

Animism:

The Religion of the Tribal World

Animism is the religious faith and life system of the tribal peoples of the world. The author explains the basic characteristics of animism—a perspective of life totally different from the Western non-religious view of life. He also lists the key ingredients which missionaries must understand in order to reach tribal peoples in an effective manner with the Gospel so as to plant the Church of the Supreme God among them. Nothing is more challenging—nothing is more rewarding!

by Dean C. Halverson

The term “animism” comes from the Latin word *anima*, which means “soul” or “breath.” As such, it refers to that which empowers or gives life to something. It follows, then, that animism is the religion that sees the physical world as interpenetrated by spiritual forces—both personal and impersonal—to the extent that objects carry spiritual significance and events have spiritual causes.

Thus, if there is an accident, or if someone is sick, there are spiritual reasons behind such things that must be taken into consideration. Otherwise, the cause behind the accident or the sickness cannot be fully understood or remedied.

The animistic form of religion is called “folk religion,” such as “folk Hinduism” or “folk Islam.” The tendency for people to gravitate toward a form of their religion explains why many people who come from a country with a Hindu or a Buddhist heritage do not believe the way the “text-book” description of their religion says they should believe.

Understanding Animism

Why should we seek to understand animistic religions? After all, aren't

those the kinds of religions that are practiced by primitive tribal groups wearing weird masks and dancing around fires? How relevant can such a primitive religious system be to us today? Are these the people with whom we “rub shoulders” who are both modernized and well-educated?

It is important for us to understand animism because it is both pervasive and attractive to people everywhere.

The Pervasiveness of Animism

Most world religions have a concept of God that makes Him out to be distant, abstract, and unknowable. For example, Hindus say that Brahman, their term for ultimate reality, or God, is *nirvana*, which means “without attributes.” A God without attributes is obviously abstract to the extreme. The result of Brahman being so distant and abstract is that people are left with a spiritual void that calls out to be filled. Hindus have filled that void with 30 million intermediate gods.

We in the U.S. have witnessed this tendency to move toward animism in the phenomenon of the New Age movement. When that movement

began 20-30 years ago, meditation, in which the meditator sought to experience unity with the divine oneness, was central to the movement. But now channeling contacting one's personal spirit-guide rivals meditation as being at the center of the movement. Again, this is an example of humanity's tendency to move from an abstract concept of God—the divine oneness—to filling the void with the more personal spirit-beings.

This tendency also explains why many in our secularized culture, in which God has been replaced by the theory of evolution, have become so enamored with angels and with SETI (the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence) during the past couple of years.

So, animism needs to be understood because it is the form of religion to which people gravitate. Although precise figures are hard to come by, the estimates concerning the percentages of animists in the world are significantly large. For example, Gailyn Van Rheenen, an expert on animistic religions, estimates that “at least 40 percent of the world's population” is animistic (Van Rheenen, 1996:30). An article entitled “What's going on.” points to the growth of animism as

being a trend of the future.

Religious pluralism reigns; any god will do. Neo-paganism is emerging with disturbing force. There are more registered witches in France than there are Catholic priests (Myers, 4).

The International Bulletin of Missionary Research lists "Tribal Religionists" as making up around 17% of the world's population (Barrett, 25). This percentage is lower than Van Rhee-*nen's* probably because it counts only those who are strictly tribal religionists and does not take into consideration those who are numbered as, say, Buddhists, but who adhere to more of a folk form of Buddhism (animism mixed with Buddhism) than to the original teachings of Buddha.

Attractions of Animism

A main reason animism should be studied is because it holds a tremendous attraction for people. First, it is popular for some because it infuses the sacred into a reality that has been emptied of anything spiritual by the scientific/evolutionary perspective. Animism puts the mystery back into the secularized matter-only world.

Second, animism holds an attraction because it offers people a way to cope with one's everyday needs and problems, such as the need

- to be healed of an illness,
- to be successful in business,
- to find a job,
- to excel in school,
- to restore a soured relationship,
- to find a mate,
- to gain guidance for the future.

