

CHAPTER FIVE

The Holy Spirit and the African spirit world

1 THE SPIRIT WORLD IN TRADITIONAL THOUGHT

1.1 Theism, holism and the spirit world

We have seen that an understanding of African theism is necessary because it is fundamental to our comprehension of the role of ancestors and spirits in traditional religions. Fundamentally, the supreme being is unpredictable and unknowable; and sometimes he is downright dangerous! For this reason the traditional person turns to someone nearer home, someone more easily related to, more easily understandable, someone one can argue with, plead one's case with, and even scold. And so the African turns to the ancestors, and sometimes to nature spirits. McVeigh (1974:148) says:

A God who is so inscrutable is best left on the periphery of life. It is better to focus one's attention on such entities as the ancestors who, while also retaining characteristics of undependability and inscrutability, are nevertheless more understanding and understandable than the Supreme Being.

Thus, there is a direct relationship between the theism and the spirit world of traditional Africa. For the most part God is unknown, and no relationship exists with him. The ancestors, however, are known; and the strong community and family relationships are unaffected by death. Accordingly the veneration of ancestors has become what Bosch (1975:24) calls the 'main artery of African religion'. An inadequate theism results in the development of the spirit world.

But this is not the only connection, nor the ultimate solution for the traditional African. The shades tend to be unreliable, malignant, unpredictable and fickle. They often demand more than man is wont to give, or else they do not make their desires clearly known. Willoughby (1928:82) recounts how a Zulu headman reproached the ancestors 'for always coming in the form of sickness, instead of asking properly for what they want and knowing that they will get it'. Sometimes adversity will suddenly strike a family, and they will need to know *which* particular ancestor or other person caused that adversity, and why. The answers to these perplexing questions are paramount, since without them the adversity will not go away. The family needs to know what it must do to appease the offended ancestor, or to counteract the malicious workings of a sorcerer. As we have seen in the previous chapter, this is when they will turn to the specialist diviners for solutions to these and other vexing questions.

We have seen that traditionally, the spirit world pervades the whole of life. The same essential reality permeates everywhere and is experienced rather than verbalised. All things are saturated with religious meaning. Because there is no distinction between sacred and secular, physical and spiritual - everything is at the same time 'sacred' and 'spiritual'. This 'everything' is all-embracing, including people, events, nature, work - in fact, all facets of the African's life. As Mbiti (1969:3) has observed, Christianity will fail to be meaningful in an African context unless it fully occupies the whole person at least as much as traditional religions do: 'The whole environment and the whole time must be occupied by religious meaning, so that at any moment and at any place, a person feels secure enough to act in a meaningful and religious consciousness'. Mbiti (1969:5) continues by describing African traditional religions as earthly and anthropocentric, 'pragmatic and utilitarian rather than spiritual or mystical'. Reacting to this description, Shorter (1973:53) objects that this constitutes an 'indictment of African traditional religion', and says that these statements 'are based on the assumption that sacred and secular can and must be separated and opposed. The reverse is true True religion has to be centred on the needs and interests of mankind, otherwise it is irrelevant'.

1.2 Nature spirits

In discussing the African spirit world we need to consider the nature and function of 'nature spirits' and their relationship to ancestors. In the first place, it seems that nature spirits do not play a prominent part in the lives of the black peoples of Southern Africa. In prominent anthropological works such as Krige (1943 & 1950) on the Lovedu and the Zulu, Schapera (1953) on the Tswana,

Mönning (1967) on the Pedi and Hunter (1979) on the Pondo, virtually no mention is made of nature spirits. Here the spirit world consists almost exclusively of ancestors. In other parts of Africa, however, nature spirits are abundant.

The spiritual world of African peoples is very densely populated with spiritual beings, spirits and the living-dead.

(Mbiti 1969:75)

Spirits, according to African belief, are ubiquitous; there is no area of the earth, no object or creature, which has not a spirit of its own or which cannot be inhabited by a spirit.

(Idowu 1973:174)

Willoughby (1932:1-118) gives a long treatise of the different 'nature spirits' he identifies among the Bantu: spirits that dwell in water, sacred stones, caves, hills, springs, trees, groves, forests, and many others. He makes the very interesting point that these practices which 'look like trappings of nature-worship will be found upon clear examination to be time-worn rites of approach to the mighty dead' (1932:1). Willoughby thus sees 'nature spirits' as being ancestors who were buried in or near that particular natural phenomenon, and who with the passing of time had 'degenerated' to being identified with that phenomenon.

This theory has received fairly general acceptance. Mbiti (1969:78) is cautious in his description of the nature of spirits: 'they defy description ... the spirits are the "common" spiritual beings beneath the status of divinities, and above the status of men. They are the "common populace" of spiritual beings'. As far as their origin is concerned, Mbiti (1969:79) supports Willoughby's theory: 'Most people ... seem to believe that the spirits are what remains of human beings when they die physically ... the ultimate status of men'. Idowu (1973:174-175) also describes spirits in a way that supports the theory that 'nature spirits' were once human. In any case, all of these spirits are endowed with 'personal' characteristics. 'Impersonal' nature forces do not exist in traditional Africa.

Dancel (1971:91-140) has identified three main categories of spirits among the Shona of Zimbabwe: the *midzimu* (ancestors), the *mashavi* (alien spirits) and the *ngozi* (avenging spirits). All three categories are spirits of the dead; although some *mashavi* are types of 'nature spirits'. They too, however, are personalised spirits. Mönning (1967:52) speaks of the 'power which is situated

in natural objects' and says that to the Pedi 'all of nature is, in some sense, soul-invested', but he does not amplify nor illustrate this statement at all. Andersson (1958:23) refers to the *nkisi* cult among the Kongo which 'has its origin mainly in nature worship', but that 'many original nature gods and nature demons now seem to be deities which originated in ancestor worship'. Once again, to Western thinking the whole issue seems to be a somewhat confusing, unresolved contradiction. When we remember, however, the essential spiritual oneness of all things, including inanimate natural phenomena and people who have died (ancestors), the dilemma no longer exists.

Another type of spirit that must be mentioned are the anthropomorphous spirits, often visible to people, which are ogre-like little creatures, often with strong sexual connotations. They too are associated with natural phenomena. The best-known in Southern Africa is *Thokoloshe* or *Hili*. The origin of these spirits is not speculated on; they are simply believed to exist.

