

J.A. van Rooy

THE WORD OF GOD
FOR
AFRICA

INSTITUTE FOR REFORMATIONAL STUDIES

THE WORD OF GOD FOR AFRICA

The traditional African world view and what the Bible says about it

J.A. van Rooy

A PERSONAL GREETING

This little book is not intended to be a learned theological treatise on "The African world view". It has been written by a simple African Christian for ordinary African Christians. Therefore, it was also not written in a very sophisticated English, but in the kind of English that people without a complete secondary education should easily understand – the type of English that should be relatively easy to translate into an African language. The author tried to take his example from the Bible to write in a plain, simple, straightforward style.

May the Spirit of the Living God use this booklet to bring His light to Africa.

- J.A. van Rooy, P.O. Box 536, Louis Trichardt 0920

SECTION I

The idea of limited good

There is, in some African languages, the proverb "To give is to hang up in order to take it down later on". Another proverb says "The benefactor gives benefits to a benefactor like him", by which we mean: "One good turn deserves another".

The idea of reciprocity is very strong in Africa.

What does the Bible say about this? Well, we read the following in Luke 6:35:

"No! Love your enemies and do good to them; lend and expect nothing back. You will then have a great reward, and you will be sons of the Most High God, for He is good to the ungrateful and the wicked."

The Bible therefore has a different idea about this. What is the root of this difference? It seems to me as if the answer is that in Africa *the idea of the limited good* is very prominent. By this we mean that there is a limited amount of cosmic good in the world. The only way to obtain more of this good in the form of life, power, prestige or wealth for oneself is to take it away from someone else. Unless one takes it away from someone else, it is impossible to obtain it.

Ritual murder

This belief is the idea that underlies ritual murder. It is a common practice in Africa, when a chief is installed, to kill a person and take, before he dies, parts of his body, for instance his lip and eye, and prepare medicine from these parts of his body in order to give it to the new chief to eat or drink. The idea is to increase the chief's power, prestige and wealth – in one word, his own life-force – by taking it from the life-force of the person who has been killed.

This, of course, is not what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches us that the only way to obtain power and blessing is by asking from God. In the case of a chief, like in the case of the young King Solomon, it means to ask wisdom from God to rule the people for the honour of God. It also means to be more concerned about the well-being of others. It means working for the people, judging according to just principles and being willing to take good advice and to be taught.

Zombies

Here is another example. It sometimes happens that a person is very industrious, and works hard in his fields and uses manure, cow dung and artificial manure, and weeds his fields in time, and because of his hard work God blesses him and he gets a good harvest, far more than his less

industrious neighbours. In that case, his neighbours will often be jealous of him and they won't believe that he received this blessing of the good harvest because of his hard work. They will say: he has Zombies working for him. Where did he get these blessings or these good things unless he took them from someone else? That is what people believe.

Now of course one would never hear this principle of the limited good defined or expressly mentioned in Africa. At least I have never heard of it. But the idea is there, nevertheless, and it is perceived by the way it works in the instances that I have mentioned. There is an interesting saying in Vendaleland. 'When the Shangaan people were removed from Venda to their own land there were one or two bad years which the Venda explained by the saying, "The Shangaans took the maize with them". Of course they didn't mean that the Shangaans took away all the seed; they meant that they took away the cosmic good, the productive power of the fields.

Reciprocity

Since people in Africa believe that there is a limited amount of cosmic good, they feel very strongly about stinginess. If a person is a miser, if he is stingy and does not share his possessions with other people, he is regarded as a bad man. He lives at the cost of other people's life force. It is suspected that he gets rich by taking the possessions of other people. He wants to be the only one who is rich. Soon this man will be suspected of every kind of evil. It may be possible that this man actually became rich through his own intelligence and hard work, but very often people will not realise that and they will say that "He is an evil man, he took it from other people". People often think that it would be better if all of us were poor rather than that some were poor and some rich.

This being the case, there is a very strong principle in Africa that every good thing that one gets from another man has to be returned in some way. If I accept a gift from someone and I do nothing in return, it means that I am taking more than my due share of this cosmic good. I might soon be suspected of being an undesirable character. In the case of very poor people, who have nothing to return, some Africans will take a small stick and put it into the basket and say, "We are still among the sticks". The stick is supposed to be a symbolic representation of the good that I return to the people who did good to me.

Gifts to chiefs

The same principle is involved in the case where gifts are given to chiefs. The idea is that the chief is the one who gives us fields to plough and pastures for our cattle or sheep. By way of returning this benefit, the subjects of the

chief will hoe his fields for him or weed his gardens – or beer is made and taken to him. When a cow is slaughtered, a part of that beast is taken to the chief and that is regarded as his due part.

Now there is nothing wrong in this. We even read in the Bible that our Lord Jesus told us to give to the King his due. We read in Matthew 22:21, " ... they brought him the coin, and he asked them, 'Whose face and whose name are these?' The emperor's, they answered. So Jesus said to them, 'Well then, pay the emperor what belongs to the emperor and pay God what belongs to God'". The same principles are found in Romans 13:5-7 and I Peter 2:17.

Lobola

The same principle is also involved in the case of the bride price (lobolo). To lobola means that two families establish a tie of kinship and friendship. The bride's family will give the bride to the bridegroom's family. The bride is a benefit. She is expected to bear children for the new family into which she is taken up. This means that something good has been taken from the bride's parents and therefore something else has to be returned in the place of it, and that is what lobola is. In return for the bride they receive cattle or nowadays money or something else. This is not a commercial transaction, although these days some people unfortunately seem to regard it in this way. Originally it was not intended to be a commercial transaction.

It is also common that in a case where this bride-price has not been paid, although the bride is staying with her husband, she does not really regard herself as legally his wife. As soon as quarrels start she will remind him that he has not paid the bride-price for her yet, and therefore does not really have any authority over her.

It is for the same reason that the clan or the family to which a child belongs depends on where the cattle are. If the cattle are still with the bridegroom's parents it means that nothing has yet been given in return for the bride and then legally she still belongs to the totem group of her parents and in that case the children also belong to the totem group of the bride's parents. As soon as the bride-price has been paid, it means that the children now belong to the totem group of the bridegroom's parents.

There are also bad things which happen because of this principle. For instance, in some countries in Africa, a woman can marry a woman as long as she looks around for a man to produce children from that wife of hers. This is quite wrong according to the Bible. Fortunately young women in Africa rebel against that kind of thing these days. They do not accept it any longer.

Penalties for wrongs

This principle of reciprocity is also the underlying idea in the case of penalties.

If a person wrongs another person or he wrongs the tribe as a whole, it means that he has decreased the life-force of the other people, for he has taken some of the cosmic good from them and therefore he has to pay it back. Penalty in African customary law means paying back what you have taken. This is a difference between African custom and European custom, and it seems that here African custom is superior to European custom and is much nearer to the biblical principle. The Europeans punish a person by sending him to jail for a few months or even for many years, but the person who has been wronged does not receive any compensation for what has been done to him. The biblical principle is illustrated in Exodus 22:1-14. Verse 1: "If a man steals a cow or a sheep and kills it or sells it, he must pay five cows for one cow and four sheep for one sheep. He must pay for what he stole". Verse 5: "If a man lets his animals graze in a field or a vineyard and they stray away and eat up the crops growing in another man's field, he must make good for the loss with the crops from his own field or vineyards". It is quite clear that the Bible also lays down the principle of compensation or restitution. This is a very important law because it follows closely on the Ten Commandments, just two chapters after it.

