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# Formation of good Christian conscience: A link between professed faith and praxis in Africa

## ABSTRACT

*The congruency of professed Christian faith with its corresponding conscience is critical for the church to embody the servanthood of Christ that would rid Africans of poverty and hegemonic vices (Verster 2022:59). However, according to Boesak (2005:39), Africa has enfeebled public conscience. Meanwhile the church is accused of practising the “wrong type of Christianity” typified by dualistic, escapist, pietistic, and ecclesiastic tendencies (Van der Watt 2003:53-54). In addition, the church is allegedly practising false neutrality, theology of disinterest, and passivity on matters affecting respective African communities (Botha & Makofane 2019:90; Fiorenza 1988:4). Using data collected from literature review, this article hermeneutically explores the possibilities of forming a theocentric conscience for actualising the church’s embodiment of a servanthood that would aid social transformation in African contexts. It proposes a formation that facilitates shifts from disinterest to interest; false neutrality to active participation; complacency to principled conscience, as well as dependence and begging syndrome to self-reliance.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The theocentric and life-transforming nature of the Christian faith makes the church a source of hope for Africa. Sadly, Galgalo (2012:5-6) describes Christianity in Africa as a stranger within, with the paradox of growing vibrantly, yet shallow and superficial. Christianity in Africa

is said to lack theological and spiritual depth for fostering life-improving services which reflect new life in the triune God, by rejecting all forms of corruption, striving to eradicate poverty. The religious numerical dominance in Africa is expected to be converted into a practical force for transforming its communities, by ridding them of all forms of abuses, corruption, violence, and hegemonic practices. This contrast directly challenges levels and the formation of conscience in the church. It shows that the church scuffles to own and apply Christ-rooted values in ever-changing historical and cultural situations (Chuka 2018:103). The views expressed above indicate the need for forming a good Christian conscience.

Although the matter has been debated from various perspectives, theological scholars share a common view that conscience is a vital driver of decisions, decision-making processes, emotions, and consequential action. This suggests that good Christian conscience guides decisions, decision-making processes, emotions, and corresponding action emulating Christ, the servant of the world. However, there are risks or distracters to doing the known good. In view of this, Chuka (2018:103) raises a serious statement that knowing the good to be done is not enough because doing the “known good” requires motivation. This article explores challenges the church in Africa faces in its attempt to form and practise a good and well-motivated Christian conscience capable of maximising its transforming impact in African communities. It proposes the formation of a good and well-motivated Christian conscience that takes faith from merely professing to Christocentric praxis for the transformation of African contexts. The author opines that attaining a Christocentric praxis requires shifts from disinterest to interest; false neutrality to active participation; complacency to principled conscience, as well as dependence and begging syndrome to self-reliance.

## 2. UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE

The debate on conscience has evolved over the years from being the means of keeping the purity of spirituality to God-centred integrity of the heart, the governing factors of decision-making and life experience, and self-predisposition to live and act in a particular way.

Sheldon (1902:381) describes conscience as “the law of one’s own being” towards spirituality. Lee (2019:615) claims that John Calvin framed anthropology by linking knowledge of God to human reasoning, with the latter deemed to have originally been designed for accessing the former. He believed that, even after the fall, God still illuminates human reasoning, endowing it with sufficient knowledge for moral discernment. Christian conscience, in this instance, may be understood as a Holy Spirit-illuminated

human reasoning towards the knowledge and experience of God. Sheldon (1902:381) suggests that the exaction of conscience keeps a person's spiritual nature untarnished. The untarnished spiritual nature posits conscience as the Holy Spirit's illuminated law of one's being functioning as self-regulation for the maintenance of unadulterated spirituality.

Boesak (2005:214) defines conscience as the integrity of the heart, with a sense of God's justice being an additional witness out of awareness that the sovereignty of the triune God permeates every sphere of life. Christian conscience is viewed as a state of being God-conscious at all times, in all places, and life endeavours. Although likely to be mistaken for a mystical view, the concept counters the dualistic approach to Christian faith practice of compartmentalising life by being godly at church and otherwise at home, school, work, and in business places. It embodies a theological understanding that life, in its integral whole, should be lived for, in, and with God. It also upholds the concept that life in its entirety is supposed to be vocatively lived as self-predisposition to God and his service (Chuka 2018:91).

