Chiquete, ENA 2026, 'Myths and Taboos in the Religiosity of Christian Women: Implications of the Angolan Cultural View of the World', *African Women in Theological Scholarship: Emerging Voices and Perspectives : African Theological Journal for Church and Society*, vol. 7, no. 2 pp. 33-54

Myths and Taboos in the Religiosity of Christian Women: Implications of the Angolan Cultural View of the World

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Abstract

Religiosity and spirituality are deeply embedded in the daily lives of African women, directly influencing social issues and their overall life dynamics. The strength of female spirituality and religiosity is a growing concern in the Angolan religious context, as these elements are intrinsically linked to the cultural worldview. Such cultural manifestations constitute pillars of women's lives, giving meaning to their most decisive and existential moments. Consequently, the rites and taboos often practiced among women are directly related to their basic religious beliefs, conferring not only meaning but also shaping women's Christian identity and spiritual practice.

Thus, there is a critical gap between the insufficiency of the Christian faith, as it has been presented, in providing adequate and contextualised responses to the practical challenges of the lives of Angolan women. This makes urgent and necessary a practical and contextual theology that provides and validates the depth of the Christian faith to provide answers to the vital questions of the life of Christian women in this context. When the church does not offer a theology that responds to the fear of spirits or the protection of the newborn, the Christian woman, pressured by insecurity, resorts to the solutions of the traditional worldview. The result is a syncretistic Christianity that professes Christ in worship services, but resorts to

traditional ritual in moments of crisis, which is the result of a profound weakness in the biblical teaching that is given to women.
The use of amulets, fear of sterility or disease, the value and dignity of women intrinsically linked to their fertility, idolatry of motherhood, and syncretic rituals to ensure the health and protection of children are evidence that there is a fundamental theological tension between trust in providence and ritualistic manipulation. Therefore, it is necessary to bring a teaching that considers the way women interpret the events of life through a practical and contextual theology that applies the gospel to cultural gaps. By empowering women to understand Christ as Lord of life, death, and fertility, the Angolan church not only preserves sound doctrine, but also promotes true social and spiritual liberation. The resulting spirituality will cease to be a refuge from fear and will become a celebration of freedom in Christ, where the Son truly sets people free (John 8:36).

Introduction

The ministry of biblical teaching among women in Angola was developed so that they could know God and guide their lives by divine principles and to allow the issues inherent to the female universe to be addressed with greater depth and care. Consequently, most local churches have established specialised departments for the development of curricula and programs that respond to the religious needs of women, taking into account the challenges they face daily in their Christian walk.

Weekly Bible studies, camps, and lectures are spaces where women teach other women, challenging them in various areas, from spirituality and family to health issues and home economics. These programs provide an environment of freedom for mutual learning and counselling. However, practical observation throughout these programs reveals the existence of various myths and rituals that circulate among women in these Christian environments.

According to Nicholls, if the gospel does not transform the visible behaviour of the community and the person to the point of generating changes at the deepest level, which is the worldview, then this conversion can be considered

partial.[1] The gospel in a culture can never be considered “a visitor”. Rather, it must be judge and redeemer. But type of spirituality observed among Angolan Christian women demonstrates that daily life does not always reflect Christian values.

Through oral culture, forms of traditional spirituality has been transmitted and persistently coexist with Christian principles, resulting in a syncretism that stems from the deficiency of the biblical and theological formation of women responsible for teaching other women. Consequently, several vital problems do not find satisfactory exegetical and practical answers from the Bible, which leads women to repeatedly resort to cultural elements to deal with critical situations. In the Angolan context, common biblical teaching has not confronted the vital cultural beliefs of the immediate sphere of women's reality.

Hiebert states that each culture receives the gospel message differently, and since no culture is impartial, caution is needed in communication to avoid distortions of the biblical message. Among the different aspects presented by Hiebert, the importance of contextualisation so that the local community understands the message in its own cultural horizon stands out. One of the fundamental points he addresses is the need to develop an understanding of Scripture and theology that respond to the contextual environment in a unique way, thus avoiding religious syncretism and rituals in their various forms.[2]

In Angola, even after decades of Christian history, it is possible to observe striking traits in the religiosity of Christian women in which rites, myths, and taboos still make up the expression of their spirituality. According to Lidório, when a culture is confronted with the gospel, it is necessary to conform habits to biblical standards. Although the process of conversion and change of worldview may be slow, the persistence of the rites is a strong sign and indication that there are fundamental issues of the Christian faith that are not yet well understood by the community, generating only religiosity.[3] Religiosity generates myths and taboos to give meaning to daily life. These acts as a source

[1] Nicholls, *Contextualization*, 15–19.
[2] Hiebert, *The Gospel and the Diversity of Cultures*, 141.
[3] Lidório, *Introduction*, 111–113.

of knowledge and are indicative of the level of syncretic understanding that the faithful possess.

