


# Spiritual warfare in Africa: Towards understanding the classical model in light of witchcraft practices and the Christian response

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The socio-religious panorama of the African religion deserves a close observation of its foundation and function. The perception of the spirit world is dominant in Africa. Similarly, spiritual warfare in the African context is prevalent in the mind and worldview of an African. Spiritual warfare derives its framework from African Traditional Religion (ATR). Hence, understanding ATR's complexity helps us with the understanding of spiritual warfare. Some essential questions to understand would be what is spiritual warfare from an ATR perspective? How do Africans perceive spiritual warfare? And how do Africans engage in spiritual warfare? What is the place of ATR in spiritual warfare? African Traditional Religion acknowledges the reality and functionality of witchcraft. The perception of the reality of evil forces in Africa attracts all forms of spiritual rites, seeking more extraordinary spiritual powers for defensive and offensive spiritual warfare. This article argues that the effectual Christian response to spiritual warfare with witchcraft practices in Africa is 'the classical model' of spiritual warfare. The article provides a synopsis of the models of spiritual warfare, that is, the classical model (CW), world systems model (WSM), ground-level deliverance model (GLDM), and strategic-level deliverance model (SLSW). Subsequently, the article provides the framework for African spiritual warfare and witchcraft practices from traditional and contemporary perspectives. Lastly, the article argues that the Evangelical Christian Response to witchcraft practices is rooted in 'the classical model' of spiritual warfare.

**Contribution:** The article contributes to African religiosity within the African context. It reveals the ongoing argument about the continuity and discontinuity of the ATR beliefs and practices in Christianity. The article adds to the evangelical or classical arguments in support of the discontinuity of ATR beliefs and practices in Christianity.

**Keywords:** spiritual warfare; African Traditional Religion (ATR); Neo-Pentecostal; Evangelical Christians; classical; witchcraft; gospel; world-system; ground-level; strategic-level; deliverance.

## Introduction

<sup>1</sup>The African continent has a vast religious landscape, and most Africans are deeply religious, says Johnson A. Mbillah (2020:257). John S. Mbiti (1990:1) gives credence to Africans as a notoriously religious people because of their religiosity. The subjects of spiritism and spiritual warfare shape the African context. The concept of the spirit beings and spiritual warfare finds its roots in the African Traditional Religion (ATR), a combination of African Traditional cultures and religions. The African religion appears attitudinal because it reflects more on the way of life of Africans (culture) than experience (Sanni 2016:4). J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (2020) observes the African worldview and alludes to the firm belief in mystical causality as the bedrock for the activity of spiritual warfare. Today, spiritual warfare, even though a term that is not biblical, appears as a concept derived from Pauline theology. Paul admonishes the Ephesian Christians to fight against principalities, powers and evil forces in the heavenly places (Eph 6:10–12). Paul's admonishment suggests spiritual warfare. This spiritual battle is not strange to the African context. Asamoah-Gyadu (2015:23) draws an understanding from the Lord's Prayer and avers that evil predominantly includes witchcraft in Africa. The African worldview of witchcraft practices is a dominant part of the spiritual encounters in the African context.

1. In this article, the author uses the terms spiritual warfare interchangeably with spiritual battle and spiritual encounter.

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Therefore, this article argues that the effectual Christian response to spiritual encounters with witchcraft practices in Africa is 'the classical model'<sup>2</sup> of spiritual warfare. The article provides a synopsis of the models of spiritual warfare, that is, the classical, world systems, ground-level deliverance and strategic-level deliverance models. It provides the framework for African spiritual warfare and witchcraft practices from traditional and contemporary perspectives. And, restates that Evangelical Christian Response to witchcraft practices reflects 'the classical model' of spiritual warfare.

## Synopsis of the models of spiritual warfare

The African context has a perception of the spirit world that shapes their worldview. Samuel Waje Kunhiyop (2012:53) alludes to the assertion of the ATR, which says the world has divinities and spirits that have positive or negative effects on human life. Evil spirits cause painful affliction to human beings. This experience is relevant in the African context and introduced unbiblical doctrines and practices within African churches. Sorrowful experiences force humans, especially Africans, to view their painful afflictions from a religious belief and understanding (Kunhiyop 2008:375). Hence, Kunhiyop (2008:375) prompts a robust analysis of the models of spiritual warfare in the African context.