Vithoukias and Muresanu (2014:104) claim that "conscience and consciousness are part of a system of information governing human experience and decision-making process". Conscience is allied to decision-making, life experience, emotional feelings, and quality of action. Decisions and decision-making processes are mainly influenced by the constituted system of information gathered through human senses and life experiences. This system of information determines ways of monitoring and assessing situations for regulating the quality of decision, life experience, and action. As a theocentric experiential faith and way of life, Christianity informs decision-making processes. Of course, action-oriented decisions play a critical role in the practice of Christian faith. Decisions and actions are in proportion to the stored information in the mind. Therefore, in Christian conscience and consciousness, the gospel and the teachings about the life of the kingdom of God internally stored in the human mind become part of the regulatory system in the process of making decisions, expressing emotions, and faith praxis. Christian conscience leads to God-honouring decision-making for meaningful practice of faith in contexts.

Chuka (2018:91) links conscience to morality, where moral conduct is understood as a person's self-predisposition to live and act according to the conscience possessed. Christian conscience implies predisposition of personal moral judgment, decision-making, and practical life towards Christian faith with its theocentric virtues, ethos, values, beliefs, and praxis. The formation of a good Christian conscience facilitates the internal process, by learning and assimilating biblical values, virtues, and beliefs about the kingdom of God as part of the acceptable guide for living life among the extrapolating forces. It

aids Christian vocation, resulting in self-gifting and self-donation to the praxis of love, justice, care, integrity, and good stewardship over God's creation (Venter 2005:340). In this article, the phrase "internal procession" is used to emphasise the importance of internalising biblical teachings, values, virtues, beliefs, and ethos under the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

### 3. PAUL AND THE CONCEPT OF GOOD CONSCIENCE

Paul's idea of conscience builds on the ancient Greek concept with its psychological and moral aspects. In the ancient Greek world, conscience was understood to be a phenomenon or immediate motion, logical meaning, critical ability, action, composite cognitive function, and self-awareness (Mantzanas 2020:66). It was understood as a cognitive perception based on self-awareness and pantheism, directly associated with respect, order, modesty, and punishment, determination of actions as either good or evil (Mantzanas 2020:66). Above all, pantheism is based on the view that the gods who are the source and focal point of conscience fill all things. Conscience under pantheism concept was a personal reason for fulfilling the moral obligation to the gods, oneself, and the community, by choosing to do good deeds and avoid evil acts.

Paul uses *syneidesis* (conscience) in the context of the ancient Greek pantheism concept of divine-centred conscience with a view that the triune God is the source and focal point of moral excellence. He theocentrically associates conscience with words such as "seared" (1 Tm. 4:2), "weak" (1 Cor. 8:12), "confirmation" (Rm. 9:1), "witness" (Rm. 2:15), "corrupt" (Tt. 1:15), "clear" (2 Tm. 1:3), and "good" (1 Tm. 1:5, 19). Conscience indicates a new shared identity and life under the gracious salvific acts of God in Jesus Christ. In expressing new life of accountability to God, the creator and redeemer in Christ Jesus, conscience signifies personal or corporate introspection.

In 1 Timothy 1:5 and 19, the word "conscience" is accompanied by the adjective "good". Good conscience, alongside a pure heart, and a sincere faith seem to be the source of the commanded unconditional agape kind of love (1 Tm. 1:5). Timothy is entrusted with a charge to hold faith and good conscience (1 Tm. 1:19). This implies that claiming to have faith in God leads to a theocentric conscience for internalising and expressing unconditional love towards humanity and all creation. In this article, theocentric refers to a conscience that originates from and honours God through self-disposing to impacting respective contexts with godly love.

## 4. FORMATION OF GOOD CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE

The church exists pragmatically where its services, in response to contextual challenges, justify the relevance of its existence because diakonia is integral to its nature and mission, linking what the church is to what it does (WCC ACTalliance 2022:10). However, antagonism to the practice of good Christian conscience in Africa is real. It originates from internal or external factors.

