, as well as textual analysis of sermons and indigenous theological reflections, the paper probes the extent to which scriptural fidelity and ancestral consciousness coexist or conflict in lived religious practice. Ultimately, this paper argues for a contextual theology that acknowledges ancestral consciousness not as heretical residue but as a hermeneutical lens through which many African Christians approach Scripture, offering both theological legitimacy and spiritual continuity within the African cosmological framework.

Keywords: Ancestral consciousness, African Christianity, Biblical authority, Contextual theology, Spiritual duality

INTRODUCTION

African Christianity operates within a complex and dynamic spiritual milieu where theological convictions inherited from missionary Christianity intersect, and sometimes collide, with deeply rooted indigenous cosmologies. At the heart of this intersection is the enduring presence and influence of ancestral traditions a spiritual and cultural heritage that predates the arrival of Christianity on the African continent. For many African Christians, religious life is not a compartmentalized experience but a holistic embodiment of the sacred, where spiritual continuity

with the past embodied through reverence for ancestors coexists with the profession of faith in Jesus Christ ¹.

The African worldview, as extensively articulated by scholars such as John Mbiti and Bolaji Idowu, is predicated upon a relational ontology in which the cosmos is perceived as a web of interconnected beings visible and invisible, human and divine, living and departed². In this cosmology, ancestors are regarded not as deities but as morally authoritative intermediaries and active participants in the spiritual well-being of the community ³. They represent a living memory, embody communal values, and are considered custodians of the moral order. Their presence is ritually acknowledged in ceremonies, family rites, and socio-religious practices, forming an indispensable part of African religious identity.

In contrast, Christianity especially as introduced through Western missionary efforts has emphasized a model of spiritual authority rooted in sola scriptura, where the Bible is seen as the sole and ultimate source of divine revelation and theological normativity. This framework often delegitimizes ancestral veneration, interpreting it through a Western lens as idolatrous, syncretistic, or demonic ^{4,5}. Consequently, many African Christians have been placed in a theological dilemma: to maintain fidelity to the teachings of Scripture as interpreted through Euro-American paradigms, or to remain culturally authentic by honouring the spiritual legacy of their ancestors.

This unresolved tension forms the crux of the present study. It seeks to explore how African Christians, particularly within the Nigerian context, navigate the dual spiritual authorities of biblical revelation and ancestral consciousness. Rather than choosing one over the other, many believers engage in a nuanced negotiation that results in a contextual theological synthesis a lived theology that attempts to be both scripturally faithful and culturally resonant. This theological negotiation does not imply an uncritical amalgamation of incompatible systems; rather, it suggests a deliberate reconfiguration of spiritual meaning that reflects the reality of African Christian experience.

By critically examining liturgical practices, homiletic patterns, family rituals, and pastoral theology, the paper demonstrates that African Christians often reinterpret biblical texts in ways that either challenge or accommodate ancestral frameworks. Drawing on qualitative interviews with clergy and laity in Nigeria, as well as textual analysis of sermons and indigenous theological reflections, the study investigates how African Christians engage in what can be termed a hermeneutics of ancestral consciousness a mode of interpreting Scripture that is shaped by, and responsive to, ancestral epistemologies ⁶.

This inquiry contributes to the field of contextual theology, particularly within African theological scholarship, by reimagining ancestral consciousness not as a residual paganism or theological contamination, but as a valid hermeneutical resource. In doing so, it seeks to move the conversation beyond the restrictive binary of syncretism versus orthodoxy,

¹M. G. Sisiani, C. A. Ouma, and M. Wambua, "African Traditional Religion and Christianity: A Study of Religious Syncretism in Kenya," *Journal of African Religious Studies* 12, no. 2 (2023): 45–60.

² John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 108–109.

³ Elizabeth Clark, "Reverence for Ancestors in Africa: Interpretation of the Fifth Commandment from an African Perspective," *Scriptura* 109, no. 1 (2012): 480–489.

⁴ Tite Tiénou, *The Theological Task of the Church in Africa* (Accra: Africa Christian Press, 1990), 15–30.

