

**SPIRITS IN THE FIRST-CENTURY  
JEWISH WORLD, LUKE-ACTS AND  
IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT:  
AN ANALYSIS**

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1.1 THE BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

1.1.1 THE IMPERATIVE OF THEOLOGICAL RECONTEXTUALISATION

One of the major needs of 21st century theology is the hermeneutic of the 21st century millennium, perhaps more than any period of church history, is to re-evaluate the Christian message has been fully embraced by the majority of people who profess to be followers of Christ in the world. Since 1945, in the tradition of Korten (2001:10), world Christianity has experienced a massive shift of its geographic base as a focus from Europe and America to Africa, Asia and Latin America and the people of the southern hemisphere.

Such an observation is echoed by Mbiti (1965:10) who says "this is the challenge which modernity must face, as the focus of Christianity shifts away from the West towards areas, situations, cultures, contexts, traditions, languages and problems which are largely different from those which preoccupied or preoccupy the theological output of the church in the West over the 500 years of 'Christianity'". In the process of shift of the Christianity's centre of gravity in the modern world from the Northern continents to the South, Africa is playing a significant role in the resurgence of the faith. It is, therefore, important for African theologians to identify some of the challenges which a post-colonialist African church must now face as an important flag-bearer of Christianity in the new century" (Tutu, 1995:ix).



## SUMMARY

In many African traditional societies, the felt needs of people are usually met by the services of the shaman or other traditional medicine specialists. These needs vary and they could include the need for protection against witchcraft and evil spirits. Another need in Africa is for physical and psychological health. These needs are felt by many Africans inside and outside ecclesiastical structures. Despite centuries of western influence and teaching by missionaries, these felt needs have not gone away. The sensitivity to the spirit world and its impact on the human and material world still remains a firm belief in the African socio-spiritual reality.

In its missiological responsibilities in the past and now, the church in Africa continues to display a theological deficiency in addressing this vacuum in African spirituality. Consequently, many African Christians are trapped in the dual, two-tier or split-level Christianity. This shows itself in times of existential crises in which many committed and respectable African Christians revert to traditional religious practices as a means of meeting their spiritual needs, due to the church's inability to do so. This observed lack of traditional Christian theology and its irrelevancy to African life, has left many African Christians in a dilemma.

It is this lacuna in Christian theology and practice that the researcher seeks to address in this study. By analysing documents on spirits in the first-century Jewish world and the two-volume work of Luke-Acts, the researcher endeavours to show the relevance and possible appropriation of the New Testament message to African spiritual realities. This is based on the understanding that the world of the first-century Jews and other communities in the Mediterranean region at the time, has more in common with Africans than the extremely naturalistic, rationalistic and abstract-oriented worldview of the early western missionaries who initially brought the gospel to Africa. Central to the researcher's thesis, is the argument that, if early Christians, as exemplified by the Lucan audience, could respond to the fears, problems and realities of the spirit world by using God-ordained, spiritual and biblically acceptable means and not magical ways, African Christians, too, who find themselves in similar situations, can do the same. The contention in this study is that the rediscovery of the aspect of the spirit world of the New Testament message will go a long way towards resolving the problem of split-level Christianity in Africa. This task remains a theological imperative for New Testament scholarship in order for the church to present a holistic message to the masses of Africa and to demonstrate how the immanence of the Christian God in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, relates to the daily needs of spirit-sensitive Africans - a message that Luke tried so hard to convey to his readers in the first century.

### Key words:

- spirits
- possession
- demon
- exorcism
- magic
- Luke-Acts
- African Traditional Religion
- devil/Satan