### 4.1 Internal influences of conscience formation

Chuka (2018:90) depicts conscience as a human, inherent, natural moral capacity or endowed commands and admonitions which align acts to desired morality. By inherent, Chuka implies an inborn internally implanted conscience. For example, Psalm 51:5 speaks of being sinful from conception. Such views raise questions. At what stage of human life development is conscience awakened? Does the environment play a role in the formation of conscience? It is undeniable that there are both internal and external influences in conscience formation.

### 4.2 External conscience formation

In this article, external refers to external factors influencing the formation of a person's conscience. These consist of a person's environment such as family, culture, and other external issues contributing to the nature of the conscience formed. Chuka (2018: 103) adds that the ever-changing historical and cultural situation affects the conscience formed. Vithoukas and Muresanu (2014:104) suggest that conscience is externally formed as the brain feeds on data gathered through the senses of touch, hearing, sight, smell, and taste. The received conscience-forming data is internally processed through imagination and emotion, judged by reasoning, where it is either accepted or rejected. It is finally stored in the reservoir of memory.

The environment such as culture, politics, religion, and economy play a key role in conscience formation (Vithoukas & Muresanu 2014:105). Besides conscience being an inherent moral disposition, Chuka (2018:89) also speaks of Christian conscience. In a world of religious pluralism, Christian is one among several other forms of religious consciences. Christian conscience refers to Christian beliefs and teachings being its nurturing environment. Such conscience is a product of internalised Christian values, beliefs, and conceptual systems influencing Christocentric decisions, decision-making processes, and service. The formation of Christian conscience is a process of transmitting theocentric knowledge that empowers individual reflections and passion for Christocentric services aimed at transforming adverse social settings.

Chuka (2018:93) views the formation of Christian conscience as a complex of anthropocentric (human-centred) and theocentric (God-centred). Anthropocentric implies the role human beings play in the formation of a good conscience, by passing Christocentric values to one another. The formation of Christian conscience is anthropocentric, because it is also done among human beings in their contexts for the benefit of the community and its environment. Meanwhile, theocentric refers to the formation of Christian conscience illuminated by God. Christianity is, by nature, a theocentric faith strongly upholding the belief that it takes God to graciously inspire change of human will from unbelief to belief. The believer's response is interpreted as simply human intellect and will cooperating with or yielding to divine grace (Puthanangady *et al.* 2013:287-188). Therefore, the word "illumination" stresses the point that God enlightens human conscience through human agents. However, while Chuka (2018:102) seriously admits the formed good Christian conscience, it needs motivation for "the known good" to be done. Other pressures compel Christians to act against their conscience. Although motivation is highlighted as a precursor to "doing good", Chuka does not state its meaning clearly.

## 5. THE NEED FOR GOOD CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

Sheldon (1902:360) advances the view that conscience was the crowning feature of evolution. Historically, conscience has been connected to phases of social or spiritual life and the development of political institutions. It is also closely associated with the rise of religious consciousness and the growth of the sympathy aspect of human nature. It is assumed that, through conscience, humanity has grown in reasonable and religious sensitivity to fellow human beings and the value of preserving ecology.

A number of reasons trigger the need for the formation of a good Christian conscience in Africa. For example, Agbiji and Swart (2015:1) base the need for Christian conscience on the church's potential in contributing to the moral, sociopolitical, and economic transformation of Africa. The church is thereby urged to emerge from false neutrality and the theology of disinterest on internal and external forces or practices hindering the progress or well-being of Africa and Africans (Botha & Makofane 2019:90; Fiorenza 1988:4). This suggests that good Christian conscience is a catalyst for transforming context.

The numerical dominance of Christianity in the sub-Saharan region should increase Christians' self-gifting or self-dedication to services of love, justice, care, integrity, and good stewardship over God's creation. More efforts need to be made in improving levels of converting Christian faith into a force for the

transformation of African communities. For example, although highly religious statistically, the vast majority of African countries are ranked among highly corrupt nations on the world corruption index (Fagbadebo 2019:21). The numerical advantage of Christianity should consequently raise responsible citizens whose interaction with social realities would be based on Christian virtues, ethos, and values (Freeks 2022:1) as the “light of the world” and “the salt of the earth” (Mt. 5:13-16). Galgalo (2012:5-6) sadly observes that the vibrantly growing Christianity in Africa is shallow, superficial, and lacking spiritual and theological depth.