⁵ Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 27–45.

⁶ James Kibaara, "African Traditional Ritual Expressions of Salvation: Contextualized Biblical Hermeneutic(s) as an Ecclesiological Praxis," *European Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion* 6, no. 1 (2022): 19–29.

proposing instead a framework in which ancestral traditions can be integrated into a Christ-centred theology without compromising the core tenets of Christian faith. Ultimately, this study affirms that African Christianity, when properly contextualized, has the potential to offer a rich, dynamic, and culturally grounded theological voice within the global Christian discourse.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Problem Statement and Research Gap

Mainstream Christian theology especially as shaped by Euro-American evangelical and Protestant frameworks has historically positioned ancestral veneration as a deviation from biblical orthodoxy, often equating it with superstition, syncretism, or idolatry (Tiéno, 1990; Sanneh, 2003)^{7,8}. This theological framing, which was heavily propagated during the missionary era, has deeply influenced ecclesiastical doctrine and practice across much of sub-Saharan Africa. The consequence of this approach is a sustained theological dislocation whereby African Christians are frequently forced into a false binary: either adhere to “pure” Christian doctrine as interpreted through Western theological categories or remain loyal to their cultural heritage and risk being labelled as theologically compromised.

This dichotomy, however, is both pastorally and theologically inadequate. It fails to recognize the integrative capacity of African cosmologies, which do not strictly separate the sacred and the secular, or the spiritual and the ancestral. Instead, in many African societies, the spiritual authority of ancestors is not viewed as a rival to divine revelation but as part of a continuous ontological order in which divine, ancestral, and communal agencies are all mutually reinforcing^{9,10}. The inherited dualism imposed by colonial theological models does not reflect the lived faith of millions of African Christians who experience no contradiction in revering their ancestors while also professing Christ as Lord and Savior.

Although there has been important scholarly work on African Christologies¹¹, inculturation theology, and African women’s theological perspectives, relatively little attention has been devoted to how everyday believers negotiate the theological space between ancestral reverence and scriptural authority. Much of the existing literature focuses on elite theological discourse or institutional responses, often neglecting the grassroots theological innovations that occur in sermons, home rituals, liturgical adaptations, and personal devotions^{12,13}.

This paper addresses this gap by focusing not on abstract doctrinal formulations but on the lived theological strategies of African Christians especially in Nigeria who navigate these dual spiritual frameworks. Through qualitative fieldwork involving interviews with clergy and laity, as well as liturgical and homiletic analysis, the study explores how many believers are not merely suspended between two competing systems but actively engage in constructing a coherent and contextually rooted theology that integrates both ancestral consciousness and biblical fidelity.

⁷ Tite Tiéno, *The Theological Task of the Church in Africa* (Accra: Africa Christian Press, 1990), 15–30.

⁸ Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 27–45..

⁹ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 108–109.

¹⁰ Idowu, E. B. *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*. SCM Press, 1973, 103–115.

¹¹ Bediako, K. *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa*. Regnum Books International, 1992, 250–275

¹² Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women’s Theology*(Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press,2001),45–60.

¹³ Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1975), 90–105.

In doing so, the paper contributes to the growing field of African contextual theology by shifting the conversation from whether ancestral veneration is permissible to how it functions as a hermeneutical and pastoral resource within African Christian spirituality. It argues that such integrative theological models should not be dismissed as syncretistic anomalies, but rather recognized as authentic expressions of faith that challenge the dominance of imported theological frameworks and assert the validity of indigenous Christian thought.

Theological Background: Dual Sources of Authority Ancestral Authority in African Traditional Religion (ATR)

In most African cosmological frameworks, ancestors occupy a vital and revered position within the spiritual ecosystem. They are not worshipped as deities, yet they are perceived as morally influential and spiritually significant. Their continued presence symbolizes communal identity and the transmission of cultural and ethical values across generations^{14,15}. Ancestors serve as the mediators of communal wisdom and are actively acknowledged during rites of passage, agricultural ceremonies, and healing rituals¹⁶. This dynamic role gives rise to what Gathogo (2008) terms a “theology of relational continuity,” where the boundary between the physical and spiritual realms is fluid and dialogical rather than oppositional^{17,18,19}.