The general feeling is that nature spirits have lost much of their 'vital force'. As Mbiti (1969:79) points out, 'the spirit mode of existence means the withering of the individual, so that his personality evaporates, his name disappears and he becomes less and not more of a person: a thing, a spirit and not a man any more'. Mbiti does not need to be interpreted as saying that these spirits are 'impersonal'. In anthropocentric terms, a man 'withers' to an ancestor, and finally to an anonymous spirit, or nature spirit. Nevertheless, these spirits are very much a part of the traditional world. A person has projected the spirits into one's natural surroundings in order to feel more comfortable oneself; if this is where one is ultimately to be, then it had better be a world with which one is familiar. Most spirits are therefore localised (Mbiti 1969:80). Although weaker in terms of their 'life-force', they are socially elevated as they are older than people, and must therefore be respected. The main difference between these nature spirits and ancestors in practical terms seems to be that they do not appear as often to people. When they do (apart from in folk tales) they may bring adversity or even possess people.

1.3 Evil spirits

One of the functions of a diviner is to determine the identity of and exorcise 'evil spirits'. These spirits in the traditional understanding could include nature spirits, spirits under the control of malicious sorcerers, and spirits which come from outside a person's particular tribe or lineage. Ancestors in traditional Africa (in stark contrast to the view of the Spirit-type churches) are never referred to, nor considered, 'evil' spirits - as their very existence depends on the

continued respect of their relatives. Daneel (1971:134), in his discussion on *ngozi* (avenging) spirits among the Southern Shona says 'the avenging spirit is never a member of the afflicted person's patrilineage'. *Ngozi* spirits, however, may be construed as 'evil' spirits for they are 'the most formidable, dangerous, and therefore also the most feared ... but this does not imply moral wickedness'. The avenging spirit is 'of an aggrieved person that comes back after his death to demand justice and retribution for the unrepaired wrongs that were done to him during life' (1971:133). The avenging spirit can also be exorcised by the diviner (Daneel 1971:139). We must note in passing that 'exorcism' by diviners in no respects approximates the exorcism of demon spirits by the Spirit-type churches.

Spirits similar to the avenging spirits described by Daneel are also identified by Mönig (1967:87) among the Pedi as *malopo*. Willoughby (1932:110) makes the categorical statement 'All Bantu evil spirits are human ghosts'; and he also speaks of the 'discarnate tribesman' who 'comes back armed with spirit-power to right wrongs that the wrongdoers refused to redress while he lived' - probably a reference to avenging spirits. Mbiti (1969:82) speaks of 'spirit possession' which usually has 'bad effects'; and that 'exorcism is one of the major functions of the traditional doctors and diviners'. Neither Mbiti nor Idowu have much to say about anything approximating avenging spirits in traditional religions. Idowu (1973:177), however, makes the statement that 'persons, animals, or birds are believed to be instruments of possession by spirits of all descriptions - good or bad, vengeful and helpful'. One gets the impression that some African theologians have downplayed the importance of the spirit world in African traditional life out of deference to the Western rationalistic world to whom such descriptions would be 'unscientific'. We have seen that one of the weaknesses of African theology, and particularly that theology propounded by Africans with a Western theological background, is the lack of attention given to pneumatology.

In summary, we may say that the African traditional world is pervaded by spirit beings which may be described and identified in various ways. Many of these spirit beings are feared; and the traditional African goes to the diviner to seek protection from them on many occasions. There seems to be no doubt that there is a close connection in perception between the ancestors and all types of spirit; some investigators see all spirits as being of the same genus and species! They are all, at any rate, 'personal' spirits with individual identity and characteristics.. They often 'possess' people, which in traditional thought is not always a bad thing. Spirit mediums, for example, are possessed by spirits in order to convey significant messages to people; this possession is a treasured feature and not a threat. But at other times people are possessed by spirits in

such a way that they desire to be free from the troublesome consequences. These spirits must be exorcised. A Christianity which fails to speak into this existential spirit world of Africa, and which fails to provide solutions to the problems inherent there, does so at its peril.

2 THE ANCESTOR CULT

2.1 The importance of the ancestor cult

It is not the purpose of this study to give a detailed exposition of the nature and purpose of ancestors, on which subject much has been written. But for the purposes of comparison and contrast with the concept of the Holy Spirit in African Spirit-type churches, it is necessary to understand how the traditional mind conceives of ancestors. Incidentally, the term 'ancestor' is used in preference to 'shades' (Berglund, West) or 'living-dead' (Mbiti, Setiloane), simply because it remains the more generally used term, even if an inaccurate one! I have avoided the use of the term 'ancestral spirit' because Africans do not usually speak of the ancestors as 'spirits'.

The ancestor cult is without question the most prominent aspect of African traditional religions, the heart of the African spirit world. Contrary to what some researchers have said, this is not a belief which today is dying out. Daneel (1971:96) has illustrated how among the Southern Shona over 70% of those interviewed 'believed the ancestors to have protective powers over their living descendants'. In fact, the ancestor cult 'still plays an important part in the lives of most Africans who are converted to Christianity' (Daneel 1985:94). In Zimbabwe, indications are that the ancestor cult is now more openly practised since independence in 1980, and as a result of the consequent Africanisation. Pauw's (1975:140-141) research among the Xhosa supports Daneel's findings. Those interviewed were from historic mission churches; and fully 88,9% of those in *urban* churches (90,9% of those in rural churches) believed in the possibility of being affected by the ancestors. In an interview with a Black theologian with a 'mission church' background, I discovered that he felt that it was 'impossible' for any African to sever all connections with the ancestor cult; to do so would mean to be cut off from the community. We must expect, therefore, that pneumatology in Africa that does not seriously consider the objective reality of ancestors, and which fails to provide an answer to the problems inherent in that reality, will be an irrelevant pneumatology.

2.2 Manifestations of ancestors

It is generally agreed that ancestors usually manifest themselves through dreams, and also through sicknesses or other misfortunes. African people, unlike most Westerners, take dreams very seriously. Not all dreams are believed to have been sent by the ancestors. 'Dreams sent by the ancestral spirits can always be recognised, for they mostly come with a message from the dead' (Krige 1950:287). This is an important distinction; for the traditional African usually recognises a message from the ancestors by means of a visible manifestation of the dead man in one's dream. Many dreams are experienced which are not thus interpreted. But 'coherent and consequent dreams, especially those in which some dead relative or friend figures ... are taken as real revelations from the spirit-world' (Willoughby 1928:94). Thus Hunter (1979:235) says that the ancestors reveal themselves in dreams to their descendants 'appearing as they were when they were alive'. Daneel (1971:99) explains that this phenomenon is 'experienced as a real encounter between the dream-soul of the sleeper and the spirit'. It seems that it is only when the meaning of a recurring dream is unclear that recourse is made to the diviner for interpretation. When an ancestor appears in a dream, the meaning is usually clear enough. Incidentally, the Xhosa use different words to exemplify the close connection between the ancestors and dreams. The word for 'ancestor', *ithongo* is the same as that for 'dream'. 'Sleep' is *ubuthongo*. A living person who is very old may also be referred to as *ithongo*; traditional Africa does not make a clear distinction between the living and the dead (Hunter 1979:231). The Zulu frequently refer to their aged by the term *idlozi*, also their word for ancestor (Berglund 1976:89).

