

THE CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO ANIMISTS
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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THE CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO ANIMISTS
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

By

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INTRODUCTION

THE CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO ANIMISTS
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

INTRODUCTION

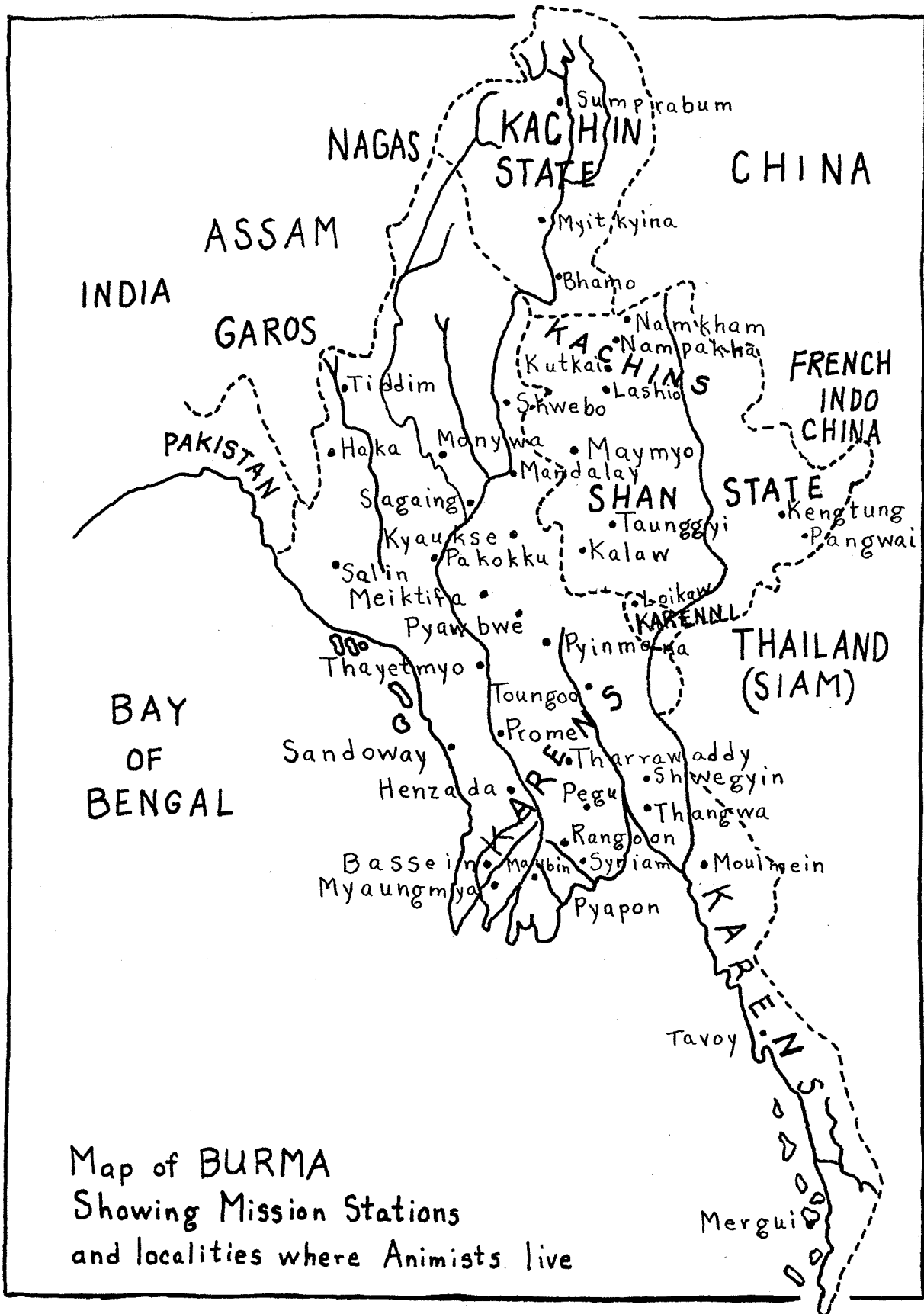
A recent discovery that a certain group of Christians in Burma are still subject to the influence of animistic beliefs, though they have been Christians for several generations, has led to this study, "The Christian Approach to Animists in Southeast Asia." Other characteristics of these peoples which have been in existence for a longer period of time, and which have hindered their growth in the Christian faith will also be considered.

The background of Animism from which these peoples have come will be shown in the different aspects in which it prevails among certain races of Burma and Assam---the Karens, Kachins and Burmans of Burma, and the Garos and Nagas of Assam. These peoples are chiefly from hill districts, and their environment and racial characteristics are homogeneous in the main. The focus of attention will be on the Karens of Burma throughout, and the other races will be considered for purposes of comparison and contrast. As Animism still exists among them to-day, it forms part of the problems confronting these Christians.

The beginnings of Christian Missions a little over a century ago, and the development and progress of the Christians will be reviewed. Problems of the present will be stated and analyzed so far as it is possible in the changing conditions prevailing in that part of the world to-day.

While source materials on the specific subject of the thesis are not abundant, books on Animism and histories of Christian Missions in Assam and Burma will be studied. Articles on the present situation in the International Review of Missions and in the Annual Reports of the Burma Christian Council will be considered. Where no printed materials are available, the writer will draw on her observations and experiences in a life spent largely in Burma among the Karen people.

It is hoped that a solution will be found, which will stabilize the Christians out of Animism in their faith, and help them to meet the future in trust and confidence.



CHAPTER I

ANIMISM AS A RELIGION OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

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A. Definition of Animism

Animism, or spirit worship, is the belief that "all nature is possessed, pervaded, and crowded with spiritual beings." All sorts of motionless objects, as well as living and moving creatures, have souls or spirits in them, and every human being has a soul or souls, leaving the body temporarily during dreams, and with a kind of finality at death. These spirits are thought of in an anthropomorphic fashion. When in good moods they are amenable to reason but aggressively quarrelsome if provoked. They are often not to be trusted, and one must be constantly on guard to appease and propitiate them, and ever on the alert to continue in their favor, once obtained.¹

Animism is found all over the world, especially among primitive peoples. It is more widespread and has more adherents than any other religious type, as often it is held in conjunction with another faith.² There are many forms of animistic beliefs in different parts of the world, but everywhere the kernel of it is fear, the unceasing fear of evil spirits and of their plots against men, and of the sorcery closely connected with their worship by which these animists are tormented.³

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1. Cf. John B. Noss: *Man's Religions*, pp. 17-18.

2. Cf. John E. Skoglund: *The Spirit Tree*, p. 9.

3. Cf. Johannes Warneck: *The Living Forces of the Gospel*, p. 115.

In general, they are held to be beings inferior to men, or the spirits of dead people, who return to work evil upon the living.

The idea of a high God still exists among animists, but He is too far away to be concerned with man. The ideas about spirits and souls hold down the belief in God. The spirits seem to be more powerful than God who is friendly to men. The spirits are numerous and formidable and their service hard, so "a melancholy gravity, a tragic sadness runs through animistic religion, and all frivolity and enjoyment of life are far from it."¹ Animism is not a religion on the upward trend to God, but one disintegrating and on the downward path, from a happier time when the idea of God was brighter, not so dim as now, and almost lost. This belief in a high God is found in its most perfect form among the Karens of Burma, and will be developed in a later chapter.

B. Animism in Burma

In Southeast Asia, animism is found especially among the hill peoples of Burma and Assam, the most eastern province of India--the Karens, the Kachins and even the Burman Buddhists; the Garos and Nagas of Assam.