Witchcraft

Another example of how this belief in the principle of the limited cosmic good works, is the way witchcraft is believed to work. For example: when two wives of one man live together and the children of one are prosperous and healthy and do well in school, and those of the other wife are sickly and unfortunate in everything they do, the mother of the less fortunate children is likely to suspect her co-wife of witchcraft. She will reason in this way: "These children are the children of one father. Why are all my children weak while all the children of the other wife are strong? The only explanation can be that this wife is practicing witchcraft: she is taking away the life-force of my children to increase the life-force of her children. "She would even use the expression, "she is eating my children". This does not agree with what the Bible teaches us.

All this does not mean that the Bible is against everything that is taught by traditional African belief. There are many aspects of traditional African belief that are closer to the Bible than European belief. We have already mentioned a few examples. The Bible also teaches us that when we borrow something we must give it back. We read in Psalm 37:21: "The wicked man borrows and never pays back but the good man is generous with his gifts".

Stinginess and greed are also criticized very strongly in the Bible. Let us read what Colossians 3:5 says about this: "You must put to death, then, the

earthly desires at work in you, such as sexual immorality, indecency, lust, evil passions *and greed* (for greed is a form of idolatry)".
God does not want some of us to be rich whilst others stay poor and hungry. Therefore we also read in Proverbs 21:13: "If you refuse to listen to the cry of the poor, your own cry for help will not be heard".

God is the source of all good

But when the Bible starts speaking about the cosmic good it is very clear that it comes from God. This means that it cannot be obtained by taking it from someone else. Of course we do not refer to common theft; we are talking about cosmic good. This, one obtains for oneself by working. God told us in Genesis 3:19: "You will have to work hard and sweat to make the soil produce anything". He who fulfills this command of God, will find wealth and will obtain the good things of the world.

Let me give another example, from Ecclesiastes 3:13: "All of us should eat and drink and enjoy what we have worked for. It is God's gift". This means that we do not find life by taking it away from anyone else, we are given life by God. '

Because God is the source of all good, it also means that the cosmic good is not limited, because God is not limited. God is the source of unlimited wealth and life and power. His resources are inexhaustible, they can never be used up. There is always more than enough for everyone.

Who are the happy ones?

The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 3:22 and 23: "Paul, Apollos, this world, life and death, the present and the future – all these are yours, and you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God." So we need not take anything from anyone else, it has been given to us already by God Himself, who is the source, the never ending source of everything that is good. Therefore we need not be stingy any longer, no, we do good to others just as God has done good to us by giving us his Son and his Spirit, and is still doing good to us every moment. That is why Jesus Himself said in Luke 6:27 to 35, "But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who ill-treat you. If anyone hits you on one cheek, turn the other cheek to him too. Give to everyone who asks you for something, and when someone takes what is yours, do not ask for it back. Do for others just what you want them to do for you."

The apostle Paul says more or less the same in Acts 20:35: "I have shown you in all things that by working hard in this way we must help the weak, remembering the words that the Lord Jesus Himself said: "There is more happiness in giving than in receiving."

According to heathen beliefs the person who takes much good away from others is the one who is fortunate. According to the Bible, the more I give the more I have.

The source of life

Psalm 36:9: "You are the source of all life and because of your light we see the light".

Fear

One thing that we Africans fear, like all human beings, more than anything else, is death. Traditionally witchcraft was often regarded as the cause of death. A person often takes all his money and his last resources to a *sangoma* diviner or a witchdoctor, because he believes that he is being bewitched and he wants that witchdoctor to tell him who is bewitching him. In Africa the witch is feared like the devil himself. Sometimes the fear is so great that even people who call themselves Christians run to the ancestor spirits to ask help from them.

Can the dead give me life?

I remember the answer given by an old woman who had been attending catechism class, to a question I put to her. I asked her, "Mother, do you still believe in the ancestor spirits? Do you think that they can do anything for you?" Her answer was this: "How can they give me life when they are dead themselves?" This old woman by the grace of God had seen how foolish people are who look for life among the dead.

Another old woman called Alilali, a member of the Mphaphuli royal family, also found the Lord Jesus at an advanced age. She became such a convinced believer that on her last sickbed she summoned her granddaughter who could write and let her write down her last wishes. Those wishes were simple: <<Do not perform any pagan ceremonies at my burial or at my grave, and never bring any offerings to me, since I will be with Christ.>>

SECTION II

The source of life

Dead people cannot save us. They cannot give us life. The only one that can save us is the Living God, Creator of men, the Creator of life, the Father of Jesus Christ. We have already at the start of the lesson read in Psalm 36 that He is the source of life. Let me quote some more verses. In Deuteronomy 30:20 it is said: "Love the Lord your God, obey Him and be faithful to Him and then you and your descendants will live long in the land that He

promised to give your ancestors." And in Acts 17:25: "It is He Himself who gives life and breath and everything else to everyone".

So why do we still go to the dead? Do we not have the Living God? It is only people who do not know the Living God who still go to the ancestor spirits. The Bible tells us that they will become like those whom they trust. If they go to the dead they will become like the dead themselves. Psalm 115:8: "May all who made them and who trust in them become like the idols they have made".

In Deuteronomy 26:14 we read that any believing Israelite who brought the offering of the first fruits to the Lord, had to pray and witness that he had not given any part of his produce to the dead.

Threats to life

The most important threat to life, according to African belief, is witchcraft.

There are different kinds of witchcraft. The first kind is through bewitching a person by cursing him in anger. People are afraid of that kind of witchcraft, as one can see in the saying: "One does not speak a harsh word to a person who is ill". Anyone who knows God will not be afraid to be cursed in that way.

In 11 Samuel 16:6-13 we read about king David who was fleeing from his son Absalom. During his flight, when he was leaving Jerusalem, a man with the name of Shimei walked along throwing stones at him and cursing him. One of David's soldiers, Abishai, said to the king, "Your Majesty, why do you let this dead dog curse you? Let me go over there and knock off his head". But what did David answer? He said, "This is none of your business. If he curses me because the Lord told him to do so, who has the right to ask why he does it. ... the Lord told him to curse, so leave him alone and let him do it. Perhaps the Lord will notice my misery and give me some blessings to take the place of his curse". And David in fact was blessed by God and this Shimei was later killed by the son of David, king Solomon. If anyone curses us, the Lord teaches us in Matthew 5:44 that we have to bless him. The way to overcome this evil is not by cursing back but by blessing. And by blessing others, even our enemies, we become blessed by God.

Witchcraft carried by animals, and lightning

Many people in Africa believe that witchcraft can be carried by animals such as the striped mongoose, which enters the body of a person and causes him to be ill. People also believe that it is possible for people to use witchcraft in order to have an enemy or his house struck by lightning.

People often abuse that superstition and might even go about boasting that they were responsible when a house was struck by lightning.

This of course is nonsense. Lightning is a charge of electricity which is usually caused by water vapour in the air. It occurs just as frequently where there are no people who claim to be able to control lightning.

If anyone claims to be able to control lightning, we can tell him what the Lord teaches us in the book of Job (8:35): "And if you command the lightning to flash, will it come to you and say, 'At your service?'" and in Jeremiah (10:13): "At his command the waters above the sky roar; he brings clouds from the ends of the earth. He makes lightning flash in the rain and sends the wind from his storeroom".

Another kind of witchcraft is supposed to be *conveyed* by spirits. The person who wants to kill or harm another person performs certain rites and uses certain formulas in order to harm the other person. It seems as if quite a number of verses from the Bible have been written especially to strengthen us and give us courage not to be afraid of this kind of witchcraft. Let us read, for instance, Psalm 91:11-13: "God will put his angels in charge of you to protect you *wherever* you go. They will hold you up with their hands to keep you from hurting your feet on the stones. You Will trample down lions and snakes, fierce lions and poisonous snakes. God says: I will save those who love Me and protect those who know me as Lord".