Ancestors are limited in that their influence is mainly restricted to their kinspeople of the same lineage. Usually in African societies these will be their patrilineal descendants; although sometimes an 'ancestor' can even be a younger relative who has predeceased one - hence the inadequacy of the term. The ancestors visit their kinsmen from time to time by means of various signs which are interpreted by the living family. Berglund (1976:197) discusses manifestations of ancestors in some detail, the most common being a great number of different sicknesses, and delay in conception. Various unfortunate and fortunate occurrences will be ascribed respectively to the ancestors' displeasure or their favour. Their main benevolent function is that of protection. If they are neglected, however - for their main need is to be remembered - then 'they are capable of unleashing destructive powers on one or several members of the family concerned' (Daneel 1971:95). In this respect we see the ancestors as the causative agents of both good and evil. It would seem that they are regarded merely as *agents*, the ultimate cause being the supreme

being. Having protective powers, the exercise of these powers results in good, the withholding of them in evil. Furthermore, the direct actions of the living kinsmen, particularly in ritual acts of remembrance or the neglect of such acts, has direct bearing on the conduct of the ancestors. Among the Pedi, 'there are no restrictions to either the chastisement or the blessings that they can confer on their descendants ... nothing is impossible for the ancestor spirits' (Mönnig 1967:54).

2.3 The 'veneration' of ancestors

For the purposes of this study, it is important that we note how the character of ancestors is conceived of in traditional thought. Perhaps it is appropriate to say that they are conceived of as 'elevated people'. This is evident in that most Bantu languages place them in the first noun-class, the personal class. The supreme being, on the other hand (such as *Modimo* in the Sotho languages) falls into the third noun-class, which is also the class of natural objects (Mönnig 1967:54). Furthermore, although ancestors are approached with the respect that is due them as the older and wiser ones of society, it is doubtful whether this approach may be construed as the same as that to be given to God. In other words, such terms as 'ancestor worship' or even 'ancestor veneration' are really inaccurate. Of course, the ancestors are known to be 'dead'; and therefore they are not the same as living people. They are generally believed to be less fortunate than the living; and because of their limitations they are believed to have been compensated by having more power than the living. African peoples, however, who 'pray' to ancestors also 'pray' to living people. The point is that ancestors are conceived of as quite distinct from the supreme being; although they are thought of as nearer to God than living people are. Mbiti (1969:9) is quite emphatic that 'Africans themselves know very well that they are not "worshipping" the departed members of their family. It is almost blasphemous, therefore, to describe these acts of family relationships as "worship"'.

Contact with ancestors on the part of the living is usually made through sacrifices. Berglund (1976:214) prefers the term 'ritual killing', possibly to absolve the practice from biblical associations. Ritual killings occur when the ancestors are believed to be hungry; for essentially, a ritual killing is to participate in a communal meal with the ancestors. Traditional Africans must continually see to it that the ancestors are fed. Thus, apart from ritual killings, beer is poured out for them and food left in the pot. They are 'people' after all; and people need food and drink!

Traditionally, the ancestors are thought of as unpredictable and capricious. For this reason, Mbiti (1969:84) shows how the ancestor cult is performed as 'paradoxically acts of hospitality and welcome, and yet of informing the living-dead to move away'. There seems little doubt that although the ancestors are seen as being primarily for the preservation and continuity of the family, there is also a sense in which they are a threat, and therefore to be feared. No-one can ever be sure what they are going to do or not do next.

The 'humanness' of the ancestors is seen in the way in which they are addressed. Krige (1950:289) speaks of two classes of ritual killing among the Zulu: the *ukubonga* or thanksgiving, and the *ukuthetha* or 'scolding', when the ancestors are reproached because they have not protected the family properly. Berglund (1976:198) has pointed out, however, that Zulus do not 'scold' their ancestors - the word for 'scold' would be *ukuthethisa*: 'Zulu have been most emphatic that this cannot be done. "Who are we to scold our seniors?"' There would appear to be a difference of opinion on the matter. When I spoke to some Zulu friends about this, they seemed to think that traditional people do indeed *ukuthethisa* their ancestors. Nevertheless, these terms do imply that there is an intimate personal relationship between the living and the departed in traditional African society. A suppliant may make suggestions to the ancestors of acceptable alternatives to the course being followed, and respectfully request a change in attitude. The language is always that of polite everyday speech, the address of a person to his senior.

Mönnig (1967:60) uses the term 'ancestor worship'; and yet he observes that the manner in which the Pedi approach the ancestors is 'the normal attitude of conversation between equals, a man to man way of speaking. There is also no hesitation in upbraiding the ancestors and telling them what their duties are'. Daneel (1971:179) also points out the difference in approach made in Shona traditional religion to the ancestors and to the supreme being, *Mwari*.

Indicative of the difference of approach is the 'scolding' of the ancestors and ordinary banter which is permitted in the address of these spirits, compared to the more resigned mood of the officiating priests and priestesses when they speak to *Mwari* at the cult cave.

Berglund (1976:198) states quite categorically, 'There is in Zulu society no worship of the shades, if by worship we understand a veneration of them'.

2.4 Ancestor 'possession'

Some observations need to be made regarding the 'possession' of people by the ancestors. Willoughby (1928:104) states that 'ancestor spirits are thought to enter into individuals occasionally and use them as mediums of communication with men'. Daneel (1971:100) speaks of how Shona ancestors communicate with the living by selecting a medium (*svikiro*) from among their living descendants. Mbiti (1969:81-82) says that 'spirit possession occurs in one form or another in practically every African society'. He points out, however, that such possessions generally 'result in bad effects', and that the spirit needs to be exorcised by diviners. Mostert (1986:86) distinguishes between what he calls 'normal' communication with ancestors, and those ancestor visitations which are 'malevolent and disturbing to the normal disposition. It is these "disturbing" visitations only which I would call "possession"'

There are, however, in traditional African society 'specialist' spirit mediums who are diviners. The suggestion that these have been replaced in the African independent churches by the prophets will be measured by a comparison between them. A description of spirit possession in the traditional sense will enable us to evaluate manifestations of the 'Holy Spirit' in the Spirit-type churches.

Several observers note that women are more susceptible to spirit possession than are men. Taylor (1963:157) observes that the manner of communication between the living and the dead in Africa 'is more subtle yet simpler and, in a sense, cleaner than the crude occultism of Western necromancy. Europe, not Africa, has materialised its 'ghosts' and called up its dead in visible form'. When speaking of 'spirit mediums' in Africa we must try to divorce them from the gypsies and strange old ladies of Western spiritism! There do not appear to be any records of the visible appearance of 'ghosts' in traditional Africa; and when these have occurred, they seem to be always as a result of contact with European ideas - such as the *dipoko* in Sotho languages, a derivation from the *spook* of Afrikaans folk-lore (Mönnig 1967:55).