Religion Watch reported, for example that "the new religions making the most impact in Japan today are those stressing individual spiritual powers and techniques....today's young recruits are little interested in religious doctrine. The focus on the cur-

rent wave has turned from belief to techniques (Cimino, 6-7).

We have all experienced those times when God seemed silent and distant and when His apparent lack of action leaves us feeling helpless. The feeling that God is distant and, that He does not care might overtake us after hearing the news that one has cancer, or after experiencing the death of a child, or being laid off from a job. At such times we become desperate, and we are tempted to grab for something that works—anything that will give us the power to get us out of our suffering or to fix what is wrong.

Animism promises such power. Philip John Neimar, an American-born Jewish businessman who is also a priest of the animistic "Ifa" religion says, "Religion is a marketplace. You have to deliver. And Ifa works" (Ifa, 4) To the extent that we seek to manipulate spiritual powers—including seeking God for the "quick fix" or for our personal benefit—we are coming from an animistic rather than a biblical perspective. In that sense, we all have animistic tendencies.

Only when we serve and worship God solely for who He is—and not for what He can do for us—is our worship pure and free of animistic inclinations (see Steyne, 46-47).

Animistic Beliefs and Practices

1. One God and the Many Spirits

Most animistic religions teach that there is one Supreme Being who exists beyond the intermediate ancestors, spirits, and gods. This God is either by nature monistic (an impersonal oneness) or monotheistic (a personal being). For animists, this Supreme Being is either too far removed from His creation or too abstract to be known. It might be that the Supreme Being uses the inter-

mediate spirits to do His will and to serve as His representatives. However, He still cannot be approached or known directly.

2. The Ultimate/Immediate Division

The animist views the "formal" religions of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, etc. as being relevant with respect to the *ultimate* issues, such as who is God, what is humanity's problem, and what happens after death. However, they see those religions as being irrelevant when it comes to addressing the *immediate* issues of everyday life. This division between the ultimate and the immediate realms is the reason why an animist can be a practicing Catholic, but also consult a shaman (an animistic priest who communicates with the spirits) in order to be healed.

3. The Spiritual Realm

According to animism, the spiritual realm with which we must deal consists of personal spirit-beings and an impersonal spiritual energy.

a. Personal Spirit-Beings. Animists believe there are two different kinds of spirit-beings. Those that have been embodied (such as deceased ancestors) and those that have not (such as spirits and gods) (Van Rhee-*nen*, 259). The spirits are often seen as being mediators between us and God, able to intercede on our behalf. But to mediate on our behalf they must first be given homage (Henry, 8).

Spirit-beings possess specific powers and are localized geographically. Some spirits exert their powers over human endeavors (such as a business venture, a marriage, community relations, or war), while others exert their powers over aspects of nature (such as storms, the seas, or fields).

b. Impersonal Spiritual Force. Besides the personal spirit-beings, animistic religions also teach that there is an impersonal spiritual

energy that infuses special objects, words, and rituals. Such energy gives these objects the power that people need to accomplish their desires.

Animists will often attribute magical powers to an object. For example, the following is a description of a technique for those in folk Islam who make a fetish out of the words of the Qur'an, their sacred scriptures.

One aspect of fetish-making involves writing a verse from the Koran that is relevant to the problem or concern of the person on a piece of paper in water-soluble ink. Before the paper is put inside the fetish, the *marabout* (a Muslim leader) dips it in water so the ink dissolves. Then the person who will wear the fetish drinks the water, thinking that by doing so the message will be internalized (Quicksall, 10-11).

4. Concept of Sin

Animists are not concerned so much about offending the supreme God as their concerns of a more immediate nature—afraid of offending the local spirits. They realize that an offended spirit will inevitably exact retribution in the form of injury sickness, failure, or interpersonal strife.