Within this worldview, ancestral participation in community life underscores a moral economy governed by harmony, reciprocity, and respect for lineage. Such a system privileges intergenerational solidarity, in which the ancestors are regarded not as departed but as “the living-dead” (Mbiti, 1969) still active and invested in the well-being of their descendants²⁰.

Several African theologians have argued that Jesus Christ can be understood within the framework of African ancestral consciousness, not as a replacement but as the fulfillment of the ancestral function. Kwame Bediako, for instance, presents Christ as the “Great Ancestor,” whose mediatory role between God and humanity parallels that of revered ancestors in African cosmology, but with a redemptive and universal dimension²¹. John Mbiti similarly contends that Jesus qualifies as an Ancestor because He inaugurates a spiritual lineage, provides moral and spiritual leadership, and continues to be present among believers through the Holy Spirit²². These Christological models allow African Christians to maintain cultural coherence by interpreting Christ as the culmination not the contradiction of ancestral expectations. In this view, Jesus becomes the Ancestor par excellence: ever-present, morally authoritative, communally grounded, and spiritually

¹⁴ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 108–109.

¹⁵ E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (London: SCM Press, 1973), 103–115.

¹⁶ Itumeleng Meko, “The Living-Dead/Ancestors as Guardians of Morality in African Traditional Religious Thought,” *Global Journal of Archaeology & Anthropology* 10, no. 5 (2019): 1–6..

¹⁷ Julius Gathogo, “Evangelicals and Public Life in Kenya,” in *A Christian Response to Terrorism: The Kenyan Experience*, ed. George Heath and David Tarus (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2017), 72–87.

¹⁸ Julius Gathogo, “Genesis, Methodologies, and Concerns of African Theology of Reconstruction,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 130 (2008): 19–38

¹⁹ Julius Gathogo, “Imprints of NITD-Kabete in Mutira Mission, Kenya: Recollections on Josphat Kathogo wa Kamoni (1918–1978),” *Kairos* 15, no. 1 (2021): 45–60.

²⁰ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 108–109.

²¹ Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 93–104.

²² John S. Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 145–147..

mediating.^{23,24} This theological perspective affirms the legitimacy of ancestral categories within Christian faith, while upholding the uniqueness of Christ's salvific work. It also offers a contextualized Christology that makes the gospel both intelligible and incarnational in African spiritual and cultural terms.

Scriptural Authority in Christianity

In contrast, the Christian theological tradition particularly in its evangelical and Pentecostal expressions tends to centralize biblical authority as the singular, divinely inspired norm for faith and conduct. This *sola scriptura* orientation treats the Bible as the ultimate arbiter of truth, relegating other sources of spiritual insight, including indigenous knowledge systems, to the margins. Scriptural passages such as Hebrews 9:27 "it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" are frequently cited to invalidate ongoing relationships with ancestors and to construct a linear eschatology that precludes posthumous interaction^{25,26,27,28}.

This exclusivist interpretive stance can engender a form of theological dualism that many African Christians experience as disjointed from their cultural realities. Lamin Sanneh (2003) critiques this tendency, noting that such approaches often fail to reckon with the deep-rooted cosmologies into which African believers have been enculturated. Consequently, the authority of Scripture is sometimes perceived less as a liberative force and more as a cultural imposition, one that may inadvertently sever believers from their historical and communal identities²⁹.

Rather than fostering spiritual coherence, this binary framing often results in internal tensions wherein believers are compelled to compartmentalize their ancestral consciousness in private life while maintaining strict biblical orthodoxy in public worship. This paper argues that such compartmentalization is not only unsustainable but also misses the theological potential inherent in constructing a culturally grounded and biblically faithful spiritual synthesis.