In the same vein, McGrath reflects that gender influences the formation of the type of spirituality.[4] At the same time, Altuna states that the Bantu woman, by taking responsibility for the life that comes from the ancestors and by preserving the tradition of connection that unites the sacred within the group, continuing the lineage, has an experience that revolves around various myths and taboos. Therefore, the woman in this context has a different responsibility than the man. She carries within herself the weight of preserving and maintaining home and blood as a symbol of life.[5]

In view of this, the following question arises: Why has Christianity proved to be, to a certain extent, insufficient to respond to the yearnings of Angolan Christian women?

This article presents a study based on participatory observation, carried out among evangelical Christian women who participate in study groups, retreats, and Bible discussions. Many evangelical Christian women, despite confessing the Christian faith, continue to be bound by taboos and rituals as a solution to their existential dilemmas, the result of biblical teachings weakened by little theological instruction. Methodologically, this work is presented as a field research report, whose data were collected through direct experience and immersion in activities, with active interactions and notes resulting from question, answer, and counselling sessions.

Historically, missionary work has had the sensitivity of promoting the education of native peoples, with a focus on rural and domestic education. However, when creating specific programs for women, the focus was essentially on literacy, manual labor, and household management, aiming to form good wives. In this context, the Bible was taught only as a supplementary discipline.[6] There was, therefore, no deliberate effort for women to deepen their theological knowledge. The educational model of Bible schools was limited to the basics, without providing elementary biblical principles that

[4] McGrath, *An Introduction*, 34.
[5] de Asúa Altuna, *Cultura Bantu Tradicional*, 257–273.
[6] Henderson, *The Church in Angola*, 176–177.

could transform the perspective of women's cultural worldview, thus creating a gap between what the Bible says and what is practiced. The weakness of biblical and theological knowledge, resulting from poor training and inadequate preparation in the face of existential dilemmas, has consolidated the strength of cultural ritualistic practices rather than a position based on Christian principles and values.

Lidório reinforces that syncretism and religious nominalism are direct consequences of the lack of understanding of the receiving community's worldview on the part of the communicator of the Gospel.[7] González and Orlandi point out that in Angola, Christianity interacted directly with animist cultures, and although missionary work included evangelisation and social action, the numerical growth led many missionaries to neglect the traditional African vision.[8] The African perspective on the spiritual world and ancestry was little considered in the formation of new converts, allowing syncretism to develop dangerously. This neglect did not favour the theological formation of women, causing weaknesses in the interpretation and application of the Bible.

Henderson corroborates this view by noting that since the founding of the church in Angola in 1870, the gospel has been planted in a deeply religious soil dominated by a worldview where spirits influence every aspect of life, from birth to death.[9] The Angolan religious universe conceives the human being as a composite of material and spiritual elements in constant interaction. As a response to spiritual action, the culture created a variety of rituals. Although there were parallels between the cultural and biblical vision, especially in the concept of community and monotheism, these points of contact were not properly developed, leaving gaps that traditional rituals continue to fill.

Religious syncretism and the persistence of rituals and taboos among Christian women in Angola are not isolated phenomena, but rather the historical result of an evangelisation that, although diligent, prioritised form to the detriment of the worldview. By focusing primarily on female education in the household and basic literacy, the missionary effort (and later church teaching) failed to provide the theological tools necessary for Angolan women to interpret their

[7] Lidório, *Introduction*, 19.
[8] González and Orlandi, *História*, 364.
[9] Henderson, *The Church in Angola*, 29–31.

spiritual reality from the Scriptures. The insufficiency of biblical teaching in answering the vital questions raised does not lie in the limitation of biblical revelation, but in the superficiality of its transmission. When teaching does not confront the universe inhabited by spirits and the anxieties existing in the local culture, the faithful tend to maintain a nominal faith while resorting to traditional rites to solve practical and daily dilemmas, as Hiebert pointed out: 'the absence of a contextualised theology creates a void that syncretism easily fills'[10], and in this way myths and cultural rites arise.

