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Dear Friends,

We wish you a merry Christmas and a happy New Year. May God be with you and bless you. May Christ be born anew in your heart. Though there are many attempts to take Christ out of Christmas, its spirit of wonder and love cannot be quenched. Christmas is not just a “season” or a “holiday,”
Christmas is
“Joy to the World, the Lord is come!”
It means
“Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled.”

Africa for Christ

Many hearts are turning to Jesus Christ, particularly in Africa. Christianity is making great strides on this continent. It is African Christians who, in bold faith, have resisted Western

attempts to bring homosexuality into Church and State. Indeed, *“the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.”*

(Isaiah 9:2) But in spite of all the light, much of Africa is still dominated by superstition and witchcraft. - In Tanzania, for instance, the fear of witches is so great, that *“about 20 000 persons are said to have been killed as ‘witches’ in the decade 1991 to 2001*

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And in Uganda, a calculated *“total of 22 000 to 23 000 Africans were killed as ‘witches’ by fearful neighbours.”*

1)

Witchcraft

Even in South Africa, which has enjoyed the light of the Gospel more than any other African country, witchcraft has increased. In Limpopo at least 97 women and 49 men were killed as ‘witches’ in less than a year (April 1994 to February 1995). In Lebowa it was 312 over 10 years. In Venda, in the early 1990s, more than 400 people accused of witchcraft had to seek refuge in police stations. In Limpopo, in 2000, over 1300 cases of witchcraft were opened. 2) These are surprisingly high figures, for most people surely know that God says: ***“There shall not be found among you anyone... who practises divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD... You shall be blameless before the LORD your God.”***

(Deuteronomy 18:10) 3)

By God’s grace, many witches and witchdoctors have, however, been set free from occult powers by the Lord Jesus Christ. ***“He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them...”*** (Colossians 2:15)

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The book

“God among the Zulus,”

by Dr Kurt Koch, documents the power of God over the forces of darkness. It speaks of 60 years of the Mission

KwaSizabantu

in KwaZulu-Natal 4) and is a great testimony to the redeeming power of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Children without the Gospel

It is a tragedy that in South Africa most children no longer hear the Word of God at school. The vacuum is being filled by Humanism and Animism, and the result is that, as people enter into the main stream of life, Christian ethics go out of the workplace and Christian observance from

public life. The Bible says: ***“If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”*** Yet, spiritual bondage has increased and is impacting all areas of life.

Faltering Development

In a revealing article entitled *“Witchcraft and African Development”* Dr Erich Leistner, former head of the *Africa Institute*, shows why much of Africa is bound up in poverty and strife. It is because of superstition. He writes:

“Africa’s problems, and in particular the reasons for its faltering development, cannot possibly be grasped without considering the role of witchcraft. Witchcraft belief is commonly viewed as belonging to the outmoded worldview of primitive societies. Together with other superstitions, it is expected to fade away thanks to education, Christianity, the media... The opposite has, in fact, happened in post-colonial Africa, including South Africa. Recent decades in particular have witnessed substantially increasing fear of witchcraft as well as countless brutal killings of alleged witches throughout the continent.”

Fear of witchcraft arises from a magic world view, in which man feels himself surrounded by invisible forces, spirits, demons, and souls of the departed. They are all around him – in rivers, fountains, trees, rocks, everywhere. And in order to deal with them, he looks for specialists who can interpret and manipulate them - healers, herbalists, diviners, mediums and witches. Many of these work to good purposes, but

“the line between healing and witchcraft is thin and often crossed,”
says Dr Leistner

. *“Thus the Ralushai Commission has found that most traditional healers are also involved in witchcraft-related killings and ritual murders.”*

– Alienated from tribal life, city dwellers are especially vulnerable to fears and dependent on occult help. In 1998 there were 350 000 healers estimated in South Africa. These *“doctors”*

even advertise in the suburbs. They offer treatment to

“remove ghosts from homes,” “cleanse houses and cars from Tokoloshe,”

“control lovers,”

“control money,”

and solve

“bad luck,”

and

“bewitchment.”

However, he who trusts the Almighty is not afraid of anything. He does not fear man or spirit, for he stands in God’s power and protection. The Bible says: ***“God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”***

(2 Timothy 1:7) Jesus calls us to a new life, saying:

“Come unto me!”

(Matthew 11:28) and He commands:

“Repent and believe the gospel.”

(Mark 1:15)

Who rules?