For example, Migene Gonzalez-Wippler, a follower of the animistic religion called Santeria, knew that Elegua—the name of her god—required his followers to perform a simple offering to him every Monday

morning. One Monday, however, Gonzalez-Wippler forgot to perform the ritual offering because she had just returned from a tiring trip and was busy unpacking. As she was walking

amid her apartment putting things away, she cut her leg on the sharp edge of the handle to the cabinet in which she kept her god. "When I pulled back my leg," writes Gonzalez-Wippler, "the door of the cabinet swung open, and there, looking up at me with aggrieved eyes, was Elegua's image" (Gonzalez-Wippler, 236). Gonzalez-Wippler understood the cut to be the price that her god had inflicted on her for having neglected him. Van Rheenen writes, "Animists live in continual fear of these spiritual powers" (Van Rheenen, 20).

5. Contacting the Spirits
Animists are more inclined than

Westerners to attribute spiritual causes to their sickness or bad fortune. Divination, which is the practice of giving information... which is not available by natural means" (Henry, 71), is the means by which a person discovers either how he or she has offended some spirit or which person has cast a curse on him or her. Divination is also the means by which one discovers how to resolve the problem either what the spirit requires or how to throw a counter-curse.

Methods of divination are numerous and varied; they include tarot cards, palm reading, the *I Ching*, tea-leaf reading, observing how feathers fall, the throwing of cowry shells, astrology, omens, dowsing (see Weldon), rituals, necromancy (contacting the dead), and interpreting dreams and visions. Divination can also be used to discover when it is the most fortuitous time to do such things as asking for someone in marriage, begin constructing a building, sign a contract, or make an investment.

6. The Afterlife

There is no universal and consistent doctrine throughout the many animistic religions as to what happens to a person after death. Many see the person's spirit as continuing to exist after death either by being reincarnated into another life on earth or by "graduating" to a higher spiritual level. The belief is also common that

Differences Between the Personal Spirit-Beings of Animism and the God of the Bible	
Personal Spirit-Beings of Animism	The God of the Bible
Limited to one geographic location	Not limited geographically; God of all the earth and the universe (Acts 17:24)
Has power over various aspects of nature	Has power over all things, the seen and unseen (Acts 17:24)
Depends on our sacrifices.	Does not depend on our sacrifices because He has created all things (Acts 17:25), and because He has provided on our behalf the "once and for all" sacrifice (Hebrews 9:24-10:14)

Differences Between the Impersonal Spirit-Beings of Animism and the God of the Bible	
Impersonal Spiritual Forces	The God of the Bible
The spiritual forces can be manipulated according to the person's will.	God is not moved or manipulated by charms or by rituals. That which moves God is a repentant and humble heart before Him. (Ps. 51:16-17; Proverbs 21:3)
The spiritual forces can be used for either good or evil purposes.	God is holy and hates that which is evil (Psalm 5:4). The Bible says that the "sacrifice of the wicked is detestable—how much more so when brought with evil

the person who dies becomes an ancestral spirit. The family must then continue to give offerings to that ancestor because it has the power either to protect or to plague the family.

Suggestions for Missions

1. Be Sensitive to the Animists' Perspective.

In his book *Filipino Spirit World*, Rodney Henry talks about how an "informal conspiracy of silence" developed among the laity toward the clergy in the Philippines. By the phrase "conspiracy of silence," Henry is referring to the lay people's reluctance to talk to the clergy about their problems with the spirits because the clergy do not take such things seriously. For example, Henry described a situation in which a layperson was asked to deal with someone who was being "troubled by demons." This layperson said.

I stopped to ask our American missionary to pray for me and for the situation with the student. When I explained the situation to him, he simply laughed at me and changed the subject. That was the last time I ever talked to an American about the spirit-world (Henry, 33).

The first principle, then, in dealing with someone who comes from an animistic perspective, is to refrain from scoffing at their view of the world. Such skepticism will only cause them to refrain from discussing that part of their lives with you, but it will not turn them from it.

2. Be Aware of the Influence of Secularistic Thinking in our Lives

The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization has stated that "the influence of the enlightenment in our education, which traces everything to natural causes, has further dulled our consciousness of the pow-

mists believe in the existence and the influence of the supernatural. Both Christianity and animism would stand together in their opposition to naturalistic thinking that says only matter exists. Animists, like Christians, believe that, while we might plant the seeds and culti-

vate the soil, there is a supernatural element that causes the growth. While the doctor is the one who dresses the wound and sets the broken arm, there is, again, a supernatural element that causes the healing.

