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Reimagining Salvation and Sin through the Lens of Power and Weakness for the African Context: a Theological and Contextual Analysis

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of Christianity in Africa presents a theological paradox: a continent characterised by vibrant faith while simultaneously plagued by systemic violence, corruption, and poverty. To address this dichotomy, this paper argues for a reimagining of the Christian doctrines of salvation (soteriology) and sin (hamartiology) through the lens of power and weakness within the African context. Drawing upon the African cosmological worldview, the philosophy of Ubuntu, and the Christus Victor motif, this article examines how traditional African pursuits of spiritual and physical power intersect with the biblical theology of the cross. By redefining sin as a communal fracture and the abuse of power, and salvation as holistic deliverance, the paper proposes that the gospel subverts conventional notions of dominance. Ultimately, it asserts that God's power, made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9), offers a prophetic witness that challenges both Neo-Pentecostal triumphalism and socio-political oppression, fostering a transformative political theology for Africa.

Introduction

Christian social reflection in Africa must begin with what theologian Katongole (2011) describes as a 'disturbing observation': the continent is defined by the competing images of churches and coffins. This stark reality captures the central paradox of contemporary African reality. On one hand, the

demographic centre of global Christianity has decisively shifted to sub-Saharan Africa, a region experiencing astonishing church growth, vibrant worship, and a pervasive public display of faith. On the other hand, this same region is beset by the persistent 'coffins' of civil war, political corruption, systemic poverty, and social unrest. Katongole (2011) notes that between 1994 and 2003, over nine million of the world's thirteen million conflict-related deaths occurred in sub-Saharan Africa. This grim reality compels a critical theological inquiry: What difference does Christianity make in the face of such profound distress?

In this article I argue that the dissonance between Africa's growing faith and its lived socio-political turmoil stems, in part, from a theological disconnect. Foundational Christian doctrines, specifically salvation (soteriology) and sin (hamartiology), have often been imported through Western missionary paradigms that individualise sin and spiritualise salvation (Harold 2019:3–7; 2024:119-130). Such frameworks fail to adequately address the communal, structural, and cosmic dimensions of African life and its inherent anxieties. The result is a faith that may offer personal solace but often lacks the theological resources to confront the systemic forces that produce the "coffins." As Katongole (2011) poignantly asks, if the church represents hope and the socio-political systems represent tragedy, how do we probe the complex relationship between the world of churches and the world of coffins?

To bridge this gap, this paper proposes a reimagining of salvation and sin through a lens uniquely suited to the African context: the dialectic of power and weakness. In Africa, these are not merely abstract theological categories; they are existential realities that dictate survival, social harmony, and spiritual security, as traditional African cosmologies envision a universe animated by spiritual forces, where power is actively sought for protection and flourishing. Weakness is feared as a state of vulnerability to malevolent entities and misfortune (Boaheng 2023:12–18). This worldview shapes how African Christians interpret the gospel, often seeking a 'power encounter' that promises victory over the forces of darkness.

In this article, I further argue that a robust evangelical African theology must engage this indigenous understanding of power and weakness, not simply to baptise it, but to show how the gospel both fulfils and subverts it. By integrating the communal ethic of Ubuntu, the holistic nature of African

soteriology, and a nuanced reading of the Pauline theology of the cross, I will demonstrate how the gospel relates to and transforms the African understanding of power. Sin will be reframed as a relational fracture and the abuse of power, while salvation will be presented as a holistic deliverance that culminates in the *Christus Victor* motif. However, this victory is not one of triumphalist dominance but, paradoxically, is achieved through the 'weakness' of the cross. Ultimately, this theological reframing offers a prophetic witness that embraces vulnerability as a conduit for divine grace, challenging both the excesses of Neo-Pentecostal prosperity gospels and the oppressive political structures that plague the continent.

