

CHAPTER 5

THE SPIRIT WORLD: HERMENEUTICAL ISSUES

5.1 THE SPIRIT WORLD: JEWISH/BIBLICAL AND AFRICAN

The affinities between the Christian faith and the primal traditions have for some time now been pointed out by scholars who are interested in the study of the spirit world (see Turner 1977; Bediako 1995:94; Ferdinando 1996:103). Woven through this thesis, is a thread of evidence which is indicative of this special relationship. Turner's (1977:32) argument is that, in the history of the spread of Christianity, its major extensions have been solely into societies with primal religious systems. According to Turner, among these societies are the Mediterranean world of the early Christian centuries, the tribal peoples of Northern and Western Europe and also the primal societies of Africa, the Pacific and parts of Asia.

African peoples, as in the Mediterranean communities in the first-century world, believe in the existence of the spirit world (see Loubser 2003:225). Mugambi (1989:56) relates that in Africa, the world was believed to be peopled or inhabited by beings both visible and invisible. Among visible beings and things were human beings, animals - both domestic and wild - and plants both valuable and dangerous or poisonous for human life. The invisible beings included deities, divinities and ancestors. There was, and still is, belief that there is an interplay between the invisible and visible worlds of the one universe. Thus, the commonalities in the spirit world between the first-century New Testament communities and those of Africa, no matter how remote they may appear to be, make possible a dialogue of some kind to occur. It is against this background that this study has been undertaken.

In Jewish literature of the post-exilic or intertestamental period, there is evidence that there was a proliferation in the belief in demons, spirits and powers of evil in the period leading to the New Testament (see Schäfer 1990). Even in the New Testament times, there are instances confirming the widespread practice of magic, for example, the two Jewish magicians - Simon Magus (Acts 8:9) and Bar-Jesus

or Elymas (Acts 13:6-12). Luke also writes about certain itinerant Jewish exorcists, who had added the name of Jesus to their repertoire of magical names (Acts 19:13-20). Contrary to Old Testament and official Jewish restrictions against the use of magic, many Jews throughout the Mediterranean world adopted and further developed these occult practices of their pagan neighbours.

The prevalence of the use of magic or amuletic materials among the Jews of the first century - something which is also evident among Africans - is symptomatic of pneumatic phobia. The contention would be that if there was no fear of harm resulting from the activities of malign spirits, there would be no reason to embark on elaborate apotropaic measures. In both first-century Jewish society and in the African continent, however, there appears to have been no doubt of the sovereignty of Yahweh (Jewish) or Supreme Being (African) over the world of spirits. Although Ferdinando (1996:122) may assert that the Supreme Being(s) in Africa is not sovereign, it is something that cannot be proved conclusively. Long before the arrival of missionaries, *uNkulunkulu*, *uThixo*, *Modimo*, *Mwari*, etc., was believed to be the ultimate in creation and over creation.

However, a noticeable difference between the African spirit world and that of the Jewish/biblical one is the role played by Satan. In the African spirit world, there is no idea that the spirits are controlled by a single over-arching being who is an opponent to the Supreme Being. In Jewish religious thought, the development of the idea of the devil, Satan, also known as the arch-enemy of God and in charge of the forces of evil, had grown to such a level that the Satan figure had been taken as reality in the New Testament times (see Rev 12:9). The development of the revelation of the Satan concept, and eventually the Satan figure, had become such a reality by the time of the New Testament, that Jesus never questioned or challenged it.

The belief that the forces of evil are marshalled by their leader, the devil, is no less illustrated by the Beelzebub controversy (Lk 11:14-22 par. Mt 12:22-37; Mk 3:14-22). In the episode, demons are portrayed as operating as part of the kingdom of Satan. The casting out of demons demonstrated a clash of kingdoms, namely that of God through Christ, and that of the devil. Jesus linked the demons' being cast out, to the defeat of Satan: "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning"

(Lk 10:18 NASB). Unlike what is generally understood in primal (African) societies concerning spirits, the New Testament sees the world of evil spirits as being highly organised. In the African spirit world, spirits appear disorganised and competitive.

In the African Traditional Religion, spirits, witches and sorcerers seem to be largely autonomous in their activities, whereas in the Bible, the operations even of supernatural beings hostile to God proceed only by his permission and within limitations and boundaries set by him, that is, God. This is shown clearly in the temptations of Job and Peter (see Job 1-2; Lk 22:31-32). In the New Testament, the sovereignty of God over Satan, the spirits of evil and their activities, is never called into question.

5.2 THE RELEVANCE OF LUKE-ACTS FOR THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

The two-volume work of Luke represents a transition of preaching the gospel to predominantly Jewish audiences to those of Gentile nations. In the book of Acts, Luke shows how a religious movement that started in Jerusalem - a city regarded by Jews as the centre of their faith and nation - ended up in Rome - the Gentile capital of the Roman Empire. The movement that started with Peter as a leading figure in the (Jewish) church in Jerusalem ended up with Paul - the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; 15:12; 1 Tim 2:7) - boldly preaching the kingdom of God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ in Rome (Acts 28:31). For Luke, the Christian faith is not a Jewish monopoly but for all nations (see Viljoen 2003:203). This is seen in the universality of Luke's message (see 3.4.3), which, among other things, is demonstrated by the fact that God "has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26). As Gentiles, Africans can share equally in the Christian faith as anyone else. Through faith in Jesus Christ they form part of the *ekklesia* that Paul and Luke talk about in Acts (see 3.5.5).