Clinton E. Arnold's (1997:14) response to the question of spiritual warfare reveals that 'foundational to spiritual warfare is a belief in evil spirits and a desire to get the upper hand on them before they get it on us.' Arnold (1997:14) suggests a spiritual battle to overcome evil spirits, just as Paul admonishes that our battle is against principalities, powers and evil forces (Eph 6:10–13). Williams F. Cook, Charles E. Lawless and Thom S. Rainer (2019:17) consider the reality of spiritual warfare as a concept with various definitions and debates. Hence, four models of spiritual warfare are products of the understanding of biblical passages related to spiritual battles, such as Pauline theology to spiritual battle. The four models are divergent views of spiritual warfare and reflect the multilevel and multidimensional understanding of the battle, reflecting a battle against the world, flesh and the devil (Cook et al. 2019:18).

### The classical model

David Powlison is a notable proponent of the classical model of spiritual battle. He focuses on combating the temptation and sin that affects a Christian because of the flesh and sinful nature (Eddy & Beilby 2012:44–45). Beilby and Eddy (eds. 2012:46) allude to Justin Taylor's succinct description of the classic model, affirming that it is Jesus' pattern of fighting temptation. He (Jesus) used God's word (Eph 6:17; cf. Heb 4:12) to succeed in spiritual battle at the Wilderness of Temptation (Mt 4:1–11). Hence, the classical model of spiritual warfare does not suggest replicating Jesus' direct

forms of spiritual battle like exorcism. Instead, Jesus' demonstration of power and authority over evil forces appears missional in the establishment of the church (Powlison 1995:95, 127).

Charles H. Kraft (2017:95–96) explains the classical model in his three crucial dimensions (allegiance-relationship, truth-understanding and power-freedom). Kraft illustrates these dimensions in Luke 9:11, 10:17, and 10:20, referring to Jesus' conversation with his disciples on what is the most vital dimension. The most important dimension is our relationship with God, not the desire to demonstrate power over evil forces. The author agrees with Kraft that the demonstration of power brings freedom, but it is not as crucial as the allegiance-relationship, which is essential in spiritual encounters. Hence, the classical model for spiritual warfare appears at the centre of evangelical view because it emphasises repentance, Scriptural meditation, prayer, discipleship and freedom in Christ (Eddy & Beilby 2012:56–57). This view is the heart of Powlison's classical model, even though Boyd disagrees with Powlison's emphasis on lifestyle strategies. Gregory Boyd says to bind and loose spirits are essential in spiritual warfare (Eddy & Beilby 2012:49; Powlison 2012:chap. 2). Boyd (1997:213) adds that Jesus' power and authority over nature, diseases, demons and his resurrection were acts of war resulting from victory over Satan. The author disagrees with Boyd but agrees with Powlison that repentance and salvation in Christ are powerful means of deliverance from spiritual forces, even in Africa. Jesus spent his time and ministry proclaiming and demonstrating this truth that brings freedom (Jn 8:32). Kraft (2017:96) says, 'When people are encountered with the claims of Christ and respond positively, the most important spiritual battle is won.'

### World-system model

Walter Wink (2012:56) is one of the leading voices on the World-System Model of spiritual warfare. Wink grounds his view on the pantheistic integral worldview, that is, 'understanding of the principalities and powers as the spiritual interiority of human social structures and its deep indebtedness to what we have called a world-systems model of spiritual warfare.' Wink (1998:20) says pantheism is the view that everything is God, but pantheism believes that 'everything is in God and God in everything.' He demythologised 'principalities and powers' in Pauline theology. Therefore, powers are encountered only in structures, not personal beings (Wink 1984:5, 105; 1998:27–28). Wink (2012:74–75) presents Satan as the world's corporate personality, who serves as a symbol of the evil that exists in this present age. He derived his understanding from biblical texts that present Satan as the one in charge of the whole world (Mt 4:1–11; Lk 4:6; Jn 1. 5:19). David Bradnick (2013:240) reviews Wink's world systems model, portraying Satan as 'the symbolic repository' of evil. He finds out that Wink's model of 'spiritual warfare occurs when Christians hope, pray, and partner with God to expel evil in oppressive social structures' (Bradnick 2013:240). Therefore, Satan appears as:

<sup>2</sup>See the elaborate discussion on 'Classical Model' of Spiritual Warfare in James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy (eds. 2012), *Understanding Spiritual Warfare: Four Views*, chap. 2.

[T]he symbol of the spirit of an entire society alienated from God, the great system of mutual support in evil, the spirit of persistent self-deification blown large, the image of unredeemed humanity's collective life (Wink 2012:75).