At the 2010 Soccer World Cup, when the Cameroon team lost in spite of its well paid attendant witchdoctors, the Cameroon Minister of Sport had to explain the defeat to his Parliament. He said: *“Witchcraft, besides mysticism, internal wrangling, jealousy and disorder had been the cause of the Lions’ debacle.”* - But not only footballers think on these lines, businessmen and politicians do, too. According to Dr Kenneth Meshoe, leader of the

African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP),

witchdoctors also serve South African politicians, including cabinet ministers, and they visit Members in the Houses of Parliament. Hundreds of traditional healers allegedly attended Nelson Mandela at his inauguration as State President. President Zuma threatened voters with the wrath of their ancestors, if they failed to vote for the ANC. For the forthcoming 2012 centenary celebrations of the ANC, an interfaith night vigil is planned (6.1.2012) at which *“the spirits of all our founding fathers and mothers of our movement”* will be invoked

. *“This very important event will be attended by Kings, Chiefs, and Traditional Leaders and healers and will also include the leaders of the African National Congress and our allied partners.”* 5)

Jealousy

Witchcraft is motivated by jealousy and hatred. It aims at diminishing or destroying the life force of the targeted person. *“Inequality,”* says Dr Leistner, *“is a foremost source of tension... If in an egalitarian community someone becomes rich, apparently over-night, witchcraft is the only explanation the neighbours can think of... The very concept of personal advancement and prosperity as the result of personal endeavour, hard work and knowledge is not an inherent part of African culture. Rather, there is the firm belief that all people have the same fixed amount of life-force or ‘cosmic good’, which cannot be increased other than by stealing it from another person through magic manipulation...”* 6)

He is amazed that this factor is not acknowledged by economists, saying: *“Considering how severely witchcraft impinges on development, it is remarkable that the subject is totally ignored in the vast literature on African development, particularly the host of studies financed by the World Bank.”*

Occult beliefs and practices are thus a major cause for preventing God's blessings in Africa. Dr Leistner says: "*The debilitating fear of occult forces has proved largely resistant to modernisation* ." And then he rightly adds: "*It would, however, be overcome if people accepted Christ to be stronger than these forces.*"

Jesus is Lord.

It is a good sign that Africa is so open to the Gospel, which holds great hopes. And this in spite of modern man having become so casual about Christ, Christmas and Christianity, and therefore ignorant of the blessings Christ has brought into the world. The modern unbeliever does not understand the great liberation of mind and soul which, through centuries of history, has taken place in Christ's power and by His Spirit. He fails to see the great benefits in all areas of life. But Christmas tells us again and again, that the forces of darkness can be overcome, that the Lord has reached out to man in his lostness and sin. For "**God so loved the World that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.**"

Let us, then, not become careless but set our hope

"on the living God, who is the Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe." (1 Timothy 4:9)

May God bless you richly,

D. Scarborough.

Footnotes:

1. This letter is based on Dr Erich Leistner's article, Witchcraft and African Development, November 2011.

2. Ibid.

3. Some other passages are: Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 19:26-28, 31; 20:6, 27; Deuteronomy 18:9-14; 1 Samuel 28:7-25; 1 Samuel 28:3, 9; Isaiah 8:19; Malachi 3:5

4. Dr Kurt Koch, God among the Zulus, reprinted 2011 for the 60 th anniversary of the ministry of Rev Erlo Stegen, KwaSizabantu, obtainable at Christian Liberty Books, PO Box 358, Howard Place 7450, Tel 021-689-7478; e-mail admin@christianlibertybooks.co.za "> [ad min@christianlibertybooks.co.za](mailto:admin@christianlibertybooks.co.za)

5. Centenary Programme, issued by Baleka Mbete, ANC Chairperson.
 6. E Leistner adds: "Even though accumulation of wealth tends to cause envy and arouse suspicion of witchcraft, it is also very much admired...(but) the holder of wealth must share... make gifts, offer sumptuous parties and demonstrate an ostentatious life-style that helps to spread benefits."
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OUR WORLD BELONGS TO GOD (continued)

A Contemporary Testimony of the Christian Reformed Church, USA, 1986

Drafted in view of the secularisation of modern life and culture.

THE MISSION OF GOD'S PEOPLE (continued)

48. Since God made us male and female in his image, 1 one sex may not look down on the other, nor should we flaunt or exploit our sexuality. Our roles as men and women must conform 2 to God's gifts and commands 3 as we shape our cultural patterns. Sexuality is disordered in our fallen world; 4 grief and loneliness are the result; 5 but Christ's renewing work gives hope for order and healing and surrounds suffering persons 6 with a compassionate community.