We can also refer to Psalm 63:9 and 10: "Those who are trying to kill me will go down to the world of the dead. They will be killed in the battle and their bodies eaten by *wolves*", and the whole of Psalm 64: "I call in trouble, "God, save my life! Protect me from the plots of the wicked, from mobs of evil men. They sharpen their tongues like swords and aim cruel words like arrows. They are quick to spread their shameless lies; they destroy good men with cowardly slander. They encourage each other in their evil plots and they plan where to place their traps. 'No one can see them,' they say. They make evil plans and say, 'We have planned a perfect crime'. The heart and mind of man are a mystery. But God shoots his arrows at them, and suddenly they are wounded.

He will destroy them because of those words; all who see them will shake their heads. They will all be afraid; they will think about what God has done and tell about his deeds. All righteous people will rejoice because of what the Lord has done. They will find safety in him; all good people will praise him."

If after having read this you still fear, open the Bible at Psalm 17:8 and read it: "Protect me as you would your very eyes. Hide me in the shadow of your wings from the attacks of the wicked."

* * *

SECTION III

Life-force and power

1 John 5:12: "*Whoever* has the Son has this life. Whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life".

Ways of increasing one's life-force

Since people often fear death and witchcraft they look for means by which to strengthen or increase their life-force. There are different kinds of amulets which people trust in, believing that by these they will counteract the work of witchcraft. Some of those amulets are pieces of cloth or wood or metal. Many members of the ZCC regard their star badge as this kind of thing. I once took away one of those badges from one of the workers at our hospital and the next day he came to me and asked for it back. He said: "Please give it back to me, I didn't sleep at all last night. I'm very ill because you've taken away this protector of my body."

Another man told me that when he has that star, that badge, even ghosts and evil spirits are afraid to come near him.

"They close their eyes and their minds to the truth"

In Isaiah 44:14-18 we read the following words of the Lord: "He might cut down cedars to use or choose oak or cypress wood from the forest, or he might plant a laurel tree and wait for the rain to make it grow. A man uses part of a tree for fuel and part of it for making an idol. With one part he builds a fire to warm himself and bake bread. With the other part he makes a god and worships it. With some of the wood he makes a fire and roasts meat, eats it and is satisfied. He warms himself and says, 'How nice and warm, what a beautiful fire'. The rest of the wood he makes into an idol, and then he bows down and worships it. He prays to it and says, 'You are my god, save me'. Such people are too stupid to know what they are doing. They close their eyes and their minds to the truth."

These are the words of God.

What can give us life-force?

We find the answer to this question in Isaiah 12:2: "God is my Saviour, I will trust Him and not be afraid. The Lord gives me power and strength. He is my Saviour".

I think this is very clear. We can also read Jeremiah 17:5: "The Lord says 'I shall condemn the person who turns away from me and puts his trust in man, in the strength of mortal man'", and Psalm 9:10: "Those who know You, Lord, will trust You. You do not abandon anyone who comes to You".

Eternal life

If we are afraid of death, let us take our refuge in God. Amulets and badges are powerless to give me anything. They are powerless to protect me. Perhaps I might feel confident in my heart because I trust in them, for if anyone trusts in an object he imagines that that object gives him power. But these objects cannot really protect me against death or danger; their power is entirely imaginary. The real life, eternal life, indestructible life, we can find only in God our Lord. Let us read what Moses says in Deuteronomy 30:19-20: "I'm now giving you the choice between life and death, between God's blessing and God's curse, and I call heaven and earth to witness the choice you make: chaos or life! Love the Lord your God, obey Him and be faithful to Him and then you and your descendants will live long in the land that He promised to give your ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

Jesus Christ is our life

He who has Jesus Christ has indestructible life. In Proverbs 8:35 and 36 we read the following words: "The man who finds Me finds life and the Lord Will be pleased with him. The man who does not find Me hurts himself. Anyone who hates Me loves death." And in John 1:4: "The Word was the source of life and this life brought light to mankind". Also in the Gospel of John, chapter 17 verse 3, in the high priestly prayer of our Lord, we read these words: "And eternal life means knowing You ,the only true God, and knowing Jesus Christ whom You sent". John 5:26 goes on to say: "Just as the Father is Himself the source of life, in the same way He has made his Son to be the source of life".

We may inherit eternal life because Jesus died for us and gave us His life. Read the Gospel of John 10:10, 11, 15 and 17: "The thief comes only in order to steal, kill and destroy. I have come in order that you might have life - life in all its fullness. I'm the good Shepherd who is willing to die for his sheep. I know My sheep and they know me and I'm willing to die for them. The Father loves me because I'm willing to give up my life in order that I may receive it back again". This is why the Bible says, "He who has the Son has life. He who does not have the Son has not life" (I John 5:12).

The resurrection of Jesus and life and glory

Whoever believes in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour has received eternal life; glorious life, the life in the new world. We read in John 11:25: "I am the resurrection and the life".

In Romans 5:10 we read this: "We were God's enemies but He made us His friends through the death of His Son. Now that we are God's friends, how much more will we be saved by Christ's life?" This means that he who has

Jesus Christ has no need of amulets or badges of metal or wood any more for he has life. Anyone who does not have Christ will die and perish with his amulets and all.

We read in Amos 5:4 that "The Lord says to the people of Israel, 'Come to Me and you will live'".

And Jesus told Mary, the sister of Lazarus, in John 11:26: "Whoever lives and believes in me will never die".

The way to life

The way to find this eternal life is to return to God. He himself said through the prophet Ezekiel (18:32), "I do not want anyone to die" says the sovereign Lord. "Turn away from your sins and live". We can also read in Psalm 16:10: "Because you protect me from the power of death, and the one you love you will not abandon to the world of the dead".

To lose one's life to find it

Because Jesus has given us eternal life we now have a new law of life. Listen to these wonderful words from Luke 9:24 and 17:33: "Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it." Isn't this wonderful? We find eternal life by letting life go and looking for life only in Jesus. Those who try to increase their own life-force by taking it away from other people will not succeed in increasing their life. They will only succeed in losing their life. They may end in eternal death.

Let the child of God rejoice and say the words of Psalm 118:17: "I will not die, instead I will live and proclaim what the Lord has done".

* * *

SECTION IV

Doctors and diviners

Their medicines

There are herbs in nature which God has provided for us, which have healing qualities. The old people knew about them and many African doctors know about them and use them. Some of them have very strong healing properties. On the other hand, some of them can be dangerous, just as European medicine is sometimes dangerous if used indiscriminately and in too great quantities. Let us be thankful for what God has given us in nature. Medicines were a great help to people in times when there were no hospitals and trained doctors. Even nowadays it can still help people.

The lies of the diviners

Nevertheless, there are many diviners or doctors who deceive people. The problem is that many persons do not only want medicine, they also want to

know who causes the sickness. The diviners know that these people want to be told lies, so they go ahead and tell them lies. One of our mission helpers was visiting a friend who is a diviner and during his visit some people arrived who were looking for medicine. Before that diviner gave that medicine he first cast the divining bones and told them who the evil person was who was taking away their life-force- the witch. After that he gave them the medicine. They gave him a good sum of money for that. After they had left, this mission helper asked the witchdoctor why he told these people a lot of lies. The doctor answered: "Well, if I don't tell them lies, they are not satisfied. They pay me to tell them lies, so I tell them lies." I hope that you, my reader, aren't one of those foolish people who are prepared to waste their money by buying lies with it.

Killing people

Many children are killed because of the ignorance of these witch-doctors. I have seen hospitals full of children, wasted away, almost dead because of the treatment they have received from these witch-doctors. For instance, when a child has diarrhoea the cause of the diarrhoea is in his stomach. But when a child has diarrhoea for many days he becomes dehydrated. That means that his body loses a lot of water and that makes him lean and causes him to waste away. What is more, food and water do not remain in his stomach. Because he becomes dehydrated, there is not enough water in his system, his body therefore dries out and the fontanelle on top of his head falls in.