Argument on the world system model suggests a system that focuses on the evil perpetrated in the world under the rule of Satan, not on his personality. As rightly put by Wink (2012):

Satan is the spirituality of an epoch, the peculiar constellation of alienation, greed, inhumanity, oppression, and entropy that characterizes a specific period of history as a consequence of human decisions to tolerate and even further such a state of affairs. (p. 76)

Wink (1984:85) assumes that the idea of 'all the powers' in Ephesians 6:12 is human, structural, not divine, but a world atmosphere with powers invested in institutions, laws, traditions and rituals. John Stott (1979:273) and Peter O'Brien (1984:134) refute Wink's view of the World-System, and the author concurs. They argue that Paul's intention on powers in the heavenly places suggests that powers are supernatural or spiritual, not structural. Wink's interpretation of Pauline theology on the 'principalities and powers' appear to be unconvincing because he fails to observe Christian principles of hermeneutics. His theological discourse on powers expresses the influence of social theology, that is, the concerns for social structures in the world.<sup>3</sup>

### Ground-level deliverance model

Boyd's (2012:179) ground-level deliverance model (GLDM) analyses warfare in the Old and New Testaments and debunks the modern Western ideology of rejecting the spirit world, that is, 'flaws of the excluded middle.'<sup>4</sup> He sees Yahweh's battles in the Old Testament and that of Jesus in the New Testament as a reflection of earthly and heavenly wars, which has 'two dimensions of one and the same battle' (2012:135). Boyd (2012:202–205) argues from a biblical and cross-cultural perspective that evil spirits are ontological beings and associate with societal structures but are not in themselves structural, as Wink argues in his world system model. Boyd believes that the powers are 'conscious, volitional agents.' Consequently, he agrees with the reality of territorial spirits and believes that active prayer is sufficient for deliverance. He based this argument on Jesus' victory over Satan and their powers (Boyd 2006:32–35; 2012:188–189). His opinion is that Jesus' battle against Satan and his cohorts is not only on the cross, and his victory was not only accomplished with his resurrection. Jesus' miracles of healing and deliverance are part of the spiritual warfare to advance God's kingdom against Satan, says Boyd.

The author agrees with Wagner and Greenwood, who disagree with Boyd's view and argument on territorial spirits and Powlison's criticism of Boyd for not focusing on the

3. See comments on the weakness of Wink's argument on powers in Chloe Lynch (2011:265–266) on Wink's Interpretation of Paul's Language of the Powers.

4. See the explanation on 'flaws of the excluded middle' in Paul G. Hiebert (1994:196–197), *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*. Some supporters of 'flaws of the excluded middle' among modern and contemporary Western scholars are Rudolf Bultmann, David O'Connor, and Hans Kung.

centrality of Christ in dealing with human sin. Instead, he focuses on what he coined as Jesus' lifestyle warfare, that is, to merge humility and service, manifesting knowledge of God and serving him (Boyd 2012:165).

### Strategic-level deliverance model

Wagner is the main proponent of this model of spiritual warfare (Boyd 1997:294). The strategic level spiritual warfare (SLSW) has the concept of territorial spirits, which means having powerful, high-ranking spirit beings that control a geographical location. The proponents of SLSW defend this concept using scriptural texts and themes in both the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament portrays idols of certain nations as demons that engage good angels, including Michael (Dt 32:8; 32:17; Ps 82; 96:5; 106:37–38; Dn 10). Likewise, several New Testament passages serve as bedrock for proponents of SLSW (i.e. Lk 10:19; 11:20–22; Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 1 Cor 2:6–8; 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 6:12; Jn 1 5:19; Rv 2:12; 12:7–9; 18:2) (Eddy & Beilby 2012:52–53). Wagner (1996:21–22) simplifies SLSW into three levels, that is, ground-level, occult-level and strategic-level. Wagner sees the three levels as spiritual warfare, focusing on casting demons out of people, dealing with witchcraft and confronting territorial spirits. For instance, some scholars argue that in late 1980, demons that held individuals in bondage could hold people groups and certain territories in evil bondage.<sup>5</sup> They suggest that such evil bondage can be a reason evangelism and church growth in certain locations are unsuccessful. Therefore, exorcism becomes a necessary tool for successful evangelism and church growth.

Wagner (2012:54) expresses that SLSW involves 'spiritual mapping,' which is a process of discerning the names of specific territorial spirits of a geographical location. Also, 'identificational repentance' in SLSW involves investigating and identifying past sins of a city, then dealing with them through confession and repentance. Bradnick's (2013:240; Boyd 1997:294; Löfstedt 2018:5) review of Wagner and Greenwood recognises the evidence of territorial spirits in SLSW. The concept alludes to spiritual mapping, identification, repentance and prayer walks as a viable method to overcome territorial spirits. The charismatic church in the 'Global South' understands the concept of SLSW because of the standard practices of spiritually strategising, identifying and praying for deliverance. Thus, the non-charismatic evangelical response reveals a pastoral strategy that reflects combating territorial spirits (Wagner 2012:238).

