

Reaching Animists with the Gospel

Adapted from “Perspectives on the World Christian Movement” – Ch. 91

- ❖ Animism is neither to be referred to as a tribal religion, (as Animism can be found in major cities like Los Angeles and Hong Kong) nor is it to be considered primitive.
- ❖ According to E.B. Taylor who coined the term Animism, it is “a life of accepting the reality of spiritual forces and beings in contrast to the materialistic outlook on life.”
- ❖ It can be further defined as “the belief that personal spiritual beings and impersonal spiritual forces have power over human affairs and that humans, consequently, must discover what beings and forces are impacting them in order to determine future action and, frequently, to manipulate their power.”
- ❖ Given this definition, there is already the establishment of one bridge to the Gospel - that is the acceptance of the supernatural and spiritual view of life.
- ❖ We must pay attention to the problem of encounter. Animists can not just add Christianity onto their ritualistic worldview (falling into the errors of polytheism or syncretism), rather they must encounter Jesus Christ for who He is, the only way to salvation, and reject the things that they have erected as idols, embracing Christ alone.
- ❖ Beware of the motivation for which Animists may seek to accept Christianity. Their motivation will affect their view of the Gospel, Christ, and the Christian life.
- ❖ Be careful that the words you use to communicate Christianity and the Gospel to an Animistic person are still true to their meaning in the Biblical sense of the word. Be careful that the message does not get distorted either from you as the communicator, or as received and interpreted by the hearer.
- ❖ Animistic cultures are by far group-oriented, instead of individualistic. So while the group is made up of individuals, the individuals are part of a group and think in a wholistic mind-set. This affects the way in which decisions are made, because it is not centered on the individual, but the group. Therefore when we try reach an Animistic people, it is better to speak to the group as whole, rather than trying to evangelize individuals.
- ❖ We must remember that we can not leave an individual or a group merely as converted, but must continue the process of disciple-making by incorporating them into a local body of believers.
- ❖ In incorporating Animists into a local body of believers, we must be careful that it is structured according to the means and methods of the culture, in so far as they do not distort the message being sung, taught, or proclaimed. It is important that this indigenous church brings in forms and styles of worship that are contemporary to their culture, rather, than establishing a church based upon Western norms.

Presuppositions of an Animistic Worldview

- 1.) There is a relationship between the seen and unseen world. The influences of God, gods, spirits, and ancestors affect the living and humans are thought to be controlled by these unseen beings.
- 2.) Animists believe that all of life is interconnected. This is most clearly seen through their ritualistic practices.
- 3.) Animists seek power to control the everyday life. This power can be used in a malevolent way to harm someone, or a benevolent way to help another. It can also be considered ambivalent, either to harm or to help, depending upon the motive of the one who possesses such power.
- 4.) Animists seek to determine what powers or forces are influencing their lives. This determination is fleshed out through omens, astrology, seeking counsel from witch doctors, etc.
- 5.) Animists are very concerned about what powers will cause future evil to befall them. Therefore they try to ward off this evil by appeasing certain spirits/gods before this evil comes upon them.