The trouble is not in the fontanelle or in the head of the child, the trouble is in the stomach, but because the witch-doctors are ignorant they think that the trouble is in the fontanelle. Therefore they make small cuts in the fontanelle and rub ashes and fat into it and say the child will be healed by this treatment. Well, it is possible that the child might live through the mercy of God and that God Himself without means of medicine cures this stomach through His divine Power. But this child will never be healed by these cuts in his head. I have seen many small children arriving at the hospital almost dead; some of them died after a few hours; some arrived at the hospital dead. Those who are saved are saved because they are given the right medicines at the hospital, and the doctors put needles in their veins to let the food drip directly into their veins to restore the water in the system.

The laws of witchcraft according to which witch-doctors operate

Witchcraft operates in different ways. In the first place, there is the fairly innocent type of treatment by giving a person medicine. Some of these medicines are good, some are harmless, some are bad and kill people.

In the second place there is treatment by witchcraft of the kind that we have described in Chapter 2.

In the third place there is the kind of witchcraft that could be called sympathetic magic or contagious magic.

In the case of *contagious magic*, something is taken that comes from the body of a person (like his hair or nails) or else something that has been in very close contact with that person for a long time. For instance: some clothing or a few hairs from the skin in which a child has been carried are taken and mixed with different kinds of medicine and this is burned together with other medicines with the idea that this might cure the person. Or, by treating these things in another way, it is thought possible to increase the life-force of that person. That is why people are very careful not to let pieces of their clothes or of the clothes of a child fall into the hands of other people, because they believe that this gives other people power over a person.

I remember the case of a woman who tried to kill her husband by cutting a piece from his trousers and taking it to a doctor. The doctor mixed it with some medicine and burned it and took this medicine and made cuts on the inside of the legs of the woman and rubbed the medicine into those cuts with the idea that by that her husband would be killed. This is *contagious magic*, because the trousers are almost part of the body of the husband, since they have been in long and close contact with the husband.

Another kind of magic we can call *imitative magic*. Imitative magic is a kind of magic that is supposed to work through imitation. One very interesting example of it is the Domba dance. Young Venda girls, before they are married, are supposed to undergo a certain kind of ritual for a few weeks or months. Almost naked they dance in a long row very close to each other. The row of girls imitates the movements of the python snake, because it is believed that the python is the symbol of fertility, of child-bearing. The python swallows other animals and therefore sometimes it is swollen up. In the same way they want these young girls to swell up in pregnancy, and they believe that if they imitate the movements of the python, they become associated with it and they will become fertile and have children.

Some of the amulets, especially wooden amulets that people use, are also imitative magic. An amulet that is supposed to cause other people harm may be made from a piece of wood taken from a protruding root in a footpath. The idea is that many people may have stumbled or struck their toes against this root and so a lot of magic has accumulated in that piece of root so that when a piece of wood is cut from that root it retains the property of being able to harm people.

In another case, when a witch-doctor wants to make a wooden amulet that has strong protective qualities that give people power, he might look for a place where there is a steep ascent on a mountain and then look for a branch which in the course of many years has been grasped by many people to help them ascend the mountain. It is believed that because this branch has helped many people to ascend the mountain, the properties of helpful power or beneficial power have accumulated in that branch, so that if a piece of wood is cut from that branch, it retains the power to help people and to give them power.

What does the Bible say?

The Bible teaches us that death as well as life comes from God. It teaches us that not a hair will fall from our heads if God does not want it to happen (read Matthew 10:29 and 30). If I do not want to stumble, I must look out where I step. If I walk carelessly without looking where I step and stumble, if I strike my toe against a stone, it is not because I have been bewitched, it is because I did not look where I walked. If you want to do well in the examination, it is no use getting amulets from witch-doctors. Work hard and see to it that you know your work. If you buy a new car it is no use going to a witch-doctor to get medicine in order to treat this car. You must treat the car well and see to it that it always has enough oil in the sump, that the tyre pressure is always right, and you must observe traffic rules. If you do not do this it is no use going to a witch-doctor to get medicine for it.

If you fall ill, use the medicine that God has provided for you and pray to Him. There are hospitals, and there are doctors who fear the Lord, who will do their best for you, believing that the Lord will help them when they treat you, when they give you medicine and even when they have to operate on you. Why do you still go to people who only tell you lies and take your money?

Spirit and body

We know that it often happens that people who go to witch-doctors are also healed. Sometimes they might be healed through the medicines which were given to them. Sometimes they are healed just because they trust in those doctors. It is well-known that the spirit has a strong power over the body. If my spirit tells me that I have been healed, my body will often believe it and react healed. The Bible also tells us that. Read in the Book of Proverbs 17:22: "Being cheerful keeps you healthy; it is slow death to be gloomy all the time"; and Proverbs 14:30: "Peace of mind makes the body healthy but jealousy is like a cancer". Proverbs 18:14 says that "Your will to live can

sustain you when you are sick, but if you lose it your last hope is gone". I advise you to memorise at least one of these verses.

Doctors tell us that almost half of all people who are ill and who come to them to be treated are not really ill in the body, they are ill in spirit. If those people who are not ill in the body but in the spirit believe that they are going to be healed, they usually are healed. If they have faith in the doctor, that doctor can heal them, even if he gives them salt water to drink, or gives them an injection of methylated spirits. On the other hand, if they do not believe in him, he can give them the best medicine and it won't help at all.

There is a very interesting example of this power that the mind has over the body. There is a certain tribe where the people believe that if a person dreams about seeing a snake, he is sure to die within two weeks. There was a missionary working among that tribe whose servant dreamed that he had seen a snake. When he came to work in the morning, he told the missionary that he was going to die within two weeks, because he had dreamt that he saw a snake. He already knew of several people who had had that dream and they all had died.

The missionary did not laugh at him. That would not have helped, but would only have served to break the communication between them. He knew that it wouldn't help a bit to tell the servant that it was superstition and nonsense. The man would only have said "Well this is a white man, he doesn't know our customs, he doesn't know about these things". What the missionary said was, "Well, I am very sorry to hear this. If you have to die, you may die, but remember, you still owe me two pounds and you are not allowed to die before you have paid me back those two pounds, and you wouldn't want to die with debts like this, would you? So I expect you to come and work these two weeks, and you must eat in order to obtain strength to work, and you must eat that food in my presence so that I can see to it that you are eating in order to obtain strength to pay for your debt". The missionary said that because he knew very well that the persons who had died after having dreamt about a snake, died because they just give up hope and stop eating after they had had that dream, so they did not die because of having dreamt about the snake; they died of starvation. That man who had had that dream was willing to come and work in order to pay off his debt. He came and worked although he felt very ill. He thought, "Well, I have to work to pay this debt of mine". He tried his best and he ate. After two weeks had passed and he was still working, the missionary came to him and said: "Now did you die?" And then the spell was broken. The man saw that it was superstition because he had experienced it. From then on the people from that tribe did not believe in that kind of superstition any longer.

One instance of this kind of belief-that is very strong among African peoples is the belief that if a woman has had a miscarriage and she has sexual relations with her husband before she has had a menstruation again, after a few months, the husband is sure to fall ill and die. Now, I don't blame people for believing this, as I think I know many sincere Christians who also believe this. Nevertheless, any doctor will be able to tell you that this is not the case. You can also go to a black medical doctor and he will tell you that this is not the case. If any one dies because of this, he dies because his mind tells his body that he is going to die, and he dies. I am sure that many people have died because of that.

