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A table of contents for the *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ajet-02.php

Dancing with the Devil

An AJET Editorial

One of the most enduring myths of the past is the tale of Faust—the man who sold his soul to the devil. The story goes something like this. There once lived a man, a learned but poor man, who dreamed of power, wealth and occultic knowledge. One night while curled over his books in study but secretly coveting the world's wealth in his heart, Faust was visited by an uninvited guest. The devil in the person of a sorcerer named Mephistopheles interrupted Faust's repose by offering to give the discontented scholar all that his heart could desire on earth—on one condition—that he would sign away his soul to the devil so that at death he would forfeit eternal life. Faust grabbed at the offer. The devil was as good as his word. Faust became knowledgeable in all the dark arts. In their sinister wake came wealth, fame and power beyond his imaginings. No pleasure was denied and no dream unfulfilled. Yet the years of plenty swept by with cruel speed. Soon Faust faced his own mortality. As he lay on his death bed the final and greatest wish of Faust—to be swept up into the eternal pleasures of heaven—was denied by the one who owned his soul and had come to collect his rightful possession. The old legends of Faust end with the screams of terror that accompanied his long descent into the eternal horrors of hell. Too late did Faust realize that the lust for earthly power was a devil's bargain. He paid with his soul and he kept paying for eternity.

The story of Faust is in many ways the story of Africa. Just as poor and struggling Faust dreamed of earthly power and pleasure so too does our wounded continent long for strength and wholeness. Yet into our dreams of earthly salvation a figure cloaked in the shadows of traditional religion, new age narcissism or humanistic ideology arrives uninvited. The offer of power, often through magic or the occult is tempting. All we want is the child to get well, the job to come through, the school fees to be paid, the curse to be lifted. The simple visit to the distant hut in the middle of the night, the dark dabbling with fortune telling or "good" witches, these are the short strokes of our signature on the Faustian bill of sale.

One of the great tasks of the Gospel in Africa is to liberate this continent from the Faustian bondage into which it has fallen. We bow before the spirits because

we lust for the power that we believe only demons can give. Yet the One who died and rose again as lord over the powers beckons us to break off this dance with the devil and find freedom to live in glad submission to him now and eternal delight with him forever.

That message of the gospel still needs to be heard by the distracted Faust's of Africa. We read of the revival of African traditional religion with its spiritism and fear in Liberia, Sierra Leone and elsewhere. One hears constant rumors of powerful politicians offering sacrifices to whatever powers might help them gain or keep their high positions. The newspapers carry stories of devil worship on the rise in the secondary schools of Kenya. Even allowing for a healthy dose of journalistic sensationalism aside, there is a growing body of evidence that the spirit of Faust is on the loose in Africa.

What does the African Church have to say to the Fausts of our day? We must find ways to convince this restless and day dreaming continent that Christ has "shown us the path of life", that only "in his presence is fullness of joy" and only "at his right hand" are there "pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11).

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This issue of AJET seeks to explore both the causes and cures of this Faustian fascination with witchcraft and divination. In our lead article, Julius Muthengi gives us an historical and global tour of the roots of divination and offers a serious biblical evaluation of this worldwide art of darkness. Festus Kavale in a later article focuses particularly on the issue of witchcraft and looks at it both as a theologian and as a pastor. Our remaining two articles explore different but significant subjects. Mark Olander shares the fruits of a major research project he completed on what motivates students to learn. In our final article, Mary McCallum addresses the issue of Kenya's population explosion by looking at traditional methods of conception management among the Kalenjin tribe of Kenya and some of the promising approaches available today. A number of fine book reviews should further stimulate your thinking. May the fruit of your reading be a faith strengthened to face the spiritual warfare around us and within us.

Contributors to this Issue

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