Second, offending the supernatural carries consequences. With the animist, those consequences include things such as sickness, doing poorly in an exam, interpersonal strife, or financial ruin. With the Christian, the consequences of our offending or sinning against God is that it causes our relationship with Him to be broken.

Third, both Christians and animists have the hope that there is a way by which to escape the consequences of our transgressions.

Fourth, often the animist believes in some form of a Supreme Being who stands above the spirits and spiritual powers.

Asking the animist to talk about his or her concept of the Supreme Being, and about his or her cultural traditions, legends, and practices often bears unexpected fruit. That fruit could be a redemptive analogy, a theological similarity

Animistic and Biblical Worldviews		
	ANIMISM	CHRISTIANITY
GOD	God exists, but He is beyond our abilities to know Him or to communicate with Him.	God exists, and although He is beyond our comprehension, since He is infinite, He is nevertheless knowable; and He has made himself known to us through Jesus Christ and through the Bible (Hebrews 1:1-2).
ULTIMATE/IMMEDIATE ISSUES	Formal religions are concerned only with the ultimate issues of sin and salvation; but animism offers the power to cope with the immediate and everyday needs.	The God of Christianity is concerned both with the ultimate and the immediate issues of life. God desires to provide not only for our eternal needs but also for our daily needs (1 Peter 5:7).
THE SPIRITS	The spirits are seen as being either intermediaries between us and God or as representatives of God.	The spirits are deceptive; they seek to take the place of God in our lives.
POWER OF THE SPIRITS	The spirits and the instruments of magic have the power either to do harm to others or to bring benefit to them.	The spirits do have power but our utilizing such power leads to bondage. God has demonstrated through Jesus Christ that He is greater than the spirits and magic power, for "the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4; see also Exodus 8:18), and He has "disarmed the powers and authorities" (Colossians 2:15). Submitting to God brings freedom (John 8:32-36) not bondage.

ers of darkness" (Lausanne, 2). We, as Western Christians, need to be aware of how naturalistic empirical thinking has influenced our worldview to the extent that we have dismissed the influence of the spirit world altogether. Such a worldview, moreover, is not biblical.

3. Find Common Ground

Animism and Christianity share several concepts in common (see Tippet, 134-139), and the Christian can use them for building common ground.

First, both Christians and ani-

with Christianity in picture or story form—that could be used to illustrate the Gospel. Ask questions such as:

- What is the supreme God like?
- Was there a time when God was close to humanity? What caused the original separation between humanity and God? Why does God seem so distant now?
- How do we offend the gods, spirits, or ancestors?
- What are the consequences of such offenses?
- Is there a way by which to divert those consequences?
- Does God care about us now? If so, how?

4. *Highlighting the Differences*

The key differences between animism and Christianity are very significant. First, in Christianity God has not remained distant and silent, but He has broken through to our world through Jesus Christ, through whom He has made himself known to us (John 1:1,14,18; Hebrews 1:1-2; 1 John 4:9-10).

Second, through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, God has paid for—removed, covered, taken care of—the consequences that we have incurred as a result of our offenses against Him. The gods, spirits, and ancestors of animism offer no such answers.

The “once and for all” nature of Christ’s sacrifice, more over, means that the matter of our sin is settled with God (see Hebrews 9:25-26; Isaiah 53:6;2 Corinthians 5:21), and the path is cleared for us to have a personal relationship with God (Hebrews 4:16).

5. *Trusting in God Alone*

The animist is coming from the

perspective that God is distant and that He does not care about our everyday concerns or, if He does care, He can act only through the spirits. As a result, the animist takes his or her problems and concerns to a spirit to solve, or relies on the power of a ritual or an amulet to meet his or her needs.

For example, the following was

Only when we serve and worship God solely for who He is—and not for what He can do for us—is our worship pure and free of animistic inclinations.

written about a Catholic woman who placed her faith in a locket that had an image of St. Vincent De Paul on one side and a likeness of the Virgin Mary on the other:

Many times I was as in danger of losing my life,” said 74-year-old Barbara Trzos aid “Maybe because of the locket I was spared.