A black friend of mine had the misfortune that his wife had a miscarriage. She went to the doctor and asked him when she could resume sexual relations with her husband. The doctor said, "Well, you can wait for a week". The man came to me to make sure if that was the case and I told him, "Yes, if the doctor said that you needn't be afraid". But a week later he came to me and said: "I am not feeling well, I am afraid that I have gone into dirt" – to use his expression. I told him: "Well, you may perhaps not feel well, and you may start feeling worse and you may even die, but if you die, you will die not because you are really ill, or because any poison has gone from the body of your wife into your body. You will die because you believe you are going to die". The next day and the day after that he came to me and he said that he was feeling well. His mind had stopped telling him that he was going to die. In this way we see that the mind has power over the body.

This is the way not only witch-doctors but also faith healers are able to heal people. They heal people whose minds have been telling their bodies that their bodies are sick and then when they are healed their minds stop telling their bodies that their bodies are sick. The mind starts believing that the body is whole and that person is healed, sometimes instantaneously. In that way witch-doctors and faith healers and even the sect called Christian Science can often heal people.

* * *

SECTION V

Ancestor spirits

It seems as if all over the world all people believe that although the body of a person dies, his spirit does not die in the same way as the body. There is still the knowledge that there is life after death. We get the belief in Africa that the spirit is the same as the shadow, therefore, many people believe that a dead body does not cast a shadow. People usually do not test these beliefs, they just believe them. Perhaps previously bodies were not exposed to the sun, they were covered in blankets or they were buried after dark so that they could not test this belief. If you want to test it, it is quite easy. Go to a

corpse and take a torch and shine it from one side of that body and you will see that on the other side of the corpse there is a shadow of a man and of a stone and of a tree, whether living or dead, is the same.

Ways of burial

Often when a person is buried, he is buried together with some utensils and perhaps some food to accompany him to the country where he is going. Often he is also buried in the skin of a cow or an ox which is supposed to be his clothing in the world of where the dead is going. This is also an indication that people believe that the spirit continues to exist. The same is the case when someone sees a dead person in a dream. The one who has dreamt will not believe that it is only a dream or that he has only thought about that person. He will be sure that that person himself or herself has come to him to communicate with him. Often when having dreamt about a person the person who had the dream will go to a witch-doctor or a diviner in order to find out what the dead person has been looking for.

Offerings

The belief is that the ancestor spirit has to be cared for by being given offerings. Sometimes when those offerings are made they are accompanied by prayers. Often the spirits are addressed by name one after the other. Some beer might be spilt on the ground or some blood of a fowl or an ox or a calf or a goat, and they will be told to eat their share of it so that the living can enjoy what is left.

When they bring these offerings and pray to the ancestor spirits there is often, among many tribes, no sign of love or trust. They do not bring it because they really care for the spirits, they bring it because they are afraid that if they do not do it, those spirits will take revenge on them by killing the children and cause the crops to wither and prevent them from getting good harvests. Therefore it is interesting to hear that sometimes when they pray they will say, Now we have given you your food, go away and leave us alone, do not trouble us". They believe that the spirits really need the offerings or our gifts.

The function of the spirits

I think most African people have some knowledge about this, because many things that happen are ascribed to the spirits. If a pregnancy is difficult, it is often ascribed to the spirits. If a person has a dream of a deceased person he will think that that spirit has visited him. Many names of persons refer to the ancestor spirits. The divining dice are supposed to be directed and caused to fall in the right way by the ancestor spirits of the diviner.

That is why African people who have not really committed themselves to the Lord are very afraid of these ancestor spirits. They do not yet know the Living God who controls everything. But even people who know about Him and believe that there is a God, do not really trust Him, they still believe that we have to bring offerings to the spirits.

They think that God the Creator does not really care for us. He is too great and too far and we are too small. He does not pay attention to us, whereas the spirits, being related to us, do pay attention to us. Therefore they prefer to bring offerings to the spirits and pray to the spirits rather than to the living God.

What does the Bible say about the ancestor spirits?

The Bible teaches us that only the Lord God created heaven and earth in the beginning. When He created it He did not go away and leave heaven and earth and the creatures to themselves. He is still looking after creation even today. He is still holding it in His hands. I suppose you have already heard that beautiful Negro spiritual: " He's got the whole world in His hands". He cares for us to such an extent that in the Gospel of Matthew we read the words of our Lord Jesus, (Matthew 10:29-31), "Even the hairs of your head have been counted." We also read in Isaiah 45:7: "I create both light and darkness, I bring both blessing and disaster, I the Lord, do all these things". All these things do not come from the ancestor spirits, they come from our Lord.

That is why He also says, in Exodus 20:3 in the first commandment, "I do not want you to have any other gods". He does not want us to have other gods because there are no other gods, He is the only God.

Isaiah 46:9: "Remember what happened long ago, acknowledge that I alone am God and there is no one else like Me".

Isaiah 45:21,22: "Come and present your case in court, let the defendants consult one another. Who predicted long ago what would happen? Was it not I, the Lord, the God who saves His people? There is no other God. Turn to me now and be saved, people all over the world. I am the only God there is".

Isaiah 44:6: "The Lord who rules and protects Israel, the Lord Almighty has this to say: 'I am the first, the last, the only God. There is no other God but Me'. If God is the only God, there cannot be any other God.

Do the ancestor spirits still know anything about us?

The ancestor spirits do not know anything about us. In Isaiah 63:16 we read these words (I would advise you to read it also from the Bible in your own language and to memorize it): "You are our Father. Our ancestors Abraham

and Jacob do not acknowledge us, but you Lord, are our Father, the one who has always rescued us". Let me read it to you from the NIV: "But You are our Father, though Abraham does not know us or Israel acknowledge us, you oh Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is Your name".

Isn't this clear? The Bible itself says that people who have died do not know us any longer. They do not acknowledge us any longer. They are somewhere else. They are either in heaven with God or in hell with the devil if they have died outside of Christ. The only one who knows us, our only Redeemer, our only Saviour is the Lord our God.

Let us read what the Bible tells us in Ecclesiastes 9:10: "Work hard at whatever you do because there will be no action, no thought, no knowledge, no wisdom in the world of the dead and that is where you are going". So the dead people won't have anything to do with us. They are not even allowed to come and tell us anything.

In Luke 16:19 and the following verses we read about the rich man in hell who asked Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brothers. Abraham answered: "It's impossible. They have the Bible, let them listen to the Bible. If they don't want to listen to the Bible they won't listen even if someone from the dead comes to them".

We are safe with Jesus

What is important is this: Let us repent while we are still on earth, because when we leave earth it is not possible to be saved any longer if *we* had not been saved before we died. If we die without Christ, our relations on earth cannot do anything any longer to alleviate our suffering.

In Hebrews 4:1 we read the following words: "Now God has offered us the promise that we may receive that rest he spoke about. Let us take care then that none of you will be found to have failed to receive that promised rest."

In Hebrews 9:27 we read: Everyone must die once, and after that be judged by God". You can also read the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, especially Luke 16:26-31. If a person has died outside Christ, *it is no use* bringing offerings for him. Those offerings do not reach him. They won't be able to alleviate his thirst in the flames of hell.

But there is something very comforting. If we die in Christ *we do not need* any people to bring offerings to us or to pray for us. If we are with Jesus our Saviour we have part in all His glory and in all his riches. What do we still need from earth since we have everything, since we are eating the tree of Life? The apostle Paul said that to him life is Christ and death is gain. He even longed to die and to be with Christ. (Philippians 1:21 ,23).