The fact that Luke has a special interest in the poor (see 3.4.1), the ostracised and the women (see 3.4.2), makes his writings relevant to the African continent, which is ravaged by abject poverty, political upheavals and wars. The message of hope that Luke offers to his readers of Christ being "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" (Lk. 1:32), cannot be overemphasised in Africa. The angelic proclamation of "peace on earth" (Lk 2:14; Acts 10:36), has never been so urgent in a continent prone to wars and rumours thereof.

Since the majority of church members in Africa are women, Luke's interest in the role played by women in the early church is of significance. Luke shows that women were active participants in the early church. They shared in the gift of salvation (Acts 16:14-15) and together with men they anticipated the gift of the Spirit. Luke also depicts women not just as mere followers, but as active supporters of the ministry of Jesus and his disciples (Lk 8:2-3). Luke's special focus on women signals hope for marginalised African women in general, and church women in particular (see the accounts of Elizabeth, Mary, Anna; cf Abogunrin 2000:11).

In the two-volume work of Luke, it is clear that his readers struggled with spirits so that there was a constant need for protective, magical or apotropaic measures. In the same way, Africa languishes under the yoke of the fear of spirits. Luke tells his audience that spirits, under the leadership and rulership of Satan, have been defeated by Christ. Luke introduces the devil very early in his gospel (4:1-13) as God's arch-enemy and as someone determined to hinder the ministry and mission of Christ. But, Luke also leaves his audience in no doubt that Satan, together with all his kingdom of spirits, has been overcome and disarmed by Christ (Lk 11:22; see 3.5.7.2).

Against the backdrop of problems facing Africa, it is important to begin to appreciate Luke's perspective on soteriology which is comprehensive (see 3.5.3). Luke does not see salvation as concerning only the soul and the hereafter; he sees salvation as also related to a person's body, health, victory over demonic powers, provision of daily needs and the security and total well-being of the individual and society (Viljoen 2003:206). According to Viljoen, the Jesus that would be meaningful, especially in the African context, is the one Luke proclaims as the all-conquering and all-sufficient Saviour who has broken into the domain of Satan and his demons. Furthermore, as far as Viljoen is concerned, the conquest of Satan and the kingdom of spirits by Christ, as presented by Luke, should not only be proclaimed but also applied in the life of the Christian community.

The comprehensive understanding of salvation in the writings of Luke can be applied to the African context for the benefit of the believers. Powell (192:6) rightfully describes that, "salvation in Luke-Acts means participation in the reign of God" (see 3.5.4) - the reign of God which is both present (Lk 11:20; 17:21) and a future

reality (Acts 22:18, 29-30). The participation in the reign of God, according to Viljoen (2003:205), may involve either the introduction of positive features (peace, blessing, eternal life - see 3.5.3) or the removal of negative ones (disease, demons, sin). In presenting salvation as participation in the reign of God, Luke makes no distinction between physical, spiritual or social aspects of salvation (Lk 5:23). God is concerned with the salvation of all aspects of human life (see Viljoen 2003:205). Anything that militates against the fullness of life, whether it be the bondage of sin, disease, demonic oppression, death, or social ostracisation, is challenged in the broadened concept of salvation in Luke-Acts. This understanding of salvation is not only what Africa needs, it is also an invitation that demands a response (Lk 9:23-26; see Bosch 1991:413).

5.3 THE QUESTION OF THE ANCESTORS

Although the issue of ancestors, and what the Bible says about it, requires a comprehensive inquiry, it is vital that we comment on it here, because it rightfully belongs to the study of the spirit world. Ferdinando (1996:122-123) correctly points out that in the Bible, there is near total absence of reference to interventions by the dead in the affairs of the living. In both the Old and the New Testaments, there is no mention of the dead taking the initiative to make contact with their living family members, neither to communicate, nor to harm, nor to bless. However, there are several scriptural passages that condemn, implicitly or explicitly, attempts by the living to contact the dead or the "living-dead" (a term preferred by Mitchell and Mbiti). In Israel, there was to be a total ban on anyone who "consults the dead" (Dt 18:11). One of the sins of Israel condemned by Isaiah, is that people tried to consult the dead: "When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people enquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?" (Isa 8:19).

Though the Bible is emphatic on its ban on consulting the dead, it does leave open the possibility that the dead may communicate with the living. In the well-known story of the 'witch' of Endor (1 Sam 28:3-25 - see 2.5.4 pp 90-92), the medium was surprised that Samuel actually was brought up from the dead. This witch was apparently completely overwhelmed by what seems to have been an utterly novel experience for her. The episode, however, does not tell us whether the bringing up

of Samuel was a demonic manifestation or whether God permitted the communication of the dead with the living. What is clear, though, is that the communication did take place. In the New Testament, we are told about Moses and Elijah (long dead) conversing with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. These may be unique cases within the corpus of biblical revelation, but they nevertheless show the possibility of the dead communicating with the living.