This suggests the deepening of theology and spirituality for the church, in order to resist internal and external forces depriving Africa of peace, harmony, and exploration of its God-given potential. The process of deepening theology and spirituality may require the church to avoid false neutrality or theology of disinterest on internal and external forces or practices hindering progress, development, or well-being of Africa and Africans (Botha & Makofane 2019:90; Fiorenza 1988:4). In this article, the use of “internal and external” acknowledges that retrogressive forces at work in Africa come from both outside and within or among Africans. In terms of external force, Africa has historically suffered the slave trade, colonialism, and brainwashing into demeaning itself, its way of life, and technology. Africa was made to believe that civilisation is escaping Africanism and embracing Europeanism.

Despite its countries being politically self-governing, Africa has consciously and unconsciously grown its own hegemonic and exploitative imperialists who use their position of influence to injure Africa and fellow Africans. These home-grown individuals and structures with hegemonic habits perpetrate oppression, abuse power and authority, and exhibit deprivation of integrity at both national and family levels. At household level, issues of gender-based violence and domination, depriving the space for equity and equality, remain sources of concern in African society. At the national level, Africa has raised dictators and leaders involved in corrupt practices. In some instances, tribalism and racial domination have been witnessed in Africa. At the religious level, Agbiji and Swart (2015:7) record a very unfortunate ordeal, where leaders were bribed into the complacency of supporting tyranny and the tyrannical ambition of political leaders. Through such bribes, church leaders are lured to advocate for political tyrannies at the expense of the poor, the oppressed, and the victimised. Bribing of leaders is possible especially with the allegation that churches in Africa suffer from dependency syndrome and are notoriously known for begging (Mashau 2020:49).

To curb bribery among church leaders, the formation of a well-motivated good Christian conscience capable of counteracting both internal and external forces at work in all levels and forms of African societies is a necessity. Through

the formation of a good and well-motivated Christian conscience, the church is expected to internalise, uphold, and promote theocentric values, virtues, beliefs, and ethos for the growth and development of African communities. This requires a serious consideration of the formation of a deep, compelling, and good Christian conscience so that professed faith is congruent with acts of faith in Christ, vivified through values of love, justice, and integrity.

Speaking from the Nigerian context, Chuka (2018:89) conjures up three points to justify the need for a Christian conscience. First, Christian conscience is a way of responding to the callous upsurge of relentless, religiously inspired terrorism against Christianity. Secondly, Christian conscience is for measuring the authentic Christian personality. It seems to suggest that Christian conscience is a mark of identity for the Christian faith. Thirdly, it is defending the call to an enduring system of justice for evolving a common community living within the pluralist body polity. Christian conscience is for the cohesion of harmonious co-existence in pluralities causing human conflicts.

Ekena (2017:i) asserts that formation of Christian conscience is a pastoral strategy from below, capable of renewing moral imagination and reawakening the moral endowment inherent in every human being for inverting human actions based on blind choices capable of causing immense human suffering and loss of life. The phrase “from below” suggests that Christian conscience is not an imposition by the top layer of the hierarchy on those considered to be at the bottom. Since the church is composed of people who are gathered in an atmosphere of teaching, learning from, and challenging each other to grow and go out to serve (Everist 2002:13-18), it means that Christian conscience is formed communally and collectively.

Christian conscience formation in Africa is necessary, because the church struggles to live out the message of servanthood (Verster 2022:59). It is alleged that the church is practising a “wrong type of Christianity” characterised by problems of a dualistic, escapist, pietistic, and ecclesiastic approach (Van der Watt 2003:53-54). Mashau (2020:49-51) adds that Christianity in Africa has generally reflected denominationalism, lack of contextualisation, dependency syndrome, consumerism, spiritual blindness with the inability to self-critique, and self-correction. He further cites traits of marginalising, dominating, and relegating women to the kitchen and childbearing. Chuka (2018:103) observes that the church struggles to own and apply Christ-rooted values in ever-changing historical and cultural Africa. The church is lagging behind the pace of historical and cultural change taking place in Africa. The need for the formation of a Christian conscience is deepened further, especially with the accusation that some religious leaders have, at times, been bribed into supporting tyranny or tyrannical political ambition (Agbiji & Swart 2015:7).