Concepts

Thus, the concept of myth, which, according to the Käser, has Greek origins and is always related to deities and metaphysical issues,[11] is based on the worldview of a specific cultural group and has the practical function of promoting plausible actions for phenomena that often transcend purely rational understanding. Lidório completes this definition by stating that myths explain the way of life of a people based on their faith and beliefs.[12] For the communicator of the gospel, myths serve as a terminological and conceptual guide, revealing the limits of a people's understanding of a given subject, as well as the facilities or resistances that the biblical message can find in local religiosity, giving them a utilitarian value.

Rites, on the other hand, are practices performed by individuals or groups that play a vital role in community life. They originate from a firm interpretative conviction of life and religiosity[13]. As Sardenberg points out, in community contexts, all essential phenomena of human existence are given cultural meanings that give them meaning.[14] Thus, the rites aim to ward off evil and prevent calamities.

In this sense, it is essential to understand that in the Angolan view of the world, myths and rites do not operate only in the realm of the imaginary, but function as mechanisms to manage reality and existential security. For women, these

[10] Hiebert, *The Gospel and the Diversity of Cultures*, 145.
[11] Käser, *Foreign Cultures*, 192.
[12] Lidório, 103–104.
[13] Lidório, *Introduction*, 109
[14] Sardenberg, "De sangrias, tabos e poderes", 320.

practices represent an attempt to exert control over the uncertain and to keep fear at bay, whether in protecting fertility, children's health, or preserving family harmony. The rites continue to be the immediate resource, creating a spirituality fragmented between professed doctrines and the practice of daily survival. In the Angolan context, given its cultural and religious richness, several rites and taboos stand out in the female universe, as detailed below.

Myths and Rites

According to Käser, the rites can be classified as: atonement, apotropaic, purification, transition, natural renewal, and palliative.[15] He repeatedly highlights the rites of transition because they are more visible practices that involve the entire community. However, rites of elimination or removal, although occurring almost silently, are widely practiced among women.

Apotropaic rites aim to eradicate or ward off evils that threaten the community or the individual. In the case of Christian women in traditional contexts, the perception persists that the origin and maintenance of life depend largely on their attitudes and the integrity of their bodies. Cases such as congenital biological deficiencies, miscarriages, or fertility problems are interpreted in the light of the spiritual health of the womb. Consequently, women strive to keep their bodies healthy to avoid any harm from them.

In a certain Christian community, a woman gave birth to twins, one of whom died shortly after birth. This mother was instructed not to cry for her deceased son during the funeral, allegedly risking losing her second child. The belief underlying this orientation is that babies maintain an intimate connection between the visible and invisible worlds. If the mother showed sorrow, the spirit of the deceased son would draw the brother into the world of the dead. To mitigate the risk, they gave her a doll that was supposed to accompany the baby alive, being breastfed and cared for as if it were the lost child. By strictly following this ritual, the mother believed she had eliminated the spirit of death from her home.

[15] Käser, *Foreign Cultures*, 192-210.

In another situation, a newborn became seriously ill. The baby's grandmother performed a ritual in which the child's hair was shaved and roasted with palm oil. Small cuts (scarifications) were made in the genitals, breasts, and belly of the baby's mother, where the mixture of oil and ash was applied. The aim was to purify the mother's milk and uterus, which was considered weak, eliminating the deficiencies that affected posterity.

The widow's bath consists of expiating evil through penances or sacrifices. It is common for the widow, after the burial of her husband, to be subjected to the ritual of bathing. Performed in rivers or, in urban areas, inside houses, bathing aims to cleanse the woman's body of the traces of the deceased. It is believed that, without this purification, her husband's spirit would have lived with her again, causing the premature aging of her face and preventing a new marriage. This practice is particularly frequent among young widows.

