

**The Spirit of God and the spirits of Africa: a  
dogmatological study from the vantage  
point of pneumatology**

**by**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The study of pneumatology is important and necessary in theology, and also in the church. What Christians have to know and understand about it must be taught clearly. The nature and work of the Spirit of God should be mastered by every believer in Jesus Christ. In this way, wrong concepts and teachings can be rejected by the Christian way of life, in the church especially in Africa.

It is very noticeable that Africans, in their traditional worldview are conscious of the existence of the Supreme Being, spirits, divinities, ancestral spirits and the spiritual world with its diversity.

Africans, Christians and non-Christians believe that around them there are invisible spiritual beings and because of this consciousness they are haunted by the wish to discover what is really going on in the invisible world of the spiritual realm.

Most Africans consider the existence of the ancestral spirits as a very important matter and they are in daily need to consult them about every event happening among them in their traditional context. In every event they believe there is always somebody, meaning a spirit, behind what is happening. A death or an accident cannot happen without having been caused by a spirit especially an ancestral spirit. The ancestral spirits are thought to be active in the lives of their living descendants on earth. Ancestral spirits are ambivalent in their relation with the living. They can bring good things to their descendants if they are well treated. They harm and molest them when they are angered by their descendants.

The fact that Africans have been confronted with the Gospel has had an

impact on the lives of Africans. We have to acknowledge that many things in the conduct of African culture have changed or are going to change in the practical lives of Africans. Although the Gospel has had an impact on the people in Africa, it is unfortunately observed that some Africans do not manifest real change.

Christian Africans, despite this encounter with the Christian faith, usually revert to traditional practices in case of hardships like accident, incurable diseases and barrenness, for example. The context of religious pluralism which Africans are experiencing, presents an open door to syncretism. Traditional practices are seriously against the biblical teaching and practices. Christians in the church are found (many times) to be involved in these traditional practices where they fear the attacks of their ancestral spirits or the misfortunes by other spirits.

The Spirit of God is active in the world and also in Africa. Christians have to rely on God and not on their ancestral spirits for the sustenance and support in different domains of life.

The solution to this on-going attitude of Africans to the spirits can only come from the Word of God. It is absolutely important to continue with the proclamation of the Gospel to Africans. This proclamation of the Word of God must be taken seriously by the church and Christians in Africa. It is only the message from the Bible that can free Africans from their belief in the ancestral spiritual world.

## **Key concepts**

### **Spirits**

### **Ancestral spirits**

**Spiritual beings**

**Spirit of man**

**Spirit of God**

**Supreme Being**

**Africa**



## OPSOMMING

### **Die Gees van God en die geeste van Afrika: 'n Dogmatologiese studie vanuit pneumatologiese perspektief**

'n Studie in pneumatologie is belangrik en noodsaaklik vir die teologie asook vir die kerk. Wat christene daarvan moet weet en verstaan, moet duidelik geleer word. Die persoon en werk van die Gees van God moet deur elke gelowige in Jesus Christus goed geken word. Op hierdie wyse sal foutiewe konsepte en leerstellings ten opsigte van die christelike lewe afgewys word, veral in die kerk in Afrika.

Dit is opvallend dat Afrikane in hulle tradisionele wêreldvisie bewus is van die bestaan van 'n Hoogste Wese, geeste, gode, voorvadergeeste en 'n geesteswêreld met sy verskeidenhede.

Afrikane, christene sowel as nie-christene, glo dat hulle omring is deur onsigbare geestelike wesens, en as gevolg van hierdie wete word hulle in hulle gedagtes lastig geval met idees om te ontdek wat werklik in die onsigbare wêreld van die geesteswêreld aangaan. Meeste Afrikane aanvaar sonder twyfel die bestaan van voorvadergeeste en hulle ervaar 'n daaglikse noodsaak om die geeste te raadpleeg ten opsigte van elke gebeurtenis wat in hulle tradisionele konteks plaasvind. Vir alle gebeurtenisse is daar altyd iemand, wat beteken daar is altyd 'n gees agter alles (wat gebeur). 'n Sterfgeval of 'n ongeluk of siekte gebeur nie sonder dat dit deur 'n gees, veral 'n voorvadergees, veroorsaak word nie. Die voorvadergeeste, word geglo, is aktief besig in die lewens van hulle lewende nasate op aarde. Voorvadergeeste is (egter) ambivalent in hulle verhouding tot die lewendes. Hulle kan goeie dinge aan hulle nasate doen

wanneer hulle goed behandel word. Hulle benadeel en molesteer wanneer hulle deur hulle nasate kwaad gemaak word.

Die ontmoeting tussen die evangelie en die Afrikane het 'n impak op die lewens van Afrikane gelaat. Ons moet erken dat baie dinge in die voorkoms van die Afrika-kultuur verander het en in die praktiese lewens van Afrikane nog gaan verander. Alhoewel die evangelie 'n impak op die mense van Afrika het, word ongelukkig waargeneem dat sommige Afrikane nie werklik hierdie verandering uitleef nie. Christen-Afrikane, ten spyte van die kennismaking met die die christelike geloof, keer normaalweg terug na tradisionele praktyke in gevalle van teenspoed soos 'n ongeluk, ongeneeslike siekte, onvrugbaarheid, ensovoorts. Die konteks van godsdiens-pluralisme wat Afrikane ervaar, skep 'n oop deur vir sinkretisme.

Tradisionele praktyke is ongetwyfeld teen bybelse leringe en praktyke. Christene in die kerk is egter (dikwels) betrokke by hierdie tradisionele praktyke wanneer hulle die aanvalle van voorvadergeeste of die onheil van ander geeste vrees.

Die Gees van God is aktief besig in die wêreld en ook in Afrika. Christene moet op God en nie op hulle voorvadergeeste vertrou nie vir hulle leeftog en ondersteuning op die verskillende lewensterreine.

Die oplossing vir die voortgaande houding van Afrikane teenoor die geeste kan slegs van die Woord van God kom. Dit is absoluut nodig om voort te gaan om die evangelie aan Afrikane te verkondig. Hierdie verkondiging moet ernstig opgeneem word deur die kerk en christene in Afrika. Dit is slegs die boodskap van die Bybel wat Afrikane kan bevry van



die gees van die wêreld.

## **Kernbegrippe**

**Geeste**

**Voorvadergeeste**

**Geestelike wesens**

**Gees van die mens**

**Gees van God**

**Opperwese**

**Afrika**



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Soli Deo Gloria

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this PhD-thesis: *The Spirit of God and the spirits of Africa: A dogmatological study from the vantage point of pneumatology* is my own work and has not been submitted by me to any other University.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Background**

#### **1.1.1 . The spirits of Africa**

Several writers have shown in their findings and writings that Africans believe in the existence of many spiritual beings (Mbiti,1969:75; Idowu, 1973:173-178). They have indicated that Africans in their traditional contexts are strongly attached to the spirit world. Everything that happens in life is supposedly caused by the spirits, except for natural calamities like famine, which are ascribed to the transcendent deity. Gehman (1990:145), citing Lindblom (1920:214), mentions that the least neglect in this respect (such as neglecting to offer sacrifices to spirits) is avenged by the sending down of all sorts of misfortunes upon the negligent one, such as diseases of both people and domestic animals, and even death. Therefore, when an accident happens, it is feared that it has been caused by the spirits. Remarkably, many African cultures and tribes recognise the influence of spirits in their daily life. “In a dynamic worldview, everything that exist harbours impersonal forces, and such forces drive everything that happens” (Nürnbergger, 2007:22).

Since Africans strongly believe in the existence of the spiritual realms and the influence of the spirits, it is important to deal with this matter in order to understand the causes of this situation. This study attempts to do just that. The way of thinking about spirits is part of the daily life of Africans. The idea of spirits haunts the African, especially in traditional surroundings. The spiritual world is said to be heard everywhere among

African tribes. Every African tribe reports the existence of myriads of spirits (Mbiti, 1990:77).

The fact that Africans strongly hold to the idea of the existence and the influence of spirits, creates a certain type of behaviour, attitude, a certain way of thinking and living in relation to the world. In the traditional context, Africans live according to the arbitrary wills of the spirits in order to please them. In a manner of speaking they are living daily with the psychotic fear of the influence and the rule of the spirits. . . . “But even more important is the strong belief in the ancestral spirits and their influence on the individual, the family, and the clan, and the tribe as a whole. Instances of these beliefs are readily found in almost every part of Africa. Thus the Yoruba believe in the power of ancestral spirits, a belief from which has developed the Egungun cult” (Sawyer, 1970:2).

In traditional Africa, spirits are considered to be protectors of living people in the family. Many individuals on the continent of Africa hold that opinion. Spirits are consulted when activities have to take place within the family or the large community. The duties of the spirit of the dead grandfather include the care and protection of the family on earth. It should be informed when a son is going to marry and thanked when a member of the family acquires a business or a bus so that it will bless the venture (Gelfand, 1977:32). This is also echoed by Taylor (1993:36) citing Wagner who asserts that Joshua rebukes the Israelites for serving the gods on the other side of the river and in Egypt (Joshua 24:14). It is true that by serving idols or pagan deities, people are actually serving demonic spirits (Cor. 10:20).

This African belief system results in confusing conceptions of the Spirit of God, of God the Father and Jesus Christ in the minds of Africans. A

clear distinction has to be made between the spirits of Africa and the Spirit of God. Van Rooy, citing Sundkler (1961:238-252), says that among the Sotho people, as generally in Southern Africa, when people think of a spirit and its working it is almost bound to be an ancestral spirit. There is no trace of a Holy Spirit of God who is in any way involved in the world or the affairs of mankind (Van Rooy, 1995:74).

Some African theologians hold the idea that God belongs to the spiritual world. Nyirongo (1997:25), when speaking of the African conception of the spiritual world, points out the following: “Parrinder, who has written several books on African religions, reports four levels of deities (1969:27). At the top is the Supreme Being or Creator, below Him are chief divinities (non-human spirits) who are believed to control the natural phenomena ....” God is thus at the summit of the spiritual hierarchy.

Why are Africans this concerned with the spirit world? What are the causes of their attitude toward the spirits of Africa?

### **1.1.2 . The Spirit of God**

The correct understanding of the nature and the works of the Spirit of God is very important to the Christian churches in Africa. From the beginning of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, several questions were asked about the Holy Spirit. This is captured in the following words by Schweizer (1979:IX):

How can we distinguish the Holy Spirit from any other spirits there may be? This was the question already being asked by the Corinthians. Paul’s answer – that he is present where Christ is

acknowledged as Lord and is therefore available for the benefit of all, for the building up of the Christian community ... soon ceased to be sufficient. Irenaeus already sees duly ordained bishops as guarantors of the Holy Spirit – a position definitely established by the Council of Trent. Over against this, the Reformation maintained the absolute inerrancy of Scriptures down to the Hebrew printing, while in protest against both churches, all sorts of groups have sought for conforming of the Spirit in the stirring of the individual heart.

Throughout the history of the Church, ecclesiastical leaders have held different views concerning the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Many controversies arose among Christians with regard to the nature, attributes and the works of the Spirit of God. Heron (1983:80) mentions:

So far as the doctrine of the Spirit of God was concerned, the Cappadocians found themselves fighting on two fronts. On the one hand were the extreme Arians, the Anomoeans, led by Eunomius, who insisted that God's very nature was defined as 'unbegotten'; sought to show that the Spirit has been created by the Son, who as 'begotten', was himself inferior to the Father. On the other hand were those on the left wing of the Homoeousian party. They held that the Spirit was neither God nor creation, and offered such analogies as 'God is master, creatures are servants, the Spirit is neither master nor servant, but free ....'

While Jesus Christ is a true human being, who ate, drank, became sad, worked as carpenter, performed miracles among people, had human friends, parents and brothers, not any of this happened with the Spirit of God. This fact creates doubtful thoughts in the hearts of some people

concerning the personality and the works of the Holy Spirit. Berkhof (1988:95) mentions:

The terms Spirit of God or Holy Spirit do not suggest personality as much as the term 'son' does. Moreover, the person of the Holy Spirit did not appear in a clearly discernable personal form among men, as the person of the Son of God did. As a result the personality of the Holy Spirit was afterwards called in question, and therefore deserves special attention. The personality of the Holy Spirit was denied in the early Church by the Monarchians and the Pneumatomarchians.

In our present day, some Christian denominations do not consider the Spirit of God as God Himself. This idea or doctrine was also held by some church leaders during the first centuries of the existence of the Church. Macedonius, bishop of Constantinople between 341 and 360, seems to have taught that the Holy Spirit was a creature subordinate to the Father and Son. This was a denial and proved to be as harmful to the conception of the Holy Spirit as the views of Arians were to the conception of Christ (Cairns 1981:35).

Meticulous analyses and observations show us that there are opposite and various doctrines taught among Christians concerning the Holy Spirit. In Africa, this evidence is not ignored. Christians do not hold the same knowledge about the Spirit of God in Africa and in the world. "Once again, there returned to me with renewed force the conclusion left with me those days before; that there appeared to be a vast difference between the Biblical and the modern understanding of the role of the Spirit in the world and in the Church, of the extent of His activity in men,

women, society and nature; consequently maybe even of the very nature of the Spirit” (McIntyre, 1997:17).

It is of great importance to clear up doctrinal obscurities concerning the Spirit of God. This will enable the Church to maintain the doctrinal truth among its members today. It will also help the Church in Africa to stop the spreading of wrong doctrines about the Spirit of God. “The person and the work of the Holy Spirit continue to be an area of controversy among Christians. In this respect, some readers, perhaps many, will believe that they themselves see light when I do not. It is a remarkable fact of recent Church history that convictions which were controversial in my student days in the 1960’s and 70’s have now become so broadly adopted that it is the mainstream views of those days which are now regarded as controversial ...” (Ferguson, 1996:13).

Opposite or polarized teachings regarding the Spirit of God can create confusion about the understanding of the person, attributes and the works of the Spirit of God. It is necessary to produce revised knowledge in this field of theology in Africa where people face the spirit world with fear. Given the stated relationship between Africans and the spirit world, one can even ask whether the Spirit of God is believed to be at work in the life of African peoples. Do Africans really understand and accept the works of the Holy Spirit while fearing the spirits of Africa?

### **1.1.3 . The spirit of man**

There are questions that are not clear, or that are simply difficult to explain: Questions about the relation between the spirit of man and God’s Spirit during man’s life on earth and after death.



Scholars have always held different opinions about the identity of man. Some say that man is a composition of body and soul. Van der Walt (2002:166) indicates that in traditional Africa man was also seen as a dichotomous being, consisting of a body and a soul. Others hold the opinion that man has three components namely body, soul and spirit. Van der Walt (2010:264) says: “And I will speak about a dichotomist view of being human...although there are also trichotomist views (man for instance consists of body, soul and spirit/mind). These two views are both prevalent among Africans.”

Death is a certain phenomenon. It cannot be avoided. Many people are worried about death, especially in Africa, because the after-life is not well-known. Nürnberger (2007:25) says: “The after-life is not a desirable goal, except perhaps for very old people who have become tired of life and perceive themselves to have become frail and useless.” Clarification of the biblical concept of the ‘spirit of man’ will also have an impact in this regard.

## **1.2. Problem statement**

Some Western missionaries denied the existence of a doctrine of spirits as part of the practices of the African culture, while Africans were in turn seriously attached to the activities of the spirits in their lives. Hastings (1996:336) echoes: “Some missionaries saw the principalities and powers of tradition as simply empty, imaginary things. For others, they were diabolical, just as they were for Tansi or Harris. But for many Christians they were real, far from diabolic....” According to the Christian missionaries from Europe, the African belief in spirits fell into the category of superstition.

The result of this attitude on the part of the Western Christian churches has been that the African spirit world went underground. The official position of the Church was merely to deny the African reality, or to hand out church discipline to the member who believed in this realm. Since missionaries preferred to deny their reality rather than work with the African in appreciation of these phenomena, the African has in many areas of Africa held his Christian faith in one hand and his belief in the mysterious world of his pre-Christian days in the other (Smalley, 1967:178).

Christians and non-Christians live in continual fear and expectation of the influence of the spirits. The spirit world is for many reasons uncanny. Despite the fact that it is incorporeal and invisible, the world of spirits remains a source of wonder, especially frightening to humankind. At the same time, Africans are interested to know and understand what is going on with the spirit world, both in the churches and in the traditional context. The study will also explore this position in light of the biblical doctrine of the Spirit of God. Both the biblical and the African views of the Spiritual world will be carefully explored. The main research question is: How can the biblical teaching regarding the Spirit of God help Christians in Africa who still fear and rely on the ancestral spirits in their life?

The specific research questions are:

- What is the biblical teaching regarding the Spirit of God, the spirit of man, ancestral spirits and the spirit world?
- What is the traditional African perspective regarding the Spirit of God, the spirit of man, ancestral spirits and the spirit world?

- What is the normative theory that can be proposed from the Bible to Christians in Africa who still fear and rely on the ancestral spirits in their life?

### **1.3. Aim and objectives**

The main aim of this research is to study and outline how the biblical teaching regarding the Spirit of God can bring new perspective to Christians in Africa who still fear and rely on ancestral spirits in their lives.

The objectives of this research therefore are:

- To study and outline the biblical teaching regarding the Spirit of God, the spirit of man, ancestral spirits and the spirit world.
- To study and outline the traditional African perspective regarding the Spirit of God, the spirit of man, ancestral spirits and the spirit world.
- To propose a biblical vision about ancestral spirits for Christians in Africa who still fear and rely on them.

This study undeniably represents an important interest for Christians in general, and African Christians and Church leaders on the continent of Africa in particular.

This work will discuss, analyse and explore some of the numerous beliefs, thoughts and influences of the spirit world in Africa from a biblical perspective. The Word of God remains our unique norm in life. The study will attempt to offer clear understanding of what the Bible teaches

about the spiritual world and the person, the work and the attributes of the Spirit of God, in contrast with the African spirits. “Although life in present day Africa is changing, the question of traditional beliefs and practices is still a very important issue. In what ways do traditional beliefs help a person to understand the truth of God and in what ways do they lead people away from the truth of God? What does the Bible say about the spirits of the dead ...?” (O’Donovan, 1996:219).

The study furthermore presents an effort to discuss what the Bible teaches us about the spirit of man, and also what happens to the spirit after death. What does the Word of God say in connection with the after-life of man? What do African traditional views say?

After the study has investigated the above-mentioned, it will attempt to analyse and understand why many Africans are too attached to the beliefs about the influence of the spirits, despite the proclamation of the Gospel inspired by the Spirit of God. “Where Christ is irrelevant, a serious spiritual vacuum can be expected to open up in the consciousness of Christians, which is quite naturally filled with the authority, power and presence of the ancestors, who have always been around” (Nürnberg, 2007:40).

Finally, such a study has to reflect on the biblical teaching about the spirit of man and the Holy Spirit. A better interpretation of the biblical doctrine of the Spirit of God will guide the attitude of African Christians in their daily life and shape their way of worshipping the triune God. Among Africans, Christians and non-Christians alike are continuously aware of the presence and the influence of the traditional spirits. There is a need to understand, in one way or another, the spirit world in Africa. In doing

this we must not forget to grasp what the Scriptures teach about the spiritual world and the Spirit of God.

It is necessary to clear the way in order to bring the Gospel to Africans without obstacles. African Christians need to receive the message of the Gospel and comprehend the spiritual realities around them.

The doctrines of the African traditional religions about the spiritual world will be critically evaluated in the light of the Holy Scriptures, which constitute the unique source of norms and principles in life to all Christians.

#### **1.4. Central theoretical argument**

In this study, the argument is that the Spirit of God, who is God Himself, is truly at work and must be worshipped, honoured and confessed by Christians in Africa. There is no spirit that can be compared to the Spirit of God. The Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, remains the main and unique foundation of our argumentation.

#### **1.5. Research methods**

This dogmatic study is undertaken from a reformed point of departure (Osterhaven, 1964:41). The following methods will be used:

- An exegetical study of relevant passages of Scriptures will be done according to the syntactic-theological approach from a reformed perspective (Kaiser, 1981:87-104). For all questions, normative

grounding will be sought from the word of God because there is, according to the view of the researcher, no genuine truth beside it.

- A literature review of past works (research, publications and other secondary materials) will be done in order to explore the subject. Various documents on the spirits of Africa will be critically used, read, compared between themselves and also meticulously evaluated to obtain satisfactory results. Findings of many other researchers on the spirit world in Africa will be studied and analysed for a better understanding of the subject. Different theological studies will be consulted to contribute to this study.
- Information gathered through the researcher’s personal experience will be used to supplement the literature review.

### 1.6. Schematic representation with regard to points 2, 3 and 5

<b>PROBLEM STATEMENT</b>	<b>AIM AND OBJECTIVES</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY</b>
1. How can the biblical teaching regarding the Spirit of God help Christians in Africa who still fear and rely on the ancestral spirits in their lives?	To study and outline how the biblical teaching regarding the Spirit of God can help Christians in Africa who still fear and rely on ancestral spirits in their lives.	This dogmatic study is undertaken from a reformed perspective (Osterhaven,1964:41).

<p>2. What is the Biblical teaching regarding the Spirit of God, the spirit of man, ancestral spirits and the spirit world?</p>	<p>To study and outline Biblical teaching regarding the Spirit of God, the spirit of man, ancestral spirits and the spirit world.</p>	<p>An exegetical study of relevant Scriptural passages will be done according to the syntactic-theological approach (Kaiser, 1981,87-104).</p>
<p>3. What is the traditional African perspective regarding the Spirit of God, the spirit of man, ancestral spirits and the spirit world?</p>	<p>To study and outline the traditional African perspective regarding the Spirit of God, the spirit of man, ancestral spirits and the spirit world.</p>	<p>Literature review will be done.</p>
<p>4. What is the normative theory from the Bible for Christians in Africa who still fear and rely on the ancestral spirits in their lives?</p>	<p>To propose the normative theory from the Bible for Christians in Africa who still fear and rely on the ancestral spirits in their lives.</p>	<p>Literature review will be done.</p>
<p>5. What is the proposed biblical solution to</p>	<p>To propose the biblical solution to Christians in Africa who still fear and</p>	<p>Synthesis of the biblical and theological reflection will be used to propose a</p>

Christians in Africa who still fear and rely on the ancestral spirits in their lives?	rely on the ancestral spirits in their lives.	biblical solution to Christians in Africa who still fear and rely on the ancestral spirits in their lives.
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## **CHAPTER 2: THE BIBLICAL THEOLOGICAL TEACHING ON THE SPIRIT OF GOD AND THE SPIRITUAL WORLD**

### **2.1. Introduction**

In this chapter we are going to elucidate the biblical teaching on the Spirit of God and the spiritual world. At the end of the chapter we include a short overview of the Christian response through the ages to these topics in order to supply us with a more contextual understanding of the spirit world.

### **2.2. The biblical-theological perspective on the Spirit of God**

#### **2.2.1. The Holy Spirit is confessed as God himself**

The Holy Spirit is indeed confessed as God and He is at the same time understood as one in essence with the Son. Rosato (1983:262) states: “The Holy Spirit (*to pneuma hagion*) is understood by Christians as the divine agent who brings about the Transcreation, or the culmination of human and cosmic liberation, since he perfects the Father’s creative and the Son’s recreative mission in history. For this reason, the Spirit is confessed as antecedently in himself the Transcreator who is identical in being with the Father-Creator and the Son-Recreator.”

Although we confess one true God, we also proclaim the existence of three persons, distinct from one another in one God. Kelly (2008:88) mentions: “In other words, considered as to their one Godness, they share absolutely and simply one and the same eternal essence as antotheos or self-existence, underwed deity. Hence, the Father, the Son,

and the Holy Spirit are each *antotheos* or *a se esse*, because they are the one true and triune God. Each of them possesses the whole essence of the Godhead, and yet this does not make them more than one God, nor remove their personal distinctions.”

There is only one God who is Father, Son and the Holy Spirit and not three Gods. Insisting on this truth, Kelly (2008:88) states that hence it is quite clear that in God’s essence reside three persons in whom one God is known.

The Spirit of God is God Himself and He has a personality. Claver (2001:27) clearly indicates that throughout the pages of the Bible it is always assumed that the Holy Spirit is no more and no less than God Himself. In 2 Cor. 3:17 Paul clearly announces: “the Lord is the Spirit.” Commenting on this passage, the New Geneva Study Bible (1995:1832) states that the Holy Spirit is truly God, like the Father and the Son, He is the One who is known singly as the “Lord” in the Old Testament.

Again, Calver points out that it is because the Holy Spirit is God that Scripture describes him as possessing all those essential hallmarks, which are the sole privilege of God Himself, who is Holy, Eternal, Omnipotent, Omnipresent, Omniscient (Calver, 2001:27-28).

### **2.2.2. The importance of knowing the Spirit of God**

Is it necessary and important for Christians to know the Spirit of God? Such a question may seem strange but it has real significance for the church, especially the church in Africa. Torrey gives us clear thoughts about this question when he says that before one can correctly understand the work of the Holy Spirit he must first of all know the Spirit

Himself. He adds that a frequent source of error and fanaticism about the work of the Holy Spirit is the attempt to study and understand his work without first coming to know Him as a person (Torrey, 1976:9).

The knowledge of the Spirit of God is necessary for believers in Jesus Christ. Without the Holy Spirit, Christians will have nothing to do in their service for God. Calver (2001:21) mentions: “We have already said that we could not be expected to serve God properly if we were simply confined to our own limited human resources. So if we were without the Spirit, just where would we be?”

Honestly, one cannot easily deny the importance of knowing the Spirit of God, his nature, personality and evidently his works. Torrey (1976:10) points out:

It is of the highest importance from the standpoint of experience that we know the Holy Spirit as a person. Thousands and tens of thousands of men and women can testify to the blessing that has come into their own lives as they have come to know the Holy Spirit, not merely as a gracious influence (emanating, it is true, from God, but as a real person, just as real as Jesus Christ Himself, an ever-present, loving friend and mighty helper, who is not only always by their side but dwells in their hearts every day and every hour, and who is ready to undertake for them in every emergency of life.

It is really true that good knowledge of the Spirit of God helps believers in Jesus Christ to have an acceptable attitude before the triune God and worship Him accordingly.

### **2.2.3. The terms *ruach* and *pneuma***

These terms, from Hebrew and Greek, are rendered “spirit.” They refer to the Spirit of God, spirit of man or wind. Packer (1987:57) mentions:

Both the Hebrew and Greek words rendered spirit in our Bibles (*ruach* and *pneuma*), carry this basic thought and both have the same range of association. They are used for (1) the divine Spirit, personal and purposeful, invisible and irresistible; (2) the individual human consciousness (in which sense spirit becomes synonymous with soul, as for instance in Luke 1:46, 47); and (3) the wind that, when aroused, whirls leaves, uproots trees, and blows buildings over.

Other scholars take the same Hebrew and Greek words to mean wind, breath or spirit. Among them, Horton (1976:18) says that actually the Hebrew word for spirit (*ruach*) like the Greek word (*pneuma*) can mean wind, breath or spirit. According to the same scholar the Bible discerns the existence of three spirits. He writes that actually the Bible speaks of three spirits, the Spirit of God, the spirit of man, and the spirit of the devil (plus the evil spirits or demons associated with him) (Horton, 1976:277).

In his exploration of this case, Ferguson mentions that the biblical words for 'spirit' (Hebrew *ruach*, Greek *pneuma*) are onomatopoeic terms, both their physical formation and their sound conveying a sense of their basic meaning: the expulsion of wind or breath, the idea of air in motion (Ferguson, 1996:57). Green also sees in the words rendered Spirit of God three meanings namely wind, breath and spirit. For, he writes: "The word used for the Spirit of God in both Hebrew and Greek is highly significant. *Ruach* in Hebrew and *pneuma* in Greek have the three meanings of wind, breath and spirit. The Spirit of God is his life-giving breath without which man remains spiritually inert (Green, 2004:20).

#### **2.2.4. What the Spirit of God is not**

There are in Africa some believers in Christ who hold a wrong view about the Spirit of God. They consider Him as a force, an energy, a power or an influence. This is not true.

##### **2.2.4.1. The Holy Spirit is not a force**

The Holy Spirit is not a phenomenon like a force. Speaking of the Holy Spirit, Calver (2001:28) says that it would be wrong to view Him as some kind of indefinably nebulous force. The Holy Spirit is not something we can possess. But He can use us. Torrey (1976:10) points out:

If we think of the Holy Spirit, as so many do, as merely a power or influence, our constant thought will be, 'How can I get more of the Holy Spirit?', but if we think of him in the biblical way

as a divine person, our thought will rather be, 'How can the Holy Spirit have more of me?' The conception of the Holy Spirit as a divine influence or power that we are somehow to get hold of and use leads to self-exaltation and self-sufficiency. One who so thinks of the Holy Spirit and at the time imagines that he has received the Holy Spirit almost inevitably will be full of spiritual pride and strut about as if he belonged to some superior order of Christians.

Young refutes viewing the Spirit of God as a force, for he indicates that the Spirit of God is not an impersonal force for righteousness, or the principle of rational understanding, or the basis of right and wrong built into the universe (Young, 1977:39).

#### **2.2.4.2. The Holy Spirit is not impersonal**

It is abnormal to think of the Spirit of God as an impersonal phenomenon. Calver (2001:28) mentions that too often we can be tempted to regard the Holy Spirit as some vague kind of divine "it", and this would be far from the truth.

One cannot address or refer to the Spirit of God as an object or a thing with the pronoun 'it'. The Holy Spirit is not impersonal. Criswell (1977:52) states:

It is easy to fall into the psychological error of looking upon the Holy Spirit as an 'it', an influence, an energy, a power, a force ... It is

easy, psychologically, to look upon the Holy Spirit as a power, an impersonal 'it'. When we separate the person from the power, we easily fall into that subconscious attitude. The Holy Spirit becomes an indefinite something or other, an enigmatic mystery.

Picking up this idea, Young says that the Holy Spirit is referred to as he, not as an impersonal it (Young, 1977:39).

#### **2.2.4.3. The Holy Spirit is not something abstract**

It is clearly noticeable that the Spirit of God is not something abstract, just an idea in the mind of people. Berkhof indicates that though Socinians, Unitarians and present-day Modernists speak of the Holy Spirit merely as power or an influence of God, He clearly stands out in the pages of the Bible as a person, John 14:16, 17; 15:26; 16:7-15; Romans 8:26 (Berkhof, 1960:40).

#### **2.2.4.4. The Holy Spirit is not a creature**

There must be a clear understanding that the Holy Spirit is not a creature. Packer writes that the conclusion is that the Spirit is no mere powerful creature, like an angel. With the Father and the Son He is God Almighty (Packer, 1987:62).

The Spirit of God is not part of the creation, but He is the Creator. Erickson (2001:272) asserts: "In addition to having divine attributes, the Holy Spirit performs certain works which are commonly ascribed to God.

He was and continues to be involved with creation, both in the organization of it and in the providential keeping and directing of it.” The psalmist says: “When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground” (Ps. 104:30).

### **2.2.5. The names of the Spirit of God**

Names are important in knowing a person. Through names one can understand the attributes of a person. The Bible uses different names to designate the Spirit of God. Torrey (1976:35) points out that at least twenty-five different names are used in the Old and New Testaments in speaking of the Holy Spirit. There is the deepest significance in these names. By carefully studying them, we find a wonderful revelation of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Williams (1980:19) says that many names and titles are given to the Holy Spirit in Scripture and each has its special significance and interest. Some are particularly revealing of His deity and personality, while others tell us more about His attributes, character and ministry.

Attention will be paid to some of the names used to designate the Spirit of God.

#### **2.2.5.1. The Spirit**

The Bible uses this name and it is known to be the simplest of the names of the Holy Spirit. This name is also used as the basis of other names. The Greek and Hebrew words so translated mean literally



“breath” or “wind.” Both ideas are in the name as applied to the Holy Spirit (Torrey, 1976:35).

The name “spirit” is given to the Spirit of God. In Gen. 1:2 and Gen. 6:3 we read about this name. The New Geneva Study Bible (1995:7) speaks of the hovering eagle-like over the primordial abyss, the almighty Spirit makes the earth into a habitation for human beings. Ferguson (1996:20) says that in the light of this tradition of exegesis within the Old Testament itself, *ruach* in Gen. 1:2 is best understood as a reference to the activity of the divine Spirit, not the impersonal activity of the wind.

#### **2.2.5.2. The Spirit of God**

The Spirit proceeds from God, the Father and the Son. It is with reason that the name Spirit of God or Spirit of Christ may be used. Torrey says that the Holy Spirit is frequently spoken of in the Bible as the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 3:16). In this name we have the same essential thought as in the former name but with this addition, that His divine origin, nature, and power are emphasised. He is not merely the “wind” as seen above, but the wind of God (Torrey, 1976:43).

Speaking also of this name, Fee(2005:29) records: “Despite the fact that his understanding the Spirit has been forever stamped by the coming of Christ, Paul nonetheless thinks of the Spirit primarily in terms of the Spirit’s relationship to God (the Father). Not only does he speak more often of the ‘Spirit of God’ than of the ‘Spirit of Christ’, but God (is) invariably the subject of the verb when Paul speaks of persons receiving the Spirit. ... For example God gives us his Spirit (1 Thess. 4:8; Gal. 3:5...).”

### **2.2.5.3. The Spirit of Truth**

Jesus calls Himself the Truth and the same He applies to the Spirit of God. Fitch (1974:99) mentions that our Lord referred to Himself as the Truth and He called the Holy Spirit the Spirit of Truth, and adds that Truth is the opposite of error even as light is the opposite of darkness.

In John 14:17 the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Truth. Torrey mentions that the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Truth because it is the work of the Holy Spirit to communicate truth, to impart truth to those who receive Him.... All truth is from the Holy Spirit. It is only as He teaches us that we come to know the truth (Torrey, 1976:53).

### **2.2.5.4. The Spirit of Holiness**

In the Bible the Spirit of God is also called the Spirit of Holiness. In Romans 1:4 we read: "... and who through the Spirit of Holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord."

The Holy Spirit is separate from human beings who are sinners. Fitch (1974:109) says: "By whatever other name we call the Spirit of God, He is pre-eminently the Holy Spirit. God is holy. Our Lord Jesus Christ was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens" (Heb. 7:86). Likewise the Spirit, being the Spirit of Christ, is the Spirit of Holiness." Holiness is an important character of the Spirit of God and believers have to live in holiness.

Holiness is necessary to believers in Jesus Christ. As the Word of God says, without it no one can see God. In Hebrews 12:14 we read: "Make

every effort to live in peace with all men and be holy; without Holiness no one will see the Lord.” This means that without the aid of the Holy Spirit, who alone can sanctify us and make us holy, we shall never stand before the burning bliss and purity of the God who made us all (Fitch, 1974:109).

#### **2.2.5.5. The Spirit of Jesus Christ**

The Spirit of God is called the Spirit of Jesus Christ in Philippians 1:19. Torrey (1976:48) says that the Spirit is not merely the Spirit of the eternal Word but the Spirit of the Word incarnate, not merely the Spirit of Christ but the Spirit of Jesus Christ. It is the man Jesus exalted to the right hand of the Father who receives and sends the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is also called the Spirit of Christ in Romans 8:9 in which passage the writer says: “You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.” Torrey says that the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Christ because He is Christ’s gift. The Holy Spirit is not merely the gift of the Father, but the gift of the Son as well. We read in John 20:22 that Jesus “breathed on them and said: ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” The Holy Spirit is therefore the breath of Christ, as well as the breath of God the Father. It is Christ who breathes upon us and imparts to us the Holy Spirit (Torrey, 1976:46).

In Acts 16:6-7 the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Jesus and it is written: “Paul and his companions travelled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried

to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.” Torrey (1976:48) is of the opinion that by using this name, the Spirit of Jesus, the thought of the relation of the Spirit to the man Jesus is still clearer than in the name preceding this, the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

#### **2.2.5.6. The Spirit of grace**

In Hebrews 10:29 the Spirit of God is called the Spirit of grace. The verse reads: “How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?” This name brings out the fact that it is the Holy Spirit’s work to administer and apply the grace of God. He Himself is gracious, it is true, but the name means far more than that; it means that He makes the manifold grace of God ours experientially. It is only by the Work of the Spirit of grace in our hearts that we are enabled to appropriate to ourselves that infinite fullness of grace that God has from the beginning bestowed upon us in Jesus Christ (Torrey, 1976:55-56).

#### **2.2.5.7. The Comforter**

This name, Comforter, is clearly given to the Holy Spirit in the Bible. The Lord Jesus Christ speaks of Him by saying He will send the Comforter. In John 15:26 the writer uses the word ‘counsellor’ (New International Version). Torrey (1976:58) mentions that the translators of the Revised Version found difficulty in deciding how to render the Greek word so translated.

Torrey says that the Greek word translated as “Comforter” (*parakletos*) means “One called alongside”, that is, one called to stand constantly by one’s side and who is even ready to stand by us and take our part in everything in which his help is needed. It is a wonderfully tender and expressive name for the Holy One. Sometimes when we think of the Holy Spirit, He seems to be so far away, but when we think of the Parakletos, or in plain English our Standby or our Part-taker, how near he is (Torrey, 1976:58).

Christian believers have the task of counselling others, strengthening them in their life with the Word of God through the help of the Holy Spirit, the Counsellor (John 14:16). Fitch (1974:236) clearly points out that to think of the communion of the Holy Spirit naturally leads us to consider how the Spirit helps us to counsel one another. The Holy Spirit is our Counsellor and counselling needs his help. Counselling is the work of the Holy Spirit. Effective counselling cannot be done apart from Him (Fitch, 1974:240).

#### **2.2.6. The Spirit of God and the power**

It is the Spirit of God who enables the believers in Christ to do the work of the Lord. The Spirit of God has power. In the book of Acts 1:8 the Lord promised power to his disciples. And they were told not to leave Jerusalem before they received this power from the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4).

Fitch is aware of that fact when he writes that our Lord Jesus Christ promised the disciples ability, capacity, potency and a dynamism by means of which they would become altogether different from what they

had been before. They would of course exercise that power under authority, the *exousia* granted them by their Lord, true authority and right, the authority of which He spoke when He said: “All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18). Under such authority they would have nothing less than the dynamism of the Holy Spirit of God (Fitch, 1974:88).

This power is different from what men lust for in selfishness. Believers in Christ have to avoid such a longing for power. Fitch (1974:89) mentions: “And in our fallen state we still lust after power. Of all the attributes of God that we covet, power surely must come first. The history of man is the struggle for power. The eagerness to possess things and to hold others under our control is native to us all.” In the thought of Criswell, we can learn that the true power comes from God. The disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ were to be clothed with power, the power of the Holy Spirit covering them. The old rags of fear and defeat were to be taken away and in their place were to be brought the new robes of valor, courage and victory. The old Simon Peter, cowering before the simple question of a little maiden and hiding from the crowing of a cock, is to be the bold, fearless preacher of Pentecost. This is the raiment of spiritual revolution bestowed by the Holy Spirit” (Criswell, 1977:86).

Several Christians think of power when speaking about the Spirit of God. Packer (1987:21) says that to start with, some people see the doctrine of the Spirit as essentially about power, in the sense of God-given ability to do what you know you ought to do and indeed want to do, but feel that you lack the strength for.

It is true that the Spirit of God enables believers to perform what God tells them to do. The Lord Jesus Christ told his apostles to stay in

Jerusalem until they had received the power when the Spirit of God would come upon them (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). Criswell wrote:

Church history verifies that, without full testimony to the divine personality and agency of the Holy Spirit in bringing the power of God upon people, no blessing can be expected by the church. When the Spirit is dishonoured, the favour of heaven no longer descends. Second, we are to remember that the Holy Spirit is honoured by being involved in every prayer and referred to in every sermon. Wherever religion comes in power, the presence of the Spirit, as connecting the church on earth with Christ in heaven, plays an important part (Criswell, 1977:38).

Many believers in Christ attribute to the Spirit of God different influential deeds which are not always biblically appropriate. Packer mentions that many think about the Spirit in a way that, though not wholly false, is certainly smudgy and not true enough. Hence spring all sorts of inadequacy and practical imbalance, sometimes threatening to stifle the Spirit whom in our incompetence we are seeking to honour. Getting the Spirit into better focus is, therefore, an urgent matter (Packer, 1987:45).

Christians are armless and powerless without the help of the Spirit of God. They are unable to serve God with dignity if they do not receive the power of the Holy Spirit. Fee states that only dependence on the Spirit can enable us to know what is pleasing to God (Fee, 2005:105).

The sinful nature of man cannot offer resistance in the battle against sin, but with the power of the Holy Spirit this is possible. Green (2004:109) writes: "Power over the inclinations of the fallen 'flesh' is possible only when the Spirit is given control by our act of deliberate choice. He has the power to overcome my fallen appetites, but he will not use it in me

unless I ask him.” This is clear that in himself, a Christian believer will not achieve the good intentions he has without the power of the Spirit of God. Fitch says that no man can do what he ought to do according to his ability without the power to accomplish it. And this Christ promises by His Holy Spirit (Fitch, 1974:89).

Packer is of the opinion that power in action is in fact the basic biblical thought whenever God’s Spirit is mentioned. In the Old Testament, he says, the Spirit of God is always God at work, changing things (Packer, 1987:57).

## **2.2.7. The person of the Spirit of God**

### **2.2.7.1. Complexity of views on the Spirit of God’s personality**

Some writers show different views held by people about the Spirit of God as a person. Packer says that for most people nowadays Spirit is a vague and colourless word. The thought it is most likely to bring to mind, is of a human mood or attitude (high or low spirits, good spirits, animal spirits, a cheerful or downcast spirit, a spirit of mischief or of kindness, that’s the spirit, and so forth) (Packer, 1987:56). Fitch (174:240) indicates: “Too often when men think of the Holy Spirit, they think of something impersonal, an influence, a force, but never a person.” Welker (2006:27) expresses this view as follows:

Is the Holy Spirit a person? ‘Strange question’, some might answer, of course it is. Doesn’t the classical Trinitarian dogma speak of ‘one divine essence in three persons? And the Spirit is obviously one of them!’ But others might doubt



this, and common sense is on their side. If you personalize the Spirit, they might say, 'you will get a ghost'. That means that if we simply analogize the Holy Spirit to a human person, we will arrive at the concept of an invisible entity, appearing here and there, wherever it wants to (John 3:8), doing strange things in supernatural ways. How should we come to believe that this is the shape of God's presence in the world, as Holy Scripture puts it? In fact, the question of the Spirit's personality is a very complex one. Historically we should ask how and in what sense the concept of person was introduced into the fourth-century discussions of the Trinitarian being of God – and how and in what sense the term was used for the Spirit's identity.

Berkhof mentions some scholars who reject the personality of the Holy Spirit. He says that still later Schleiermacher, Ritschl, the Unitarian present-day Modernists, and all modern Sabellians reject the personality of the Holy Spirit. He declares that it is often said in the present day that those passages which seem to imply the personality of the Holy Spirit simply contain personifications. But personifications are certainly rare in the prose writings of the New Testament and can be recognised (Berkhof, 1953:96).

For some other theologians the Holy Spirit is simply a phenomenon. Criswell says that the heretic Sabellians defined the Holy Spirit as just one of the modal expressions and manifestations of God. They looked upon the Holy Spirit as an energy, an influence (Criswell, 1977:60).

## **2.2.7.2. The personality of the Spirit of God**

### **2.2.7.2.1. The personality of the Spirit of God defended**

Through the ages, the personality of the Spirit of God has been a subject of discussion. Walvoord (1977:5) states that the personality of the Holy Spirit has been subject to denial and neglect through the centuries in the Christian church and is seldom understood by twentieth-century Christians.

For true Christians, the Holy Spirit is a divine personal being. Torrey states that it is also of the highest importance from the practical standpoint that we decide whether the Holy Spirit is merely some mysterious and wonderful power, which we in our weakness and ignorance are somehow to get hold of and use, or a real person, infinitely holy, infinitely wise, infinitely mighty and infinitely tender, who is to get hold of and use us. The former conception is utterly pagan, not essentially different from the thought of the African fetish worshipper who has his goods he uses. The latter conception is sublime and Christian (Torrey, 1976:9).

Bickersteth says that the being of the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of God is not to be confounded with the Father and the Son and this appears from all those passages in Holy Writ, which reveal to us the simultaneous co-operation or manifestation of three infinite Agents (Bickersteth, 1976:37).

Packer argues in clear terms that in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is set forth as the third divine person, linked with, yet distinct from the Father and the Son, just as the Father and the Son are distinct from each other (Packer, 1987:61).

The Holy Spirit is a divine person, this is a truth sustained by many writers who really rely on the Scriptures. Among them Williams says that Scripture is clear in its teaching about the personality of the Holy Spirit. An informed Christian will not speak of the Spirit as “it” but as “He.” He is a divine Person with whom a believer can enjoy intimate fellowship and to whom he can offer meaningful love and obedience. To think of the Holy Spirit in terms of an “influence” is not only to think in an unscriptural way, but also to deprive ourselves of great spiritual blessing in terms of communion with Him (Williams, 1980:24). Horton, referring to the book of Acts quotes “that it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us.” How clearly this indicates the reality of the Holy Spirit and the personal relation the first-century believers enjoyed with Him (Horton, 1976:9). Criswell states that the Holy Spirit is a person in the same sense that God the Father is a person and God the Son is a person (Criswell, 1977:61-62).

#### **2.2.7.2.2. What confirms the personality of the Spirit of God?**

According to Criswell, there are some things, however, that we can say about the Holy Spirit, things which are patently obvious. In a full-orbed personality four characteristics are included: a person is someone who can think (he has a mind, understanding). He can feel (he has emotions, sensibility). He can choose (he has will, purpose, volition). And he can do (he can act). All four of these characteristics of a full-orbed personality can easily be seen in the Holy Spirit of God (Criswell, 1977:61).