Spirit mediums in Africa are 'possessed' by ancestors in order to communicate with the living. Various things happen which show that a medium is 'possessed'. Mbiti (1969:172) gives examples from various parts of Africa. Quite often the medium goes into a type of trance, while people around her are singing boisterously. The onset of this trance is accompanied by trembling, after which the medium begins to speak in the 'voice' of the ancestor. (I was present in a Venda village in 1976 when a spirit medium spoke in a Shona dialect, that of the ancestors of the Venda). This speaking may go on for some

time, during which the medium is usually addressed by another diviner. After the trance is over the medium returns to normal. The people enquiring of the diviner are thereafter to carry out the instructions of the ancestor as interpreted by the diviner. In West Africa spirit possession is induced by dancing, after which the trance involves trembling, rolling of the eyes, falling down in a fit, and is often accompanied by supernatural feats. In all these cases described it would seem that, as Mbiti (1969:176) observes, 'the individual loses temporarily the control or exercise of his personality, and depicts or mirrors the influence or semi-personality of the spirit or divinity in him'. Spirit possession thus in traditional thought means that a spirit temporarily enters into somebody (usually a woman) and displaces her ability to control herself while she is being possessed.

Among the Shona, as with many other African peoples, the desire of an ancestor to possess someone is usually signalled by a lengthy illness. The onset of possession is heralded by shaking and grunting noises during dancing and the beating of drums. Once again, 'the medium's personality is temporarily suspended and he or she is the *sekuni*, or whichever spirit is being represented' (Daneel 1971:100). The family may then discuss their problems with the possessed medium; for they are actually talking with the ancestors (1971:119). Daneel (1971:132) also describes possession by alien (*shavi*) spirits, evidenced during a ritual dance. Whilst the medium dances, the *shavi* spirit responds to a particular rhythm or tune and takes possession of her. Depending on what type of spirit has entered her, she may jump around or climb trees like a baboon, fall down and move on the ground like a reptile, and so on. The possession is again temporary. *Ngozi* (avenging) spirits, on the other hand, manifest their possession in a more permanent form, particularly causing mental disorder (1971:136). Manifestations of possession by a divining spirit in a diviner are indicated 'through grunts, snorts, hissing sounds, monosyllabic cries, writhing of the body or high-pitched monologues' (1971:149). Manifestations vary considerably from one diviner to the other; some are far more sober.

There are parallels to all this among the Zulu. A Zulu person possessed by ancestors is expected to become a diviner, for spirit possession is linked to divination. At first, the person will demonstrate all sorts of strange behaviour, will tend to be anti-social, and will be subject to constant dreaming and prolonged illness. The eventual possession is evidenced by frequent yawning and sneezing, by shaking, quivering and convulsions, by belching and hiccuping, and even by singing the songs of the spirits (Krige 1950:303; Berglund 1976:137). The 'coming out' of a novice diviner (the initiation) is accompanied by frenzied dancing, jumping, singing and hand-clapping, and much beer-

drinking (Berglund 1976:162). This corresponds very closely to the initiation described by Hunter (1979:325) among the Pondo. Berglund (1976:127) uses the term 'brooding' for possession by ancestors - this is in fact an accurate translation of the Zulu *ukufukamela*, which is used to describe spirit possession.

It is very important that Christians doing pneumatology in Africa acknowledge the importance of the ancestor cult, and that not only in the so-called 'traditional' areas. The ancestors are real in Africa; and they form the heart throb of the African spirit world. This is not a superstition that can be ignored or removed by education, as was the former attitude of Westerners. In their relationships with the ancestors African people experience very real problems. Perplexing dreams, the withholding of protective powers (particularly a concern when a traditionalist becomes a Christian), the unpredictability and possible spite of the ancestors (and the feelings of threat that this brings), and the often devastating effects of spirit possession - all these and many more problems plague a person's everyday existence. These are issues that the Christian church in its mission has often overlooked. How should Christianity in Africa respond to the existential needs which the ancestor cult purports to meet? Are the Spirit-type churches leading the way in a truly African and Christian response? We will now turn to these and other related questions.

3 ANCESTOR BELIEFS IN INDEPENDENT CHURCHES

3.1 Misunderstanding the Holy Spirit?

Perhaps the most serious and devastating accusation levelled against the Spirit-type churches is that which infers that the traditional concept of ancestor spirit has simply been transferred to the 'Holy Spirit'. Oosthuizen spent most of a whole chapter entitled 'The Misunderstanding of the Biblical Meaning of the Holy Spirit in the Independent Movements' on this theme. In his view this was 'the most difficult theological problem in Africa, namely, the confusion that exists with regard to the ancestral spirits and the Holy Spirit' (1968:120). To support this Oosthuizen quotes from Pauw (1960:207) who in turn, referring to Sundkler's *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, says that for the Zulu 'traditional beliefs about possession by an ancestral spirit ... have been transferred to the idea of being filled with the Holy Spirit as found in some churches'.

Sundkler's work, however, was actually more cautious in this regard. He observes that Zulu Zionists are careful to point out the discontinuity between their practices and those associated with the ancestors (1961:247). In one place

only Sundkler (1961:250) speaks of the role of the 'Angel', who 'not only brings a message from the ancestral spirit; the Angel *is* the spirit, the ancestral spirit'. We shall see that Sundkler's position was somewhat ambiguous, and was in any case considerably modified by his later writings. But I do not think that *Bantu Prophets* gives any concrete indication that would support Oosthuizen's thesis that the Holy Spirit is identified with, or has taken the place of, the ancestors. Oosthuizen (1968:122) assumes that Sundkler's research proves the 'definite line in the independent movements between the 'Holy Spirit' and the ancestors'. Later, he is even more explicit: 'The functions of the ancestor 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' (1968:129).

Oosthuizen was doing the Spirit-type churches a grave injustice, albeit unwittingly, with these and other similar statements. His later empirical research, however, shows more sensitivity, although he finds a strongly sympathetic approach to the ancestor cult among independent churches in the greater Durban area. Beyerhaus (1969:74-75) castigates the Spirit-type churches with statements like these:

A careful analysis (given by the Rev. Makathini) makes it possible to trace the main concepts of the nativistic movements directly back to the African traditional anthropology. The *moya* [spirit] concept is wound up with the *isithunzi* [shade] and *amandla* [power] idea which underlies all traditional ancestral contacts ... the way of receiving the Holy Spirit resembles the old *idlozi* [ancestor] possession or is its direct continuation ... in this way the whole concept of God is distorted. As Jesus Christ is no more the centre, the 'spirit' is no more his Spirit, but simply an *amandla* manifestation with spiritistic implications (parentheses in original; brackets added for clarification).