The struggle of the African with the idea of the veneration or mediation of the ancestors is both historical and universal. Craffert (1999:80) points out that, while in the Hebrew Bible there is a dissociating of the tombs and the dead from the cult of Yahweh, there is literary and archaeological evidence that God's people wrestled with the question of ancestors. Craffert tells that among the Jews there was a trend that acknowledged the presence of function occupied by ancestors in community affairs. The ancestors were a gateway to the divine and were considered a continuous influence in human affairs. Visiting the tombs and even making prayers there, was part of the trend. The early church also adopted this line of tradition from their faith ancestors. Christians visited the tombs of the saints and martyrs of the church and these became focal points for early Christian worship (Craffert 1999:81).

The cult of the dead, to a greater or lesser degree, still remains a bone of contention in the African church. There is a view that states that ancestors are demonic manifestations meant to derail the faithful (see Nyirongo 1997; Turaki 1999; Kato 1975). Another view holds that ancestors are co-mediators with Christ (see Kabasélé 1991:125-126; 1998:111-112; Setiloane 1976). Yet still, there are those who believe that the doctrine of the Communion of Saints can be a useful framework for incorporating African ideas about ancestors into Christian theology (see Fasholé-Luke 1974).

Admittedly, these are important considerations and contributions towards the complex issue of ancestral veneration. Of all the various theological positions adopted by scholars, it is the demonising of the ancestors that becomes problematic in the conveyance of the gospel in Africa. In the African traditional religions, ancestors were never considered demonic or as part of evil spirits. It is unfortunate that the negativity with which missionaries viewed the ancestors has predisposed some

African Christians to treat such a sensitive issue in a rather haphazard way. The labeling of the ancestors as demonic has caused serious damage to the cause of the gospel in Africa. What could have been more theologically correct is that as “Satan disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Cor 11:14), so the evil spirits can masquerade as ancestors to derail God’s people from the worship of the true God. But equating ancestors with evil spirits is untenable if viewed within the framework of the African traditional religio-cultural perspective.

The concept of the intermediary in Africa that was played by the ancestors in the past compares well with the Christian teaching of Christ’s mission of connecting humanity with God. But to suggest that ancestors continue to play a mediating function outside Christ or with Christ, appears to compromise the very unique mission of Christ. Biblically speaking, the mission of salvation and mediation does not seem to fall within the competence of ancestors. Even though Luke makes the ancestors of Christ immediately present through an elaborate genealogy (Lk 3:23-38), there is equally no doubt that Jesus is presented as someone who is given the throne of his ancestor, David, to rule a kingdom that shall have no end (Lk 1:32-33). His greatness, absolute uniqueness and highest nature of his divine Sonship are unparalleled. In his papal encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio* (5), Pope John Paul II reminds us that Christ is one universal mediator, the one Saviour of all and the only one able to reveal God and lead to God (cf. *Lausanne Covenant* 3; Acts 4:12).

5.4 WORLDVIEW

The omission or lack of interest in the African spirit world by the early missionaries who brought the gospel to Africa, has been ascribed, and rightly so, to problems relating to the worldview. Kraft (1989:87) has correctly observed that, whereas most people in the world are primarily concerned with the spirit and human world, westerners generally are almost exclusively concerned with how to conquer and manipulate the material world. Silviso (1994:103-104) attributes this mechanistic worldview to the onslaught of the Enlightenment with its resultant theological presuppositions (cf. Haikola 2003:764). The problem with the western worldview is that it virtually ignores the spirit world and, in the process, treats people, the universe and even God, as if they were machines. The danger of such a worldview is

that there is a desire to develop precise theological formulations and dependable rules of human behaviour, deriving from the belief that God and the people are like machines.

The influence of the Enlightenment and the resultant mechanistic worldview dealt biblical studies, especially those of the New Testament, a serious blow. As the vast majority of biblical scholars are outside the culture they are investigating, their outcomes tend to be rather *etic* than *emic*. The terms “emic” and “etic” can be explained as two different viewpoints from which one studies human behaviour: etic is a view from outside the system under study, and emic is a view from within the system under study (see Pike 1954; Pilch 1995:135). If biblical scholars and researchers do not use a comparative approach, they run the risk of interpreting ancient Mediterranean texts anachronistically and ethnocentrically. Pilch (1996:135) is quite correct in pointing out that western interpreters often make a mistake of trying to analyse ancient Middle Eastern persons with tools developed in the western culture. The unfortunate outcome is that the researcher transports this analysis to a culture foreign to his/hers and this makes his or her viewpoint an imposed etic.

This is exactly what has happened to the interpretation of the ancient Mediterranean texts by western scholars, theological or otherwise. Biblical texts relating about the supernatural, for example, spirit possession and exorcism, were analysed using western tools of evaluation. It is, therefore, no wonder that translators and exegetes have regularly imposed their western emic views as etic perspectives on native emic reports. Spirit possession and exorcism, instead of being interpreted within the socio-religious framework of the first-century Mediterranean persons as realities, they were explained in psychological terms.