Concerning the previous idea, Berkhof (1953:96) mentions:

Scripture proof for the personality of the Holy Spirit is quite sufficient: (a) Designations that are proper to personality are given to Him. Though *pneuma* is neuter, yet the masculine pronoun *ekeinon* is used of the Spirit in John 16:14 and in Eph. 1:14. Some of the best authorities have the masculine relative pronoun *hos*. Moreover, the name *Parakletos* is applied to Him, John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7, which cannot be translated by “comfort” or be regarded as the name of any abstract influence. That a person is meant, is indicated by the fact that the Holy Spirit as Comforter is placed in juxtaposition with Christ as the Comforter about to depart. The same term is applied to Him in 1 John 2. It is true that this term is followed by the neuters *ho* and *auto* in John 14:16-18, but this is due to the fact that *pneuma* stands in between. (2) The characteristics of a person are ascribed to Him, such as intelligence, John 14:26; 15:26; Rom. 8:16; will, Acts 16:7; 1 Cor.12:11, and affections, Isa. 63:10; Eph. 4:30. Moreover, He performs acts proper to personality. He searches, speaks, testifies, commands, reveals, strives, creates, intercedes, raises the dead etc....

The Spirit of God is a person, with distinctive characteristics which can be ascribed to a person. Torrey (1976:11) states:

The Spirit of God is a person with all the qualities appropriate to a personal being. What are the distinctive characteristics or marks of personality? Knowledge, feeling or emotion and will. Any entity that thinks and feels and wills is a person. When we say that the Holy Spirit is a person, there are those who understand us to mean that the Holy Spirit has hands and feet and eyes and ears and mouth, and so on, but these are not the characteristics of personality but corporeity.

#### **2.2.7.2.2.1. Characteristics**

There are characteristics which are ascribed to a person. Erickson (2001:274) states that the Spirit's possession of certain personal characteristics is our third indication of this personality and among the most notable of these characteristics are intelligence, will and emotions, traditionally regarded as the three fundamental elements of personhood.

- Knowledge

The Spirit of God is characterised by knowledge. Pache asserts that the Spirit knows and searches the things of God (1 Cor. 2:10-11) (Pache, 1954:12). Erickson (2001:274) says that about various references to the Spirit's intelligence and knowledge. We here cite John 14:26, where Jesus promises "that the Spirit will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."

- Will

The Spirit of God as a person, also wills. Erickson(2001:274) mentions that the will of the Spirit is attested in 1 Corinthians 12:11, which states that the recipients of the various spiritual gifts are “inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.” Pache (1954:12) declares that He bestows His gifts upon every man as He wills.

- Emotion

The Spirit of God can be grieved in his personality; we can lie to Him as we lie to individuals. Smeaton (1980:107) records that to lie to the Holy Ghost (Acts 5:3), to grieve the Holy Spirit of God (Eph. 4:30), are expressions which, as every reflecting mind perceives, imply a person who is pleased or displeased, and they cannot, with any propriety or fitness, refer to what is impersonal.

Taking up this aspect, Erickson (2001:274) writes: “The Holy Spirit can be affected as is a person, this displaying personality passively. It is possible to lie to the Holy Spirit, as Ananias and Sapphira did (Acts 5:3-4). Paul speaks of the sins of grieving the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30) and quenching the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19). ... And then, most notably, there is the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31; Mark 3:29). This sin, which Jesus suggests is more serious than blasphemy against the Son, surely cannot be committed against what is impersonal.” Torrey, repeating the case of the sin of grieving the Spirit of God, states strongly that there is no passage in the entire Bible in which the personality of the Holy Spirit comes out more tenderly and touchingly than in Ephesians (Torrey, 1976:14-15).

### **2.2.7.2.2.2. The personal attributes of the Spirit of God**

The attributes ascribed to the Spirit of God demonstrate the truth of his personality, and these can only be applied to a person.

- The Spirit of God is said to be Comforter, Advocate and Teacher.

The Holy Spirit is designated as the Comforter. As such if God possesses personality, and the Holy Spirit is a person of the trinity, it follows that He has personality (Walvoord, 1977:6). About this, Packer states that the Spirit of God is the Comforter (in the sense of strengthener), Counsellor, Helper, Supporter, Adviser, Advocate ... and only a person can fulfill such roles (Packer, 1987:61). Again Walvoord (1977:16) points out that He is the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of might and counsel. These elements can be applied to a person and this explains that the Spirit of God is truly a person.

- The Spirit of God is a leader

A leader acts as a person. Torrey (1976:18) says that the Holy Spirit is also represented as the leader and guide of the children of God and that we read in Romans 8:14: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God they are the sons of God." Torrey adds that the Holy Spirit is not merely an influence that enables us to see the way that God would have us go, nor merely a power that gives us strength to go that way, but a person who takes us by the hand and gently leads us in the paths which God would have us walk (Torrey, 1976:18).

### **2.2.7.2.2.3. The Spirit acts as a person**

The Spirit of God is also a subject of verbs of action. That means He acts. Fee (2005:27) indicates: “Finally, the Spirit is sometimes the subject of a verb or implied activity that elsewhere is attributed either to the Father or to the Son. For example, in successive passages in 1 Corinthians 12 Paul says of God (the Father is implied) that he ‘produces’ all these activities in all people (*panta en pasin*, v.6), while in a similar sentence in vers 11 the Spirit is the subject of the identical verb with a similar object (*panta de tauta*, all these things), now referring to many Spirit manifestations enumerated in verses 8-10). Likewise in Romans 8:11, the Father ‘gives life’, while in 2 Cor. 3:6 it is the Spirit.”

The Spirit of God performs various actions as a subject in a personal manner. Bickersteth (1976:42) indicates that the Spirit performs such actions as only a person can perform: He created the world and gives life (Ps. 33:6), He commands, He teaches. In Acts 8:29 we read that the Spirit said to Philip “Go near and overtake this chariot.” Here we understand that the Spirit gives an order to be executed and this only a person can perform.

Finally we can clinch this argument by concurring with Erickson saying that all of the foregoing considerations lead to one conclusion: that the Holy Spirit is a person, not a force and that person is God, just as fully and in the same way the Father and the Son are (Erickson, 2001:274).

## **2.2.8. The deity of the Spirit of God**

### **2.2.8.1. Its reality in the Bible**



The reality of the deity of the Spirit of God is present in the Bible. One cannot deny, forget and ignore it. Williams points out that from the primordial scenes of Genesis to the glorious visions of the Apocalypse, the deity of the Holy Spirit is expressed everywhere. (Williams, 1980:29). Erickson (2001:271) states that there are several bases on which one may conclude that the Holy Spirit is God in the same fashion and to the same degree as are the Father and the Son.

#### **2.2.8.2. The divine attributes of the Holy Spirit.**

The Holy Spirit has the attributes similar to those ascribed to God, the Father. Torrey (1976:24) states that the distinctively divine attributes are eternity, omnipresence, omniscience and omnipotence. All of these are ascribed to the Holy Spirit in the Bible.

For instance, the omnipresence of the Spirit of God is indicated in Psalm 139:7-10 in which it is written: "Where can I go from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast."

Picking up this view, Williams (1980:29) indicates that his (the Spirit's) attributes, activities and prerogatives are always those of God. The titles "Spirit of God" (*Ruach Elohim*) and "Spirit of the Lord" (*Ruach Yahwe*), used quite interchangeably in the Old Testament, clearly identify Him as the Almighty and help to prepare us for the developing revelations of Scripture. In the same line of thought Calver (2001:27) says that it is because the Holy Spirit is God that Scripture describes him as

possessing all those essential hallmarks, which are the sole privilege of God Himself. Finally, Calver (2001:36) writes: “So who then is this Holy Spirit? He is God at work in us progressively making us more and more like Jesus.” The Holy Spirit is always active in our lives performing divine activities. Osterhaven (1964:70) states that the Holy Spirit is real; He is God in our midst.

### **2.2.8.3. The Holy Spirit is God Himself**

The Holy Scriptures show throughout that the Spirit of God is God Himself. Capturing this idea, Calver (2001:27) mentions that throughout the pages of the Bible it is always assumed that the Holy Spirit is more and no less than God Himself.

In Acts 5:3-4, the idea of the deity of the Spirit of God is even clearer. Referring to these last verses of Acts Chapter 5, Calver says that Peter has to rebuke Ananias for his attempted deception. He boldly announces the simple fact, “you have lied to the Holy Spirit ...You have not lied to men but to God” (Acts 5:3, 4) (Calver, 2001:27).

Picking up this idea, Erickson (2001:272) states: “Another passage where ‘Holy Spirit’ and ‘God’ are used interchangeably is Paul’s discussion of the Christian’s body. In 1 Corinthians 3:16 he writes: ‘Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?’ In 6:19 he uses almost identical language: ‘Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?’ It is clear that, to Paul, to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit is to be inhabited by God. By equating the phrase ‘God’s temple’ with the phrase

‘a temple of the Holy Spirit’ Paul makes it clear that the Holy Spirit is God.”

This demonstrates in a clear way that the Holy Spirit is God Himself, and this cannot be denied by an intelligent mind.

Kelly (2008:68) mentions: “Reflecting on the words of Jesus to the woman of Samaria that ‘God is spirit’ (John 4:24), T.F. Torrance writes in his study of the patristic doctrine of the trinity: God is Spirit and is truly known and worshipped as such, for Spirit is the specific nature of God’s eternal being (*ousia*), whether as Father, Son or Holy Spirit, and therefore...their interrelations are to be understood and expressed only in an essentially spiritual way.”

It is truly accepted that God is called Spirit in the Bible. Kelly (2008:68-69) states: “... this is made plain from Scripture. For us we there hear God called Spirit, so also do we hear the Holy Spirit, seeing that the Spirit is a hypostasis of the whole essence, spoken of as of God and from God.” It should be noticed here that the Holy Spirit is truly God himself.

## **2.2.9. The works of the Spirit of God**

### **2.2.9.1. The importance of the agency of the Spirit of God**

Through the Holy Spirit, God remains active and really present among his people. Green (2004:130) says: “In a word, the Spirit is the supreme sign that the future has invaded the present, that the new age has begun... the Church is the community where this mighty Spirit of God, who brings the future into the present is active.” Nobody would deny the

importance of the work of the Spirit of God in the world, especially in the Church. Buchanan (1966:22) mentions that the first thought that will occur to every reflecting mind, in perusing our Lord's address to his disciples immediately before his departure, is that the work of the Spirit is, in its own place, as needful and as important as the work of Christ himself.

In every aspect of life, man needs the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Without his aid, Christians would be unable to perform their service to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Buchanan (1966:23) writes:

And when he gave the reason – when he said, 'It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Spirit will not come unto you; but if I go, I will send him unto you – must they not have been impressed with the conviction that the office and work of the Holy Spirit were, in their Lord's estimation, as needful for the establishment and maintenance of his Kingdom on earth, as his own office and work had been?

Christians today, may become distressed because of the fact that the age of revelation is over. But there is a great reason to be confident that the Lord Jesus Christ is still active among them. Green states that they may have lost their apostles, but they have the Spirit of the Lord himself remaining with them to teach them (Green, 2004:56).

The Church has to enjoy the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in its midst through the Spirit of God. Green (2004:56) says:

The Spirit is his parting gift to the Church to make his presence as real to them as if they were listening to him teaching beside the Sea of Galilee: and the Spirit can do more for us than ever Jesus could have done had we been his contemporaries. He can come within us, and take up residence within our very beings. He cannot only bring to our remembrance what Jesus taught, but can reveal to us the deeper significance of his person, his death and resurrection which we could never have grasped by historical contemporaneity. We are indeed not worse off but better.

Taking up this thought, Fee mentions that above everything else, as fulfillment of the new covenant the Spirit marked the return of the lost presence of God (Fee, 2005:1).

#### **2.2.9.2. In creation**

Scripture says that the Holy Spirit is a Creator. In the book of Genesis 1:2 it is written: "... and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." Taking up the idea, Bickersteth (1976:65) mentions that the Holy Spirit's acts are the acts of God. He is Creator of heaven and earth ... This creation and fashioning of the universe is again and again ascribed to the Holy Spirit.

The Bible clearly testifies to the creation of the universe by God. In Ps. 33:6 it says: "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their

starry host by the breath of his mouth.” Torrey says that this passage teaches us that all the hosts of heaven, all the stellar world, were made by the Holy Spirit. We are taught explicitly in Job 33:4 that the creation of man is the Holy Spirit’s work (Torrey, 1976:66). From this, the creation of the material universe and of man is confirmed as the work of the Spirit of God.

The Spirit of God stands as the life-giver in the creation of man. Fitch (1974:176) writes that when man was formed, God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Gen. 2:7). And, says Fitch, it is the mighty Spirit of God who works this miracle of creating man in the divine image (Fitch, 1974:176).

It is the Spirit of God who gives order and shape to the creation of God. Williams (1980:34) says that the Old Testament writers view the Holy Spirit as the responsible, divine instrument in the ordering of the inanimate as well as the animate creation.

### **2.2.9.3. In the birth of Jesus Christ**

When the Lord Jesus Christ was to be born, the Spirit of God was active in the process. Berkhof (1953:98) says that He prepared Christ a body and thus enabled Him to become a sacrifice for sins, Luke 1:35, Heb. 10:5-7. Taking up this idea, Fitch mentions that similarly when our Lord came to earth, a body was prepared for Him within the womb of the virgin Mary. How? “The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you, therefore also that holy one which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35) (Fitch, 1974:176).

The work of the Holy Spirit is manifest in the birth of the Saviour, Jesus Christ. Williams (1980:55) states that we shall discover that the Holy Spirit was intimately and essentially involved at every point in the life of the Saviour, from the Nativity to the Ascension.

Matthew 1:18, 20 reads: "This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. ... But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said ... because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit." From this passage Williams mentions that in these well-chosen words we are confronted with the great miracle of the virgin birth of Christ. The Holy Spirit is wonderfully involved, and it is He who effects the conception of the truly human Christ in the womb of Mary (Williams, 1980:56).

#### **2.2.9.4. In conviction and sanctification of believers**

Sinners, men and women need the assistance of the Spirit of God to give up their evil ways and corrupt life, and turn to an effective godly life. De Jong (1980:214) states that it is God the Spirit who renews our lives and calls us into holy fellowship.

The evidence is that through the work of the Holy Spirit, the hearts of people are changed to become members of the body of Christ. Welker (1994:310) states: "the persons who arrive in the communion of the Holy Spirit and who are filled with the Spirit of Christ (cf.1 Cor.2:16) not only perceive the revealed mystery of sacrifice and free self-withdrawal and revitalization revealed by this free self-withdrawal. They become witness

of this life-giving Spirit (1 Cor 15: 45); they become sisters and brothers of Christ; they become members of Christ's body; they stand in intimate communion with Christ; through word and deed they pass on Christ's message, the expression of Christ's will."

Sanctification is only effected by the Spirit of God in the hearts of the believers in Jesus Christ. Referring to this concept, Hendriksen (1981:256-257) writes: "what then, does the leading of the Spirit to change from the passive to the active voice- actually mean? It means sanctification. It is the constant, effective, and beneficent influence which the Holy Spirit exercises within the hearts and lives of God's children, enabling them more and more to crush the power of indwelling sin and to walk in the way of God's commandments freely and cheerfully."

There is a need to understand the nuances between justification and sanctification of the members of the Church of Jesus Christ. Gaffin (1988:48) says: "Undeniably there is a tendency, at least in practice, to separate or even polarize justification and sanctification. Justification on the one hand, is seen as what God does, once for all and perfectly; sanctification on the other hand, is what the believer does imperfectly. Sanctification is viewed as the response of the believers, an expression of gratitude from our side for salvation defined in terms of justification and the forgiveness of sins -- usually with an emphasis on the inadequate and even impoverished quality of the gratitude expressed."

It is the Spirit of God who gives us the capacity to become Christian and really to be cleansed from our sins. Witherington (2006:160) states that the cleansing of sin and the giving of new life is the work of the Holy Spirit, whether or not the water rite is involved. Stressing this truth again, Witherington (2006:151) says: "We are told that God did not skimp when



he poured out lavishly or richly. It was sufficient not only to set us back in the right relationship with God, but also to cleanse us from sin and give us a guarantee that we would inherit eternal life, which of course implies that the believer has yet to inherit it.”

Berkhof (1960:133) says that sanctification may be defined as that gracious and continuous operation of the Holy Spirit by which He purifies the sinner, renews his whole nature to the image of God, and enables him to perform good works.

Believers in Christ would think that the Spirit is only active in the Church. But it is observed that the Holy Spirit really works in the Church and also among the unbelievers in the world. Buchanan (1966:27) invites us to consider briefly the work of the Spirit with reference to each of these two classes of men, believers and un-believers, or the world and the Church.

This is clear that the Spirit of God is active in both the world and the Church. The Holy Spirit is said to convict the sinners of their sins and to comfort those who believe in Christ. Buchanan (1966:26) states that unbelievers will be convicted by his coming, but believers will be confirmed and edified.

Without the work of the Holy Spirit it is difficult and impossible for men to recognise their misery and sinful nature in which they are captive. They cannot come to Jesus Christ, the Saviour. Torrey says that while we cannot convince men of sins there is one who can, the Holy Spirit. He can convince the most hardened and blinded man of sin. He can change men and women to be utterly overwhelmed with a sense of their need for a Saviour (Torrey, 1976:71. Green (2004:89) says that at every point the Holy Spirit is involved in the process of someone becoming a Christian.

#### **2.2.9.5. In mission and the proclamation of the Word**

When one thinks of the missionary work and the preaching of the Word, one's thoughts lead one to the glorious work of the Holy Spirit. Fitch (1974:14) says that the missionary heart is manufactured. It cannot be copied. It is part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

The missionary work as done by the apostles and other believers, was surely the work of the Spirit of God, who calls and equips his servants. Fitch (1974:148) writes that special men were still chosen, Saul and Barnabas, but they were chosen by the local congregation under the guidance of the Spirit of God. ... "Separate me Barnabas and Saul." This is how the Holy Spirit spoke to the men who were God's leaders in the Church at Antioch. They were all men of the missionary heart.

The preaching of the Word of God is made possible and fruitful only through the work of the Holy Spirit. Torrey (1976:81) points out that it is only when the Holy Spirit Himself takes the written Word, or takes the testimony of our fellow man, and interprets it directly to our hearts that we really come to see and know Jesus as He is. Taking up this thought, Buchanan says that on the teaching of the Spirit the efficacy of all the means of grace depends, and especially the efficacy of the reading and preaching of the Word. Without the Spirit of God, the ministry of the Word would be utterly fruitless (Buchanan, 1966:50). Green (2004:79) states that all this emphasis on the Spirit as the Author, the Controller and the Energizer of the Church's mission is highly significant.

#### **2.2.9.6. In sustaining the Church and the believers**

The people of God are confident when they feel the presence of God among them. In Exodus 33:15-16 we read: "Then Moses said to him, 'If your presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?'" From this passage Green (2004:127) concludes that it was the presence of God that marked out Israel as special.

During the Old Testament days, the presence of God was normally experienced in Israel through the tabernacle in the wilderness and later the temple in Jerusalem (Green, 2004:126).

In the New Testament period the presence of God is manifested by the Holy Spirit among his people. Green (2004:128) says: "To be sure, that is true of the individual also (1 Cor. 6:19). But the corporate aspect is primary." Without the presence of God through His Spirit the Church remains fruitless. Green mentions that the Church, gathered for worship and then dispersed in mission and service, is the people God had chosen for his possession, to manifest something of his glory as the Spirit makes his presence known among them, and through them, to others (Green, 2004:128).

The work of the Spirit of God is real in the Church since the time of Pentecost. It is during the event at Pentecost that the Holy Spirit empowered the disciples of Christ to carry on with the service for the advancement of the Kingdom of God. Bickersteth says that in the Acts we have the work of the Spirit in the Church, from the day of Pentecost at Jerusalem, in ever widening circles of blessing, until the gospel standard is planted within the walls of Rome: herein is seen the

ecclesiastical governance and jurisdictions of the Spirit, resting as tongues of fire on the disciples, opening the door of life to the Gentiles, appointing overseers of the flock, guiding their counsels and warning them of the eternal issues involved in the acceptance or rejection of the Gospel (Bickersteth, 1976:35).

It is the Spirit of God who leads the activities and believers in the Church. Horton (1976:162) states that one of the most important manifestations of the work of the Spirit, both in the Church and in the lives of individuals, was the way the Spirit led them.

The work of the Spirit is needed in all the aspects of the church as assembly of the people of God and in the life of each individual. For this reason Horton points out that the Spirit is truly the Guide and Protector of the Church. The Book of Acts thus emphasises that the Holy Spirit in the very nature of things is closely bound with every aspect of the life of the Church and the Christians (Horton, 1976:166).

With the work of the Holy Spirit, the Church has to grow adding new members to it and enabling them for the life to come. Calver writes that the Holy Spirit was constantly active empowering this new community for Jesus by equipping the Church for its ministry. It is scarcely surprising that this became such a major priority in the work of the Holy Spirit. He was not given merely to bless us but to make us a blessing to others (Calver, 201:142).

It is the Spirit of God who works in man to change his sinful nature through the teaching of the Word of God. Without the work of the Holy Spirit it is difficult for man to experience spiritual growth in his life. Williams writes that the Holy Spirit is the source of the believer's new life as well as his resource for all life's experiences. He is involved in every

phase of our spiritual experience. As Scripture puts it, we are not only “born of the Spirit”, but we walk by the Spirit (Williams, 1980:150).

#### **2.2.9.7. In the inspiration of the Scriptures**

The Bible is inspired by the Spirit of God. The Word of God testifies itself to this truth. In 2 Tim. 3:16 we read: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.” Taking up this, Berkhof (1953:98) says that the Holy Spirit inspired Scripture, and thus brought to men the special revelation of God (1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Pet.1:21), the knowledge of the work of redemption which is in Christ Jesus. Williams (1980:35) writes that in Scripture the Spirit is viewed as the source of inspiration for tasks that demand more than human skill. ... He inspires Scripture. The Word preached is not coming from the experience of men. . Green states that closely associated with the Spirit’s presence in worship is his inspiration of the Scriptures (Green, 2004:140).

#### **2.2.9.8. In prayer**

Praying is a hard exercise for man, even the disciples who were in the company of the Lord Jesus found it difficult. In Luke 11:1 we read: “One day, Jesus was praying in a certain place. When He finished, one of his disciples said to him: ‘Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.’” Taking up this idea, Torrey writes that the disciples did not know how to pray as they ought, so they came to Jesus and said “Lord, teach us to pray” (Torrey, 1976:130).

This truth does not only concern the disciples in the past. Christians today still experience difficulties with prayer. Torrey (1976:130) states

that today we do not know how to pray as we ought – we do not know what to pray for, nor how to ask for it – but there is one who is always at hand to help (John 14:16,17), and He knows what we should pray for. In the same line of thought Green says that, but that is not all. The Spirit who is the supreme object of prayer is also the prime inspirer of prayer (Green, 2004:120).

In Romans 8:26-27 it is written: “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.” Taking up the biblical thought, Fitch says that the Holy Spirit draws us to prayer. As He does so, He is praying in us with such inexpressible longing that even God the Father has to search our hearts to know what is in the mind of the Spirit (Fitch, 1974:175).

### **2.3. Man as spiritual being in biblical perspective**

It is interesting to look at the spiritual aspect of man as a creature of God, because there are elements which point to that fact from the recording of divine creation.

#### **2.3.1. Man is a divine creature**

From the first book of the Bible, God is recognised as the Creator of all things. Gitt (2003:96) mentions that God is the ultimate First cause and He created everything, as stated emphatically in Genesis 1:1: “In the

beginning God created ...” Taking up this truth, Horton (1976:21) says that the climax comes when God says “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen. 1:26). One can understand that God has a clear programme about the creation of man. Gitt is of this view when he writes that the purpose of this creation was human beings, as God had planned (Gitt, 2003:96).

Description is given in the Scripture concerning this creation of man. Horton (1976:21) reports:

Genesis 2:7 gives more details. God formed (moulded; shaped as a potter would) the man of (moist) dust from the ground (red earth), and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living soul (being, person, individual). Again, though the Holy Spirit is not mentioned, it is reasonable to believe that He was active along with the Father and the Son.

Man is clearly a creature of the Triune God from the biblical point of view and as expounded by many writers. In the same line of thought Koehler accepts the creation of man as being done on the sixth day. On the sixth day the Triune God made man (Gen. 1:26-27, 31). The details recorded in the Bible indicate man as the chief and foremost of all visible creatures. God counselled with Himself, and He fashioned the body of a mature man named Adam. God made Adam from the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). He gave Adam a rational soul and a conscience. God created Adam in His own image. On the same day God made one mature woman named Eve;

God made her from one of Adam's ribs, which He took from the man (Genesis 2:21-22) (Koehler, 2006:91).

Some people among the scientists do not accept the divine creation of the universe and in particular that of humankind. Clark (1984:2) states that throughout the twentieth century the most vigorous attack on divine creation of man has been the theory of evolution. The atheistic approach to evolution rejects the creation of man by God. But Clark says that not everyone believes the Bible. From reports in the public media one easily gets the impression that it is only a small and ignorant minority of the population who believes the Bible (Clark, 1984:2).

Speaking of the creation of humanity Koehler (2006:91) writes: "This record of humankind's creation seems childish and silly to many. To many it seems appropriate only for kindergarten children and is in no way to be accepted as an actual fact by people of high learning and great accomplishments." However, to believers in the Saviour Jesus Christ, the Bible is the truth and it is the infallible Word of God. Koehler affirms that Christians believe that God has made humanity. Christians do not hold that we are the descendants of primates. Nor do Christians believe that humanity arose from a primordial soup, a collision of stardust, a chaotic association of atoms, or any theory that from time to time finds fashion and sway (Koehler, 2006:91-92).

Despite what some scholars say about the creation of man it should be retained that man is evidently the creature of God. Moller(1997:46) attests that consequently man is presented as the climax and crown of God's work of creation on earth. Concerning the same idea, Coleman (2011:56) mentions that God's creative activity culminated in the making of man, a being distinct from everything else in the universe.



### **2.3.2. Constitution of the human being**

Different views are held among theologians in connection with the composition of man. Based on the Scriptures some say that man is formed of two parts and others retain the idea of three aspects. Koehler states that the Bible teaches that man consists of two chief parts: body and soul (Matthew 10:28) or body and spirit (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Sometimes Scripture speaks of three parts: body, soul and spirit (Koehler, 2006:93). Gitt recognises the existence of three common and strongly divergent views of man namely: monism, dualism and trichism (Gitt, 2003:95).

Dichotomists, writes Koehler, teach that man is composed of a body which is from dust and of the soul emanating from the spiritual essence. Koehler mentions that a human being consists of body and soul in one complete person (Genesis 2; Ecclesiastes 12:7). The body of a person is of the dust of the ground (Genesis 3:19) (Koehler, 2006:92).

Elaborating on the soul, Koehler finds that the soul of a person is not a material essence; instead it is an immortal, living, spiritual essence (Koehler, 2006:92). The immortality of the soul could arouse questions as it is spoken of in this context.

Is the soul really immortal? God only is immortal but everything or creature can be destroyed even the soul. Van der Walt (2002:166) says that according to Scripture only God is immortal. Man does not have immortality, not even his "precious soul." It is granted to him by God – and then also as complete man (not only to the soul) – on the day of resurrection. Again, Van der Walt rejects the idea of an immortal soul when he writes that this is contradicted by the fact that nowhere in God's

Word it mentioned to be immortal, made of something like an “immortal soul” and even less of “mortal remains” (Van der Walt, 2010:260).

The conflicting thoughts with regard to the composition of man is a very difficult issue. The Bible seems to teach the existence of the dichotomous and trichotomous aspect of man. Berkhof mentions that there are two passages, however, that seem to conflict with the usual dichotomous representation of Scripture, as we find it in Thess. 5:23: “And the God of peace Himself sanctifies you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entirely without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”; and Heb.4:12: “For the Word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and narrow and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Berkhof, 1953:194). The idea of Berkhof supports the dichotomous aspect of man when he states that the Bible points to two, and only two constitutional elements in the nature of man, namely body and spirit or soul (Berkhof, 1953:194).

Man is not to be regarded as a sum of two different parts (dichotomy) or of three different parts (trichotomy) because he cannot be divided. Green (2004:20-21) points out that for one thing, the Hebrews did not divide man up into spirit, mind and body as we tend to do: they thought of him as a single entity, an animated body, a living person. Taking up this thought, Van der Walt clearly states that our conclusion is therefore that Scripture always deals with the whole of man in his relation to God, and not with his composition or parts. Body, soul and spirit are not simply parts of the human being, but the whole of man, seen from different angles. Soul or spirit is therefore not something in or of man, man does not have a soul or a spirit, but man is soul and is spirit (Van der Walt, 2002:165).

Man has also a spiritual dimension in his existence as a divine creature, and this fact must seriously be considered when dealing with the composition of man. Coleman (2011:58) says “Man was made a spiritual creature. It is not necessary to speculate about the constituent elements of human nature. Whether we are composed of matter and spirit or matter, spirit and soul, the fact is that we have a spiritual component that only God can satisfy. Man lives in two worlds -- the world of matter or the flesh and the world of the spirit. We cannot live by bread alone. For us to deny our spiritual nature and seek to live without God would be a repudiation of our distinctive place in creation, it would be to live on the level of the animals.” It should be kept in mind that man can be involved in spiritual and material activity according to his nature.

### **2.3.3. The image of God**

#### **2.3.3.1. Scriptural witness**

It is clearly affirmed in the Scripture that God created man in his own image. In Genesis 1:26 it is written: “Then God said: ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground’.” There is nothing that refutes this truth. Berkhof says that according to Scripture man was created in the image of God, and is therefore God-related (Berkhof, 1958:202).

Being created in the image of God, man has to live and remember the love of his Creator and be engaged in loving other creatures of God. Having such a love in mind, Mulholland (2013:12) mentions: “The primary purpose of being created in the image of God is to be grounded

in a relationship of loving union with God as we engage with others and live in creation. This relationship is so profound that Peter speaks of it as becoming a partaker of the divine nature (2 Pet.1:4), and Paul describes it as being ‘filled with all the fullness of God’ (Eph 3:19).”

The image of God includes the spiritual aspect of man; as God the Creator, is Spirit. Again Berkhof says:

God is Spirit, and it is but natural to expect that this element of spirituality also finds expression in man as the image of God. And that this is so is already indicated in the narrative of man’s creation. God ‘breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul ....’ In view of this we can speak of man as a spiritual being, and as also in that aspect the image of God” (Berkhof,1958:204).

### **2.3.3.2. The meaning of the image of God**

The question of understanding the real and deep meaning of humanity created in the image of God remains very important among Christians. Van Huyssteen (2006:119) declares that one of the most vexing problems to Old Testament scholarship has been what specifically is meant by the creation of humanity in the image (*tselem*) and likeness (*demut*) of God.

This idea of man created in the image of God is interpreted in controversial way among Christians. Van Huyssteen (2006:117) says that scriptural references to the creation of humans in the image of God

are clearly few and far between and their meaning has always been controversial.

Many people interpret “the image of God” differently in the light of the Scriptures. Gitt (2003:99) asks this question: “What does it mean to state that man was made in the image of God?” The answer to this important question could reveal marvellous elements distinguishing man from other creatures. Answering this question, Gitt says that God created man according to His own ideas and thoughts, in His likeness, reflecting God’s own properties and qualities (Gitt, 2003:99). Clark, in his view holds that the image of God implies dominion, God’s instructions to Adam about agriculture and husbandry .... God endowed Adam with the ability to speak, not only to speak to Eve, but to speak to God and worship Him. The important point is that God and Adam talked to each other and Adam understood. Animals do not understand, are not subject to moral commands, cannot sin, and hold no religious services (Clark, 1984:7-8).

The image of God is seen in the sense of dominion of humans over other creatures like fish and beasts. Taking up this idea, Van Huyssteen (2006:135) states:

Herzfeld has argued that this understanding of the *Imago Dei* in terms of the human function of exercising dominion, and in effect acting as God’s deputy on earth, in some form or another remains the favored interpretation among Old Testament exegetes (cf Herzfeld 2002:23). The reasons for this widespread acceptance are explicitly present in the three strengths of Rad’s interpretation: (1)

the functionalist approach clearly emphasizes a holistic view of what it means to be humans;(2) within the context of the Genesis Imago Dei texts, the creation in God's image is immediately followed by the charge to exercise dominion; (3) Rad consistently strove to take the historical and literary contexts of the priestly texts into account. In addition to these specific strengths, Herzfeld has added an important argument for an updated functional interpretation of the image of God texts: in the light of the current ecological debate that is often highly critical of exploitative notions of dominion or stewardship, a functional interpretation also supports human responsibility and care for the environment precisely by positing human dominion over nature.

Berkhof is of the view that the image of God constitutes the essence of man. The image of God in this restricted sense is identical with what is called original righteousness. It is the moral perfection of the image, which could be, and was lost by sin (Berkhof, 1958:207).

Referring to 1 Cor. 11:7, Clark states that the image of God is not something man has somewhere inside of him, or somewhere on the surface, as if God had first created man and then stamped him with a signet ring. No, the image is not something man has, man is the image. First Corinthians 11:7 pointedly says: "He (man) is the image and glory of God" (Clark, 1984:9). From this thought, one should understand that man is the image of God and he does not have God's image. Clark adds

that man is a created being. Made in the image of God, he is endowed with reason, will and emotions (Clark, 1984:52).

Other writers view the image of God in connection with the relationship of man to his creator. Van der Walt (2002:173) mentions that a subsequent group of thinkers have maintained that the image should not be sought in a static “something” or a characteristic, but in the dynamic relationship between God and man.

The traditional idea of the image of God is seemingly challenged this time. Van Huyssteen (2006:116) mentions: “The biblical idea that human beings are created in the image of God and that *Homo sapiens* is therefore placed more or less at the center of the created universe seems to be especially challenged in our time. For Christian theology one of the most crucial questions to day should be whether there is a way in which we may rediscover the canonical function and orienting power of a concept like the *Imago Dei* without retreating to metaphysical abstractions. Welker has also argued recently that rediscovering core theological concepts that specifically express the relation between creator and creatures should never be done in abstraction from the way we humans find ourselves concretely situated in the world.”

#### **2.3.3.3. The fall of man**

The image of God was damaged by human sin, the fall of man disturbed the perfect harmony that existed between man and God and it was destroyed. Koehler (2006:95) says that the immediate result of Adam’s fall into sin was the loss of the image of God. After the fall of man, there is a necessity to restore the perfect and harmonious

relationship which prevailed between God and man. Van der Walt points out that where man (Adam and Eve) was perfect upon creation (living according to the image of God) this perfection was deformed after the fall and should be reformed in the power of the Spirit (Van der Walt, 2002:174).

It is not possible for man to be reconciled with God and reflect the glory of God without the Saviour Jesus Christ. Kruithof states that Calvin also insists that the divine image can be restored only through salvation in Christ who is the most perfect image of God (Kruithof, 1968:51).

#### **2.3.4. The spirit of man**

Is there something like the spirit of man? In Psalm 51:10-12, 17 it is written: "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me ... the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

On analysing the thought of the psalmist, one will admit that there is a spirit belonging to God and to man. Moule mentions that he speaks of the Spirit of God and the spirit of man, and treats the two as analogous to one another (Moule, 2000:9). Alluding also to this idea, Rosato (1983:264) indicates that Christian theologians claim that the human spirit is an image of the personal character not only of Yahweh (memory) but also of his Word (knowledge) and his Spirit (love), so that Augustine's psychological model of the Trinity serves to show that in the



structure of human personality there is a divinely intended means to help humanity arrive at the reasonableness of revelation.

The word “spirit” can be equalised with someone’s life. This idea can be depicted in Luke 23:43 when the Lord Jesus Christ said: “...Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. When He had said this, he breathed his last. The same goes with Stephen for it is written in Acts 7:59-60: “While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit ...when he had said this, he fell asleep.” Green points out that to his mind it is true that *ruach* is used of man’s spirit in a number of ways. It is used in the story of the flood, for instance, to denote the “breath of life” (Gen. 6:17) which God gives, and takes back again (Green, 2004:21). With the idea of Eccl. 12:7, in mind Horton writes that the Bible does show that man’s own spirit comes from God and will return to Him (Horton, 1976:21).

The word ‘spirit of man’ also brings to mind different ideas for individuals and it bears several meanings which fact causes ambiguity in the understanding of the word. Welker (2011:76) says that general talk of the spirit is highly ambiguous. Through different cultures and circumstances, this phenomenon can be observed. Again Welker (2011:79) mentions: “countless appearances of the spirit are highly ambiguous and ambivalent -- just as Paul Tillich suggested (cf. Tillich 1963). Monistic, dualised and dualistic forms of thought can, for example, successfully tame complex thoughts and ideas that span cultures.”

Turning to human beings, the spirit of man is clearly spoken of in the Scriptures. When Adam (man) was created, it is biblically indicated that God breathed into his nostrils and man became a living soul (Gen 2:7),

he become a living spirit, soul and breathing body. Taking up this thought, Moller (1997:46) points out: “The Bible mentions the similarity between man and beast. At the same time it also refers to the radical difference between the two ... it exists in that man, unlike other living creatures, was created in the image and the likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27) ... this implies, among others, that man, regarding his inner self, is spirit. This means that he is in a personal relationship to God and he exists as an I, precisely because the spirit of the I (God) in him.”

There is a relation and contact between the spirit of man and the spirit of God in various activities as in prayers. Alluding to this idea, Welker (2011:79-80) indicates: “Using a critical and nuanced approach, we must try to understand the ways in which the human spirit and the divine spirit related to each other. The apostle Paul offered us an excellent example of the way we can approach this task. He perceived the incredible complexity of the human spirit. On the one hand, he is fascinated with the ability of the spirit to enable contact over vast spatial and temporal distances, not only with other people, but also with God. Yet on the other hand, he sees the helplessness of a human spirit overwhelmed by the glory of God so that the Spirit must intercede for us with “groans too deep for words” (Rom.8:26).

### **2.3.5. Spiritual relationship between man and God.**

Man is called to be in a relationship with God his Creator throughout his existence. Mulholland (2013:12) states that genuine Christian spirituality views humanity as a spiritual being created in the image of God and participating with God in fallen creation which God intends to redeem fully.

Man's life is spiritually and materially enjoyed. In his works Mascall (1959:33) mentions that to be a human being is to be a being who has a unique and extremely exciting status in the universe: for it is to be a dweller in both the great realms of creation, the realm of matter and the realm of spirit. This shows how the maintenance of spiritual relationship is important for human beings.

Carey (1977:179) insists on this fact: "Man, as I have described him, lives in the intersection of two spheres. He is a natural and physical being, but one who no less definitely dwells within the indefinable spiritual realm. His problems begin when he tries to deny one or the other of these spheres, or when he distorts their relationship."

Man is called to live in relationship with God, his Creator, to serve Him because that is life. Van der Walt (2010:278) reminds us about this relationship: "Remember that the Bible is always describing human beings in their relationship to God. So 'spirit' simply means life and not something separate which is added to the body or material part."

Man's relation with God is very important and must not be neglected. Mulholland (2013:12) indicates that the God context is fundamental. The evidence from the Scriptures is that God is the Creator of man and this cannot bring any doubt in our mind as human beings.

There is a real relationship between man and his Creator which has to be understood in faith through the work of the Holy Spirit and this is represented in the fact that man is the image of God. Mulholland (2013:13) mentions: "Thomas Merton puts it like this: 'What God seeks of us is His own image in ourselves. This image is not something that we can produce by our own efforts. Indeed, we do not have to produce it. It

is already there. It is the simple reality of our true being as sons of God by grace'.”

Indeed, man is shown in a special position among other divine creatures because he is the only one who is created in the image of God. Van Huyssteen (2006:112) points out: ...the focus in the lecture will shift to one of the core traditions of the Christian faith, the doctrine of the *imago Dei*, and the deep-seated religious belief that humans are special because they were created in the image of God.”

Referring to Calvin's idea of the image of God in the relation with the human mind, Van Huyssteen (2006:130-131) states: “For Calvin the image was spiritual; and its primary seat was in the mind and soul. In an interesting passage, Calvin does reveal a remarkably positive and thus holistic attitude toward the human body: the divine glory is in fact also displayed in humankind's outward appearance, although the proper seat of the image of God is still the mind or soul (Institutes 1.15.3, P.162). In this sense the *Imago Dei* is deeply spiritual and extends to everything in which human nature surpasses the nature of all other species of animals.”

Moreover, one should argue that the uniqueness of man among all the divine creatures can be sought in the fact that God gave to man the order to dominate over the other divine creatures and be his steward and representative. (Gen 2:286).

### **2.3.6. Death and man**

#### **2.3.6.1. Origin of death**

How did death originate? The Bible is clear and precise on this point. For God said to man in Genesis 2:17: “But you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” As history went on, in Genesis 3, the Devil deceived the woman, Eve, who ate the fruit from the forbidden tree and gave to her husband, Adam, who also ate. From this transgression of the command of God, sin entered the world with death. Koehler (2006:395) writes: “Because God did not create Adam and Eve to die, humanity is not subject to death according to the order of creation. ... Death entered the world by sin (Romans 5:22).” Sin brought death into the world.

To die is not something natural; but it is due to sin. Clark says that Scripture uses the term death both for physical death and for spiritual death and both together are the penalty for sin (Clark, 1984:65).

In the New Testament, the idea of death is openly linked to sin as its cause. In Romans 6:23, it is written: “For the wages of sin is death. But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” In his own words Nürnberger points out that because we are all sinners, we all have to die (Nürnberger, 2007:91). Death awaits the whole of humankind because everyone has sinned and has to die. Van der Walt (2010:368) shows that the fact that one day every one of us will die is, according to Scripture not something normal but God’s punishment for sin. Berkhof says that Scripture teaches us that death resulted from sin and is a punishment for sin, Gen. 2:17; 3:19; Rom. 5:12, 17; 6:23 (Berkhof, 1960:167).

#### **2.3.6.2. Attitude towards death**

Death is something dreadful to human beings who do not know the afterlife despite the biblical teaching. Nürnberger (2007:25) mentions that death cannot be considered to be a promotion to a more glorious form of existence. But believers in Jesus Christ have solid reasons to stand with joy before death. Clark-Soles (2006:139) writes:

Why should death bring joy? The wonderful benefits that result from Jesus' departure, his death, include peace (*eirēnē*), eternal life (*zōē*), the birth of the church as he bestows the Spirit from the cross (John 19:35), the receipt of the paraclete (19:30; 20:22), and the complete unity of the believer with God and Jesus. Jesus' way to the Father prepares a place for them so that they will dwell intimately with God.

In John 14:23, the Scripture says: "Jesus replied, 'if anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.'" Taking up this verse, from John, Clark-Soles (2006:139) mentions: "I must emphasize that this constitutes the ultimate answer to the problem of death: God and Jesus making their dwelling place among the believers here and now, in this life and then projected into eternal future." According to this thought, true Christians have to see death as the way to experience peace in the presence of God.

In John 17:3, Jesus Christ defines eternal life in the following words: "This is eternal life, that they may know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." To believe firmly in Jesus and belong totally to Him is life. Clark-Soles expresses this thought as

follows: “With Jesus, you have all you need; without him, you have nothing” (Clark-Soles, 2006:129).

The problem of death is truly present in the thought of man because everyone knows that one day he will experience it. Carey (1977:161) reports: “One of the great problems of individualism, wrote B.F. Skinner, seldom recognized as such, is death – the inescapable fate of the individual, the final assault on freedom and dignity. The fact of man’s mortality is close to the heart of the problem of man and, as such, is never far away from his anxious thought.” Man lives with the idea of death but the solution to the problem is found in Jesus Christ, the Saviour. For the Scripture testifies to it. In John 3:16 we read: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

### **2.3.6.3. Afterlife**

What is the situation of man after this life on earth? Scripture which is our source of norms of life gives a clear indication about this question. 2 Cor. 5:8 says: “We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” There is here the idea of being in the presence of the Lord after death. Berkhof (1960:169) writes that believers are represented as enjoying a conscious life immediately after death (Luke 16:19-31; 23:43; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23; Rev. 6:9).

Clark-Soles mentions that according to some New Testament literature (Synoptics, Acts, Paul), as well as Josephus and early rabbinic writings, belief in the resurrection or the afterlife was a distinguishing characteristic of the Pharisees, as opposed to the Sadducees, who

rejected such beliefs (Clark-Soles, 2006:61-62). The Lord Jesus Christ says that He is the resurrection and life. Kruithof (1968:139) writes:

In the inter-testamentary period, belief in the resurrection became more pronounced. The Pharisees in Jesus' day held to it. Martha at the grave of her brother confesses that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day. It was on this occasion that our Lord uttered those profound words: '... I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me, though he dies yet shall live' (John 11:25).

There is certainty of life after death for those who believe in Jesus Christ. For Clark-Soles mentions that Paul insists on a doctrine of bodily resurrection because to do otherwise empties both the cross and the *parousia* of any real force. Resurrection necessarily requires that a person has first died. Paul believes that, before his resurrection, Jesus was thoroughly dead (Clark-Soles, 2006:80). The thought is that life is a reality after death for man. Neil says that it is only through Jesus Christ that clear and confident hope has entered into the world (Neil, 1968:72).

God, the Creator, is God of living, because those who believe in Him continue to live even after having experienced death. Neil mentions that we turn first to look at his teaching. In one tremendous sentence, He has told us all that we need to know: "He is not a God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him" (Luke 20:38) (Neil, 1968:72).