The original contribution of this article lies in bringing four theological perspectives, namely African cosmological accounts of power, Ubuntu's relational anthropology, the *Christus Victor* motif, and Paul's theology of power perfected in weakness, into a single constructive framework for African hamartiology, soteriology, and public theology. Although these ideas have been discussed separately, insufficient attention has been given to how their integration can simultaneously affirm African concerns about spiritual power and protection while challenging triumphalism, authoritarian leadership, and socio-political domination. The article therefore argues that sin should be understood as the personal, ecclesial, and structural abuse of power that fractures communal personhood. In contrast, salvation is God's holistic restoration of persons, relationships, communities, and creation. Crucially, Christ's victory is interpreted through the weakness of the cross, thereby presenting divine power not as coercive dominance but as sacrificial, restorative, and life-giving power. This synthesis provides a contextual evangelical foundation for the African church's prophetic witness against corruption, poverty, violence, spiritual abuse, and other practices that efface human dignity.

The African Worldview of Power and Weakness: A Foundational Matrix

Any attempt to construct a contextual theology for Africa must begin with a deep appreciation of the continent's indigenous intellectual and spiritual heritage. The concepts of power and weakness are central to this heritage, forming a foundational matrix through which reality is interpreted. This matrix

comprises at least two major, interconnected strands: the cosmological pursuit of spiritual power and the philosophical-ethical understanding of communal power embodied in Ubuntu.

Cosmology and the Pursuit of Spiritual Power

To understand how salvation and sin are perceived in many parts of Africa, one must first understand the traditional African worldview, which posits a dynamic and interconnected cosmos. African cosmologies, while diverse, generally recognise two intertwined spheres of existence: the visible, physical world and the invisible, spiritual realm that is not a distant, abstract heaven but a vibrant, ever-present reality populated by a hierarchy of beings: the Supreme Being (God), ancestors, divinities, and a multitude of other spirit powers, both benevolent and malevolent (Boaheng 2023; Mbiti 1980). Human existence is therefore understood as a continuous navigation of these forces, a delicate balancing act to maintain harmony and secure the well-being of all living beings.

Within this framework, power is understood as a vital force, a life-energy necessary to secure health, wealth, fertility, and, crucially, protection against evil, as observed by Boaheng (2023) in his study of the Akan people of Ghana. This entrenched worldview causes many to live in perpetual fear of evil spirits, witchcraft, and curses that can negatively affect their lives; consequently, power is not an abstract good but a pragmatic necessity for survival. It is how one overcomes the inherent weaknesses and vulnerabilities of the human condition in what is often perceived as a hostile spiritual environment. Weakness, conversely, is therefore not merely a physical or moral failing but a dangerous depletion of this vital force, rendering an individual or community susceptible to misfortune, disease, death, and spiritual attack.

The transition from African Traditional Religion (ATR) to Christianity has not eradicated this deep-seated cosmological anxiety. In fact, for many African Christians, the gospel is appealing precisely because it is seen as a more potent source of spiritual power. This has fuelled the explosive growth of neo-Pentecostal and charismatic movements across the continent, which emphasise ‘power encounters’, spiritual warfare, and deliverance from demonic oppression (Kgatle & Frahm-Arp 2022). Prophets and pastors are often revered as mediators of this divine power, capable of breaking

generational curses and securing supernatural breakthroughs. While this focus on power resonates deeply with the traditional worldview, it also carries the risk of distortion, leading to a 'theology of glory' that prioritises triumphalism and overlooks the biblical emphasis on suffering and weakness.

Ubuntu: Communal Power and Human Fragility

While Western cosmology emphasises a spiritual and often individualistic pursuit of power, African philosophy offers a profound social and ethical corrective through the concept of Ubuntu. Rooted in the Bantu languages of southern Africa, Ubuntu is a complex and rich philosophy of personhood encapsulated in the maxim '*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*' ('a person is a person through other persons') (Mpetsheni 2019; Tutu 2000). It posits a relational form of personhood where individual identity and well-being are inextricably linked to the community.