1. Genesis 1:26-2:25 - "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature..'"

2. Song of Songs.

3. Galatians 3:28 - "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

4. Proverbs 7 - "My sons, listen to me... Do not let your heart turn to her (the adulteress) ways or stray into her paths. Many are the victims she has brought down... Her house is a highway to the grave, leading down to the chambers of death."

5. 1 Corinthians 6:9-20 - "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor homosexual offenders nor thieves, nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."

6. John 8:1-11 - "They said to Jesus, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery.

In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?'... He straightened up and said to them, 'If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.'"

7. We serve Christ as singles, 1 whether for a time or a life, by undivided devotion to the work of God and so add our love and service to the building of his kingdom.

1. 1 Corinthians 7:25-35 - "I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs – how he can please the Lord... An unmarried woman... her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit."

2. In marriage and family, 1 we serve God by reflecting his covenant love in life-long loyalty, and by teaching his ways, so that children may know Jesus as their Lord and learn to use their gifts in a life of joyful service.

1. Ephesians 5:1-6:4 - "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loves us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God... Wives, submit to your husbands... Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy... Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right... Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

2. In education we seek to acknowledge the Lord 1 by promoting schools and teaching 2 in which the light of his Word shines in all learning, 3 where students, of whatever ability, are treated as persons who bear God's image 4 and have a place in his plan.

1. Proverbs 4:9-10 - "She (wisdom) will set a garland of grace on your head and present you with a crown of splendour... and the years of your life will be many."

2. Psalm 119:105 - "Your (God's) word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."

3. Colossians 1:17 - "He (Christ) is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

4. Deuteronomy 6:1-9 - "These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you... so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God..."

5. Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength... Impress them on your children. Talk about them..."

6. In our work, even in dull routine, 1 we see the call to serve our Lord. We must work for more than wages, 2 and manage for more than profit, 3 so that mutual respect and the just use of goods and skills 4 may shape the work place, and so that, while we earn or profit, useful products and services may result. Rest and leisure are gifts of God 5 to relax us and to set us free to discover and to explore. Believing that he provides for us, we can rest more trustingly 6 and entertain ourselves more simply.

1. Ephesians 4:17-32 - "He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work,

doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.”

2. 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13 - “We worked night and day, so that we would not be a burden to any of you... When we were with you, we gave you this rule: ‘If a man will not work, he shall not eat.’”

3. Ephesians 6:5-9 - “Like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart, serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward...”

4. 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 - “Make your ambition to mind your own business and to work with your hands, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders...”

5. Philippians 4:8 - “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable... or praiseworthy – think about such things.”

6. Hebrews 4:1-13 - “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.”

7. Grateful for the advance in science and technology, 1 we make careful use of their products, 2 on guard against idolatry and harmful research, and careful to use them in ways that answer 3 to God’s demands to love our neighbour and to care for the earth and its creatures. 4

1. Genesis 1:28-31; 9:1-7 - “Fill the earth and subdue it... Be fruitful and increase in number... And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man.”

2. 1 Chronicles 29:1-19 - “O LORD our God, as for all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name, it comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you. I know... that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity... Give my son Solomon the wholehearted devotion to keep your commands... and to do everything to build the palatial building for which I have provided.”

3. 1 Timothy 4:1-5 - “Everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.”

4. Romans 8:10-23 - “The creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.”

5. Since God establishes the powers that rule, 1 we are called to respect them, 2 unless they trample his word. We are to obey God in politics, 3 pray for our rulers, and help governments to know his will for public life. Knowing that God’s people live under many forms of government, we are thankful for the freedoms 4 enjoyed by citizens of many lands; we grieve with those who live under oppression, 5 and we work for their liberty 6 to live without fear. □

1. John 19:11 - “Jesus answered, ‘You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.’”

2. Romans 13:1-7 - “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established... For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong... He is God’s servant to do you good, for if you do wrong, be

afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant..."

3. Acts 4 - "They (the ruling Sanhedrin) commanded them (the apostles) not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, 'Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.'"

4. Isaiah 61:1-2 - "The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me to preach good news to the poor... to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour and the day of vengeance of our God."

5. Genesis 18 - "Then the LORD said, 'The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see...' Abraham approached him and said, 'Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? What if there are fifty righteous people in the city?'... He answered, 'For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.'"

6. Romans 6:16-19 - "You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness."

All Scripture texts are taken from the NIV Bible. To be continued...

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