She clutched it in Krakow, where she was taken to a prison and sentenced to death aid She clutched it in Auschwitz, where she performed slave labor. She clutched it in Dresden, where the bombs exploded around her. She clutched it in Bergen-Belsen, where disease and starvation almost finished her.

I do believe,” she said, “the locket was protecting me” (McCaffrey, B1).

Placing one’s faith in such a thing as a locket is animism. Animists might interpret their clutching on to something, such as a locket, as clutching on to that which God has provided for them. In reality, however, that object has become a replacement for God; they are trusting in the supposed magical powers of the creation rather than in the Creator Himself.

First of all, trusting in God means that we need to encourage the animist to let go of whatever he or she is clutching for protection or prosperity and to cling instead to the only true and secure Source of our protection and prosperity.

The way to get the animist to question his or her object of trust is first to discuss how dependence on an animistic powers is an addiction that leads to bondage. The more power we experience the more we crave that power. Such powers eventually begin to “own” us.

Second, we need to demonstrate through our lives that God is intensely interested in every aspect of our lives. We can rest, therefore, in His power to provide

for our needs. Peter exhorts, “Cast all your anxiety- on him because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). It is in the sense of casting all our anxieties on God that we are to be a “better animist than the animist,” for we should take every concern to God. When a child gets sick, our first reaction should be to pray for him or her and to seek God’s grace concerning his or her care. If we’re worried about our jobs, our primary response should be to take our concern to God.

Third, we must point the animist to Scripture. We need to lead them to Matthew 10:29-30, for example, and point out what Jesus said “God is not only aware of each sparrow that falls to the ground but that He is even aware of the number of hairs on our heads. If God is concerned about such insignificant matters as sparrows and hairs then how much more is He concerned about us, For we “are worth more than many sparrows” (Matthew 10:31).

Make it clear that approaching God through prayer is the answer to our problems, not depending on the power of some spirit or amulet. We should also pray for things with the

animist. Ask the animist what concerns he or she has, and then pray for those concerns with him or her. Then stand back and be prepared to see God work in ways that might be beyond our previous experience or limited expectations.

6. God Works in Mighty Ways

Jesus made a connection between the demonstration of God's power over Satan's kingdom and the invasion of the kingdom of God into Satan's realm when He said, "If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matthew 12:28). Significantly He made a similar connection between the conquering of demons and the invasion of His kingdom when He gave His pattern for prayer; "Our Father in heaven... your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven...*but deliver us from the evil one*" (Matthew 6:10, 13, italics mine).

Because the Lord's Prayer is clearly still relevant for us today, God is demonstrating His power over Satan and his demons so as to confirm that the presence of His kingdom is also still active today. This is significant for us as we consider working with animists.

Because the power to cope with everyday issues is such an important matter, the animist will probably not be inclined to switch allegiance from the spirits to Jesus unless the power of Jesus is visibly demonstrated to be greater than that of the spirits. Moreover, God does not seem to be shy about showing His power to animists who are seeking after Him (Shetler). So be ready to be amazed by the way in which God will work.

At the same time, though, we as Christians must walk a fine line between *expectant faith* that believes God wishes to demonstrate His power to the animist and a *presumptuous*

faith, whereby we make demands on how God is to demonstrate His power. God knows best what is important to a person in animism and which demonstration of His power will have the most effect in the animists' lives.

One Wycliffe missionary, for example, said that God did not work healing among the tribe with whom he was working. Instead, God validated His message by giving the people dreams. Such dreams worked better than healings because dreams were an important source of information for this particular people.

The point is that we need to seek the Holy Spirit's guidance in knowing how we should pray for the animist.

While, initially, God might demonstrate His power in amazing ways in order to get the attention of the animist, the issue will quickly change from that of power to that of trusting God and of becoming conformed to His character (see Shetler, 78-79). Malcolm Hartnell, a missionary too the animistic Digo people in Kenya, Africa, stated it well when he wrote,

If Christianity, in the person of God, simply offered a better genie than the demonic powers, Digo-land would have converted a long time ago. But, of course, God does no such thing. At the heart of the Christian faith is a personal relationship with God, akin to that of a child to its parent. God does promise to meet our needs, he does promise to guide us, he does promise to give us victory over sin and Satan. But the primary goal of our relationship with God is not to get everything we want but to make us more like God himself and he answers our requests according to that purpose (excerpt from Hartnell's personal prayer letter).