From the perspective of Ubuntu, true human power and excellence (humaneness) are not found in individual dominance, autonomy, or material accumulation but in interconnectedness, compassion, hospitality, and the promotion of communal harmony. Ogude (2019) explains that Ubuntu imposes a moral obligation to prioritise the well-being of others, recognising that one's own humanity is fostered and affirmed in relation to other people. This stands in stark contrast to the Cartesian 'I think, therefore I am', which grounds identity in individual consciousness. Ubuntu proposes, 'I am because we are'.

This philosophy radically redefines weakness. Within an Ubuntu framework, human fragility is not a defect to be despised or overcome, but an intrinsic and essential part of the human condition that necessitates mutual dependence and care. Mokoena (2025) observes that African culture embraces our humanness. Our fragility is not a weakness but part of us. It is this shared vulnerability that binds the community together in a web of mutual responsibility. Therefore, power in the African social ethic is inherently communal; it is the collective strength derived from solidarity, consensus-building, and restorative justice. Weakness, in this sense, is isolation, individualism, selfishness, and the severing of the communal bonds that sustain life. To lack Ubuntu is to lack human excellence, to be less than fully human.

The dual lenses of cosmology and Ubuntu create a productive tension. The former highlights a pragmatic desire for power to overcome existential threats, while the latter grounds power in communal well-being and ethical responsibility. A credible African Christian theology must hold these two in creative dialogue, showing how the gospel addresses the deep-seated need for spiritual security without sacrificing the communal ethic that is the bedrock of African social life.

Reimagining Sin: Relational Fracture and the Abuse of Power

A contextualised understanding of sin (hamartiology) is crucial for addressing the African paradox. Traditional Western theological formulations, heavily influenced by Augustinian thought and forensic models of atonement[1], have often defined sin primarily as an individual transgression against divine law, a legal debt owed to God. While not biblically incorrect, this emphasis can feel abstract and disconnected from the communal and structural realities of African life. Reimagining sin through the lens of power, weakness, and the African worldview reveals it to be a profoundly relational and systemic reality. Such a perspective challenges conventional Western forensic notions by critiquing their focus on individual guilt, which can obscure the ways that systems of domination undermine solidarity and justice (Delport & Lephakga 2016: 6). Rather than viewing wrongdoing as a matter of personal failure alone, the African approach highlights the importance of power relations and communal fragility, interpreting acts of exploitation as disruptions to the collective fabric rather than isolated moral lapses (Conradie 2006).

Sin as Ukunxaxha*: Communal Breakdown and the Effacement of Personhood*

In African theological thought, sin is commonly understood as a breach in communal and interpersonal relationships, setting it apart from Western approaches that tend to view sin as an individual infraction against divine law (Knoetze 2020: 5). This viewpoint shifts attention from personal guilt to the well-being of the community, interpreting sin as a shared breakdown that is evident in broader patterns of oppression and diminishing human connection

[1] For a more in-depth study on atonement within evangelicalism see Michael Horton (2020) *Five Views on the Extent of Atonement.*

(Gobodo-Madikizela, Bubenzer, and Oelofsen 2019: 123). Therefore, sin is less about breaking an abstract rule and more about disrupting a concrete relationship. Mpetsheni (2019:101-104), in his work on Ubuntu as a soteriological ethic, explores the concept of sin through the isiXhosa term *ukunxaxha*. This term means 'missing the mark' or, more vividly, deviating from the path of communal harmony and wholeness. Sin is a breakdown of the social order; it is any action, attitude, or system that diminishes another person's life force, violates their dignity, or disrupts the delicate equilibrium of the community. This aligns with the broader African understanding of evil as that which destroys life, while good is that which enhances it.