1. Among the Karens.

There is no system or consistency in the jumble of superstitious beliefs of the Karens, so the Burmans often mock them as having no religion at all. They do not venerate their spirits, thinking them to be

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1. Ibid., pp. 81, 89.

stupid but with power to harm them. They endeavor to appease them or in some way escape their evil influence.¹

There are spirits of wood and mountain but the most prominent are the Bgha or family spirits, who, when offended, cause illness by eating the Kala (psyche) of the person, and ultimately cause his death, if allowed to go on. To save the person, the Bgha must be appeased by offerings of chicken or pig. Every member of the sick person's family must be present on the occasion. They hope that the feast will be so tempting that the Bgha will leave the sufferer and take the food instead.² If one member of the family is absent, and the sick person should die, the blame for it could be laid on the one absent. To this day in their own language, Karen animists are called "those who eat Bgha feasts." This custom has often been the cause of individuals being unable to give up the old religion for Christianity, because of family obligations. On this account, a person intending to become a Christian will first perform certain heathen rites by means of which he can forever sever himself from all the obligations of his former faith. Even the heathen, tired of performing their religious ceremonies, may put an end to their connection with the evil spirits. Just what these rites are, missionaries have not been able to discover, except that a course of feasting is involved.³

2. Among the Kachins.

The Kachins, living in the hills to the north of the Karens

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1. Cf. Edward Norman Harris: A Star in the East, p. 38.
2. Cf. Harry I. Marshall: The Karens of Burma, p. 12.
3. Cf. Harris, op. cit., pp. 72, 86.

in Burma, also have the belief that sickness is caused by the spirits. The spirit which has been offended, and the sacrifice which is demanded, are determined by the way in which a piece of bamboo explodes on being heated in a fire. A Priest reads the signs and gives the oracle. The position of the fibers at the broken joints of the bamboo revealed the will of the spirits.

If they crossed over, a large offering on a cross was desired. If they stood out, then the meaning was doubtful and a new experiment must be made. If straight up, then a sacrifice of chicken or eggs or at most a pig would be satisfactory.¹

If a large offering was required, an altar or table of bamboo was erected to hold the portions of the animals, actually given to the spirits. The "life" of the animal was the real gift to them, and its "life" was added to the thousands of other animals already residing in the celestial stables. The priest performing the sacrifice received the hind quarter of the animal as his share, in addition to the money paid him for determining the oracle. The rest of the animal was eaten by the people of the village who offered it.

Dr. Ola Hanson, who spent many years among the Kachins, has said that the sum total of their religion is to appease offended nats (or spirits).

But this takes various forms according to different circumstances. If lightning strikes, the nat of thunder must have an offering or worse danger is at hand. If a house or a village burns, sacrifices must be made, and water sprinkled to send off the incendiary nat, Mauhte, who is always abroad. If a man is drowned, killed by a falling tree, a tiger or an enemy, or if he loses his life in any kind of an accident, the nat causing such a misfortune must be placated, or others will meet the same fate. If a woman dies in confinement, the necessary ceremonies must be performed. Otherwise,

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1. Skoglund, op. cit., p. 28.

the woman becomes a nat, whose special aim will be to bring others into the same trouble. In all such cases, the object is to pacify the nat, that there may be no further mischief.¹

All along the roads in districts where Kachins live, crude altars may be seen on which offerings to the spirits may be made.

3. Among the Burmans.

The Burmans, the dominant race in Burma, are Buddhists but among them, as among Chinese Buddhists, is found this fear of the spirits. The philosophy of Buddhism has been described as the superficial polish, and animism as the solid constituents that hold the faith together.² The worship of the spirits is the real religion of the ordinary man, and even the Buddhist monks engage in it. This is the case, even though Buddhism has struck its roots deeper into the life of the Burmese people than in Ceylon or China. The spirits called nats, personifications of natural forces, or spirits of the dead, dwell in gloomy places, and are very dangerous to men.³ Banyan trees are especially venerated as the abode of nats, and spirit altars are found in them with offerings of candles, fruit, flowers and food. One banyan tree was held in such honor that the whole tree was covered with real gold leaf, such as is used in Buddhist pagodas. A banyan tree is so sacred to the Burmans that no Burman will cut it down. But other races do not hold it in such regard and do cut it down if necessary.

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1. Skoglund, op. cit., pp. 30-31

2. Cf. Richard G. Beers: The Christian Mission to Primitive Peoples in Southeast Asia. A thesis, p. 63.

3. Cf. Warneck, op. cit., p. 114.

C. Animism in Assam

In the Indian province of Assam, adjoining Burma on the north, animism is found among the Garos and the Nagas. These peoples would seem to be more closely related to the peoples of Burma, than to the Assamese who are Hindus. Assam is the part of the world where the heaviest rainfall is found, sometimes as much as 475 inches in a single year, the average being around 113 inches.¹ The amount of rain really determines the crop. Rice, the chief crop, does not develop if there is no rain. If too much, the plants rot or wash away. Irrigation or flood control is beyond the understanding of primitive man. He knows little about ways to fertilize the soil.²

1. Among the Garos.

The religion of the Garos is centered on appeasing the spirits that they may grant fertility to the soil, and a good crop of rice. Dreams that the farmer may have before planting the crop are of special significance and to dream of fish and sand means an unusually good crop. Sacrifices must be offered by individual farmers to the spirit of the particular piece of land which they plan to cultivate. Before cultivation, the whole village offers sacrifices to Rokime, mother of rice, and the village priest offers a prayer:

May the rain be enough to water the plants but not so great that their roots are washed away. Keep from our fields the wild elephants and from our village sickness and death, in order that we may rightly till the fields.

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1. Cf. Beers, op. cit., p. 25. Quoted from Sword: Baptists in Assam, p. 19.
2. Cf. Skoglund, op. cit., p. 49.

In the harvest season, the first fruits of the grain are offered to the spirits, and the whole village joins in a festival of three days. The animist attributes all his good fortune to the spirits who smile upon him and his works, and all bad fortune to the powers of evil, which besets him on all sides. A constant succession of sacrifices must be offered to keep on the right side of the good spirits, and to ward off the bad effects of the evil ones.¹

2. Among the Nagas.

The picture of the situation among the Nagas of Assam is a much grimmer one than among the peoples already considered, for the Nagas are head hunters, offering human sacrifices to the spirits. Head-hunting is due to the idea that the soul-stuff is found especially abundant in the head, so the vital power and courage of the dead man is appropriated by the man who kills him and possesses his skull. Human heads are used to make medicine and magic.²

Also it is believed that in the next world the ones whose heads have been taken will be the slaves of the head-hunters. Consequently, the one who has many heads will have many slaves. Prosperity also comes to the village which takes many heads. Bumper crops, many children, good hunting and fishing, are all ascribed to this practice.³

Human sacrifices are offered by Nagas in order to secure rain and to increase the productivity of the soil.⁴ In spite of all the measures the government has taken to put down this terrible practice, it is still

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1. Cf. Skoglund, op. cit., p. 49.

2. Cf. Warneck, op. cit., p. 43.

3. Skoglund, op. cit., p. 68.

4. Cf. Wilson D. Wallis: Religion in Primitive Society, p. 122.

carried on in isolated districts, so great is its hold upon the Nagas, even till the present.