The belief persists that the mother's womb may not be a place totally immune to the action of evil spirits. For this reason, many Christian women hesitate to name their babies before birth. It is believed that silence protects the child, avoiding attracting spirits that could prevent birth. After birth, care extends to biological waste: baby faeces cannot be disposed of randomly, as it is feared that they may be handled by sorcerers. These practices highlight how fear can imprison Christian freedom and joy, leading women to follow traditional rules in search of community acceptance and security.

In the context under analysis, pregnancy is understood as the convergence between spiritual forces and the vital-fruitful power of the parents. Consequently, the gestational process is permeated by a series of taboos and protective rituals. Practices such as the omission of the probable date of delivery, the absence of advance naming, and the prohibition of directly touching or mentioning pregnancy highlight the sacred and vulnerable nature of this period. As postulated by de Asúa Altuna, fecundity is interpreted as the highest and most cherished gift in this worldview; it elevates women to a higher social and religious state, for this process is believed to establish blood ties that bind the ancestors to the new lineage.[16] Therefore, women sees this

[16] de Asúa Altuna, *Cultura Bantu Tradicional*, 302–373.

fact as a moral and religious duty: the child must not only be conceived but must survive.

In addition, the relevance of these taboos is manifested in everyday social interactions. This dynamic is exemplified in an episode involving a pregnant woman and a pastor. When she was touched in the abdominal region, the pregnant woman showed great apprehension. Immediate religious intervention, through prayers and words of affirmation, served as a mechanism to mitigate fear and reestablish spiritual protection over the foetus. The symbolic efficacy of these beliefs is reflected in the interpretation of later events. The loss of a subsequent pregnancy, for example, was attributed by the mother to the absence of a ritualistic blessing equivalent to what was received by the first child. It can be inferred that the foetus is perceived as an entity vulnerable to external influences and curses, which justifies the need for strict spiritual protection mechanisms.

Likewise, in the daily life of Christian communities, the persistence of recommendations based on oral transmission persists, which configure a system of beliefs parallel to biblical doctrine. A prominent example is the ritual of *okupitisa* (or "passing"), performed in grieving contexts.[17] The practice involves the use of vaginal secretions in the newborn to repel supposed spiritual influences from the environment of death. This shows a human attempt to manipulate the sacred. Similarly, procedures such as bathing and drinking water used in maternal intimate hygiene for the treatment of dehydration (diarrhoea and vomiting) demonstrate confidence in the mystical virtues inherent in the body to the detriment of medical care and trust in divine providence.

Similarly, existential insecurity is also manifested in the attribution of pejorative names to children who have survived successive births with foetal death with the aim of deceiving death, or in the use of amulets (cords at the wrist and waist) against the evil eye. Such practices constitute a spirituality based on fear. Theologically, these beliefs indicate that Christian conversion has not yet reached the level of a worldview. From the Christian point of view,

[17] Expression in the native language Umbundu to translate the ritualistic process of passing the child into an act of protection.

reliance on apotropaic rituals is a practical denial of Christ's sufficiency and his prevailing victory. These women live under the weight of taboos that produce a state of spiritual slavery. Pastoral theology must approach these phenomena not only as superstition but also as a gap in the understanding of divine protection and Christ's authority over life and death.

The harmony and stability of marriage are also often placed on the shoulders of the woman. In this context, she seeks resources, sometimes syncretic, to maintain the balance of the home. Sardenberg explains that, in several cultures, fluids such as menstrual blood and semen are seen as elements of power. Some women even mix menstrual blood into their husbands' food to ensure their fidelity and stay at home.[18]

Although Leviticus 15:25–27 presents menstruation through the lens of ritual impurity, certain Angolan cultures deify it, linking femininity to spirituality.[19] The elimination of sanitary pads, for example, is surrounded by taboos: the blood must be diluted in water and absorbed into the earth so as not to be used in infertility rituals. This sacralised view of the fluids of the body imposes a routine of constant vigilance that often replaces trust in divine providence.

In this way, “the pressing need to ensure the continuity of the lineage and the stability of the home often override the individuality of the spouse. Being married is even more important than the husband himself. In this context, sterility is stigmatised as a curse attributed to women, placing them in a condition of vulnerability in which procreation becomes the main objective.”[20]

Consequently, for some young Christian women, adherence to polygamy or independent motherhood has become an acceptable alternative to celibacy, which is socially interpreted as a pathology or sign of immaturity. The single mother phenomenon highlights the resilience of cultural beliefs that challenge the biblical one flesh pattern outlined in Genesis 2:24.