The Bible speaks about offerings to the dead ancestors. **Deuteronomy 26:14c**

We shouldn't think that we neglect our ancestors if we do not bring offerings to them. We do not neglect them, we just hand them over to the Living God. I still remember the letter that an old woman in our hospital asked one of her grandchildren to write when she saw that her time to die was near. Her name was Alilali. She called her grandchild who could write and asked her to write down her message for her children and grandchildren. Now I quote from that letter: "My sisters, here is my message: No one of you should deny these words that I am telling to Mubva. When I die you mustn't go to a diviner to try to find out who killed me. You mustn't slaughter a goat for me as offering. You must never bring offerings to me. If you bring offerings to me I might be chased away from heaven. I will also never come back in another person to take possession of that person. I am a child of God, I have been taken by God. No one must feel sorry for me and that includes you my sisters and you my grandchildren. These are my words. Alilali".

Who could still doubt that this old woman had been saved by God?

The offerings that God wants from us are not to spill a little beer or water onto the ground and then think that we have completed our duty. The offerings that God expects from us are to devote our whole life to Him; to surrender our heart, our power, our mind and our thoughts to Him (read 2 Timothy 4:6, Mark 12:29,30; Romans 12:1; Proverbs 23:26a).

God has the right to expect that from us, because He has given us His only Son, Jesus, to die for us on the cross in order to make payment for our sins. If we still think we need the ancestor spirits, that means that Jesus is not a sufficient mediator for us and it means that His death is not a sufficient sacrifice for us.

* * *

SECTION VI

What is spirit possession?

Spirit possession occurs all over Africa. The belief is that ancestor spirits often desire to return and to live again in the body and the spirit of one of their offspring. This usually happens long after the death of a person. It is very seldom that a father or a grandfather or a mother or a grandmother is said to return. It is usually three or more generations back. What is believed to happen is this: the spirit comes and enters the body and spirit of one of the living people and this person then is supposed to die temporarily, and his or her personality is supplanted by the personality of the deceased ancestor.

How it starts

Cases of spirit possession usually start when the one who is believed to be possessed becomes ill or feels weak and without energy. That person is always tired. After a time a diviner is consulted and the diviner will say that this is a case where one of the ancestors desires to take possession of this person. The ancestor is returning and the ancestor wants to dance. It sometimes happens after a person has touched beads belonging to one of the ancestors or has touched or eaten an exceptionally large baobab fruit or another kind of fruit. Without knowing it the person is supposed to have touched a fruit that is associated with a particular ancestor.

The treatment

The treatment starts by taking that person to one who is supposed to have one of the ancestor spirits, and that person calls all his or her associates together. They then start dancing, making noise and singing and that person is told to dance together with them. While the person is dancing she is taken and shaken rudely in order to wear her out. She will be kept dancing for hours and for days on end until finally she is totally exhausted and becomes dizzy and even faints. This person who wants the spirit to enter is told that she will feel like one dying and that when she feels like dying the spirit will enter her and the spirit will live in her and speak through her. This person will also be ill-treated in many ways, she won't be allowed to wipe her nose or to spit, the moisture will just be left to run down to her mouth. Further she will be given evil-smelling plants and other things to smell. They find these materials by cutting the leaves of certain trees. Sometimes the leaves are put against the nose of that person until the person who is treating her sees that she is fed up with waiting and she really desires that the spirit will enter now. Then – let us call this person "the doctor" for short – then this "doctor" tells the patient that it seems as if there are two spirits fighting to enter. The "doctor" will tell the parents of the patient that this problem still has to be solved. She will say: The divining dice have told us that one wants to come in but another followed and is now trying to get in first. The patient will then be told to choose which spirit she wants to enter.

The patient is taught

Now we shall describe what is taught among many people. Particulars differ from people to people, although the main idea is the same. On the day when the "doctor" decides that the time has come for the spirit to enter, she takes the patient aside and tells her, "Today is the day when the spirit will enter. It will happen tonight. When it happens you must start dancing with all your power until you are quite dizzy and then suddenly you must run into the house and you must groan three times and say, 'Hee hee hee!' and then

you must fall down and become stiff like a person that is dead. That is when the spirit comes into you. If you do that you will be healed from this illness of yours. Otherwise you will stay ill. You will also start speaking Shona." (In the case of a Venda person. In the case of Shangaan it is Zulu and in the case of Zulu it is often Sotho, but it must be another language. But let us listen how it happens in Venda.) "You must start speaking Shona only from that moment. I will teach you that Shona when you fall and you start waking up again and you start speaking you must not speak your own language, speak only Shona and say: 'Ndimi Madzane', which means: 'I am Madzane'" – or any other name that the "doctor" chooses. "If you want water you must say: 'Ndi no tswanga Mvura'. Do not say anything else, say only that. I shall later teach you some more Shona. But if you tell anyone about this, that you do not know this language by yourself, that we have taught you this, be sure that you will die, because you have brought out our secret". She will also say, "Even I myself has never told anyone, because I know that the day that I do so, on that day I will die."

Then when it happens that night, this "doctor" and her associates start dancing the whole day. The patient will do exactly as she was told to do. She will dance till she is quite dizzy until finally she does as she has been told and falls down in the hut and becomes stiff. Then the "doctor" will come, together with associates, and they will cover her with a blanket. Then they will start ululating (that means making trilling sounds with their tongues {isiZulu <ukukikiza>}) in a joyful way and say, "Today the ancestor spirit has come". When they have said that they go to her, wake her up and then all the family will come and ask her, "Who are you?" And she will say, "I am Madzane", but speaking in Shona. Then they will be very glad and the old men and women will dance and they will say, "Oh yes, we know Madzane, some of us knew her when we were still very young, she was a very old woman, or we knew him, he was a very old man. We are glad to see him again". And then that person will say: "Ndi no tswanga mvura". And the old people will be glad and give her water to drink. She will then immediately be lent some of the clothes of the other person who danced and she will be allowed to dance together with them. That will last for some days until they go home. When they stop dancing they sneeze. They say that by sneezing the spirit leaves them for a time and they become their old selves. There are certain plants which they sniff to cause them to sneeze and to cause the spirit to go home and to leave them for a time.

Afterwards that person is called "Mudzimi": or "Lilombe" or whatever the term for an ancestor spirit in that particular language is.

Just a remark: Those people never know any more about the new language that they are supposed to be able to speak than what they have been taught or

what they have picked up in the course of time. It is not true that they suddenly are able to speak a new language. If those dancers are gathered, even those who have been speaking the new language for a long time, and a Shona who really knows Shona comes along and he starts speaking with them, they run away because they cannot answer him. The same applies to people from other places.

What does the Bible say about this?

In the first place, I want to say this myself: It may be possible that sometimes those people are really possessed by spirits, but it is not ancestor spirits. We have already seen what the Bible says about people who die. They do not stay on earth and they cannot return to earth. The Bible is very clear on that. They either go to the Lord or they go to hell. There is no other place, and that happens immediately at death. So the Bible is clear on this point that spirits of people who die do not return after many years to take possession of living people. On the other hand we know that there are many spirits in the air. The Bible speaks about "the powers" and the Bible shows us many instances where evil spirits took possession of living people. Now there is no reason why this should not be possible even today. If anyone opens his mind and heart to an evil spirit, the devil is not so stupid as not to try to use that opportunity and send one of his evil angels to take possession of that person, and that might be the reason why some of those persons are able to know things that happen far from them even if they have not seen it. It might be the devil that informs them. Of course devils do not know the future. Only God knows the future, because He controls the future. But the devil does not know what that is, so possessed people won't be able to tell the future. If they do, it is just a lucky guess.

But the Bible is also clear (in the second place) that whatever communication there is with spirits, whether it is just deception or whether there is anything real in it, people who believe in God are not allowed to take part in those practices. I read from Deuteronomy 18:9: When you come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you, don't follow the disgusting practices of the nations that are there. Don't sacrifice your children in the fires on their altars; and don't let your people practise divination or look for omens or use spells or charms, and don't let them consult the spirits of the dead. The LORD your God hates people who do those disgusting things, and that is why He is driving those nations out of the land as you advance. Be completely faithful to the LORD."