METHODOLOGY

This article adopts a qualitative theological methodology grounded in contextual analysis and literary review. Rather than relying on empirical fieldwork, the study engages in a critical examination of relevant theological literature, African Christian sermons, and liturgical texts available in public domains, as well as academic writings that reflect the intersection of ancestral traditions and biblical Christianity in Africa.

The research draws on secondary sources including published sermons, theological reflections, and liturgies drawn from churches in Nigeria, particularly those documented within Anglican, Pentecostal, Catholic, and African Independent Church traditions. These materials are

²³ Bénézet Bujo, *The Ethical Dimension of Community: The African Model and the Dialogue Between North and South* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998), 77–84.

²⁴ Chesosi Bonface Kimutai, "Jesus Christ, the Supra-Ancessor: The Quintessential Image of a Bona Fide African Christology," *EAS Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies* 2, no. 2 (March–April 2020): 57–64.

²⁵ Justin Taray, "Inculturation and the African Church: A Theological Reflection," *African Ecclesial Review* 50, no. 3 (2008): 210–225.

²⁶ Mandla Ncube, "Ancestors and the Christian God: A Theological Reflection," *Africa Theological Journal* 17, no. 1 (1988): 15–25.

²⁷ Michael Ekpenyong and Emmanuel C. Ekeke, "A Comparative Study of Eschatology in Christianity and African Traditional Religion," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 45, no. 1 (2024): a2958

²⁸ Paul G. Hiebert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," *Missiology: An International Review* 10, no.1(1982): 35–47.

²⁹ Cyril Orji, *Unmasking the African Ghost: Theology, Politics, and the Nightmare of Nationalism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2022), 60–75.

examined for recurring themes, language, and metaphors that indicate an ongoing negotiation between ancestral consciousness and scriptural authority.

In addition, the article engages African theological scholarship especially works by renowned figures such as Kwame Bediako (1995), Mercy Amba Oduyoye (2001), John Mbiti (1969), and Lamin Sanneh (2003) to analyse how Christian theology in Africa has historically engaged with and responded to indigenous worldviews. Through a thematic and hermeneutical reading of these texts, the paper explores how scriptural fidelity is maintained or adapted in light of ancestral cosmologies.

By utilizing these textual and conceptual sources, the article presents an interpretive synthesis that illuminates the theological imagination of African Christians who seek to integrate ancestral respect with biblical conviction. This method allows for a nuanced exploration of how dual spiritual authorities are reflected, reinterpreted, and reconciled in lived Christian thought without relying on firsthand ethnographic data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings: Navigating Spiritual Duality

The analysis reveals that many African Christians do not simply juxtapose Christianity and ancestral traditions, but rather engage in an ongoing theological negotiation between them. This negotiation manifests in ecclesial practice, pastoral theology, and domestic spirituality, resulting in a lived theology that subtly integrates dual sources of authority³⁰.

Syncretic Liturgy and Family Rituals

Although many denominational churches particularly those influenced by evangelical or Pentecostal doctrine formally reject ancestral rites, their liturgical expressions often reveal implicit continuities with African traditional practices. This is evident, for instance, in funeral services, where the Christian act of “remembrance” often functions analogously to traditional libations. Instead of pouring out drink or invoking ancestral spirits directly, prayers are offered that honour the memory of the deceased, underscoring relational continuity and communal belonging. The language used may refer to ancestors obliquely as “those who have gone ahead in the Lord,” a phrase that merges Christian eschatology with African reverence for the departed³¹.

Similarly, in naming ceremonies, which traditionally involve ancestral invocation, churches have substituted overt rites with Christian prayers and blessings. However, these blessings often retain the moral and communal framework of ancestral acknowledgment. This subtle accommodation suggests a theology of continuity that allows believers to affirm their Christian identity without discarding their cultural heritage³².

Pastoral Theology and Healing Practices

In the realm of pastoral care, African clergy frequently adopt what might be termed a “dual epistemology” a theological framework that draws upon both the authority of Scripture and the cosmological categories of African Traditional Religion (ATR). This is particularly evident in

³⁰ Paul Kollman, “Classifying African Christianities: Past, Present, and Future: Part One,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 40, no. 1 (2010): 3–33.