The concerns raised above show that, even if the church knows the content of the Christian faith, it struggles to apply it. The gap between knowing the contents of the Christian faith, on the one hand, and its being owned and applied, on the other, is a clear indicator of a weak Christian conscience or the practice of wrong Christianity. The problems identified by Van der Watt and Chuka render the church ineffective, as it degenerates to passivity, pedestrianism, or alienation. The Christian conscience is not strong enough to challenge, stand, or fight against the power patterns of sin in Africa; hence, the relegation to a dualistic, escapist, pietistic, and ecclesiastic approach to faith praxis.

Boesak (2005:39) calls for restoration of the enfeebled public conscience for the actualisation of the African renaissance, also termed “a search of the African soul”. The term “enfeebled” suggests that the public conscience is there, but it is weak. It further shows that apartheid in South Africa, human trafficking, and all forms of abuse and suppression in Africa are products of weakened public consciences. Based on Thabo Mbeki, Boesak (2005:42, 56) is of the view that the renewal of the Africa renaissance is a call to rebel against “the tyrants and the dictators, those who steal the public wealth, against the ordinary criminals who murder, rape, and rob”. It is about conducting a war against poverty. As a way of participating in the actualisation of the African Renaissance, the church is called upon to adopt the language of poverty eradication as opposed to charity works. The restoration of conscience is about resuscitating the conscience that has been weakened by selfish or self-centred concepts of human-to-human domination and intentions of benefiting oneself at the expense of others. Such a noble cause requires collaborative efforts of Africa, Africans, and all the relevant institutions in fighting against vices that privilege a few, hinder progress, and deprive the vast majority of Africans of the right to fullness of life and livelihood. This means that a good and strong Christian conscience promotes justice, equity, and equality for all humanity as well as the practice of responsible stewardship over all God’s creation. It champions the cause for the well-being of humanity and ecology.

## 6. THE CHALLENGE OF UPHOLDING GOOD CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE IN AFRICA

Realising the need for a Christian conscience does not guarantee its practicality because doing the “known good” requires motivation (Chuka 2018:102). Christians face counter forces, environments, or circumstances, rendering the upholding of good conscience a risky undertaking. Assuming that all Christians, who act inconsistently with their faith, lack good conscience or are morally bankrupt is *ultra vires*. Acting in congruency with the good

conscience demands motivation, especially in dilemma occasioned by a domination of hegemonic, oppressive, and alienating structures at work in societies (Dykstra 1996:252-253; Chuka 2018:102). Often, these forces have more compelling power than the stance to uphold good conscience, thereby inducing false neutrality, theology of disinterest, and passivity in the church (Botha & Makofane 2019:90; Fiorenza 1988:4).

The other challenge Christians in Africa face is dual allegiance and the antagonistic dichotomy between Christianity and indigenous cultural beliefs, causing a crush of consciences (Dei 2019:15; Moyo 2023:16). As will be explained later, the cultural or religious environment contributes to the formation of conscience. Therefore, dual allegiance and dichotomy mean dual consciences. The dual allegiance or dichotomy occurs because both Christian and African cultural beliefs seem appealing, although they sometimes antagonise each other. In this antagonism of culture and Christian faith, African Christians find themselves in a dilemma of consciences. For example, some Christians in Africa still offer sacrifices to their ancestors or participate in African religious events because of *ubuntu*-influenced communal solidarity or need for survival, especially in moments of crisis (Pali 2014:145; Moyo 2023:183). The church is tasked with keeping a healthy tension between *ubuntu*, with its emphasis on communal solidarity, and gospel-based conscience, which may be against some of Africa's communally accepted practices. In such dilemmas of conflicting demands of Christianity and *ubuntu*, choosing the conscience to align with becomes a challenge.