#### **2.4. Biblical perspective on the spiritual world**



## **2.4.1. The spiritual world: its reality**

### **2.4.1.1. Evidence of the spiritual world's existence**

There are people who doubt the reality of the existence of the spiritual beings and their activities in the world. Osterhaven (1964:79) indicates:

How many people believe in good and bad angels today? It may have seemed quite proper to simple believers in the Middle age, and it may be acceptable to credulous illiterates here and there in our day. But for enlightened people to take these imaginary creatures seriously is quite out of step with the advances of modern science and altogether primitive and crude. This was the position of many in as well as out of the Church, and it remains the attitude of some today.

According to Page, there can be little doubt that the biblical writers believed in the existence of Satan and evil spirits and that this conviction helped these authors account for what they experienced in their lives and, adds Page, the critical question facing modern readers of the Bible is whether such a belief is credible and meaningful today (Page, 1975:267).

Osterhaven, in his book *Our Confession of faith; a study manual on the Belgic Confession* states: "The last sentence in the article rejects two errors, the denial of the existence of spirits and angels, and the position that the devils have a status independent of God. The devils exist, but they exist as creatures of God, corrupt and depraved in all their ways, yet creatures subject to God's will nonetheless" (Osterhaven, 1964:81).

The valuable answer to those who doubt the reality of the devils and their leader Satan is to go to the Scriptures. Page states that his underlying assumption is that the Bible's authority is primary; thus, experience must be judged in the light of what is taught in Scripture. He goes on saying that one cannot expect to be able to assess contemporary phenomena with discernment without having a solid grasp of what the Bible actually teaches (Page, 1975:9). Osterhaven (1964:80) points out that Scripture sets forth the doctrine of both good and bad angels very plainly with the Lord Jesus Christ teaching their existence in the most unmistakable terms. Berkhof (2005:141) writes that there is clear evidence of belief in the existence of angels from the beginning of the Christian era. He also specifies that some of them were regarded as good, and other as evil.

The evidence of the existence of these spiritual beings is attested in many biblical passages. Williams (2002:89) mentions:

Jesus says to Peter: 'Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels' (Matthew 26:53). A 'legion' was composed of around six thousand men, so more than twelve legions mean over seventy-two thousand angels. This gives us a lower limit to the number of angels. The book of Revelation speaks of thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousands of angels worshipping before the throne of God (Rev. 5:11). As for demons, Scripture never gives us the number of demons that exist. However, there are some

clues. Paul says that Gentile idolaters are worshipping demons when they worship their idols (1 Cor. 10:20-21), and even assuming that demons are behind only a fraction of idol worship we are probably left with a large number. When Jesus exorcises the tomb dwelling man from the region of Gerasene, what was apparently a single spirit reveals: 'My name is Legion ... for we are many' (Mark 5:9).

It is clear that the Bible speaks of angels, demons and Satan, and these spiritual beings are invisible although Christianity underlines the belief in the spiritual world. Again Williams points out that angels and demons are inextricably woven into the fabric of Scripture and Christian belief. He also mentions that the plausibility of belief in angels is therefore part and parcel of the plausibility of Christianity, and angels and devils are a matter for Christian apologetics (Williams, 2002:xiv).

The existence of Satan and other spiritual beings is supported by Montgomery states that he believes that (a) the devil exists as a real and powerful superhuman creature who, for a temporary period of time, has been allowed by God to wander to and fro throughout the earth seeking whom he may devour; (b) that the devil's work is largely accomplished by demons who are under his control; (c) that the satanic forces are powerful, deceptive, opposed to righteousness, and constantly tempting man to engage in ruinous sin (Eph. 6:12; 2 Thess. 2:9; Heb. 2:14; John 8:44; 1 Pet. 5:8; Matt. 4:1) (Montgomery, 1975:240). Berkhof in his view of this matter also indicates that all religions recognise the existence of a spiritual world and that their mythologies speak of gods, half-gods, spirits, demons, genii, heroes, and so on. Speaking in particular of the

angels, he mentions that no one who bows before the authority of the Word of God can doubt the existence of angels (Berkhof, 2005:143).

#### **2.4.1.2. Angels: divine creatures**

Angels as other spiritual beings are creatures of God. Osterhaven (1964:79) commenting the Confession of Faith, article XIIb writes: "... He also created the angels good, to be his messengers and to serve his elect; some of whom are fallen from that excellency in which God created them into everlasting perdition; and others have by the grace of God remained steadfast and continued in their primitive state ...." The Word of God speaks of the creation of the angels. Berkhof (2005:143) mentions that the creation of the angels has sometimes been denied, but is clearly taught in Scripture.

In his own words, Koelher (2006:87) recognises the creation of the angels and says: "After the sixth day, no new creatures were made (Gen. 2:1-2). We conclude, then, that the angels must have been created sometime within the six days of creation ... All the millions of angels (Revelation 5:11; Luke 2:13) were created at the beginning ... they are distinct spiritual beings created by God. The Psalmist writes: 'God makes His angels spirits' (Psalm 104:4)." From this one can understand that God is the Creator of angels and other spiritual beings. Nehemiah 9:6 writes: "You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens, even the highest heaven, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you." The fact that angels are creatures is also supported by Williams who says: "The existence of an angel depends upon their being created and sustained in existence by

God (cf. Neh. 9:6 and Col. 1:16). There is nothing implausible in this; as atheist J.J.C. Smart admits: 'Surely an omnipotent being could have created ... spirits directly.' (Williams, 2002:78)."

#### **2.4.1.3. Angels and demons are personal beings**

Although angels and demons are spiritual beings belonging to the spiritual world, they present characteristics of a person such as speaking, experiencing joy, having knowledge, for Koehler (2006:88) mentions that the archangel said to Mary: "I am Gabriel who stands in the presence of God" (Luke 1:19). Koehler adds that the text plainly shows that Gabriel was conscious of his existence and of his personality, angels are rational beings and experience joy over a sinner's repentance (Luke 15:10) (Koehler, 2006:88).

In his words, Berkhof (2005:144) states that angels are rational, moral and immortal beings and this, he adds, means that they are personal beings endowed with intelligence and will.

Williams understands that angels are conscious and rational in their nature, and that is why he writes:

An angel, being a spirit, clearly satisfies the classical definition of a person (by Boethius), namely that a person is an individual substance of a rational nature. An angel is just as much a person as you are. A person can be more briefly defined as a conscious purposive agent. To be conscious means to engage in acts of thinking, feeling, desiring, willing, believing and knowing.

To be purposive means to have desires, intentions or aims, and set out to achieve them. To be an agent means to be something with the ability to do or achieve things in the world (Williams, 2002:80).

The Word of God speaks of the evil spirits besides Satan. Harper (1970:32) declares:

Not only is Satan exposed by the light of Christ's coming, but so also are the evil spirits, of which we read so little in the Old Testament. Here we are able to learn very much more about their nature and mode of operation. We know from the New Testament that these spirits are not the souls of dead people. They are rather fallen angels who were evicted from heaven at the same time as their commander, Satan.

Taking up this subject about the evil spirits, Williams (2002:55) mentions that the term for an evil spirit, demon, comes from the Greek *daimon*, which originally meant merely 'supernatural being' or 'spirit' and was used of any and all spiritual beings besides God. Again Williams points out that demons are both like angels being naturally spirit and unlike angels in being confirmed, not in the grace of God, but in their sinful (divinely permitted but undesired) rejection of grace. He also indicates that just as angels are what they are by their 'yes' to God, demons are what they are by their 'no' to God (Williams, 2002:101).

These evil spirits are active in the world and have characteristics of persons. For Harper (1970:32) writes:

These evil spirits are personalities, like God's angels, not impersonal influences. They are agents working under the authority of Satan. They can speak (Mark 5:9, 12), believe (James 2:19), exercise their wills (Luke 11:24), and they know about their future fate (Matt. 8:29) and recognize Jesus as the Son of God (Mark 1:24) and so clearly possess intelligence. But, like Satan, they ultimately only operate within the permissive will of God, and on occasion they fulfill His will.

From this it is clear that angels, demons and evil spirits are personal beings but invisible.

## **2.4.2. Satan**

### **2.4.2.1. The name**

Satan is the leader of the fallen angels. Berkhof (2005:148) states that Satan appears in Scripture as the recognised head of the fallen angels. He bears different names describing his nature and character. Williams (2002:100) says that Satan's many names and descriptions give an insight into his nature. Berkhof (2005:148-149), mentions that the name 'Satan' points to him as 'the Adversary', not in the first place of man, but of God. And again Williams, in his book, indicates several of the names of Satan:

Satan (Job 1:6-12) means accuser, or adversary.  
*Abbadon* (Hebrew) or *Apollyon* (Greek) means

the destroyer. *Beelzebub* (Greek *Beelzeboul* cf. Matt. 12:24) means lord of the flies and refers to the prince of demons. *Belial* (2 Cor. 6:15) means worthless. Satan is also referred to as the ruler of the kingdom of the air (Eph. 2:2), the prince of this world (John 8:44) and as being like a roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8) (Williams, 2002:100).

#### **2.4.2.2. The personality of Satan**

Like all the angels, Satan is a creature of God. Williams (2002:101) states that Satan is not an equal but opposite god to God; he is an angel, created by God, who chose to rebel against God.

Satan has the qualities of a person, and he is said to have spoken to the Lord Jesus Christ in the wilderness to tempt him. In Matthew 4:3 it is written that the tempter came to him and said: "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." From such an act one would surely understand that the Devil is a personal being. Jennings (1975:5) states that as far as the Scriptures go, the personality of the Devil is as clearly revealed as the personality of Christ. And again Jennings speaks of Satan as a reasoning being mentioning that the Devil is then, according to Scripture, an actual, living, reasoning being, and, in some way, the embodiment of evil, as God of good; and who can deny it? (Jennings, 1975:6.)

Montgomery underlines the personality of Satan when he writes that separating the Devil from mere 'magic' involves, first of all recognising that he exists as a real personality (Montgomery, 1975:11). Satan and



other angels are personalities not abstractions. White (1977:44) writes: “Since Satan is an angel, and all his evil spirits are angels, it is important to note some of the characteristics of angels. Only by so doing can we understand the personality, power and limitations of Satan and his kingdom of demons,” Again White says that the reality of Satan is clearly taught in the Scriptures. Indeed the devil is evil, as God is good. But this does not mean that the devil is an abstraction, he is a person (White, 1977:43).

#### **2.4.2.2.1. The works of Satan**

##### **2.4.2.2.1.1. Against the work of God**

The activities of Satan are various and in the first place inclined to oppose God, the Creator. As in the narrative of the fall of man, the real attack of Satan is not on Eve but to refute the Word of God. Leahy (1975:34) mentions: “In Genesis 3 the devil appears as most clever ... He does not openly attack Eve, but insidiously casts a doubt on the Word of God to her. Is it really the case that God has said: ‘You shall not eat from every tree of the garden?’ The question seems to suggest that God is putting an unwelcome and unfair restriction upon man.” White (1977:122) says that at the outset of history, Satan tempted Eve and the consequence to the human race was sin, the greatest tragedy of all time.

Satan is the tempter who came to Adam and Eve to drive them from the love of God. Leahy (1975:5) reports that the tempter came to Adam and Eve with cynical composure and questioned their whole covenant relationship with God, casting doubt on the veracity of his Word to them and posing as their friend and benefactor. White says that temptation

was also the weapon with which the devil tried to overcome Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11), and our Lord was the only person to ever utterly resist Satan's temptation (White, 1977:122).

The devil likes to be equal to the Creator, God, which is the sin of pride and he usually wants to bring men to this sin. Jennings (1975:102) notices: "Thus Satan at the first and Satan at the last, drags his victim, man, in his own path of pride, of complete self-sufficiency and independency, and that, in one form or another, is the surest, clearest, characteristic of his work all through the ages." As we have already said, Satan's work is to destroy the work of God by all means. Again Jennings says that are we to be surprised, then, if, whilst the Devil is today, on the one hand, binding together in various ways all that is opposite to God, uniting men by selfish interests into confederacies, trust, unions, societies, yet, on the other, he is ever aiming at destroying practical unity wherever it does exist among the children of God; and thus as far as lies in his power undoing the work of the Son of God (Jennings. 1975:104-105).

#### **2.4.2.2.1.2. Against Jesus and his followers**

Satan desires to destroy the Lord Jesus Christ and his followers, and that is why he undertook the temptation of Jesus in the desert. In this very work of Satan it is revealed that he failed. Leahy (1975:38) mentions: "God cannot be tempted with evil (Jas 1:13). The temptation of our Lord in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11, Mark 1:12, 13; Luke 4:1-13) was addressed to Him in his human nature." White (1977:107) states that the devil's objectives are based in his sworn enmity against Jesus Christ.

Satan, as he is called, is observed accusing others. Kelly (1968:10-11) writes that in the Apocalypse, Satan appears in his Old Testament position in heaven, where he brings accusations night and day against Christians (Rev. 12:10) until his eventual expulsion by Michael and his angels. White underlines that although Satan and his angels have the capacity to appear in bodily form to men, they seem to prefer to attack people as spirits, and they assault people from without, or actually entering into them. He adds saying that we see throughout the Bible, and particularly in the New Testament, that Satan deposes his demons as spirits to enter into men, women and children (White, 1977:51).

### **2.4.3. Angels and their activities**

Angels are creatures of God. White (1977:34) writes:

The Bible often refers to the vast number of living beings in space as angels. ... They were created for a variety of functions, as indicated in the Word of God. They are 'spirit-messengers sent out to help and care for those who are to receive his salvation' (Hebrews 1:14). Wrote the psalmist: 'He orders his angels to protect you wherever you go. They will steady you with their hands to keep you from stumbling against the rocks on the trail' (Psalm 91:11, 12).

There are good and evil angels according to the state they find themselves in after creation. Leahy states that the Scriptures speak of

good and bad angels, of holy angels, angels which kept their first estate (Jude 6) (Leahy, 1975:13).

#### **2.4.3.1. Good angels**

These angels were created like others and did not sin. Koehler (2006:88) declares:

At first all angels were in a state of trial and probation in which they could sin. Some of them did sin, as Scripture testifies: 'God did not spare the Angels who sinned' (2 Peter 2:4). Others did not sin. These angels remained in the sinless condition in which they were created and are now confirmed in their holiness. They cannot sin because they are holy angels (Matthew 25:31), and they always see the face of God in heaven and enjoy everlasting bliss and communion with God (Matthew 18:10). All this the angels owe exclusively to God's goodness.

Leahy says that the good angels are represented as forming the army or hosts of God, ever ready to obey His word. They do his commandments, adds Leahy, hearkening unto the voice of his word (Psalm 103:20) (Leahy, 1975:13). Berkhof says of the good angels that they perennially praise God, fight His battles, and serve Him faithfully (Berkhof, 2005:149).

### **2.4.3.2. The evil angels**

As their name indicates, these angels are not obedient to God. Koehler (2006:89) says that these angels were originally good, however, they sinned (2 Peter 2:4). Koehler (2006:89) mentions: “These evil angels are now forever rejected. Scripture states that they are ‘reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day’ (Jude 6). There is no salvation for the evil angels.” For Leahy, the fallen angels form the army of Satan, the forces of darkness which endeavour to destroy the works of God (Leahy, 1975:13). Berkhof says that the evil angels as powers of darkness are bent on cursing God, battling against Him and His Anointed, and destroying His work, and they are in constant revolt against God, seek to blind and mislead even the elect, and encourage sinners in their evil. They are lost and hopeless spirits (Berkhof, 2005:149).

It is not fair to fear the spiritual world as Christians who are saved by the blood of Jesus Christ. Page (1995:269) says that there is the danger of breeding fear and paranoia by exaggerating the power of the devil and evil spirits. This must be avoided.

## **2.5. Response of the Christian faith to the biblical perspective on the spiritual world**

Now that we have elaborated on the biblical material as far as the spiritual world is concerned, it is significant to present a short overview of how the Christian faith responded to this topic through the ages.

The ecumenical creeds, namely the Apostolic Creed, the Nicene Creed and Athanasian Creed, all refer to the Holy Spirit as the third person of

the one true God. Osterhaven (1964:72) says that the Holy Spirit then must be no less a person than Jesus Christ Himself. The Nicene Creed explicitly mentions the fact that the Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of life. Osterhaven (1964:72) alluding to the idea, writes : “The Council of Constantinople, in 381, after confirming the Nicene Creed adopted a half century earlier, inserted several descriptive phrases after the words , “ I believe ...in the Holy Ghost, so that the ancient Creed reads: ” We believe ...in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified ....” It was also a basic confession of the early church that human beings are created as the image of God, that they have a spiritual dimension, and, being saved by the Lord Jesus Christ, are looking forward to the everlasting life of the (new) world to come.

Throughout the history of the Christian church, there were many different movements which emphasised the person and the work of the Holy Spirit with different nuances and which generated a plurality of pneumatologies (see Mashau 2000:30-49). The following movements could be mentioned here: Montanism (2<sup>nd</sup> century), Anabaptism (sixteenth century), Pentecostalism (nineteenth and twentieth centuries) and the charismatic movement (twentieth century).

Within the content of this study, special reference should be made to the period of the Reformation of the sixteenth century. Calvin was called the “theologian of the Holy Spirit”, because of his emphasis on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Hesselink (2008:299) declares: “Calvin has often been acclaimed ‘theologian of the Holy Spirit (as early as 1901 by Charles Lelièvre; later by B.B.Warfield (1931), Werner Krusche (1957), and others. The same claim has been made for Luther and Bucer, but one can still maintain that the Holy Spirit plays a greater role in Calvin’s

theology than in that of any other reformer. 'Pneumatology is present everywhere in Calvin's thought' (Ganoczy, "Calvin",135)."

The Christian religion confesses the Holy Spirit as God Himself who has a proper personality and He is a person not a mere force, power or an influence; and more than that the Holy Spirit has his attributes, qualities as God and He is distinct from the Father and the Son. De Jong (1980: 210) states: "The early church settled the deity of the Holy Spirit at the time of the great Trinitarian controversies. Not only was the Son declared to be of one essence with the Father but also the Spirit. Here our confession repeats what has been commonly confessed by the believing church: of one and the same essence, majesty and glory with the Father and the Son. The fullness of the divine being and attributes belongs also to him." Kelly (2008:80) says: "Calvin, again in common with many church fathers, demonstrates from the Old and New Testaments the full deity of the Holy Spirit. It is especially in light of the divine works wrought by the Spirit that Calvin shows him to be fully God. The Holy Spirit brings about regeneration and immortality by his own (not a derived) power. Many of the same works attributed to the Son are also attributed to the Spirit. He could not work in this way if he were not a person subsisting in the very essence of God, and thus as fully God as the Father and the Son."

The personality of the Holy Spirit is something certain which has to be openly declared and proclaimed by the church to all the peoples in the world and also in Africa. De Jong (1980:208) mentions: "It is to the glory of the Reformation and especially Calvin that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit came somewhat into its own. As never before in the church's history his person and work were stressed."

The Spirit of God is undeniably to be accepted and considered as a person. Welker (1994:312) states that the Holy Spirit is thus certainly to be understood as a person, but as a public person. Erickson (2001: 273) indicates that the Bible makes it clear in several ways that the Holy Spirit is a person and possesses all the qualities which that implies. About the same issue, De Jong (1980:208) points out: “that the Holy Spirit is person should be clear to all who know God’s work. Many passages clearly indicate this. Although the word “Spirit” is neuter, the pronoun used to designate him is always masculine. He is never called ‘it’ but always ‘he’ in the Bible.”

Through his works we ought to notice that the Holy Spirit is really God. McNeill (1977:138) declares: “The divinity of the Spirit is demonstrated in his work... For it is the Spirit who, everywhere diffused, sustains all things, causes them to grow, and quickens them in heaven and in earth. Because he is circumscribed by no limits, he is excepted from the category of creatures, but in transfusing into all things his energy, and breathing into them essence, life, and movement, he is indeed plainly divine.”

The Spirit of God is effectively active in the work of the creation and the protection of all creatures. About this fact, Hesselink (2008:302) points out that in Calvin’s theology the Spirit also plays an important role in the creation and preservation of the world. It should be noticed that the Spirit of God brings shape and order to the divine creation. Again, Hesselink (2008:303) declares: “The Spirit of God is not only involved in the act of creation but also gives order and shape to it and sustains it. In the process of creation it is the Spirit who with tender care (*forendo*) supported the confused matter of heaven and earth until beauty and order (*series*) were added “(Inst. I.13,22, OS III, 138 ).”



Christians have to recognise that they are dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit. De Jong (1980:208) says: “Without the Spirit’s presence our hearts are dead and our minds are darkened. The Spirit of God gives life and light and liberty.” Elaborating on the Christian life, Hesselink (2008:304) states that for Calvin, from the beginning to the end the Christian life is made possible by God’s grace as it is experienced by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Sustaining the role of the Spirit of God among Christians, Welker (1994:308) declares: “the true and real church, the ecumenical and transcontinental church, the church that extends beyond particular epochs, and thus also the visible body of Christ, concretely present here and now, was and is built up by the Holy Spirit (Cf. Acts 9:31; 11:24; and *passim*).”

As far as spiritual beings are concerned, the Christian Church recognises the existence of the angels, good and evil, despite their denial by some individuals like the Sadducees. Osterhaven (1964:80) mentions: “It was the party of the Sadducees within the covenant community in ancient time and the vain, scientific philosophical movement known as the Enlightenment in the modern period which found it impossible to believe in the angels... The fact is that Scripture sets forth the doctrine of both good and bad angels very plainly with the Lord Jesus Christ teaching their existence in the most unmistakable terms. If the Church wishes to be guided by Christ and the Scriptures it must give attention to these concerns.”

Angels are creatures of the Triune God, who is the Creator of all things. Quoting from the Belgic Confession XII, Osterhaven (1964:79) says: “..... He also created the angels good; to be his messengers and to serve his elect; some of whom are fallen from that excellency in which God created them into everlasting perdition; and the others have, by the

grace of God, remained steadfast and continued in their primitive state.” From this it should be understood that there is nothing in the whole divine creation that could claim its self-existence, and this includes the angels and the evil spirits with their activities. Osterhaven (1964:80) indicates that concerning the devils and evil spirits one reads of their power and activity, their temptation of God’s people, their hatred of God and of all good, their utter corruption and their promised overthrow and consignment to everlasting punishment.

After having dealt with the Christian response to the Spirit of God and the angels, attention has to be given to the spiritual relation between man and God, the Creator who is Spirit. Since he was created, the spiritual aspect of man also has to be considered. Welker (2011: 78) declares: “In all these processes, the human spirit is corporally, bodily bound. It encounters us in individual human bodies.” More than that, the Holy Spirit is active among all the believers in Christ. Welker (2011:83) mentions: “We can find a helpful alternative when, with Calvin, we reclaim the biblical and original understandings that Jesus Christ, upon whom the Spirit of God ... rests, pours out this Spirit upon all those who are his ” (Dunn 2006). In his seminal work, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1.11.15), Calvin emphatically notes that Christ the Messiah was not anointed with oil but with the Holy Spirit so that those who belong to him might have a share in his power.”

Christianity teaches that man is a creature of God made in the image and likeness of God. Referring to the Belgic Confession, Art XIV, Osterhaven (1964:90) mentions: “We believe that God created man out of the dust of the earth, and made and formed him after his own image and likeness, good, righteous and holy, capable in all things to will, agreeably to the will of God....” This image of God is something very

important to be understood by Christians who truly desire to worship the Creator. Alluding to this fact, Spykman (1984:36) indicates: “Man and Woman, male and female, together the image of God what does this tell us about ourselves? The Bible uses this language only in speaking about human beings. By a distinct act of creation God appointed humankind as his representative and ruler in the world (Gen: 1:28-30). Humankind was made sovereign over creation-like God, yet under God, creatures of time and space.”

In the same way, it is necessary to know that Christian faith admits and proclaims that man is a fallen being subjected to sin and, since then he experienced death corporally and spiritually as the consequence of his fall. Quoting from the Belgic Confession, Osterhaven (1964:92) mentions: “Although God created man in his own image and likeness ... man by the instigation of the devil, wilfully subjected himself to sin. The consequence of that subjection, of that fall, was ‘death and the curse,’ as the confession expresses it. His death and corruption of his entire nature was separation from God who is man’s true life.

However, something very strange happened within the Reformed tradition since the days of the Reformation: the emphasis on the person and work of the Holy Spirit gradually decreased and was underplayed in the theological reflection and church practices. This situation was changed when in the twentieth century the charismatic movement brought back a new reflection on the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit. Traditional churches were almost forced into a situation of re-evaluation of the person and work of the Spirit.

An excellent illustration of this new approach is found in the official report of the seventh assembly of the World Council of Churches which was held in Canberra, Australia 1991.

Topics that were dealt with, include the following: “Come, Holy Spirit- Renew the whole creation”, “Spirit of truth -- Set us free ”, “Spirit of Unity -- Reconcile your People”, “ Holy Spirit –Transform and sanctify us.” The assembly was united in the confession of the Holy Spirit as the Source and the Giver of life and of exploration of a Spirit-centred theology (WCC 1991: 240). Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Christians proclaim the gospel message in many different cultures, which are still transformed, renewed and corrected by Him. Yet, the different spirits must be discerned to see if they are of God. Their number is almost unlimited and affects every facet of human life. “The spirit of freedom and truth moves us to witness to the justice of the kingdom of God and to resist injustice in the world” (WCC 1991:244). The Spirit encourages Christians to “seek a world of social and economic justice” (WCC 1991:246).

This new approach as far as the person and the work of the Holy Spirit is concerned, must be welcomed. The Spirit of God empowers, enlightens and renews human lives; He transforms cultures and societies and redirects them to the coming kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and points us to the cross and resurrection of Christ, who is the Hope of the world.

## **2.6. Summative conclusion**

The Spirit of God is God Himself. He has a proper personality. He is a person, not a mere force, power or an influence. The Holy Spirit has his attributes as God, and He is distinct from the Father and the Son. He is

distinct from the father and the Son. He is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent.

The Spirit of God performs actions which only a person can do: He speaks, He knows, He protects. As God, his involvement in the creation is made clear in the Bible. He is active and always at work among us as children of God. And without the presence of the Holy Spirit man cannot do anything to the glory of God.

Men can resist Him, grieve Him, lie to Him, speak to Him etc. He also intercedes for man.

Man is a creature of God like the angels but man has a body and the angels do not. The Bible openly says that God created man in his image. In Genesis 1:26-27 it is clearly said. And in Gen 2:7, it is written that God breathed into the nostrils of man the breath of life; and man became a living being, a living being with the breath of God, the spirit from God. As a living creature man has no parts more important than others.

It is obviously wrong to deny the existence of the spiritual world because the Bible testifies to the reality of the spiritual beings; which are invisible. The Scriptures assume their true existence throughout and affirm their activities. Some of the angels are good and others are evil.

Through the ages the Christian church confesses the Holy Spirit as true God who gives life and renews life. During many centuries of the history of the church the emphasis on the person and work of the Spirit was almost lost or very much underplayed. It was charismatic movements (in the broad sense of the word) which kept the focus on the Spirit alive. During the sixteenth century, Calvin revived a theology of the Holy Spirit,

a revival which was to a large extent rediscovered during the twentieth century and which played an important role in the African context.

The Spirit of God is a divine person whose attributes are the same as those of God, the Father and the Son. He is God himself. And the Christian church confesses the Holy Spirit as truly God who works through creation, in the hearts of believers. The certainty of the spiritual world is evident and cannot be denied. Man as a divine creature keeps a spiritual relationship with God the Creator who made him in his own image and likeness.

## **CHAPTER 3: AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE SPIRITS**

### **3.1. The reality of the spirits and spirit world in Africa**

#### **3.1.1. Introduction**

The reality of the existence of the spirits to people in the African context is not to be denied easily. It is a fact that can be found everywhere in the world. Turaki (1999:95) refers to “the conviction that man is not alone in the universe, for there is a spiritual world of powers or beings more powerful and ultimate than himself.”

In Africa, people know about the existence of the spirit world. Sanneh and Carpenter (2005:2) assert that “according to Africans, whether Christian or not, we are not alone in the universe, which is inhabited by the devil and by a host of spirit forces that are even attentive to us.” Many tribes are accustomed to the spirits. The influences of the spirits are frequently spoken of in many parts of Africa. Gehman (1990:136) shows that “all African peoples believe in the Supreme Being, the spirit world and mystical power, while some believe in divinities and others do not.” From this it is evident that the existence of the spirits and spiritual world is a reality. Amanze (2000a:326) attests that “common to many African people is the belief in ancestral spirits. Practically everywhere in Africa ancestry plays a significant role in the lives of the African people.” People in Africa live in fear of and expectations from these numerous spirits. One could even ask the following question: “Is the influence of the spirits only an imaginary phenomenon or just an exaggeration of the African people?”

Some African indigenous church leaders recognise, in no uncertain terms, the reality concerning the existence of the spirits. They present this idea as something attached to African traditions and cultures. Ngada and Mofekeng (2001: 23-24) say: “We have always been aware of the world of spirits. It is part of our African heritage. We recognize in the world around us that there are spirits of various kinds: evil spirits, good spirits, the spirits of our ancestors, the spirits of *iminoya/meya* of human beings and above all the Almighty and Supernatural Spirit, the Spirit of God or Holy Spirit. In Africa the Almighty Spirit was there healing us long before the missionaries landed on our shores. From birth to death our lives are and have always been marked by customs related to the world of spirits. At birth a baby is introduced to the living spirits of the ancestors by the elder of the clan or by anyone who has authority in the family.”

Such a message from the mouth of an African indigenous church leader raises questions about the impact of the Gospel taught to Africans. Has the Christian message really penetrated to the leaders of the churches and their members? Nürnberger (2007:40) asserts: “The answer seems to be fairly straightforward: the Christ they came to know through the message of the missionaries, subsequent indigenous leaders even their own reading of the Bible, does not seem to have covered their most pressing spiritual needs. Where Christ is irrelevant, a serious spiritual vacuum can be expected to open up in the consciousness of Christians, which is quite naturally filled with the authority, power and presence of the ancestors, who have always been around.”



### **3.1.2. What Africans say about spirits**

#### **3.1.2.1. In general**

We would not like to be engaged in this work in deep discussions concerning the terminologies on various invisible beings. We desire to bear in mind throughout this work the expressions “spirits” or “spirit world” as designating the innumerable invisible beings called spirits, ancestors, divinities and gods. This option does not exclude the fact that, in specific cases, we will be obliged to use the other expressions to designate these invisible beings.

In Africa, people consider the world of spirits seriously. Gehman (1990:124) says: “The spirit world is alive with a variety of spirit beings. These spiritual beings are said to be ministers of God, some of whom are said to have created the world. To distinguish them from the Supreme Being and the lesser spirits, we shall call them “divinities.” These include the ancestral spirits and spirits of nature.

Many authors, writing about African spirits, have shown that a great number of peoples and cultures are infused with the ideas of the spirits in Africa. Kahn (2008:178) mentions: “Nothing happens in the visible world that has not been predetermined in the invisible world. We can understand here that according to Africans what happens in the daily life of the living is caused by the spirits.” Alluding to this view, Mashau (2007:639) states: “The underlying premise of African occultism is the belief in a spiritual world with spiritual forces that have the power to inflict harm among the living. In the traditional African worldview suffering of every sort – illness, barrenness, drought and death – is normally explained in personal terms: ‘there is always somebody’. This somebody often belongs to the world of the occult: a spirit has brought pain to

human beings and must therefore be repelled or accommodated.” In their traditional circumstances, Africans attribute active deeds and influences to the spirit world. In every domain of life, spirits are said to be at work. This way of thinking causes African peoples to have an interest in the spirits. Gehman (1990:138) mentions: “Many peoples believe in spirits which are not the ghosts of former human beings. They may be spirits which bring disease like the plague or smallpox. Others associate forces of nature with spirits. There are spirits which dwell in trees, mountains, rivers or other mighty forces of nature. Some believe that charms possessing magical powers have spirits living in them.”

It is wise to be careful when generalising the beliefs in the spirit world of a whole continent. Peoples differ and the change of the times is accompanied by the transformation of mentalities. The contact between Africa and Christianity has introduced new elements to the life of African peoples.

Turaki (1999:45) writes: “African traditional worldview emphasizes the pervasive presence of spirit beings, powers and forces. Our Christian theology in Africa must take this worldview very seriously.”

The encounter between Christianity and African peoples really has an impact on their worldview and behaviour toward the influence of the spirit world.

### **3.1.2.2. The reality of the ancestral spirit in the Congolese experience**

Many people affirm without doubt the certainty of the existence of the spirits of the ancestors. This idea is common among different tribal

communities. Those who accept the existence of the ancestral spirits rely on their own experiences. One of the informants reported what he experienced, heard and saw with his own mother in the following words. His mother was doing a small business. When her activity became fruitless, she invoked the spirits of the ancestors to make her business prosperous. According to this person, real changes in the business of his mother were observed after invocation and after she had brought sacrifices to the ancestral spirits (verbal communication, 2012).

### **3.1.2.3. The active role of the ancestral spirits in the Congolese context**

A great number of people highly regard the spirits of the ancestors. They believe in the presence of the ancestral spirits around them. They accept that the ancestral spirits are really acting in their lives for better or for worse.

Many informants easily declare and affirm that sickness, poverty, unemployment among members of a given family, poor harvest and other various occurrences in the community are caused by the ancestral spirits. People always say that the spirits of ancestors are able to produce supernatural events of different kinds. According to many individuals, there is always an ancestral spirit or any spirit behind all supernatural events that take place.

It has been clear during our field work that many solutions to daily problems happening in society can be found in consulting the spirits of the ancestors. Hunting, fishing, doing business, farming as well as other

numerous activities become unproductive when the ancestors are neglected or forgotten by members of the community.

The Luntu tribe in the Democratic Republic of Congo believes that the ancestral spirits can bring fortune to members of the community when they are invoked and given sacrifices of animals, birds and other valued objects. Goats, chickens or hens, money, guns and food are always used in this kind of ceremony. But in case of the people neglecting the bringing of sacrifices, ancestral spirits will make scourges fall upon the different activities of the people like agriculture, business, hunting, fishing. It is remarkable how many people in their daily life refer to the ancestral spirits to search solutions to their multiple problems. What happens in the life of individuals, especially in the traditional context, is said to be caused by the ancestral spirits (source: verbal communication, 2012).

#### **3.1.2.4. Evil spirits in the life of individuals in the Congolese context**

It is believed by many people that evil spirits play a destructive role in bringing misfortune among the members of the community. These spirits make people sick, poor, mentally disturbed when they are wronged or are not satisfied. They create conflict between members of the same family. They are also said to provoke accident, death, divorce, etc. in the lives of many people. Some informants reported that in the case when a parent (father) decides to hand over the money paid as dowry for his daughter to a certain relative and if it happens that the decision is not carried out, the daughter will experience barrenness in her marriage. The daughter will not bear children until the dowry money is given to the

right individual. Cases of this kind are reported among many tribes in the Congo.

Evil spirits are inclined to prevent people to have access to what they need for a normal life. They are able to destroy unity, harmony and peace in society and because of that, people are daily afraid of them. There are different traditional spirits which threaten people. Among these spirits many informants mention witchcraft, the spirits of the dead, especially those who died an unnatural death (source: verbal communication, 2012).

### **3.1.2.5. Communication between individuals and the ancestral spirits**

Many informants hold that there is a strong belief that the living can communicate with ancestors and this may happen through a dream, or some mysterious event. For instance one informant reported that his uncle who was travelling alone through the bush met a lion. This lion appeared to him without harming him. The interpretation was that his ancestor was accompanying this man on his journey.

It was also reported by some informants that ancestors may appear as unknown persons to their descendants, and mysteriously they can disappear from sight into the bush. This means to traditional Africans that an ancestor has brought a message to the living descendants. The same idea was reported about wild animals. For example the presence in the midst of people of some kinds of snakes, chameleons and lizards, is always interpreted as an announcement of a message from the ancestral spirit. The presence of a lizard is said to be the announcement

of a baby girl to be born from a pregnant woman in the family. It is held that there is always communication with the ancestral spirits during the pregnancy of a lady. It is believed that when a woman is pregnant, a spirit of an ancestor can visit her in a dream to tell her that the child should bear his name. In case this is not respected, the new-born child will be sick (source: verbal communication, 2012).

### **3.2. Examples of some selected tribes**

There are many tribes and ethnic groups living on the continent of Africa. All these peoples have the beliefs in the vitality of the spirits and their influence on the life of the individuals. We would have needed to say something about all the African Peoples but we only deal with some of them.

#### **3.2.1. The Ashanti of West Africa**

The Ashanti people of West Africa think of the spirits as a reality in their lives. They know and recognise their existence. They also recognise the existence of God as the Great Spirit different from the other spirits of Africa. Mbiti (1970:23) says: "According to the Ashanti people, the Universe is full of spirits; but God is the Great Spirit who has made them all. Ashanti people believe that he is the fathomless spirit who has made all creation."

#### **3.2.2. The Kagoro of Nigeria**

The Kagoro peoples of Nigeria make a distinction between God and the spirits. For them, God is greater and more powerful than the spirits of the dead. Mbiti (1970:24) mentions that the Kagoro regard God as the protecting spirit who guards them against the spirits of the departed.

### **3.2.3. The Kikuyu of East Africa**

The Kikuyu of East Africa have knowledge of different kinds of spirits. Like other peoples of Africa, they believe in the existence of the spirits. For them, each individual possesses a spirit. Hopley (1922:28) indicates: "The Kikuyu will tell you that there is only one *ngoma* or spirit for each person, and that women as well as men possess it." Besides this type of spirit the Kikuyu people consider the trees as possessing spirits. Again, Hopley (1922:31-32) asserts: "When clearing a forest to make a cultivated field, the Kikuyu people generally leave a large and conspicuous tree in the clearing. Such a tree is called *murema kiriti* and is believed to collect the spirits from all other trees which have been cut down in the vicinity. We have here an interesting example of animism, the spirits so collected being most emphatically declared to be tree, and human spirits."

### **3.2.4. The Kamba of East Africa**

The Kamba people of East Africa also believe in the spirits like the Kikuyu. Their belief in the spirits is said to be strong. Hopley (1922:27) says that the belief in the vitality of the ancestral spirits is very strong among both the Kikuyu and the Kamba people; the former call them *Ngoma* and the latter *Aimu*.

### **3.2.5. The Baluba of Central Africa**

As other African peoples, the Baluba people of the Katanga Province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are also concerned about the existence of the spirits. They hold the view that the ancestral spirits are interested in the lives of their living descendants. The spirits have to be consulted when taking a communal decision. People have to ask for the guidance of the spirits. Booth (1977:44) says: “Whenever a village is moved it is essential that the spirits of any earlier inhabitants of the new site be consulted as well as the ancestral spirits of the present village. Diviners must make contact with the spirits and if the result is unfavorable, an alternative location must be selected. The ancestral spirits are also very concerned about the moral standards of their descendants. Those who fail to follow the traditional customs are a danger to the whole community, which includes its deceased members. Such transgressions may expect negative attention from the ancestral spirits.”

### **3.2.6. The Shona of Zimbabwe**

Among the Shona people of Zimbabwe we encounter a variety of spirits in which people believe and these spirits are thought to be protectors and many other activities are attributed to them. Gelfand (1977:180) declares: “Besides the tribal or clan spirits responsible for affairs of the clan, each individual or nuclear family has its own ancestral or spirit elders, members of the family who, when they die, become the guardian spirits of their children on earth. They are the spirits of the grandfather, the grandmother, the father and the mother. The guardian spirit and protector of the family is that of the paternal grandfather. It is the most important of these spirits and is often the cause of illness, death or mishap in any family. Other ancestral spirits may punish individual members of the family if a ritual concerning them is omitted.”



Shona people are positive about being in contact with the spirits. They are open to communicate with the spiritual beings. They are even characterised by that fact. In his book *African Traditional Religions. An Introduction*, Thorpe (1993:57) says: “An outstanding characteristic of Shona religion is its openness to communication with an invisible realm of spirits.”

Again Thorpe (1993:57) states: “The spirit possession is a phenomenon which is accepted among the Shona people. They have a positive look upon it. Spirit possession is generally viewed positively in Shona culture. It is a frequent occurrence and is understood as a means of maintaining intercourse with an invisible spirit realm. Thus the spirit mediums pertaining to the Mwari cult are recognized, among other things, by their ability to enter into states of trance or possession.

### **3.2.7. The Yoruba of West Africa**

The Yoruba people of West Africa are like the other Africans interested in the reality of the existence of the spirit world. Many types of spirits are found among them and they also influence the life of the Yoruba. The spirit realm, which is invisible, nevertheless exerts a strong influence, as real as world crisis situations watched or heard by a Western person in news bulletins. A Yoruba accepts that at death a person enters the spirit realm as one of the living dead (Thorpe, 1993:95).

Yoruba people believe that there is communication between the departed and the living. Individuals who die, remain in contact with those who are still alive. The dead have, according to the Yoruba people the capacity to help their living relations. This way of thinking brings those who remain on earth to a good relationship with the dead. Thorpe

(1933:95) mentions: “Those who have departed this world have simply exchanged this life for another. They have unlimited potentialities which can be used to the benefit or detriment of their people remaining on earth. It is, therefore, wiser to keep the ancestors in a state of contentment.”

### **3.2.8. The Mende of Sierra Leone**

The Mende of Sierra Leone are said to hold belief in nature spirits. For them spirits are found in the creatures like the trees, hills, lakes and so on. Parrinder (1954:44) says: “The Mende of Sierra Leone believe in nature spirits or genii which are associated with rivers and forests. The genie may appear in human form and white colour, and seek to entrap the unwary traveler.”

### **3.2.9. The Kwotto of Nigeria**

The Kwotto people of Northern Nigeria also have the idea of the spirits. To them, spirits are thought to bring fertility to women who are not able to bear children. In the situation of drought, they invoke spirits for assistance. That fact shows how spirits are important and helpful in the life of the people. They are thought to perform vital activities. Sawyerr (1970:3) indicates: “Among the Kwotto of Northern Nigeria, when there is drought, the spirits of their deceased chiefs are invoked to give the living rain, whilst the spirits of commoners are invoked to help ‘to prosper the fruits of the earth and give fertility to women’. Indeed, animals are believed to have souls also. These people are said to placate the spirit of a lion which has been killed for fear that the remaining lions will avenge the death of one of their kin.”

### **3.2.10. The Zulu of South Africa**

The spirit world is known among the Zulu people of South Africa. It is a reality that cannot be denied although the Zulu people do not know where this world is located. Booth (1977:18) states: "In true Zulu fashion when they mean that the man is really dead they say 'the spirit has gone out'. It has then left its bodily habitation and gone to live in the spirit world. It is not clear just where this world is."

### **3.2.11. Summary**

The observations done by various writers lead us to say that the tendency of African tribes is to hold the idea of the existence of the spirits and their influence on peoples' lives. Spirits are thought to be active in the daily lives of people. Sawyerr (1970:3) mentions: "All the various tribal groups in Africa show a tendency to offer sacrifices to the ancestors as well as to various other spirits, including witches, of whom they are generally afraid."

## **3.3. The spiritual world in African context**

### **3.3.1. Its consideration**

Most African peoples consider the spirit world as having great importance. The spirit world is thought of with veneration and fear. This world of spirits is alive and active according to the African view. Several events happening in life depend on the spiritual world.

This world of spirits comprises various spiritual beings according to the African traditional view. We encounter in it first of all the Supreme Being, who is the Creator. Besides him there are the numerous spirit beings

known to all the African peoples in their traditional context. Africans believe in the Supreme Being, the ancestral spirits, divinities and other created spirits. Some scholars have divided the spiritual beings into different groups. Turaki (1999:80) mentions: "First in the hierarchy is the creator, then the deities, object-embodied spirits, ancestral spirits and other miscellaneous spirits." Turaki (1999:81) says: "In defining the religious worldview of Africa, Mbiti stresses the fact that the spirit world of the African people is very densely populated with spirit beings, spirits and the living-dead or the spirits of the ancestors. The spirit world is the most pervasive worldview. Contained within it are the spirits, the ancestors and the Supreme Being or God."

### **3.3.2. The Supreme Being**

Africans believe in the Supreme Being who is considered as the Creator in the spiritual world. The Supreme Being is God, the Creator according to the African belief. All Africans believe in the Supreme Being. Amanze (2000:3) says that "one of the most distinctive characteristics of African traditional religions in general and Tswana in particular is belief in a Supreme Being." Taking up this idea about the belief in God, Fraser (1969:42) asserts: "You need not begin to prove to the African that God is. He knows it and has never doubted." It is clear that Africans have the belief in the existence of a Supreme Being. This brings Turaki (1999:146) to state: "But on the whole, theologians and scholars have confirmed that generally, traditional Africa has a belief in the existence of a Supreme Being, the Creator." Mashau (2009:109) clearly points out that "all Africans are very conscious of the existence of God, even

though their response to him has been obscured by sin and consequently misdirected into the idolatry of ancestral worship.”

Most Africans are in agreement that the traditional Africans do not actively worship this Supreme Being. Turaki (1999:86) mentions: “Even with this definition of diffused monotheism in the Yoruba religion, coupled with similar notions scattered across the continent of Africa, the awareness and belief in the Supreme Being, the truth is, this Supreme Being is not known to have been exclusively worshipped by traditional Africans. Instead, the African divinities and the ancestors, who are the lesser beings, have been actively involved in the everyday religious life of the traditional Africans. They directly receive sacrifice, offerings and prayers offered by the traditional Africans. In most traditional African societies, the Supreme Being was not actively involved in the everyday religious practices of the people, but the divinities, the gods and the ancestors were. In some parts of Africa, the Supreme Being is usually mentioned in prayers, songs and in some religious ceremonies.”

The Congolese bantu tribes have the belief in the Supreme Being. They recognise Him as God who created everything and who is still at work. The Baluba, Bemba and other Congolese tribes have a saying according to which they warn everybody not to laugh at the handicapped because God is still creating in heaven.