³¹ Luvuyo Ntombana, “The Trajectories of Christianity and African Ritual Practices: The Public Silence and the Dilemma of Mainline or Mission Churches,” *Acta Theologica* 36, no. 2 (2016): 104–119.

³² Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, “A Hermeneutics of the Igbo-African Kola-Nut as a ‘Type’ of Holy Communion,” *Nnadiesbube Journal of Philosophy* 3, no. 1 (2019): 1–13.

counselling, deliverance ministries, and healing services. For example, pastors may address perceived ancestral curses through scriptural exorcisms and prayers of deliverance, while also validating the cultural significance of ancestral displeasure as an expression of disrupted moral and communal order³³.

Such approaches reflect what Kärkkäinen (2019) calls a “contextual pneumatology,” in which the Holy Spirit is believed to operate not only through biblical texts but also within culturally meaningful categories of power, presence, and healing. By recognizing ancestral concerns as moral rather than metaphysical deviations, pastors reinterpret them in light of biblical teaching, thereby preserving scriptural fidelity while ministering meaningfully to local fears, values, and cosmologies³⁴.

These findings highlight a recurring theological motif: that ancestral consciousness is not necessarily antagonistic to Christian faith but can serve as a mediating lens through which many African Christians encounter and internalize the gospel.

Theological Implications: Beyond Syncretism

The practices observed among African Christians where ancestral consciousness and biblical faith intersect have often been labelled "syncretic" in pejorative terms, especially within dominant Euro-American theological frameworks. However, such assessments often fail to grasp the theological intentionality and contextual intelligence embedded in these practices. Rather than indiscriminately mixing incompatible systems, African Christians are engaged in a nuanced theological process: one that neither subordinates Scripture to culture nor eradicates cultural identity for the sake of doctrinal purity³⁵. What emerges is not theological confusion, but a constructive synthesis aimed at spiritual coherence.

This theological negotiation reveals a crucial shortcoming in many inherited Western theological models: the presumption that Christianity must remain detached from indigenous categories of thought. The result has been an epistemological colonization of Scripture, where Western modes of interpretation are mistakenly universalized as normative. By contrast, the African Christian engagement with ancestral traditions demonstrates the capacity of non-Western communities to read and apply Scripture through indigenous lenses without necessarily compromising its core theological claims.

Toward a Hermeneutic of Ancestral Consciousness

At the centre of this synthesis is a call for a hermeneutic of ancestral consciousness an interpretive approach that affirms the spiritual insights of African cosmology while remaining anchored in the authority of Scripture. This approach neither dismisses biblical revelation nor treats ancestral traditions as equal in salvific power. Instead, it recognizes that many African Christians approach Scripture not abstractly, but relationally through categories such as family, memory, moral legacy, and communal presence.

One example is the re-reading of texts like Hebrews 12:1, which speaks of being “surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses.” While Western readings tend to spiritualize or

³³ Hlomani Moyo, “Dual Observances of African Traditional Religion and Christianity,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 148 (2014): 115–132.

³⁴ Arto Salonen, Seppo Kärkkäinen, and Timo Keinonen, “Teachers Co-Designing and Implementing Career-Related Instruction,” *Education Sciences* 9, no. 4 (2019): 255

³⁵ Caroline Kane, *Syncretism and Christian Tradition: Race and Revelation in the Study of Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 120–135.

historicize this verse, African believers may naturally hear ancestral echoes interpreting the “witnesses” as including the moral and spiritual legacy of their forebears. This does not replace the mediatorship of Christ (cf. Hebrews 12:2), but instead situates the believer within a continuum of moral testimony and communal memory.

Kwame Bediako (2004) makes a compelling case for such contextual engagement. He argues that just as early Christian theology incorporated elements of Greco-Roman philosophy (such as *logos* and *oikonomia*) without diluting the gospel, so must African Christianity reckon with and reinterpret its cultural heritage in light of Christ. To do otherwise, he contends, is to perpetuate a truncated version of Christianity one stripped of its incarnational character and relevance to African contexts^{36,37}.