Now here it is quite clear that to have anything to do with ancestor spirits, not only to worship them, but also to try to consult them or to be possessed by

them; is to be unfaithful to the Lord. We can also read from Isaiah 8:19-22. There, the Lord condemns that practice. I will read this one:

“When men tell you to consult mediums and spirits, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn. Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God. Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness.”

I think this is quite clear. We know of one person in the Bible who went to consult spirits. He went to a medium who had more or less the same function as these people who are possessed by spirits. Who was that? It was king Saul. And he did that on the day before his death and after he had seen that the Lord had cast him away. What does this teach us about persons who consult mediums?

* * *

SECTION VII

Divining dice

What the Bible says

We have already read in the previous chapters, especially in Deuteronomy 18:10,11, that these practices are forbidden by the Bible. God has given us our great prophet, our Lord Jesus Christ, and everything that we really need to know about life and death, we know from Him. We know that He Himself is life, and that to be without Him is death, and that the future is in his hands. We do not need to know more about it than the Bible tells us.

There are many people who believe in the powers of diviners, people who use divining dice in order to reveal secrets to other people. We can be brief about this. I have already said in the chapter under "Spirit Possession" that it might be possible for evil spirits to take possession of mediums and reveal to them secret things which ordinary people do not know. That is possible, but the Bible is clear that it is a sin, that it is against the will of God. It is not possible to have communion with God, to belong to Jesus Christ, and also to have communion with evil spirits. In the second Epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 6 verse 14, we read these words of the apostle Paul. He says, "Do not try to work together as equals with unbelievers, for it cannot be done. How can right and wrong be partners? How can light and darkness live together? How can Christ and the devil agree? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? For we are the temple of the living God!" And then in chapter 7:1: "So then, let us purify ourselves from everything that makes body or soul unclean, and let us be completely holy

by living in awe of God". Also in I Corinthians 10:20 Paul says, "I do not want you to be partners with demons. You cannot drink from the Lord's cup and also from the cup of demons; you cannot eat at the Lord's table and also at the table of demons. Or do we want to make the Lord jealous? Do we think that we are stronger than He?"

Diviners deceive people

Although it is possible that diviners might know secrets which they have learned from demons, that is not always the case. Usually it is not the case. I have spoken to more than one person who was trained by real diviners, by real witch-doctors, to be a diviner himself. Those persons became Christians afterwards, and because they realized that they could not be diviners or take part in those practices, they left it. All of them are very clear on the point that most of it is deception; they deceive people. And they do it with the co-operation of the people. People come to consult the doctor and they usually come in a group. They are usually not allowed into the presence of the diviner immediately, they are first left to sit somewhere in his yard and in that time if anyone watches them it can usually be quite clear which one of them is the person whom they suspect of witchcraft. Even if the doctor does not do it himself, if he sends one to listen closely to what they say and do, it might even be possible to deduce not only *whom* they suspect but of *what* they suspect him and *why*. Also how they are related to each other. There are other ways in which the doctor can get information from them. The most important way and the surest way is to let them tell him without knowing it when finally he starts throwing the dice. He does it in their presence and he starts speaking to the dice. He will speak the whole day and the people are supposed to react. They will say: "Siyavuma!" ("We agree!"). "Siyavuma! Siyavuma!" As long as he speaks they say: "Siyavuma!"

Now when he speaks and he says something with which they agree, they say it with a little more emphasis: "Siyavuma!!!" But when they do not agree with it they just say it in such a way that it is quite clear that they do not agree with what he says, so they just say: "Siyavuma", very softly. In that way, if he speaks long enough, he can hear what the case is, what the trouble is, which person is suspected, why that person is suspected. He can get a lot of information.

After he has spoken to the dice for a long time, all the time having listening to what they say and how they react, he will say, "Now I am going to tell you exactly what happened", and then he throws the dice and tells them what *they* have been telling *him* all the time, and they are very pleased. They think that he has supernatural gifts by which he is able to know what they wanted to know. And of course he usually tells them what they want to know, so

they agree with him. If they are too clever for him and do not react as he expects them to react he will just tell them the dice refuse to speak today, or he will tell them what he wants to tell them, or he will say, "There is no witch involved in this, it is an ancestor spirit who wants to be given offerings," or something of that kind. It might have been possible to give many more examples of that, but unfortunately this rather differs from people to people.

The technical terms are not the same among different peoples but the general principles are the same, and anyone who has really been trained as a diviner, isangoma, sankoma or whatever, will be able to tell you that most of it is deception or fraud.

* * *

SECTION VIII

Interpersonal relationships

Christians or modern learned people think that people who still hold to the traditional beliefs are always wrong and that *they* are always right. That is not the case. There are many good things which God revealed to people before they ever had contact with His revelation in Jesus Christ or with the Bible. We read these interesting words in Romans 2:14,15: "The Gentiles do not have the Law; but whenever they do by instinct what the Law commands, they are their own law, even though they do not have the Law. Their conduct shows that what the Law commands is written in their hearts. Their consciences also show that this is true, since their thoughts sometimes accuse them and sometimes defend them". This shows that God has revealed much of His will in the consciences and in the hearts of pagan people. Of course, the devil is trying his best to wipe out what God has written in their hearts, but he hasn't always completely succeeded. We see this also in Africa.

I am not a black African, I am a white man, but I have seen many things, many customs in which the people of Africa are superior to white people, and I think it is necessary to say that too and to know what it is.

I have learned a lot from African people, especially in the field of interpersonal relationships. This is a very important field to African people.

Customs of white people

It is interesting that many black people call white people "makgowa", that means people who are quarrelsome, people who do not have respect for other people. I think that is because white people are more accustomed to saying exactly what they think, more so than black people. If they think that someone has done wrong, they say, "You have done wrong", and they do not even always say it in a nice way. Some even are proud of the way they

say it. They usually do not hide anything, they speak out. And even if they bring out all secrets or say anything, they do not seem to think that that is wrong or not desirable. They say, "As long as it is true we say it". They even do that when it causes embarrassment or displeasure to other people. They are also unafraid of quarrelling with other people or not being at peace with other people because they do not fear being bewitched or killed by magical means. If a person hates a white man and that white man knows that he is innocent, he will just forget about it. It seems as if the hate does not do anything to him and does not worry him.

If he is a Christian he might go, not because he is afraid of what that man may do to him, but because as a Christian he wants to live in peace with his neighbours and for that reason he might go to the person who hates him and try to make peace; but he won't do it because he is afraid of that man.

The African approach to interpersonal relationships

In Africa this is one of the most important principles of life. It is expressed in the proverb that is found all over Africa: "Umuntu ngumuntu ngomunye", that means a person cannot live by himself or for himself. The same idea is expressed in the English proverb, "No man is an island". A person who lives by himself is usually believed to be a very abnormal person. Joy and peace are only enjoyed when a person is with other people and fits into his proper place in the community among other people. African people seem, to prefer to say, "This is *our* house" or "*our* ox" or "*our* property, rather than, "This is *my* property," "It is *my* field," or, "This is *my* ox."

Personal relationships

Because personal relationships are so important in Africa the ideal man is regarded as a man who can get along well with other people, who is not fond of quarrelling; who can compromise; who does not think too much of himself; who does not try to compete with other people and try to be better than they; or to have more than they; who does not try to collect for himself more wealth than other people have; who, even if he is clever, does not show that he is clever; who does not talk too much. It sometimes goes so far that things which, when said in a European context would sound like insults, in Africa are regarded as compliments. If one says, "This person has not got plans, he isn't clever, he is a calf," that means he is a desirable kind of person, the kind of person one would like to have as a son-in-law.