It is rather obvious that in interpreting biblical texts, especially on spirit possession and exorcism, the highly supernaturalistic worldview of the New Testament that believes in the existence and activities of spirits, was superseded by a rational and scientific worldview of the West. In our investigation into the worldview of Luke-Acts, we have seen that the reality of the spirits and their activities is never questioned (see 3.5.7).

When the early missionaries came to Africa, they displayed a spirit-world denying attitude to their audience. In imposing this mechanistic worldview upon the spirit-sensitive communities of Africa, the missionaries were not alone but in cahoots with their colonial partners. The western worldview was not just spiritually communicated by missionaries; it was enforced politically and in some cases, militarily, as well. In many ecclesiastical situations, this resulted in African converts going to church on Sunday to serve the God of the missionaries, but during the week in the wake of existential crises, they (African Christians) would consult the shaman or other medicine- and spirit specialist. The perception was that the God of the missionaries could not handle hostile spirits or attacks of witchcraft and sorcery which torment people on a daily basis.

Much has been said about Bultmann's famous, if excruciatingly confusing, phrase, that one must demythologise myth. This led many New Testament scholars and researchers to question the historicity of some, if not all, supernatural occasions in the New Testament. Many biblical scholars still operate within the Bultmannian paradigm. What is often forgotten, though, is that demythologisation was Bultmann's way of contextualising a highly supernaturalistic worldview of the New Testament for a materialistic audience of the western world. But the uncritical transplanting of the 'demythologised' version of the gospel deprived African Christians of the holistic way in which Christ and the early Christians viewed and solved problems.

If Durkheim's (1995) classical definition of religion in which he emphasises that the function of religion is to constitute an order that makes reality understandable to the individual, or Einstein's (1934) suggestion that a human being has a need to organise the world in order to feel safe and secure, are to be believed as valid, then the mechanistic worldview of the western missionaries did not only miss the general function of religion to the spirit-sensitive communities of Africa, it also displayed lack of fidelity to biblical revelation, especially that of the New Testament which is very supernaturalistically oriented. Unfortunately it has taken western researchers (including biblical scholars) long to realise that science is one element in viewing the world and that it is no longer the sole element and perhaps not even the strongest element in building a worldview today because, as Haikola (2003:774-776) has observed, science, despite its successes and achievements in the modern world, is incomplete, relative and uncertain. Moreover, the imposition of the west-

ern (traditional Christian) interpretation of the New Testament, especially, has deprived African Christians and other Third World Christians (who happen to form a greater number of world Christian population in terms of demographics) an opportunity to equally participate in the shaping and ownership of the faith they so dearly cherish, as Gentile Christian communities did in the time of Luke.

5.5 THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND THE BIBLICAL SPIRIT WORLD

Whereas issues pertaining to the spirit world have eluded most New Testament scholars in the past, it is a welcome shift that contemporary historical Jesus scholars in North America have begun to show a great interest in the world of spirit (*kwelemimoya*) and manifestations thereof - exorcisms, healings, visions, etc., - that pervade the gospel narratives. In Great Britain, a similar orientation can be discerned from the work of Dunn (1975). The contribution of social sciences to New Testament scholarship in terms of the spirit world has been immensely helpful in that some supernatural phenomena in the New Testament, especially in the gospel narratives, that were explained in psychoanalytic or psychiatric terms in the past as mere multiple personality disorders, are being revisited and interpreted within the cultural understanding of the first-century Middle Eastern persons.

The purpose in doing this, according to Malina (2001:xi), is to present, from an area of cultural anthropology, some useful models that might aid in fathoming the social-system context of the behaviour of the people presented in the New Testament. Such an approach, in Malina's view, will certainly be of great value in making the New Testament intelligible (cf. Neufeld 1996; Neyrey 1998; DeMaris 2000). The purpose for using anthropological models in the New Testament study is to comprehend the documents in terms of the social systems in which they were originally proclaimed. The study of comparative studies, such as psychological anthropology and other anthropological disciplines is pertinent to biblical studies because most of the researchers investigating ancient Mediterranean texts like the New Testament, do so from outside the culture under study. This helps the researcher, to some extent of course, to avoid imposing his/her etic (e.g. western) interpretation on an otherwise emic (e.g. ancient Mediterranean) report.

The fullest use of anthropological models in historical research has been John Pilch's application of altered states of consciousness (see Pilch 1996). A wide range of conscious states that reasonably fall under the ASCs are, alterations in thinking, disturbed sense of time, loss of control, change in expression of emotions, change in bodily image, perceptual distortions, changes in meaning and significance assigned to experiences and perceptions, a sense of the ineffable, feelings of rejuvenation and hypersuggestibility (Ludwig 1968:77-83; DeMaris 2000:13). Bourguignon (1979) reports that a review of the data from a world sample of 488 societies showed that 87 percent of these have institutionalised forms of altered states. In the Circum-Mediterranean world, 80 per cent of the societies experience and use altered states of consciousness (ASCs). Even though both behaviours and beliefs show marked regional variation, in view of such a very high percentage of societies having altered states, it is quite clear that such behaviour is neither psychopathological nor a figment of scholarly imagination (see Zaretsky and Leone 1974:223). Societies lacking both the behaviours and the beliefs form a very small minority. In actual fact, a society may have trance and give it a different interpretation, or it may believe in spirit possession but label it as a cause of illness or some other alteration in capacity rather than in consciousness.