When sin is viewed through the dialectic of power and weakness, it becomes evident that sin is fundamentally the abuse of power against the weak. It is the powerful using their strength, be it physical, economic, political, or spiritual, to exploit, oppress, or diminish the vulnerable. Mpetsheni (2019) describes this as the 'effacement of *Umntu*' (personhood). Actions like selfishness, greed, corruption, and violence are sinful not just because they are morally wrong in the abstract, but because they actively dehumanise others and tear the fabric of Ubuntu. This communal understanding of sin bridges the gap between personal morality and social justice, making it directly relevant to the contemporary African socio-political landscape, where the abuse of power is a daily reality for millions.

Structural Sin: The Legacy of Power Abused

A reimagined African hamartiology must also grapple with the reality of structural sin. The continent's history is a testament to the devastating consequences of systemic abuses of power. The transatlantic slave trade, colonialism, and the apartheid regime in South Africa were not merely collections of individual sinful acts; they were sinful systems that institutionalised the effacement of African personhood on a massive scale (Katongole 2011). These historical injustices created enduring structures of inequality and trauma that continue to shape the continent today. Post-colonial governance failures, marked by what Katongole (2011) calls the legacy of 'King Leopold's Ghost', represent a continuation of this structural sin, where national elites often replicate the exploitative patterns of their former colonial masters.

Endemic corruption in public office is a particularly glaring modern manifestation of structural sin. Defined as the misuse of public power for private profit, corruption is a profound relational fracture that perpetuates poverty, undermines development, and erodes public trust (Coetzer & Snell 2013:31–35). When a government official diverts funds meant for a hospital or school, it is not just a financial crime; it is an act of *ukunxaxha* that denies life and flourishing to the most vulnerable members of the community. Prophetic theologians in Africa have increasingly identified corruption as a primary moral and spiritual crisis that the church must confront (Ishaya 2017; de Wet 2014). Building upon these frameworks, an analysis of religious complacency in the face of widespread poverty and corruption in Africa reveals how the instrumentalisation of religion by some leaders can exacerbate socio-economic disparities, despite the continent's profound religiosity (Agbiji & Swart 2015:15). This highlights the urgent need for deliberate strategic interventions by religious institutions to transition from mere pulpit criticism to active anti-corruption crusades and comprehensive accountability strategies (Orogun & Pillay 2021:7). This necessitates an examination of how ecclesial leadership, particularly within sub-Saharan Africa, often grapples with maintaining public trust amidst perceptions of corruption driven by financial greed and an inability to critically distance itself from neoliberal ideologies (Hewitt 2017:115–118) including evaluating the historical trajectory of capitalism in Africa, which has frequently prioritised profit over equitable development, thereby contributing to inequality and systemic underdevelopment despite abundant natural resources (Koskey et al 2025:17–18). Indeed, African theological discourse has, at times, faced criticism for its delayed engagement with political theology and its overemphasis on cultural liberation rather than direct advocacy for social justice and integral human development (Iheanacho 2021:10). However, recent initiatives by bodies such as the Zimbabwean Catholic Bishops' Conference demonstrate a renewed prophetic mission, directly addressing corruption and advocating for national cohesion amidst political instability (Iheanacho 2022). This emerging trend underscores a critical shift towards an intensified engagement with issues of governance and ethical leadership, thereby challenging frameworks that have historically legitimised corruption (Kretzschmar 2020: 2).

The Sacralisation of Power: Sin within the Church

The abuse of power is not limited to the secular realm; it has deeply and tragically infiltrated the church, the very institution called to be a sign of God's kingdom. The rise of neo-Pentecostalism, while bringing spiritual vitality to many, has in some circles been accompanied by the sacralisation of human authority. Charismatic leaders are sometimes elevated to a status beyond critique; their words treated as divine oracles. This concentration of unchecked spiritual authority creates a fertile ground for abuse.