Among the Nagas and Garos of Assam is found the idea commonly known as taboo which exists in all Animism, but to a lesser degree among the peoples of Burma. The Naga idea, called genna similar to the Polynesian taboo, means forbidden under supernatural penalties and attaches especially to forbidden practices, and to holidays observed during performance of sacrifices and various ceremonies. The social group concerned, whether a household or a village must have no contact with other social groups, while the ceremony is being performed. Certain articles of food are forbidden under permanent genna. Some genna of agriculture is periodic. Some genna is occasional and applies only during a crisis, as an actual or threatened epidemic. Calamities may be caused by disregard of genna, which is punished as a social offence. No one may work or enter or leave the village on which genna rests. The Garo marang are concepts similar to Naga genna.¹

D. Summary and Conclusion

Such is the dark picture of Animism in Southeast Asia, and the terrible bondage under which the people live even until to-day. The gloom is brightened here and there by the gleams now shining through those who have turned from this darkness, and have come out into the light which is Christ.

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1. Cf. Wallis, op. cit., p. 8.

CHAPTER II
HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN APPROACH
TO THE ANIMISTS

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HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO THE ANIMISTS

A. Appeal of Christian Missions to Animists in the First Beginnings of Evangelistic Work

When Christian Missions first began in Burma in 1813, the animists were not reached. They lived in remote districts among the hills, and were wild and ignorant peoples. The Burmans called the Karens "wild cattle of the hills," and oppressed them as slaves. The Karens were a most timid people and very seldom came into the towns. The missionaries worked only among the Burman Buddhists, who had a well organized religion of very high ethical and moral beliefs. It was seven years before the first Burman convert was made, and to this day their response to the Christian gospel has been very poor.

1. Preparation in the Hearts of the People for the Gospel Message.

a. The "Lost Book" of the Karens.

When missionaries finally turned to the Karens fifteen years later in 1828, they found a people longing for the message which they brought, and well prepared to receive it by their folk-lore and traditions. Among their legends was a story that they had once worshipped the one true God, Father God the Creator, from whom they had received a "leather book." But they had wandered away from Y'wa, as they called God, had

neglected their leather book, it had rotted away in the damp climate of Burma, and was lost. Yet some day their younger brother, the white man, would come in a large ship with white sails, and would bring them a "golden book" which would restore them to their former fellowship with God.¹ So when the white missionary came with the Bible, it was taken as the fulfillment of this legend, and the harvest among them was great.

The traditions which the Karens had held taught that Y'wa created the heavens and the earth, and all that they contain; that He created man, out of earth, holy like Himself, but that man fell from his state of holiness into a state of sin and misery by eating the forbidden fruit, through the temptation of Satan; but that God had promised to redeem and restore man to His favor, and that for his future salvation they were to wait in hope.² The origin of these beliefs is a mystery. There may have been some contact with Jews. In their language are some Semitic sounds, seldom found in Eastern languages.³ Among them have been seen individuals with a pronounced Jewish cast of countenance. They love to call themselves Israelites, of the ten lost tribes. However that may be, they certainly believed in a God, very much like the God of the Old Testament, holy, righteous, transcendent, infinite and eternal. They did not fear Y'wa, as the Israelites feared Yahweh. They said, "Y'wa is good. He will not harm us. But Satan and the spirits are many, and eager to harm us. We must try to placate them."⁴ So they worshipped the evil spirits in fear, though still praying to Y'wa.

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1. Cf. Randolph L. Howard: Baptists in Burma, p. 58.
2. Cf. Francis Mason: The Karen Apostle, pp. 95, 96.
3. Cf. Harris, op. cit., p. 31.
4. Harris, op. cit., p. 38.

The Kachins also acknowledged a Creator, whom they called Karai Kasang. They did not worship him, for they said he is too far away, and they do not know what food to offer him.¹ So they also lived in bondage to the spirits, as has been described in chapter one.

b. Longing For Freedom From Bondage to the Spirits.

Some animistic peoples among the Kachins were found wearing cords around their wrists in token of their bondage and need of a deliverer. Some had an expectation of a coming Saviour, whom they called "Aremetaya" or "the holy loving one." Some even kept a little room or shrine, inviolate and clean and lit with a little lamp, which they said they were keeping for the coming Lord.²

2. Contrast With People of Other Religions.

In such ways the animists showed their longing to be set free from their fear of the evil spirits, and their bondage to them. They had no organized system of religious doctrines, no idols, and no places of worship other than their spirit altars, crude shelves of bamboo on which their sacrifices were offered. They had no literature as the Buddhists. They did not even have a written language.

So when their "younger brother" came into their hills preaching Christ and His power over evil spirits, and ability to deliver them from bondage, the Karens listened eagerly, and begged that the Golden Book be given to them in their own language. The Bible had been translated into Burmese by 1836, but few Karens could then read Burmese. Work was begun

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1. Cf. Alexander McLeish: Christian Progress in Burma, p. 42.

2. Cf. Ibid., pp. 50, 52.

on the translation into Karen, the New Testament was completed in 1843, and the Old Testament was completed in 1853¹. So at last the Karens had their Golden Book in their own language and schools were started among them that they might learn to read it.

B. Development Among the Christians

The first Karen to become a Christian was Ko Tha Byu, a bandit and a murderer of more than thirty persons, either as principal or accessory.² His natural temper was violent and ungovernable, resembling insanity. Yet he became a flaming evangelist of the Gospel, preaching throughout Burma from Mergui in the South, to Siam in the East, and Sandoway in the West, wherever Karens were to be found. At the end of his twelve years of service, 1828-40, one thousand two hundred and seventy Karens were officially reported as members of the churches in good standing, most of them through the efforts of this one man.³ For, as one of his own people said, "Ko Tha Byu was an ignorant and stupid man; and yet he did more good than all of us, for God was with him."⁴

1. Missionary Efforts: Home and Foreign.

From the first, the Karens were great missionaries, not only among their own people, as Ko Tha Bya, but also among other races of Burma and even of Siam. Their fellow animists, the Kachins in the north,

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1. Cf. McLeish, op. cit., p. 97.
2. Cf. Mason, op. cit., p. 4.
3. Cf. Ibid., p. 96.
4. Mason, op. cit., p. 84.

were first brought to Christ through the efforts of five Karen evangelists, seven converts in six years.¹

2. Self Support of Schools and Evangelistic Work.

a. The Karens.

The Karens have always been noted for their independence and the support of their churches and schools. As early as 1831, they started to build their own houses of worship. In 1838, Karen Christians in Moulmein, then the center for Mission work set up by Dr. Adoniram Judson, gave Rev. Justus Hatch Vinton, their missionary, Rs 70 for evangelistic work. Four years later in the same field, a group contributed Rs 200 for their new church.² Not only did they carry on the work in their own district, but at the risk of their lives they made evangelistic trips among the Karens near Rangoon in the district then ruled by the Burmese King.

In 1852 when Lower Burma had come under British administration, the Vintons with some Karen helpers, moved over to Rangoon. A plot of land was bought on the outskirts of the city in 1853, and was registered in the name of the Rangoon Karen Home Mission Society in Burma. At the first annual meeting thirty pastors and three hundred lay delegates were present. Rs 600 was raised for evangelistic workers, and eight men were employed. Rs 3,830 had been contributed by the Karens towards the building of a Chapel. This was named Franc Chapel from a five franc piece, first contributed by a friend in America during the

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1. Cf. Skoglund, op. cit., p. 37.

2. Cf. Madras Conference Series, Vol. V, p. 433.

furlough of the Vintons.¹ Other friends donated sums of money to go with "Frankie" to Burma. English friends in Rangoon also shared in the work. This building, completed in 1855, is still the one building on the compound to which foreign aid was given. Other buildings, erected during the ninety years till 1942, include the Vinton Memorial, (a large Hall, with a wing containing seven large classrooms,) a school building of sixteen classrooms, a three storied brick dormitory for girls, nine wooden dormitories for boys, a small school hospital, seven teachers' houses, and two dining halls. These were built entirely with contributions from the two hundred churches of the Association, and grants from the Government toward the school buildings and dormitories. Most of these still stand, though ten of the smaller buildings have been destroyed since the World War.

