

## EVANGELIZATION AMONG ANIMISTS REPORT

Introduction: It should be stated from the outset that this study group represented a wide spectrum of participants with conflicting experience. Therefore the success of this study group will be measured in terms of the problems and burdens shared rather than solutions found or strategy formulated.

In his paper Dr. Tippett structured his comments on six problem areas which those seeking to evangelize among animists must constantly keep in mind. They were: the problem of encounter, the problem of motivation, the problem of meaning, the problem of social structure, the problem of incorporation, the problem of culture void.

From the study group point of view the lines were less definitive but it was the matter of encounter which occupied more time than any other factor. In his paper Dr. Tippett states: "Animists cannot just drift into the Christian faith...the passage from heathenism to the Christian faith is a definite and clear-cut act, a specific change of life, a 'coming out of something,' and an 'entry into something quite different'..." While all agreed heartily with this, the question of how much of the "old" could be brought into the "new" produced a very wide variety of opinion.

Converts from ancestor veneration in Africa spoke of having been led even as young children — led by the Holy Spirit — to cut all ties with the whole system. From India the heart rending suffering of new believers, many of them children, was causing their advisers to question whether a more gradual break with the social-religious customs that tie the family so closely would lessen the conflict between new converts often isolated among large numbers of heathen. Over against this position of a clear cut severance of all ties with the "old" came first hand accounts from the Pacific area and South America of old functions being given new meaning. Old crafts and art once used to convey evil connotation are now dedicated to Christ and made a vehicle of Christian concepts. So there remained the two stances. The problems of the first could easily be seen in providing meaningful functional substitutes to fill cultural and religious voids. The problems of the second school of thought, as expressed by some participants was the impossibility to truly disassociate the past meaning in the carried over form.

With regard to the problem of motivation a number of examples were put forward. In the northeastern part of India conversion often resulted from a "power encounter" — through a vision, a dramatic healing, etc. The danger resulting from such conversions was felt to be the probable lack of any deep inner transformation resulting in a short lived experience. Yet it must be recognized that God is using this means in many people movements. This must wherever possible be followed by a love and truth encounter so the new convert can quickly be brought from what may be a simple "conversion" — turning from...to an inner transformation through acceptance of the truth in Christ.

As the group moved to the area of meaning, we again saw many problems raised but few concrete solutions agreed upon. How are we to ensure that the meaning we give to words will be translated to the hearer

when the whole religious vocabulary in his language has an evil or perhaps immoral connotation? Or even more difficult — how to convey truth for which no suitable words exist in the hearer's language? Some vivid examples were terms for a Holy, loving God; the Holy Spirit...Some examples from the translation of the Scriptures into Eskimo dialects of Canada told of introducing entirely new words taken from English but given an Eskimo form. Others advocated the use of an indigenous term with a qualifying clause or adjective. All agreed that this problem was a continuing one for which the evangelist must continually seek the help of the Holy Spirit.

As time had overtaken us the last session was primarily given to the essentiality of providing definite forms of incorporation into a fellowship body. This was seen in its scriptural content from I John 1:1-4. Specific examples were also given of the loss of new converts when not immediately structured into the body of the Church. Often because of race or class difference they were welcomed to the church but not incorporated into a relevant group and soon drifted away again.

Two solutions were suggested supported by experiences participants were currently undergoing in their own lands. One recommendation was to commence separate ethnic or class churches where participants feel at home. Others disagreed affirming that converts be incorporated into multi-ethnic or multi-class churches. A good compromise was suggested in allowing separate ethnic groups to form their own churches but be incorporated into a larger fellowship coming together often enough to maintain a unity within the body.

In summarizing the discussion Dr. Tippett suggested a most useful set of points aimed at assisting the evangelist to adjust his method and approach. All peoples fall into one of the following positions suggested Dr. Tippett.

- a. The period of awareness. This initial contact period leads one to
- b. The period of realization. The hearer realizes this message has relevance to him and he must decide to accept it or reject it. This in turn gives way to c. Encounter or the *demonstration* of his decision.
- d. From encounter the next step, to be taken as quickly as possible, is that of incorporation — the fitting of the new "member" into the "body." The process however continues and the new body-member now begins the process of maturation.

To keep such a grid before us should enable us to make our contact and message most effective whatever the present position of those to whom we minister.