### Framework for African spiritual warfare

Arnold (1997:17) says, 'Foundational to spiritual warfare is a belief in evil spirits and a desire to get the upper hand before

5. See the conclusion of charismatic evangelical missiologists such as Wagner, Charles H. Kraft, George Otis Jr., and others in Erwin Van der Meer (2010:157). See more on SLSW in Erwin Van der Meer (2008:chap. 8).



they get it on us.' Spiritual warfare is not new in Africa because of the belief in the reality of the spirit world. Geoffrey Parrinder (1962) asserts that in Africa:

[T]he spiritual world is so real and near, its forces intertwining and inspiring the visible world that, whether pagan or Christian, man has to reckon with things invisible to mortal sight. (p. 10)

African Traditional Religion exists in Ancient and contemporary Africa. The ATR serves as the foundational framework for the understanding of African spiritual warfare (Mbiti 1990:1). African Traditional Religion reveals that religious beliefs and practices are part of African life. Mbiti rightly observes that Africans are notoriously religious. Bolaji Idowu (1973) says:

Religion results from man's spontaneous reaction to his immediate awareness of a living power, wholly other and infinitely greater than himself; a power mysterious because unseen yet a present and urgent Reality seeking to bring man into communion with himself. (p. 75)

Africans believe in the existence of the supernatural powers of witchcraft, sorcery, magic, and a Supreme Being. Although the Africans believe that magical powers raise epistemological and ontological questions (Falen 2018:80). Modern Africa still believes in witchcraft: a great tyranny that spreads fear and death (Parrinder 1970:9).

## African Traditional Religion

Mbillah (2020:257) rightly asserts that ATR is a primordial African religion that first existed before the arrival of Christianity and Islam, forming a triad of religious heritage to Africans. Victor I. Ezigbo (2021:105) alludes to Byang Kato's 'destructionist presupposition', an idea that there is a war between Christianity and ATR. Kato (1975a, b:17) avers that ATR is man-made, but Christianity is from Jesus, who is God. The ATR does not have a founder and has no sacred books or writings. The diversity of African ethnicity reflects in the understanding of ATR (Kato 1975a,b). Idowu (1973:83) observes that the study of ATR has one significant obstacle: the indigenous Africans' lack of written documents of the ancient past. Most of the sources from indigenous Africans are oral traditions. Kunhiyop (2012:53) alludes to ATR as a religious system that sees the world as a place permeated with spirits and divinities that positively and negatively affect all spheres of life. The ATR has a powerful influence on the worldview of Africans because of the belief in the reality of the spirit world (Kato 1975a,b:36–41). From an ATR perspective, an African believes that the spirit world consists of spiritism, occultism and witchcraft. Kunhiyop (2012:53–63) rightly says ATR reflects things that somehow agree with the Bible such as the existence of evil, good and bad spirits known as angels and demons. African Traditional Religion agreeing with the Bible does not suggest that its religious system is biblical.

Kato (Tienou 1985:19) rightly attests to the spiritual desires of traditional African worshippers.<sup>6</sup> The ATR craves a spiritual

6. Tite Tienou's collection of Kato's articles and addresses is a series of monographs designed to provide, in handy format, theological perspectives on vital issues facing Christianity in Africa today.

reality that eventually metamorphoses into idolatry instead of the worship of the true God. Idowu (1973:125) argues that calling ATR idolatry is unfair to it and violent to its essence. I disagree with Idowu's argument and align with Kato (1974a,b) on his view that ATR worshippers desire spiritual reality, which can change to idolatry.<sup>7</sup> Kato (1976a,b:6–7, 29–30) outrightly debunks Idowu's idea of 'implicit monotheism,' that is, tilting towards religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence because of the perception that all religions are from God. He sounds a warning to evangelicals on the concepts of 'Implicit Monotheism.' Idowu insinuates that ATR worship is God-ordained, but Kato rightly counters this as idolatry. He says, 'Whatever rationalisation we may try to make, the worship of gods in Africa is idolatry' (Kato 1975a,b).<sup>8</sup> Kato (1974a,b:20–21) says idolatry is evident in ATR. Therefore, no one should deny that idolatry is part and parcel of ATR. The idolatry of ATR echoes the biblical truth about human depravity irrespective of ethnic background and religion (Rm 1:18–32; 3:10–18). He further says the living experience of a god in ATR is different from the Christian experience of God. For example, Kato's father craved a spiritual reality as an ATR adherent. He dedicated his son to becoming a *juju* priest and being under the watch of a powerful *Kuno*, a devil. Kato's father desired his son to interact with the spiritual world, so he exposed him to fetish practices and the art of offering sacrifices to the gods (la Haye 1986:17; Kato 1962:10–11).