As highlighted by other scholars such as Mbiti (1977:36), *Ubuntu* as a human philosophy is good but needs to be illuminated by the gospel, in order to maximise its benefits. In this instance, it remains the vocation of the church, as the light of the world and salt of the earth (Mt. 5:13-16), to not only stand, but also fight against all the power structures, patterns, and traditions jeopardising the flourishing of the relationship with God and the well-being of humanity at work within *ubuntu* and other exotic systems. Amid the highlighted challenges, the formation of a motivated and good Christian conscience is a necessity for the church to act in congruency with its calling and remain resolute in God's mission among social challenges. Ekeke and Ekpenyong (2011:145, 149) cite love as the principle of Christian action, the person of Christ Jesus, and the Holy Spirit – the energising power of a Christian's life – as a motivation for doing "the known good". The motivation of the church is in the assured companionship of God in the calling and mandate to serve among the power structures contradicting the exercise of a good Christian conscience. The formation of a good and motivated Christian conscience is a necessity for the church to fulfil its calling of serving God for the transformation of the African context.

## 7. FORMING A GOOD CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE IN AFRICA

This article accounts for the risks of being consistent with Christian conscience in Africa. It shows that attaining the idealised Africa will never be easy and will not come automatically. There will be challenges, setbacks, and reversals along the way which cannot be discounted. However, success will be assured if Africans build upon past achievements, capitalise on emerging opportunities, and draw upon their strong cultural and spiritual values (African Union Commission 2015:45). Inspiration can be drawn from considering that only Africans are better positioned to transform Africa for themselves, using transformational approaches forged and driven by Africans (African Union Commission 2015:15). This article also emphasises that the church in Africa is placed in Africa with its spiritual, social, economic, environmental, political, and cultural challenges and potentials in biodiversity by God's design as an agent of transformation. If all Africans, including the church, shy away from confronting internal and external hegemonic or oppressive structures out of fear, then the problem will not only be perpetrated, but also increasingly deepen its roots to the destruction of Africa. Unfortunately, Africans have already had a fair share of the destruction; one would only fear for posterity if such oppressive structures were allowed to continue deepening their roots. This article proposes that the church in Africa has to take the formation of conscience seriously. It suggests the following shifts in the formation of Christian conscience for the church in Africa to fulfil its mandate of serving God for social transformation.

### 7.1 Shift from conscience of disinterest to interest

The overemphasis on the ecclesiastical approach has led the church to be more introvert than extrovert. Hence, it is less interested or disinterested in social, political, economic, health, and many other issues affecting the community. To fulfil its diaconal obligation to society, the church is expected to shift from disinterest to being interested in ridding Africa of the retrogressive internal and external forces or practices affecting the progress, development, or well-being of Africa and Africans (Botha & Makofane 2019:90; Fiorenza 1988:4). It is, therefore, inevitable to talk about the formation of a Christian conscience that can contribute to the transformation of contexts. The formation of conscience should facilitate a shift from the "wrong type of Christianity" enforcing dualistic, escapist, pietistic, and ecclesiastical tendencies to having an interest in issues affecting communities.

## 7.2 Shift from conscience of false neutrality to active participation

According to Agbiji and Swart (2015:8), the “God-talk” by religious leaders weakens the resolve to rise against retrogressive systems, unjust political and economic systems in Africa, for they encourage prayer void of responsible action. Mashau (2020:51) observes that the

church in Africa remains silent when atrocities such as racism, gender-based violence, marginalisation of women and children, and all other forms of injustices against humanity occur.

The silence may be out of disinterest or false neutrality because of fear or pressure from the powerful perpetrator of social ills. In false neutrality, the church may know its obligations to stand with the oppressed and those in human-inflicted crises, but chooses to play it safe by not challenging the power structure perpetrating ravaging social vices in communities. If the church is to accomplish its mandate in the *Missio Dei*, it is essential to avoid being part of or passively observing hegemonic structures perpetrating human-induced crisis. The church has to be actively involved in fighting evil systems, structures, and practices.

## 7.3 Shift from complacency to principled conscience

Drozdek (2018:98-99) ranks conscience, categorised into universal and individual, above human intellect, will, and emotions. Universal conscience is described as the core of humanness shared by all human beings across time and culture from the beginning of human life. Universal conscience is further considered an immutable moral principle used to assess thoughts and actions. It is segmented into antecedent conscience as prior assessment and consequent conscience as an aftermath assessment. Individual conscience, also known as human disposition, is governed by personal moral principles, influenced by the social and natural environment and one’s inner dimension (Drozdek 2018:99). The individual conscience is malleable, changeable, formed by inner and outer influences, including universal conscience (Drozdek 2018:105). Meanwhile, the actualisation of universal conscience depends on the inner dimension of the individual conscience. This shows that these two levels of conscience are interdependent. Unless Christian principles, values, attitudes, and ethos at universal conscience are assimilated into the personal inner dimensions, Christian conscience remains impracticable.