In understanding the spirit world, Bourguignon's report is useful because she looked at altered states globally. In doing so, she identified two major ways that human cultures understand altered states of consciousness (see Bourguignon 1973:13-23). The first way, trance corresponds to shamanism and involves the temporary absence of the soul or spirit from the body and travel to, and interaction with spirits, in an alternate realm (see Walsh 1993:742). The second, possession trance, involves temporary or permanent entry into a person or persons (Bourguignon 1979:261; cf. DeMaris 2000:14). In applying the model of shaman to Jesus, Pilch finds that the story of Jesus in the gospels matches the typical shamanic biography closely, a key feature of which is the entry into an altered state of consciousness to allow journey to, or contact with, another reality, namely, the spirit world (see Pilch 1995; 1996; 1998a).

The application of the model of altered states of consciousness to the gospel narratives may be relatively new and causing uneasiness among modern biblical schol-

arship about the use of such formal anthropological models, but such an approach will go a long way towards making New Testament studies intelligible to spirit-sensitive communities of Africa and elsewhere. Disciplines like anthropological psychology and models based on these social scientific research reports offer far more suitable tools for analysing the ancients (e.g. Mediterranean persons) in reliable, cross-cultural fashion (see Pilch 1996:138).

5.6 JESUS, THE EARLY CHURCH AND THE SPIRIT WORLD: LESSONS FOR THE CHURCH IN AFRICA

Jesus and the early church accepted the spirit world and its manifestations as real. There is no evidence that either Jesus or the early church was accommodating popular superstitions. Though the argument that the Jewish understanding of demonology was influenced to a rather large extent by the teachings of Zoroastrianism (Persia) during exile is a valid one, there is no evidence in the gospel narratives that Jesus challenged the Jewish understanding of the existence and activities of the devil and demons as not true. Instead, Jesus, in his public ministry engaged the devil (see Lk 4:1-12 par Mt 4:1-11; Mk 1:12-13; Fisher 2003:206). To Jesus, the phenomena associated with demons were as real as the sicknesses and physical infirmities which he cured or as the human, religious and political authorities who opposed him (see Yamauchi 1986:131f).

In the gospels, the demons are presented as spirits of superhuman strength that are impure and evil and in rebellion against God. In the Beelzebub controversy (Lk 11:14-26 par. Mt 12:22-32), it is clear that Jesus understood the demons as not working in an autonomous, independent and haphazard manner. But he understood them as acting under the direction of Satan and as part of his kingdom. Thus, Jesus viewed his enemy as a unified kingdom of evil which was hostile to him and his mission.

The gospels reveal the authority of Jesus over Satan and demons. The exorcisms were the victorious combat with the devil and his kingdom. The occasions of the casting out of demons were signalling the fact of the arrival and nearness of God's kingdom and a preparation for its coming in fullness. In the exorcisms performed by Christ, it becomes clear that God's immanence could not be doubted - as a

God who was concerned with the daily concerns of his people and creation. Though the exorcisms were not necessarily the final victory over evil, they signalled an effective anticipation of the eschatological events. The final overthrow and destruction of the devil and his spirits, is certain.

The remarkable thing is that Jesus never kept the authority he exercised over demons just for himself, but he also gave the same authority to his disciples (Lk 9:1). Furthermore, the disciples are not only given the authority of Christ over demons, but also the usage of the name of Jesus in the casting out of demons. Luke reports that the seventy disciples returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name” (Lk 10:17). In banishing the spirit of divination in the girl at Philippi, Paul said, “I charge you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her” (Acts 16:18). Luke also tells us that when the sons of Sceva, who were itinerant Jewish exorcists, tried to use the name of Jesus in their magical formula to exorcise demons, they were overpowered and embarrassed by the demoniac.

In the sequel to his gospel, Luke continues to relate that in the ‘absence’ of Jesus Christ, his disciples did not stop with the ministry of exorcism. Luke tells in Acts 5:16 that, “The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits and they were healed”. Later, in Acts 8:7 when Philip, the evangelist, not the apostle, went to Samaria, he preached and performed miracles: “For unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed, crying with a loud voice.”

As much as we need to acknowledge that the ministry of exorcism continued in the early church as recorded in Acts, there are other important aspects that are associated with exorcism that we must note. Christian exorcism is a ministry that should be carried out in the disciples’ obedience to, and relationship with God, and prayer. This comes out clearly in Jesus’ reply to his ineffective disciples after they had failed to exorcise a demon: “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer” (Mk 9:29). The addition of fasting to this verse in some ancient manuscripts, is indicative that it (fasting) was used as an accompaniment to prayer and this could be a reflection of liturgical practice in the early church done on serious occasions (cf. Acts 13:3).