While acknowledging that virtually all Africans believe in the existence of a Supreme Being, McVeigh (1974:38) states: “Such a belief plays an ‘unproductive part’ in their lives. It is not a ‘vital, effective’ conception of them. This is especially true of the Bantu. The divinities have temples or graves; God usually has none. They have a priesthood, He has none;

they receive regular offerings, He receives them very rarely; they are constantly prayed to, He is addressed only in time of great necessity.”

The fact that Africans are too attached to the activities of these divinities pushes God far from their minds. They think of God as being far from the reality of their daily lives. This situation brings the divinities to occupy the centre of attention among Africans.

### **3.3.3. Divinities**

Divinities are known in Africa but there are places where they are not prominent. Idowu (1973:165) says: “As I have indicated, it is not easy to discuss this element freely for the whole of Africa because it is not everywhere prominent.” West Africa has many divinities. Again Idowu (1973:165) indicates: “West Africa may be said to be the home of divinities; but even here, we have variations from a very crowded pantheon to a very thinly populated one, and even to a situation where they appear to be scarcely in existence.” Referring to divinities Mbiti (1969:76) declares: “It is reported that the Ashanti have a pantheon of divinities through whom God manifests Himself. They are known as *abosom*; are said to ‘come from Him’ and to act as His servants and as intermediaries between Him and other creatures.”

In the mind of Africans, the spirit world is inhabited by various spiritual beings: one Supreme Being, the creator and other numerous divinities, spirits and ancestral spirits. About this, Ray (1976:50) says: “It is generally recognized that there are two fundamentally different types of divinities in African religions: the one creator god, who is usually remote

from daily religious life, and the many gods and spirits which are constantly involved in everyday religious experience.”

From this description one can easily understand why Africans are more attached to the local deities and ancestral spirits as the Supreme Being is thought to be far from the people.

Divinities are conceived in the forms of human beings although they are spiritual beings. They belong to the spirit world like the ancestral spirits. Gehman (1990: 124) says: “though they form separate homogenous categories, they are both spiritual beings anthropomorphically conceived; that is, thought of in the form of human beings.”

The Ashanti people of West Africa believe that God created the divinities, and these ones serve their creator. Gehman (1990:128) asserts: “The world is full of spirits among the Ashanti. The Supreme Being created a pantheon of divinities known collectively as *abosom*. These divinities ‘come from him and are parts of him’. They derive their power from him and serve as his ministers and mouthpieces in this world. Below the divinities are the lesser spirits which dwell in trees, animals and inanimate objects. Then there are the ancestral spirits which are found everywhere.” It can be said that among the Ashanti people divinities are viewed with great respect.

In Central Africa the Baluba people of the Congo recognise a cluster of gods. These divinities are numerous and each has its specific activity. Gerard Milondo and Michel Kasongo Yumbi (personal communication, July 5, 2011) report: “Each village has its own god to protect it. In the situation of calamities, villagers invoke their god to assist them in fighting against the disaster. Different gods are represented by an object. For example, a god called Moma is represented by a big snake which is

considered as a king. Other gods among the Baluba peoples are represented by snakes like Nkongolo and Mulobe. Kakudji is a god of the dead. It is said to harm the living in different ways. This god is represented by a small statue. People invoke it when they want to go hunting. It is not allowed to make fire with flame in the house where this god is put (Kakudji). Members of the family connected to it, have the obligation to put the statue of this god on the table while eating food. This is done in order to assure that this god is protecting the people and the food against evil spirits and witches. It is also believed that the god is also eating.”

The Ewe peoples have a complexity and multiplication of divinities. Gehman (1990: 127) says that “these peoples are located in the southern parts of Ghana, Togo and Benin” and “they are reported to have so many divinities or gods that no detailed account has ever been made of them.”

#### **3.3.4. The spirits of the ancestors**

To many Africans the spirits of the ancestors are important. Hopley (1922:22) says: “The belief in ancestral spirits is the predominating spiritual factor in the minds of the great majority of the peoples.”

African peoples think of these ancestral spirits as being present around them and watching everything the living are doing on earth. Parrinder (1954:57) quoting Cullen Young, indicates: “To us, the idea of ancestral priority has just no meaning, but to these older African men and women in the backland villages, life from day to day and, we might legitimately



say, from moment to moment, has no meaning at all apart from ancestral presence and ancestral power.”

Many other writers, sociologists and anthropologists, who have dealt with ancestral spirits came to the conclusion that ancestors are important in Africa. Parrinder (1954:57) asserts: “Many others who have an intimate knowledge of African life make the same point. In South Africa, ‘the ancestral spirits are the most intimate gods of the Bantu: they are part of the family or tribe, and are considered and consulted on all important occasions’. In Zimbabwe, ‘the family divinities are the ghosts of one’s grandfathers, grandmothers, father and mother, uncles and aunts, brothers and sisters’.” This demonstrates how an African family, clan or tribe goes beyond the living descendants, because it is not limited to those who are on earth.

In their traditional context, many Africans have the knowledge of the existence of an invisible world with different spirit beings. It is noticed that their attitude of great respect towards the ancestors is more pronounced. Gehman (1990:139) says: “Among many African people the vast majority of known spirits are ancestral spirits, that is the ghosts of the dead, whether they are the recent dead (living dead) or long since dead (spirits).”

This is clear that for most African peoples the spirits which are in their thoughts are those of men and continue to live after death.

### **3.3.5. The abode of the spirits**

According to many African peoples, spirits have their dwelling places. Smith (1961:23) mentions: “The spirits of the Bantu are mostly those of

human beings who continue to live in the unseen world, these may take abode in trees or mountains or waterfalls or rivers, they may assume the form of snakes or other animals ...”

Gehman (1990:138) asserts: “Generally speaking, spirits are found everywhere. They especially like the wood, bush, forest, rivers and mountains (hills). In each part of the country, certain places are especially regarded as the haunt of the spirits. They may take up their abode in animals and birds. If some strange animal leaves its normal habitat and approaches a village, the local people believe that some spirit must dwell in the animal. For why would this normally aloof animal approach the habitat of men? Some believe that the realm of the spirits is below the earth. Others think it is above the earth in the sky. Spirits may also possess human beings. In most areas there is at least one person who may be seized by a kind of madness when possessed by a spirit. Spirits may also appear to people in their dreams.”

The Vhavenda people in South Africa know that the spirits inhabit some areas. Speaking of the Vhavenda, Mashau (2007:643) states: “There are certain locations all over the Venda area that are known to be inhabited by the spirits. In actual fact, every chief has or had a forest or mountains in which the spirits of his ancestors are supposed to abide. Accordingly, many of these places are the actual burying places of the chiefs.”

Burton (1947:114-122) narrates “about the sacred hill called Pungwa Bele in the Congo. Many stories are told of those who have followed wounded game to the hill, but who never came back. If a wounded animal makes for that sanctuary, the hunter dare not follow it. He simply remarks that ‘the spirits want the meat’ and leaves it. But one day a certain Mudishi, a converted Christian and other Christians decided to

climb the so-called sacred hill. Standing on the topmost point, they lifted their hats and sang Christian songs. After their venture, peoples were saying that they have entered the realm of the spirits. They can never come back in the flesh. But when they returned, they were welcomed by the crowd. All the stories which were told about this so-called sacred hill were imagination.”

### **3.4. The role of spirits in Africa**

#### **3.4.1. Spirits and the peoples**

Africans are conscious of the existence of the spirit beings. They know that around them are invisible beings which impart to them their influences. Spirits are seriously trusted by many Africans in their traditional context. Smith (1936:54) points out that “if we take a general view of their beliefs ... we see that the Africans are conscious of living under the control of a great number of spirit beings. There is, over all the Highest Leza, Nyame, Katondo or whatever name is given to Him. And there are other spirits in trees and rivers and mountains, some of whom, no doubt, if not all, were men at one time. In addition to all these, Africans put their faith in things through which that strange force does its work, and by the help of which men may get long life and happy days.”

Spirits are considered as a source of life and welfare. They are givers of blessings to people. The birth of a child, success in business, agricultural growth, fruitful hunting and fishing and other various blessings are always attributed to the works of the spirits. Especially the ancestral

spirits are positively viewed. Ancestors are not taken as cruel toward the living who are generally their living descendants. Gehman (1990:152) mentions: “Even as all kinds of trouble on the spirits of the departed, so every kind of blessing is attributed to the ancestors. One Mukamba said that ‘the ancestors are responsible for every good thing that comes to us and we must offer gifts and sacrifices to them as thanksgiving’.”

In traditional African context, when an event happens, ancestral spirits are consulted through mediums or dreams to give direction to the living members of the community. Parrinder (1974:61) mentions: “The ancestors were thought to be able to help their tribe in time of war, and were invoked before battles. In particular are the ancestors believed to have acquired special knowledge in the after world. They are consulted as oracles, and mediums pass on their messages to those who consult them. In dreams ancestors speak to men, and the interpretation given by mediums indicates the will of the fathers. They can give new medicines and reveal new forms of treatment to doctors.” It is clear that ancestors are highly viewed in Africa with regard to getting solutions to problems in the life of people.

An ancestral spirit which feels it has not been respected, brings harm on the people. They will experience trouble in their life. Parrinder (1954:60) says: “More especially are sickness and death thought to be due at times to the ancestors. They may be annoyed at the neglect of their descendants, and special diseases such as insomnia or epilepsy are put down to them.... cure would be brought about by sending the ghost away, through a rite or medicine.”

### **3.4.2 . Good spirits and their works**

Africans have the knowledge of good spirits. These spirits do not harm people in their life. They are thought to bring blessings and protection to the community. They are not feared but honoured. To maintain good relationship and harmony with spirits people are obliged to give them sacrifices of various kinds. Burton (1942:20-22) declares: "Of course, two legs and the breast bone were presented as tribute to the chief ... where besides the path stood Buyu-bwanga .... This was the guardian spirit of the village. Buyu-bwanga had cost hundreds of francs, cloth, sheep, gunpowder and very much more. He ... was said to be inhabited by the spirit of the great chief Ilunga Sungu. He gave success in hunting, profitable fishing and caused the crops to grow. Indeed every blessing of the villages was traced directly or indirectly to Buyu-bwanga."

In many African tribes people expect numerous benefits from the spirits around them especially the ancestral spirits. Among the Akamba tribe of Kenya in East Africa, healing sickness and protecting people from sickness and other disasters are considered as major benefits. The spirit can protect an individual from an accident during his journey. Gehman (1990:153) says: "Protection from danger was another benefit from the *aimu*. The ancestors were beseeched for safety in the home and safety on a safari. As one person said: 'The ancestors can bless the living if the ancestors are given what they ask for. They can bring wealth, health to the sick, and protection from danger.'"

Some Africans think of spirits as helping in bringing on rain. And this phenomenon is a blessing for many peoples in Africa. The lack of rains in a given region is a disaster. Parrinder (1954:44) mentions: "There are numerous animal spirits and sacred snakes which assist in rain-making. The Zulu talk of a female spirit Inkosazana who helps the corn to grow, and for whom maidens perform springtime rites in the fields."

It is believed by some Africans that good spirits can possess an individual in order to communicate good news to the people. This spirit possession is considered like a means to be in contact with the spirit world as Africans always need to know what is happening in that world. Thorpe (1993:57) says: "Spirit possession is generally viewed positively in Shona culture. It is a frequent occurrence and is understood as a means of maintaining intercourse with an invisible spirit realm."

These spirits speak to the individuals on behalf of the spirit world. Mediums are used to inform the people about the needs of the community.

### **3.4.3 . Evil spirits and their works**

Evil spirits are different from the good ones. They do not bring blessings to the individuals. They are not benefactors, but they seek to do harm or afflict, even to the point of death, to peoples, clans, families or entire villages. Turaki (1999:176) writes: "Traditional Africans believe in the existence of evil spirits in contrast to the good ones. The origin and nature of these evil spirits are not usually known, but shrouded in mysteries. The most common source of evil spirits is associated with humans. It is a common belief that 'certain deceased people become evil spirits during the improper dispatch of the body in funeral rites, through breaking the tribal custom, an abnormal death or improper ritual performances in life'(Steyne, 1990:78.) These evil spirits 'are to be feared because of the mischief they create, the terror they spread and the destruction they work'."

These evil spirits make people unhappy. They are feared and people can use rites and offerings to appease them or drive them out of the community. As they can inflict all kinds of sicknesses and various sufferings, African peoples, among them many Christians and non-Christians, look for prophets or mediums to help them drive away these evil spirits. McVeigh (1974:30) indicates: "While it is true to say that the basic attitude to the living toward the dead is one of trust or reverence, there are other spirits – evil spirits – who leave the realm of the living, angry and whose main preoccupation is to inflict punishment and revenge on the living. The cause of their anger is variable. They have died by violence or taken their own lives. Perhaps their funeral ceremonies were inadequate or they were bewitched! Not uncommonly they may have been very old people who in their advanced age were neglected by their relatives and promised to haunt them after death."

As can be understood, the works of evil spirits are mainly to molest, to punish and to bring bad things among the people. People usually regard them with fear. The created spirits are thought of as dangerous. Gehman (1990:199) mentions: "Almost always the spirits appear to attack, molest, destroy and harm the living people. Since they are unpredictable, the safest thing is to remain far away from their places of abode. Any tragedy of illness, insanity or epilepsy may be blamed on them."

The ancestral spirits have no reason to harm their descendants who are still living. Their living offspring are in one way or another perpetuating the remembrance of their dead grandparents. But it happens many times that the dead are angered by the living descendants in various ways by behaving against the cultural rules. Gehman (1990:17) points out: "These ancestral spirits, the 'living-dead' in the words of John Mbiti, can

bring benefits to the living. But more frequently they produce the problem of 'ghostly vengeance'. When unhappy, these ancestral spirits return and haunt the living. Ancestral spirits are notable for their troublesome relations with their descendants. When an ancestor is offended by the living, his aggrieved spirit becomes a menace to the living, haunting the living by causing sickness and death."

Evil spirits do not work for the progress and the welfare of the people. They are harmful. They can destroy and put to death the individuals. They can bring disaster among the people in the community.

#### **3.4.4 . Ancestral veneration**

The ancestral spirits are important in Africa. African peoples have a strong belief in the ancestral spirits and their influence. Africans attach great significance to the role played by the ancestors among them. To keep contact and communion between men and the spirits, sacrifices and various offerings are brought to the ancestors. The living descendants rely on their living dead who are thought to be more powerful and influential in their daily lives. They need their ancestral intervention for their success in life. The dead also need the living to be kept in memory. McVeigh (1974:29) says: "The ancestors are depended upon for their happiness. Not only do they like to be remembered; a case can be made for saying that their very existence depends upon the memory of the living. As for the living, they need the help of the departed in their fight against the evils of life which seem to threaten them on every hand. The dead are both more knowing and more powerful than the living. Therefore they are uniquely able to provide success in time of need."



This is the situation prevailing between the living and the ancestral spirits. The manifestations of these relations are noticed through different rites and offerings performed by the living to honour the living dead. Turaki (1999:177) mentions: "The belief in the ancestors is the most fundamental religious creed and tenet. The religious institution surrounding this religious belief is what others call 'cult of the ancestors' and the form of worship as 'ancestral worship' or veneration. Controversy exists about whether or not recognition of ancestors with sacrifices and offerings is reverence or actual worship."

Are ancestors in Africa worshipped or venerated? What is remarkable here is the fact that ancestors are seriously believed and respected. They are regarded with great honour in the community. The meaning of life is not viewed separately from the presence of the ancestors and their power. In the minds of Africans, the community is an ensemble of the departed ancestors and the living. Opinions differ. We encounter writers who accept the concept of veneration and those who admit the idea of worship. This then depends on the definition of the term "religion." Parrinder (1954:63-64) indicates: "Many writers still speak of the ancestral cults as religious worship ... Other writers are positive that it is grossly misleading to speak of ancestral worship."

There are scholars who maintain the idea that sacrifices and offerings to ancestors are a sign of veneration and fellowship. Mbiti is one of them. Nyirongo (1997:39) states: "According to him the African's sacrifices and offerings to his ancestors are not worship, but a symbol of fellowship, because though physically absent, the ancestors are still close to their families. But, in another case, he rates the ancestors as not only the best link between God and man but also as important as other

intermediaries; in yet another case he says direct prayers to God is the most important and most common aspect of worship.”

In spite of all these controversies, something is eminently clear to all the writers and Africans themselves and that is the strong belief in the ancestral spirits and their power. In the thoughts of African peoples, the spirits of the ancestors are ever-present and receive honour and various gifts from the members of their respective families according to the customs. At the occasions of birth, marriage, sickness, accidents, family gatherings, the spirits of the ancestors are invoked; traditional beer, meat and other gifts are brought to the spirits. The participants are involved in the atmosphere of feast and reverence to the ancestors. Smith (1936:47) points out: “Prayers are said to these *mizimu* [spirits]. Feasts are made in their honour. They are present, and take part in these feasts. Such is the belief of the Africans.”

In some African societies there is a habit of throwing a portion of food comprising meat, fish, porridge and drink on the ground before the person starts eating the meal. This is done to show respect and honour to the ancestral spirits according to the belief of Africans. It also demonstrates that the spirits of the ancestors are present around them. Parrinder (1954:52) mentions: “In the Gold Coast in everyday life of the Ga people the dead are very present ... Most people, as a regular habit, never drink, and may never eat without throwing a small portion on the ground for their forefathers.”

Without any doubt, Africans have an revering attitude towards their ancestral spirits. It is something which takes root from the deep culture of the Africans. The living needs the help of the dead in their daily fight against the attacks of the evils and enemies which seem to threaten

them on every hand. Then the ancestors must be treated kindly to maintain communication with them. By keeping good relationship with the living dead the living will be assured of the assistance from their ancestors. The ancestors also need the living but the latter must not offend the former. The living has to bring offerings to their ancestors with the objective to make them happy all the time.

### **3.4.5 . Illness and healing**

#### **3.4.5.1 The causes of sickness**

The causes of sicknesses are various and of different origins; and in this regard Africans do not hold the same opinions. According to Thorpe (1993:59) the Shona people of Zimbabwe recognise that many illnesses have ordinary causes and these are treated by home remedies or, nowadays, taken to Western doctors. He adds saying that only prolonged illnesses which do not respond to ordinary measures are taken to a *nganga* (a healer) for treatment.

Westerlund is of the opinion that in the past the causes of sicknesses were mostly referred to the ancestral spirits but now there is a shift in this aspect. For he writes:

The decline of belief in spiritual beings and the subsequent increase of living humans as agents of disease, which have been exemplified ... have been observed in many other parts of Africa too. For instance, in a collected volume on witchery, the editors Middleton and Winter point out that 'it is commonly held by people in a large number of

African societies that the practice of secret maleficent acts is on the increase. Concerning the Ndembu, an agricultural Bantu people in northern Zambia, Victor Turner concludes that illnesses and other types of misfortune no longer bind a group of people together in veneration of ancestors sanctioning the moral order. Since diseases are increasingly attributed to witchery, which in the past caused death only, misfortune now tends to break a group instead. In a study of another agricultural people, the Cokwe or Chokwe in south-western Zaïre (Democratic Republic of Congo), P. Stanley Yoder similarly remarks that the importance of redressive rituals concerned with ancestors has diminished and that they are far less frequently invoked now than before (Westerlund, 2006:189).

Christians in Africa have been interested in this phenomenon about the shift from the belief in ancestral spirits causing sickness to the human agents like witches as the cause of illness. Again Westerlund (2006:192) mentions this “among charismatic Christians, for instance in Pentecostal churches, who strongly believe in the existence of the Devil and evil spirits. There may also be ways of dealing with problems of witchery which are similar to those found in AIC’s.”

Not all African peoples are changing in considering ancestors as agents which make diseases happen but there are those who attribute the causes of illnesses to ancestral spirits. Speaking of the Sukuma people, Westerlund (2006:91) says that it seems that spirits of ancestors may be

thought of as agents of all kinds of diseases as well as of infertility and other misfortunes, possibly with the exception of death. This observation among the African people of Sukuma is supported by other scholars like Gass. For Westerlund (2006:92) mentions again: "... in 1919, Gass and others concluded that ancestors were seen as the main reason for maladies and other kinds of misfortune; and even though there has been a decline in terms of beliefs and practices relating to ancestors, there are still many Sukuma who relate to these spirits as important agents of disease."

Appiah-Kubi (1981:12) says: "The Akan people attribute misfortune, suffering and disease to the spirits. For he says that disease, for example is an attack by a spirit upon one's spirit, and it can be overcome by medicine, whose spirit is stronger than the spirits of disease, and he adds that an illness that does not yield to such a medicine must be attributed to other forces, such as witchcraft." From this thought one understands that spiritual beings are a reality among the Akan and they are active in intervening in the life of individuals. Again Appiah-Kubi (1981:12) reports that according to Akan thinking, there are evil forces sufficient to account for all the wickedness, tragedies, and misfortunes of life and that their attack on the individual takes various forms, resulting in sickness, disaster, sorrow or death.

Ancestors are viewed as ambivalent beings, which can protect and harm people depending on the treatment they receive from their descendants. Stating his viewpoint, Westerlund (2006:95) has said: "A certain amount of unpredictability is a characteristic of all ancestors. Like living humans, spirits of ancestors are not good or bad but good and bad. As ambivalent beings, ancestors may be contented agents of blessings as well as discontented agents of misfortune."

### 3.4.5.2 Healing

Considering the importance and the nature of the causes of illnesses as indicated by Africans, one can understand how seriously the involvement in the process of healing or therapy is taken. Appiah-Kubi (1981:81) writes:

Religious forms of healing have attracted attention through the years in almost every society, and recently have been recognized to have many features in common with rational forms of psychotherapy. Healing in this respect is conceived not as simply getting a malfunctioning organ to work well again, but as a question of dealing with the total person. Healing cannot take place without going into the deep root of the disorder as well as getting in touch with the spiritual world.

The assertion of Amanze brings doubt to the present-day human mind since he hardly admits that this can happen today. Picking such an idea, Westerlund indicates:

Besides, more secular-oriented modern education and health care have contributed largely to challenging African indigenous religions and concepts of disease causation. The spread of bio-medical ideas and practices is one of the factors that have furthered the importance of non-religious and especially natural etiologies and therapies. Modern external influences,

religious as well as no-religious, increase the pluralism that already existed. Thus, in principle, these influences do not add anything new. For instance, Islamic and Christian ideas of jinns or evil spirits fit into the category of religious causation, while biomedicine with its secular basis is narrowly concerned with the category of natural and biological causation (Westerlund, 2006:193).

From this, one has to comprehend how the healing depends on the causes of the sickness, and that is to say these causes may be spiritual or natural, even physical. Ngong (2010:25) elaborates this thought as follows:

Because human mishaps may have the spirit world as their provenance, it is imperative to consult the *nganga*, medicine people who diagnose not only the physical causes of illnesses but also their spiritual causes. Physical sickness may have spiritual causation and so it is necessary to consult the medicine person who detect the spiritual cause or causes, and help the individual figure out what to do in order to stem this threat to life.

Speaking of African Christianity in Botswana, Amanze asserts that healing is one of the most important ministries of the African Independent Churches and that people are healed of all sorts of diseases in the name of Jesus Christ (Amanze, 2000a:112).

Healing is an activity which attracts many people to join the healer's church. Amanze (2000a:112-113) says: "This being the case healing has been a centre of attraction in the life and work of many African independent Churches. To this end the Person of Christ is conceived as the healing hand of God the Healer par excellence." The leaders of these independent churches present Jesus Christ as the Great Physician who heals all kinds of physical diseases. Again Amanze mentions:

"Because of his powers to heal all kinds of sickness as observed in the records of the New Testament all African Independent Churches believe and teach that Jesus is the Great Physician. It is also believed and taught that the healing power of Jesus is inherent in the Church today and can be exercised by the prophet-healers, bishops, prophets, elders of the Church and the entire congregation which is the body of Christ. Therefore Christ who is present in the church today heals through the worshipping activities of the church today. He heals those who suffer spiritually, physically, mentally and socially. In the prayers of healing the power of Jesus heals people and also comforts those who suffer from various calamities or disasters in life by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Amanze, 2000a:112).

#### **3.4.6 . Divination and diviners**

This phenomenon is well known among African peoples. McVeith (1974:67) says that most Africans have a firm belief in the power of divination although some laugh at it. He also declares that when Africans seek for an understanding of life's enigmas, they often go to a diviner for help (McVeigh, 1974:64). Mashau (2007:646) asserts: "Divination has to



do with the foretelling of the future through magical acts. It is not only a means of discovering things to come, but is also used to uncover past secrets, and to smell out witches and sorcerers.”

Quoting some different sources, Turaki (1999:201) writes: “Stejne defines divination as a technique with which to interpret phenomena of nature and occult spirits.” A Bible Dictionary puts it this way: ‘The attempt to predict future events which cannot be perceived by normal means’ (New Concise Bible Dictionary, 1997:129). Another one states: ‘The art of determining the future or ascertaining the divine will’ (The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary, (1987:187). Divination is widespread in traditional Africa and even seems to appear as a common everyday practice. Anything that happens to man must invariably have a definite spiritual cause. And this belief takes divination seriously.

Khathide (2007:352-353) referring to Ndwandwe (2000:215) and Abyole (1988:127) declares that within a framework of a worldview that believes in the existence of witchcraft, spirits and power, divination is a phenomenon that is taken seriously. For Amanze, in almost all African societies there is a strong belief in ancestors (Amanze, 2000a:10). From this follows, that the spirits of the ancestors are taken seriously by Africans.

Speaking of the Ibo people of Nigeria in West Africa, Ilogu (1974:39) mentions: “To the Ibo therefore, the spiritual world is very real and intimate. Hence, the belief in the existence of spirits in all aspects of nature and its various phenomena.” According to Thorpe, perhaps the most widespread cult of all is that of the Ifa divination system practised by the Yoruba people of Nigeria and he adds that strictly speaking it is

neither a secret society, nor is it devoted to the remembrance of the ancestors (Thorpe, 1993:97).

There is an interest in divination by Africans which is supported by certain motives. Picking up the thought of Imasogie (1983:60) and Langerwerf (1987:14-15) Khathide sees in this the fact that in Africa, the necessity of divination is made possible by the belief that there is no event or sickness that occurs without a spiritual or metaphysical cause, hence people must look beyond physical events to their spiritual aetiology (Khathide, 2007:353). Due to this people like to know what is going on in the other world.

Shorter (1995:8) says that divination is a form of revelation which goes beyond mere diagnosis, the examination of the patient and the knowledge of natural cures and remedies, to include the analysis of dreams, the restoration of mental hygienic balance and the dynamics of human and suprahuman relationships.

Citing Setiloane (1976:54-57) and Imasogie, Khathide explains diviners as people who, by virtue of their extra sensibility to spiritual reality and years of training have become “fathers and mothers of secrets” (Kathide, 2007:354). Referring to Danfulam (2000:87) the same author mentions that the diviner, as an agent between the human and the spiritual world, explores and exploits the mystical world to normalise, ameliorate, restore and reconcile estranged relationships for a harmonious and habitable universe (Khathide, 2007:255).

In Ndebeleland, people practising evil magic, among them the witches, were killed when discovered by the diviner. Bhebhe (1979:17) writes: “An *isanusi* (Diviner) was employed to discover witches. The Zansi Isanusi, unlike the Shona diviner, did not employ bones for his divination

but used spirit possession and discovered the hidden causes by the *ukuvumisa* technique (asking leading questions from enquirers).” The same author adds that the Izangoma, unlike the Izinyanga, excelled in the field of divination; and that they foretold future events and discovered causes of illness and other hidden “facts” through spirit possession, and by the *ukuvumisa* process (make-agree) (Bhebhe, 1979:57).

Diviners and so-called prophet-healers enjoy good audience and acceptance among African peoples, because what they say is easily accepted as true. Speaking of the Ndebele people of Southern Africa, Bhebhe (1979:86) mentions:

The reason indeed why people did not protest against the decisions of the *isanusi* was that he was an excellent judge of public opinion. The man he singled out as a witch was frequently the one everybody thought of as having an odd type of behaviour or as possessed of evil intentions. This was why Christian converts were such easy victims of dangerous suspicions. They were ostracized by the rest of society for their refusal to conform to the traditional ways. In the event of people re-coursing to an *isanusi*, the Christian would turn out to be the odd man and would invariably be picked out as the practitioner of evil magic.

This happens to Christians as they refuse to live according to the old traditional African beliefs.

In the African context diviner and prophet do not differ too much in their way of working. Hastings (1989:152-153) referring to the thought of Hubert Bucher, writes:

Hubert Bucher in his more recent study *Spirits and Power* has reinterpreted Daneel's evidence to argue that there is really no such significant difference between nganga and prophet: 'Whenever prophets come to the conclusion that illness or misfortune have befallen a client because of the legitimate claims which a deceased ancestor or his living representatives have against him, they use the traditional standardized patterns of conflict as an explanation and recommend the appeasement of the irate ancestral spirit as the only solution, exactly as any traditional diviner would do'.

One can understand that diviners are involved in discovering what is hidden or unknown to ordinary people in society.

### **3.4.7 . Spirit possession**

#### **3.4.7.1 Its reality and nature**

This phenomenon is frequently spoken of in Africa. Shorter (1985:180) when speaking of a case of spirit possession in Uganda, asserts that it is not even necessary to practise mental dissociation in order to be possessed by a spirit, as it is proved again by the Ugandan example. But, for Westerners spirit possession is something doubtful. Quoting

Silvoso and Burnett, Khathide (2007:358) mentions: “For most westerners, the subject of spirit possession usually commences with the question ‘Can spirit possession actually occur?’ (Burnett, 1988:162, Silvoso, 1994:103-104).”

Shorter (1985:180) explains that spirit possession is basically a belief that there is a spirit possessing you, or submerging your own personality in some way, and that the identity of this spirit and social attitudes towards it depend on cultural factors. And he adds that these factors shape the mental content which underlies the personal identification of the spirit (Shorter, 1985:180).

It is remarkable that words like spirit medium, spiritism and spiritualism are associated in the discussion of the phenomenon of spirit possession in traditional healing. Appiah-Kubi (1981:18) says that in discussing the phenomenon of spirit possession, scholars have used various terms – spiritualism, spiritism and spirit medium. He also affirms that generally speaking, spiritism is the belief in the possibility of communicating with the spirits of the departed or the dead and the practice of attempting such communication, usually with the help of a medium who is believed to act as an intermediary with the spiritual world (Appiah-Kubi, 1991:18).

Many scholars, among them Andrew Lang, recognise the existence of this phenomenon called spirit possession through the communication of the spirits of the dead. Appiah-Kubi (1981:19-20) citing Andrew Lang, mentions the following:

In the philosophy of Animism and the belief of many peoples, savages and civilized, spirits of the dead or spirits at large can take up their home in the bodies of living men. Such men or

women are spoken of as 'inspired' or 'possessed'. They speak in a voice not their own, they act in a manner alien to their natural character, they are said to utter prophecies and to display knowledge which they could not normally have acquired, and, in fact do not consciously possess in their normal condition. All these and similar phenomena the savage explains by the hypothesis that an alien spirit, perhaps a demon, a ghost, or a god, has taken possession of the patient. The possessor being full of the spirit, delivers sermons, oracles, prophecies and what the Americans call 'inspirational address' before he returns to his normal consciousness.

Some scholars do hesitate to accept the reality of spirit possession as held by Africans. Quoting Lambek and Beattie, Khathide reports that Lambek (1996:238) referred to spirits as "products" of imagination; partial constructions that are fictional but not simply "fictitious" and that Beattie (1977:4) called them "abstract qualities" (Khathide, 2007:358).

This argument was held by some missionaries from abroad coming to Africa with the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel of salvation. About this fact, Khathide (2007:358-359) mentions that the early missionaries who came to the African shores with the intention of proclaiming the gospel, inadvertently demonstrated ignorance in understanding and dealing with spirits and spirit possession. Again Khathide reports that this was largely due to their Enlightenment-rooted presuppositions which, in essence, denied the existence of the spirit world (Khathide, 2007:358-359).

Africans are reportedly experiencing this phenomenon and Christians in Africa must be aware of it. Quoting from Thaba, Khathide (2007:360) declares that it is in predominantly primal societies like in the African continent where spirit possession is mostly experienced because it is an acknowledged reality there. Gehman (1990:158) writing on the African Traditional Religion asserts that a major way by which the ancestors communicated with the living was through possession.

Features like abnormal sickness, unusual physical strength are said to go along with the spirit possession. Gehman, (1990:158) writes:

Spirit possession usually begins by someone starting to cry for no reason. Or he may have an abnormal sickness, like a headache which is accompanied by loud crying or running away from home. ... When one is fully possessed, he demonstrated the powers of the *aimu*. He demonstrates unusual physical strength. One famous spirit medium in Kitwe runs very fast on one leg towards some distant hill to which she has been called. Or the possessed may walk on fire without being burned, cut himself without being hurt or eat dangerous fruits without being sick.

All these features may be observed through the behaviour of a possessed individual. In some circumstances, dancing is also considered to be a feature of a spirit possession phenomenon. Again Gehman says that thus the places where the people are most likely to

become possessed are the dancing grounds ... and the places where the harvest is prepared (Gehman, 1990:160).

Speaking of the experience in the spirit possession among the Maasai people of Eastern Africa, Westerlund (2006:80) writes the following:

Due to great problems of drought and famine, some Maasai had to flee to Bantu areas in the coastal region; and when they returned they brought with them some foreign spirits. After that, isolated cases of possession by such spirits were reported, but it was not until the last two or three decades that this modern phenomenon became common or widespread. Spirit possession among Maasai has also been spread through the activities of numerous healers, *waganga*, from the coast, who have extended their activities to the Maasai plains.

In brief we can assert with Khathide (2007:361) that this serves to show that the problem of spirits as agents of evil in general and spirit possession in particular, is widespread in Africa. And also this phenomenon is something which Africans acknowledge as real and something for which they seek help from African traditional healers, or from the Christian church leaders, as in the case of Father Milingo, or from both (Khathide, 2007:361).

#### **3.4.7.2. Exorcism**



It usually happens in Africa among Christians and non-Christians that they look for exorcism when tormented by the spirits. Khathilde (2007:360) says that perhaps the issue of spirit possession in Africa was highlighted by the ministry of exorcism by Father Emmanuel Milingo from Zambia. Milingo was consulted by people who were possessed by spirits. Again Khathide reports that those who were tormented by *mashawe* (spirit possession), something that traditional healers understood and could deal with – came to Father Milingo for exorcism (Khathide, 2007:360).

According to Shorter (1985:188) exorcism of demons plays little part in Mgr. Milingo's healing services outside the African context. He adds saying that in Africa, however, and in Lusaka especially, the Archbishop exorcised the kind of alien spirits that were described ... imputing to them a diabolical identity, and entering, himself, into a mild trance accompanied by glossolalia (Shorter, 1985:188).

Milingo is said to have exorcised different spirits from possessed persons. Again Shorter asserts that among the spirits he exorcises are the *mashave* or *mashawe*, alien or patronal spirits and the *mizunu* or benevolent spirits of deceased ancestors (who may at times be believed to punish the living with misfortunes of various kinds) (Shorter, 1985:188).

Speaking of the Maasai of Eastern Africa Westerlund (2006:81) underlines their interest in practising the method of exorcism to heal possessed persons. For he mentions that possession is contracted through contacts with non-Maasai people, and possessed Maasai must consult non-Maasai healers or Christian churches for the purpose of exorcism.

Exorcism in the opinion of Mgr. Milingo is an important part of his ministry in which he thinks of himself following the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. Hastings (1989:148) writes:

For Milingo exorcism is, or should be, a central part of a priest's ministry. In this he places himself directly under the authority and example of Jesus. It is Jesus who provides him with the power to throw out evil spirits: in the realm of exorcism we human beings are not standing in the ordinary arena. We are in the World of the spirits, and so in order to stand firm and face the enemy, we need to be clothed properly – hence the need of God's grace.

This is clear that Mr Milingo of Lusaka, Zambia, believes in the power of the spirits to possess people and he is at the same time confident that evil spirits can be cast out with the power of Jesus.

The Jaba people of Nigeria in West Africa know this phenomenon of exorcism and are said to use certain instruments while practising it. Khathide citing Kato (1975:37) has to mention that among the Jaba people of North Central State of Nigeria, there are certain medicine-men who specialise in the profession of exorcism, and the instruments used in exorcism include a drum, calabash and locally made guitar (Khathide, 2007:369). And during this ceremony the spirits which are in the possessed person leave him or her free. Again Khathide reports that the chief exorcist sings, calling the names of the spirits in the possessed person, and the high volume attracts not only the possessed person into dancing, but also neighbouring women as well. After dancing for about

two hours, the possessed person falls down as if dead, apparently from exhaustion. She lies for a while, then gets up renewed in strength. From that time the spirits leave her (Khathide, 2007:369).

African Christians and non-Christians know about the existence of exorcism or they are aware of it as many people can tell about it. When an individual is reportedly possessed by the spirit or the spirits, he or she can consult a traditional diviner to cast out the spirit. Church leaders, sometimes referred to as prophets, are also consulted for exorcism in the case of spirit possession as in the case of Mgr. Milingo of Zambia. Hastings (1989:140) says that Milingo can well be compared with a number of famous healers in twentieth-century Africa, men like Simon Kimbangu and Isaiah Shembe, who link together Christianity and African tradition.

#### **3.4.8 . Prayers and spirits**

Africans practice prayers in their traditional context and those who are Christians do so in the churches . In this situation Christians address their prayers to God and non-Christians to spiritual beings. Mbiti (1975:4) says that at least 90 per cent of the prayers are addressed to God and therefore He emerges as the clearest and most concrete spiritual reality. Prayers are addressed not only to the Creator, God, but also to the numerous spirits encountered in African Religion. Again Mbiti (1975:8) asserts the following:

We know that in African Religion it is held that some of the spirits were created as such by God, others are the remaining portion of departed

people, and some are personifications of natural objects and phenomena. The prayers as they stand do not make this distinction clear, but they are addressed chiefly to the living dead of the family (who may be mentioned by name), or to personifications; and hardly to spirits which are unknown or not connected with the family.

Africans appeal to spirits in their traditional context in situations of sickness and disaster. Mbiti (1975:9) declares that people appeal to the spirits for various types of help, particularly in connection with sickness, and indeed many of the prayers addressed to the departed spirits are appeals for help in time of sickness and distress.

### **3.4.9 Summary**

In the thoughts of Africans, the ancestors play a great role in their lives. They cannot do anything without the help of the spirits, especially the spirits of the ancestors. In all events, ancestors or spirits have to be consulted. They have always something to say.

Good spirits are thought to bring a good life to the living. They are engaged in healing, protecting, giving rain and enough crops, giving children. But the evil spirits are feared for the harm and disasters they bring on the community. To maintain harmony between the spirit world and the living on earth certain offerings and ceremonies must be performed in honour of the spirits.

The ancestors do not seek suffering for their living descendants. Their main concern is to bless and protect, not to cause harm. They are truly

concerned about the tribe, clan, family and the whole community. They are dedicated basically to the well-being of the individuals.

Do Africans have reasons to rely on the help of the ancestors? Are the spirits really assisting them in their well-being? What is the role then of the Spirit of God in the life of the Africans? Can the spirits of the ancestors or the divinities influence the individuals and change the course of their lives?

Africans have to seek the truth and not adhere to things which are of no help. When people believe in certain phenomena, it appears to them that these are a reality, but it is not the case.

### **3.5. The African concept of man as a spiritual being**

#### **3.5.1. Man's life on earth**

##### **3.5.1.1. Origin of man**

In their traditional context, African peoples conceive man as a creature of God although many contradictory legends or myths are told about the origin of man. Most Africans speak of God as the Creator or the Maker or the Moulder of man. Mbiti (1969:93) says: "It is generally acknowledged that God is the originator of man, even if the exact methods of creating man may differ according to the myths of different peoples."

There are numerous myths narrated by Africans in connection with the creation and the origin of man. These myths give various and amazing stories about the creation of man depending on the different peoples scattered throughout the continent of Africa. We would like to mention

only a few of these myths here. For example the Ngombe speak of man coming from the sky without directly relating this to God, the Creator, although they mention the name of Akongo in their myth. Smith (1961:175-176) writes: "In all Ngombe myths about the origin of man it is related that he came down from the sky. The sky is regarded as a definite place supported by two beings: one, Libanja, holds up the sky in the east by means of an enormous pole, and the other, Songo, does the same in the West. ... In the beginning, it is said, there were no men on earth: they lived up in the sky with Akongo. Everybody was happy until a woman named Mbokomu made herself a nuisance. When she could be tolerated no longer Akongo put her in a big basket with her son and daughter and with cassava, maize and sugar-cane and lowered them down to earth. On their arrival they began to plant a garden, and it prospered. One day the mother said to her son: 'Don't you know that when we die there will be nobody left to carry on our garden? ... Your sister is a woman, is she not? Take her to be your wife and beget children by her'. ..." This is an amazing myth among others told by Africans.

Referring to the myths on creation among some African people, Mbiti (1970:163) indicates: "The Fon believe that when God had set the universe in order and had created animals and vegetation, He then formed the first human beings from clay and water. The Shilluk also tell that God made man out of clay of different colours, which explains the difference in skin pigmentation. Then, He gave man legs with which to walk and run; hands with which to plant grain, eyes with which to see that grain; and a mouth with which to eat it. Afterwards God gave him the tongue with which to sing and talk; and finally ears, so that he may enjoy the sound of music, of dance and the talk of great men. Then God

sent man out, a complete man. The Yao and other people around lake Malawi, believe that the first human being sprang from a hole in a rock, as did also the other animals. Afterwards 'the people of God' closed up the hole, but it is said to be in the northern part, in a deserted section of the country. Similar myths are told among the Basotho, Shona, Tswana and others. Among the Zulu it is said that the hole was in a marshy ground. The Herero believe that God caused the first human beings, Mukuru, and his wife, Kamangarunga, to come from the mythical "'tree of life', situated in the underworld" These myths and others are told among Africans to explain the origin and the existence of man on earth.

Almost every African society has its myth or myths concerning the creation or the origin of man. The Pare of East Africa recognise God as the Creator. McVeigh (1974:49) writes: "The Pare people of Tanzania for example say that they know nothing more about Kyumbi than that He is the Creator of all things, beyond that He is not interested in them nor they in Him."

### **3.5.1.2. Nature of man**

Africans consider man as being of a dichotomous nature. They say that man is composed of body and spirit (or soul). This last part of man constitutes his spiritual aspect. The spirit is the life principle and its existence is manifested through breathing. When a person stops breathing, it is said that the spirit has left him. One may describe death by saying "his breath is gone"; the body itself remains behind. Nyirongo (1997:99) says: "According to the African's view, man consists of two major parts: the immortal soul (or spirit), which goes to the spirit land after death and the tangible body which rots in the grave. Depending on

how the deceased lived, he can be transformed into an ancestral spirit or become an ordinary malevolent spirit if there is no longer any descendant to remember him.”

Africans hold that man has a body which can be destroyed at death, but the spirit or soul continues to live. Taking up this belief, Nyirongo (1997:101) mentions: “To sum up: the major elements of a person are: his tangible body, soul and shadow. The body rots in the ground whilst the soul and shadow are transformed into an ancestral spirit or become an ordinary or malevolent spirit.”

It should be noticed that according to Africans man transforms into a spirit at death. Nyirongo (1997:99) writes: “In other words, after death the deceased transforms into spiritual existence which is the ancestral. It is in this state that the individual is capable of maintaining a spiritual bond with his relatives. This belief appears to be the reason for the elaborate funeral rites.” This way of thinking is found in many parts of Africa, when one observes the ceremonies accompanying the funeral rites.

Man’s spiritual dimension is real because he gains his life from God. His life is meaningful as long as he remains in contact with the Creator, God. Idowu (1973:75) indicates that man thus realises from the beginning that he has a dual nature: his commonplace life is here on earth; but there is a living Being to whom he is linked by reason of his essential personality. In short, man is so [constituted and] conditioned that he must be dependent upon God if his life is to be real, full and harmonious. His life is really worthwhile only insofar as it is controlled and sustained by God.



### 3.5.1.3. Man's social relation

The concept of man has many implications for social life. It is strongly forbidden to kill a man in a great number of African tribes especially without reason. A killer, among the Baluba people of Congo, will be haunted by the spirit (called *kizwa*) of the dead. This spirit can also kill the members of the family of the killer if it is not appeased through the payment of animals, money and other valuable things (verbal communication, 2011).

In Africa man is a true human being in society only in his relationship with other members. Any individual who lives in isolation from the community due to his bad deeds will not be considered as a true man or woman. Ray (1976:132) says: "African views of man strike a balance between his collective identity as a member of society and his personal identity as a unique individual. In general, African philosophy tends to define persons in terms of the social groups to which they belong. A person is thought of first of all as a constituent of a particular community, for it is the community which defines who he is and who he can become."

Man has to perform his actions in connection with what is done in the community. In some way all man's actions and his circumstances are conceived as closely connected with the functioning of things in general. Ray (1976:134) states: "Because of these multiple connections, man is not thought to be a single or simple entity. In contrast to the Western notion of the soul as the 'essence' of man, the Dogon people think of man in terms of multiple 'souls' or 'selves', each reflecting a concrete relation between the individual and his social and cosmic environment. Unlike Western philosophers, the Dogon do not think of man as a static

and unchanging being, but as a dynamically developing cluster of forces whose powers may be increased or decreased according to his moral and spiritual act. They may also be influenced by other and by supernatural and ritual acts.”

Social relations are very important among African people. They must be protected and promoted in various ways. Africans usually seek the means to consolidate their bonds among members of a tribe or a clan. Anybody has the right to break social relationships without being severely harmed. Gehman (1990:52) indicates: “More important than the relationships between the clan members and their totem, is the relationship among the clan members themselves.”