Scholars like Kgatle and Frahm-Arp (2022:2-7) have documented the harrowing reality of spiritual and sexual abuse of vulnerable congregants by powerful church leaders. In their analysis of the public trial of pastor Timothy Omotoso, they highlight how discourses of faith and spiritual authority can be manipulated to silence victims and protect abusers. In these instances, the pursuit of spiritual power becomes a tool for domination, exploitation, and control rather than for service and empowerment. This represents a profound distortion of the Christian gospel and a grave communal sin; a betrayal of the trust placed in the church as a place of refuge and healing. It is a stark reminder that the human propensity to abuse power is a universal temptation, and the church is not immune.

Reimagining Salvation: Holistic Deliverance and *Christus Victor*

Just as sin in the African context is comprehensive and communal, so too must the understanding of salvation (soteriology) be. A gospel that offers only a spiritualised, otherworldly salvation is inadequate for a continent where the threats to life are immediate, tangible, and multi-faceted. African Christianity, in its most authentic expressions, has always intuited this, understanding salvation as a holistic deliverance that addresses the whole person in their communal and cosmic context.

Salvation as Total Deliverance: Beyond the Spiritualised Gospel

Pioneering African theologians like John Mbiti have long argued that for African Christians, salvation is not merely a future, eschatological deliverance from hell, but a present, tangible rescue from all factors that constrain and confine human flourishing. Adelakun (2011:25-27), reflecting on Mbiti's work, notes

that African Christians understand salvation as 'total deliverance, not from sin alone, but from all misfortunes'. This encompasses physical healing from disease, economic provision in the face of poverty, social restoration from alienation, and spiritual deliverance from the oppressive powers of witchcraft and evil spirits.

This holistic expectation is not a departure from biblical teaching but a recovery of its breadth. The Greek term for salvation, *soteria*, and its verb form, *sozo*, carry a range of meanings in the New Testament, including being rescued from physical danger, being healed from sickness, and being preserved from destruction, in addition to the more common theological meaning of being saved from sin and its eternal consequences (Adelakun 2011:25–27). In a continent where poverty, disease, and violence are ubiquitous, the African emphasis on a salvation that touches every aspect of life is a faithful response to the biblical promise of abundant life (John 10:10). It addresses the African believer's acute awareness of human weakness and vulnerability in the face of overwhelming cosmic and socio-economic powers.

The Christus Victor *Motif: A Resonant Atonement Model*

To effectively relate the gospel to the African pursuit of power and protection, theologians have increasingly found the *Christus Victor* model of the atonement to be particularly resonant. First articulated systematically by Gustaf Aulén, this model, which was dominant in the early church, presents the work of Christ on the cross not primarily as a legal transaction (penal substitution) or a moral example (moral influence), but as a cosmic battle. In this divine drama, Christ confronts and defeats Satan, evil spirits, and the powers of sin and death that hold humanity in bondage (Aulén 1965).

This motif speaks directly to African cosmological anxiety. Boaheng (2023:24-29) has powerfully contextualised this model for the Akan people of Ghana, coining the term *Nkunimdie* (victory) Christology. He argues that for Akan Christians, who live with a persistent fear of malevolent spiritual forces, the message that Christ has won a decisive victory over these powers is the heart of the gospel. The cross is the scene of this triumphant victory, where the forces of darkness are disarmed (Colossians 2:15). This *Nkunimdie* Christology empowers African Christians to discontinue their syncretistic reliance on

traditional priests, amulets, and rituals for protection, and to place their complete and sole trust in Christ's victorious atonement.

In this framework, salvation is understood as a definitive transfer of allegiance and citizenship. It is a movement from the kingdom of darkness, characterised by fear and vulnerability, into the kingdom of light, characterised by divine security and belonging (Magezi & Magezi, 2016:1–2). This soteriological model affirms the reality of the spiritual powers that populate the African cosmos but declares them decisively defeated and subjugated by the superior power of Christ. It provides a robust theological foundation for the deliverance ministries central to African Pentecostalism, while grounding them in the finished work of the cross.