In the gospel according to Matthew the issue of obedience in relation to exorcism, becomes pronounced: “‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many, mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers’” (Mt 7:22-23). Jesus does not question their exercise of prophecy or performance of exorcisms and other mighty works. But it appears that the people who are denied entry into the kingdom of heaven having done these things, did what they did not with the right attitude, nor out of obedience to God and dependence on him (cf. Ferguson 1984:16). When the seventy disciples came back rejoicing in their victory over demons, Jesus called their attention to the fact that their joy had to be based on the assurance that their names were written in heaven (Lk 9:20). In the gospels, it is clear that Jesus was effective because he was always in perfect submission to the will of the Father (cf. Jn 6:38). This complete obedience to the will of the Father is illustrated more clearly in the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness by the devil (Lk 4:1-13).

Something that cannot be emphasised enough in the ministry of exorcism, is the crucial role of the Holy Spirit. In the Beelzebub controversy, Jesus attributes his ability to cast out devils and to work miracles, to the presence of the Holy Spirit in him (see Lk 11:20 par. Mt 12:28), and the apostles after him, were equally convinced thereof (see Acts 10:38). Reading the Acts of the Apostles, we see very clearly how important healings, miracles and exorcisms were, in the infant church (see Cantalamessa 2003:196; Boer 1961). In the occasions of power encounters that we survey in the book of Acts in this thesis, it becomes clear that the Holy Spirit played a pivotal role in combating the forces of evil and the agents of the kingdom of darkness. In Acts 8, the encounter with Simon the sorcerer coincided with the coming of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas confront Elymas the magician after “being sent out by the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13:4). In Acts 16:6 the Holy Spirit forbade the missionaries to speak the word in Asia but instead, as we can deduce, led them through a dream to Macedonia (v. 9). While in Philippi, Paul and Silas cast out a spirit of divination from a slave girl which was obviously an indication of the presence of the Spirit in them. Paul, like Jesus, used a word in casting out the demon. In Acts 19, we are told that after the falling of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples in Ephesus and the embarrassment that befell the sons of Sceva, many of the believers came, confessed and divulged their magical practices.

When realising that their magical books or *Ephesian Letters* were not compatible with the requirements and the teachings of the gospel of Christ, they brought these books and burnt them in the sight of all. Apparently, after the young believers saw the extraordinary miracles God did by the hands of the Spirit-filled Paul, and also seeing diseases leaving sick bodies and the evil spirits coming out of them, it dawned on the believers that the split-level Christianity, or the dual faith they had hitherto adopted, fell short of God's standard. It is clear, therefore, that Luke rejects the use of divination (in the case of the Philippian slave-girl) and magic (in the cases of Simon Magus, Elymas the sorcerer and in Ephesus) in the life of the Christian community. Instead, he challenges them to use spiritual means, as opposed to magic (see 2.6.7.1 and 2.6.7.2; Eph 6:10-18; 2 Cor 10:3-6). Faith in the sufficiency of God's power is what is encouraged for Christian believers.

It is this last power encounter in Acts 19 that has a direct bearing on the church in Africa. When the disciples in Ephesus realised the power of the gospel they had believed in through the miracles of Paul, they repented of their magical practices and literally forsook their God-dishonouring deeds. There is enough inclination to assume that the magical practices they were involved in were good and of an apotropaic nature. Seeing that Ephesus was believed to be intensely populated with spiritual beings (see Eph 6), there is reason to believe that the Christian converts thought that their magical gadgets and *Ephesian Letters* could play as amuletic material over and above their salvation in Christ and the gift of the Holy spirit. When they saw the power of God in action, their fears of the invisible spirit world or attacks of demonic manifestations, dissipated. When the Ephesians realised what could be achieved in the name of the Lord Jesus, they repented and paid allegiance only to Christ, the Lord over the spirits. The result was a mighty renewal and outreach in the region. God's people throughout the centuries have had to come to the realisation that spiritual and biblical means of combating demons and attacks of witchcraft are more powerful than shaman-prescribed means.

5.7 DEMONISATION: A CRITIQUE

In this thesis, we have already seen, in the Jewish background studies to the New Testament, how the belief in demons proliferated. The Essenes called themselves the "sons of light" and indicated the majority as "sons of darkness", the "congregation of traitors", as people who "depart from the way, having transgressed the law

and violated the precept” (*CD* 1:13-20). The Essenes retell the whole history of Israel in terms of this cosmic war. Even in earliest times, they say, “the Prince of Light raised up Moses” (*CD* 5:18; cf. *I QM* 19:10-12) but the Evil One, here called Beliar, aroused opposition to Moses among his own people.

The demonisation of enemies was not just unique to them. In doing so, they shared traits with other Jewish groups, which in turn, resembled other communities in the first-century Mediterranean world. But this was acutely felt and believed among the Jewish people based on the belief that they had been peculiarly chosen by God to be his people. Anyone who was deemed not to follow dogmatic rules according to some particular group, was considered demonised.