Similar stories may be told of other Karen stations, of which there are ten altogether. The missionaries to the Karens, who encouraged them to support their work, did so in opposition to the policy of the Mission in Moulmein. The early missionaries to the Burmans had discouraged their converts from contributing to the work, and had supported both schools and churches entirely by funds from America. The idea was that Christians should feel that the Grace of God is a free gift, contrary to the Buddhist doctrine of earning salvation by laying up "merit," by contributions to charitable and religious works.

But the Karen converts from animism had no such belief as that of "merit." The Karen language was not taught in the schools of

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1. Cf. Calista Vinton Luther: The Vintons and the Karens, p. 113.

the Burmans, and the Karen Christians themselves, less cultured than the Burmans, and in so much larger numbers were despised even by their Christian brothers among the Burmans. The Karens as a race share their possessions, and their motto is, "If we eat our own rice we can do things our own way."¹ Seven of the missionaries who encouraged the Karens in their policy of independence and self-support, resigned from the American Missionary Union, and continued their work in faith, until the American Society came to agree with their policy, and recalled them.²

To return to the early organization of the work among the Karens throughout Burma, not only were churches organized into associations, but from the beginning all the activities of a well regulated Christian community were adopted. Missions, both home and foreign, were initiated, and evangelists sent out to various parts. At the very first meeting of the Shwegyin Association four men were appointed to evangelize the far off regions of Northern Siam. Throughout the Karen community converts were gathered in large numbers, and for a time it seemed that the entire race would become Christian.³

These early Karen converts were very ignorant. They knew only that their book had been brought back to them, and that they did not need to fear the evil spirits any longer, as Jesus was stronger than the evil spirits. But the high standards of morality which Christianity sets, were found to be very difficult for these simple people to attempt

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1. Cf. Madras Conference Series, Vol. V, pp. 432-437
2. Cf. Luther, op. cit., p. 112.
3. Cf. Harris, op. cit., p. 70.

to reach. They did not want to give up dancing, drinking, card playing and theatre going, which they themselves recognized as unsuitable for Christians.¹

The incoming of other faiths among them, ---Buddhism, Hinduism, Roman Catholicism, ----as Burma was opened up under British rule, also caused confusion among the Karens. There arose false prophets who proclaimed new cults, mixtures of the various religions, which had enough truth blended with superstition to appeal strongly to the Karens.²

So the early promise was not realized and for twenty or thirty years progress was slow. The days of ignorance passed by, and the disciples became established in the faith. The hindrances which had arisen, proved later to be helps, as they served to strengthen the true and sincere believers in God. Even until today they call themselves "worshippers of God" more than "Christians." Many of them would seem to have transferred their fear of the spirits to fear of God, and not to have realized fully the perfect revelation of God as a loving Father, which is found in Christ's teachings. They seemed slow to comprehend anything of the work of Christ, nor did they have any deep sense of sin. It was only after Karens had been converted from heathenism for some time, that they developed that sense of sin, and as that deepened, their understanding and appreciation of the work of Christ also increased.³

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1. Cf. Ibid., p. 75.

2. Cf. Harris, op. cit., p. 78

3. Cf. Ibid., p. 85.

The schools which were started among the Karens so that they might learn to read their Golden Book have been continued to the present day. Of 611 schools in 1931, 593 received no aid from the Mission, and almost all of them were in villages. They had entire freedom to teach about Christ, and from them came the Karen leadership. As an evangelizing agency they have done much, reaching out to non-Christian communities as well as to the Christian community which they served.¹

In 1942, one out of every five Karens was a Christian. Today there are more than 100,000 church members. In a little over a century the progress made by them has been remarkable. From ignorance and poverty, even slavery, they have become well educated, a number being college graduates, though many are still only just literate. They have entered many different professions and are to be found in all walks of life, though the majority are still farmers.

b. The Kachins.

The progress among the Kachins has not been so great, perhaps because they live in more isolated districts among the hills where travelling is difficult. There are now nearly seventeen thousand Kachin Christians. The increasing use of opium and liquor among them has taken a terrific toll, and hindered their advance.² They have the Bible in their own language, and show great zeal in spreading the Gospel among their own people. Recently, they started a theological seminary

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1. Cf. Howard, op. cit., pp. 74, 115.

2. Cf. Skoglund, op cit., p. 42.

in their own hills, to train leaders in their own language. They formerly had to go down to Rangoon far away from home, and study in Burmese.

Of one million two hundred thousand animists in Burma, about three hundred and thirty thousand have become Christians (1942) ---a great contrast to the twelve and a half million Buddhists from among whom only fifteen thousand have become Christians.¹

c. Others.

In the Indian province of Assam, the gospel was first taken into the Garo hills by two Garo young men, who had been in school in the plains, and had become dissatisfied with the religious instruction they had received there. One of them prayed earnestly that his distress of mind might be relieved, and he might be given an everlasting blessing. On the third evening as he prayed, he had a vision of a tall dignified person standing near him, and there sounded in his ears, as if spoken, the words, "Thy prayer is heard."² Soon afterwards he and his uncle came into contact with an Assamese Christian preacher, and after much study they both became Christians, and went back to their homes in the hills. One opened a school and the other toured among the villages, preaching Christ. In four years' time, 1867, these two men had brought twenty seven men and women to Christ. From this small beginning have come more than 400 churches (Baptist), entirely self-supporting, with a total membership of nearly 25,000.³

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1. Cf. Randolph L. Howard: It Began in Burma, p. 118.
2. Cf. Skoglund, op. cit., p. 53.
3. Cf. Skoglund, op. cit., pp. 57, 58.

Today, one out of ten Garos is a Christian, and they reach out through their leaders and their schools to nearly one-third of the people. Only the Christians have education, so from the lips of their Christian teachers, Garo pupils receive not only knowledge for their minds, but wisdom for their souls.¹

Christian missions among the head-hunting Nagas met with more difficulties than among the Garos of the near by hills. It was commenced in 1872, by an Assamese Christian, followed by an American missionary. But as the Nagas came on occasion into the plains, and saw the schools which had been started there, they begged for schools and teachers, and a small mission was established among them. In 1889, head-hunting was stopped among the Ao Nagas, and greater freedom for the missionaries was secured. Dangers still exist, however, as head-hunting continues in some remote areas. To-day Naga Christians number more than 85,000 --- many more than the more peaceful Garos. All the schools there are Christian, and are civilizing and evangelizing agencies.²

C. Conditions During the World War

1. Absence of Missionary Leaders in Burma, Development of Their Own Leadership.

Great changes were wrought in Southeast Asia by World War II. Burma was occupied by Japan for some years and was fought over twice. The devastation and loss of life that modern warfare brings were

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1. Cf. Ibid., p. 60.

2. Cf. Ibid., pp. 71-74.

terrific. Communications were cut. The people in one district knew nothing of what was happening to their friends in others. It was impossible to carry on the evangelistic work as formerly through the central societies of the different Karen fields. So small groups carried on as best they could in their own neighborhoods. The advice and financial assistance which they had received from the different Missions were no longer available, as all missionaries had to leave the country on the outbreak of war. Yet so well did the majority of the Karen Christians bear their trials that non-Christians came to them, and asked them what their secret was, that they always had such confidence and serenity of mind. They replied that it was because of their Christian faith, and preached to them of Christ. When Burma was opened up to the outside world again, this was the testimony that was given:

There is a tremendous awakening among the heathen Karens right now. In Maubin district alone, over a thousand were baptized December, 1945; 85 near Bassein last Sunday, and I don't know how many more elsewhere. Bassein and Myaungmya evangelists alone have baptized no less than 2000 since the Japanese moved out.¹

This was in the Delta districts alone. The same is true in other districts also, though perhaps not in such a great degree.