### **3.5.2. The destiny of the spirit of man after death**

#### **3.5.2.1. Causes of death**

In Africa, death does not happen without cause. It is always sent to the victim by someone else. Each individual who dies in Africa has been killed. A person can die because of sickness, accident or any known fact but relatives of the dead will seek to find out who killed their brother, sister or parents. In many places of Africa death is not a reality but it is obviously provoked. Witchcraft, magic, curse, words of angered old men or women are frequently feared and cited as the causes of death. Mbiti (1969:155).points out: “Man has since accepted death as part of the natural rhythm of life; and yet, paradoxically, every human death is thought to have external causes, making it both natural and unnatural. People must find and give immediate causes of death. By far the commonest cause is believed to be magic, sorcery and witchcraft. This

is found in every African society, though with varying degrees of emphasis; and someone is often blamed for using this method to cause the death of another.”

When any external agent is not proved to have caused the death, God is considered as the one who brings death among people. In most African villages death is always caused by someone or something unnatural. Mbiti (1969:156) indicates that “the cause of certain death is God, especially those for which there is no other satisfactory explanation, for example through lightning, of very old people (natural death), or where a person may contravene an important custom or prohibition. Even when God may be seen as the ultimate cause of death, other intermediary agents may be brought into the picture to satisfy people’s suspicions and provide a scapegoat. One or more of the causes of death must always be given for virtually every death in African villages.”

### **3.5.2.2. Destiny of the spirit of man hereafter**

According to African beliefs, death is not the final point of life’s process. A person becomes a living dead, as soon as he dies. He is a ‘spirit’ in the sense that he is no longer living in his material body. But he still retains features which show him in physical terms. The spirit of the dead continues to live in the abode of the dead. The place of this world of the spirits is not the same. It depends on the people’s belief. This idea is known almost everywhere in Africa. The Kono people of Sierra-Leone, for example, call this place *faa*. Smith (1961:271) says: “*Faa* is the invisible abode of the dead. People who are reported to have returned to this life tell of the beauty and wealth of the place. There the spirits

continue to live much as men live in this world; and they have the same characteristics but superior ability to help those who call upon them.”

Although Africans hold the belief in the continuation of life after death, it is remarkable that death is seriously feared because there is a great uncertainty about the life after death. Nürnberger (2007:25) notes: “The after-life is not a desirable goal, except perhaps for very old people who have become tired of life and perceive themselves to have become frail and useless. Nobody looks forward to becoming an ancestor. The hope that one might have is that one will continue to be respected after one’s demise, not to be excluded from the community, not to fall victim to fading memories, not to become a homeless spirit because of neglected funeral rites.”

In many cases Africans believe that the soul of the dead person in the end becomes a spirit which does not have any characteristics identical to that of human beings. Mbiti (1969:163-164) mentions: “Available evidence points us to the conclusion that, as far as traditional African concepts are concerned, the human soul is destined to the ontological mode of the spirits and not beyond that point, whether or not some of these spirits hold a higher position than others ... Some of the spirits become attached to natural objects and phenomena, some are feared when encountered by human beings, some possess people, but the majority seem to ‘vanish’ out of human contact and thinking.”

These ideas bring us a clear light on what happens to a person who physically dies according to the traditional African beliefs. As one observes this, he will understand that many of these ideas come from innumerable myths and legends known and told by Africans themselves. Many people in Africa are attached to their traditions. We have to bear in

mind that Africa is not a static continent, a land where things are not changing. Many thoughts, habits and other various things have changed.

### **3.5.2.3. The journey to the world of the dead**

African peoples believe in the existence of the world of the dead. For some this world of the dead is located at a distance from earth. Still others think of it as being here but invisible to human beings. This concept of the location of the land of the departed is not very clear. According to Africans' view the souls or spirits of the dead travel to that invisible land. This world is inhabited by the dead in the thoughts of Africans. To reach this place, Mbiti (1970:255-256) indicates: "Some African people make preparations for the journey to the land of the departed. This is done mainly in the form of funeral rites. Among many, however, there are no special preparations probably because the land of the departed is thought to be close and similar to this world. According to Chagga beliefs, the journey to the next world is long, dangerous and terrifying. The soul must travel through a desert region where the sun is very hot. It takes eight days to cross this desert, arriving on the ninth day. There are guardians at the entrance to the spirit chief's residence, and these bar the soul from entering until its grandfather has paid a bull of admission. To equip the soul for this demanding journey, people anoint the corpse with fat, pour milk and fat into the mouth, and wrap the corpse in a hide believed to protect the soul from the hot sun on the way. They sacrifice a bull to the grandfather of the deceased, and petition him to help the new-comer."

There are some people in Africa who believe that between this visible world and that invisible world of the living-dead lies a river which has to

be crossed by the spirits of those who are dead. Mbiti (1969:159) mentions: “The Lodagaa believe that the land of the departed lies to the west, being separated from this by the river of death. As soon as the funeral rites are performed, the soul begins its journey. At the river it is ferried across, for a fee of twenty cowries which friends and relatives provide at the funeral. But crossing this river is an ordeal whose hardness depends on the nature of the life that a person has led in this life.”

Among some African tribes, relatives, friends and associates express the idea of a journey to the land of the dead by using specific words connected to the farewell event. This happens at the occasion of the burial. McVeigh (1974:26) asserts: “After the corpse has been lowered into the grave, various articles may be placed beside it – beer, milk, seeds, pipe, tobacco, etc. These are also necessary on the other side, and the deceased is able to take with him their ‘immaterial counterparts’ wherever he goes. Before covering the body, the members of the family say a final farewell: ‘Goodbye! Do not forget us! See, we have given you tobacco to smoke and food to eat! A good journey to you! Tell old friends who died before you that you left us living well’.”

All these beliefs retained by Africans prove that death is not considered the annihilation of human life. There is an assured life for Africans after death. Those who are dead live somewhere in the world of the departed. According to African peoples, to reach this invisible world, the dead travel to it after death. This way of thinking brings a certain attitude before death and the dead themselves among the Africans.

### **3.6. God as spiritual Being in African context**

### **3.6.1. God as the Supreme Being**

Africans think of God as the Supreme Being. They conceive Him as a spiritual Being who is above the lesser spirits. Many spirits really exist in the minds of African people. This brings them to consider these spirits in the hierarchical organisation with God occupying the summit. We must notice a clear distinction in the perception of Africans between God, the Supreme Being on the one hand, the divinities and the numerous spirits on the other hand. Parrinder (1954:31) mentions: "There have been writers on African society who have maintained that belief in a Supreme God is due to the influence of a hierarchical society; and that is nothing more than a glorified chief or ancestor."

All African people believe in the Great Being who is above everything. He is the one who created all things. According to Africans nothing is equal to the Supreme Being. Throughout Africa people acknowledge the existence of this Supreme Being. Mbiti (1969:29) points out: "In my larger work, *Concepts of God in Africa* (1969), I have collected all the information available to me concerning the traditional concepts of God. The study covers nearly 300 people from all over Africa outside the traditionally Christian and Muslim communities. In all these societies without a single exception, people have a notion of God as the Supreme Being. This is the most minimal and fundamental idea about God, found in all African societies."

Africans know God, and they are conscious of his existence. Mbiti (1969:29) says: "But God is no stranger to African people and in traditional life there are no atheists. This is summarized in an Ashanti proverb that 'no one shows a child a Supreme Being'. That means that

everybody knows of God's existence almost by instinct and even children know Him."

Many African people speak of the Supreme Being as Spirit. For them God does not eat. He has no father and He is not a man. Nobody can see God with his eyes. He is invisible. Mbiti (1969:34) mentions that it is commonly believed that God is Spirit even if in thinking or talking about him African peoples may often use anthropomorphic images. As far as it is known, there are no images or physical representations of God by African people: His being is one clear indication that they consider Him to be a Spiritual Being. The fact that He is invisible also leads many to visualise Him as spiritual rather than physical.

In the minds of Africans God is far away and He is not interested in the life of man. He is a High Being who has nothing to do with people. Van Wyk (2010:2-3) states: "It is good that he is a distant and uninvolved God, for should he come nearer, his awesome power would harm or destroy whatever and whoever approaches him. This view of God depends on Africans' view of hierarchy. God is at the top of the hierarchy of powers; the space between God and man is filled by gods, divinities and spirits and petitioners can only reach him through these intermediaries. One cannot have direct contact with a superior power like God ...."

### **3.6.2. The names of the Supreme Being in some selected tribes**

Generally speaking, names are important in the life of the peoples throughout the world, Africa included. Names are good indicators of the characters of the beings they designate. Smith (1961:4) says that in



Africa, names are not mere labels, but often express qualities for which the owners are conspicuous.

Names of persons have to be regarded with respect and importance. To very important and remarkable individuals like chiefs, epithets are in the ordinary way used to address them with praises. These praise names usually show the character and exploits of the chiefs or any remarkable person in the community. Smith (1961:4) mentions that similar epithets are bestowed by Africans upon the Supreme Being, and these can generally be analysed and interpreted without doing violence to the language, though care must be taken not to read too much into them.

Every tribe in Africa has a name for God. This is a sign that Africans do not ignore the existence of the Supreme Being. Besides the principal names for God, there are other names which Africans use for God. The Tonga people call God Leza, but other names are used to designate Him. Smith (1961:72) says: "Four of these, apart from Leza, have already cropped up incidentally in ... namely Cilenga, Syampanga, Namulega and Nacanzo. These all seem to refer to him as the Creator of all things. Cilenga is derived from the root *lenga* (to create, originate), and Namulenga is another form of the same name. Syampango apparently comes from the root *panga* (to make, form), the verb commonly used for any kind of constructive activity as, for instance, of a carpenter making a table. Nacango seems to be derived from the verb *anza*, a synonym for *lenga*."

It is remarkable to learn that Africans attribute names which are meaningful to the Supreme Being. Names given to God tell something about Him. They are names which express what God is believed to be like, thought of, et cetera. Idowu (1973:150) points out that the names by

which Deity is called in Africa are descriptive of his character and emphatic of the fact that he is a reality and that he is not an abstract concept. The names denote that, as Westermann observes, he is a reality to the Africans and convey the purest expression of their religious thinking and of their religious experience.

- The Ngombe people of Congo call God Akongo. This name is said to have been given by the ancestors. Smith (1961:63) mentions that the name Akongo used for the Supreme Being is said by old men to have been handed down by their ancestors since the beginning of the world. It is unrelated to any other word in the language of the people. It has nothing whatsoever to do with the term Congo or Kongo.
- The Tutsi and Hutu tribes of Rwanda and Burundi call God after the name Imana. The Supreme Being is believed to be the great Creator, the first cause of all good. The meaning of this term is not known. Smith (1961:187) says: "None of the Africans whom I have asked can offer me any explanation of the name Imana, whose meaning seems to be as shadowy as Imana's origin itself. I have been able to find no tradition relating to a time when he was not; he has always existed, and his name has always been Imana."
- The Yoruba and the Igbo peoples of West Africa respectively call God Olódúmaré and Chukwu. Idowu (1973:150) declares that the Yoruba name Olódúmaré is an illustration of a name which is unique to Deity; the Igbo name, Chukwu, illustrates the name of Deity – *Chi* meaning source-Being or spirit and *ukwu* meaning great, immense or undimensional.

- The Zulu people of South Africa call God Unkulukulu. For them this name attributes to the Supreme God and has the meaning of greatness. God is the Great one and Creator. Mbiti (1969:34) states that the main Zulu name for God, Unkulunkulu, carries with it the sense of the Great-great-One and the same name is used by neighbouring people such as the Ndebele to whom it means the Greatest of the great.

### **3.6.3. God's activities according to Africans**

Most Africans speak of God as Creator of the universe. Among them, the Bambuti consider God as one who created the earth and heaven. Mbiti (1970:161) says: "The Bambuti narrate that God created the earth and heaven (his throne which was below), then water, trees, man, and animals."

Many other African peoples are said to have similar stories about the creative work of God. Mbiti (1970:162) mentions that in the Mende story it is narrated that God made all things first and afterwards He created men, both husband and wife.

In his book *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969:39) Mbiti points out that over the whole of Africa creation is the most widely acknowledged work of God. This concept is expressed by saying that God created all things, by giving Him the name of Creator or Moulder or Maker by addressing Him in prayer and invocations as Creator.

There are abundant examples of what African people say about the creative activity of God. Most Africans have this belief concerning the

creation of things, heaven and earth by God. Gehman (1990:1ff92) sustains this point when he writes that the belief that God created the heavens and the earth is widespread all over Africa.

Some African myths on creation do not clearly ascribe the creation of man to God. Mbiti (1970:166) mentions that the Maasai story says that God sent one group of his children to the earth, as the first men. In another version it is said that one of the original four gods came from the sky and became man. From him sprang all the Maasai.

Although the belief attributing creation to God is held by a great number of Africans, one must be cautious to understand that the divine revelation is of importance for Africa. Van der Walt (2002:131) says: "We therefore have to distinguish between the Author of the creational order and the ordered creation."

According to Africans, God is still creating. He has not yet stopped creating. He is still going on with this activity of creation. Mbiti (1969:40) mentions: "It is also held that God continues with His creative work throughout the universe. The Twi say, for example, that God never ceases to create things."

Africans rely on God for their daily life. God is present in the life of African people. Mbiti (1969:42) says that in various ways, different people acknowledge the sustaining work of God. Some like the Abaluyia, Akan and Zulu say that God sustains human life, so that without Him mankind would vanish.

This concept adhered to by some Africans is not generally accepted and well understood because for most African people God is transcendent and far away. He is not concerned, so to say, with what is happening among them. Van Wyk (2010:4) points out that while considering the complex character of the African Supreme Being, it cannot be denied that a large element of transcendence and remoteness can be ascribed to the God of traditional Africa.

According to Africans, in their traditional context the far away God has no interest in the lives of the people. Again Van Wyk (2010:4) mentions: "There is little direct contact with him and little direct involvement from his side. A person is not able to experience his love in and through the Mediator Jesus Christ."

God is viewed as immanent in certain circumstances. Africans are used to say, in many daily events, that they rely on God. For example when a relative is very sick and dying, Africans will say: "only God knows!" This shows that they also have the idea that God is not only far but He is at the same time present. Speaking of Africans about this matter, Idowu (1973:155) mentions: "Neither do they know of the God who is not an immanent being. They do imply that God is far away (transcendent), but at the same time that he is near and active in the universe."

This thought shows that Africans are conscious that God is also present among them during their daily life. Long (2000:23) says: "For most African people, God is present in everyday life because he is just and he punishes sin. The more devastating the communal or individual calamity, the more likely it is that people will attribute it to God rather than to spirits or evil forces."

It must be noticed that God is thought of as being far but acting among people through the spirits, especially the ancestral. Van Wyk (2012: 699) referring to one of the models of the ideas of God in Africa declares: “It sees God (Leza) as personal, nearly, transcendent, omnipotent and involved and one whose interest is of a moral nature (Zambia/Botswana/RD CONGO). What is lacking here is God’s revelation in Christ.”

### **3.7. Conclusion**

For Africans, the spirit world is very important in human life, and contains various spirits. Among these spirits, the ancestral spirits are considered seriously in the daily activities of people. According to many Africans, spirits of ancestors are involved in the life of the living. They are concerned with what happens among their descendants.

## **CHAPTER 4: CHRISTIANS IN AFRICA, THE SPIRIT OF GOD AND ANCESTRAL SPIRITS**

### **4.1. The encounter between the Gospel and Africans**

Christianity has left an impact on Africans during its encounter with the African traditional religion, bringing remarkable changes in various domains of life. Appiah-Kubi (1981:35) asserts that “Christianity has been both a cause and catalyst of social change in Africa.”

#### **4.1.1 . Religious changes**

The preaching of the Gospel or the Christian message has brought changes in the thoughts and deeds of Africans. Hastings (1996:448) echoes:

The Christian life of the first converts was enthusiastically confrontational. At first even the traditional Isoko name of God, Oghere, was rejected, as were all deities and ancestral spirits. The new Christians worshiped Egode or Ijohiva through Jesu Kriti and each group was led in its worship by the first male Christian in the place, who became its '*olori*', a name used equally for leaders in non-Christian cults. At the initiation of a new Christian, the congregation would gather at his home, outside which all his 'fetishes', previous religious symbols and statues of any

sort, were set on fire, while the Christians danced around the flame, proclaiming the power of God and the impotence of the spirits of the past.

This illustration taken from the Isoko people shows how Christians give up their past ways to the new life, and this phenomenon was observed many times where the Gospel was preached to Africans. Thorpe accepts this view when he points out that it must also be recognised that many changes have occurred within the last two centuries as far as religion on the continent is concerned (Thorpe, 1993:3).

These influences were not only noticed on African traditional religion, but Christianity in Africa was in some ways influenced by the African traditions. Again Thorpe recognises that view when he writes that not only have Islam and Christianity had a considerable influence on Africa, but they, in turn, have been affected by African world views, so that today we can speak of an African Christianity or an African Islamic approach (Thorpe, 1993:3-4). We can observe that when new religions came to Africa they brought with them new orientations and practices but they also learned or absorbed some thoughts and practices from Africans.

#### **4.1.2 . Customs and various practices in transformation**

The spread of Christianity through Africa has had an important impact on the customs, traditional beliefs and practices among the African peoples. Gehman has shown changes in the customs and practices of the Luo people. For he reports that Luo customs, offensive to the Christian



conscience, are not forced upon born again believers when they die. Indeed, this often is true, says Gehman (Gehman, 1989:18).

The Ibo people had the custom of killing twins born to a given family; this was practiced before the coming of Christianity in their region. Ilogu (1974:64-65) reports:

It was an old Ibo custom to destroy twins because it was considered unnatural for human beings to be born more than one at a time, only lower animals like hens, goats, dogs and the rest could give birth to more than one at a time. A woman giving birth to twins would therefore need a special cleansing sacrifice and twin children would be destroyed, otherwise the land thus abominated would incur the wrath of the ancestral spirits, which would plague the community, because the "natural" harmony between man, the spirit world and the cosmos in general, had been destroyed. Taylor at Omtsha advised the newly converted Christians to disobey this custom and keep their twin children. This the converts found difficult. Then they came to Taylor with a request that he, Taylor, should provide them protection from the outrage of the populace, who no doubt would forcibly destroy such twins of the Christians and punish their parents in addition. ....When the Rev. Solomon Samuel Perry from Sierra Leone, of Ibo-parentage, had taken over the C.M.S. (Church

Missionary Society) work at Omtsha, he made many entries in his journal on the subject of twin killing, and the efforts he made to stop the practice... All the Christians agreed with Perry to save twins. The following day all the Christians rejoiced openly and publicly that they had got twins. ... Of course it took the added efforts of other missionaries like Mary Slessor in the extreme south East of Iboland at Aro-Chukwu, and the influence of British colonial masters to end this practice of twin killing.

This is one of the unhealthy and evil customs held in Africa which Christianity has eliminated from the life of Ibo people of Africa. Still other atrocious customs and practices are reported among the Ibo people. Again Ilogu (1974:65-66) mentions:

Three types of human sacrifice had existed in Iboland before the arrival of Christianity – the sacrifice of atonement when extreme abomination to the land had led to breach of harmony between the spirit world and the community. ... The second was when chiefs and some noblemen holding the Ozo title were buried with their slaves partly to ensure a smooth passage to the land of the spirits where they join the restful bliss of the ancestors. It was believed that such slaves would also serve their masters in the life after death. The third occasion was the use priests and manipulators of secret cults,

oracles and shrines made of human sacrifice to appease the gods of such oracles, for example the water spirits at Onitsha. Missionaries in Iboland were naturally worried about this practice and at once did whatever they could to stop it.

There is no one who can accept and positively appreciate these African practices which are clearly against the will of God and human dignity.

#### **4.1.3 . Christian attacks on the beliefs in ancestral spirits**

It is generally understood that African beliefs in ancestral spirits and their influence constitute an obstacle to the acceptance of Christianity among Africans. This justifies the position of Christian missionaries toward the beliefs in ancestors and African culture. Speaking of the Tswana people Amanze (2000a:59) points out: "It appears that in all these matters no attempts were made to adopt the Christian message to Tswana cultural values. On the contrary as we have seen above great attempts were made to eradicate all Tswana religious beliefs and practices on the understanding that they were 'heathen' hence incompatible with Christian values and way of life. With one voice missionaries from all the mission churches as well as Pentecostal Churches attacked firmly and decisively what appeared to them as the rearing of the ugly head of Satan whom they came to fight under the banner of Christ."

Christian faith cannot go along with African beliefs in the spirit world because they are opposite to each other. McVeigh(1974:37-38) mentions: "Important as these values are, however, African spiritism is not without its problems. Especially when viewed from the Christian

perspective, it is found wanting; and its inadequacy is precisely its tendency to stifle or suffocate the belief in the High God.” Hence one can understand that Africans do not in their traditional views recognise the Triune God as the unique source of true power.

Again Amanze (2000a:57-58) tells the following about the Tswana:

All the missionaries attacked Tswana belief in ancestral spirits. They were very critical, more particularly, of ancestral veneration which they understood as ancestral worship. Offerings and sacrifices to the ancestors were forbidden as evil. The early missionaries’ attack on the ancestors should be understood within their general perception of the Christian faith. To them the Biblical revelation of God was the only revelation in the world that imparted absolute truth on religious matters. They stressed God’s absolute powers and man’s dependence on God which did not allow room for other intermediaries such as the ancestral spirits.

The hard work performed by Christian missionaries to overcome the beliefs in the spirit world was not without result. Amanze asserts that the missionaries’ efforts to stamp out Tswana culture had a great deal of success since much of the religious reforms that took place in their midst were enforced with the assistance of traditional rulers and thus Tswana chiefs contributed substantially towards the dismantling of Tswana culture in all its aspects (Amanze, 2000a:59).

## **4.2. Persistence of traditional African beliefs among Christians**

### **4.2.1 . Recurrences of beliefs in the ancestral spirits**

It is unfortunately noticed that some Africans though they are Christians and well rooted in the Church still adhere to the belief in ancestral spirits, fearing their influence. Such an observation led Nürnberger to write:

The proclamation of the Biblical message has had a profound impact on African Religion. Obviously, this is particularly true for those who have become Christians, or who were born in Christian families. But in most cases the impact has been partial and incomplete. Some observers believe that for the majority of African Christians it is rather superficial. The fact that many African Christians live in 'two worlds' has often been observed and lamented. However, with increasing boldness articulate Christians including prominent theologians, confess and confirm their African traditional heritage, including ancestral veneration, and strive to incorporate it into their spirituality and their theological system (Nürnberger, 2007:40).

African Christians experience the recurrence of belief in the ancestral spirits and other powers of darkness, and as this situation creates fear in them they are on the one hand Christians in the Church and on the other hand they consult diviners about their ancestors. Mugambi (1995:110) states: "The converts clearly distinguish themselves from the traditional community by identifying themselves with a church, but at the same time

they return their tradition kinship ties through the established norms which the missionary enterprise could not penetrate. Thus the African Christian, to use our analogy again, has a more efficient tool at his disposal, as far as the religious aspect of culture is concerned, than an African who has rejected Christianity or has not yet been exposed to it.”

One could ask the question why this is found among Christians in Africa. Nürnberger, says that one can believe in Christ in the way one always believed in the ancestors, expecting from Christ what one would have expected from the ancestors. If that happens, nothing of significance has changed (Nürnberger, 2007:42).

The spirit world is important in the traditional context of Africa. Many African peoples are frequently haunted by the idea of the spirits. A great number of Africans, among them Christians and non-Christians are strongly attached to the phenomenon of the existence and the influence of the spirits. Sawyerr (1970:2) says: “But even more important is the strong belief in the ancestral spirits and their influence on the individual, the family, the clan and the tribe as a whole. Instances of these beliefs are readily found in almost every part of Africa.”

The involvement of African Christians in the veneration of ancestors is something the churches in Africa do not easily admit but some individuals within churches are promoting this practice. Giving their evaluation of that practice, Afeke and Verster (2004:50) remark: “With reference to Pauw and Haselbarth Theron (1996:40) observes that in Protestant churches views regarding ancestral veneration vary from total opposition, to neutrality, to accommodation. He perceives that positive views and attempts at accommodation or adaptations mostly come from individuals within the churches. The official viewpoint of these churches

is still to reject ancestral veneration, or to express negative attitudes towards it, and there is no real attempt to find an alternative. Theron is of the opinion that this attitude created a vacuum that has been filled by Africans themselves in that a continued belief in their ancestors still exists, and in that the rites and customs of ancestral veneration are still practiced in secret.”

Our Lord Jesus Christ also gave attention to the presence of the spirits by healing and casting them out of individuals who were possessed. In Luke 9:37-40 we learn: “The next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met him. A man in the crowd called out: ‘Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. A spirit seizes him and he suddenly screams; it throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him. I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not.’”

#### **4.2.2 . Conversion and the reality of the spirits**

Africans who have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord still manifest the conviction or the thoughts of the presence of spirits which are dreadful Gehman (1990:171) writes: “The powers and influences experienced in traditional Africa are not mere superstition and imagination. They are not the reflection of childish understanding. For the captures teach the reality and activity of unclear spirits.” Christian Africans have to be informed about the real existence of the spirits, and they have to know that they belong to the Creator God. Again Gehman (1990:171) says that the Bible teaches the reality of spirits within the framework of the sovereignty of God. It has been found in some situations that certain converted Christians bring with them into the

Church their traditional authority and belief in the influence of spirits. Hastings (1996:335) reports: “For many Christians there were also elements of continuity, especially in personal terms. The Christian conversion of people with traditional authority was not unusual. They could carry their authority with them, and at least some early priests were able to say ‘if I had not been a priest, I would have been a diviner’.”

This shows how Christians in Africa can live **in** two different worlds while they are considered converted to the Lord Jesus Christ. Kathide indicates that a belief in ancestral spirits seems to be the most prominent feature in the African traditional religion because it always resurfaces in one way or another (see Krüger, Lubee & Steyn, 2002:34; Zulu, 1998:182; Clark, 2001:182) (Kathide, 2007:327).

#### **4.2.3 . Fear of the influence of the spirits**

The African traditional attitude toward the spiritual world is one of honour and fear, depending on the behaviour of the individual vis-à-vis the ancestral spirits. Thorpe (1993:113) asserts that “among the fears that beset Africans are fear of evil spirits and malicious persons called witches or sorcerers, who use medicines to harm and destroy; fear of offending the ancestors, and fear of losing one’s vital force.” Turaki (1999:128) says that “the standard of what is socially acceptable in conduct and speech is sometimes being motivated by fear.”

In African traditional religion the fear of the ancestral spirits is observable. Gehman (1990:17) mentions that because the spirits of the dead are dreaded and feared, the Luo have the custom of driving away the ancestral spirit at the funeral. When reporting on the rituals of burials



among the Luo people of Kenya, Gehman says that any failure to follow the ancestral traditions was believed to bring revenge upon the living. He also asserts that most of those Luo who participated in the legal proceedings were professing they saw nothing wrong with those Luo traditional rites. He also mentions that Christian clergymen testified, defending those Luo burial practices. Quotations were made from the Bible to support some of their customs (Gehman, 1990:18). One can understand that even Christians in Africa still rely on the ancestral practices because of the fear of the influence which the ancestral spirits could possibly have upon them.

Ancestors are believed to be interested in the life of their living descendants through the interventions in what is happening in the community. Amanze (2000a:10) says that it is believed that when wrongdoing happens in the family the ancestors resent it and punish the evil-doers for they are the guardians of public morality and of the traditions of the elders. As ancestors can punish those who trouble the family, one has to behave respectfully toward them, fearing to be punished. Amanze writes that it is commonly believed among Batswana that the dead have power not only to bless and send prosperity to their relatives but also to curse or reverse their fortune (Amanze, 2000a:11). The same author, citing Brown, reports that J.T. Brown left behind the following testimony which is worth noting: "After much enquiry I have come to the conclusion that the attitude of the ordinary Mchuana towards the dead is on a footing with that of the devout of some higher forms of faith, who, while they adore their saints and often times fear them, only look upon them as mediators, and do not place them in any pantheon as gods to whom worship is due" (Amanze, 2000a:12).

In the situation of difficult circumstances, Christians in Africa need to seek for help from the ancestors. Gehman (1990:19) affirms that reliance upon the ancestors is felt needed during times of emergency, even to many Christians.

Resorting to traditional beliefs and practices by African Christians constitutes a challenge to the Church on the continent. Gehman says that in view of this common problem of Christians yielding to traditional pressures and resorting to traditional religious practices, the Christian Church should seek to understand the appeal of the traditional religion and evaluate this in biblical perspective (Gehman, 1990:20).

This attitude of Africans, even Christians, resorting to the traditional beliefs and practices might be due to fear in their lives. McVeigh underlines the presence of fear in the life of Africans when he writes that however, it is clear that Edwin Smith also knows of an insalubrious “fear in African life, the fear connected with dynamism and its stepson, witchcraft” (McVeigh, 1974:19). Turaki mentions that the principles of moral power and moral fear are pervasive in the traditional society as a result of the dominant presence of the mystical and mysterious powers and forces and the hierarchy of beings (Turaki, 1999:129).

In another situation McVeigh shows his confidence in Christianity to destroy this fear among Africans. He says that in this way Christianity acts as a means to the eradication of fear in African religion (McVeigh, 1974:19).

God only has to be worshipped. Creatures cannot be worshipped. The Apostle Paul gives a clear message about this point to the Corinthians. In 1 Cor. 8:5-6 we read: “For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’ ...

through whom we live.” In the African traditional context, ancestors are given too much attention and great importance. They are considered highly in the daily life of the people.

African people have to learn from the Word of God that God is always at work through his Holy Spirit. They do not have to think of the spirits the way they do. Yong (2000:82) indicates: “There is thereby a link established between the Spirit, the New Being in Jesus as the Christ and the biblical word of God.”

#### **4.2.4 . A Congolese experience of the fear of ancestral spirits’ attacks**

Most informants on this case, among them Christians and church leaders, admit the attitude of fear of the influence of the ancestors although they say that with Christ they are conquerors.

P. Kyungu (personal communication, October 2012) reports: “All bad events happening among people in general and also among Christians like illness, death, poverty, accidents, unemployment et cetera are attributed to the activities of the ancestral spirits and other spirits. Christians are said to be much concerned by these spirits because of what is taught, preached and prayed for in the church gatherings. It is often heard that Christians ask for prayers to be protected against the attacks of the ancestral spirits and other evil spirits like those of witchcraft. Still other Christians say they are not afraid of the attacks of the spirits as they believe in Jesus Christ and that in the name of Jesus Christ they are protected, and in this name (of Jesus Christ) they are capable to conquer the evil spirits.”

Alluding to ancestors, Nkurunziza (1989:79) has this to say: “The ancestors are believed to have power to bless, punish and to curse their descendants. So some fear does enter into the relationship between the living and the dead.” The reality of fear in the ancestral spirits among the Congolese peoples cannot be ignored or denied as they also are Africans.

### **4.3. Syncretism in the African Church**

In Africa, the phenomenon of syncretism is not a myth but a reality especially when one analyses how highly people view and fear their ancestral spirits while they are believers in Jesus Christ.

#### **4.3.1 . What is syncretism**

This word “syncretism” brings to our mind the idea of error and wrong use of the evangelical truth. Writing about syncretism, Gehman (1999:270) points out: “Failure to incarnate the Gospel will lead to one of two errors: planting a foreign church which is not truly contextualized, or planting a syncretistic church which comprises the truth of the Gospel.” There must be one absolute truth in the Christian faith, that means we only believe, trust and worship God, the Creator, and not doing it for God, the Father of Jesus Christ and simultaneously for the ancestral spirits or other spiritual beings. Alluding to this fact, Nürnberger (2007:98) asserts that syncretism denotes faith in more than one divine partner, for instance Yahweh and Ba'al. Hearing this, a Christian African has to avoid being attached to Christ and at the same time give respect and honour to ancestors.

Syncretism is something negative in the Christian religion because it denotes a denial of the true revelation of God, the Creator. Gehman (1999:272) mentions: "Syncretism generally has a negative connotation when referring to the Christian faith. It implies compromise. Hence, few people ever believe that they themselves are falling into syncretism."

Mixing Christian faith and African thoughts and practices, that is the real concern about syncretism and it is a danger. Long (2000:225) states that the most apparent danger is that of mixing the Christian message with African traditions in such a manner, that the two become inseparable.

#### **4.3.2 . Its effects and reality in the African Church**

Syncretism is a phenomenon which is noticeable and present in the Church of Jesus Christ in Africa. Mashau (2009:119) points out: "Increased syncretism clearly points to the way in which secularism and pluralism have impacted African Christianity. Many black Africans are more comfortable within Christianity when some of their traditional beliefs such as the veneration of the ancestors are accommodated. In a meditation, Rev. G.M. Seliloane acknowledges that it is typical of African Christians to venerate their ancestors to the point that this defines their African identity. In his view, this is why many Africans find themselves most at home when in sectarian groups." According to this, the phenomenon of syncretism is practised in the independent churches, and well accepted among members on the continent of Africa.

With the Christian faith, the question is not about feeling comfortable with what is taught even if it is unbiblical but to adhere to the true revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Nürnberger (2007:149) asserts that at

all times the biblical witness has assimilated insights and metaphors from its religious environment, but it has not tolerated syncretism.

In Africa, there are Christians who on the one hand rely on God and on the other invoke their ancestral spirits for assistance or blame them for hardships in their lives. Mashau (2009:119) recognises this fact when he states:

I must confess that syncretism is rampant in South Africa, even among confessing members of Reformed Churches. I was once invited to administer the sacraments in one of the Reformed churches in the neighbourhood of Potchefstroom (Northwest Province, South Africa). As I was about to baptize two babies, I noted that both had amulets on their necks and ropes tied in their hands – obvious signs that their parents had either consulted the sangomas (witch doctors) or prophets (faith healers) of indigenous churches or one of the sectarian groups. My conscience did not allow me to continue, and I immediately interrupted the service by inviting the local pastor and elders together with the parents to join me in the consistory room. I explained to them why I could not continue with the baptism of the two children and encouraged the church council to seek ways to provide in-depth counsel to such parents. The parents responded by pointing out that they had consulted the traditional doctors in order to get protection for their children.

This shows how Christians who are in the church remain attached to traditional beliefs in the ancestors' role in their lives.

In some parts of Africa, we encounter confessing members in the Church who show two faces of their lives, meaning that on one side they go to church to pray and on the other side they consult their ancestors through the witch doctors. Speaking of the Igbo of Nigeria, Dom Nwachukuvu (2000:5) writes: "Other people regard the church as a mere social club. Though they attend the church regularly, they still consult with diviners and fortune tellers when they encounter problems, especially spiritual ones. The role of the church, as they perceive her, is to provide avenues for fellowships and social interaction. Beyond these, the church has no real relevance for their daily existential problems." This is a real problem found in church life among Christians in Africa and it challenges the normal development of the churches.

People do not seem to be satisfied with what is taught and practised in the church and they intend to leave the church to the old traditional ways of living. About this, Sundkler (1964:297) mentions: "The syncretistic sect becomes the bridge over which Africans are brought back to heathenism – a viewpoint which stresses the seriousness of the whole situation. It can be shown how individuals and groups have passed step by step from a Mission church to an Ethiopian church, and from the Ethiopians to the Zionists, and how at last via the bridge of Zionism they have returned to the African animism from where they once started."

There are some aspects of the African traditional worldview which influence people to give up their Christian faith when they like to meet certain needs. Turaki (1999:249) recalls: "Man in traditional Africa has a

way of having his needs met. If the thing needed cannot be met by God, or by certain persons, he looks to other persons or places where such needs could be met. He may not have the moral courage to go and ask God, because the thing that is being requested may be morally wrong. For this reason, he turns not to God but to those that can sanction such an immoral request. The spirit beings readily meet such needs.”

#### **4.3.3 . Spontaneous syncretism among Christians**

There are some cases in Africa, where syncretism can be considered spontaneous when Christians unintentionally perform practices from different religious sources. Gehman (1990:273) says: “Most syncretism, however, is spontaneous without anyone seeking intentionally to combine conflicting elements of different religions. This spontaneous syncretism usually takes place at the grass roots level by people who unknowingly mix things which do not mix. The resultant mix is sometimes called split level Christianity or two-storied religion. This is a compromise between the truth of the Gospel and some of the traditional customs and beliefs.” We could say here that some practices are done in the churches because of the lack of a good theological and biblical basis. Ignorance may be the cause of this spontaneous syncretism. Horton (2008:252) indicates: “Because believers remain saint and sinner simultaneously they never outgrow their need to be fed by the Gospel through these divinely instituted means of grace. Not only at their conversion but throughout their pilgrimage the gospel alone is the power of God for salvation (Rom. 1:16). If Christ is clearly proclaimed each Lord’s Day from Genesis to Revelation, believers will be strengthened in faith and good works and unbelievers will be exposed to this generating



Word.” There is here an invitation to fight against the phenomenon of syncretism through the proclamation and teaching of a sound biblical doctrine to Christians in Africa.

When this need is not met Christians will continue to wander in the churches and will be involved in unbiblical and non-Christian practices. Gehman (1990:273) demonstrates: “For instance Christians may seek in prayers spiritual help from the church and pastor for a sick family member. But when that fails they seek traditional help from the medicine man. Christians may bury their dead loved ones through the church and the pastor, but then at night seek out the counsel and help from the traditionalists. Thus there are two levels of Christianity, the ideal which operates in the day through the church and is publicly professed, and the real practice which takes place at night, secretly and beyond public knowledge.”

#### **4.3.4 . Conscious syncretism**

In this case the leadership of the church is conscious of the unbiblical teaching and practice and deliberately introduces it in the doctrine to be taught to Christians. Gehman(1990:272) mentions: “Syncretism which comes from the top leadership within the churches, is often conscious and deliberate in seeking to accommodate the Gospel to other religious faiths or cultures.

While the proponents usually do not intend to compromise the Gospel they in fact seek to accommodate the Christian faith in order to make it more appealing and relevant. Thus they assimilate various practices and beliefs which in fact are incompatible with the truth of the Gospel.”

In this case, it happens that Christians are told to practice some cultural traditional activities in their worship. For instance a diviner can be presented in the church as speaking through the Holy Spirit. Again Gehman (1990:272-273) indicates: “They may equate the work of the ancestral spirits with the work of the Holy Spirit, thus intermingling the Holy Spirit with traditional spirits. Thus they are knowingly engaged in syncretism through deliberate actions on their part.”

#### **4.4. Religious pluralism and Christians in Africa**

##### **4.4.1 . The reality of the situation**

Christianity is not the one and only religion in Africa, because other influential and world religions are present on the continent. Amanze (2000b:325) mentions that “recent statistics on different religions in Africa seem to indicate that Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religions enjoy the highest numbers of adherents compared to other world religions.” This is a testimony of the presence of more than one religion in Africa. Mashau (2009:108) indicates: “On the one hand, we are witnessing the phenomenal growth of Christianity – as is the case with Latin America and Asia – but, on the other hand we have also witnessed the growth of other religions. Statistics show that other faiths such as Islam, Hinduism and traditional African Religions are flourishing as well.”

Religious pluralism is a real fact in Africa. One cannot deny it, and we would like to stress that the religious characteristics of African people is one of its sustaining factors. Mashau (2009:109) says: “The growth of Christianity and other religions on the African soil can be attributed to the

reality of African religiosity, perhaps summed up best by John Mbiti who noted that Africans are notoriously religious.” Van Wyk (2012:699) is of the same view when he states that “investigation shows that Africans are incurably religious and religion permeates all departments life.”

Africans are conscious of the existence of God and they can manifest their religiosity through the worship of the Supreme Being. Mashau (2009:109) indicates that “religion is holistically integrated into African worldview, and this can be attributed to the notion of religious consciousness.”

The presence of several religions on the African continent is not without threats to Christianity and its members.

#### **4.4.2 . Threats of religious pluralism to Christian faith**

Christianity cannot retain the absolute truth among numerous other religions. Mortensen (2001:41) recognises this threat when he writes: “Missiological studies from the evangelical perspective have come a little late to the scene but are now catching up fast, and in these two books there is plenty of food for thought on how Christian theology needs to change in the light of the multifaceted encounter with transformed world religions. Such a theology must examine how one should evaluate Christianity’s absolute claim on truth in relation to the comparable truth claims of other religions.” This is an element which Christians have to understand properly and know that other religions claim their own truth and that truth is not of Christianity.

Mashau (2009:113) says that “pluralism presupposes that there is no absolute truth, and that truth is relative.”

With pluralism one has to accept that there are many truths, and that peoples must accommodate each of them and tolerate others' various viewpoints. Again Mashau (2009:113) asserts: "When discussing religious pluralism, P.J. Buys noted that truth is different for every person and therefore, all truths should be accepted. He continued to outline how those who promote pluralism embrace it as a phenomenon that is absolute, such that anyone (even Jesus) who is so narrow-minded as to say their religion is the only way to God is guilty of intolerance. As a result, pluralism can only take place within an environment where there is respect, accommodation, and tolerance of diverse viewpoints."

With this view in mind, it becomes clear that religious pluralism is an open door to syncretism which orthodox Christianity has to deal with in Africa.

The necessity to maintain the orthodoxy of Christianity is strongly manifest in the thought of Christians. Amanze (2000b:331) says:

It is important to note that the conflict between Christianity and African traditional Religions has continued unabated to the present day. This conflict is based on the fundamental belief that Christians have received a 'special revelation' in the person of Christ who is the Word of God incarnate. As such the revelation of God in Christianity is perceived as historical, concrete, complete, perfect and final. In this regard other revelatory experiences of God in other religions such as African Traditional Religions, are considered as false and idolatrous. Christians therefore, feel that they would fail in their duty if they

compromised their mission of making all nations Jesus' disciples according to the Great Commission as recorded in Matthew 28:18-20.

From this view the need for religious pluralism is difficult to achieve even impossible to think of. Mashau (2009:116) recalls that whatever is done must contribute toward the spirit of tolerance, accommodation and the common good.

Religious pluralism is viewed as having brought social and religious conflict in Africa while other Africans would admit to co-operation between different faiths. Writing on religious pluralism in Nigeria, Uzoma (2004:652) argues that religious pluralism threatens Nigeria's social stability and its hard-won democracy by setting up different religions and cultural beliefs, particularly of new, radical Christian evangelical and fundamentalist Muslim sects, against one another.

It is hard to reach harmony in a religious pluralism environment where each faith seeks its own identity and survival. The two dominant religions in Africa, namely Christianity and Islam are considered enemies. About this Amanze (2000b:332) states that "it is common knowledge that Islam has been viewed the world over as an arch-enemy of Christianity in Africa."

#### **4.5. Church healing ministry**

##### **4.5.1 . Prophecies, traditional healers and Christians**

Health is of great importance in African communities as elsewhere in the world. In Africa the issue of health seriously worries many people in the

church and outside it. Kalu (2008:263) indicates that “the issue of health and healing is a very important aspect of religious life in Africa, and the explanation of the growth of both African churches and Pentecostalism on the continent.”

In Africa it happens frequently that sick people consult medical doctors, traditional healers or faith healers. King (2012:175) says: “South Africa has multiple types of traditional healers, including *sangomas*, *nyangas* and *umthandazis* (faith healers). Within the study region *inyangas* and *sangomas* are two types of healers that are seen by local residents as generally equivalent with the exception that *sangomas* have the power of communing with ancestral spirits. Consequently, *sangomas* can receive additional training and are viewed as more powerful by some community members. *Umthandazis* might be affiliated with one of the African churches and use the Bible, prayer sessions, and other approaches for treatment.”

The African churches of the Spirit and other Pentecostals teach the active intervention of the Spirit of God in the holistic life of people. Anderson (2001:101) asserts “that they proclaimed the universal Pentecostal message that the same God who saves the ‘soul’ also heals the body, and the Africans added that God also provides answers to the fears and insecurities inherent in the African worldview.” It is clear that to Africans God is also active to heal sicknesses through the power of the Holy Spirit, and this may prevent individuals from consulting medical doctors, believing that they will be cured by intense prayers and sacred rites.

In this regard churches play a remarkable role, especially the African independent churches which are involved in the activities of healing and

prophecies. Bucher (1980:156) mentions: “During a survey conducted by Daneel, it was found that, apart from healing activities, the biggest attraction of ‘churches of the Spirit’ derives from their prophetic activities, such as the performance of miracles, the accurate prediction of a person’s future, the detection of a married partner’s infidelity, assistance received in one’s search for a suitable marriage partner or a better job. This evidence is matched by the high incidence of the belief among members of these churches that God sends us messages through prophets who are inspired by the Holy Spirit.” It is clearly understandable that the Holy Spirit is central in these prophetic and healing activities among Christians.

A deep analysis of the concept shows that the Holy Spirit is taken as a force or power, possessed by individuals or church leaders. About this, Bucher (1980:157) asserts that “Marie-Louise Martin has claimed that in contemporary African prophetic and messianic movements the prophets and messiahs ‘possess’ the ‘spirit’ like an impersonal power. And this is what the Spirit of God is not.”

Referring to the above-mentioned situation, Bucher (1980:157) insists: “In a similar vein, G.C. Oosthuizen has maintained that in these movements the Spirit has ... become the monopoly of the leader [and] ... is actually at his disposal. He sees the cause for this state of affairs in the fact that the functions of the ancestral spirits have been transferred to the Holy Spirit, or simply ‘The Spirit’, so that in the independent Post-Christian movements their ‘holy spirit’ is no longer the Holy Spirit of whom we learn in Scripture.”