The problem with this type of interpretation basically seems to be that the African world view and its application to Christian pneumatology has been grossly misunderstood. It is by no means as 'cut and dried' as Beyerhaus has made out; and I am as anxious as he is to identify sound biblical pneumatology in Africa!

We shall see that the Spirit-type churches by and large have confronted the ancestors, and that their concept of the Holy Spirit, far from accommodating the ancestors, is directly opposed to them. As Daneel (1987:261-262) points out:

This orientation to the traditional world-view could create the impression that the prophet's motive is to preserve the old mentality. That this is not the case is evident from the fact that the spirit is branded a demon and its claims on the patient - especially if these involve ancestor worship - are rejected and the spirit is exorcized. Here the Holy Spirit and the ancestral spirit are usually diametrically opposed, and it is a matter of confrontation rather than identification ... we are dealing with a Christian Spirit-inspired confrontation that reaches into the traditional world-view at a far more existential level than was possible for the historic churches with their Western theological norms and doctrinal purity.

These words remind us that missionaries often have tried to look into the African world through Western-hued spectacles. The images appear to be distorted; and so what is not understood is relegated to a mysterious African traditional spirit world that is considered 'demonic'. Western theology has by and large not satisfied the African yearning to be protected from the evil forces that are existentially felt. The 'gospel' has been impoverished because the Spirit of God has not been allowed to fill the void left after the message has rejected the ancestors. Thus, injustice has been done to the Spirit-type churches who have attempted to provide a solution to this emptiness, by criticising their methods because they do not fit into Western theological categories.

3.2 Tolerance and ambivalence

One cannot make generalisations when it comes to the beliefs and attitudes of the Spirit-type churches with regard to ancestors. The weight of evidence, in Southern Africa at least, would point to the fact that for many of these churches contact with the ancestors is rejected. The 'ancestors', they believe, are not ancestors at all, but demon spirits which need to be confronted and cast out. Some churches, however, display a far more tolerant and ambivalent attitude. Thus Pauw (1975:302) noted that 'ancestor beliefs and rituals are definitely openly and officially recognized and sanctioned in some Zionist groups'. One of the South African independent church leaders, Archbishop Mhlope of the Christian National Apostolic Church in Zion, said: 'Whoever forsakes his ancestors is also forsaken by his ancestors and he becomes an easy prey to diseases and to all his other enemies' (Institute for Contextual Theology 1985:17-18). Elsewhere, the same document (1985:24) says 'the customary

way of commemorating and making contact with the spirits of our ancestors is a family affair, not a religious service ... in most cases our leaders do encourage the commemoration of our ancestors in our homes'. One wonders whether this distinction between family and religion does not betray the influence of Western dualism. West (1975:29) noted a similar attitude among some of the churches in Soweto that he surveyed: 'the question of the shades' was 'a personal matter for individuals, and of no importance to the church'. This, in fact, is often the view of African theologians. Other churches however, believed that the ancestors actually assisted the church (1975:37). Several of the prophet-healers interviewed by West admitted that their power came from God through the ancestors (1975:117). Makhubu (1988:60) says that 'most of the African Independent Churches honour and respect ancestors. This is something that is deeply rooted in African people'. The Zulu Nazarite leader Shembe has also 'given a place to the ancestral spirits in his system of theology ... In his church, the dead are entitled to veneration, and commemoration services are held in their honour ...' (Vilakazi 1986:76). Nussbaum (1985:58) found among independent churches in Lesotho that 'the ancestral spirits and the Holy Spirit were not necessarily opposed to one another'.

Among the Southern Shona independent churches Daneel (1974:114) found the Ethiopian-type churches more accommodating to the ancestor cult than the Spirit-type churches, who largely confronted it. West found the opposite to be true in Soweto, where the Ethiopian-type churches confronted the ancestor cult, whilst the Zionist-type churches seemed to accommodate it (1975:181). Pöllitzer (1984:124) found that the Oruano Movement in Namibia (which he describes as an Ethiopian-type church) 'allows its members ancestor veneration without reservation'. In Swaziland Cazziol (1987:99) found that there was some ambiguity in the attitudes of the churches he researched: 'All the Zionist leaders contacted by the author stressed that the mediatory role between men and God is now fulfilled by Christ and no longer by the ancestors, yet the latter are still revered and respected because traditions command it'. Armitage's (1976:298) fairly extensive study of Zionists in Swaziland confirmed this: 'although their (the ancestors') status is reduced in the spiritual beliefs of the Zionist churches, they are still considered forces to be reckoned with, propitiated, humoured and remembered'. Interestingly, Armitage (1976:299) found that among the churches she studied the ancestors do indeed function as mediators between man and God. But this too a Western observer would find ambiguous: 'The Zionist principle, however, is to modify the traditional custom so that the Christian God and not the ancestors are central to worship and prayer'. Pauw (1960:161) found the practice of the ancestor cult in what he termed a 'Pentecostal separatist church' among the Tlhaping in the North-

ern Cape Province; this was, however, 'a unique example'. Nussbaum (1985:148-149) found that there was a tendency among Lesotho independents to reject traditional beliefs in the powers of the ancestors; but his survey results were somewhat inconclusive.

Both Daneel (1973:54) and Pauw (1975:205) demonstrated the strong support for the ancestor cult among African people belonging to European-connected historic churches in the communities they surveyed: Daneel in what is now Masvingo, Zimbabwe, and Pauw in the Black township of New Brighton, Port Elizabeth. Daneel's research indicated that 80% of his respondents believed in the power of ancestors, whereas Pauw found that 64% of his 180 respondents considered Christian teaching compatible with ancestor beliefs (1975:215). There is no indication that this trend has significantly changed since these surveys were conducted. In fact, in a personal discussion, Daneel indicated to me that in Zimbabwe at least, the ancestor cult has been more openly practised since independence in 1980. He previously wrote that 'it is clear that the basic traditional beliefs concerning the ancestors are still prevalent amongst the members of the indigenous churches' (1973:54).

Moving further north in Africa, Andersson (1958:174,205,225) reported on the active participation in the ancestor cult among the Khaki and Munkukusa movements in what was then the Congo. In particular, he pointed to the incorporation into 'Christian' ritual of such practices as the use of grave-earth and visiting the tribal ancestral graves. Martin (1964:143-144) commented on these phenomena as follows: 'The Khaki cult thus tried to integrate into its life that fellowship between the living and the dead within the clan and tribe which is so relevant in African religion'. Martin (1964:148) also quotes Kenyatta who refers to a 'separatist church' in Kenya which 'combined belief in God with that of the ancestors'. In Ghana, Appiah-Kubi (1979:120) noted that the Akan independent churches place importance on the veneration of ancestors, and that this was a major reason for the attraction that these churches are to Africans. Interestingly, some African scholars of the independent church phenomenon, notably Baëta (1962), Ndiokwere (1981) and Omoyajowo (1982) leave the subject of ancestors out of their discussion altogether. One wonders whether this, together with the reaction some Western scholars have received to their probing into the topic (we have given the example of West), is not because so often ancestor veneration is regarded as an exclusively African affair which cannot be explained nor understood by inquisitive Europeans.