The Gospel's Subversion: Power Perfected in Weakness

While the *Christus Victor* motif powerfully addresses the African need for spiritual victory, it carries an inherent danger. If not carefully balanced by other biblical themes, it can devolve into a superficial triumphalism, a 'theology of glory 'that mirrors the world's obsession with dominance and strength. The biblical gospel, however, contains a radical and subversive core: the theology of the cross, which declares that God's ultimate power is revealed and perfected in weakness.

The Theology of the Cross versus Prosperity Triumphalism

The danger of an unbalanced *Christus Victor* model is most evident in the excesses of the neo-Pentecostal prosperity gospel. This theology often equates divine favour with material wealth, physical health, and worldly success, treating weakness, poverty, and suffering not as part of the fallen human condition, but as signs of a lack of faith, personal sin, or demonic oppression (Heuser 2016; Smith 2021). This creates a spiritual meritocracy where the 'strong' are blessed and the 'weak' are blamed for their own suffering. It is a theology that, in its worst forms, baptises materialism and offers a crown without a cross.

The biblical gospel, particularly as articulated by the Apostle Paul, radically subverts this human understanding of power. In 2 Corinthians 12:9, Paul recounts his plea for God to remove a 'thorn in my flesh'. The divine response is not a demonstration of overwhelming power, but a profound theological

revelation: ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness’. Paul’s conclusion is equally revolutionary: ‘Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.’ Shawa (2024:80-86) argues that Paul’s theology presents a triadic formula where the experience of weakness is a prerequisite for experiencing God’s grace and the power of the resurrected Christ.

The incarnation, life, and crucifixion of Jesus are the ultimate embodiment of this principle. The cross, a symbol of Roman imperial power and ultimate human degradation, is transformed into the site of God's greatest victory. This victory is achieved not through coercive dominance, but through sacrificial love, non-violent resistance, and apparent defeat. The ‘scandal of the cross’ (1 Corinthians 1:23) lies precisely in this paradox: that God's wisdom appears as foolishness to the world, and his strength appears as weakness. Reframing spiritual power in African Christianity, considering this scandal, is a critical theological task. It requires acknowledging that suffering and fragility are not necessarily indicators of spiritual failure or divine displeasure. Instead, human weakness can become the very channel through which the grace and power of the resurrected Christ are most profoundly experienced. This paradigm shift is crucial for a continent intimately acquainted with suffering; it offers a theology where the marginalised, the poor, and the broken are not at the periphery but at the very centre of God's redemptive work.

Prophetic Witness in Weakness: A New Political Theology

Embracing a theology of weakness has profound implications for the church's public and political role in Africa. If sin is the abuse of power and salvation is found in the God who identifies with the weak, then the church’s mission cannot be a quest for worldly power or political hegemony. Instead, it must be a prophetic witness enacted from a position of solidarity with the vulnerable.

Katongole (2011, 2017), a leading voice in articulating this new political theology, argues that post-colonial African states have largely failed to deliver genuine transformation and that the church's hope lies not in aligning with dominant political narratives but in cultivating ‘new stories’ of hope from the grassroots. He points to examples of peacemakers like Bishop Paride Taban in South Sudan and Maggy Barankitse in Burundi, who operate from a place of

vulnerability and lamentation to build communities of reconciliation amid violence. For Katongole, authentic prophetic witness in Africa requires a 'prophetic solidarity' with the weak and a 'hopeful imagination' born from lament, not from cheap optimism or triumphalist declarations.