The foundations for this leadership among the Karens had been well laid in their policy of independence and self-support from the very beginnings of the work among them. They had truly eaten their own rice, and done things their own way. As missionaries had decreased

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1. The Burma News, No. 20, June, 1946, p. 5.

in number, and suitably educated Karens had been available, they had taken over the entire management of three fields. Other fields had the guidance and advice of only one foreign missionary to each field, where at first there had been several. This prepared them for the great test of the World War, to which they rose so nobly.

The Kachins in the North also carried on evangelistic efforts in their hills to the best of their ability. Good leaders were developed among both races, and have continued the administration of the work, even after missionaries returned at the request of the people.

2. Exposure to the Evils of Modern Civilization in Assam.

Assam was not affected so completely as Burma, though the enemy did penetrate into the eastern section on the border of Burma. But many of the military efforts of the Allies took place in the province. The air route known as the "hump" went over the Naga and Garo hills, and the Kachin hills of Burma. Some suffered from the fighting among them, or above them. Parachutists, or "umbrella men" as they called them, dropped down among them from the skies above. An oil line was constructed from Calcutta, through Assam and Upper Burma into China. Roads were cut through virgin forests by men and women of the villages of the district. The Stillwell Road was built from Ledo through districts where the people had had very little contact with modern civilization, having seldom seen trucks, aeroplanes and bombers. They received wages for their work during the war, more than they had ever known before. They

discovered the power of money, and could now buy many of the things the white men had, at which they had formerly marvelled.¹

D. Summary and Conclusion

The so called "simple world of the primitive" is no longer simple. Psychologically and socially, as well as materially, it is becoming increasingly complicated under the pressures of modernity. Tensions are created which cause further complications. His tendency is to try to live as a modern man, throwing away his primitive background. From a head-hunter to a college graduate in two generations is known in one Naga family. These primitives in their rapid development do not have any of the stabilizing factors of modern civilization. In their own state of life they have been receptive to the gospel, but the same peoples, secularized by modern conditions are infinitely harder to reach.²

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1. Cf. Skoglund, *op. cit.*, p. 89.
2. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

CHAPTER III
THE PROBLEMS AMONG THESE CHRISTIANS
OF ANIMISTIC BACKGROUND TO-DAY

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A. Unsettled Political Conditions

Hardly had the British returned to Burma and set up the government again, when it was announced that they would soon withdraw and give independence to the country. It had been promised long before the World War, and progress had been made in self-government, especially after separation from India in 1937. But now Burma was to be completely on her own, as an independent country outside the British Commonwealth of Nations. Great was the excitement, even turmoil, throughout the country. Religion had always been the main topic of conversation, but now politics took its place. Christian evangelists found that when they entered a village, they must first give the people the latest political news before they would listen to their preaching.

It was still not safe to travel about. River launches had been destroyed during the war, and few replaced. Only country row-boats and some dilapidated motor boats, which could not be depended upon to work, were available. On land, cars were not to be seen for years, only jeeps were on hand and were not so sure to get there, as the oxcarts with their wooden wheels and no springs. Railways were still in bad condition, --- rails torn up in places and bridges

blown up, and even where they were in better condition, engines and wagons were not available. Then also there were groups of bandits everywhere looting and robbing the people of the little that the war had left them. For as in the aftermath of all wars, law and order had broken down, and true peace had not been established.

1. National Aspirations: Karen and Kachin States.

Conditions were unsettled and yet a new government was to be formed. It was decided that the new country was to be a union of several states, --- Burma, the Shan State and Karenni which had existed for many years, and a new Kachin State which was to be formed in the northern part of Burma. But what about a Karen State for the second largest group in the country? Agreement could not be reached quickly. Karens were divided among themselves. The Christians had certain ideas, and the non-Christians others. A Karen New Year's Day had been observed for some years, based on ideas held by them as animists. Should it now be celebrated according to Christian beliefs or just as a day of feasting and social assembly?

Political parties of many different opinions were set up, and Karens were to be found in each party, as well as in the three entirely Karen parties formed along racial lines. A Minister for Karen Affairs was to be a member of the new Cabinet. Nationalism seemed almost a new religion in Burma, but too much along racial lines.

2. Pressure of Buddhism.

Before the World War a system of "National Schools" had been established in distinction from the other schools of the country. Here "National" was equivalent to "Burman Buddhist." This has been the

policy of some who wished to make Buddhism the unifying force of nationalism and the state religion of the country.

Eighty five per cent of the total population of the country are Burman Buddhists, and only three per cent are Christians of all races and denominations. To many, Christianity is a Western religion, and its effect may be to set off the Christians from the rest of the people as not truly national.¹

But when the Constitution of Burma was drawn up, Christianity appeared as a "recognized" religion, though it was declared that "the State recognizes the special position of Buddhism as the faith professed by the great majority of the citizens of the Union."²

The President of the Union of Burma on one occasion said, "In the principle of complete spiritual and religious tolerance lies one of the firmest foundations of the country's freedom and independence."³

At a meeting of the Burma Christian Council in 1951, the Prime Minister stated:

Burma is built on a political and not a religious constitution, and there is religious freedom. --- The Government has made no religion the state religion, and the Government treats all alike.⁴

At the annual meeting of the Y.M.C.A. in Rangoon in 1952, the Minister for Home and Religious Affairs, himself a strong Buddhist, declared, "It is the policy of the Government of Burma to encourage all religions and to help to make people more religious, irrespective of religious faiths."⁵

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1. Cf. Kenneth Scott Latourette: *Missions Tomorrow*, p. 120.
2. "A Survey of the Year 1948," *International Review of Missions*, Jan., 1949, p. 30.
3. *Ibid.*
4. "A Survey of the Year 1951," *International Review of Missions*, Jan., 1952, p. 25.
5. "A Survey of the Year 1952," *International Review of Missions*, Jan., 1953, p. 24.

The war had caused a visible decline in morals and religion. Anti-social tendencies had increased. There was very little regard for personal and property rights. Immorality was marked, and corruption and bribery prevailed.¹ To counteract these conditions among the Burman Buddhists, religious and political leaders, including the Prime Minister himself, sponsored a revival of Buddhism. Sacred relics were brought from India and Ceylon, and great crowds assembled in all the principle towns of Burma to worship them. The great pagodas were repaired and regilded, and new ones built. Buddhist literature was extensively distributed. Newspaper publicity was used. Buddhist priests were sent to remote parts of Burma to teach Buddhism.²

In contrast to the extensive Buddhist literature available, there was a scarcity of Bibles and hymnbooks for some years after the war. Heavy and total losses in book stocks and printing equipment had taken place. Bibles had to be printed in England, and hymnbooks in America. When the first supply came in, they had to be rationed. A whole village could buy only five copies, and what were they among so many? The need was felt most keenly by the new Christians who had never owned any Bibles. When more copies were finally available, the political conditions of the country were even more unsettled, travel was difficult, if not impossible, the postal service had been practically discontinued, and Bibles could not be sent to remote districts where they were needed desperately. In spite of these dif-

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1. H.J. Harwood: "A Perspective of the Situation in Burma," World Christian Handbook, 1949, p. 136.
2. Cf. "A Survey of the Year 1952," International Review of Missions, Jan., 1953, p. 24.

ficulties, the British and Foreign Bible Society at the end of 1951, reported an increase of 60% in circulation of the Scriptures. 52,700 copies were distributed in accessible districts, the highest figures since the war. More than four times the pre-war average was received in contributions to the Society.¹

The Burma Christian Council and the Christian Literature Society are striving to meet the need for other Christian literature, both translations from English and also original writings in the different vernaculars. They are greatly handicapped by lack of suitable materials and of workers. New Christian literature should have two aims: to nourish the intelligent spiritual and devotional life of Christians, and to arouse the interest of the general public in ideas and ideals that attract. This is especially necessary to counteract the vernacular literature with strong Communistic and other radical ideas which prevail in the bookshops of the large cities.²

3. Appeal of Communism.

For in Burma as in other countries of the world, Communism has come with a strong appeal to the peoples of the country, suffering from economic breakdown and from the political confusion described above. Even Christians have been misled by its teachings, and as in China have thought, "This teaching with its stress on service and sacrifice, on discipline, loyalty and faith, is just like Christianity."