Other people do not consult traditional healers, for their Christian faith says that it is not compatible with what they believe. About this point, King (2012:1179) reports:

One Mzinti resident indicated the decision to not visit with traditional healers because 'we are a religious family. We believe in prayers and the divine'. Another woman explained: 'I am a Christian and we do not believe in that. We believe in God. I have seen that some of my family members where I am married believe too much in *sangomas*. They sometimes go to *sangomas* and I still remember after the death of my husband they brought most of the *sangomas* and then I was very, very sick. Then my sister came here and called the Christians and they came and held prayers and after that I was well. That is why I never turn my face towards the *sangomas*.' From this we can understand that there are people, Christians or non-Christians who go to church for healing and after that they go to the traditional healers.

#### **4.5.2 . The Spirit of God and the faith healers**

It is evident that in Africa the Holy Spirit is not commonly considered as God. Leaders of some African churches claim having the ability to use and pass on the Spirit of God to other individuals. Bucher (1980:146-147) writes: "Just as the hosts of powerful stranger-spirits are believed to be able to send these spirits into other people, the founders of churches of the spirit pass on the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands, and



like traditional-healers, they diagnose the cause of their clients' troubles, dispense 'medicines' intended to heal and to protect, detect witches and attempt their cure."

Taking this into consideration one sees that the Spirit of God is not considered as a divine person who can guide and utilise individuals to perform certain powerful actions. Kalu (2008:264) explains this idea when he writes: "In South Africa, the Christian concept of Amandla in the Zulu language implies the authority and power of the Holy Spirit over all types of oppression. It evokes the extra power and grace through which the Holy Spirit diagnoses, heals, and revitalizes believers. God's spirit is a vitalizing energy, a flowing and outpouring of power."

This demonstrates that faith healers are individuals who manipulate the Holy Spirit to perform what they like to do or otherwise the Spirit of God can use them for various objectives. Bucher (1980:151) shows that "members of churches of the Spirit would seem to regard the Holy Spirit in the light of the Shona traditional territorial spirits believing him to use their leaders and prophets as his mediums." One would agree with Anderson taking up this idea (2003:108) when he writes: "The prophets would usually manifest some sign that the spirit has taken control; thus the prophets would snort, whistle, pant, jerk and contort their bodies in different ways." Christians and non-Christians as well are interested in consulting these specialists in healing believing that they are able to drive out the evil spirits which could be haunting them.

Prayers constitute an important activity among Christians in Africa for they are in one way or another considered as a means for healing and practicing exorcism. Khathide (2007:374) in his writings underlines the idea for when referring to Laurent he mentions that prayers for

deliverance from demons and harmful spirits are offered at many church services even during the week, and the number of faith-healers and those who minister in deliverance is increasing in the churches of whatever background and doctrinal persuasion on the continent.

Hastings (1989:142) referring to the ministry of healing which was done by Emmanuel Milingo in Zambia, wrote the following: “As he describes it: ‘I am aware of what is happening to me, and I am sometimes even directing questions to God, but I leave the greatest active part to Him. As I enter into prayer, there comes in me a power which puts me at ease and makes me relax ... this form of communication, through inspiration in prayer, is reinforced at times in other ways.’”

Some criticism was levelled at Milingo about his way of praying. It is reported by Hastings that in many cases, he operates by touching with his hand, and it would seem that it was particularly the touching of women which elicited much of the earlier criticism of him. He prays for every separate part of the body involved and one presumes that he normally touches that part (Hastings, 1989:146).

Prayers are objects of advertisement by the churches in Africa, especially the Christian independent churches and the African healing spirit churches. Appiah-Kubi (1981:94) mentions that in some cases the churches advertise their ability to provide prayer for healing for those who are facing difficulties in life.

Prayer is needed for Christians in all circumstances because a Christian is a being depending on God in everything, especially at critical moments. When speaking of praying Khathide (2007:246) argues that Luke also shows that Christians in Acts, prayed at critical moments, and

that after Jesus', ascension, the disciples, including women, "all joined constantly in prayer" (Acts 1:1).

#### **4.5.3. Attraction of the healing activity**

It is always observed in Africa that people are flocking to the churches involved in the healing activity believing in the power of the faith healers to overcome sicknesses which ordinary medical doctors are unable to cure. Speaking of the failure of the mission churches seriously to take into account the healing ministry, Amanze (2000:175-176) states "that it is therefore their members who in despondency continue to drift in embarrassing numbers to the indigenous churches for divine healing, or other spiritual needs."

Long (2000:76-77) declares: "God intends his church to become a place of healing for its members. The missionary family receives a gift of healing from the church. It came through the elders as they prayed for the father and anointed him. It came through those with a gift of healing as they ministered grace to the family turning them toward God and away from bitterness that threatened to take root in their suffering. It came through those who were skilled in healing interventions. But their healing did not mean an escape from suffering." It is clear here that the healing activity is supported and it has an important role among Africans in the church. Nkurunziza (1989:114) says that "healing is an important aspect of protecting and sustaining life in the organic universe and that the art of healing in the Bantu philosophy of life is both a religious and physical act."

People in Africa are attracted by what is concrete and publicly visible. Healing activities fill a need among Christians in Africa. Referring to this opinion, Anderson (2001:1) mentions “that the God who forgives sin is also concerned about poverty, oppression and liberation from afflictions. It is this message that makes African Pentecostalism attractive. Often with little formal theology, a clear pneumatology is exhibited in church practice and in the interpretation of the working of the Spirit in daily life.” Where there is a visible manifestation of the working of the Spirit of God there Africans will gather in great numbers to experience the spiritual wonders.

#### **4.6. Christians’ view of God, the Holy Spirit and ancestral spirits in the Congolese context**

##### **4.6.1 . God and the Christians in the Congolese context**

Many informants from different denominations say that God is considered as the Creator of all things, a Supreme Being, who is infinite without beginning and end. For them, God revealed himself to men as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is active among people. He is accessible to them and listens to people when they invoke Him by his name. He answers to their prayers and He is compassionate. More than that He is righteous in all his deeds. He loves man and cares for his needs. He protects man against evils and dangers.

To other Christians God is a person who gives life and all things people need in their lives. He gives what men like to possess. Men can obtain these things through intensive prayers. God is the provider. He is the

Creator of all visible and invisible things. Man must totally depend on Him as the source of life.

God is a powerful person who is ready to bring satisfaction to Christians in their lives when a request is made. This explains why many Christians continually leave the church to idols and veneration of ancestral spirits when they do not experience positive changes in their daily lives. God is prayed to in order to make people happy, rich, prosperous, etc. He is a provider of different needs for men (source: verbal communication from Christians of different denominations in the DRC, 2012).

#### **4.6.2 . The Spirit of God and Christians**

Many Christian informants on this view the Spirit of God as a force or power centred on demonstrations or just a strong force to help them live their faith. It is also remarkable that Christians like to try out natural phenomena with the Holy Spirit. Many Christians believe that the Holy Spirit can resist evil spirits which are around people trying to harm them. This, they say, is only possible through prayers sustained by the Spirit of God.

Christians like to observe signs and miracles performed by the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God has to do visible things for example heal sick people, bring to life people who are dead, bring to normal life those who are mentally disturbed.

To be in a trance means to some of them to experience the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit. Many African Christians think that true believers are those who show some visible signs of the Holy Spirit like speaking in tongues, making people to fall down while praying for them

or to cry out loud. Without these manifestations a Christian is not filled with the Holy Spirit. To them the Spirit of God must act in a visible manner to make a difference. People have to see and recognise that the Holy Spirit is making Christians more important (source: verbal communication, 2012, DRC, Lubumbashi).

#### **4.6.3 . Manifestations of ancestral spirits and churches**

Some church leaders say that they are always in contact with individuals possessed by the spirits of ancestors. These persons come to church to ask for prayers to be healed from the sicknesses caused by the evil spirits. This always happens when one does not comply with the demands of the spirits of the ancestors and other spirits.

People also argue that witches use these spirits to harm other individuals in the society. In this case prayers of church leaders are needed to cure victims of the spiritual attacks.

There are church leaders who are specialised in casting out evil spirits. In case of death, those who are initiated to invoke these spirits can determine the causes of death and even name the author of the death.

In the church it is usually thought that spirits cause people to be poor, to stay unmarried, to experience long term sicknesses, to be mentally ill. It is common for church leaders to attribute these conditions to the influence of spirits of the ancestors or to other spirits.

Many people are attracted by the church activities consisting of healing and solving the spiritual problems of the people. Many individuals like to invite church leaders (pastors) to pray for them in order to help them

solve their numerous problems concerning poverty, sicknesses, sterility, unemployment.

Mad people in the community are said to be under the control of evil spirits or unsatisfied spirits of the ancestors. To cure them, prayers by church leaders are needed (source: verbal information, 2012).

## **4.7 The Spirit of God or ancestral spirits**

### **4.7.1. Pneumatological difficulties in African context**

It is held by some scholars that Africans do not make a clear distinction between the spiritual and the physical world; and that in African context people are threatened by the numerous spiritual beings around them. Ngong (2010:1) puts the thought this way:

Pentecostal pneumatology is usually (seen) as the best way the Holy Spirit may be understood in the African context because it fits well with what is usually described as the African worldview. This worldview is one in which there is no firm distinction between the spiritual and physical world as both are intricately intertwined ... African Initiated Churches (AIC's), specifically those Pentecostal-type churches, are usually seen as the churches that have understood this African cosmology and tailored their message to address the felt needs of the people. The felt needs of the people are usually portrayed in terms of overcoming the malevolent spirits that

threaten human life in their environment, thus enabling them to enjoy fullness of life.

This worldview needs a clear and an appropriate understanding from scholars who like to deal with this matter in the African context. Ngong (2010:2) argues: “That is why it does not appear to propose much that is new in the African context; it assumes that because Africans think in particular way, the Holy Spirit has to work in their midst only in ways that are familiar. Since their greatest threat appears to be from a capricious, spiritualized cosmology, the Holy Spirit can only be presented as the power that enables them to overcome these capricious spirits.”

Speaking of the churches in Botswana, Amanze (2000a:115) mentions that it is important to point out that the Holy Spirit is the life-blood of the African Independent Churches and because of their emphasis on the role that the Holy Spirit plays in the life of the Church the Independent Churches in Botswana are commonly known as spiritual Churches. And more than that Amanze (2000a:115) adds saying that their understanding of the nature and work of the Holy Spirit, however, is still a matter of great debate. Cited by Amanze (2000a:115) Oosthuizen has argued that there is a misunderstanding of the person and work of the Holy Spirit in what he calls the nativistic movements.

It is observed that there is no distinction between the Holy Spirit and the spirits of the ancestors in the imagination and practices of the African independent churches. According to Oosthuizen, cited by Amanze (2000a:115) there is a confusion regarding the relationship between the ancestral spirits and the Holy Spirit; and that it is maintained that there is a close connection between the Holy Spirit and the ancestors in the Independent Churches.



Thinking of the moral conduct, Amanze (2000a:115) argues that for instance, instruction from the spirit may lead to the acquisition of two, three or more wives in which case the Spirit's activity is not related to moral guidance but rather to vital force.

This shows how Christians in Africa can hold to their old beliefs while they actively belong to the churches. Amanze (2000a:115) states that "Pauw cited in Oosthuizen has indicated that the belief in the Holy Spirit does not completely displace the belief in ancestors in Zulu Zionist churches. In the same line of thinking, Nürnberger (2007:42) says that one can believe in Christ in the way one always believed in the ancestors, expecting from Christ what one would have expected from the ancestors.

Amanze (2000a:115), citing Oosthuizen, argues that the concept of the Holy Spirit's orthodoxy is questionable in the African Independent Churches. For he reports that in his estimation the doctrine of the Spirit in the Independent Churches is the wide gate through which a number of pre-Christian conceptions have entered into Christianity, and adds that the Spirit is the channel through which the ancestral ideas enter Christian conceptions, with the result that something different is practiced. A good comfort for Christians in Africa is that they are temples of the Holy Spirit. Shorter (1985:180) mentions that all Christians in a state of grace are temples of the Holy Spirit and are endowed with charisms or gifts for the service of the community.

#### **4.7.2 . Discernment of the spirits**

Africans are taught that the Spirit of God is at work and He is also present among them. Taking up this thought, Yong (2000:64) argues that in short, to say that the Holy Spirit is present in the non-Christian faiths is one thing and it is quite another to say where and when the Spirit is present, and how or through what beliefs, practices, etc. the Spirit is at work.

According to Amanze (2000a:116) African Independent Churches in Botswana make a clear distinction between ancestral spirits and the Holy Spirit, and he adds saying that practically all the churches in this category assert that the Holy Spirit is God. The situation in Botswana is like that but in the other independent churches the distinction between the Holy Spirit and the ancestral spirits is not clear. Amanze indicates that although it is true that in the majority of cases no clear distinction is made between the ancestral spirits and the Holy Spirit it is fallacious to conclude that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Independent Churches is unscriptural (Amanze, 2000a:116).

The discernment of the spirits is an important issue. Yong (2000:64) writes: "The main issue related to a pneumatological theology of religions now comes to the fore: the problem of discernment. ... More importantly, what safeguards exist against confusing the presence and activity of other spirits with that of the Holy Spirit, and, vice versa, confusing the presence and activity of the Spirit with that of other spirits committing blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? ... The task of explaining where, when and how such realities are related to the divine plan therefore necessarily requires theological discernment."

This point of view applies also to the circumstances in the Christian Church on the African continent where the beliefs in numerous spirits

are prominent. Yong is of the view that it may be the case that the Christian criteria for discerning the Spirit's presence and activity is and can only be Christological (Yong, 2000:64-65). One can say with Nürnberger (2007:40) that "where Christ is irrelevant, a serious vacuum can be expected to open up the consciousness of Christians, which is quite naturally filled with the authority, power and presence of the ancestors, who have always been around."

### **4.7.3 . The Spirit of God at work among Africans**

#### **4.7.3.1. The Holy Spirit and the African Independent Churches**

Many Africans are attracted by the ministries of the Independent Churches because they are considered as the abodes of the Holy Spirit and they believe that is where the spiritual truth is fully experienced. Enang (2000:42) writes this: "Our respondents believe that the Independent Churches are the abodes of the Holy Spirit. It is only in these churches, they believe that the Holy Spirit is experienced. In there, he moves, fascinates the people, takes possession of them and fills them completely."

Leaders of the Independent Churches claim to possess the Spirit of God and this brings them honour in comparison with other members of the churches. Amanze (2000a:115) indicates: "Sometimes, it is pointed out, church leaders claim to possess the Holy Spirit in such a way that he becomes the monopoly of the leader, it is actually at his disposal, as in the case of the ancestors who can be ceremoniously scolded if they do not react favourably after sacrifices have been offered to them." In these

conditions the church leader is an important person whose word has power over the members.

Preaching, according to the Independent Churches in Africa is the result of the direct inspiration of the preacher by the Holy Spirit. Amanze notices: “Since the Holy Spirit is the Power of God it is believed that one of his tasks is to inspire people to preach the Word of God. It is the Holy Spirit who empowers people to spread the church far and wide by preaching the Word of God inside and outside the church” (Amanze, 2000:120).

It is known that Africans live in fear of the spirit and other invisible powers. About this, Enang (2000:42) declares that because the fullness of the Holy Spirit is experienced in the Independent Churches, one is freed by the Spirit in these churches from the powers of witchcraft and other enemies of man, be they invisible like the demons or physical foes like people who look for the downfall of their fellow human beings.

In the African type of churches, the Spirit of God is presented as the power overcoming all the powers of spirits or demons. Ngong (1010:33) has written: “That the Holy Spirit is seen as the power that overcomes all other adversarial powers is to be lauded. Theologically, no power can overcome the power of God’s Spirit, given that God is Creator of the Universe. God would not be God and the Spirit would not be God’s Spirit if it could be overcome by created spirits.” This teaching is well understood by Christians in Africa who are always looking for protection against the malevolent spirits around them in their traditional context.

#### **4.7.3.2 Christians and the healing ministry in Africa**

The ministry of healing is appreciated among Africans who like to join churches which are involved in this activity. Appiah-Kubi (1981:89) asserts that the most important single reason that people join the indigenous African Churches is healing. Enang (2000:30) reports that healing, understood by the Independent Churches as a gift of the Holy Spirit, is one of the most prominent features of these churches. This is true throughout Africa. According to Enang, healing is the foundation upon which the church rests and in the Nigerian Independent Churches miracles and faith healing are central elements of religious practice. Healing, long prayers, fasting and confession of sins are the prescribed spiritual exercises (Enang, 2000:30).

The healing phenomenon is felt as a need among African people especially when it is performed by the prophet healer. Shorter (1985:215) reports: "The story of the Prophet John illustrates very well the dilemma of the Catholic Church in Africa and other Third World areas where the healing ministry is concerned. It testifies to the great need people feel for healing and to the success of an integrated approach." Taking up this thought, Amanze (2000:117) writes that the Holy Spirit helps prophets and healers in their work of healing the sick and that his work is to provide the healing power. From this one can easily understand that the Holy Spirit is active among the individuals in the church. Again Amanze has to say that it is generally believed that the Holy Spirit works at different levels in the life of the individual and in the church. One of these has to do with the healing aspects of the Holy Spirit (Amanze, 2000a:117).

#### **4.7.4 . The ancestors in the life of the African Christian**

#### **4.7.4.1. Respect to ancestors**

The belief in the ancestors is common in Africa. Speaking of the Tswana people of Botswana, Amanze reports:

Generally speaking ancestral spirits are spirits of human beings who have passed away and are now living in the spirit world which is sometimes conceived as the underworld possibly because the dead are buried in the ground. Quite often the ancestral spirits are interested in the affairs of their descendants as much as they used to be when they were still alive. It is believed that when wrongdoing happens in the family the ancestors resent it and punish the evil-doers for they are the guardians of public morality and of the traditions of the elders (Amanze, 2000a:10).

Cited by Gehman, Parrinder says that there is no doubt that ancestral spirits play a very large part in African thought. ... The ancestors are part of the social group (Gehman, 1990:163).

Turaki (1999:176) asserts that the ancestors are the most powerful basic and primary component of the kinship system in an African community.

Ancestors are considered by Africans to be of great importance in their lives. Again Turaki (1999:178) mentions that the ancestral spirits may also serve as intermediaries between man and God. Amanze (2000a:162) in his view has to say that because of the key position of the ancestors in African societies attacks on the ancestors by

missionaries in the missionary field became one of the factors that gave rise to church independence.

In the African Independent Churches members consider the ancestors with respect and honour. Again Amanze (2000a:164) writes “that they are intermediaries between God and his Church here on earth and as such prayers are made to God through them. The same author adds by citing the illustration of the Citizens’ Apostolic Church where for instance belief in ancestors is preserved in the faith and the practice of the Church, and that the Bishop believes that the ancestors have power to help the Church.”

#### **4.7.4.2. Persistent features in the beliefs of ancestors**

In their traditional context African people have a great attachment to their ancestors and they strongly believe in the influence of the ancestral spirits. Khathide (2007:327) expresses his opinion that a belief in ancestral spirits seems to be the most prominent feature in the African Traditional Religion because it always resurfaces in one way or another.

Afeke and Verster (2004:48) quoting Baëta (1968:301) have this to say: “Africans have welcomed the message of the Gospel, but have not yet left behind beliefs and practices that for centuries have been part of the philosophy of their present existence and of life beyond the grave.”

This indicates how Africans are concerned with their ancestral spirits. Again referring to the Zulu (1998:182) Khathide mentions that “in Africa, as ancestral belief is a living tradition among many tribes, it is not surprising that most Africans have been exposed to the issue of ancestors, whether directly within their own families or indirectly from

their neighbourhood. According to this thought one will say that Africans are aware of the belief of the ancestors and nobody can affirm ignoring it.”

In his observation of the religious system Turaki (1999:75) has this to say: “Our observation of modern Africa, in spite of colonization and Christian missionary work, has shown that the traditional religious system has enduring and persistent features, a worldview and influence, and for this reason, it still has a place in the lives of Africans.” Gehman is of the view that many professing Christians rely on the African traditional religion in times of crisis. For he asserts that reliance upon the ancestors fills a need during times of emergency, even for many Christians. The traditional help derived from the medicine man is often felt strongly during times of great need (Gehman, 1999:19). Citing Mbiti, Gehman says that he (Mbiti) speaks of a “religious concubinage” in which people embrace the good in both Christianity and African traditional religion (Gehman, 1999:19).

#### **4.8. Evaluation**

God alone is worthy of our worship. Human beings are invited to adore the Creator, God. Exodus 20:3-5 gives a clear indication to worship only God: “You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.”

Only God has to be worshipped. It is wrong for humans to worship any creature or spirit of any kind.



Jesus Christ is the only Lord and Mediator between God and men. There is no other name through which we can go to God. In Acts 4:12 it is well said: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by whom we must be saved." Only Jesus Christ perfectly reconciles man with God. Africans who consider the ancestors as intermediaries between God and themselves are going astray from the true scriptural teaching. Nyirongo (1997:18) says that when man persistently suppresses God's revelation he becomes spiritually blind and deludes himself into believing that he still trusts and worships the true God.

There is no need to look for other intermediaries besides Jesus Christ because He is the only one who opens doors to God for us. Jesus Christ in John 14:6 declares: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

The African attachment to ancestors as intermediaries between God and men occurs to us as rejection of the revelation of God. Our knowledge of God is in Jesus Christ. Nyirongo (1997:18) mentions: "Isn't the African's relationship with his intermediaries a reflection of his suppression or rejection of God's clear revelation as explained in Romans 1:18-25?"

Despite the impact of the proclamation of the Gospel to Africans, the traditional beliefs in the ancestral spirits and their consequences are still remarkable in the life of Christians in Africa. Jebadu (2007:246) asserts that despite the suppression and expulsion done in the past, this religious tradition is still able to survive and continue to demonstrate its vital force in the lives of many Asians and Africans, including those who have embraced the Christian faith. Mashau (2007:651) insists: "All

African Christians should be encouraged to engage in the nature of a Christian spiritual life (Eph. 6:10-20). They should engage in a spiritual warfare (Powlison, 1995) which also includes things as prayer and reading of the Bible on a regular basis. This includes a total break from the past life where a person lived under the control of sin. Christians in Africa should be encouraged to have a living fellowship with Christ, hence they will become victors over the evil one and his evil messengers.”

Many writers on African religions have stressed the fact that “Africans are religious peoples.” Van Wyk (2012:698) says that investigation shows that Africans are incurably religious and religion permeates all departments of life.

It is not sufficient to be religious. What is important and needed is the true adoration of the triune God. This is possible only through the Son of God. Jesus Christ is the true and perfect revelation of God to human beings.

Christ is a better mediator because, unlike Moses, the prophets and priests, He is eternal God. He is a priest forever and ever (Heb. 6:20). With such glorious testimonies in the New Testament, why should we appoint other mediators (ancestors, priests, angels ...) in order to be saved or to relate to God? Such an act is a denial of God’s gracious plan for us (Nyirongo, 1997:58).

The belief in the spirits of the ancestors by many Africans, asking for help, assistance and communication with the Supreme Being through them, is contrary to the revelation of God. Idowu (1973:179) says that

thus, there is the general belief that communion and communication are possible between those who are alive on earth and the deceased, and that the latter have the power to influence, help or molest the former.

The ancestors are dead. They are not of this world of the living. Idowu (1973:185) declares that because the ancestors are no longer in the world of ordinariness, the way they are approached must be different from the ordinary approach to them during the time of their earthly life. They are spirits and are approached as spirits, even though they are spirits with a difference in consequence of their family ties with their earthly flock.

Even if the prevalence of the belief in the ancestral spirits stands strong in the thoughts of a great number of Africans, it is clear from the Bible that God forbids to enter into contact with the spirits of the dead or to invoke them. The Scriptures testify to that truth in Deut. 18:10-12 where we read: "Let no one be found ... who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord ..."

Human beings are not allowed to ask for help from the spirits. In this case the Israelites were not to turn to ghosts and departed spirits for conversation and divination. Doing such a thing means that one does not take God of the covenant seriously.

It is not right to fear the spirits of the ancestors who are dead or expect any good or harm from them or the living. It is even wrong to defend and support these practices of Africans towards the ancestors. The true way to know and worship God is in Jesus Christ through the Word of God.

Nyirongo (1997:19) points out that if we begin (as the African theologians have done) with sympathy with the African's claims and then turn to the Bible to support or validate them, we are bound to go astray. First we must acknowledge and understand what God has revealed in his Word before we can get clarity.

It should be clear that syncretism is not needed for Christians in Africa, but it is only the Word of God that can make Africans free from the fear of the attacks of their ancestral spirits. Mashau (2007:650) declares that "the saving Gospel of Christ should be proclaimed to these people (1 Cor. 1:22-23). True conversion and regeneration in Christ can set people free from their fear of demonic powers."

## **CHAPTER 5: PROPOSED BIBLICAL VISION ABOUT ANCESTRAL SPIRITS**

### **5.1. Introduction**

This chapter mainly focuses on the question about the attitude of the Africans toward their ancestral spirits. What is the biblical and theological solution to be proposed to Christians in Africa who still fear and rely on the ancestral spirits?

It is believed in Africa that ancestral spirits can influence the course of the lives of their descendants on earth by bringing among them good luck or misfortune depending on the circumstances. Mbiti (1969:84) mentions: "The living-dead are wanted and yet not wanted. If they have been improperly buried or offended before they died, it is feared by the relatives or the offenders that the living-dead would take revenge. This would be in the form of misfortune, especially illness or disturbing frequent appearances of the living-dead."

The literature review, the synthesis of the biblical and theological reflection will be used in this chapter to provide an adequate answer from a biblical point of view to the fear and veneration of ancestral spirits by Christians in Africa.

Why do Africans strongly hold to the beliefs and practices about the ancestral spirits?

## **5.2. Ancestral spirits and their existence**

### **5.2.1. The place of ancestors in African beliefs**

The ancestors are the dead members of a family, a clan or a tribe and they are the most powerful, basic and primary component of the kinship system in an African community which is a place where death and life co-exist communally and in interdependence and solidarity (Turaki, 1999:176).

It is said that ancestral spirits are the spirits from the dead human beings who are still active in the lives of the living. Amanze (2000a:10-11) says: "Generally speaking ancestral spirits are spirits of human beings who have passed away and are now living in the spirit world which is sometimes conceived as the underworld possibly because the dead are buried in the ground. Quite often the ancestral spirits are interested in the affairs of their descendants as much as they used to be when they were still alive. It is believed that when wrongdoing happens in the family the ancestors resent it and punish the evil-doers for they are the guardians of public morality and of the traditions of the elders. The ancestral spirits also are concerned with the fertility of their descendants, the fertility of the soil and the availability of good wealth upon which the other two are dependent." It emerges that the ancestral spirits occupy an important place in the community and they play a great role according to the members of the group.

In Africa the dead are not forgotten but they are considered to be of great importance. Burnett (1988:63-64) asserts thus that in African society the dead are not really forgotten but are considered to be sociologically alive, at least for a period of time, and they are

remembered by offerings and respect, and the ancestors in turn are considered as helping the living.

It is very clear that, the ancestral spirits are given much attention by Africans in the community throughout many societies. Thorpe (1993:95) mentions that one very important and powerful group of spirit beings is the ancestral spirits.

It has to be pointed out that beliefs and practices held by Africans have to be examined in the light of the Word of God in order to gain considerable audience among Africans, traditions and Christians. O'Donovan (2000:230) states: "To summarize, it is evident that Christian truth can only be based upon the Bible. It cannot be based on the experience of any individual. The experiences of peoples may be very real to them but who except God is to know the true source of their experience." Truth which is convincing comes from the Holy Scriptures only, and beliefs contrary to the biblical doctrine may not be judged significant and accepted by Christians in Africa.

In many parts of Africa, the reality of the ancestral spirits remains in evidence among the people claiming to get power, salvation, various benefits, protection or whatever from the influence of the living dead. Burnett (1988: 61) stresses this idea when he writes: "the fact that the ancestors have left this world means that they are freed from the restrictions imposed by the physical world. Therefore, they have greater power, and can influence the lives of their earthly descendants."

The Bible, the Word of God, does not have the same vision on the ancestral spirits, their activities and powers as held by Africans. Following this thought we could assert with Nyirongo(1997:192) that the

Bible gives all that we need for guidance and it also is the only reliable yardstick for all our claims.

### **5.2.2. The reality of their existence in the African world view**

Africans accept that the ancestral spirits exist, and it is a reality in the minds of African people. Amanze (2000a:326) asserts that “common also to many African people is the belief in ancestral spirits.” About the reality of the existence of the ancestral spirits, see also 3.1 above.

### **5.2.3. Syncretism in African Christianity**

Christians in Africa are involved in church life and at the same time they participate in the veneration of the ancestors fearing to be punished by the ancestral spirits if they do not show them respect and honour. This attitude brings Afeke and Verster (2004:48) to write that “according to Baëta (1968:301) Africans have welcomed the message of the Gospel, but have not yet left behind beliefs and practices that for centuries have been part of the philosophy of their present existence and of life beyond the grave.” It should be clearly noticed here that some Christians in Africa practice a syncretistic lifestyle which is not biblically acceptable.

#### **5.2.3.1. Causes of the fear of the ancestral spirits**

In Africa, ancestral spirits are a source of fear to people. Gehman (1990:145) mentions: “Yet on the other hand, the living-dead are dreaded. The ancestors are feared. When death occurs, a barrier is



erected between the living-dead, which creates anxiety and fear.” Mbiti alludes to this aspect of fear towards the ancestors (Mbiti, 1969:84).

As ancestral spirits are considered more powerful than the living, they easily inspire fear in the lives of the people. Speaking of the Igbo of Africa, Newell (1976:292) notes: “Ancestors help the Igbo to articulate a logical folk theory of their ontology and to explain the meaning of life. Ancestors possess powers which can cause or prevent misfortune. Moral and material failures in Igbo society may be caused by the ancestors directly through the imposition of sanctions on the living or indirectly through their lack of preventive action as intermediaries for the living.”

The idea about the ancestors is well-known through several African communities where people believe that illness, accident, bad results in hunting or fishing, barrenness in marriages, drought, in fact all bad things are produced by dissatisfied ancestral spirits. Thorpe, speaking of the Shona people, mentions that the spirits can become troublesome or angry, even hunting or afflicting their living relatives if they are disregarded, but their primary function is one of guardianship (Thorpe, 1993:57).

Amanze (2000a:10) observes the interest of the ancestors in the lives of their descendants and writes: “Quite often the ancestral spirits are interested in the affairs of their descendants as much as they used to be when they were still alive. It is believed that when wrongdoing happens in the family the ancestors resent it and punish the evil-doers for they are the guardians of public morality and of the traditions of the elders.” Analysing this aspect of the viewpoint of Africans on the ancestral

spiritual world one could expect the emergence of a false fear toward the living dead.

The fear of the influence of the ancestral spirits is present among many Africans claiming that the deceased are able to harm them in their earthly lives. Burnett (1988:58) indicates: "In Africa today, there is still great concern at a bad death. This may lead to considerable fear in which a man's house may be abandoned in case the ghost will return and cause harm. It could be that a whole village will move to another locality." This point is stressed when Amanze (2000a:163) quoting David Barret asserts: "David Barret in his study of African societies has noted that the belief in ancestral spirits is predominant in almost all African societies mainly as an expression of family and clan continuity and solidarity. The recently deceased ancestors are quite often regarded as still inhabiting the family. They exercise control over the living and all life exists under their surveillance. Barrett observed that ancestors are treated with awe, fear, reverence, respect and veneration and their influence penetrates in almost every sphere of life." Many African people are said to fear their dead relatives while they are still living on earth and this attitude is observed throughout Africa.

Moreover numerous other reasons can be cited why Africans worship a number of spiritual beings like the ancestral spirits. Smith (1936:55) points out: "The reasons are clear enough. In the belief of Africans all power is not in the hands of one unseen being, not even the highest. There is distribution of power. A number of beings are able to make man unhappy. It is good sense, the Africans say, to get on the right side of all who may be able to do men damage or give them help. Turaki (1999:94) asserts that the presence of fear in the traditional religions is caused by

the strong and pervasive belief in the impersonal, mystical and spiritual powers and forces.

From this idea one understands that Africans do not like to make some spiritual beings unhappy, especially the ancestral spirits who are thought to be close to the living on earth.

### **5.2.3.2. Is the fear of the ancestors justifiable?**

#### **5.2.3.2.1. Hardships and the fear of ancestors**

From the writings of many scholars (Turaki, 1999:177; Thorpe, 1991:115; Idowu, 1973:178) it transpires that fear of the ancestral spirits can be seen as characteristic of Africans' attitude toward the living dead. Idowu (1973:178) points out: "It is certain that the irrational fear of dead is not uncommon and is still with us in every culture. There are people who relate their dreams, their experiences of haunting, or even what they believe to be ocular evidence of the movements or doings of the deceased."

There is no reason, according to the Scriptures, to be afraid of the ancestral spirits which are dead, because they are no longer active or able to harm the living. Ecclesiastes 9:5-6, 10 says: "For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward and even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun. ... Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom."

The Bible shows that the fall of man into sin brings various consequences in the life of humankind, manifested through the appearance of different hardships like illness, poverty, crime, wars, violence, hatred and pride. Turaki(1999:168) notices that as a result of man's rebellion, sin and the fall, man is under God's divine wrath and judgment.

It is not right for Africans to attribute the consequences of sin to the ancestral spirits as powerful beings which are able to punish man. It is wrong to take their status as sinners as a ground for them to fear the ancestral spirits' attacks.

For we read in Deut. 32:15, 17: "Jeshurun grew fat and kicked; filled with food, he became heavy and sleek. He abandoned the God who made him and rejected the rock his Saviour. They made him jealous with their foreign gods and angered him with their detestable idols. They sacrificed to demons, which are not God – gods they had not known, gods that recently appeared, gods your fathers did not fear."

The Bible gives a strong assurance by indicating that men must be attached to the Saviour, Jesus Christ and not be afraid of the influence of a spiritual being while believing the proclamation of the Gospel. Matt. 28:18 asserts: "Then Jesus came to them and said 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me'."

#### **5.2.3.2.2. Ancestral spirits are limited in powers**

The fear that African people have for the ancestral spirits can be considered insignificant in the sense that these spirits are also creatures. Mbiti (1969:70) writes that in a few cases, it is held that God specifically

created the spirits to act as intermediaries between Him and men. One has no right to pretend that ancestral spirits as creatures of God are powerful without limitations.

Turaki (1999:244), when speaking of the spirits in Africa, states that in the traditional belief, some of the spiritual beings originate from the spirits of the dead or from some non-human creation.

It is remarkable that the origin of the spirits remains unclear in the minds of a great number of African peoples. But Turaki (1999:244) has attested that the Bible is clear about the origin of the spiritual beings and that they are all created by God and all are under the sovereignty of God. God is in charge and in control of all his creation and creatures, and He has both authority and power over all spirits beings.

God is the Creator of all that exists, visible and invisible. Turaki (1999:283) points out that from the biblical records, the existence of spirits or the supernatural powers have an origin, God is the source, the Creator and that spirit beings are limited in terms of power, knowledge, intelligence or abode.

Among spiritual beings, ancestral spirits are not omniscient, omnipresent or eternal and their activities manifest certain limitations. Newell (1976:290) indicates: "On the power dimension, only the High God is accorded unlimited power. Other spirits share a continuum of limited power and the amount of power and influences exercised by any spirit over the living depends on the configuration of countervailing power which the latter can muster during any given crisis."

It is dangerous and misleading to think in terms of equity between God, the Creator and the ancestral spirits with regard to their spectrum of

actions. Ryrie (1972:22) in his book *A survey of the Bible Doctrine*, asserts clearly the omnipotence of God by writing: “God is omnipotent. Fifty-six times the Bible declares that God is the Almighty one (and this word is used of no one but God, cf. Rev. 19:6).”

The Bible exposes death as being a radical break with life. Burnett (1988:66) has written: “If this is true then one may also agree with the statement of the Asian consultation on Ancestral practices: ‘ancestral’ spirits’ have no supernatural power either to bestow blessings or to inflict curses upon the descendants. We, therefore, encourage Christians confronted with the problems of ancestral practices not to be controlled by a sense of fear, trust, or adoration of the ancestors nor create an impression of such to the surrounding society and to fellow Christians.”

#### **5.2.4. Biblical perspective on the existence of the ancestors**

##### **5.2.4.1. Reliance on the ancestral spirits**

In the traditional African context, people rely on the assistance of their ancestral spirits especially in time of hardships. For Gehman (1990:19) indicates: “Reliance upon the ancestors is a need felt during times of emergency, even of many Christians. The traditional help derived from the medicine man is often felt strongly during times of great need.”

Christians, however, confess that the Spirit of God is at work because the Lord Jesus said He would not leave believers in Him alone. John 15:15-18 indicates: “If you love Me, keep my commandments, and I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He

dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you.” This passage gives Christians the assurance that the Spirit of God is active among them and in them, and this truth must exclude the idea of relying on any spirit, except the Spirit of God only.

Matthew 28:18 emphasises the authority of Jesus over every power. This text explains how the Saviour Jesus Christ has the power to reign and rule over everything. Davies and Allison (2000:682) mention that Jesus is not waiting passively in heaven for his glorious arrival as judge and king but he is already exercising his lordship as God’s Son, his plenipotentiary.

Jesus refuses the offer of Satan to have rule of the world, knowing that he has to achieve his mission up to the cross. Again Davies and Allison (2004: 546) say: “The Son of man, who was once handed over to the authority of others, now has authority over everyone. The sense is not that Jesus has the ability to do all things but that He is the ruler of all ... the resurrected Lord has fulfilled the promise of the Son of man’s vindication.” There is no contradiction because the same authors argue that the Son of man, who was once handed over to others, now has authority over them, and that the sense corresponds not to the later omnipotent (the ability to do all things), but to the Greek ... Jesus is the ruler of all (Davies and Allison, 1988:682). In his exegetical view, Turner (2008:689) mentions that God’s bestowal of universal authority or power upon Jesus echoes Dan. 7:13-14, 18, 22, 27 – and that in Dan. 7 and Matthew alike, the Son of man’s authority passes to his community.

Christians in Africa and also everywhere in the world have to rely on the triune God for all that can happen to them in their lives, because the

Saviour Jesus Christ has authority over everything and thus they have nothing to fear.

According to Allison (2004:546), Matt 28:18 implies the same conviction that is expressed in several of the New Testament Christological hymns, namely, that through the resurrection Jesus is exalted and enthroned and made Lord of the cosmos, and that in other words, God has entrusted to Him all authority.

Then those who trust in Christ do not have reason to fear the influence and attacks of the ancestral spirits and other spiritual beings.

#### **5.2.4.2. Are the ancestral spirits worthy of our trust and honour?**

The Word of God is clear by inviting us to put our trust and honour in God only, the Creator, and the Provider of all needs to mankind, and not to embrace other gods or spirits. Deuteronomy 15:15-17 points out this by saying that they provoked Him to jealousy with foreign gods; with abomination they provoked Him to anger.

The trust in objects or spirits other than in God the Creator and Redeemer is an abomination to the Lord, God. McConville (2002:456) argues: "Jeshurum grew fat (v15) echoes the fat or oil that Yahweh Himself has extracted for them from flinty rock. The people reject Yahweh even as they overindulge in his gifts. They reject him as both Provider and Creator (God who made them); they have no faith in the Rock, the one who can be completely trusted. They scorned him, literally regarded him as foolish. The rebellion here is characterized as a choice of other gods, in defiance of the fundamental command of Yahweh. The turning to foreign gods (literally foreign ones) flies in the face of his



declaration in v.12. The abominations are the trappings of foreign worship, whose repugnance to Yahweh is frequently recalled in Deuteronomy. Other gods are now exposed in successions, as demons and no gods at all, gods they had known with the implications of love, delight and care predicted of Yahweh in vv.10-14 as usurping Yahweh's rights."

To serve and fear ancestral spirits could bring us to understand that God is not powerful and able to protect men, and this may be deduced from the comment of Brueggemann(2001:279) on this scriptural passage: "In response to such overwhelming goodness, however, Israel has been ungrateful, unresponsive and recalcitrant. Israel responded to Yahweh stupidly. Israel's condition was one of satiation: fat, bloated, gorged. Israel was no longer needy and could not remember its dependence upon the first commandment (5:7: 'You shall have no other god before me.')."

"Israel embraced other loyalties and other ways of securing its own existence, not recognising the crucial importance of the Father God. ... Israel refused the obedience and loyalty due to Yahweh for all Yahweh's goodness. The entire history of Israel is a sorry, sordid tale of stupid autonomy, of rejection of that old relationship that gives Israel its life in the world" (Brueggemann, 2001:279).

Turaki (1999:168) notices that by wilful and deliberate rejection of God's revelation, knowledge of Him, his authority, man transfers his allegiance from God to creation -- to the worship of creation itself.

#### **5.2.4.3. Biblical consideration about the ancestral spirits**

The Scriptures declare openly that only God is worthy of our adoration, veneration and worship (see Exodus 20:3 and also Deut. 6:14). These verses show that our worship should go to God, the Creator above all the spiritual beings.

It is believed in many places in the world that the spirits of the dead are active and can interact with the living. Bae and Van der Merwe (2008 : 1299) assert that ancestral beliefs are deeply dependent on the premise that the souls of the dead may return to the living and influence their lives; that it is possible and acceptable for the living to communicate with the deceased who are able to exert an effect on the destiny of their descendants.

This view reveals the belief that after death, man continues to live. Afeke and Verster (2004: 54) point out: "It is clear from all indications that both the Christian and African traditional religions acknowledge the existence of humans after death. However, this does not have the same meaning in both religions." Life has its source from God and the believers go to Him after death and there is no room for interaction between the dead and the living. Bae and Van der Merwe (2008: 1302) say that in fact, all contact with the spirit world is expressly forbidden irrespective of the nature of the spirits concerned (Lev. 19: 26-31, Dt. 18: 10-11; Job 7:7-10; Is. 8:18-20; Lk. 16:19-31).

A great number of African peoples give an important place to respect, veneration and worship of ancestors and this can easily be associated with idolatry. Bubeck (1975:30) indicates: "Idolatry. This sin is the flesh rebelling against worshipping only the true and living God. Idolatry takes place when we physically or mentally put anything before God. Pleasure,

money, things, our work, even our families may become gods. This fleshly sin springs from our desires to choose the god that pleases our flesh rather than bowing before the true and living God.”

Africans have to avoid the emphasis put on the central role played by the ancestral spirits in their daily lives where they replace the honour of God by the claimed activities of their living dead. Turaki (1999:177) mentions that the belief in the ancestors is the most fundamental religious creed and tenet, thus the religious institutions surrounding this religious belief is what others call the cult of the ancestors and the form of worship is ancestral worship or veneration.

God is the Creator of all things and the entire universe is for Him. Wright (1998:110) asserts: “The world belongs to God, because he made it. There is absolutely nothing in creation, in the highest heavens or the deepest earth that does not belong to God.” Hearing this statement one understands that God is great, and Lord over all things and humankind. Again Wright (1990:111) insists that if absolutely everything in heaven and on earth belongs to Yahweh, which does not leave very much to belong to any other god.

Vogt (2006:222) commenting on Deuteronomy 18:9-12 mentions: “Attempts to manipulate Yahweh or to obtain guidance in unauthorized ways are an abomination, the very thing that resulted in the expulsion of the Canaanites from the land. The implication is that improper worship will lead to the expulsion of the Israelites as well.”

To venerate ancestral spirits, as it is practiced by numbers of Africans is something unacceptable by the Scriptures because it negates the sovereignty of God, the Creator and the fact that God is Lord and worth of our adoration. The Bible clearly indicates

through the Lord Jesus Christ that only God has to be worshipped. For Matt. 4:10 asserts that Jesus said to him: “Away from me, Satan for it is written: ‘worship the Lord God, and serve him only’.”

Matthew 4:10 supports the idea that only God is to be worshipped. The text reveals the answer of Jesus Christ to the temptation by Satan after fasting for forty days and forty nights. Davies and Allison (1988:373) give us a sound exegetical view by arguing as follows: The words “away from me!” attribute the devil’s departure to the authoritative command of Jesus. Possibly the words “be gone, Satan!” point to a more verbal link. In both places, Jesus is choosing the path of duty: the end ordained by the Father is to be achieved by the manner ordained by the Father, namely the cross. And any opposition to this is satanic. To reject the way of the cross is to be on the side of the devil.

The words “worship the Lord your God and serve him only” serve as a severe command and a clear message to everyone who gives honour to any being but the Creator, God.

Davies and Allison (1988:373) assert that the words “if you worship me” come in to make the scriptural response line up with the tempter’s temptation. And “only”, which serves to bring out what is implicit in the original, emphasises that none but God should receive divine honours.

Jesus did not accept to follow the instructions of the devil which He totally rejected. Again Davies and Allison (1988:373) argue: “The original context of the old Testament text is instructive. It pertains to idolatry and takes the reader back to the incident with the golden calf. In the New Testament Jesus, the Son of God, does not follow the folly of Israel. He turns down the devil’s offer of the kingdoms of the world and their glory,

rejecting the proposed condition. The one true God alone is to be served and worshipped. What would it profit to gain the whole world without acknowledging God's Lordship."

#### **5.2.5. Proposed biblical vision on the existence of ancestral spirits**

As has already been mentioned, the ancestors are the dead individuals who are thought to influence the lives of the living. What does the Bible say about the interaction between the living and the dead? Is it possible for the dead to return to the ordinary life on earth according to the Scriptures? It should honestly be said that the dead do not have the possibility to enjoy earthly life with the living because this fact is contrary to the biblical will.

In Isaiah 8:19, it is written: "When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? "

This passage is a clear indication that the spirits of ancestors are not to be consulted or relied on when people perform their daily activities. Although ancestral spirits are thought of as being influential in humans' lives on earth, there is no reason to have fear towards them, and even to adhere to this practice which is against the Word of God.