Two examples illustrate this tension. In the first case, a young woman from a Christian community, after becoming involved with a married man and

[18] Sardenberg, “De sangrias, tabos e poderes”, 315.
[19] Cardovil, "Feminine Power”, 431–435.
[20] de Asúa Altuna, *Cultura Bantu Tradicional*, 319.

conceiving a daughter, chose to become his second wife. Despite the application of disciplinary measures by the church, which resulted in her exclusion from communion for fourteen years, the woman justified her decision as a search for social honour. From this point of view, the status of second wife is preferable to singleness, prioritising the sacred duty of traditional fruitfulness over the marital exclusivity advocated in 1 Corinthians 7:2, where mutual fidelity is the remedy against immorality.

The second account involves a family whose patriarchs exercised leadership in the church council. They consented to their daughter's polygamous marriage to a non-Christian man. The acceptance of marriage was strictly based on cultural achievement, specifically on the delivery of the dowry or *alambamento*.[21] For the family, conformity to traditional rites validates unity, ignoring the implications of disparity in beliefs and the warning of Colossians 2:8, which warns of the danger of becoming trapped in human traditions that do not follow Christ.

The need to understand God's word

The family, as an institution established by God, is the place of communion and the preservation of life. However, it is observed that in the ecclesiastical context under analysis the values that sustain the family unit are often permeated by a syncretism that fuses biblical precepts with elements of traditional religions. This fusion generates a worldview where home preservation is pursued not only by theological obedience but also by the need for cultural validation that can distort the understanding of divine grace.

Although motherhood and the vocation to care are gifts given by God, the dignity of women must not be reduced to their reproductive capacity. In light of Proverbs 31:25, women are exhorted to take on “strength and dignity,” finding a value that transcends the functional attributions of culture. In Christian anthropology, the value of women is inestimable because they are

[21] *Alambamento* refers to the traditional Angolan custom of dowry. It consists of a set of valuable goods given by the groom's family to the bride's family and is an essential legal and social rite of passage for the legitimacy of marriage before the community. The composition of the list of goods varies, respecting the usual specificities of each ethnolinguistic group.

bearers of the i*mago Dei* (image of God), regardless of their marital status or biological maternity. It is therefore imperative that women in conditions of sterility or celibacy (whether vocational or circumstantial) develop spiritual resilience and inner resources to face stigma and social marginalisation. Identity in Christ must prevail over cultural and biological pragmatism.

Consequently, to mitigate the transmission of ritual symbols and oral counsel that perpetuate generational oppressions, the church must promote a biblical counter-memory. It is necessary to train female leaders capable of discipleship and mentoring (Titus 2:3–5), capable of transmitting, through oral tradition and practice, the liberating truth of the gospel. The theological formation and qualification of women are fundamental to heal existential tensions and free them from structures that imprison their spirituality. The goal is the restoration of feminine dignity from the perspective of the Creator, and not from the expectations of the social group.

In this way, Davis observes that, in cultures guided by the ethics of shame, collective and family well-being is pursued at any cost.[22] The study shows that women have developed systems of self-preservation, especially in the face of gender inequality related to issues of marital infidelity. While female adultery is seen as intolerable, male infidelity is often normalised or forgiven and is even justifiable (even in the ecclesiastical environment), leaving the wife guilty of her husband's moral deviation. For this reason, older women have sought to guide younger women never to confess such conflicts to their husbands, nor to ecclesiastical leaders who, because they are often men, could judge partially, but to treat the matter confidentially with other more respectable and experienced women, so that they can be helped to keep their secrets even when the woman's infidelity results in a pregnancy.

The problem is aggravated by the distance between mostly male spiritual leadership and the realities of the female universe. O'Donovan advocates male primacy in teaching, assuming that women would be more willing to listen to men than the other way around when it comes to religious matters, and that this could have been the reason Jesus appointed men to take care of his

[22] Davis, *Making Disciples*, 168.

church.[23] However, while he presents his approach from an African perspective, he ignores the fact that the teaching of Scripture should produce, not merely believers, but disciples, people who understand and live intimately with God, and that teaching produces transformation in the way they live. The structure that separates men and women can limit women's education to basic, domestic content, preventing them from confronting their deepest fears and dilemmas in the light of Scripture.