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1. Cf. Ibid., p. 26.

2. Cf. Harwood, op. cit., p. 138.

But it is anti-Christian for it claims that one class is perfect and can do no wrong.¹

It has become a religion in itself, opposing internationalism in the political realm, and the historic religions of the world in the religious sphere. In the countries of Asia generally, there is a tendency to assume that Communism will be much less oppressive in Asia than in Europe. There is also a fatalism about the inevitability of its coming and a rather passive attitude towards it.²

The new National Government of Burma was set up in January 1948, when the British withdrew after granting independence to the country. It was admittedly "leftist" and called "Moderate Socialist." This did not satisfy some of the Burman Communists, and in May 1948, they rebelled against the government. There were two groups of them, called "Red Flag Communists" or followers of Leon Trotzky, and "White Flag Communists," or followers of Moscow. As the rebellion went on, various other groups also rose, each with its own objectives which it wished to realize, and each working on its own to gain its own ends, not co-operating with others to gain common ends. At one time nine such different groups were noted.

As the Karen request for a State of their own had not been granted, some of them rose against the government towards the end of 1948. Both Christians and non-Christians participated. At one time an estimate was made that about 10% of the Karen race was involved.

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1. Cf. Leonard Constantine: "The Gospel of Communism," International Review of Missions, April, 1952, p. 210.
2. Cf. John C. Bennett: "Christians and Communism in Asia," International Review of Missions, July, 1951, p. 297.

The great majority remained loyal, but many innocent people suffered at the hands of several different groups. Villages were looted and burned. In some parts, individual towns were destroyed more than once.

Refugees of all races and religions fled to the large cities, especially Rangoon, and the problem of relief among them was acute. People in large towns fled to the district, hoping to find security there, while people from the district fled to the towns in the same quest. Communications were more upset than before, and one travelled at the risk of one's life as time went on. But political stability was achieved by 1951, so it was possible to hold the first general parliamentary election after Independence. Communist promises, however, of a class-less society and economic equality still worked their subtle propaganda among discontented labourers and idealistic youth.¹

The new Parliament voted to grant a State to the Karens, and the Salween District, largely populated by Karens, was to be the nucleus of the new State. Adjacent territories might be added later, if their populations so voted. But the new State has not yet been formed as the rebellion still continues in that area.

For the Christians, this means a prolonging of the separation of one Christian Karen community from another. Need appears to predominate over achievement. As these disturbed conditions continued, there has been a great depletion in the ranks of pastors

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1. Cf. "A Survey of the Year 1952," International Review of Missions, Jan., 1953, p. 24.

and teachers. The Burma Christian Council made the following report concerning this situation:

Violent death, physical breakdown and death, shifts to better paying employment, especially of trained men teachers with family responsibilities, the normal ageing and retirement over a ten-year period have all taken heavy toll, and what we see at present is the pre-war group grown older and fewer in numbers. The training program and facilities are inadequate. Recruitment for a life long vocation in distinctive Christian service becomes difficult under such conditions.¹

To make the problem more acute, the government policy on foreign entry and residence sharply restricts the possibilities of any considerable reinforcements of the missionary staff, which is only about half of its pre-war strength.² However, within the last few months, two new missionary families have arrived in Burma to take up teaching positions in the Theological Seminary, and the Bible School. Also, Karens in one district completely cut off from others, have started a Bible School of their own in a village with such pastors as were available to teach and train young people. The Christians in this district did good evangelistic work among the non-Christians living in their neighborhood during the World War, and their zeal continues in this way.

One English speaking church has sent a young lady member to receive a training in Christian Education in America, and to return to help in the church. Other Christian leaders have also received theological training in America, and have returned to Burma to assist missionaries in station work, eventually to take over the full administration of the field.

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1. "A Survey of the Year 1949," International Review of Missions, Jan., 1950, p. 24.
2. Cf. Ibid.

At the end of the World War all the Christian schools were put under indigenous administrators, and such missionaries as were attached to the schools were there to teach and advise only. Many buildings had been totally destroyed, but mat buildings were put up, and such equipment as was available was used. A new educational system was established with State Schools giving free education, and the old system of Grants in Aid to private schools was abolished. It was therefore necessary for the Christian schools to ask for large school fees, much more than in pre-war years. In spite of the poor buildings and lack of proper equipment and the school fees charged, the Christian schools are full to capacity.¹ One school has adopted the platoon system, and has two sessions a day, with two staffs of teachers and two student bodies, using the same building, one group in the morning and the other in the afternoon. As many non-Christians attend these schools, they are true evangelizing agencies, or at least agencies of friendship and understanding.

Some new schools have opened in needy areas. Others have repaired their buildings and are in better condition to meet the great demand. A policy of free compulsory education has been proclaimed, and is being carried out by the Government as funds permit. Young people from Burma are receiving advanced training in India, Britain, and America,² sometimes on State Scholarships, and sometimes with private aid. Some older leaders have also gone abroad for further training.

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1. Cf. "A Survey of the Year 1952," International Review of Missions, Jan., 1953, p. 25.

2. Cf. Ibid., p. 26.

During the World War Christians of different denominations, especially the Baptists, Methodists and Anglicans learned to work and worship together, and this has continued in some places. The Baptists and Methodists have established two new Union Schools, supported by the two Missions, but under national administration with managing bodies representing the local communities. A dispensary has been opened in Rangoon in buildings made available by the Anglicans, under the supervision of a United Christian Medical Society. This was initiated by indigenous Christian laymen of all denominations. A dispensary in Mandalay has lately been opened in the former S. P. G. Children's Hospital, and is supported by the Christians of these three denominations. In these ways the ecumenical spirit has grown in strength under the leadership of the Burma Christian Council, which now has direct membership in the International Missionary Council.¹

Such have been the conditions in Lower Burma among the Burmans and Karens. Similar conditions have prevailed among the Kachins in the north though the political unrest there has not been so great, as the Kachins received a State of their own at the beginning of independence. The chief source of anxiety in that district has been the presence of Nationalist Chinese troops who were driven out of China in 1949, and have been along the eastern borders of Burma ever since. There are also groups of bandits roaming over the country, and plundering and looting the inhabitants.

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1. Cf. "A Survey of the Year 1952," International Review of Missions, Jan., 1953, p. 27.

Assam has had a much more quiet period since the War than Burma. The troops of the Allies withdrew and there was no political disturbance there. Among the Garo and Naga Christians the problem has been that their younger educated people have not been satisfied with life in their hills, and have entered government positions and other positions of responsibility on the plains. Here also is Nationalism and its demands on the Christians, and the progress in the taking over of responsibility along Christian lines has been slower than in Burma. Communism and the pressure of another religion do not seem to have become problems in these remote hill districts of Assam, as in the more accessible parts of Burma.

