

Editorial

The theme of this issue of the Journal of Adventist Mission Studies looks at various aspects of animism and Africa Traditional Religion (ATR), a religious system that has too often been lightly taken. A hundred years ago Christian missionaries felt that ATR would quickly disappear as the “superior” civilization of the West and Christianity confronted it. However, ATR is alive and well and in fact it is thriving and growing among many upper class people. It is time for Christian leaders to openly discuss the worldview issues and challenges of ATR rather than ignoring them.

Shamanism, sorcery, and witchcraft are closely connected to the values and expressions of ATR, and these practices often are characterized as themes and practices found only among tribal peoples. However, today these expressions of spiritualism are widespread among adherents of every world religion and are more and more prevalent in the West. Mis-siologists speak of Folk Islam, Folk Buddhism, and Christo-paganism—all expressions of spiritualism.

Adventists have long held that the final deceptions of Satan would involve spiritualistic manifestations. Fifteen to twenty years ago I had a hard time seeing how that could take place in the West as more and more societies became increasingly secular. However, as people rejected their Judeo-Christian heritage, which was build on the Word of God, they soon discovered that they still had spiritual needs. Many are attempting to fulfill those basic spiritual needs today by dabbling in all types of Eastern religious practices or participating in occult activities. Movies and television series are filled with supernatural themes and bookstore shelves are loaded with non-biblical approaches to finding spiritual meaning and purpose.

This issue of the Journal of Adventist Mission Studies has an African flavor, but the lessons and themes are increasingly applicable to Western societies as people look for spiritual fulfillment in paganism, witchcraft, and spiritualism.

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