Moreover, because education for women has historically been reduced to education for domestic duties, Henderson describes curricula where the Bible was just one subject among many manual skills.[24] This historical path, combined with the assumption that women should not teach the Bible, which justifies low investment in the theological formation of women, is perpetuated by the fact that today there are female leaders who are excellent housewives, but who have a weak theological preparation to face contemporary syncretism.

Thus, in the face of this reality of self-preservation and silence, it becomes evident that overcoming spiritual insecurity does not depend only on the individual effort of women but requires a proactive and empathetic posture on the part of ecclesiastical leadership. The distancing of male leaders from the dilemmas of the female universe, often labeled simply as beliefs, ends up validating and creating an environment conducive to the use of traditional rituals as an emergency solution and practicality. Rites cannot only be forbidden; they must be understood and replaced by a deeper understanding of Christ's protection that can fill the symbolic and emotional void of the woman.

Therefore, there is an urgent need for church leaders to review the model of formation offered to women. It is imperative to move from merely complementary or domestic education to theological instruction that allows teachers to communicate the gospel in a way that redeems the culture without being absorbed by it. Only through biblical literacy that dialogues with the worldview of Angolan women is it possible to break the cycle of dependence

[23] O'Donovan, *Biblical Christianity*, 137.
[24] Henderson, *The Church in Angola*, 176–177.

on taboos and rituals, allowing female spirituality to find fullness and practical answers in the Word of God.

Similarly, Stott proposes that genuine discipleship should produce evident marks in both men and women who seek to walk with Christ. Through systematic teaching and exegesis of Scripture, the Christian develops a conviction of God's immanence and sovereignty, understanding that his voice remains active in any cultural context. Therefore, the Bible must be deliberately taught as an apologetic counterpoint, confronting traditions that diverge from the divine standard and allowing the Christian woman to build her life on the solid foundation of Matthew 7:24–27.

Moreover, the teaching of Scripture is invaluable. Through meditation and prayer, the heart prepares itself for the challenges of reality. The transposition of teaching into action produces, according to Stott, four essential marks of discipleship:

1. **Worship:** It is impossible to worship the unknown. Consequently, the more a woman deepens her theological knowledge of God's attributes, the more authentic and profound her worship becomes.

2. **Repentance:** God's word acts as a revealing mirror. By confronting divine holiness, sin is exposed, leading to confession and the abandonment of practices contrary to God's will.

3. **Faith:** The Christian faith does not subsist in a vacuum; it is a response of rational trust based on the knowledge of the one in whom it is worthy to trust. It is faith that anchors life in the midst of cultural pressures.

4. **Obedience and Witness:** Christian spirituality implies practical submission to divine authority. This culminates in testimonies, whether verbal or behavioural. The woman disciple shares Christ's redemptive work in her sphere of influence.[25]

In short, biblical teaching is the indispensable basis for women to develop a spirituality in conformity with God's will. For this reason, the investment of

[25] Stott, *To Understand the Bible*, 207-17.

time and resources in the theological formation of women is not only an ecclesiastical option, but a strategic imperative for the health of the church.

The challenge of the worldview and theology of female discipleship

Kohl and Barro emphasise the need for instructors who translate the word of God for community challenges.[26] The persistence of traditional rites and myths among Christian women is proof that biblical teaching sometimes fails to confront the deeper layers of the local worldview. When the word of God is not transmitted in a way that reaches the heart, there will be a dissociation between the doctrine taught and daily practice.

An example of this occurred at a women's retreat. A lady complained that her mother-in-law refused to perform a protective bath, a ritual intended for her grandchildren. Although the mother-in-law stated that the Christian faith prevented such a practice and that, because they were Christians, they no longer needed these rites, the daughter-in-law interpreted the refusal, not as fidelity to Christ, but as a lack of love and intentional exposure of the children to bad influences. She even asked for the intervention of the church leadership to force her mother-in-law to attend to the ritual. This episode reveals that biblical education needs to go beyond the surface, promoting a radical change in the structure of beliefs so that religiosity is genuinely transformed. The fragility of women's theological training limits the ability of biblical teaching to confront the socio-cultural reality of women. The thirst for the application of biblical values to practical life requires that teachers have access to a robust theological education. Only then will they be able to challenge other women to a discipleship that transforms values and breaks with traditions that conflict with the gospel.