For Africans, ATR is foundational in the understanding of Christian spiritual warfare. Accordingly, ATR becomes the framework for spiritual warfare before the inception of Christianity. Turaki attests that:

The dominance of the impersonal, the unseen and the unpredictable spirit powers makes people search for power which can help in this dangerous world, where fate, evil and death abound (Turaki 2002:166).

As often said in Africa, in pidgin language, 'Power pass power,' meaning there are degrees of power. Hence, ATR worshippers continue to seek greater power for protection from the 'evil eye' of lesser powers. The practices of rituals, ceremonies, charms, witchcraft and sorcery mirror African spiritual battle. Some of the components of ATR that provide the understanding of spiritual warfare are the beliefs in mystical powers, spirit beings, gods and a Supreme Being.<sup>9</sup>

African Traditional Religion by practice appears as a religious thought that encompasses the three models of spiritual warfare, as seen in my previous synopsis. African Traditional Religion reflects more on WSM, GLDM and SLSW. The models echo the ATR framework of the existence of the supernatural powers in every sphere of life, although there

7. Kato's work is a typescript of his public lecture at the ECWA Theological Seminary, Igbaja, Kwara State, Nigeria on 08 February 1974.

8. See ATR in Kato, 'Christianity as an African Religion.' This is a typescript of the article presentation.

9. Most of these components are in the ATR works of Mbiti (1970), Idowu (1962), Kato (1975a,b) and Turaki (1997; 2000; 2006).

are no written documents. The perception of the spirit world in Africa aligns with the three models because the influences and powerful activities of the evil forces affect all spheres of life. For instance, Africans attach evil to diseases, pain and situations such as natural disasters and civil disturbances (Kunhiyop 2012:57–59).

The African religious practice requires the consultation of stronger powers to stop the evil inflicted on society, ground or territory for freedom from its bondage. An example of a strategic-level deliverance model is what Gerhardus C. Oosthuizen (1992:22) says about the African spiritual healer. He rightly alludes that the healing activities of African spiritual healers are associated with those diseases, malevolent spirits that fall within traditional African cosmology and which are because of malevolent metaphysical forces. Turaki (2002:168–69) rightly observes ways to control spiritual forces, that is, engaging in African spiritual warfare, using symbolic power, and invoking benevolent spirits to protect people and places. He says, 'Religious symbols are particularly powerful, and include the use and sprinkling of blood, colors, clothing, and designed objects or shapes.' Therefore, African spiritual warfare appears to use symbolic powers and invoke benevolent spirits to fight malevolent ones.

## African witchcraft practices

Witchcraft is a universal phenomenon. Parrinder says witchcraft:

[A]ppeared in many parts of the world, one form or another. It became particularly prominent and developed in Europe in the later Middle Ages and Renaissance periods. Still, in modern Africa, belief in witchcraft is a great tranny, spreading panic and death (Parrinder 1962:15; 1970:9).

The African belief in witchcraft acknowledges the practice of magic to make or move things, says Hamisi Mathias Machangu. He sees witchcraft practice as historically applied to any exerted influence on the human mind, body or property against a person's will, which causes disease, sickness, bad luck, 'premature' death, impotence, and other misfortunes (Machangu 2010:182). Anthropologist Carol McKinney serves within the Bajju tribe of Middlebelt, Nigeria. Her ethnographic research captures the witchcraft phenomenon. McKinney (1985:59; 2019a,b:loc. 1489, kindle) says witchcraft is:

An inherent capacity to exert supernatural influence over another person. This influence frequently causes harm, and it explains phenomena such as breaches in social relations, anti-social behavior, unexpected occurrences, sickness, and death. (p. Loc. 1489, Kindle)

The authors simple definition of the witchcraft phenomenon in Africa comes from what the author deduced to be authentic and related to evil powers that work entirely against others, including their backwardness, destruction and suffering. Oosthuizen's (1992:132) fitting response to the question of witchcraft reveals that it is a satanic force that emanates from

people's hearts, that is, jealousy, and evil desires, which lead to harming or destroying others. Kunhiyop (2008:375–378) attests to the reality of sickness, pain and death caused by witchcraft phenomena in Africa. He refers to the traditional African understanding of natural causes and observes that the existence of pain inflicted on Africans because of witchcraft activities arouse the worldview of unnatural causes. The belief in witchcraft in Africa should be a serious matter, not denied as the proponents of 'flaws of the excluded middle' in the Western world (Hiebert, Shaw & Tienou 1999:173). Therefore, witchcraft practices in Africa are both offensive and defensive. Witchcraft is offensive because it perpetuates evil or 'casts an evil eye' against another person with or without his knowledge. Witchcraft appears defensive if the individual's action is to fight against opposition to another person's progress in the spiritual realm or sometimes in the physical domain.