Spiritual warfare between God and Satan, according to Pagels (1995:13), serves primarily to interpret human relationships - especially all-too-human conflict, in supernatural form. The figure of Satan becomes, among other things, a way of characterising one’s actual enemies as the embodiment of transcendent forces. Even for many readers of the gospels ever since the first century, the thematic opposition between God’s Spirit and Satan has vindicated Jesus’ followers and demonised their enemies. Surprisingly, even Jesus was demonised by members of the out-group (see *Jn* 7:20; 8:48). Jesus was also accused of casting out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons (see *Luke* 11:18-19). Even church leaders of the post-apostolic period continued with the theme of demonising dissidents within the Christian movement. They discerned in the dissidents the presence of Satan infiltrating among the most intimate enemies of all, that is, other Christians or as they called them, heretics.

As much as belief in the existence and activities of demons is valid biblical teaching, as this thesis shows, we would be economical with the truth if we were to say it is an arena devoid of problems. The first has already been mentioned, which is the demonisation of one’s enemies. It has caused irreparable rifts in congregations because some people would label an individual or a group as Satanic or demonic. But to be overly preoccupied with it is not only problematic in Christian congregations, it also affects the mission of the church in the area of the theology of religions. People outside the Christian faith, whether they be Moslems, Hindus, Jews, Buddhists, etc., are seen as demonic, instead of being embraced in the love of Christ as

objects of God's saving concern. There was a time when the African culture was wholly condemned as barbaric and diabolical. This attitude continues to bedevil the church's interaction and dialogue with believers in the African Traditional Religion.

Another problematic area with belief in the existence of demons, is that people tend to run away from personal responsibility and accountability. In moral lapses, people tend to say, "The devil (or demon) made me do it." In this thesis, we show that belief in the devil and demons does not mean abdication from personal responsibility, because God has created human beings as free moral agents (see Bostock 2003:328-329).

5.8 PASTORAL COUNSELLING

One of the problems with the early missionaries was to ignore issues related to witchcraft, sorcery and evil spirits. At most, the feeling was to pay less attention to these phenomena. The outcome has been that, two centuries down the line, the church in Africa still struggles with these issues. Even to this day, some pastors express uneasiness in dealing with these spirit-world phenomena. But we need to commend the fact that there are growing numbers of ministers across the spectrum who agree that these African realities should be faced rather than ignored, because such an omission in the church's missiological function, perpetuates the status quo in which African Christians find themselves involved in split-level Christianity. Instead of consulting mediums or medicine-specialists outside the ecclesiastical circles, African Christians need to be aware of the repertoire of spiritual tools that are available to every believer in Christ. Instead of holding on to magical practices in order to protect and fortify themselves, the Ephesian believers, upon seeing and hearing of the spiritual tools, decided to put their trust wholly in God. This is the challenge of church leaders in Africa: That Jesus Christ is Lord over hostile spirits and that he has come to liberate his people from whatever oppresses them, including fear of the spirit world. The Lucan community had to see and hear this from Paul, their apostolic leader. The God of the church who is the protector, provider and

shepherd of his people, and who revealed himself in Jesus, is alive in his Holy Spirit to take care of the needs of his people on a day-to-day basis. Albl (2002) reminds us that the healing of the sick in the Letter of James formed part of the health care system for the congregation.

5.9 DISCIPLESHIP

Adeyemo (1997:71) perhaps touches a sensitive, yet right, cord in pointing out that the church in Africa needs more discipleship than what church leaders realise. He defines discipleship as persuading people to forsake their ignorance, or indifference, or scepticism, or pride, or corruption or wickedness or any other vices, and to embrace Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord and to join the fellowship of his church. Discipleship is more than conversion; it is addition to the church through geometrical progression. Discipleship makes every believer responsible and reproductive.

Luke is at pains in showing us what happened after the Holy Spirit fell upon a group of disciples. On that day, several thousands received the word of God according to Luke. But Luke also tells us that those who received the word of God were baptised and they devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and fellowship (see Acts 2:41-42). There was a need to disciple the converts into the sound doctrine of their new faith. For Luke, Christian discipleship is portrayed, not only as the acceptance of a master's teaching, but as the identification of oneself with the master's way of life. Similarly, the area of the spirit world in Africa calls for intense and extensive discipleship. Africa is said to be experiencing one of the fastest growth rates in the church, but we must concern ourselves with qualitative growth as well.

5.10 TOWARDS A SPIRIT-WORLD AFFIRMING THEOLOGY

5.10.1 THEOLOGY OF THE INVISIBLE

Since Christian theology is still dominated by the North/Western paradigm which is largely scientific, there is a need for shifting the focus of theology to the needs of people of the South/Third World, whose thinking is still dominated by primal spiri-

tuality. Until the invisible world is taken seriously by those who minister the word in Africa, the split-level situation will remain with us for a long time in Africa. African Christians will continue to worship in churches on Sundays but during the week when they face crises, they will consult the shaman, diviners and mediums. In the face of the lack of theological response to issues of the spirit world, people will continue to respond in their usual traditional ways, no matter how unChristian these methods are. It is against this backdrop that Hiebert (1983) has written his article on *The Flaw of the Excluded Middle*, in which he points out that the western worldview has a blind spot that makes it difficult for many western missionaries to understand, let alone answer, problems related to spirits, ancestors, divination and astrology. A theology of the invisible must take seriously a trinitarian understanding of God who is continually involved in his creation by his providence, presence and power. Such a theology must also take seriously the influence of Satan and demons. In order to do that, Christian theology must rediscover its rich legacy in dealing with the spirit world from Christians of the early church, who boldly engaged the spirit world to the benefit of those who were coming to the faith. Christian theology, in making such a provision, will dissuade many African Christians in their attempt to deal with unseen powers through ritual means, magic or divination.