Needless to say, Christian conscience at either universal or individual level faces different forms of enticements or temptations inducing compromise on Christocentric principles, values, and ethos. Such pressures can, unfortunately, lead to irrational or rational compromise, causing complacency

(Kgatla 2017:2). These enticements are a way to personal elevation, avoiding pain or both in some instances. Although it forms a focal point for controlling, monitoring, evaluating, and executing actions, conscience may be influenced and modified by natural human instincts for “survival” and the “perpetuation of survival” (Vithoukas & Muresanu 2014:105).

In this article, the word “complacency” means compromising or enticed to settle for less than Christocentric principles, values, and ethos. Although universal Christian conscience may be formed, congregants may not internalise it and make it part of their natural instinct for survival at the individual level. In fact, the awareness of the required Christian way of life to some extent induces some congregants to hypocritical behaviour where they live differently in and out of church gatherings. The phrase “rational compromise” refers to complacency after a guided thinking process, assessment of the situation, and weighing all options. Meanwhile the term “irrational” acknowledges that some of the decisions to betray the Christian conscience are made intuitively or instinctively in the face of enticement or pending threat. Both rational and irrational complacency happen in dilemmas influenced by a sense of anticipated punishment or incentives, rewards, and quest for safety (Kgatla 2017:2). Compromise may stem from natural human instincts for “survival” or “perpetuation of survival” (Vithoukas & Muresanu 2014:105).

The shift from complacency to formation of principled Christian conscience reinforces consistency with the Christocentric life of services in adverse environments. The word “principled” does not imply irrational or reckless rigidity, but it is used with respect to the need for survival and its perpetuation, while being mindful that the church is an agent in the transforming mission of God. It stresses the importance of the church taking up the responsibility of breaking cycles of human-induced crises in Africa. Therefore, Christian conscience should be a focal point for self-control, monitoring, evaluating, and Christocentric service so that the church remains in the *Missio Dei* trajectory. Briefly, the word “principled” is used to counter unfortunate ordeals such as religious leaders being bribed or compelled into complacency of supporting tyranny or tyrannical ambition (Agbiji & Swart 2015:7).

#### 7.4 Shift from dependence and begging syndrome to the conscience of self-reliance

Mashau (2020:49) describes the church in Africa as suffering from dependence syndrome and notoriously known for begging. This description portrays the church in Africa as lacking the essentials for running its own affairs and struggling to be self-reliant or supporting. The aspect of being notoriously known for begging potentially exposes the church to being taken advantage of by its possible funders or supporters. This vulnerability is a catalyst for

bribing church leaders (Mashau 2020:49). The church, in its service of Christian formation, should uproot the problem of dependence and begging syndrome aggressively and inculcate practices of self-reliance. This entails the use of a Christian formation process to facilitate the transition from the syndrome of dependence and begging to self-reliance that drives productivity for sustainable development.

## 8. CONCLUSION

Christian conscience is the internalised theocentric “law of one’s own being” or integrity of the heart essential for maintaining spirituality of a Christocentric life and servanthood in various African contexts. Such a view of Christian conscience is vital for regulating Christocentric decisions, decision-making processes, life experiences, conduct, and services for the transformation of Africa. Building on Paul’s use of the Greek word *syneidesis*, especially with its reference to the triune God as the source and focal point of moral excellence, suggests that Christian conscience guides the church to remain in the *Missio Dei* trajectory. It also explores the need for good Christian conscience in the African context where the church, as a messenger of new life in Christ, presents new hope for communities in Africa affected by human-induced crises. Although this article highlights the need for good Christian conscience in Africa, it also acknowledges that the same crisis poses a huge challenge for upholding good Christian conscience. This article proposes four shifts in the formation of a good Christian conscience in the African church: from conscience of disinterest to interest; from conscience of false neutrality to active participation, from complacency to principled conscience and, from dependence and begging syndrome to the conscience of self-reliance.

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