Using the Bajju spirit worldview to portray the African worldview, McKinney (2019a,b:loc 489, kindle) says there are ways to identify a witch. For example, a witch looks intently at someone with jealousy, contentiousness, and anger, stirring up trouble. Such a person is the first victim of witchcraft phenomena if eventually sickness and death occur. The African context is aware of the presence of witches through all kinds of stories and confessions or testimonies of those perpetrators. The author has heard stories of witches and seen those accused of witchcraft in the village and surrounding communities. The categories of those indicted are primarily children, older adults, widows and parents whose children are deceased. The author agrees with Turaki and Kunhiyop about understanding African witchcraft practices from stories to realistic events with perpetrators. Turaki (2002) says:

Both the belief and the dread of witchcraft and sorcery in Africa are pervasive and very powerful. The death of young people, mysterious deaths, accidents and incurable diseases are usually attributed to witchcraft or sorcery. (p. 169)

Kunhiyop (2015) agrees with Turaki, and he says:

From time immemorial, those that have been accused of causing suffering and pain through witchcraft have included: Widows, Parents of deceased, elderly people, children, women, and prosperous people. (Kunhiyop 2015)

## Christian response to witchcraft practices in Africa

The problem of witchcraft in Africa is part of the universal problem with sin. Human depravity is foundational to idolatry in ATR and linked to the witchcraft phenomenon. Scriptures say no one is good, and all have turned their worthless ways (Rm 3:10–18). The traditional African response to witchcraft practices appears different from the Christian response. African Traditional Religion invokes a more significant spiritual force from the spirit world to respond to any form of exerted malevolent evil powers with a benevolent spirit. Thus, ATR is the framework for response

to witchcraft practices in the African religious context. The Christian response built on the framework of Paul's epistle to Ephesians. Paul exults that Christians have a greater power to fight spiritual forces, which are not flesh and blood, meaning not human beings (Eph 6:12).

Hiebert (1994:198) asks, 'What is a Christian theology of ancestors; of animals and plants; of local spirits and spirit possession; and principalities, powers, and rulers of the darkness of this world (Eph 6:12)?' As important as the question sounds, Hiebert raises the curiosity of Christian theologians and scholars about spiritual warfare. Falen (2018:85) is aware of some of the interests and possible controversies around spiritual warfare. So, he observes that some recent scholars of African witchcraft have a precise position on the belief of witchcraft practices, claiming it is unreal and responses to its beliefs are illegitimate and dangerous. Scholars suggest a delegitimisation of witchcraft accusations and view it as violating human rights. If African theologians recognise witchcraft practices and charges as real and ongoing in Africa, then the Christian response should undergo critical evaluation. The author's critical evaluation is on the reactions of Evangelical and Neo-Pentecostal Christians.

### Response of Evangelical Christians to witchcraft practices

The Evangelical Christians hold on to the early Christian worldview that calls on the New Testament scriptural texts as a witness (Carl 2022:7–8). Albert Mohler (2010) writes an evangelical response to the meeting of Roman Catholic bishops and priests on demon possession and exorcism. Mohler responds from the framework of Paul's final word of encouragement to Christians in Ephesus (Eph 6:10–20). He begins with a clear position of evangelicals on spiritual warfare. Mohler asserts that Evangelical Christians believe in the malevolent power of evil and demons. He leans on the clarity of the New Testament to resist the effort of others to 'demythologise' the New Testament, to deny the existence of evil powers and beings. Demythologisation was not an issue in the early church era because the church fathers had a serious concern with demonic forces and acknowledged that Christians could experience its profound influence (Arnold 1997:112).

Eziegbo (2010:219–220) alludes to the argument of Bultmann on the seriousness of Africans on the demythologisation of demons and spirits, which was supported by Wink. African Traditional Religion and Neo-Pentecostals seem to recognise the devil and demons in everything and quickly accord them powers in popular piety. Somehow, African Christians who take Satan and evil forces seriously continue everywhere to interpret the gospel and their daily lives.<sup>10</sup> Carl (2002:7) cites Oscar Skarsaune to reveal that from the early church period to the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and post-Reformation, Christians are not unaware of the Devil's threat. Peter warns,

<sup>10</sup>See the argument on the seriousness of Africans against the demythologisation of demons and spirits by Rudolf Bultmann supported by Wink in Eziegbo (2010:219–220).

'Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.' (1 Pt. 5:8). Instead, Christians should rely on a greater power through the finished work of Christ to fight successfully.