3.3 Confrontation and rejection

But there is another, and more definitive reaction to the ancestor cult in Spirit-type churches. Hastings (1976:9) writes that 'the prophets and preachers of independent churches have at times adopted a more vigorously hostile line to "fetishes", shrines and "pagan" worship than the missionaries themselves'. The reason for this, he suggests, is that 'the very depth of their Africanisation allows them no room to tolerate what they have replaced far more absolutely than the mission churches' (1976:54). Daneel (1971:462) says that 'from the outset the leaders of the prophetic movements launched an attack on all forms of ancestor "worship"'. He says that the Shona Zionists 'consistently regard heathen *midzimu* (ancestors) as "evil spirits" (*mweya yakaipa*) from whom they must break away' (1987:233). The orientation towards the traditional world view is exhibited by the prophets diagnosing sicknesses and other problems as caused by ancestors or sorcery. But in contrast to the traditional diviner, as Daneel (1987:261) has pointed out, instead of accommodating the ancestor,

... the spirit is branded a demon and its claims on the patient - especially if these involve ancestor worship - are rejected and the spirit is exorcised. Here the Holy Spirit and the ancestor spirit are usually diametrically opposed and it is a matter of confrontation rather than identification.

These findings were confirmed by the independent research of Stebbing (1985:139) in the Chipinge area of Zimbabwe, where Zionists and Apostles were opposed to ancestor veneration with 'surprising unanimity'. In my own personal research (albeit limited) among urban Black Pentecostals in South Africa there was unqualified rejection of all forms of ancestor rituals. A Black theologian responded to me that in actual practice this was ambivalent; and that it was very difficult for anyone to disentangle oneself from social practices connected with the ancestor cult. My impression is that many African Christians have in fact done just that. In South Africa, this is clearly a subject on which much more research needs to be done. I have tried to emphasise here the ambivalence of the views of members of independent churches. These findings are only preliminary and they need to be substantiated with further empirical research. Turner (1967b:261) noted that in the Nigerian Aladura churches there was a rejection of ancestors in, for example, the departure from traditional burial practices. This resulted in what Turner considers a 'more Christian' burial rite (than the Anglican form from which it was derived) seen in 'the continued rejection of all traditional ideas concerning the dead'. This was confirmed by Omoyajowo (1978:105), who said that the attitude of the Aladura churches to traditional religion was one of 'uncompromising hostility'.

3.4 Confusion or clarity?

That which Oosthuizen (1968:120) considers 'the most difficult theological problem in Africa' is the question of an alleged confusion between ancestors and the Holy Spirit found in African churches, not only in the so-called 'nativistic movements', but also in 'Pentecostal sects'. Oosthuizen's analysis of the situation as he saw it in the sixties derived from the interpretations of other researchers, especially Sundkler, Andersson and Pauw. In order to accurately evaluate Oosthuizen's assessment we will need to briefly look at these and other researchers' findings. Daneel has dealt with this issue in some depth on several occasions; and we will consider his views in conclusion of this section.

Sundkler (1961:238-253) writes on 'ancestral spirit and Holy Spirit' by commencing with a description of a Zulu Zionist healing ceremony that he witnessed in a stream. If we were to take the event by itself apart from Sundkler's interpretation of it, it is clear that the Zionists were aware of the discontinuity between themselves and the traditional diviners who had preceded them in the stream, for they considered the waters to have been defiled (1961:239). The comment that 'Western, supposedly spiritualised religion is eventually changed into African spiritism' (1961:240) is, in my view too sweeping and harsh a value judgment which cannot be supported adequately, even by his own empirical evidence. In fact Sundkler's *Bantu Prophets* tends to swing back and forth between these rather hasty conclusions and incisive scientific analyses. He does point out that 'all Zionists agree in regarding the diviner as possessed by demons' (1961:241). It seems that the ceremony he describes in fact pointed to a more radical confrontation and adaptation than he at first realised. Sundkler (1961:247) says further that 'Zionists who have earlier been diviners or have had *amandiki*-possession are anxious to emphasise that the *umoya*-feeling is not the same as that in heathen hysteria'.

Sundkler's discussion of the 'Angel' who appears to Zionists in dreams and during prayer is rather interesting; and on the strength of the examples he gives it would be difficult to fault his conclusion that the 'Angel' is in fact the ancestor. One wonders, however, just how isolated these examples are. In the research that has been conducted since these incidences in the 1940s I am not aware of any other evidence of an 'angel' appearing to encourage Zionists to venerate the ancestors, certainly not in the main body of Spirit-type churches in Southern Africa. In fact, Oosthuizen (1967:85) himself was unable to prove in the Zulu Nazarite church that the 'angel' and the 'ancestor' were interchangeable concepts: 'the above theory could not be categorically presented'. Cazziol (1987:109) also writes that 'a Zionist bishop pointed out that angels are only messengers with a special communication from the Spirit. They are not the

Spirit neither are they ancestors, although he conceded that the latter have often been confused with angels' (1987:109).

Sundkler (1961:297) postscripted his conclusions made in the earlier edition of *Bantu Prophets* with the following illuminating statement:

Renewed contacts in 1969, on the spot, with Zulu and Swazi churches have helped the author to understand better that he should have attempted to interpret the religious life of these groups FROM THEIR OWN VIEWPOINT. Leaders and ordinary followers in these churches feel that they have indeed made a very decided break with their past, trying, through what they refer to as 'Holy Spirit' to drive out the evil spirits of magic and to temper the whims and demands of the departed (emphasis in original).

Further on, Sundkler (1961:302) suggests that his earlier view that these churches were 'a bridge to the religion of the past' was perhaps 'in fact, too foreign, too Western'.

In his later work *Zulu Zion* Sundkler (1976:304-305) again refers to his earlier conclusions. These had become

... misleading in that we had come to generalise our local daily observations at Ceza (1940-1942) to represent Zulu Zion as a whole ... I had overlooked a methodological consideration of prime importance. FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THOSE INVOLVED, Zion was not turned to the past but to the future ... Zion meant newness of life, health and wholeness, a new identity [emphasis in original].