5.10.2 A HOLISTIC MESSAGE

For a western missionary to be able to address the spiritual needs of Africa, it will be necessary for him or her to detach him/herself from presuppositions, such as dualism, which sees everything in terms of secular and spiritual, profane and sacred. It is important to realise that in Africa, reality, is viewed holistically. Oduyoye (1985:11) reminds us that in Africa, spiritual needs are as important for the body as bodily needs are for the soul. There is no dichotomy of reality. Primal spirituality requires that the Christian message answers to the everyday needs of the people and not only on Sundays when people go to church. When considering the ministry of Jesus Christ, it is remarkable that he was concerned with the needs of the ordinary person. At primal spirituality level, the concern is for healing, deliverance from the demonic, protection from the invisible powers of this world. This obviously involves the need for power encounter. In our survey of Luke-Acts in this thesis, it has become clear that Jesus and the apostles after him never shirked from their responsibility in dealing with spirit-world related issues in their declaration of the

whole counsel of God for the whole creation. This is the heritage that modern Christians, especially those coming from the African continent, need to rediscover. The Christ of the New Testament is what Africa needs. Instead of just presenting dogmatic formulations and debates of the European past, Africa requires that a holistic gospel that addresses all the spheres and exigencies of life be given to its people. This will be a holistic liberation indeed. This is the comprehensive salvation that the Jesus of Luke-Acts offers.

5.10.3 CONTEXTUALISATION

The mandate of Christ to the church of reaching all nations with the gospel (see Lk 24:47; Acts 1:8 and parallels) places a responsibility on the church's shoulders to contextualise its message (see Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989). The task of the church is to make the message of Jesus Christ relevant to our age and to people of various worldviews, cultures and psychologies. The gospel is relevant to all ages, cultures and peoples but its communication must be contextualised in order for it to be experienced as the living message of God. This is what has been lacking in Africa. When early missionaries came to Africa, they imposed a western worldview and a spirituality that lacked a relevance in addressing African spiritual needs. The early missionaries were not anthropological experts and thus lacked context analysis which can become a very helpful tool if one is to serve the community as an interpreter of socio-religious events (see Mazibuko 2003: 209; cf. Ndlazi 2003:103f). The need to contextualise the gospel message is not just an African requirement; it is something that has occurred throughout the history of the Christian church. The challenge in contextualisation, however, remains a proposal that the gospel message needs to be presented in a scripturally sound and culturally viable manner.

5.10.4 AFRICAN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

The need to interpret the Bible from the perspective of the African experience, is gaining momentum among African scholars. Despite the many shortcomings of the early missionaries in their endeavour to bring the message of Jesus Christ to Africans, they succeeded at least in translating the Bible into African languages and teaching Africans to read it "with their own eyes" (Ukpong 1995). Whereas Afri-

cans were told by western-inclined missionaries that the miracles of Jesus and the early Church belonged to past history, in reading the Bible for themselves, Africans discovered a Jesus who healed the sick, made the lame walk and restored sight to the blind. In the Bible, the Africans discovered a Jesus who drove out demons from people and confronted the power of Satan. This is a spirituality that many African Christians are beginning to appropriate and actualise in their communities which the traditional church chose to ignore. Because this type of spirituality is “scratching where it itches” (Kraft 1979), it answers problems and concerns facing the African people on a daily basis, thus making the Christian faith attractive to many in sub-Saharan Africa today. Whereas in the past, biblical hermeneutics concerned itself with questions asked in the western world, it is now the task of African biblical hermeneutics to address itself to questions and concerns that Africans are asking on a daily basis. These questions, which come from a certain conceptual frame of reference, demand a new mode of reading the Bible that responds to that conceptual frame of reference (see West 2002; Dube 2002; Okure 2002:42). This is aptly put by Mugambi (2001:13) when he says that Africans need to reassert “the power of naming and interpreting our world”. Such an approach, though, is not just a return to a literal reading of the Bible, but it is a reading that would be critical in its own way, paying attention to the African socio-cultural concerns and problems (see Ukpong 1995:4; Kwenda 2002:151).

5.11 AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Since the study of the spirit world in the Bible and the African context is such a wide subject, it is unavoidable that in such a limited investigation like this one, other aspects would be left unaddressed. It is therefore the researcher’s pleasure in mentioning a few of these:

- (a) Seeing that this study focuses on the impact of evil spirits on the material world, it is obviously important that the effect of good spirits in the New Testament be investigated, especially in reference to the African context.
- (b) Belief in the spirit world as it unfolds in funerary rites among African Christians.
- (c) Ancestors in the light of the New Testament writings.

(d) Exorcism of places.

(e) The role of spirits in sex.