The appropriate questions to ask Evangelical Christians about witchcraft practices in Africa should reflect the understanding of the ATR framework. Turaki (2002:171) rightly says, 'Understanding the background of African traditional religions is essential to any application of Christian spirituality in Africa.' Consequently, this raises the question, what is the proper response to the beliefs of witchcraft practices? What are the biblical perspectives on witchcraft practices? Should an Evangelical Christian adopt a particular model of spiritual warfare? How effective will be the model of spiritual warfare? These are pertinent questions that provide the framework for the Evangelical Christian response to witchcraft practices in Africa. The author argues that the classical or traditional model is the most effective response to witchcraft practices in Africa. The author agrees with Turaki's (2002) view:

Christian confrontation with the demonic within the traditional spiritual worldview arises when the demonic features as a stumbling block to Christian spiritual transformation of the traditional spiritual worldview. The demonic and spiritual forces and powers are dealt with in their encounter with Christianity as they stand in opposition to the presentation and proclamation of the gospel of Christ as well as obstacles to Christian spiritual transformation of lives (p. 172).

Turaki's view does not reflect a WSM, GLDM or SLSW model. His idea of deliverance through the power of the gospel of Christ represents the classical or traditional model of spiritual warfare. Kato, Turaki, and Kunhiyop are some African Evangelical theologians who align with the Traditional Model of Warfare. They support the approach of the gospel of Christ as a means for the total deliverance of any form of spiritual possession in humanity. The proliferation of exorcism derives its root in the framework of exorcism in ATR. The belief in the spirit world influenced Mbiti and Idowu, who hold to continuity, that is, the concept of God from the ATR experience into the present Christian experience (Bediako 1992:281; Eziegbo 2010:223; Ferdinando 2007:123). The idea of continuity is not biblical because it encourages religious pluralism and can open a possible route for religious syncretism (Myers 2011:239). Instead, discontinuity, that is, the opposite of continuity should reflect a traditional or classical model, maintaining the truth once for all delivered to the apostles of Jesus to other generations of believers in Christ (see Jud 1:3–4). The Christian faith is fundamentally opposed to African Traditional Religion. Tinashe Chengeta alludes to Paul's explanation of God's general and special revelation in Acts 2:16–21. He rightly says, 'according to Paul, it is clear that in African Traditional Religion we do not worship the self-revealing and triune God of Scripture' (Chengeta 2020).



Therefore, the ATR system of religious belief should discontinue because it is not based on the self-revealed and triune God of the Bible.

Kunhiyop (2008:386, 389) rightly affirms Scripture as the foundation for being a Christian that experiences joy amid spiritual encounters with spiritual forces that cast the spell of evil, that is, pain, suffering, disease and death. Mohler (2010) rightly affirms the evangelical framework for spiritual warfare, pointing to the name of Jesus, the authority of the Bible, and the power of Jesus' gospel as the spiritual weapons of our warfare with powers and the forces of darkness. He says if evangelicals accept exorcism, it means surrendering the high ground of the gospel, a strong weapon demons fear, that is, evangelism and missions. Mohler (2010) rightly concludes that the gospel pushes back satanic powers, rendering them impotent and powerless. 'Every time a believer shares the Gospel and declares the name of Jesus, the demons and the Devil lose their power' (Mohler 2010). The gospel of Jesus Christ, that is, evangelism and missions, not exorcism, is the most effective weapon of spiritual warfare. The most effective Christian response to spiritual warfare in witchcraft practices is the genuine confession, repentance and renunciation (Carl 2002:62). The deliverance of a spirit-possessed person by the gospel of Christ is the greatest exorcism. Kwame Bediako (2000:9–10) cites Afua Kuma (1981:19) and reports that African Christianity welcomes Jesus Christ as the superior power over any form of power within ATR. Once Christ sets a person free from the bondage of the Devil, the freedom remains (Jn 8:32; 2 Cor 5:17; Rm 8:1).

### Response of Neo-Pentecostal Christians to witchcraft practices

The African Neo-Pentecostals would embrace the ground-level deliverance and SLSW as a model of spiritual warfare. The shift from the traditional or classical model of spiritual warfare happened because of a perception rooted in the understanding of spiritual warfare within the framework of ATR. Turaki's knowledge of the dynamics of ATR makes him admit that the ATR system serves as the basis for a proper understanding of spiritual warfare in Africa (Turaki, 2000; 2002:160–73). Simbarashe Gukurume (2020) observes that:

[S]piritual warfare is an important part of everyday life and rituals in Pentecostal churches in Africa and beyond. In Pentecostal parlance, the world is constructed and construed as a battleground between born-again Christians and Satanic forces. (p. 278)