If in Africa one sees that speaking the truth would cause trouble or set people against each other or even cause hatred in general, it is regarded as better to keep quiet or even to tell a lie. If in such circumstances I do tell a lie, I

would not feel that I have done wrong, because I did it for the sake of good personal relationships.

If I realise that a person has been telling me a lie, I would not tell him to his face, "You are lying!" It is very rude to speak that way. The correct way to act is to pretend to believe what he says and just keep quiet (as long as I know in my heart that he lied).

In Africa it is more important to respect persons than to speak the truth. So if a person asks me for a lift and I do not want to give him a lift, or it isn't convenient for me or it is not possible for me to give him a lift, I wouldn't say, "I cannot give you a lift", I would say, "Well, I shall give you a lift another day". Or if my father-in-law asks me for a goat or a sheep and I do not want to give it to him, I wouldn't tell him that I don't want to give it to him, I would say, "That is in order father, I am still looking for it". And if after some time he asks me about it again, I shall tell him again that I'm still looking for it. He will realise that I don't want to give it to him. That won't worry him so much because I haven't shown disrespect by telling him that I don't want to give it to him. I have respected him and told him that I am looking for it. If I had told him that I didn't want to do it that would have been very wrong.

Another difference that falls in this field, is that white people are not reluctant to do anything on their own and to make decisions on their own. Even important decisions are sometimes made quickly by one person. In traditional African society this would be impossible. Everything has to be decided together with other people. The whole family has to be consulted. It would be impossible to try to marry a wife without first consulting the husband's family and the wife's family. Even a chief is not allowed to make decisions on his own without first consulting the council or at least the elders.

Sharing and attitudes towards property (stinginess and jealousy, etc.)

There is a very interesting proverb which says, "Children of one man share even the head of a locust". That expresses the idea that stinginess is a great evil. To refuse to share what one has with other people, is regarded as a very undesirable characteristic. Even if a man is rich because he has worked hard he will still be expected to share everything that he has with his less fortunate relatives. And if he does not do it, he will be regarded as an evil man, even a witch or someone who has zombies working for him. People will be jealous of him.

Among the white people this is not so much the case. Whites are usually more stingy than blacks. Traditionally they think that one's property is one's own

property and no one has the right to ask one to share it with him. That is often regarded by Africans as being stingy, and I think that in this respect the African way of looking at things is more biblical and Christian than the European way. On the other hand, while Africans are often very jealous of a man who has riches and property, Europeans usually are not jealous of him, as long as he got it by honest means, by his own cleverness and hard work and not by taking it from other people in a dishonest way. But what he has he will usually not share with other people unless he has been born again and has come to see things the way the Bible teaches us.

This kind of jealousy is a great drawback in the way of progress, because people do not realise that the reason why they do not have more is often that they did not work as hard as the prosperous ones. Therefore they are sometimes jealous of people who do have it, for they suspect them of evil things – even of being witches.

Unjust judgment

Sometimes this high regard for interpersonal relationships can go so far as to influence judges in court to give a wrong verdict. In a book about African Law, Dr. Van Warmelo wrote: "If two people go to court, one a rich and influential man, and the other one a poor man, the court is sometimes likely to take the side of the rich man even if he is in reality wrong, because if they do take the side of the poor man, the rich man might be offended and move to another place or because he has great power to start making trouble for them, thereby disturbing the peace among people. Therefore they would argue that it is better to give the rich man what he wants than to give a fair verdict. The poor man won't be able to make trouble because he doesn't have the means to make trouble." Fortunately this isn't always the case, as there are also people who have a sense of justice which is stronger than the sense of peace among people. They are wise because in the long run real peace can only be the result of justice, and that is what the Bible also teaches us. In Psalm 72 we are told about the reign in the Kingdom of Christ and there we read, "He will rule over your people with justice and govern the oppressed with righteousness" and in verse 4, "May the king judge the poor fairly; may he help the needy and defeat their oppressors . This is very different from what we sometimes find in Africa.

We read the same in vs. 12-14, "He rescues the poor who call to him, and those who are needy and neglected. He has pity on the weak and poor; he saves the lives of those in need. He rescues them from oppression and violence; their lives are precious to him".

Pretending to be willing to do something

This fear of causing trouble often causes people to say: yes when they really mean: no. If an important person or a senior person tells me to do something in Africa, even if I do not want to do it, I am expected to say yes and then simply not do it. If I'm asked about it tomorrow I shall try to find a reason for not doing it. This is not right according to the Bible. It is simply not being dependable. Therefore, we hear the words of the Bible in 2 Timothy 3:3 where this kind of attitude is criticised by Paul and he says about the people of the last days, among a list of other vices, they will not be dependable. Also in Romans 1:31 we read these words " ... they have no conscience; they do not keep their promises and they show no kindness or pity for others". Our Lord Himself, in the book of Matthew (5:37) said, "Just say 'Yes' or 'No'", meaning that, if you say "yes" mean "yes" and if you say "no" mean "no". Anything else you say comes from the evil one.

This custom of pretending to be willing to do something and then not really doing it, is a great drawback in the spreading of the Gospel in Africa, because when the messengers of God come to people and tell them the message about Jesus Christ, they pretend to believe and when the messengers have left they go on as before. They say that we have honoured God because we have just believed with our lips and they do not realise that in doing that they despise God and work out their own ruin. One cannot tell lies to God. He sees right into our hearts.

The good aspects of the African world view

Although we have to criticize what is wrong in the African world view, just as we have to criticize what is wrong in the European world view, there are also many beautiful things in it. Let us thank God that He wrote his Law also in the hearts of the African people.

If we read 1 Corinthians 12 we shall see that the African view of things is sometimes quite near to the biblical view; often nearer than the view of the European. As far as the unity of mankind and relations between persons is concerned, white people can still learn a lot from Africa. The Bible teaches us that all Christians should be one. They are members of one body, the body of Jesus Christ. In the body of Christ, for those who belong to Jesus Christ, it is indeed the case that a man is a man by another man". In the Christian view it is indeed true that the children of one man share even the head of a locust.

Covering up sin

Something that kills a church is the custom of covering up sin and wrong. We find in many African churches the very prevalent custom of covering up

sins, sins of ministers, sins of elders, sins of members. People see it and they speak about it behind the back of the person, but they never speak to him about it and they never tell the church about it. This is like a septic sore that poisons the whole body of Christ.

In Matthew 10:28 we read that we have to fear God more than humans. If I see sin in church, I shouldn't cover it up, but I must bring it out. I must speak to the sinner and show him where he does wrong and if he doesn't want to stop it I must tell it to the church council. That we also learn in Matthew 18:17: "If your brother sins against you, go to him and show him his fault. But do it privately, just between yourselves. If he listens to you, you have won your brother back. If he will not listen to you, take one or two other persons with you, so that every accusation may be upheld by the testimony of two or more witnesses, as the Scripture says. And if he will not listen to them, then tell the whole thing to the church. Finally, if he will not listen to the church, treat him as though he were a pagan or a tax collector".

If this is done the body will be healthy and will not die. It is not a good thing to kill the church.

Things that we are to discard

There are certain habits which the Bible says we have to discard since we are new men in Christ. These include telling lies and jealousy. We read this in Colossians 3:9 and Galatians 5:21. The Bible even says that anyone who does not discard these things will not see the Kingdom of God. We must not learn the stinginess of the white people from them, because in Colossians 3:5 we read that stinginess or greed is a form of idolatry. Let us keep the good things that God has given to Africa, such as respect for other people. Let us Christians be even more respectful towards each other than the old Africans. Would you think it is a good thing if a Christian is less respectful to another man than a heathen? But nevertheless we must speak the truth, although we must not speak it rudely, we must speak it in love. We must hate all lies, since we know that the father of lies is ther devil himself. Then we shall be children of God.

* * * * *