It is ridiculous to consult the spirits of the dead and even seek for assistance from them: because this is never advised by the word of God. Widyapranawa (1990:50) declares: "In a time of anguish and panic, due to the wrath of God, people take recourse only too easily to mediums and wizards. But as the prophet observes, it is ridiculous to consult the dead on behalf of the living. The practice of consulting mediums and

wizards ... was always a temptation for the people in Israel, notwithstanding that it was prohibited by the law (Cf Deut 18:11; Lev 19:31; 20: 6-7). It is clear that Isaiah was very much opposed to all forms of spiritism, such as was practiced by Saul at Endor....”

Psalm 146:3-4 says: “Do not put your trust in princes nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish.” The stress in this verse falls on the fact that the dead are not active, because their plans are no more. It can be noticed that there is no indication in the Bible that when someone dies, he has the possibility to return to earth and continues living the same life on earth with the physical needs for food, work to gain an income, houses et cetera. This is clear evidence that it is wrong to think of ancestral spirits as being able to live an active life on earth whereby they intervene in the lives of the living descendants. Ecclesiastes 9:5-6 says: For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun.” Remarkably Ecclesiastes 9:5-6 stresses the same fact that the dead are not active on earth and their memory is forgotten while their emotions have perished.

### **5.3. Ancestral spirits, their power and influence among Christians in Africa**

#### **5.3.1. African view**

##### **5.3.1.1. Are the ancestors still active?**

In Africa there is a common belief in many societies that the ancestors

already deceased and the living on earth are still in active communication and regular contact. Idowu asserts that thus, there is the general belief that communion and communication are possible between those who are alive on earth and the deceased, and that the latter have the power to influence, help or molest the former (Idowu, 1973:179).

A great number of African peoples adhere to the belief that the ancestors are still active in the lives of their living descendants on earth and they intervene in their daily activities, and the contact between the living and the dead is something real in the minds of many Africans. Beetham manifests such an idea when he writes that the ever-present spirits of the ancestors have constant contact with the life of man on earth and brings the world of spirits so close to the land of the living, that unseen and seen are inextricably bound up in man's common experience (Beetham, 1967:72-73).

Christianity in its orthodox position does not teach such a doctrine, but Burnett says that there are two common assumptions about ghosts made by Christians, namely that the dead are unable to contact the living, and that the materialisations are evil spirits in disguise (Burnett, 1988:65).

#### **5.3.1.2. Birth and initiation of a child to life**

A great number of Africans in their traditional context admit that their ancestral spirits have to be informed about the birth of a child, and this is done through some fixed ceremonies and sacrifices. In the Congolese context among the Baluba tribe, a new-born child has to be presented to the ancestral spirits at its birth in order to be protected against the

attacks of the evil spirits like witchcraft or others. Traditional beer is offered, poultry or an animal can be slaughtered to the honour of the ancestors so that the new-born child can be welcomed as part of the family. A child newly born has to be lifted up while the parent (father) will say: “our old parents protect this child and do not let witches touch it.” If it is a boy, the parent will say: “be the husband of many ladies” and if it is a girl, he says: “be the first wife of a respectable man”( K. Banza, informant, personal communication, July, 1012).

### **5.3.1.3. Welfare**

Many traditional societies in Africa rely on the power of the ancestral spirits believing that their welfare is sustained by ancestors and other spiritual beings. Parrinder reveals this thought when he writes: “On occasion of birth, marriage, sickness and family reunions, the ancestors are called upon. These are the family ancestors. The tribal ancestors will be evoked for rain, at seed time, first fruits and harvest, in fishing, hunting and war. As elders they must eat of the harvest first. They give strength for chase or the fight” (Parrinder, 1954:63).

It is evident that in many parts of Africa, people look for benefits from the ancestors and believe that they are able to satisfy their needs. About this, Parrinder mentions that the ancestors are besought for benefits, albeit with fear and trembling; and that the ancestors are believed to fertilize the earth and promote growth of crops (Parrinder, 1954:60-61).

In Africa, it is observed that ancestors are considered as the source of a good life for their descendants. Burnett points out that ancestors are intimately involved with the welfare of the kin group, but the nature of the



linkage may not be the same with every member (Burnett, 2000:63). Alluding to the ancestors, in Africa, Gehman mentions that “the living-dead are able to bless their people.” Another person said. “I personally and practically know this” (Gehman, 1990:153). And he also states that the living-dead become a source of comfort to the living who are always conscious of their presence; and that there is an inner sense of relief for traditional Africans when they are assured that their ancestors are continually with them (Gehman, 1990:142). For many Africans in their traditional context, the ancestors are the great sustaining factors in their lives.

Some other African authors, among them Mbiti, hold the idea that Africans do believe that God is the source of their welfare as long as He intervenes in their lives. Mbiti (1969:47) mentions: “It is to be remembered that for many African people, God’s active part in human history is seen in terms of His supplying them with rain, good harvest, health, cattle and children, in healing, delivering and helping them and in terms of making His presence felt through natural phenomena and objects. The people constantly turn to God in various acts of worship which in effect constitute man’s response to God’s interest and active part in human affairs.” It is also true that although God is viewed as active in the life of men in Africa, this does not totally exclude the intervention of the ancestors. Again Mbiti (1969:180) indicates that in many societies, rituals or other ceremonies accompany rainmaking are performed which is a community affair and that sacrifices, offerings and prayers are made, either directly to God or through the intermediary of the living-dead and spiritual agents.

Writing on this, Gehman (1990:144) says that among the African peoples, God alone is the source of rain, but however, prayers for rain

may be made to the living-dead and thanks for rain afterwards may be directed to them.

From this, we can say that worshippers in Africa must not seek God, the Creator together with the spirits of the ancestors or other spiritual beings when looking for their welfare. A clear distinction has to be made between God, who provides for human beings in their needs and the ancestral spirits which are unable to sustain the lives of the people.

#### **5.3.1.4. Illness**

Africans believe that some cases of sickness are caused by the spirits of the ancestors. Mbiti (1975:9) says that “some sickness is thought to be caused by the living dead, as ways of indicating some displeasure with the living or reminding them to remember the departed. It must be stated clearly that the ancestral spirits are not considered as the only cause of sickness.

In some African societies God is viewed as the cause of sickness. Mbiti (1970:81) indicates: “Some societies see divinities, spirits or personifications of God’s manifestations as being responsible for various types of diseases. The Chagga believe that God has a spirit which he sends to men to bring them sickness and smallpox, though a person is killed only when God permits it. The Swazi have two divinities that send sickness.” It should be noticed that the spiritual world is regarded with fear because it is a cause of illness in Africa. Gehman (1999:144) mentions: “Among most African peoples, there is a remembrance of the living-dead in times of illness, even though the ancestors may be neglected at other times. If, through divination, the family learns that the

sickness has come through some offense against the living-dead, sacrifices are offered and prayers made.” This explains why African peoples have to be in good relationships with their ancestors to avoid sickness and other misfortunes which can come upon them.

Although the causes of sickness are scientifically attributed to the germ theory some Africans, even educated Christians, consult the traditional healers with the members of their families to look for healing. Nyirongo (1997:169) writes: “All this is done because sickness is not just a clinical observation, but a communal and spiritual encounter. This is why even today, despite the availability of advanced medical practice, the educated men and women still visit their families at the village to consult *ng’angas* who pay attention to both the spiritual and the physical needs.” Barnett (1988:109) writes: “Sickness is seen not merely as the result of some natural process, but as resulting from a wide range of antisocial and unseen powers. This is illustrated in a discussion which occurred between an African tribesman and a missionary doctor ... the sickness could result from sorcery, or witchcraft, or from an offended ghost or ancestor. As a result of the diagnosis the person would be recommended to visit a herbalist, or a witchdoctor or even the missionary doctor if the sickness is diagnosed as being a white man’s illness.”

This idea about the causes of illness is even found among some Christians in Africa. Mashau (2007:643-644) indicates: “Believers view the dead ancestors as the ones who bring benefits and misfortunes to their descendants. Accidents, illness, miscarriage, and so on are supposedly caused by an angry spirit of one’s family or the dead ancestors.”

### **5.3.1.5. Sufferings**

#### **5.3.1.5.1. What do Africans say?**

To many traditional African peoples, the ancestors are very important in their daily lives, because there is nothing which can be done without their intervention. Parrinder quoting Cullen Young from his book *African Ideas of God* points out that to older African men and women in the rural villages, life from day to day and, we might legitimately say, from moment to moment, has no meaning at all apart from ancestral presence and ancestral power (Parrinder, 1954:57).

Sufferings are viewed as caused by various spiritual beings and even by men through the impulse of these spirits. Nyirongo (1997:157) mentions: “There is a link between the way the African views God and how he views suffering. Because the African sees God as distant – one to be called upon only when all else has failed, suffering has nothing really to do with his relationship with God, but with the ancestors, nature spirits and witch doctors on whom he depends.”

Nyirongo distinguishes two schools with regard to the causes of suffering. He says that some of the writers who sympathise with African religions tend to regard ancestors strictly as agents of good and any suffering that is linked with them is accepted by relatives as chastisement (punishment) for wrongdoing. Other writers view ancestors more or less negatively. According to this school, ancestral spirits are agents of suffering (Nyirongo, 1997:158).

When disasters and calamities befall Africans, the origin is always searched in the spiritual world. Gehman (1990:142) indicates: “Whenever some crisis occurs, be it personal illness, tribal disaster or

death, the diviner is consulted to ascertain whether some ancestor is seeking to make known his displeasure. Accidents which are too trivial to be considered disasters are looked upon as warnings from the spiritual world.” The orientation of many Africans about suffering is that the spiritual beings, among them the ancestral spirits, are the agents of suffering, and unfortunate events in the communities.

Gehman (1990: 150) says that when the living fail to follow the customs of the fathers, the ancestors will punish them and lead them back to the traditions, and virtually every crisis that develops, whether it is drought or pestilence, sickness or death, may be caused by the angry ancestors.

Speaking of the activities of the ancestors, Parrinder mentions that any evil may be attributed to the ancestors, drought and famine are traced back to them, for these affect the crop which are their concern as growing on their land, and that more especially sickness and death are thought to be due at times to the ancestors (Parrinder, 1954:60).

In most places of Africa, it is frequent to attribute human sufferings and hardships, natural or accidental, to the activities of the ancestral spirits and to any kind of spiritual beings as can be deduced from many writers on the African religions, cultures and lives.

In other cases, Africans think that their sufferings originate from God. Nyirongo says that when the source of suffering cannot be successfully unravelled or when the suffering persists, the Africans attribute it to the hand of God, as punishment or predestined evil and many times, however, appeal to God is combined with other help (divination, charms and sacrifices to ancestors) (Nyirongo, 1997:159).

Mbiti (1967:208) states that when people feel that a misfortune or calamity has come from God, they interpret this not as an offence, but as punishment caused by their misdoings.

Members of the community in Africa can be viewed as causing suffering to others in different manners. Again Mbiti says that almost every form of evil that a person suffers, whether it is moral or natural evil, is believed to be caused by members of his community (Mbiti, 1967:208).

#### **5.3.1.5.2. In the Congolese context**

Many people view sufferings as something abnormal and the accusations are always directed at ancestors and related witches. P. Kyungu (personal communication, 2012, Lubumbashi, DRC) affirms that all the sufferings men experience are caused by witches in the family because they do not want people living in good conditions. According to him the ancestral spirits are also involved in the sufferings of the living who do not respect them and do not follow the requirements of the tribal and cultural customs.

#### **5.3.1.6. Death**

##### **5.3.1.6.1. Causes of death among Africans**

Death in Africa is as painful as anywhere else in the world, but on the continent there is no death without an extra spiritual cause. Parrinder says that among the most powerful evil influences that are supposed to cause disease and death are the witches (Parrinder, 1954:107).

When an individual dies, it happens that in many traditional communities in various places of Africa some specialists have to be asked to discover the causes of the death. Thorpe asserts that a diviner is often consulted concerning the cause of death, especially if it did not appear to be a natural consequence of old age (Thorpe, 1993:65). Exploring the same case of death among the Akamba people, Gehman (1990:62-63) has written: "Only in old age is death considered normal among the Akamba .... Death is, therefore, viewed not as a mere happening but a snatching of life. Something comes to take away a person maliciously. Thus death is an enemy. Therefore, the Akamba always seek the medicine man to enquire into the metaphysical (supernatural) causes of death. Even though it may be caused by an accident, the question is raised 'why did that accident occur? Who caused it?' For the ultimate explanation of death is not natural but metaphysical (supernatural). The medicine man through his communication with the ancestral spirits, determines what the true cause is."

What we have to bear in mind is that the Word of God remains our best rule on which to base our life, our thoughts and our deeds. We are tempted to allude, without shame to Bosch (1991:293) who writes: "It is certainly not by accident that it is the Christian nations which have become the bearers of culture and the leaders of world history, said Gustav Warneck ... It was the Gospel which has made the Western nations strong and great; it would do the same for other nations." This invitation is also addressed to Africans who still adhere to their traditional beliefs to urge them to turn to, accept and practise the Word of God.

#### **5.3.1.6.2. Death is invincible according to the traditional**

## **Congolese worldview**

It is believed that nobody is able to conquer death. Many people say that death as conception is older than healing through medicines or other means. One of the informants states that death [as conception] is older and medical treatment is just a lie. Even if a person is well treated, he will finally experience death. Nobody has avoided or will avoid it (C. Shibangu, personal communication, November 2012, Lubumbashi, DRC).

### **5.3.1.7. Life after death**

Many African people hold the idea that death is not the end of life, believing the dead to enter into another normal life equal to the earthly one. Nyirongo asserts that to the Africans death does not end life (Nyirongo, 1997:80). This problem has also been investigated by Gehman who mentions: "Death does not terminate the existence of a human being. He continues to live on as an ancestral spirit. And he continues to maintain relationships with the living, bringing both benefits and trouble. Death is, therefore, the necessary door through which the living pass in order to take up the inevitable role as the living-dead. Death is the transition to the final destiny of all men and women" (Gehman, 1990:54).

From this exploration it can be understood that many Africans believe that the dead are still living in another world, and this explains the fact that at the funeral rites, the deceased is buried with some objects, food for example, to indicate that the departed will use them in the other life. Mbiti (1969:159) says that for people who think that the hereafter is



another world or a distant place, food and weapons may be buried with the dead body to sustain and protect the person in the journey between the two worlds or places.

To Africans, the living dead are not absent from their relatives, but they are always present and able to influence the lives of their descendants. Turaki (1999:178) says that the living dead become a source of comfort to the living who are always conscious of their presence.

According to this view it is understood that the ancestral spirits are not dead and even absent but their life is still going on in the spiritual world, and that they can assist their relatives on earth.

Gehman (1990:139) indicates: "Belief in life after death is found among most African people from earliest times. ... Among the Bantu, survival after death is not a matter for argument or speculation; it is an axiom of life (Willoughby, 1928:66). The same is true among other African peoples." And citing Mbiti, Gehman mentions: "Mbiti affirms, without exception, African peoples believe that death does not annihilate life and that the departed continue to exist in the hereafter" (Gehman, 1990:139). Mbiti reiterated this idea saying that the belief in the continuation of life after death is found in all African societies, as far as he had been able to discover.

Family in Africa is not limited to those descendants living on earth, but it goes beyond the world of the departed. Burnett (1988:60), speaking of African concepts of ancestors, writes that the family includes both the living and the ghosts of the dead and because the persons have moved from the world of fleshly order and existence, this does not mean that they have ceased to exist as part of the tribe. Investigating the same aspect of life, Idowu (1973:184) mentions: "... from the belief of Africans

that death does not write ‘finish’ to life, that the family or community life of this earth has only become extended into the life beyond in consequence of the death of the ancestors. Thus the cults are a means of communion and communication between those who are living on earth and those who have gone to live in the spirit world of the ancestors.”

### **5.3.2. Proposed biblical vision**

#### **5.3.2.1. Are the ancestors still active?**

The Bible is clear about this point. The dead do not have the possibility to return on earth and still live this physical life (see 5.3.1.1).

#### **5.3.2.2. Birth and initiation of a child to life**

God is the source of life. He is the Giver of life through the power of the Holy Spirit. At creation, God gave life to Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:7).

From creation God blessed man and gave him an order to have dominion over the whole creation. In Gen. 2:28 it is written: “Then God blessed them, and God said to them “be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it, have dominion over fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” As offspring of Adam and Eve men and women bear witness to the fulfilment of this blessing.

### **5.3.2.3. Welfare**

#### **5.3.2.3.1. Life is a divine gift**

All people throughout the world aspire to a better life because life is a precious gift from God, the Creator; and it must be respected and also protected. Evans confirms the value of life when he writes that life has value in all its forms; animal, vegetable or human and that from a theological perspective, life's value stems from its being created by God (Evans, 2011:4). From this one has to understand that human beings are worthy of real welfare in their existence.

#### **5.3.2.3.2. Christian position on welfare**

Christians believe that God is the source of life and of all the blessings He bestows on mankind. The Bible in the Gospel of Matthew 6:33 says: "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." The New Geneva Study Bible (1995:1515) comments that we are to make God's sovereign rule, and a right relationship with Him, the highest priority in life and that worry is inconsistent with this priority. It doubts the sovereignty or goodness of God and distracts from the true goals of life. God will meet all the needs of those who risk all for Him.

Surely God is constantly caring for his creatures and especially for his children. Writing about this, Erickson (2001:139) indicates: "The disciples were concerned about the necessities of life, what they would eat and what they would wear. Jesus reassured them that the Father feeds the birds of the air and clothes the flowers of the fields. He would surely do the same for them. While God provides for the lesser members

of his creation, humans are of more value than birds (Matt. 6:26) and flowers (v 30).”

Referring to the providence of God, Van Genderen and Velema (2008:284) mention that God’s providence does not indicate foreseeing ahead of time what will happen, it means to provide in everything.

All the creatures, visible and invisible depend on God, none depends on itself. Van Genderen and Velema assert that the other side of God’s preservation is the enduring dependence of all creatures on Him, and that everything is sustained by Him, but everything according to its nature: heavenly bodies, angels, people, animals, plants, inorganic nature (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:292). From this we understand that there is no creature which does not depend on the Creator, God. Berkhof states that it implies that there are real secondary causes in the world, such as the powers of nature and the will of man, and he asserts that these do not work independently of God (Berkhof, 1983:59-60).

Although God is giving us what we need, what is necessary for our welfare, men must not think that they are exempt from sufferings and that they cannot experience hardships in their lives. Erickson (2001:139) states that one salient dimension of God’s preserving us and supplying us with what we need is that the believer is not spared from danger or trial, but preserved within it and there is no promise that persecution and suffering will not come.

#### **5.3.2.4. Illness**

Sin has brought various consequences in the life of men, because it has broken the perfect harmony that existed between God, the Creator and mankind. Nyirongo (1997:173) alluding to this writes: “The Christian’s

view of sickness and healing are devoid of any mysteries. This is because they depend on the correct understanding of God's dealing with man (or man's relationship with God)."

It is also admitted in the Scriptures that some sicknesses are caused by poor hygiene and bad sanitation in human life. Nyirongo (1997:173) indicates: "Although sickness and disease came into the world through man's fall (as recorded in Genesis), God goes further to show that in daily life, poor hygiene and sanitation can cause sickness. To help the Israelites live a disease-free life God gave them a code of good sanitation and hygiene (Lev. 15)."

An individual can be sick because of his own sin. Nyirongo (1997:174) says "that Scripture also tells us that in daily life sickness and disease can be a direct consequence of personal sin. The men described in Psalm 199:67 and John 5:1-16 became sick because of sin in their lives. David complained of sickness because of similar reasons" (Ps. 38).

### **5.3.2.5. Sufferings**

#### **5.3.2.5.1. Origin of sin**

Sin and suffering are closely related in Holy Scripture. Sufferings are experienced because man distanced himself from the living God.

In Genesis, when God created man, male and female, He commanded man not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for if they did they would surely die (Gen. 2:16-17). Berkhof commenting on this asserts that with respect to the origin of sin in the history of mankind, the Bible teaches that it began with the transgression of Adam and Eve in

Paradise, and therefore with a perfectly voluntary act on the part of man, and the tempter came from the spirit world with the suggestion that man, by placing himself in opposition to God, might become like God (Berkhof, 1996:221).

This first sin is due to the fact that man did not want to submit to the Word of God and that he (man) did what God had forbidden. Berkhof clearly indicates that the first sin consisted in man's eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and this eating was sinful simply because God had forbidden it. It clearly showed that man was not willing to subject his will unconditionally to the will of God (Berkhof, 1960:68).

Writing on the origin of sin, Turaki mentions that the biblical narrative of Genesis, chapter three, gives an account of man's rebellion, disobedience, sin and the fall and that man failed the "moral test" which God gave in Genesis 2:15-17 (Turaki, 1999:167). From this it is understandable that sin started as man's rejection of the command of God, the Creator.

#### **5.3.2.5.2. Consequences of sin**

Sin is something extremely bad because it isolates man from his Creator and provokes the wrath of God. Turaki says that as a result of man's rebellion, sin and fall, man is under God's divine wrath and judgment (Gen. 3:6-8) (Turaki, 1999:168).

Sin has brought disaster to the whole life of mankind and even to the entire creation. Suffering stems from sin. Writing about the consequences of sin, Nyirongo (1997:69) indicates: "... the effects of sin were not restricted to man, but affected all of his environment,

vegetation, mountains, seas, animals, bird, etc. ... Since man was appointed by God to be a steward over the earth, it should not surprise us that even nature was also cursed. This curse can be seen, for example, in the difficulties man faces in managing his environment, e.g. the problems of pests, diseases, tides, volcanoes and storms.” One has to realise that the hardships happening in the world come from the fact that man has sinned against his creator.

About this, Berkhof (1996:259) says: “The sufferings of life, which are the result of the entrance of sin into the world, are also included in the penalty of sin. Sin brought disturbance in the entire life of man. His physical life fell a prey to pains; and his mental life became subject to distressing disturbances, which often rob him of the joy of life, disqualify him for his daily task, and sometimes entirely destroy his mental equilibrium.”

Long (2000:7) asserts that obedience to God’s covenants brought his blessings; disobedience brought punishment and that David, like those around him, assumed that severe, incurable and untimely illness or injury represented God’s punishment of sin. As we can see blessings and punishment are the results of the attitude to God’s command, and this can affect an individual, a community or a nation. Again Long indicates that God also punished the community and nation that was unfaithful to him and broke his covenants, and that Moses warned that if the nation of Israel turned away from Yahweh (their Lord God), he would destroy the peace, prosperity and eventually the very identity of the community (Long, 2000:8).

Sufferings have to be seen as the result of our life as we stand before the will of God, the Creator.

### **5.3.2.5.3. Sufferings in daily life**

Sufferings are always present in man's life but this does not indicate that God has given up his creation. Nyirongo says that whilst it is true that man's suffering can be traced back to Adam's fall, this does not mean that God stopped being involved with man (Nyirongo, 1997:162).

Even the Lord Jesus Christ experienced sufferings during his life on earth. Bowker alludes to this idea when he asserts that it cannot be doubted that Jesus had the whole fact of pain present to his mind and that He lived in the midst of suffering, and yet it did not present itself to him as a problem (Bowker, 1970:57). The glorious work of our Lord Jesus was performed through sufferings. This is what Hebrews asserts: it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings (Hebrews 2:10).

We have to understand that the reality is that even believers in Christ cannot be excluded from sufferings in their lives; they must be prepared to experience them. Nyirongo states that in our daily life, as Christians, sufferings can come through our own sins and mistakes (Nyirongo, 1997:162). Writing about this subject, Bowker rejects the idea of a simple cause-and-effect situation. He mentions that the passage as recorded by Luke 13:1-9 suggests a repudiation of a simple cause-and-effect understanding of suffering and that at the same time there is retained a sense of suffering as an ultimate punishment, or perhaps, rather, sanction, which is emphasised by the parable that Luke immediately goes on to record of a barren fig tree being given one last chance to bear fruit before being cut down (Bowker, 1970, 1970:54).



Sufferings are present in our lives and when they occur to us we do not have to blame others or to consult ancestral spirits. Again, Nyirongo (1997:163) points out: “When such suffering occurs, does it make sense to consult a diviner to identify the agent? Christians are not expected to go to such an extent, but don’t we play the blame game when things are tough? Instead of pretending that someone else is to blame, we should confess our sin to the Lord. Although the consequences may not disappear, God’s forgiveness brings the peace we need.” From this we say that sufferings must help us turn to God, and not escape from his mercy to look at the illusory security of the ancestral spirits of Africa.

#### **5.3.2.6. Death**

What do Christians say about death? Among Christians, death, here physical, is spoken of as the death of the body as distinguished from that of the soul (Matt. 10:28, Luke 12:4), as the termination or loss of animal life (Berkhof, 1960:167). One can understand death as the break of life from the body in this context, but death is not to be considered an end of everything. Berkhof asserts that death is never an annihilation, but may be described as a termination of physical life by the separation of body and soul (Berkhof, 1960:167). Burnett (2000:71) says that the Protestants have generally taken the view that the Bible exposes death as being a radical break with life.

It emerges from the previous thought that the African traditional view and the Christian view acknowledge the existence of life after death. Gehman indicates that belief in life after death is found among most African people from the earliest times (Gehman, 1990:139).

Although we observe a convergence of belief in life after death between the African traditional view and the Christian view, one has to maintain that the possibility of the dead contacting the living is useless in the spiritual reality. For Burnett argues that another text is the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. But even so, it cannot conclude that ghosts are unable to communicate with the living, and a careful reading shows that Abraham does not tell the rich man that it is impossible for the dead to return, but that it is spiritually useless. He (Abraham) said to him “if they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead” (Luke 16:31) (Burnett, 2000:69).

Without contradicting himself, Burnett has, similarly to the previous idea, mentioned that Christians have attempted to make two assumptions about ghosts, namely that the dead are unable to contact the living and that materialisations are evil spirits in disguise (Burnett, 2000:69).

Death is also considered as a means through which true believers in Christ go to their Saviour, because after death life is believed to continue. Boettner (1971:40-41) says: “What we call death is not the end, but only the entrance of the soul into a new and more wondrous world .... We know that they are with Christ, for He Himself has said ‘I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also (John 14:2-3)’ ... Also we think of death as a home-going, and of heaven as our eternal home.”

From the Christian understanding, death is also considered the punishment of sin by God. Venema (2000:37) states: “The Biblical understanding of death begins with the fall into sin. Death is the divinely

appointed punishment of humankind's disobedience. In Genesis 2:17, as part of the stipulation and probation of obedience, Adam was forewarned: 'You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you shall surely die.'" In the same line, Bultmann says that the question of the origin of death is therefore bound to become the question of the origin of sin (Bultmann, 1965:87).

It is therefore justified to say that death came into the world as the consequence of sin. Corner (2011:491) mentions: "In the Christian tradition death is a consequence of sin, and is therefore not a natural part of the life that preceded the fall ... Furthermore, the life of the world to come is supposed to be eternal or everlasting. Though the two terms may be understood differently, the everlasting being more of the same and the eternal something timeless or at least in God's time rather than ours, the implication of either term is that death can no longer put an end to our existence." Venema emphasises this fact by asserting that it is this biblical understanding of death as the consequence and punishment of sin that forms the background for the gospel message of salvation and life through Jesus Christ. By means of Christ's resurrection from death, the death which results from the sin of the first Adam is overcome (1 Cor. 15:21) (Venema, 2000:38).

There is a fact each human being has to recognise, and that is the certainty and reality of death. Boettner (1971:91) points out: "There is a tendency on the part of many people to avoid any serious discussion or even thought, on the subject of death. Yet every person knows that in the normal course of events sooner or later that experience will happen to him." This certainty of death cannot be viewed as disaster in itself, because God offers a real opportunity for salvation in Jesus Christ. Powell (1965:355) indicates that it is furthermore believed that when

Christ sacrificed Himself for sin, when He dealt with this enemy once and for all, the barrier which had excluded saints from the presence of God was removed.

This being done, through the saving death of Jesus Christ, there is, then, a sincere hope that Christians will be with the Lord. Powell (1965:355) asserts: "When Christians now die, they are absent from the body, and home with the Lord. The New Testament teaches clearly that the Lord is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on High, and therefore it follows that if the saints are with him, they are in heaven. The unrighteous dead remain in Hades, awaiting the final day of judgment when the books will be opened and sinners will answer for the deeds done in the flesh."

Although the Bible does not reject the possibility of life after death as it is also held by many African people, it excludes the interaction and communion with the spirits of the dead, ancestral spirits of Africa included. Ecclesiastes 9:4-10 clearly rejects the idea and practice of interaction and communication between the living and the spirits of the dead when it states that "the dead do not know anything, they have no further reward and even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have part in anything that happens under the sun."

Hearing this, we have to reason and say that the conditions of the dead in the afterlife are not similar to those of the living on earth, in needs and activities, and we cannot easily speak in terms of the continuation of the same life.

### **5.3.2.7. Life after death**

What happens to Christians who die? When a Christian dies, what happens to him after that event? This question **is** asked by many individuals, and we could also refer to the question asked by Job in the Old Testament. Job asks whether, when a man dies, he will live again? (Job 14:14). Dealing with this question of Job, Boettner (1971:59) says that for Christians the answer to that question is found in the words of Jesus in John 11:25-26 where Jesus said to her: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die ...”

Death is a certainty and reality, but there is a way to life given to humankind and that is life in Jesus Christ. Boettner states that death and the future state are by their very nature mysteries incapable of solution apart from the revelation that has been given in Scripture (Boettner, 1971:9).

Hendriksen, explaining Luke 23:42-43, mentions the story of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross with the two robbers, and one of the two robbers, a penitent, rebuked his partner and admitted his guilt and confessed Jesus as the innocent one and more than that, he asked to be remembered by Jesus when He would come in his kingdom and received the assurance from the Lord, who said “not only will I remember you, you will be with me, that is in my immediate presence, not in some mystical region of phantoms, nor in purgatory, but in paradise (Hendriksen, 1978:1032-1033).

The idea we derive from this, is that the believer is immediately reunited with Christ in heaven after death. Berkhof (1996:689) attests that finally, it should not be forgotten that the Bible represents believers as enjoying

a conscious life in communion with God and with Jesus Christ immediately after death.

If a Christian is in the presence of God after his death, it is unthinkable that a medium in Africa may recall the spirit of such a dead person.

Referring to the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Boettner (1971:41) mentions that we are told that the angels carried Lazarus to the place of rest and that it would seem to indicate that a heavenly escort awaits the Lord's people at their death and leads them in triumph from earth to heaven.

This idea supports the fact that a Christian, after death, exists in the presence of Christ and this rejects the African belief which opens the possibility of the dead to return and interfere in the life of those living on earth.

Answering to the question "What about the Christian who dies today?", MacArthur asserts that two verses make this clear, namely Phil. 1:23 and 2 Cor. 5:8 (MacArthur, 1967:94). From these two verses one understands that it means to be present with the Lord when an individual departs or he is absent from the body. MacArthur (ibid) indicates: "These two verses settle the matter. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Since our Lord is gone into heaven, that too, is to be the Christian's glorious destination .... His next consciousness is in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ."

If the believers in Christ die and come into the presence of God, then it must not be thought that the spirits of the dead are active in this world, as is the case among many Africans and it is not acceptable to live in fear of their attacks and influence. MacArthur asserts that the dead do

not come back and according to the Word of God, we cannot communicate with the dead (MacArthur, 1967:73). Referring to the story of King David speaking of death, MacArthur (1967:86-87) mentions: “David said that the dead cannot come to us but one day, in God’s providence, we will go to them. How blessed is the truth that it is the way of the cross that leads home. There is only one way that will take you safely from this world into the next one. That one way is through faith in Christ who came from that world to us and who went back into that world to prepare a place for you and for me.” This excerpt shows how the spirit of the dead cannot be thought of returning to earth among the living.

About this, Boettner (1971:139) mentions: “Nowhere in the Bible is there anything to indicate that the dead do return to this earth, either in spirit or in physical bodies except by a miracle when God Himself sends them back on a special mission. Such special cases we find in the appearance of Samuel when Saul sought information from the witch at Endor, in the instances in which people were raised from the dead (resuscitations, we may call them, not resurrections), performed by Elijah and Elisha, by the Lord and by the Apostles in His name, and in the appearance of some of the saints immediately after the resurrection of Christ (Matt. 27:52-53). But the Bible teaches that apart from such divine interference death brings about a permanent separation between the living and the dead.”

It must be clear from the Bible that the spirits of dead persons do not return to the earth in this life, and what is said about this can be just an illusion among African people.

## **5.4. Veneration and consulting ancestors**

### **5.4.1. Syncretism in African Christianity**

This is an important fact which is frequently found in African Christianity and it seriously challenges the church in Africa. Afeke and Verster (2004:48) allude to this: “Theron (1996:45) is of the opinion that the belief in ancestors has not disappeared, and that ancestors still play an important role in the lives of African Christians.” It is often found that Christians in Africa have not rejected their old way of regarding the ancestors, because they still view them as being active and able to influence their lives.

Christians live in such a way that they mix Christian practices with their traditional practices and beliefs (for detail information see also 5.2.3).

### **5.4.2. Veneration of the ancestors**

Veneration of the ancestors is found in many parts of Africa. Speaking of the Vhavenda-speaking peoples Mashau (2007:644) asserts: “The practice of the ancestral cult is also prevalent in other African tribes and peoples. It is embedded in the African people’s belief in life after death.”

Khathide (2007:328) says that “in Africa, as ancestral belief is a living tradition among many tribes, it is not surprising that most Africans have been exposed to the issue of ancestors whether directly within their own families or indirectly from their neighbourhood (see Zulu 1998:182).” It is a reality that many Africans are involved in the activity of venerating their ancestors for their good. Afeke and Verster (2004:49) state: “There can, however, be no doubt that where ancestral veneration is practiced, the



belief that ancestors influence the daily lives of the living is present, and it is believed that as they can bring either adversity or benefit, they must either be appeased or encouraged to bless.”

Cited by Afeke and Verster (2004:50) Bediako (1992:226) accepts the possibility of integrating ancestral veneration into Christianity. This is, however, not in line with the Word of God which negates any worship of other beings. The Scriptures invite us to worship God alone (see Exodus 20:3; Deut. 6:14; 2 Kings 17:36f).

### **5.4.3. Consultation of the ancestors**

#### **5.4.3.1. Communication with ancestral spirits**

In Africa, it is commonly regarded as a possibility to have communication with the ancestral spirits. Speaking of the Shona, Thorpe (1993:56) emphasises that an outstanding characteristic of Shona religion is its openness to communicate with an invisible realm of spirits. Such a practical experience is truly related to paganism and mysticism. Skinner (2006:136) asserts: “One of the recurrent themes of ancient mysticism and paganism is the belief in a cosmology that comprises of multitudes of supernatural beings. Above us are spiritual entities of increasing levels and power, called variously ancestral spirits, spirits of the land, angels, demons and gods. If the specific form of paganism has some ultimate personal God, or impersonal Spirit of the Universe, then he or it is obscured by all these levels of being. The believer has to get those above him to plead his case, or give him aid or information.”

It emerges from the above that African peoples strongly believe in keeping contact with their deceased ancestors with whom they retain

communion and communication. Idowu (1973:186) thus asserts that the cults are a means of communion and communication between those who are living on earth and those who have gone to live in the spirit world of the ancestors.

Cults are usually performed through various activities like sacrifices, prayers, libations etc. Nyirongo (1997:158) gives his view by arguing that the only safe attitude to one's ancestors is to constantly offer sacrifices and libations and if the source of suffering is not clear, one must consult a diviner.

Is there a real and concrete communication between African people and their ancestral spirits? Are there advantages for peoples practising such activity in Africa? What is the position of the Holy Scriptures concerning such a belief and practice?

#### **5.4.3.2. Consulting the ancestral spirits and idolatry**

When people in Africa consult the spirits of the dead ancestors they believe that they receive protection, good health, prosperity and many other advantages.

Burnett (1988:66-67) says: "How may one answer the African Christian who affirms that it was his deceased father who spoke to him in a dream and so saved him from harm? These may easily be considered as hallucinations due to emotional stress, but could they just as well be warnings from God in the same way as they are found in the Bible?"

God is the true Provider of man's needs in everything, and for this reason, the whole humanity is invited to rely on Him and worship Him

only, and also to address all requests to the Creator, God. Turaki (1999:270) indicates: “Idolatry is man’s substituted worship of the creature in place of God (Romans 1:18-32). Whatever becomes a substitution for God, becomes an idol. And whatever beliefs or practices are associated with that are in themselves idolatrous. Man’s dealing with the spirit beings and mystical powers are a gross neglect or denial of God’s providential dealings with man. Our God is a Provider and a Keeper and Protector. Given the nature of the traditional religions, in terms of beliefs and practices, we have observed that they display a great weakness, the theology of God’s Sovereignty and the theology of worship.” Thus one would easily admit that African beliefs and practices in consulting and communicating with the ancestral spirits is not acceptable according to the biblical doctrine, and the Christian Church in Africa has to abide by the Word of God. Long (2000:35) asserts that ancestral spirits may exist but do not act as intermediaries to God and on the basis of the biblical record, we cannot firmly deny the presence and influence of ancestral spirits, but we are forbidden from calling them up or seeking their assistance.

#### **5.4.3.3. Ancestors, intermediaries between man and God**

The African traditional communities believe that the ancestral spirits have the power to approach God, and the ancestors are viewed as the real intermediaries between the Creator and man. This belief is sustained by some African scholars (Mbiti, 1969:83; Idowu, 1973:184; Thorpe, 1993:115).

Gehman (1990:154) indicates that most contemporary writers of African traditional religion refer to the ancestors as mediators between the living

and their Creator and cites Ndeti as representing this line of interpretation. Mbiti clearly supports this idea when he writes that because they are still people, the living-dead are therefore the best group of intermediaries between men and God: they know the needs of men, they have recently been here with men, and at the same time they have full access to the channels of communicating with God directly or, according to some societies, indirectly through their own forefathers (Mbiti, 1969:83).

Gehman (1990:141) reporting the same view writes: "Being close in time to the living, the living-dead can best understand man's needs. Being closer to God, they have "full access to channels of communicating with God directly."

Any keen observer of the religious life of Africans easily gets the idea that ancestral spirits are given great importance in their relationship with God. Turaki (1999:178) reports that the ancestral spirits may also serve as intermediaries between man and God. Still Thorpe (1993:115) echoes the idea in his words and says: "Spirit beings whether conceived of as divinities or as ancestors, are in reality intermediaries between humans and the Supreme Being. Just as a Chief should not be approached directly without due courtesy, so petitions to God should be directed through the proper channels – neither casually nor without proper consideration. Because the ancestors are recently departed, they are still aware of the needs of their offspring. Because they have matured beyond mere earthly existence, they are closer to God and live in a realm of spiritual realities." Without diminishing the precedent views, Nürnberger asserts that in spite of many anthropological findings to the contrary, the view that the Supreme Being is a person and that the ancestors are personal mediators between God and humanity is

widespread at present, especially among African theologians (Nürnberg, 2007:33).

#### **5.4.4. Some biblical perspectives regarding veneration and consultation of the ancestors**

The Bible clearly denounces the practices of communicating with the spiritual beings or the dead. Exegetical analysis of the Scriptures provides evidence that God rejects people having any contact with the spiritual beings.

Wright (1998:216) argues: “It is a universal human desire to know the unknown, to have some preview of the future, to get guidance for decisions, to exercise control over others, to harm others and ward off the harm other may aim at oneself. Alienated from the living God, humans devise the dark arts of verses 10b-11 [of Deuteronomy 18] for such purposes. Their effect is usually to compound the fear that led to their being practised in the first place. The list of practices here is comprehensive and not at all out-of-date, since all these forms of occult, magic and spiritism are still widespread today. And we must assume that, given the consistency of God, they are just as detestable to the Lord now as they were then.

Leviticus 19:31 does not accept the fact of seeking guidance from the spirits of the dead and it is eminently clear that this verse emphasises the rejection of this detestable practice. Hartley (1992:321) asserts that this was necessary since many nations in the ancient Near East sought spiritual guidance from the dead through mediums and spirits. From this idea, one may, in fact, understand the well-known case of the Witch of

Endor when Saul approached her in seeking the guidance of God through the communication with the spirit of the dead Samuel. Scripture is against such practice and strongly condemns it (1 Samuel 28).

According to the biblical view, communicating with the spiritual beings, among these the ancestral spirits, is not acceptable and not even tolerated.

Burnett (1988:66) asserts: "Scripture, however, is emphatic that any attempt to communicate with the departed is sin. In Israel there was to be a total ban on anyone who 'consults the dead' (Deut. 18:11). One of the sins of Israel condemned by Isaiah is that the people tried to consult the dead." The attitude of traditional Africans towards their ancestors could accordingly be condemned when one refers to the situation of the people of Israel. For we read in Deut. 18:10-11: "Let no-one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practises divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead."

It is an idolatrous activity to mix the adoration of God with another being as suggested above (see 5.4.2). In Matt. 4:10 the Lord Jesus Christ rejects idolatry with all the zeal of true worship. He commands Satan to depart from him because it is only God who is worthy of our adoration.

The Spirit of God is at work in the church and in the world, because He is the Creator and He sustains the whole of the divine creation. It is not correct to address our adoration to ancestral spirits instead of to the Triune God, who is present in the church. Erickson (2001:276) states that "the work of the Holy Spirit is of special interest to Christians, for it is particularly through this work that God is personally involved and active in the life of the believer." Keeping this in mind it should be clear that

there is no reason to make room for the veneration of ancestors in our life.

The Word of God rejects the practice of consulting the spirits, the dead or other spiritual beings because God Himself is strongly against those who consult the spirits of the dead. Burnett asserts that one must conclude that the Bible absolutely forbids Christians to communicate with ghosts even if they are ancestral ghosts (Burnett, 1988:66).

This Scripture is clear about the view of God on those who consult the spirits of the dead to get answers to their problems in life. Isaiah 8:19 says: “When men tell you to consult mediums and spirits, who whisper and mutter, should not a people enquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?”

Wildberger, in his exegesis says that this passage speaks of inquiry of the spirits, and that the entire context in which the message is presented in this particular passage leaves no doubt that the term refers to the spirit of one who is dead, as is also the case in other passages (Lev. 19:31, 20:6, 1 Sam. 28:7f, Isa. 29:4) (Wildberger, 1991:371). When the spirits of the dead are consulted, this means that they can threaten or harm the people. Again Wildberger (1991:373) indicates: “Though commonly perceived in this way elsewhere, the spirits of the dead are not to be understood here as threatening power, but as protecting gods who look out for the welfare of others, from whom one can expect solidarity, a relationship which seeks the welfare of the clan ... it is presumed that there must be some point of contact between the two communities if the dead can be consulted on behalf of the living, which means that the translation ‘ancestral gods’ seems justified. The dead are ready to intervene on behalf of the living.” But even if there can be some

type of contact between the dead and the living, what is the true motive for the living to contact the spirits of the dead?

Motyer (1999:86) attests that it is commonly claimed that the dead are in possession of greater powers and superior knowledge to the living, and in the Bible it is not so. According to him, the Old Testament shows that leaving their bodies behind, the dead can be only shadows of what they were (Is. 14:10); the dead Samuel knows no more after death than he proclaimed when alive.

To others consulting the spirits is something ridiculous because there is no necessity for doing that. Oswalt clearly repudiates the fact when he asserts that it is ridiculous to consult the dead on behalf of the living, yet how easily those who reject life turn to the dead to discover the meaning of life, and that it was apparently a common belief in the ancient Near East that the dead spoke in birdlike, whispered voices, and it is to this that Isaiah refers (Oswalt, 1986:237).

### **5.5. Jesus Christ, the only Saviour**

For Acts 4:12 clearly indicates: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by whom we must be saved." Commenting on this passage, the New Geneva Study Bible states as follows: "No other name, just as the name of Jesus had been the only hope for physical healing of the men crippled from birth, so also the name of Jesus is the only hope for the spiritual healing of mankind. This exclusive and total reliance upon Christ's salvation is the clear teaching of both Jesus and the New Testament generally."



The Bible speaks in no uncertain language concerning the saving mission of Jesus Christ but it is pointedly clear about the fact that Jesus is the only way to enter God's Kingdom. John emphasises this idea when he writes: "Jesus answered, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). In the Acts of the Apostles, the idea is introduced with great insistence that the only name through which men will be reconciled with God is Jesus, not any other name.

This text of Acts 4:12 negates the widespread belief among Africans according to which the ancestral spirits are powerful and able to open the way to God as intermediaries. Barrett gives the following exegetical explanation of the verse under consideration: "for in no other name."

It would be possible to supply "name", which would suit the preceding verses, but the clause that follows, introduced by "for", deals with the name, and the logic of the argument runs: in no other person is there salvation, because there is no other name than that of Jesus by which ... we must be saved .... This salvation is in Jesus. The preposition is not used in the same way as in the Pauline "in Christ", it is essentially instrumental. Jesus Christ is the agent of salvation, the σωτηρ (Barrett, 2004:230-231.)

Alexander (1980:143) exposes his exegetical exploration on the text in the following words: "He reminds them that the character ascribed to the Messiah was not merely one of dignity and honour to himself, but of vital interest to others also. The system of which he was the corner-stone, was a system of salvation, and the only one which God has sanctioned or revealed. Name is here used in allusion to its frequent repetition in the foregoing context, and of course with the same latitude of meaning."

If Jesus is the only intermediary between men and the Creator; then ancestral spirits of Africans are wrongly considered as mediators between God and the peoples, as the ones who can bring our needs to God, especially our need to be saved. Gehman, speaking of the Akamba, writes that we conclude that for many Akamba an important role of the ancestors is a mediatory role between the living and God; but for many others the ancestors are prayed to as ends in themselves and that they are expected to help the living through their own powers without intercession made with God (Gehman, 1990:155).