Gukurume exposes the notion of Neo-Pentecostalism in Africa that holds to the model of Boyd and Wagner in spiritual warfare. Boyd's GLDM draws its framework from the Old and New Testaments, focusing on God and Jesus' victory over spiritual forces as a paradigm for ministry (Boyd 2012:135). Consequently, Neo-Pentecostalism in the African context rejects the demythologisation of evil spirits and accepts the existence of territorial spirits. Their view of territorial spirits forms the basis for deliverance ministries, that is, casting, binding and losing spiritual powers and

demonic oppressions (Boyd 2012:148). African Neo-Pentecostalism aligns with Wagner's SLSW because of its framework in Jesus and Paul's spiritual encounters (see Ac 16). The ministry of exorcism that focuses on ground-level, occult-level and strategic-level is a typical prototype of Neo-Pentecostalism in Africa. Accordingly, the emphasis of the ministry is on intense deliverance prayers that break chains of spiritual bondage, curses and all kinds of spiritual possessions. African deliverance ministries are antithetical to the Classical Model of spiritual warfare. They undermine the classical idea of the Bible and the gospel of Christ as the means for absolute deliverance of those in spiritual bondage.

The pattern of deliverance ministries in Neo-Pentecostalism is fuzzy and questionable. Samuel Tunde Abednego (2021:10) rightly acknowledges that 'something is evidently wrong with the brand of Christianity that is preached and practiced today, especially among Neo-Pentecostal and charismatic movements in many areas of Africa.' Even though:

Power encounters through exorcism are mentioned throughout this church history. The greatest emphasis of early church writings is not on the power and responsibility of the priest or church leader, but on the power of Christ and the responsibility of the believer (Carl 2002:63).

African Neo-Pentecostalism focuses more on the power of the 'men of God,' not the authority of the Bible and the power of Christ. Some Neo-Pentecostal churches have turned to a business venture where spiritual symbolism and rites are common. Asamoah-Gyadu (2015:25) observes that the contemporary African Neo-Pentecostal church life, the discourse on witchcraft practices and its battle in contemporary Christianity become spiritual warfare. Thus, Neo-Pentecostals develop their weapons of spiritual warfare, resisting the activities of evil powers. They use authoritative prayer for exorcism, healing and setting free victims of mystical possession and oppression. For instance, the prayer, commanding in the name of Jesus, speaking to the mystical powers and spirits that possessed a person.

The response of African Neo-Pentecostals to witchcraft mirrors a deep understanding of exorcism embedded in the framework of ATR. The language of spiritual warfare fits well in the understanding of African witchcraft practices. For example, Neo-Pentecostals organise 'all-night prayers or vigil' for war with demonic afflictions and possessions, undermining the power of the Bible and gospel of Christ in absolute deliverance of the spiritually afflicted. Some of the prayers are imprecatory, invoking fire, thunders and earthquakes to destroy witches and their activities. Asamoah-Gyadu (2015) rightly avers:

The search for solutions to spiritual problems has generated a plethora of healing camps and prayer services in both Pentecostal or charismatic and historic mission churches. Prophets specializing in healing, deliverance, and exorcism operate to set people free from bondage. (p. 26).

The response of African Neo-Pentecostals to witchcraft activities overflows with Christo-paganism and religious

syncretism. The author agrees with Asamoah-Gyadu (2015), who says:

African expressions of Christianity have always been informed not simply by biblical ideas of Satan, demons, and evil spirits, but also by traditional worldviews regarding the sources and causes of evil such as witchcraft. (p. 27).

African Traditional Religion is the backdrop for Christo-paganism and religious syncretism within Africans.

## Conclusion

Spiritual warfare in the African context drives its framework from ATR. The proper understanding of the dynamism of ATR helps in excellent spiritual warfare. African Traditional Religion conveys a reality of the malevolent and benevolent spirits. The religious nature of Africans embraced the existence of witchcraft activities. An African perception of life flows from the framework of ATR and the belief in the reality of witchcraft. The perception of the reality of evil forces in Africa attracts all forms of spiritual rites, seeking more extraordinary spiritual powers for defensive and offensive spiritual weapons ready for warfare. African scholars such as Mbiti and Idowu suggest continuity, that is, incorporating the understanding of God in ATR into African Christianity. Some African Evangelical theologians such as Kato, Turaki and Kunhiyop refute the concept of continuity because of the dangers of Christo-paganism and religious syncretism. Therefore, Kato, Turaki, Kunhiyop and other African Evangelicals acknowledge that the traditional or classical model of spiritual warfare serves as the most effective tool for spiritual warfare in Africa. As Mohler rightly says:

'I agree that the gospel of Jesus Christ, that is, evangelism and missions, not exorcism, is the most effective weapon of spiritual warfare, even in African spiritual warfare' (Mohler 2010).

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