

## ANIMISM, ANCESTORS and ANC

The centenary celebrations of the ANC and their determination to dedicate the country to the ancestral spirits sparked nation wide controversy. How are we as Christians to respond? What does the Bible say concerning the spirits of our ancestors? To whom should South Africa be dedicated? Are there examples in history of other nations that have invoked the spirits of their ancestors? What were the results in those cases?

**Celebrations** The African National Congress started off the year by throwing itself a lavish birthday party in Bloemfontein. To celebrate its journey from anti-apartheid movement to ruling party, they scheduled a golf outing, champagne toasts, and an inter-faith service which involved slaughtering a bull and invoking the ancestral spirits.

**Ritual Slaughter** With drums pounding and chants filling the air, the ANC president, Jacob Zuma, initiated the traditional cleansing ceremony by ritually sacrificing a bull, killing it with a spear, while it was tied to a tree. ANC secretary general, Gwede Mantashe, explained: "*traditionally the act of slaughtering has different meanings. All nations have a way of celebration through slaughter... it is the same but in different circumstances.*" The inter-faith service included messages and blessings from representatives of all major religions, including Muslim, Hindu, Christian, Rastafarian, and traditional Animist witchdoctors. Despite the ANC, chaplain general's assertion that "*all nations have a way of celebration through slaughter*" journalists could not think of how the Queen of England, for example, marks national events by ritual slaughter of a helpless animal.

**Opposition Prayer** Dr. Kenneth Meshoe, opposition leader of the African Christian Democratic Party, turned down his invitation to attend the festivities, declaring that invoking the spirits of dead leaders will have *devastating consequences* for the country. Instead Rev. Meshoe joined other Christians outside the Union Buildings in Pretoria for a prayer and worship ceremony to dedicate South Africa to the Living God, Jesus Christ.

**Intolerance** In response, the ANC chaplain general, Vukile Mehana, criticized Dr. Meshoe for his "*fundamentalist Christian beliefs*" declaring that he was "*practising religious intolerance*". Vukile Mehana condemned Kenneth Meshoe's position as "*totally unacceptable and a direct contravention of our constitution as well as the fundamental values and principles of Christianity.*"

**Venerating the Ancestors** Mehana declared that it was "*mischievous and misleading*" to suggest that the ANC favoured any one particular faith over others. He insisted that the centenary celebrations did not involve the worshipping of ancestors, but the venerating of the spirits of those who were part of its history. The distinction between ancestor worship and "*venerating the spirits*" would seem to be a fine line.

**Confusion and Distortion** The position of the ANC chaplain general seemed confused and self-contradictory. On the one hand, he condemned Dr. Meshoe's "*fundamentalist Christian beliefs*", and on the other hand maintained that Meshoe's position was in direct contravention of "*the fundamental values and principles of Christianity*"! It was not clear how Dr. Meshoe's position was a violation of the Constitution. One would have thought that freedom of religion, freedom of opinion, freedom of speech and freedom of association were guaranteed by the Constitution.

**Love for Country** Dr. Meshoe declared: "*Because I love my country I cannot associate with dedicating it to dead people.*" He urged all who love South Africa to join him in prayer "*to do what is right, because what the ANC is doing is wrong.*"

**A Cursed Nation** An example of a country which has been dedicated to ancestral spirits is Haiti. As the Wall Street Journal noted in its article: "*Haiti and the Voodoo Curse: The Cultural Roots of the Country's Endless Misery*", that despite Haiti having received billions of dollars in foreign aid over the last 50 years, it remains the least developed country in the Western hemisphere. Haiti has defied all development predictions. Operation World reports that Haiti is the poorest state in the Western hemisphere with over 75% of the population living on less than \$2 a day. Effective unemployment is around 70%. 98% of the island is deforested. Haiti has some of the worst pollution, drought, famine, rapid rise of drug abuse and spread of AIDS in the Western hemisphere. An estimated 75% of the population are actively involved in voodoo. Haiti is at the top of the corruption index. A full 25% of the police are in the pay of drug lords and gangs. The

massive earthquake in 2010 was one of the worst natural disasters to ever hit the Western hemisphere, with over 300,000 dead. At its inception in 1803, Haiti was dedicated to satan. In 2003, voodoo was declared a national religion of Haiti.

**Obstacle to Progress** The Wall Street Journal quotes Cameroonian development expert, Daniel Etounga-Manguelle as observing that voodooism is "*one of the principal obstacles to progress in Africa.*" Daniel Etounga-Manguelle observes that "*Haiti's culture is powerfully influenced by its religion, voodoo. Voodoo is one of numerous spirit-based religions common to Africa. It is without ethical content. Its followers believe that their destinies are controlled by hundreds of capricious spirits who must be propitiated through voodoo ceremonies.*" Animism is a "*progress-resistant force*". The Wall Street Journal observed: "*A Haitian child is made to understand that everything that happens is due to the spirits. He is raised to externalize evil and to understand he is in continuous danger. Haitians are afraid of each other. You will find a high degree of paranoia in Haiti.*"

**Understanding Animism** Animism is spirit worship. It involves necrolatry - the worship of the souls of the dead. The witchdoctors or shamans are regarded as *expert mediators* who know the proper incantations and sacrifices to placate the spirits. Animism is a religion that sees a spiritual force behind every event and many objects in the physical world have some spiritual significance. Animism seems obsessed with invoking good luck and avoiding bad luck. Each community is seen as having its own sets of gods and spirits. These are territorial.