The challenge of traditional cultural aspects demonstrates that there is greater effectiveness when there is a dynamic of teaching from woman to woman. This can be seen in the case of a young woman outraged by her husband's suggestion about family planning: he considered the practice an affront to God's sovereignty and family tradition. When she was advised by another

[26] Kohl and Barro, *Transformative Theological Education*, 234.

woman, who contextualised God's will on health, responsible motherhood, and body management, the young woman's perspective changed. Shared experience became the vehicle for a new theological understanding.

The dynamics of teaching from woman to woman have proven to be highly practical and effective. However, for it to be fully successful, leaders in teaching positions must have a solid theological background and understanding, ensuring a biblical, spiritual, empathetic, and contextual approach. After all, the barriers faced by the female public transcend the intellectual field, being rooted in emotional wounds and asymmetrical cultural marks accumulated over generations. Overcoming this scenario requires the systematic deconstruction of feelings of inferiority and the marginalisation of the female voice through the rediscovery of the *imago Dei*, rescuing the ontological dignity of women based on the example of Jesus Christ himself, who broke sociocultural taboos by meeting the Samaritan woman (John 4), restoring the woman with the issue of blood (Luke 8) and commissioning women as the primary witnesses of his resurrection (John 20).

In this panorama, trained theologians and leaders play an irreplaceable role as they act at the intersection between shared sociocultural experience and the liberating teaching of the gospel. The urgency of this intentional intervention is supported by empirical data collected in the pastoral field. In interviews with local male leaders, including a pastor and an evangelist, it was found that women are often afraid to seek open help in the face of their personal afflictions. Reports indicate that the pastoral attitude of crossing cultural boundaries, offering empathetic listening, and validating women's concerns are a decisive turning point for restoration.

The field research also highlighted the phenomenon locally designated as the woman's secret—a set of rituals, taboos, and veiled beliefs, perpetuated with the primary intention of preserving marital status before the community. Under the imposition of a social structure that considers masculinity culturally normative and free of flaws, attributing to women the unilateral responsibility for dilemmas such as infertility, such veiled practices emerge as mechanisms of social self-preservation. However, as observed by the leaders interviewed themselves, this dynamic compromises spiritual maturity, feeds syncretism, and weakens marital relationships. Overcoming this reductionist teaching,

which limits divine action to only a few areas of life, requires the strengthening of female theologians and leaders for a bold and contextualised biblical teaching, capable of deconstructing prejudices and reaffirming the unrestricted sovereignty and lordship of God over all dimensions of human existence.

The desires to generate and protect children and to take care of the body and the family are legitimate, but the context and the environment present challenges such as the fear of evil spirits that need to be overcome in religious, Christological, and Christian terms. According to Hesselgrave, cultures have layers of depth: The worldview, located at the most abstract level, establishes the values that regulate behaviours.[27]

Stott reinforces that Christianity, as a religion of rescue, must promote liberation from the factors of cultural conditioning that imprison the individual in mundane ritualistic situations.[28] This mental transformation is at the heart of Romans 12:2, which exhorts Christians not to conform to the prevailing system, be it secular or cultural, but to be renewed by understanding God's will. As McGrath explains, the gospel has to transform culture.[29] Although culture presents elements of cohesion, the gospel must act as the sieve through which values are filtered. As Matthew 19:4–6 teaches, human institutions are to be subject to God's creational pattern. Spirituality must reflect Christian ethics to the point of subordinating even natural impulses and socio-cultural pressures to the principles of the kingdom, seeking, as in Galatians 1:10, God's favour before communal recognition. Thus, practices such as polygamy or procreation outside marriage, although validated by tradition, collide with the model of mutual exclusivity established in Genesis 2:24 and reaffirmed by Christ in Matthew 19.

Women are at the centre of God's heart

The woman occupies a central place in God's purpose. Holy Scripture not only includes women in the history of redemption, but reveals the care, dignity, and

[27] Hesselgrave, *Intercultural Communication*, 87–88.

[28] Stott, *Basic Christianity*, 109.