We need to turn the animist's heart so he or she can see his or her need for such a relationship with God.

7. In Relationship with God

Animists need to understand that God can meet both their immediate

and their ultimate needs. The most urgent issue, though, is *their need to break their addiction to power*—and to the "powers"—*and to be in a relationship with God*.

Jesus addressed the issue of how the believer is to meet his or her needs:

And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "what shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things shall be given to you as well (Matthew-6:28-33).

There are three things to note in the passage above that are extremely-relevant to reaching animistic peoples.

1) Creation Reveals God's Glory.

God is the One who is active within nature, not the spirits, for "God clothes the grass of the field." The creation reveals God's handiwork and display's His glory (Psalm 19:1), not that of the spirits. The spirits are unworthy usurpers of His glory. We should give our worship and allegiance to God alone, not to some created spirit-being.

2) God Truly Cares

Jesus is talking in the above passage about people's everyday needs, and He is saying that God cares about meeting such needs. When we trust things like spirit-beings, rituals, or charms, we are actually bringing into question the goodness of God's character, for we are doubting that He cares. Jesus is saying in the above passage that God cares (see 1 Peter 5:7); and because He cares, He will

provide (see Acts 14:15-17). To believe anything else is to disparage God's character and to place our trust in the creation rather than the in the Creator which is a serious offense to God.

Animists are, in effect, saying that these things that are created are better able to handle our concerns than is the God who has created all things (see Acts 17:29-30), thereby placing the creation above the Creator. That is idolatry! The animist must understand that God is a jealous God and that He will not tolerate such idolatry (Exodus 34:14; Deuteronomy 4:23-24:6:13- 14), for He alone is worthy of our trust and worship. God cares for us more than any spirit or god, and He alone can accomplish all that He wills (Job 23:13:42:2).

3) Seeking God First.

Our lives are not to be consumed with temporal matters. Instead, our desires are to be for God's "kingdom and His righteousness." This is where almost everyone's thinking is upside down and backwards, for most of us believe that after we take care of the everyday matters, then we can concern ourselves with God.

Jesus is saying, however, that our desire to know the eternal One is to be our first priority; God will then take care of the temporal matters. The phrase "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness" denotes being in a right relationship with God; and it is at this point that the two realms—the ultimate and the immediate—meet. How? Because as our ultimate needs are met by being brought into a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ, then God will also provide for our immediate needs. God is not moved by charms, rituals, or fetishes. He is moved by a heart that believes and is humbled before Him

{Proverbs 21:3; Psalm 51:16-17; Isaiah 66:1-2; Hebrews 10:19-22).

8. Address their Fears

Animists live in a state of constant fear. They are afraid of the retribution of the spirits because of an offense, or they fear the harm an enemy can inflict on them through some form of spiritual power. But God is greater

If we are able to see through the deception of the spirits, then we should not bother following them. . . However, if we are unable to see through their deception, then we should be well advised to stay away from them.

than the spirits and the powers, and He will protect us (Colossians 2:15; 1 John 4:4).

The good news is that as believers in Jesus Christ we no longer need to relate to God on the spiritual realm out of fear of judgment or punishment, for through Jesus Christ God has removed the reason to fear Him (Romans 8:1). The Bible says, "Perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment" (1 John 4:18). God demonstrated His perfect love in that "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Based on our faith in Christ, we can now "approach the throne of grace with confidence, in that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:16—a very relevant verse for the animist).

9. Who is Christ and Who We are in Him

Jesus Christ is the Creator of all things (John 1:1; 1 Corinthians 8:6;

Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrew's 1:2, 10). As such, He is infinitely greater and more powerful than Satan and his demons, for they are created beings.