**Pervasive Fear** Fear plays a major role in the life of Animists. They see the world as full of spirits, omens, spells and forces. Through magic, divination and sacred rituals, they seek protection to appease the gods, the spirits and the ancestors. They observe numerous taboos and prohibitions and observe sacred places. For example, in Haiti there is a sacred tree where a pact with the devil was signed over two centuries ago by witchdoctors. Animists see a whole host of objects as sacred things with sacred power. They recognize sacred persons and observe sacred actions. One of these is the circumcision rituals on young men in the Xhosa tribe. Many hundreds of men have died from these dangerous circumcision rituals.

**The Sangoma and the Snake** During the World Cup 2010, much publicity was given to a Burmese rock python, owned by a sangoma (witch doctor), in Nyanga. It was alleged that this python was able to communicate to the sangoma which team would win each match. Gamblers paid the sangoma for predictions. The SPCA found the snake to be underweight, suffering from dehydration, mouth rot and pneumonia and confiscated the python to give it medical care. The sangoma, 25 year old Siyabonga Mthethwa, said that the SPCA did not understand sangomas: "*Everything I said does not make sense to them.*"

**Ritual Murder** The High Court in Pietermaritzburg found 28 year old Smangaliso Ngubane guilty of murder for having slaughtered his 17 month old baby daughter in a ritual killing. Amini Xaba was stabbed by her father six times in what state witnesses described as "*an offering to his ancestors*". Ngubanetested that he had heard voices that had told him to do this.

**Satanic Sacrifices** Two teenage girls in Johannesburg were doused with petrol and set alight in a satanic ritual. The provincial police spokesman reported that the girls were tied up by their friends and burned in what appeared to be a satanic ritual. The Star quoted from Izabella Little, of the Teenage Advice Forum, Life Talk, that: "*Satanism is not spoken about very often*". She mentioned an incident in Cape Town where a mother reported her teenage daughter kidnapped and taken to some satanic church where another teenager was murdered. She managed to escape but was very traumatized. Police investigated the incident, but it was never mentioned in the media. "*We always hear rumours about Satanism, but it is not something people are talking about. We would like them to come forward so that this can come into the open.*"

**Child Sacrifice** In Uganda the government is setting up posters in playgrounds and on roadsides warning of the danger of abduction by witchdoctors for child sacrifice. Police have investigated hundreds of cases of child sacrifice in Uganda. The mutilated bodies of children have been discovered at roadsides. The Anti-Human Sacrifice Task Force reports that there is a growing belief that when you sacrifice a child, you get wealth. There are people willing to buy these children to be sacrificed for the prosperity of their business.

**Powerful Spell** The UK based charity, Jubilee Campaign, reports that they know of over 900 cases of human sacrifice in the country. Churches are singing a song: "*Heal our land, end child sacrifice.*" A BBC un-

dercover reporter filmed a local witch doctor who explained how the sacrifice of a child is "*the most powerful spell*". The witch doctor was recorded saying: "*there are two ways of doing this, we can bury the child alive on your construction site, or we can cut him in different places and put the blood in the bottle of spiritual medicine.*"

**Haunted Roads** Sindephi Spogter-KaMcina of the National Executive Committee of the Traditional Healers Association claimed that the roads of South Africa are haunted because whites have not *fetches the spirits of their dead* from roadside accident scenes. He explained that the growing Christian tradition of putting up roadside memorial crosses and placing flowers at the scene of an accidental death, *stops the soul of the deceased from departing*. He claimed that roadside memorials cause accidents because the white people did not appease their loved ones' spirit. He explained that in African traditions the spirit of the dead is *brought back home* from the scene of the death. Some use a branch from a young tree to seep up the spirit and take it to the body, which must be buried in the ancestral area.

**Animism is Serious** These and many other examples remind us that Animism is real and the consequences of dedicating a nation to ancestral spirits are very serious. The Scriptures are clear: "***You shall not... practise divination or soothsaying... give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them; I am the Lord your God.***" Leviticus 19:26, 31

### What the Bible Says

***"When you come into the land which the Lord your God has given you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord and because of these abominations the Lord your God drives them out from before you. You shall be blameless before the Lord your God. For these nations which you will dispossess listened to soothsayers and diviners; but as for you, the Lord your God has not appointed such for you."*** Deuteronomy 18:9-14

**Communicating with the Dead** The Scriptures are clear that we are not able to communicate with the spirits of departed ancestors. It is appointed unto man once to die and after that the Judgment (Hebrews 9:27). There is a great gulf set between the living and the dead and communication between them is impossible (Luke 16:26). However, many people who think that they are communicating with ancestral spirits are actually communicating with deceptive demons, unclean spirits (Matthew 10:1), evil spirits (Acts 19:12), fallen angels who rebelled and are now in darkness bound for Judgment (Jude 6). Their power is limited (2 Peter 2:4). They serve the devil, the prince of darkness, the prince of this world (Matthew 12:24; John 12:31).

**Occultism** Occult practices honour satan rather than God. Occultism makes the enemies of God the guiding forces and the source of knowledge. Those who are "*giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons*" actually "*depart from the faith...*" 1 Timothy 4:1. We are commanded "***Do not learn the ways of the heathen...***" Jeremiah 10:2

***"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."*** 2 Timothy 1:7

**Dedicating South Africa** Jesus Christ is the King of the nations. He is the Creator, the Eternal Judge, the only Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5-6). Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life, no one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6). There is no other Name given under Heaven by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12). The only one to whom South Africa should be dedicated is our Creator God, the only Redeemer and Saviour, as was done when the Afrikaners established the Day of the Covenant.

***"Therefore submit to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you."*** James 4:7

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