African women's theology, pioneered by scholars like Oduyoye, provides another powerful example of this prophetic witness in weakness. Oduyoye has consistently challenged the patriarchal power structures within both traditional African culture and the institutional church, which have historically marginalised and silenced women's voices and experiences (Headley 2023:160–165). Her work is a theological 'insurrection of the subjugated', insisting that the experiences of those deemed 'weak' are essential for a complete and authentic understanding of God. By redefining Christian leadership not as dominance but as servanthood and 'foot-washing' (Mark 10:44-45), Oduyoye and the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians demonstrate that true Christian power is exercised through care, nurture, and the relentless pursuit of communal equity (Gathogo 2010). This directly counters the oppressive use of authority, whether in the home, the church, or the state, and embodies the subversive power of the gospel.

Conclusion: A Transformative Theology for a Distressed Continent

Reimagining salvation and sin in the African context are not merely an academic exercise; it is an urgent pastoral and political necessity. In this paper, I argued that such a reimagining must begin with a deep and respectful engagement with the continent's indigenous understandings of power and weakness. The traditional cosmological drive to seek power as a defence against life's vulnerabilities finds a resonant answer in the *Christus Victor* model of salvation, which proclaims Christ's decisive victory over all malevolent forces. Simultaneously, the philosophy of Ubuntu provides a crucial ethical framework, reminding us that true strength lies in communal interdependence and that sin is fundamentally the abuse of power that fractures community.

This article therefore makes a significant theological contribution by integrating the relational worldview of African cosmology and Ubuntu with the themes of

Christus Victor and Paul's theology of weakness proposing a public theology that directly confronts authoritarian tendencies in church leadership. By redefining vulnerability as a space where divine power is revealed, the model addresses issues arising from the centralisation of pastoral authority and the misinterpretations caused by prosperity theology. By anchoring the formation of ministers in this self-giving, or kenotic, model shifts ecclesial leadership from an emphasis on personal control to a focus on communal service, reflecting the deep relational bonds found in Ubuntu philosophy (Mashau & Kgatle, 2019: 5). This perspective may therefore reshape both preaching and discipleship, encouraging open dialogue and practical engagement with the real-life challenges faced by African communities (Nanthambwe, 2024:9).

This approach suggests that viewing *Christus Victor* through the perspective of Pauline weakness disrupts the fragmented and individualistic systems prevalent in modern governance, restoring a sense of communal wholeness. Such a shift enables faith communities to move past surface-level acts of charity, fostering a transformative ministry (*diakonia*) that tackles the root causes of exclusion and marginalisation. By situating this theological vision within the unique realities of African public life, the church surpasses Western, individual-centred frameworks and collectively addresses social and political challenges as a strong, united body (Nanthambwe & Magezi, 2024). This intentional realignment of Christian mission encourages the church to take on a 'practical-critical 'stance, therefore helping to prioritise the needs of marginalised groups within society (Dames, 2017: 8).

Thus, the gospel does not merely fulfil the African desire for power; it radically redefines and subverts it. Through the theology of the cross, Christianity makes the scandalous declaration that God's ultimate power is manifested in the weakness, suffering, and sacrificial love of Christ. This is the critical corrective to the triumphalist tendencies of prosperity theology and the sacralisation of abusive leadership within the church. It challenges the notion that weakness is a sign of divine disfavour and instead presents it as the locus of divine grace.

For the African church, embracing this paradox calls for a new mode of being in the world: a prophetic witness in weakness. This involves a conscious rejection of the quest for worldly dominance and a deliberate commitment to solidarity with the marginalised, the poor, and the victims of injustice. It means

lamenting the systemic sins of corruption and violence rather than offering premature declarations of victory. It requires fostering communities of Ubuntu where the vulnerable are protected, the weak are empowered, and leadership is defined by service. By embodying this subversive, cross-shaped power, African Christianity can move beyond the paradox of churches and coffins, offering a truly transformative political and spiritual theology that brings genuine healing, justice, and holistic salvation to a distressed but hopeful continent. The contribution of this study is therefore both doctrinal and public-theological. By integrating African cosmology, Ubuntu, *Christus Victor*, and Pauline cruciformity, it proposes a theology in which salvation answers the African search for deliverance while transforming the very meaning of power.

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