B. Presence of Animists Around Them

1. Temptation to Relapse into Animism.

With the disturbed conditions in every area of life that have prevailed in post-war Burma, it is not surprising to find that certain Karen Christians have not developed in their spiritual lives as they should have, or have even relapsed into secular irreligion or their old religion of animism. Throughout their history as Christians, they have lived among animists, and have inter-married among them. In some cases, instead of the Christian partner winning the other to Christ, the Christian has not stood firm in the faith but has become an animist. The high ideals of Christianity have proved too much for some believers and they have gone back to the earlier religion with its lesser demands upon them.

2. Temptation to Hold Two Religions.

There has also been the temptation to adhere to two religions. This has been the case, as was pointed out in Chapter I, with the Burman Buddhist who is also an animist. In the case of the Karen who has never worshipped the evil spirits, but has even thought them to be stupid, there is no spirit altar, but fear of them still exists. This feeling they have not expressed to their missionaries but have hidden it, thinking the missionaries did not believe in the spirits and would rebuke them for it. Only recently have two incidents become known. A certain Karen Christian once caught a thief in his house and severely punished him. This thief was said to have power over the evil spirits and in revenge he ordered the spirits to annoy the Christian by dropping coco-nuts, spoons, dishes and other articles from the ceiling of the Christian's home. This went on for some time and finally the owner obtained the help of another Karen Christian who had learned magic arts, and he exorcised the evil spirits. (A missionary in China has seen the same phenomenon there.) The Karen Christian did not use the name of Christ but depended on magic, to drive out the spirits.

The other incident indicated a belief in witchcraft.

A man and his wife, both Christians, were accused of witchcraft and the whole village turned against them. This belief in witchcraft has also been found in Africa among Christians of the present generation, who feel that repetitions of ill luck or misfortune are beyond the Almighty's control, and who therefore resort to methods of witchcraft for dealing with illness and other life problems.

It is indeed a striking fact that among the half educated, and in those very places where the ancestral religion has lost its hold, belief in witchcraft is on the increase. The loosening of the old sanctions and the growth of scepticism and a materialistic outlook on life have not in fact been accompanied, as might have been expected, by a lessening of the grip of witchcraft on the mind of the sophisticated African when faced with misfortune or disease. At least it is an indication that deep down in his being the African still believes in the influence of unseen spiritual forces and their power to affect his health and vitality.¹

The village in Burma in which this incident occurred was very isolated at the time and lived in great fear of attack. There was also a story at one time that a winged horse had been seen over this village. The people had returned practically to the life of primitives, with very little contact with the outside world, and with almost no inspiration or guidance in their spiritual life as Christians. So superstitions found a ready soil in which to grow.

The false prophets among the Karens to which reference was made in Chapter II, have continued to appear. Before the War, a new cult came into being. This was a curious mixture of Buddhism, Christianity and Animism. The founder declared that he had been baptized in childhood only to please his mother, and it is clear that he was never a true Christian. But he misled many Karen Christians and his power over them was amazing. In fact, he is said to have told friends that he was really testing his followers to see how far they would obey his precepts. At one time he ordered them to shave their eyebrows. In this way he was striking against vanity in the Karens, who consider well defined eyebrows to be a mark of beauty. He asked

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1. Phyllis L. Garlick: Man's Search for Health, p. 93.

them to wear white only, and in other ways to make themselves conspicuous among their fellow-Karens. One feature of his cult seemed to be the repetition of the sentence, "I am Christ" many times to oneself.

Other cults are in existence; one is centered on the idea of tithing, and another says there is no hell.

There would appear to be some appeals to Karen psychology in the cults founded by these prophets. One is the fact that it is quite easy to start something new among the Karens, but when the novelty wears off, it is difficult to hold them to it. Another is the confusion of mind among some weak Christians, as they hear the appeals of different religions, or of different denominations of Christianity. They find it difficult to choose between them, and a cult offering several beliefs from different groups may seem an easy solution, especially if it has a racial basis.

A group of Jehovah's Witnesses was very active in Rangoon after the War. Several of them went around the Karen community from house to house, visiting them and urging them to join their cult. They rented a hall near the Karens, and held many worship services and Bible Study sessions. But these Karens did not respond to their teachings, and after a year the Jehovah's Witnesses discontinued their efforts among them.

There is great need for missionaries and true Christian leaders to go into the remote districts of the country, and stabilize the faith of the people before they are lost to Christianity. That the Karens realize this urgent need is seen in this appeal to a

Missionary Society: "We, the following Christians, need one conscientious worker to guide us in our spiritual life. We beg you to send us one missionary in haste."¹ Another group once said:

We Karens waver in our faith, but our missionary stands as firm as a rock. We are not sufficiently different from the non-Christians. We need to follow the example of our missionaries, and be steadfast under all circumstances.

There is common agreement that although the rural population is so great, the cities and towns have received a disproportionate amount of the Christian institutional program.² It is hoped that this need will be met, as soon as the country returns to normal conditions, and it is possible to travel about in the rural districts.

C. Summary and Conclusion

The total picture of post-war Burma is seen to consist of many lights and shadows. The darkness may seem to predominate, but there are rays of light still shining which the darkness has not been able to put out. There is also what has been called a "Syncretistic fog"³ over certain areas. A strong light is needed to dispel the fog and the darkness, and that can be found only in Him who is the Light of the World.

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1. "A Survey of the Year 1948," International Review of Missions, Jan., 1949, p. 30.
2. Cf. Harwood, op. cit., p. 135.
3. Bennett, op. cit., p. 297.

CHAPTER IV
PLANS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE
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A. The Place of Foreign Missionaries

1. A Vision from the Past.

Christians in the past have foreseen to some extent the development of the present situation in Burma: the possibility of a conflict between the different religions of the country; the political and economic problems and the effects they might have on the spiritual growth of the Christians; and the question as to the place of the foreign missionaries in the future of the country.

Mission policy in the past had made regrettable mistakes in leaving new converts too soon to themselves. However true and loyal the Christian converts were, they yet lacked the heritage of Christian tradition and doctrine and life which the Christians of the West have had through many generations, and which have given them firmness and stability.¹ Christians in Burma have been exposed also to many temptations from living in a non-Christian land. Christians of the seventh generation are now found among the Karens, and the time for taking up more and more responsibilities seemed to have come even before the second World War. Their response to the challenge

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1. Cf. Harris, op. cit., p. 173.

was good, as has been described in preceding chapters.