The belief of Africans about the mediation of ancestral spirits between man and God displays the idea that Jesus Christ is not recognised as the sole appointed Mediator and Saviour of humankind. The Bible does not support this belief of Africans and it openly teaches that Jesus Christ is the unique intermediary between men and God, and that only He can reconcile all of humanity with the Creator, God. All doctrines teaching the contrary to the uniqueness of the fact that Jesus is the only Mediator between God and men are unbiblical and unacceptable.

## **5.6. The Spirit of power**

(See also 2.1.6.2.2.2 & 2.1.8)

The Spirit of God is active in the life of man in various ways because He enables him to perform different activities in the church and outside it. Ferguson (1996:21) points out: “the Lord’s power-presence is revealed in his Spirit with a view to fulfilling a variety of goals in redemptive history. He not only carries individuals beyond their normal physical capacities; he gives them abilities which extend beyond their native wit.”

Servants of God were empowered by the Holy Spirit to do the work of God.

Ferguson (1996:22) mentions that Moses was imbued with the divine Spirit to enable him to govern, and this in turn was shared with the seventy elders who undertook with him the burden of administration and rule among God's redeemed people (Num. 11:22).

In 2 Sam 23: 2-3 it is written: "the Spirit of the Lord spoke through me and his word was on my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me: He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God." From this it is clearly understood that king David was not acting on his own but he was empowered by the Spirit of God. Walvoord (1977:59) asserts that David bears witness to the inspiration of his works: the Spirit of Jehovah spoke through him and his word was on his tongue.

The power of the Holy Spirit is noticed throughout the Scriptures, Old and New Testament where the evidence of his works is visible. Walvoord (1977:74) says: "The most frequent mention of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament is in connection with enablement for various kinds of services, including illumination and bestowal of wisdom.... Rather than a universal enablement available for all who were yielded to the Holy Spirit, the enablement granted was sovereign, paralleling to some degree the sovereign bestowal of spiritual gifts in the New Testament period." The apostles were not able by themselves to do the work for which the Lord Jesus had commissioned them, but they were told to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit, that is to say until they could be empowered by the Holy Spirit. In Acts 1: 8 it says: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be

witnesses to me in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.” It was after having received the power of the Holy Spirit that the apostles began to give testimony to the resurrection of the Saviour Jesus Christ.

It is clear that the Spirit of God empowers us in our services to God and He is imparting to each individual specific gifts and talents while ancestors are not able to do that to their descendants.

### **5.7. How should we remember our deceased?**

It is important to remember, to imitate and positively follow the path of those who lived before us.

Hebrew 13: 7 states: “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.” It is clear successors can imitate the exemplary life of their elders who are already dead.

The church may recognise the history of its predecessors and refer thankfully to what they realised during their life but they have to notice that God is the source and the keeper of the past.

Bosch (1991: 181) indicates: “One of the basic reasons for having to do this, lies in the fact that the Christian faith is a historical faith. God communicates his revelation to people through events, not by means of abstract propositions. This is another way of saying that the biblical faith, both Old and New Testament, is ‘incarnational’, the reality of God entering into human affairs.” From this we understand that the faith confessed by Christians has its source in the past and then we have to

know what happened in that period. Cairns (1981:13) says that church history is thus a matter of profound interest to the Christian who desires to be enlightened concerning his spiritual ancestry to emulate the good examples of the past and to avoid errors that the church has frequently made.

God uses human beings as instruments throughout the history of Israel. Nürnberger (2008:300) mentions: “Yahweh had used human instruments in this history: the prime ancestors, Moses, Aaron, David, the prophets, priestly authorities, sages and so on. In the New Testament times it was primarily Jesus, then the apostles, the early missionaries and those who compiled the books of the New Testament. Yet nowhere and never did these instruments of Yahweh possess any authority of their own, not even Christ himself (Jn 5: 19).” Ancestors may be remembered by the living descendants but any adoration and veneration of the deceased parents are contrary to the biblical teaching.

## **5.8. A theology of inculturation?**

### **5.8.1. Introduction**

After what has been argued so far, the question may be raised whether the gospel of Jesus Christ destroys every facet of any given culture or whether there are aspects in cultures which should be preserved and evaluated in a more positive way. Keeping in mind that a process of ill-considered acculturation creates great dangers for accommodating the true gospel of Jesus Christ in such a way that the real message of the gospel may disappear, the question remains whether an approach of well-considered inculturation is not only of great value but also

necessary in the proclamation of the gospel? Should not the Christian message be incarnated and embodied in a particular cultural context of a given society in a way that does not undermine the gospel message? In short, should we argue in favour of a positive form of inculturation? To this question we now turn our investigation, trying to find an answer.

### **5.8.2. Preliminary concept and origin of the term “inculturation.”**

The term “inculturation” is of recent appearance in theological circles. Anthony (2012:236) notes: “inculturation is a rare dictionary word that gained popularity after the second Vatican Council. It is the incarnation of the Christian message in particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the church and remarking it so as to bring a new creation.”

The term “inculturation” is new in the theological vocabulary as it appears recently in Christian religion. Anthony ( 2012: 237) says : “ A historical analysis of the evolution of the church reveals that the idea of inculturation is a new one, but again it is also as old as the church. It is thus not surprising that Onwubiko(1997) said that inculturation is a new vision of an old problem in the church or a new approach to a solution of an old problem. It appeared in missiological discussion not so long ago. According to Metuh (1996), the concept was probably first used in a theological sense by Joseph Masson, a professor of the Gregorian University in Rome. Masson (cited by Metuh, 1996) argues that there is a more urgent need for a Catholicism that is inculturated in a variety of forms.”

The appearance of the word “inculturation” is not to be traced to a remote origin according to the views of scholars. Bosch (1991: 447) declares: “Inculturation represents a second important model of contextualizing theology (cf. Ukpong, 1987) and like liberation theology, of recent origin even though it is not without precedent in Christian history. Inculturation is one of the patterns in which the pluriform character of contemporary Christianity manifests itself. Even the term is new.” Anthony (2012: 237) referring to Schineller, writes: “Schineller (1990) avows that the exact origin of the word as it functions in the theological community is unclear but he points to its use by cardinal Sin of Manila at the Synod on catechesis held in Rome in 1977 and its first insertion into Papal Documents by John Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation on catechesis on October 1979. Since then, the concept has become a common place and was frequently used by Pope John Paul II during his visits to Africa.”

Although the origin of this term “inculturation” is unclear some other scholars trace it to secular and cultural anthropology sources. Anthony (2012: 237) says: “Metuh (1996) views the origin of the concept of inculturation from a secular perspective. He maintains that the term is borrowed from cultural anthropology where it denotes the process by which a person is inserted into his culture. This, however; has been given a slight change in its missiological use as a process by which the church becomes inserted into a particular culture. It is in this regard that Schineller (1990) says that at its best, the term combines the theological significance of incarnation with the anthropological concepts of enculturation and acculturation to create something new.” This brings us to refer to Bediako (2003: 53) who indicates that our reflection and action can only be contextual and therefore partial. This need not be

considered as negative, since sovereignty belongs only to the living God, and not to those who affirm faith in such a living God.

Shorter (2009) states that inculturation is a theological concept derived analogically from the human experience of cultural education (enculturation, inculturation).

There are people who hold the idea that inculturation resulted from the main line churches like the Roman Catholic Church. About this, Shorter (2009) declares: “the term inculturation was first coined by Joseph Masson in 1962. It was used by Petro Arrupe during the 1977 Synod of Roman Catholic Bishops and was the subject of a letter which he addressed to the society of Jesus in 1978. It was first adopted officially by John Paul II in the synodical document *Catechesis Tradendae* of 1979, and has since entered into theological currency. It is a term popular with African Christian theologians who see African theology as the foremost instance of inculturation and a means to combat cultural alienation in the African church.”

The Roman Catholic origin of the theology of inculturation can be noticed in the writing of Odozor (2008:584) who states that inculturation is a major concern in contemporary African Catholic theology.

The theology of inculturation has been treated with interest by Christians considering the existence of various cultures throughout the world. Odozor (2008:584) states: “inculturation is an ongoing concern for the whole church. Born into a Jewish world; the church soon found itself in non-Jewish environments; it has therefore always had to deal with the question of its relationship to the cultures in which it was taking root. This concern persists today and is being addressed by Christians throughout the world.”



### **5.8.3. The identification of inculturation**

In this part of the work it could be significant to show what “inculturation” is all about and what makes it different from other concepts in the field of Christian theology in Africa.

#### **5.8.3.1. The significance of inculturation for Africa**

This term contains the idea that the Christian faith has to be lived in each local cultural reality. Lokiru (2010: 64) mentions that the term inculturation is the descriptive end product of an evolutionary process, once called adaptation, enculturation, acculturation and accommodation etc. -- ecclesiological concepts that basically imply God acts only in the visible church -- and today called inculturation -- a Christological concept that presupposes a paschal Christology in which the Spirit of God is clearly active among peoples yet to be evangelised, drawing them to Christ.

Inculturation in this way could be seen as the embodiment of the Christian religion within the cultural reality of a given society, here the African community. Referring to the view of Pope John Paul II, Lokiru (2010:64) recalls: “inculturation according to Pope John Paul II is the incarnation of the Gospel in the native cultures and at the same time the introduction of these cultures into the life of the church. In the same way it can be defined as a dynamic interaction between ecclesial faith and societal culture: between the luring faith of an ecclesial community and the luring culture of a concrete society.” Almost in the same line, Odozor (2008:584) declares that inculturation, in its most basic sense, implies the attempt to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ in any human structure.

Inculturation is an important factor to the activity of evangelisation and can play a great role in the mission field everywhere in the world and in particular in Africa. Odozor (2008:585) says that in this sense, inculturation is synonymous with first evangelisation.

From this fact it should be clear that when the gospel is preached to people anywhere in the world it calls them to change their traditional way of living and turn to the will of God which is found in his saving word. Odozor (2008: 585) mentions that whenever the gospel is preached for the first time in any context a summons is issued to the context in question to accept the salvation God offers in and through Jesus Christ, an acceptance that must bring about change in the people's perception of reality and in their value system.

During the time of colonisation, western missionaries did not seriously consider the cultural traditions of Africans. Ngong (2012:356) says that in the context of colonial and missionary denigration of African traditional religions, cultures, the theology of inculturation has attempted to revalue African cultures by insisting that no viable African theology can be done without appropriating the African worldview.

To Africans, the reality of the power of witchcraft, divinities and many other spirits is not to be rejected as did the first missionaries in Africa. Ngong(2012:357-358) speaking of Harris of Liberia indicates : "He attracted much following because he, as Jenkins points out, unlike Western missionaries, who called witchcraft a delusion ...knew its power all too well and called upon his followers to spurn occult practices. In the eyes of his followers, Anderson writes, Harris demonstrated that the God of the Bible was more powerful than the ancient divinities, ancestors and nature spirits."

It is noteworthy that the African culture is not to supersede the Christian religion, but Christians in Africa have to recognise and genuinely, in faith, experience the wonders of the power of the Gospel and the Spirit of God in the church and in the society at large.

Some scholars believe that missionary work in Africa encountered difficulties in being accepted by newly converted Christians because of the rejection of cultural elements of African peoples. About this, Anthony (2012: 236) mentions: “the cause, according to Metuh (1993), is due to the missionaries’ intolerance of the tendency of the new African converts to introduce elements of the traditional religion into Christianity, there was a clash of worldviews and the failure of missionaries to come to terms with the traditional African cosmology.”

#### **5.8.3.2. African culture and the Christian Gospel**

African Christians are living in their proper context which offers them a certain way of worship and expressing their thoughts, in a genuine way. Kombo (2003:207) echoes this idea when he says that we cannot and do not have to shake off our African heritage in order for us to be Christians.

From this point of view it should be clear that African culture has to survive and be lived together with the Gospel message, allowing African and Christian principles to interact. About this Kombo (2003:208) mentions: “the message here is simple: the Gospel does not demand that we abandon our identity as people. Rather it requires that we let Christ dwell richly in our heritage. As he exercises inner working in this heritage -- his new dwelling -- he admits parts of it, renders superfluous

many aspects of it, and calls into existence fresh and different parts of the same.”

One could say that African culture and Christianity have to journey together and support each other. Bosch (1991:448) supports this idea when he writes: “ it should therefore come as no surprise that in the Pauline churches, Jews, Greeks, barbarians, Thracians, Egyptians and Romans were able to feel at home (Cf Köster, 1984: 172). The same was true of the post-apostolic church. The faith was inculturated in a great variety of liturgies and contexts -- Syriac, Greek, Roman, Coptic, Amernian, Ethiopian, Maronite, and so forth. Moreover, during this early period the emphasis was on the local church rather than the church universal in the monarchical form.”

The need that the theology of inculturation addresses in Africa is that Christianity does not have to be a foreign religion among its converts in this continent. Kombo (2003:216) sustains this idea when he writes: “Relating the Gospel to culture continues to be a critical issue in theology. The Gospel is to be at home in all cultures. We see this in the Pauline churches and we see it in the post-apostolic church also. In the era of post-apostolic church, the faith was inculturated in Syriac, Greek, Roman, Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopian, Manorite, and so forth. Therefore, in spite of the obvious dangers of inculturation, a church which seeks to translate the Gospel for its new situation of reception is clearly functioning within a theological mandate.”

Inculturation can be a factor which plays an important role in church life with regard to African culture. Anthony (2012:236) states that inculturation provides the fertile ground for incorporating the culture of a particular people into the life of the church.

What is needed here in the church in Africa is a positive inculturation which does not contradict Holy Scripture, the unique norm for our lives.

#### **5.8.4. The pertinence of inculturation in Africa**

The Gospel is preached to peoples living in their own culture and African peoples are not excluded from this truth. Kurgat (2011:30) writes: “A Christian approach to any culture cannot be adequately elaborated outside that culture (Bediak, 1992:30). This is not to say that culture supersedes the Gospel, but it does mean that, when the Gospel is transmitted and received within a culture, one begins to appreciate the true nature and the contours of Christian approach to that culture. In other words, the question of the Christian approach to culture is always a dynamic process, which starts with the Gospel taking people as they are when it encounters them and continues to transform their worldview, their habits and actions and relationships into the image of Christ .”

There is a true relationship between the culture of a particular people and the Christian faith, because one cannot imagine the existence of a Christian Community without a living cultural situation. About this idea, Kurgat (2011:33) states: “Christian faith cannot exist except in a cultural form (Shorter, 1997:12). When we speak of Christian faith or Christian life we are necessarily speaking of a cultural phenomenon. It is a distinctive way of life that can only operate culturally. Therefore, when we describe inculturation as a dialogue between a culture and the faith in cultural forms, in the first instance, it is a dialogue between a culture and the faith in cultural form.”

The fact here is to search how to accommodate and genuinely live and apply the Christian Gospel in a given culture or how to apply the theology of inculturation in that particular culture. Bosch (1991:454) states: “Inculturation suggests a double movement: there is at once inculturation of Christianity and Christianization of culture. The Gospel must remain Good news while becoming, up to a certain point, a cultural phenomenon (Geffré, 1982: 482), while it takes into account the meaning systems already present in the context (cf Schreiter, 1985:12f).”

One would say that culture of the Christian African cannot be rejected, but is not to take the place of the Christian faith and Holy Scripture. Alluding to this situation, Bosch (1991:455) points out: Inculturation doesn't mean that culture is to be destroyed and something new built up on its ruins: neither, however, does it suggest that a particular culture is merely to be endorsed in its present form (cf Gensichen 1985: 125f).”

Inculturation is called to play a positive role in the development of the Christian church in Africa alongside the preaching of the Gospel among peoples of different cultures which are foreign to Christianity. About this, Bosch (1991:455) has to mention: “Inculturation's concern, says Perdo Arrupe, is to become a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a new creation” (quoted in Shorter 1988: 11, if ITC 1989:143, 155). The focus, then, is on the new creation, on the transformation of the old, on the plant which, having flowered from its seed, is at the same time something fundamentally new when compared with that seed.”

The word of God has to be preached and lived in a concrete way within a given society because it is useless to separate it from the practical life

of people. Smit (1988:108) says: “For what is the Gospel ? The gospel is also not ‘a fixed deposit that can be consulted at will’! The whole history of theology, and of the church, and even of Christianity itself, has been nothing else but one comprehensive attempt to try to understand and live the gospel. And therefore we do not have access to ‘the gospel’ apart from the particular forms in which we have received it.”

It should be noticed that inculturation when used in a positive manner could help the practical proclamation of the gospel in the world and particularly in Africa despite the hard circumstances which the Church experiences. About this, we would refer to Smit (1988:112) who states that albeit difficult, the task of contextualisation is absolutely necessary for the church’s life and witness in the world.

There are imperatives for inculturation in the Bible because the Lord Jesus Christ and his followers immediately and those coming later did not absolutely reject the cultures of various peoples. This can be observed from Anthony (2012:240) who mentions:

“Jesus who is the Christ, the apostles, the Church Father in sowing the Gospel had respect for other peoples’ cultures. Jesus and his apostles came from the Jewish background whose religiosity, prayers and practices of worship were well defined. However, Jesus’ attitudes towards the Jewish cult were represented in two categories: fidelity and autonomy. In fidelity, Jesus had respect for the tradition of his time. He came not to abolish the law and the prophets but to help them (Matthew 5:17) He was faithful in observing

the offering of sacrifices in the temple (Matthew 21:12), the service of words in the synagogue (Matthew 26:17-19). However, his fidelity did not lie in the passivity, but represented that of a “critical yes”, a reforming fidelity, that placed a demand of purification to the worship of his time. His autonomy found expression in his challenge to fellow Jews to spiritualize and interiorize the Jewish religion and in this process he was giving birth to an era of Christian worship.”

#### **5.8.5. Uneasy relationship between Christianity and African tradition**

African peoples who have embraced the Christian faith are always facing the intolerance of the western missionaries rejecting the insertion of some African traditional elements into church life. Anthony (2012:236) points out: “In spite of the evident success of missionary work in Africa seen in the teeming population of Africans who have embraced Christianity, there is an evident lack of depth in the faith and commitment of converts; there is also an increasing proliferation of Afro-Christian indigenous churches. This cannot be blamed on the lack of commitment of missionaries in Africa, for we saw them labour exceedingly. The cause, according to Metuh (1993), is due to the missionaries’ intolerance of the tendency of the new African converts to introduce elements of the traditional religion into Christianity. There was a clash of worldviews and the failure of missionaries to come to terms with the traditional African cosmology” in some circumstances there existed hostility between African cultural practices and the Christian life in the churches. Kurgat



(2011:33) mentions: “Sixthly there was tension among educated who were strongly committed to cultural independence, which were scandalized by the apparent imperviousness of the church to African culture hence were therefore tempted to reject Christianity altogether. Seventhly, there was considerable hostility to African Traditional Religion. Any African Christian who raised it risked victimization.”

It should be noted that the African traditional religion has been for long invariably considered as having no thoughts and suggestions to contribute to the development of Christianity in Africa. This idea may be found in the writing of Bediako (2003:63) when he indicates: “In contrast, modern African Christianity thought has had to establish its categories in the interface of African Christian confession on the one hand, and the perennial spiritualities of the primal religious traditions of Africa, on the other (Hastings, 1976). Thus the experience of African Christianity does have some unique contributions to make to the present subject. This is why it must be reckoned as loss that most studies of inter-religious encounter continue to ignore the primal religious, possibly because they were for so long regarded by western scholars as primitive with little or nothing to contribute theologically.”

The introduction of the Gospel message among Africans was really revealed to be a joyful event but at the same time it brought difficulties in the relationship between African Church leaders and the Western missionaries. Mbiti (1998:146) points out: “Theological reflection and articulation in Africa has risen out of people’s joy in receiving the Gospel. At the same time, the injustices wrought by colonial presence, or produced by Africans themselves, and the resultant injuries, created a spirit of fighting, not only for political but also ecclesiastical independence and justice. Connected with this was the spirit of wanting

to be Christians in our own continent, using our own values and re-interpreting the Gospel in the light of own context.”

#### **5.8.6. The theology of inculturation in a situation of religious pluralism**

An important issue has to be sorted out where many religions, cultures and practices are present in the communities which include Christians in Africa. Bediako (2003:62) indicates: “Be that as it may, the fact now is that virtually all Christians the world over live in plural societies, comprising persons of other religious faiths or of none. How a person of diverse religious persuasions may live in harmony has become one of the most crucial questions in any appraisal of the social and public significance of religion, and constitutes a crucial challenge for Christian theology itself.”

With this view in mind, one would say that each religion has to see how to create a peaceful situation among different peoples having their own cultures and confessing their faiths. Kurgat (2011:34) points out: “in any process of social change there are elements of continuity. The church must look for the table factors and adapt to them. The elements taken from traditional practices if inculturated will help to make the new rite comprehensible and relevant to the people, in so far as the symbols and elements compatible with Christian belief and practices are concerned. Additionally, the traditional cultural elements that are reconcilable to Christian rituals may be admitted alongside similar practices already found in Christian tradition there should be correct judgments about African beliefs and practices and determine their value for Christian worship and catechesis.”

It should be noted that every contextual religion can learn from others in the pluralist situation as this happens in Africa. Bediako (2003:55) mentions: “this is another way of saying that we can learn from every contextual theology, whilst none can be regarded as absolute. In that sense, it can be seen to have been appropriate for African Christians to have learnt to appreciate the engagement of the Christian faith with the world through the Western contextual and experience. The challenge of African theology for Western Christians is to learn from Africa; in the word of John Mbiti, we have eaten theology with you. The question is, will you eat theology with us?”

Religious pluralism is a reality throughout the world and also among African peoples with their various cultures, but the word of God remains the absolute norm to be followed in Christianity. About this, Kurgat (2011:34) recalls: “Basically speaking, the Gospel message must retain the significant ideas of Christianity enriched and made intelligibly attracted by all means by considering what is good in a cultural heritage of a people. The Gospel therefore must always remain and be made to reflect a message of salvation through Jesus Christ from God. This message was destined for every nation, different people belonging to different cultural backgrounds in which every Christian will remain citizen of their own tribes cultural and nations.” It should therefore be understood that the Gospel message has to be correctly preached and kept as such within the context where the proclamation is done without rejecting the positive elements from the culture of the people.

#### **5.8.7. The option of inculturation in Africa**

The church in Africa needs to confess its faith in the normal way despite the environment of several cultures. The Christian faith is not expressed outside any human culture, but it is lived by people who are culturally defined. Bosh (1991: 447) says that the Christian faith never exists except as translated into a culture.

Africans have their particular way of singing and applying the liturgy in the worship, but by doing this, the biblical doctrine must be respected and applied according to the Scriptures and the will of God. Bosch (1991:452): mentions “the Christian faith must be rethought, reformulated and lived anew in each human culture (Memorandum 1982:265) and this must be done in a *vital* way, in depth and right to the cultures’ roots (EN20). Such a project is even more needed in the light of the way in which the West has raped the cultures of the Third World, inflicting on them what has been termed ‘anthropological poverty’ (cf. Frostin 1988:15).”

It must be stated clearly that the word of God is above all human cultures although each culture has to express faith through its patterns without distorting the Gospel’s message. Kathide (2007:375) maintains: “The purpose, albeit not always so openly stated, is to transform traditional beliefs so that Christianity is presented as an attractive and viable African alternative (Anderson 2000:216). The problem of inculturation will always be the danger of wanting to yield too much ground to culture without allowing it to be challenged by the message of salvation (Schreiber 1985:150, cf Shorter 1988:261f); Buyo & Muya 2003: 7).”

Dangers are manifest in Christianity due to syncretism and pluralism (see above) and also with inculturation among the worshipping

communities in Africa, but the Church has to avoid them by accepting a justifiable way of inculturation that does not distort the biblical message. Bosch (1991:455-456) says: "Inculturation remains a tentative and continuing process (cf. Memorandum 1982:466) not only because cultures are not static but also the Church may be led to discover previously unknown mysteries of the faith. The relationship between the Christian message and culture is a creative and dynamic one, and full of surprises. There is no eternal theology, no *theologia perennis* which may play the referee over "local theologies'." From this one can say that each culture is able to express its faith in a given language knowing that no culture is more important than the others within a pluralist world. Smit (1988:113) attests that therefore, linked with this realistic viewpoint, both within and outside acknowledgement of the inevitable plurality, both within and outside the reformed tradition, we ought to have what is often called "an ecumenical spirituality", that is, a spirituality urging us on to meet one another, to hold on to one another, to try to come closer to one another.

The Gospel has to be correctly applied in the lives of the Christians which should be dominated by the Christian culture. Egbulefu (1992:107-108) says: "The Church is thus the instrumental agent of the inculturation of Christianity by the Holy Spirit. Inculturation, the fusion of Christianity and the nature culture, cannot be done any way whatever, but rather in such a way that on the one hand the whole of Christianity becomes the new culture of the people and the entire people become the new people of God, and on the other hand some of the elements of the native culture become superseded, removed and replaced, while the rest are corrected, complemented and fortified and become means of

the necessary self-expression of Christianity in a way accessible to the people.”

#### **5.8.8. Conclusion**

The phenomenon of inculturation can be considered good when it is positively applied in the lives of the Christians in Africa without distorting the true message of the Gospel.

Inculturation is an important factor in the proclamation of the Gospel especially during the first evangelisation of the people living in their culture. Traditional African practices and belief, should not hinder the preaching of the word of God in the Church although the message of the Gospel has to be lived in the cultural context.

Above everything, it should be clear that the word of God is the final norm of life for all Christians who really are prepared to honour the living God in the world and also in Africa.

Christians in Africa have to understand and accept that it is not worth venerating the ancestral spirits or fearing their so-called influence in the life of the living descendants. Only the triune God is to be given honour, glory and true adoration. It should be stated that all peoples must totally depend on God. But Africans cannot be denied the remembrance of their predecessors as the Holy Scriptures remind us (Heb 13:7).

## 5.9. Summary

The Spirit of God gives us the capacity to perform any activity in our lives and this is not the work of the ancestral spirits. It is the Holy Spirit who enables us in different manners and various ways to serve God.

In creation and even in the redemption, the Spirit of God is absolutely active. He (the Spirit of God) is sustaining human life and the entire universe.

The existence of the ancestral spirits is a reality in the traditional African context. The belief in the spirits of ancestors and their real influence in the lives of the living descendants are strong in the African worldview. This explains why Africans, Christians and non-Christians, are inclined to consult their ancestors at different occasions of life: birth of a child, death, marriage et cetera. Neglected ancestors are thought of as being angry and able to punish by bringing sickness or other misfortunes upon peoples. The ancestral spirits are feared and also needed for protection and various benefits.

Christians in Africa revert to the consultation of spiritual beings when they experience hard circumstances. They then manifest a syncretistic life, at the same time being part of the church and participating in the ancestral veneration.

It is clear that the Bible negates the veneration of the ancestors. It rejects vigorously the seeking of protection from the spirits of ancestors. The biblical message forbids human beings to communicate with or consult the spirits of the dead. Veneration of ancestors is idolatry. God alone is our Refuge, Protector and Provider in all circumstances. There is no reason for fearing and relying on the ancestral spirits. Christ is

given all authority over the powers of darkness including the spirits of the ancestors.

Life after death is a certainty throughout the Scriptures. Sufferings and illness are part of our life because of the sin of man and only Jesus Christ reconciles us with God and has conquered all these hardships for our good. Even our Lord Jesus Christ experienced sufferings.

### **5.10. Conclusion**

Ancestral spirits and other spirits have detracted from the glory of God in Africa. The belief in these spirits creates conditions contrary to the will of God. The prevalence of the influence of the ancestral spirits is absent where there is a living faith in Christ. Christians in Africa seriously need the teaching of the Word of God. It is only from the proclamation of the Gospel that peoples in Africa will see the truth in their lives. Gehman (1999:185) asserts “that the African Christians need clear teaching from Scripture.” Mashau (2007:65) stresses that Christians in Africa should be encouraged to have a living fellowship with Christ hence they will become victors over the evil one and his evil messengers. This fellowship with Christ is realised through the Spirit of God.



## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND CONSIDERATIONS**

### **6.1. The evidence of the spirit world**

The spirit world is a well-known fact and is evidently held a reality among African peoples who believe in the existence of several spiritual beings. Alluding to this idea, Mbiti (1969:78) indicates that myriads of spirits are reported from every African people, but they defy description almost as they defy the scientist's test tubes in the laboratory.

The spiritual world is highly respected by most Africans, especially the ancestral spirits, which are viewed as ambivalent. They are desired and feared by the living.

Everything that happens in life is, according to Africans, caused by attacks of the spirits. Wirga (2007:1) says: "Africans continuously question themselves about all misfortunes like sickness, pain, death, natural calamities, failure, etc., and believe there is a cause for these, which can be avoided. This attitude stems from the underlying view they have of the world, which ought to be harmoniously balanced, good and peaceful. Misfortune, any imbalance or disharmony in the universe does not happen by chance, but must have a cause, which is either human or superhuman." In other words, it is said that spirits are the cause of what is happening to humans in their daily life, and then the Spirit of God is not active among peoples in Africa.

At the occasion of death, marriage, birth of a child, hunting, harvest et cetera ancestral spirits and other spirits have to be consulted. Ancestral spirits are always invoked to participate in the activities of their living descendants as part of the large family. They must be informed when a

member of the family is about to marry or to make an important and long trip.

### **6.1.1. The impact of spirits on the life of African peoples**

The way, Africans view and consider the spirit world has a real impact on their attitude toward life because they behave accordingly. Wirga (2007:1) mentions: "African peoples conceive life to be a continuous cycle and rhythm, which nothing can destroy ... this life stems from birth through various phases of initiation to the entry into the community of the departed to the company of the spirits. It is a dynamic rhythm punctuated by various rites of passages, which marks the entrance into its different stages. Thus life is the pivot on which the African worldview hinges. Muntu, man, is at the centre of existence and African people see everything else in its relation to this central position of man." It should be clearly heard that spirits especially ancestral spirits are not neglected in the life of African people because they are highly thought of and respected.

The strong belief in the existence of the spiritual world has a great influence on the lives of African people. This belief in the spirits, manifests in Africans' attitude, behaviour, way of thinking and living accordingly.

In the traditional context many Africans live and behave according to the ambivalent will of the spirits and in particular the ancestral spirits in order to please them. Africans are daily living in the psychosis and fear of the influence and the rule of these spirits which are thought to be able to harm or to bless the living depending on the way the living are treating

them. In case of ill treatment or carelessness the spirits are said to punish and molest the negligent people or community.

The majority of Africans believe that the ancestral spirits and other spirits as well, are always around them and can in one way or another bring misfortune to individuals. This consideration creates a permanent fear in the minds of Africans who think and believe that the ancestors are looking at them from the vicinity where they inhabit their abode like forests, mountains, trees, animals, lakes et cetera.

The fear of the spiritual world and specifically the ancestral spirits causes a sort of idolatry among many African peoples, Christians and non-Christians. In this regard Christians are said to pray in the church in the morning and venerate their ancestors during the night. Consequently many Christians in Africa are involved in a real syncretistic life in which they combine Christian and traditional practices. To explain this situation, Khathide (2007:373) states: In the instance where people in different cultures are borrowing elements from Christianity and incorporating them into their own religious structures, it would amount to negative syncretism. Anderson (2000:203) illustrates this by relating a phenomenon in South Africa of diviners who may consider themselves Christians, although they are usually not. Anderson maintains that even their healing power is specifically not Christian, coming directly from guiding ancestors.”

### **6.1.2. Christians and ancestral spirits in Africa**

The Word of God is the main foundation of all believing people in Christ . Those Christians in Africa who are not truly transformed by the gospel

message can, for one reason or another leave the church and return to their past traditional way of living. Witherington (2006:156) mentions that as Gordon Free rightly notes, various Pauline texts indicate that he believed that non-Christians were deluded or duped by Satan, especially about religious matters (2Cor 4:4). Even Christians in Africa, can be duped by the lies of the Devil, who inspires people with ideas and practices which are contradictory to the will of God.

Christians in Africa revert to the veneration of the ancestral spirits in order to look for protection as if the God in whom they believe is unable to do so through his Holy Spirit. Khathide (2007:375) mentions that “Oosthuizen (1987:76) has also observed that some believers in the African independent churches use ropes of different colours round the body, ankles and neck, the vestments, the stars, the beads, the pieces of string round the wrists in order to protect or fortify themselves against evil forces. Then there is also ‘washings’ (*isiwaho*) whereby holy water is used to wash off the negative magic or get the evil forces out of the system. All these objects are believed to have ‘power’ which come from God, the Holy Spirit and ancestral spirits.”

It is evident that Christians in Africa are said to revert to traditional activities when they experience hard circumstances in their lives. Mysterious and long diseases, different kinds of suffering and other hardships are pushing many Christians in Africa to leave the church and return to the traditional veneration of ancestral spirits believing that ancestors can bring solutions to their problems.

## **6.2. Biblical theological teaching on the Spirit of God and the spiritual world**

The knowledge of the Spirit of God is very important in our Christian life. Without the Holy Spirit we are unable as Christians to serve God. It is necessary to understand the work of the Holy Spirit but first of all we have to know Him.

### **6.2.1. The Spirit of God is a divine person**

The Spirit of God is not a force, an impersonal Being, something abstract or a creature. Nobody can claim to possess the Holy Spirit or to use Him according to his human will, but the Holy Spirit can possess men.

The Holy Spirit is God Himself. He is the Creator. He is a divine person. We can deceive and blaspheme Him, resist Him, lie to Him, anger Him with our sinful acts and behaviour. These actions can be done to a person, not to an impersonal power. More than that the Spirit of God speaks, instructs, guides, knows and so on. All these activities and many others can be performed by a person only.

The Holy Spirit is a distinct person of the Trinity. He should not be confused with the Father and the Son. Bickersteth (1976:37) and Packer (1987:61) support this truth and the latter says that the Holy Spirit is set forth as the third person, linked with, yet distinct from the Father and the Son, just as the Father and the Son are distinct from each other.

### **6.2.2. Man is the image of God**

Man is created in the image of God. At the creation God, the Creator, breathed into man and man became a living being. He is a single entity, an animated body, a living person. Man has to be considered in his relation with God, not with his composition or parts. Body, soul and spirit are not simply parts of the human being, but the whole of man, seen from, different angles. Soul or spirit is therefore not something in or of man; man does not have a soul or a spirit, but man is soul and is spirit (Van der Walt, 2002:165).

The image of God in humans has to be sought in the relation to God. About this, Van Huyssteen (2006:131) mentions: “ Moreover, only in the light of our relationship to God can we understand the mystery of humanity, and like Irenaeus before him, Calvin wanted to interpret the image of God primarily in the light of Jesus Christ. In this sense, then, Calvin could describe the image of God as righteousness, knowledge, and holiness, a triad that clearly emphasises conformity to God, a conformity that restores what the first parents had lost (Cf. Shults 2003:227).” The image of God in man is not about the physical appearance or something material but it has to do with the spiritual. Van Huyssteen (2006:130) says that for Calvin the image was spiritual, and its primary seat was in the mind and the soul.

More than that, Van Huyssteen (2006:134-135) points out: “It is clear that Rad implied that the whole human person, rather than some specific quality or capacity of the person, was created in the image of God. In this holistic anthropology humans are called on to join God in imposing order on nature, a nature created in reference to humans, and thus to participate in God’s saving plan (Cf. Herzfeld 2002:22 ). In this sense the purpose of the image of God refers directly to the human being’s status as ‘Lord of the world’: God set the human in the world as sign of God’s

sovereign authority in order for the human to uphold and enforce God's claims as Lord (Cf. Rad 2001:146).” There is an indication that a human being receives the order from God to dominate over the creation of God, being in this sense the Lord on earth as the image of God.

### **6.2.3. The reality of the spiritual world**

The spiritual world is a reality. It should not be doubted because the existence and the activities of the spiritual beings are true facts in the Scriptures. Satan and evil spirits, angels, good and evil, do exist as creatures of God. The devils are corrupt and depraved in all their ways.

Angels, Satan included, and demons are spiritual and personal beings. They speak, experience joy, have knowledge, act in various ways. People can speak to them. Evil angels are opposed to the Creator God. They have a destructive activity of what God is doing, but the good angels constitute the army of God. They carry forth the work of God in many and various ways. Berkhof (2005:149) confirms that the good angels perennially praise God, fight His battles, and serve Him faithfully. They give glory to God and exalt Him in His splendour and honour.

### **6.3. African perspective on the spirits**

In Africa, the existence of the spirit world is accepted as a real fact. Everywhere in Africa, people speak of the spirits. There is a strong belief in the spirit world which has a great influence on the peoples. In many parts of Africa, the influence of the spirits are frequently spoken of.

Spirits are said to be the subjects of every event happening in life. Mashau (2007:639) mentions that “in the traditional African worldview suffering of every sort – illness, barrenness, drought and death – is normally explained in personal terms: ‘there is always somebody’. This somebody often belongs to the world of the occult: a spirit has brought pain to human beings and must therefore be repelled or accommodated.”

Ancestral spirits are highly considered by most African peoples. They think of them as still alive and around the living watching what they are doing in this world.

It should be noted that in Africa, people are living in continual fear of the influences and the attacks of ancestral spirits. Remarkably ancestral spirits are feared and also needed. They are considered as protectors and providers of health and various benefits to the living descendants when they are respectfully honoured. On the contrary, when they are treated without honour they bring misfortunes on the peoples. It is in this way that the ancestors can be viewed as the cause of sicknesses and even of death.

In the African traditional context, the spiritual world is composed of the Supreme Being or God, the numerous divinities and spirits. Ancestral spirits belong to this spiritual world. Africans consider them as being in communication with the living in different ways. This can be experienced through dreams, appearance among individuals of certain animals et cetera. During the period of pregnancy, ladies are said to be in communication with the ancestors when these need to return into the family. In this regard the new born child will bear the name of the ancestral spirit which appeared to the pregnant lady during the dreams.



When the child is not named after the ancestor, his spirit will harm the baby or one of the parents until the name is properly given to the newborn.

In African context man has a body and a spirit. Westerlund (2006:141) states that a person is regarded as both a physical and a spiritual being. According to Africans, at death, the spirit of man continues to live in the abode of the dead. It is believed that the abode of the dead is at a certain distance for some and around or beneath for other. This explains the ceremonial rites performed at the burying of the corpse when people put some objects to show that the spirit of the dead is making a journey to the world of the dead which is invisible and not precisely located.

The spiritual world is viewed with great importance among many Africans because it is from this world. African peoples expect different solutions to their many daily problems and various happenings in life.

#### **6.4. Christians in Africa, the Spirit of God and ancestral spirits**

The proclamation of the Gospel to Africans has had a tremendous impact on the lives of the people. Many customs practiced by Africans have positively changed. For instance, the Ibo people of West Africa had the habit of killing their twins born among them. Ilogu (1974:64-65) reports that all the Christians agreed with Perry, to save twins. This change became possible through the proclamation of the Word of God among the Ibo.

Although Christianity has an impact on the customs and cultures of the Africans, it should also be noted that some traditional beliefs and practices in Africa remain unchanged. There are customs which Africans

still practise even when they are Christians in the church. They can pray in the morning at the church service and go to venerate their ancestral spirits during the night. This is done because Africans believe in the influence of the ancestors, especially if one does not respect their demands. As the ancestral spirits are thought to be intermediaries between men and God, there is a necessity to accommodate them. It is observed among Christians in Africa that they revert to traditional beliefs and practices especially during the time of hardships like death, diseases of long duration, lack of children due to mysterious barrenness et cetera.

The recurrences of the beliefs in the ancestral spirits are maintained by the fear that African people have toward them. Ancestral spirits are thought to be active in the life of the living on earth. This situation is found even among Christians in Africa. It is the cause of a syncretistic life and practices in the African churches.

As the attacks of the spirits are always present in the minds of the peoples in Africa, even Christians, there is a tendency to look for a God who can make them free from these spirits. This explains why many Africans view the Spirit of God as a force or power-centred demonstration or just a strong force or power to help them live their faith. Many Christians in Africa believe that the Holy Spirit can severely fight evil spirits which are around them seeking to harm individuals in the community.

Africans have great respect toward their ancestral spirits. Even Christians in Africa do manifest a kind of respect to the living dead. It is believed among Africans that ancestors are intermediaries between God and man. In some cases prayers are addressed to God through the

ancestors, especially in the African independent churches. There are many other practices demonstrating that ancestral spirits are very important and also are greatly honoured.

### **6.5. Proposed biblical vision about ancestral spirits**

Through the Holy Spirit God is always active among his people. The Spirit of God was hovering on the waters at creation. He was also active in the processes of the birth of Jesus Christ and He is active in the church and the lives of the believers.

The ancestors are dead. They are believed to be active in the life of the living in Africa. They are feared and also approached to seek benefits from them. This vision is not accepted by the Bible. The Scriptures negate that attitude toward ancestral spirits.

God forbids the living to communicate with the spirits of the dead. God severely admonishes those who are involved in this sin. African Christians do not have the right to consult the spirits of ancestors or to venerate them.

It is not correct to attribute the work of the Spirit of God to ancestral spirits. Expecting something from these spirits is a great sin. The biblical teaching encourages us to rely only on God. In John 16:13 it says: "However when He , the Spirit of truth has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority but whatever He hears He will speak and He will tell you things to come." This verse shows that the Holy Spirit is the keeper and provider of the believers.

The fear of the influence of the ancestral spirits is not justified with regard to the teaching of the Word of God. God alone is to be feared and obeyed, not the spirits. It is an idolatrous attitude to fear the ancestral spirits instead of worshipping only God, the Creator, with total attachment. The honour to God must not be shared with other spiritual beings.

Ancestors are said to be protectors and benefactors to the living descendants. People believe that ancestral spirits are able to assist them in bringing good rain, fertility of the soil, abundant crops, granting excellent health et cetera. The Bible teaches us that God is the Creator (Gen. 1:1) of everything. God is always providing for his creatures. He sustains the entire creation.

Ancestors cannot be intermediaries between God and men. There is only one mediator, Jesus Christ, between God and all of humankind. Christ alone reconciles sinners with God. It is wrong to say that ancestors can bring us to God. God is not far so that we are worried how to reach Him. Jesus Christ is the unique way for man to enter the Kingdom of God. John 14:6 insists: "Jesus answered: 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'." This biblical teaching excludes the belief of Africans in the intermediary possibility of the ancestors between man and God.

It must be clear from the Bible that the spirits of the dead do not return to earth to become active among the living. The problem of sufferings and other hardships experienced by man must not be attributed to the ambivalent will of the ancestors. Sin has brought all these sufferings in their various facets to the world. The curse after the fall of man affects the whole creation of God.

## **6.6. Suggestions**

The evidence of strong beliefs in the ancestral spirits in Africa cannot be doubted. We observe and come to the conclusion that Africans highly consider their ancestors. They live in fear of the influence of the numerous spiritual beings and also of their ancestral spirits. They usually attribute to them their misfortunes and various advantages occurring in their lives. Doing this means not recognising the Lordship and the Sovereignty of the Triune God over the entire divine creation. God is the Creator and all that exists is from his hand (Psalm 19:1-2). Human beings, angels and other spiritual beings are God's creatures. They are submitted to the power of God. The Lord Jesus Christ clearly points out: "All the authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matt.:28:8). God is powerful, protects and provides for his children. And in his love God gives us Jesus Christ as our unique Saviour.

### **We suggest the following:**

- Christians may remember, consider and follow the way of living of their dead relatives while rejecting any form of adoration and glorification of the ancestors, which is only due to God the Creator. Christians in Africa must confess that it is only the Triune God who is worthy of adoration.
- The Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ should be taught unceasingly to African Christians in order to equip them with the saving word of God. It can take time and the Church of the Lord in Africa has to endorse this task. We can say with Mashau (2007:652) that "the saving Gospel of Christ should be proclaimed to these people (1

Cor. 1:22-23). True conversion and regeneration in Christ can set people free from their fear of demonic powers.” It is only through the proclamation of the Word of God that the forces of darkness can be conquered also among African peoples.

- It should be proclaimed with clarity that Jesus Christ is the unique Saviour and Lord of the Universe. Africans have to learn and master it that beside Jesus Christ there is no other name or being which can bring man to God and reconcile them with God. None of the ancestors is able to accomplish this goal. Jesus is the only way to God’s Kingdom. Quoting Bavinck (1960:132-133) Mashau (2007:123) mentions: “Christ takes the life of a people in his hands; he renews and re-establishes the distorted and deteriorated; he fills each thing, each word, and each practice with a new meaning and gives it a new direction.”
- Biblical and systematic teaching should be given to African Christians that only God is worth of a proper adoration. Nothing else beside the triune God has to be venerated, honoured and feared as source of our life and its advantages. Only God is able and perfect to provide in our total needs, physical and spiritual as well.
- As a divine person, the Spirit of God is at work in the world, in Africa and effectively in each believer in Christ in Africa. Africans should speak to Him and rely on his work among them, in the church and in their own lives.
- Stress must be put laid on the fact that God is seriously against the communication with the spirits of the dead, and also the ancestral spirits. It is an idolatrous attitude to give honour in the sense of veneration to ancestral spirits. God alone is worthy of our worship. The fear of ancestral spirits’ and other spirits’ influence and attacks cannot be justified for those who are in Christ. It should be made

clear that God's Spirit is active in the life of African people as He is doing the same elsewhere in the world. It is wrong to attribute to spirits, especially to ancestral spirits, what the Spirit of God is effectively doing among humans. The fact is that people may remember their ancestors but they are not right when they believe and hold that human life is sustained, and under the control of the ancestral spirits. These spirits do not decide the destiny of the living.

- We should carefully distinguish between a responsible form of inculturation of the gospel in the African context, on the one hand, and a dangerous accommodation of it, on the other hand. The first option seriously tries to concretise the gospel in the African context while the second does so at the cost of the essence of the gospel.





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