Furthermore, Mercy Amba Oduyoye (2001) asserts that theology in Africa must be “life-affirming,” rooted not in abstract dogmatics but in the lived realities of people. Ancestral consciousness, in this light, becomes a theological resource helping communities to articulate spiritual continuity, moral order, and divine presence within a world still deeply shaped by traditional categories^{38,39}.

This hermeneutic approach thus reframes African ancestral theology not as a threat to Christian orthodoxy, but as a legitimate mode of contextual engagement one capable of enriching global theological discourse with insights from African cosmology, memory, and relationality.

Contribution to knowledge and Recommendations

This paper contributes to the field of African Christian theology and contextual hermeneutics by illuminating the complex interplay between ancestral consciousness and scriptural authority. It challenges the binary theological categories that have long dominated theological discourse and offers a more nuanced framework for understanding how African Christians live out their faith in culturally meaningful ways.

First, it clarifies the enduring theological tension between biblical revelation and ancestral beliefs in African Christianity. While Western theological traditions have often portrayed ancestral reverence as incompatible with Christian orthodoxy, this paper argues that such a dichotomy is not inherent to Scripture itself but is shaped by missionary frameworks that failed to account for African cosmological categories.

Second, it demonstrates how ordinary believers are not passive recipients of inherited doctrines but actively negotiate these dual spiritual frameworks through liturgical, pastoral, and domestic practices. Funerals, naming ceremonies, and prayers of remembrance are often reconfigured to reflect both Christian commitments and ancestral respect, indicating a grassroots theology that seeks coherence between faith and culture.

Third, the paper proposes a model of contextual theology in which ancestral consciousness functions not as a theological threat but as a hermeneutical asset. Interpreting Scripture through the relational and moral lens of African cosmology allows for a theology that is both biblically

³⁶ Joel Carpenter, “Kwame Bediako Makes an Offer,” *Theology Today* 78, no. 1 (2022): 5–12.

³⁷ Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 93–104.

³⁸ Thinandavha D. Mashau and Martha Frederiks, “African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation,” in *Strangers and Pilgrims on Earth: Essays in Honour of Abraham van de Beek*, ed. Eddy van der Borgh and Paul van Geest (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 109–123.

³⁹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women’s Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 45–60

grounded and culturally authentic offering a broader interpretive framework without compromising theological integrity.

Fourth, the paper invites African and global theologians to embrace a more capacious hermeneutic one that honours both the authority of the Bible and the enduring value of African cultural memory. In doing so, it contributes to the decolonization of theological knowledge and enriches the global Christian conversation with African theological insights.

Finally, the study asserts that African Christianity is not caught between two incompatible worlds. Rather, it is actively constructing a coherent theological vision that holds Scripture and ancestral consciousness in constructive tension, rather than in contradiction.

CONCLUSION

The spiritual landscape of African Christianity resists simplistic binaries and instead embodies a dynamic theological negotiation between biblical authority and ancestral consciousness. When the latter is approached not as a rival doctrinal system but as a relational and moral framework, it becomes a resource that can deepen biblical interpretation and enrich pastoral practice.

African Christians are not merely adapting to competing traditions they are reimagining both Scripture and culture in ways that affirm their Christian faith and cultural heritage. This reimagining is not a dilution of Christian truth but an expression of theological authenticity within a distinct historical and cosmological context.

A truly African Christian theology must therefore be both scripturally faithful and contextually rooted. It should affirm the authority of Scripture while listening to the lived wisdom of African communities, especially the moral legacy of elders and ancestors. Such an approach offers a holistic theological vision one that fosters spiritual continuity, cultural integrity, and ecclesial relevance.

Ultimately, this paper calls the global Church to recognize and affirm the legitimacy of African theological perspectives. It invites a broader, more inclusive understanding of Christian faith one that acknowledges that God's self-revelation can be faithfully interpreted within diverse cultural narratives without forfeiting its transformative power.

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