[29] McGrath, *An Introduction*, 54.

value with which the Creator clothes women's lives. God does not see women through cultural limitations or human prejudices, but as persons created in his own image and likeness, beloved daughters and active participants in his mission. This divine attention is manifested in the cry of Hannah (1 Samuel 1), whose inmost being was heard by God for the restoration of her social dignity, and in the revelation to Hagar, who recognised him as *El Roi*, the God who sees (Genesis 16-20). Prominently, divine attention is revealed in the choice of Mary (Luke 1:26-38): a sovereign and intentional decision of the Most High to select a woman so that through her salvation would reach humanity. To ignore the value of women is to despise the very image and likeness of the Creator reflected in her, for divine revelation demonstrates that femininity is an essential part of God's plans for the world.

In view of this, getting rid of prejudices, decrees, and human traditions that marginalise women is an ethical and theological imperative. Female dignity is not a cultural concession or a religiously negotiable right, but a divinely legitimised value. Any debate about women's spaces, rights, and freedom must come from the perspective of the Creator, not from human constructions tainted by the Fall. Seeing and embracing God's will is a sign of spiritual maturity that enables women to understand their identity and calling. The understanding of her integration in the *missio Dei* strengthens the woman to declare, like Mary, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord" (Luke 1:38, KJV), submitting herself in total consecration to divine sovereignty, even in the face of what transcended human understanding, trusting that fidelity to God is the greatest guarantee for the daily journey.

This theological understanding finds practical expression in contemporary ecclesiology in Angola where the church has developed programs aimed at the formation and integral instruction of women. The women's department in Angolan local communities stands out as one of the most dynamic and active sectors, promoting initiatives aimed at spiritual and social transformation. By playing vital roles in structuring the family, in the Christian education of new generations, and in advancing the proclamation of the gospel, women consolidate themselves as indispensable agents both in the growth of the church and in contemporary social and global transformations.

Conclusion

In summary, the persistence of rites and myths among Christian women in Angola is a clear sign that the word of God is not yet fully integrated into the local vision of the world. For education to be transformative, robust educational investment in teachers is needed. They should not only be trained in domestic and manual matters. They must be biblically prepared to rightly divide the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15), protecting the community from error and heresy.

Teaching directed at women should be intentional and, when necessary, corrective. Many traditional practices need to be challenged and redeemed through an educational process that can bring clarity about Christian identity and offer guidance from Scripture for the dilemmas of everyday life. The gospel is sufficient to answer the vital questions of women. According to John 10:10, Jesus came to bring life in abundance. By breaking down the cultural barriers of his time, Jesus demonstrated the central place that women occupy in the heart of God, whether in the dialogue with the Samaritan woman at the well, in the instruction of the sisters Martha and Mary, or in the healing of the woman with the issue of blood.

An analysis of the practices and tensions among Christian women reveals that superficial evangelisation is insufficient to consolidate a genuine faith. When theology does not dialogue with fears and cultural traditions, rites and myths remain as the real refuge in moments of crisis, generating a nominal or syncretic Christianity. The effectiveness of woman-to-woman counselling, exemplified in the case of family planning, demonstrates that women's discipleship is not just a secondary activity of the church, but a strategic vehicle for cultural transformation. In order for God's sovereignty to be understood not as a biological fatalism, but as a responsibility for the management of life, the theological formation of these women must be elevated. This requires:

Exegetical depth: Teaching that challenges the local view of the world, offering the protection of Christ as superior to traditional rituals.

Academic training: Investment in formal theological education for women, enabling them to articulate the faith in ways relevant to intimate and family dilemmas.

Practical contextualisation: Discipleship that does not ignore the issues of health, motherhood, and tradition, but redeems them from fear through the vision of Scripture.

In this way, through teachings that penetrate the deepest layers of belief, it will be possible to form true disciples of Christ, capable of leading a change of values that is both biblically faithful and culturally transformative.

Thus, it is essential to emphasise that for there to be effective work among Angolan Christian women it will be necessary for male ecclesiastical leadership to validate existential crises, no longer treating them with disdain but with theological and biblical acceptance. The effectiveness of the mission to teach the word of God will be measured by the transition from fear to trust in Christ, When the void left by the abandonment of cultural rituals is filled by a living Christian life and a deep understanding of God's sovereignty and sufficiency, Angolan women will finally experience the fullness of their freedom and the life in abundance that only Christ Jesus can give.

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