It is the mark of a great scholar that he can admit his previous misinterpretations. Nowhere in *Zulu Zion* does Sundkler embark on the sort of value judgments of which his *Bantu Prophets* is guilty. In the light of his retraction, he can hardly be regarded as an authority for pointing to confusion between ancestors and the Holy Spirit in independent churches. My impression is that Sundkler's own interpretation of the phenomena in *Bantu Prophets* is ambiguous; and as he himself pointed out later, it is also misleading.

Turning now to Andersson's *Messianic Popular Movements in the Lower Congo* (1958:174), there is indeed evidence of confusion between the ancestors and the Holy Spirit in the Khaki movement, if Andersson has correctly interpreted the phenomena. A ritual at the graves results in the ancestors revealing themselves to 'give the Spirit'. This ceremony, however, is peculiar to the Khaki movement, and is not to my knowledge practised in other independent churches. It is misleading to make generalisations from what may well be syncretistic groups and then apply them to the whole Spirit-type church movement. Andersson's (1958:224) statement that 'the Ngunzist doctrine of "the spirit" is ... at bottom of animistic nature and is traceable to the old notions of the capacity of the spirits to possess human beings or to use them as mediums, even if a true evaluation, is not to be indiscriminately applied to other independent churches'.

Pauw (1960:207) similarly referred to 'the parallel between the role of the ancestor spirits in traditional notions of revelation ... and the role of the Spirit of God in Pentecostal Separatist or Zionist churches'. But he is careful to add that 'in so far as beliefs about the Spirit in Tswana Pentecostal Separatist churches can be related to traditional beliefs about the ancestor spirits, the relation is of a vague and distant nature'. Pauw does not refer to the subject elsewhere, except to say that Sundkler's parallel between the diviner and the Zionist prophet was 'ruled out' among the Tlhaping (1960:203). We must therefore conclude that Oosthuizen's observation of the 'confusion' in independent churches was hasty and without substantial foundation in the researchers he quotes.

It seems as if Martin (1964:113) was also guilty of these too hasty evaluations in her earliest work when she wrote: 'In many Zionist groups there is little difference between the Holy Spirit and the ancestor-spirits, there is rather a profound confusion between the two'. This leads to what she calls a 'false pneumatology' (1964:161). These assumptions she bases largely on the previous works of Sundkler and Andersson. Martin too experienced a total change in position as she became more directly involved with independent church life; and it is unlikely that she would now agree with her earlier conclusions on the subject.

A more recent researcher among Swazi Zionist churches, Cazziol (1987:108) said that the Holy Spirit 'is in fact performing all the functions which were once the prerogative of the ancestors, thus it is not surprising that he is identified and often confused with the ancestors'. Cazziol seems to have been influenced by the earlier researchers in this statement; but there is no other evidence in his research to substantiate it.

Martin West (1975:178) makes a very pertinent observation in this connection: 'many people ... suspect that the independent churches have replaced the Trinity by the shades, or at least brought them to the fore in their beliefs. *In no instance during fieldwork was this ever found to be the case*' (emphasis mine). West (1975:188) amplifies what Sundkler eventually found to be true: 'One of the central problems in all these cases is to be able to distinguish FORM from CONTENT: although a modern rite may look substantially the same as a traditional rite, it is not necessarily seen in the same light by participants'. Thus it is essential in discussing any supposed 'confusion' between ancestors and the Holy Spirit to discover whether in fact the people in the Spirit-type churches themselves countenance any contact with ancestors, or make any connection whatsoever between revelation by the Holy Spirit and that of the ancestors. The parallels do *not* necessarily point to identification! Mostert (1986:87) agrees when he says 'there are weighty arguments against the contention that the African understands the dynamic of the Holy Spirit in terms of his knowledge of the possession by the AMADLOZI (ancestors) or the more malevolent spirits'. Nussbaum's (1985:57) research into five African independent churches in Lesotho confirms that in the view of the independents themselves there is definitely no confusion between their perception of the Holy Spirit and the ancestors; in fact there is a very clear antithesis.

Daneel is the one researcher who has investigated this problem in some depth. With the lack of empirical evidence to the contrary, we may take his findings as fairly representative of Spirit-type churches, not only in Zimbabwe but also in other parts of Southern Africa. It is not difficult to trace the common origins of most Zimbabwean independent churches and those churches from other parts of Southern Africa; and we should not therefore expect to find that there are fundamental differences of pneumatological understanding. He writes as follows:

The Zionists and Apostles doctrinally classify the ancestors as demons ... they clearly distinguish between the functions of the ancestral spirits and of the Holy Spirit ... the protective function of the ancestral spirits have indeed been transferred to the Holy Spirit but then in a different context and with different connotations.

(Daneel 1974:350)

In a personal conversation with me, Daneel pointed out that his findings were in the specific context of a background of Protestant missions. It may be that in such a context independent churches would have a decidedly more negative

attitude to ancestors than might be the case elsewhere (as in the area of Andersson's research, for instance). Nevertheless, the survey of evidence presented in this section strongly indicates the probability that Daneel's evaluation in Zimbabwe could be correctly applied to Spirit-type churches in other parts of Southern Africa, where the influence of the so-called 'mission churches' is just as strong. There is nothing in the research conducted here that would indicate anything to the contrary, although there are obviously some exceptions to the general rule. I have already (I hope convincingly) made the point that several earlier researchers based their findings on faulty interpretations and secondary sources. Oosthuizen has, however, pointed out in a recent (1991) note to me, that his latest research among Zulu independent churches in the greater Durban area finds that only a small percentage of mainly fundamentalist evangelicals among the Nguni reject the ancestors. This controversy may be resolved with further empirical research.

The activities of the Spirit-type churches, in contrast to being a bridge back to ancestor veneration, are in fact in Daneel's (1988:117) findings among the Shona churches 'characterised by confrontation and change'. Whenever prophetic diagnosis is given, 'whatever spirit is involved, be it forefather or hostile spirit, it is invariably branded a DEMON which must be exorcized'. This is what Daneel (1974:350) earlier called 'a revolutionary process of renewal'. When the Zionist prophet confronts the demon spirit, he has in fact 'a far more realistic approach than that of the Western missionary who frequently dismisses the traditional spirit world and consequently can never penetrate the core of the problem as the black patient experiences it'. Daneel (1988:118) also explains that a 'firm distinction is maintained between the Holy Spirit and other spirits'. We must remember that Daneel's assessment is based on his personal observation of 'literally hundreds of these prophetic sessions' (1988:117). What we have is not confusion between the Holy Spirit and the ancestors but diametrical confrontation between them. Daneel (1988:118) points to the fact that Shona traditional diviners 'react far more sharply against the prophetic activities of Zionists and Apostles than to medical and evangelistic work by Mission Churches'. Elsewhere Daneel (1984:70), writing about the prophetic healing sessions, said that: 'It is in a context of this nature where the existential needs of people are considered in their own idiom and not in terms of some alien Westernised formula or creed that the kingship of Christ and the liberating power of the Holy Spirit acquires meaning'. Nussbaum (1985:57) concurs: 'It is completely unconvincing to tell these people (the independents) that the Spirit with which they now have contact is the same as the traditional spirits. The traditional Western theory does not fit their facts'.