The power of Jesus Christ over the demons is most clearly seen in the Gospel of Mark, for there are more cases of Jesus demonstrating His power over demons (1:24-27; 1:34, 39:3:11-12:5:1-13: 7:25-30; 9:17-29) in the Gospel of Mark than in any other Gospel. Mark, moreover, gives examples of Jesus demonstrating His power not only over the demons but also over disease (1:30-34, 4:0-42; 5:25-34; 6:56), physical handicaps and deformities (2:1-12; 3:1-5; 7:33-35; 8:22-25: 10:46-52), death (5:41-42), and nature (4:35-41 :6:30-44; 6:48: 8:1-8; 11:13-14, 20-21), all of which are issues of great concern for animist people.

When you have the chance, invite your animist friend to read through the Gospel of Mark with you so you can discuss with him or her the many instances of Jesus' power. Also, consider together the passages in which are described the victory that Jesus has won over Satan (Mark 3:27; Colossians 1:13-14:2:15; Hebrews 2:14-15; 1 John 3:8).

Moreover, when a person places his or her trust in Jesus, then the following becomes true: "We know that anyone born of God [the believer does not continue to sin: the one who was born of God (Jesus Christ) keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him" (1 John 5:18). This verse points out two things that are true of the believer.

First, having believed in Christ, we are secure in Him, knowing that "the evil one cannot harm him." What this means, as Paul explains in a similar passage, is that nothing, including

“demons,” can “separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39). Through faith in Jesus Christ, we are now,

- “children of God” (John 1:12; Galatians 3:26; Ephesians 1:5),
- “justified freely by his grace” (Romans 3:24),
- freed from condemnation (Romans 8:1),
- secure in the “love of God” (Romans 8:39),
- “holy and blameless” (Ephesians 1:4),
- freed from slavery to sin (Ephesians 1:7),
- sealed by the Holy Spirit for eternal life (Ephesians 1:14).

Satan cannot touch such truths nor the spiritual power inherent in them!

The second truth about the believer is that since we are “born of God,” meaning the Holy Spirit has given us new life, we now have the power to overcome sin.” Because we live in a fallen world, we are still subject to the attacks and the temptations of the evil one (Ephesians 6:16). But through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit we have the power to resist Satan (Ephesians 6:13; James 4:7; I Peter 5:9).

10. *The Deceptive Nature of the Spirits*

Satan, the “prince of this world” (John 12:31) and the “god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4), is a natural-born liar. However, his evil nature is not obvious. Instead, his deception is cloaked in apparent beauty as well as in the promise of power.

Satan’s act of deceiving humanity with the lure of power began in the Garden of Eden when the serpent promised that “you will be like God” (Genesis 3:5). The deception continues through today. Notice, for example, the message of the human and “angelic” authors in *Ask Your Angels*:

Slowly, surely, we are collectively emerging from this illusion of evil. To do this means to hold firmly to the understanding of God as One Power, as One Ultimate Life Principle, from which all else emanates (Daniel, 29).

Such a message is appealing in its optimism, but it is fundamentally opposed to the Christian Gospel. The message of these “angels” is that evil is an illusion (thus dismissing the necessity of Christ’s atoning death) and that we are emanations from the “One Power” (thus denying that our sin has separated us from God).

Satan’s plans, moreover, are not for our good, but for our destruction (John 8:44:10:10; Hebrews 2:14), and he will use the appearance of beauty and the promise of power to lure us into that destruction (Genesis 3:6; 2 Corinthians 11:14). If we think we can see through the deception of Satan and his spirits through our own natural abilities, then one of two things will happen:

First, if we are able to see through the deception of the spirits, then we should not bother following them. Because since we can see through their schemes, they would be lesser beings than us.

Second, if we are unable to see through their deception, then we should be well advised to stay away from them.

In Conclusion

Satan will not let go of those in his kingdom without a struggle. So, be prepared in your own life to do spiritual battle when witnessing to animists. Have others pray for you and with you.

Also be encouraged that many animists are ripe for accepting the Gospel. Diligently seek the guidance and the power of the Holy Spirit as you share the love of Christ with your ani-

mist friends—with the tribal peoples of the world.

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Photo here of Halverson

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