Thus it would seem to me that the alleged confusion between the ancestors and the Holy Spirit in independent churches is (or at least was) a storm in a teacup which has no real foundation. Quite to the contrary, many of the Spirit-type independent churches have challenged the ancestor cult with its orientation to the traditional spirit world by their message of the power of the Holy Spirit to liberate from the oppression of malevolent and capricious spirits that daunt the African person's everyday life.

3.5 'Christianised possession'?

All of the various pneumatological manifestations discussed in the third chapter are purported to be evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit; Sundkler (1961:200), however, remains unconvinced. He comes to the conclusion that the various manifestations in Zulu independent churches are 'a variety of stages of Christianised POSSESSION ... the hidden depths of repressed African possession come to the surface in the form of speaking in tongues, and shouting in the Spirit'. One wonders what Sundkler would make of similar manifestations in Western churches, or in the biblical record. The fact that these manifestations have a specifically African *character* does not mean that they should therefore be rather precipitously dismissed as a resurgence of traditional spirit possession. Baëta (1962:140) also considers there to be 'several points of contact' between traditional spirit possession and the 'healing techniques' of Ghanaian 'Spiritual churches', but he hesitates to go further than that. Daneel (1974:351-352) acknowledges that during possession by the Spirit in Zionist and Apostolic churches 'there are sometimes signs of a dissociate personality, of a prophet more or less losing himself This phenomenon obviously corresponds with the traditional state of spirit-possession'. But this trance-like behaviour was actually seldom observed in the Shona churches by Daneel (1974:352). West (1975:188) says that 'Spirit possession may also be seen in terms of traditional possession cults ... it may have roots in certain traditional practices'. West (1975:188) considers this phenomenon in Soweto's independent churches to be 'a means of release of the tension and frustration brought about by life in the townships'. Oosthuizen (1968:130) sees (Holy) 'Spirit possession' the same as 'spirit possession' in African traditional religions. He says that 'dreams, convulsions, visions, trances - these states to which prophets are subject have generally been described as hysterical phenomena. They give the impression of epileptic fits, in the same way as demonic possessions in the old religion'. He concludes that 'in the African nativistic movements spirit possession, the general feature in African religion, has found a new emphasis' (1968:134). He then goes on to say that 'African spiritism thus finds congenial soil in the pentecostal approach to the doctrine

of the Holy Spirit' (1968:136-137). Apart from the rather negative connotations attached to the word 'spiritism' which were obviously intended, I have no real problem with the last statement of Oosthuizen quoted above. But what he finds disturbing we should rather see as a positive factor: it is precisely the contribution of the 'Pentecostal approach' to pneumatology which is the relevant or 'congenial soil' in the African cultural milieu. When a Christian transformation takes place in the Spirit-type churches, it often meets the need of African people far more substantially than does either its traditional 'counterpart', or the pneumatology imported to Africa in Western philosophic garb. As Daneel (1971:463) points out,

... the conveyance of knowledge or certain skills to spirit mediums through spirit-possession was replaced by the all-important possession of the elect by the Holy Spirit Thus the Christian message and all that goes with it is introduced into African society in a truly African guise.

The old types of spirit possession, divination as practised by the diviner, the ancestors, and magical medicaments and charms are all here rejected and replaced by this African Christian transformation. Yet, as Daneel (1974:348) elsewhere concedes:

Some prophets claim the sanction of the Spirit for activities which can hardly be qualified as Christian ... many prophets have gained sufficient insight about the work of the Holy Spirit according to Biblical norms to be aware of the dangers of misinterpretation involved.

Daneel (1974:349) goes on to illustrate from his research that the Spirit is believed to be given by divine and not human initiative, 'an act of faith which stands in direct relation to the recipient's spiritual life'. So too, Nussbaum (1985:58) says that in the Lesotho independent churches '*moea* (Spirit) is completely independent of human control or inducement'. The predilection among Spirit-type churches for visible and audible manifestations of the Spirit does not preclude them from appreciating the necessity of having the character of Christ, which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. The importance of being completely possessed by the Spirit (in Shona the concept is literally 'to be seized by the Spirit') is 'in order to reveal God's will as accurately and clearly as possible in a given situation' (Daneel 1974:352).

Turner (1967b:129) points out that in the Nigerian Aladura (spiritual) churches possession by the Holy Spirit is not a vestige from the old religion; for the phenomenon did not exist in the early years of the churches' development. It must rather be seen as arising through the influence of Western Pentecostalism. This is also true of the Spirit-type churches of Southern Africa. Before the coming of the Pentecostal missionaries in 1908, the concept of possession by the Holy Spirit with its accompanying manifestations was not officially sanctioned in the Zionist church from which the entire Spirit-type African church movement has its roots. Because of the African character and holistic world view, the interaction of and dialogue between the old religion and the new Christian pneumatology was inevitable. We should not however rush to conclusions about continuity between this phenomenon and the traditional beliefs. If this were true, then why do Spirit-type church leaders so often brand traditional spirits as demons to be exorcised? And why do traditional diviners react so sharply against prophetic activities? Daneel (1988:118) suggests that it is because 'we have here a Spirit-inspired confrontation which is in fact more radical and profound in its penetration of the traditional thought world than the Mission Church with its theological moulding and doctrinal impeccability could accomplish'.

The prophets in the Shona churches made it clear that receiving the Spirit came at God's initiative, not man's. These churches did not conceive of the Holy Spirit as an impersonal manipulable force but as a 'personal divine being' (Daneel 1988:120). Stebbing (1985:106) confirms this when he says that the churches he surveyed 'themselves are certain that their possession by the Holy Spirit is *quite* different from possession by tribal spirits, and that the Holy Spirit definitely excludes the others'. Similarly, Ndiokwere (1981:90) says that:

A sharp distinction is made between the Devil, the Evil one, the spirit that troubles and makes man sick, and the Holy Spirit who inspires, reveals, and fills one with power and spiritual gifts Is history not repeating itself then, if the 'man of God' is accused of casting out devils by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of the devils?

Or as Stebbing (1985:106) observes:

Christian theology must always leave room for God. It does so by recognising that a man's intentions are of paramount importance. If a person intends what is right he may be sure that God makes it right, however strange it may appear to those who do not see with the vision of God.

In the final analysis, before speaking of 'Christianised possession', and writing off African experiences of the Holy Spirit as a resurgence of traditional religion, we need to interpret them in the light of the biblical revelation, the African spirit world, and charismatic Spirit experiences all over the world.

CHAPTER SIX

The Holy Spirit in African context