2. The Attitude of the Churches in the West.

What especially made it necessary for the Christians to take up the administration of the work was the decreasing number of missionaries due to conditions in the West. About a decade after the first World War, the financial depression caused a fall in the contributions of the Church to the cause of missions. Missionaries were recalled because of lack of funds to support them. When this situation improved, a more serious one had arisen in the lack of candidates for the mission field. The evangelistic fervor of the Nineteenth Century which had originated the first foreign mission enterprise had died down. Scepticism and indifference prevailed for some time, and there was great division among the churches of the West.¹

So great was the decrease in number of the missionaries, and the consequent shortening of the missionary lines in Burma that it was said, "Burman Buddhists are beginning to think that Christianity is going out." Burman Christians said, "What of the future? We Burmans are not spiritual enough and not numerous enough to carry on."²

What might have been accomplished if the number of missionaries had continued as formerly, in those less troubled and more favorable times, cannot be known. Perhaps some of the elements of the present situation might not have arisen. Yet there is agreement

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1. Cf. Latourette, *op. cit.*, p. 122.
2. Howard: *It Began in Burma*, p. 120.

that the younger churches still need assistance from the older churches of the West to found the Church Universal, which shall be a supra-national, world-wide fellowship.¹

3. The Attitude of the Nationals Today.

The Christian nationals of Burma agree that missionaries are still needed, though the administration of the work should be in the hands of the nationals in ever growing degree. At present it may seem to be a junior partnership of the indigenous church, but it must become an equal partnership of the younger and the older churches, with the foreign missionaries becoming members of the indigenous church of Burma, so that it may become one body.²

It is realized that the evangelizing work of the church can be done most effectively by the people of the country, employing their own languages, applying their knowledge of the psychology of their people, and understanding their specific needs. But missionaries are needed to organize evangelistic campaigns, to train indigenous Christian workers, to awaken a sense of responsibility in the members of the church, to promote lay evangelism and Christian witness, and to advise concerning medical, educational, agricultural and industrial undertakings.³ In short, the missionary should be "a spiritually dynamic personality who should transmit his strength into the church."⁴ The secretary of the Burma Christian Council writes:

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1. Cf. Latourette, op. cit., p. 144.
2. Cf. "The Missionary Obligation of the Church," The Annual Report of the Burma Christian Council, 1951, p. 15.
3. Cf. G.P. Charles: "The Church in Burma," The Annual Report of the Burma Christian Council, 1952, p. 8.
4. "The Missionary Obligation of the Church," The Annual Report of the Burma Christian Council, 1951, p. 15.

The missionary has come to serve the country and the people. The foreigner, who was sometimes mixed up with the rulers in pre-independence days is no longer looked upon with that suspicion. His motives are no longer misunderstood in the free Burma. He has come as a partner and not as a dictator.¹

In the future, the prospect is that the missionaries will give over increasing control and management of the work to the nationals, and will keep in their own hands only the duties for which no Christian nationals are available.

B. The Task of the Church

1. Among the Christians Themselves.

In order that this future equal partnership may be achieved, it is necessary that the different denominations should co-operate actively, and should aim at united action wherever possible. Church Union is not contemplated for the near future. When the Church becomes more mature, it may be considered. At present the Burma Christian Council is the body through which the different denominations carry on the work of the Church Ecumenical.

It is realized that the different races must also co-operate more closely than ever before. In the past, each race has tended to carry on evangelistic work in its own racial group. Even the Karens who were such good missionaries from the first to the tribes on the borders of Burma and even in Siam, refrained from taking the gospel to the Burmans. Shortly before the World War in two districts of Burma, a desire to hear of Christ was awakened in the hearts of some

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1. Charles, op. cit., p. 8.

Burmans who appealed to their Christian Karen neighbors to preach the Gospel to them.¹ This was the first beginning. It was continued during the World War and is being done now with greater vigor. The Kachins are also reaching out to the Chinese who dwell among them. When these Christians of different races meet together in the Burma Christian Council, and sing the same Christian hymn in all their different languages, a sense of unity is felt as in no other way. This unity also exists in the discussion of common problems that come up, and that are solved in the spirit of mutual good will, when all distinctions of race are forgotten.

2. Among the Non-Christians.

The task of the indigenous church in this non-Christian country is vast. The people of the country are willing to give a hearing and consideration to the Gospel. On National days Christians have held religious services and on the last Independence Day when such a service was held in a public park, a crowd of about two thousand persons assembled, which gave rapt attention to the Christian message which was preached.² Local newspapers are willing to publish Christian messages, one even published Fulton Oursler's "The Greatest Story Ever Told" in several instalments. For some years a short program called "The Church Speaks" has been given from the local broadcasting station, and the Christian message has been preached over the air in English and Karen. A van fitted up with a loud

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1. Cf. McLeish, op. cit., p. 75.

2. Cf. Charles, op. cit., p. 14.

speaker and a projector for showing films has been very well received and is using Audio-Visual aids in this Christian work of taking the gospel to the people. The van also carries Bibles and Christian literature for all who wish to buy.

The revival of Buddhism that has been going on has awakened the Christians to feel the need of a deep and real revival of their own religion, a baptism of the Holy Spirit which will destroy all petty nationalism and racial prejudices. This must take place in their own hearts before they can undertake to bear Christian witness to the non-Christians. They confess that they feel frustrated when they consider the problem of how to move men permanently, and actually get their non-Christian friends to accept Christ as Lord of all life.¹

We all feel that as a Church we fail our Lord and Master. We do not do the things He commands. We do not have a burning passion for the souls of men to win them by all the means available. Our preaching lacks point, challenge and appeal; our expression of our faith is disposed to be foreign; our teaching of new converts and the young sadly inadequate. In exalting Christ the True and Living may we have the only remedy, because it is God's remedy, for sin and yet we confess to being luke warm, unimaginative, and timid.²

This feeling of humility and inadequacy on the part of the Christian workers themselves has made them realize the need of spiritual preparation and intense study of "the Eternal God's Book of Truth" (the Bible). To meet this need they plan to form Christian "cells" to deal more intimately with the Christian life and its

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1. Cf. "The Missionary Obligation of the Church," The Annual Report of the Burma Christian Council, 1951, pp. 10, 15.
2. Ibid., p. 5.

relation to the problems of the day, and to study methods of approaching non-Christians, so that after winning their friendship and sympathy they may lead them to Christ.¹

This great work cannot be done by Christian workers or paid evangelists alone. The number is still too few, though two hundred and ninety students were enrolled in the Baptist Seminaries and Bible Training Schools alone in 1951.² Even when they and their fellow students in other denominational seminaries take up their work, they will need the help of the church members, the laymen of different vocations.

C. The Message of the Church

The Burma Christian Council has urged that Christians in each vocation---business men, lawyers, doctors, teachers, customs officials and other Government officials, as well as men and women of other vocations---meet together in groups in order to think out the implications of Christian obedience in their calling, and to strengthen and support one another in putting into practice Christian principles, and so attempt to Christianize the different vocations.³ Christian witness through their lives before non-Christian friends in their different vocations would then be more vital and reach more people than the preaching of evangelists alone.

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1. Cf. Ibid., p. 11.
2. Cf. "Along Kingdom Highways," A Report of Baptist Missions, 1952, p. 11.
3. Cf. "The Missionary Obligation of the Church," The Annual Report of the Burma Christian Council, 1951, p. 9.

If in addition to this, the Christian laymen enter the homes of non-Christians in friendly visitation and "recommend Christianity to them as they readily recommend different material things to their friends" many more may be aroused to interest in Christianity, and may be willing to hear from their friends what they might not be so willing to hear from a strange evangelist. Questions on spiritual matters which they would never feel free to ask a religious worker might willingly be asked of a Christian friend in private.

These personal conversations would be conducted in the current idiom, in modern speech, and not in the classical forms which have been used in preaching and literature, and which have not touched the heart as the every-day colloquial speech has done. It is urged, too, that even sermons and literature be put in the current idiom¹ and not in "book language" which only the educated can appreciate. This would indeed be a great departure from methods of the past, and would bring the gospel home to the people.

How to make their worship more indigenous to the country has been considered, and efforts have been made so that Burmese culture is slowly but steadily filtering into the Christian church. Music, art, drama and poetry are fields in which Burmese culture can be readily absorbed into the church.² Even the Christmas tree has "gone Burmese." "Snow" and other trimmings of the West are replaced by Burmese flowers or balloons, for "snow" means nothing to the people of Burma, who do not have it in their country.

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1. Cf. "The Missionary Obligation of the Church," The Annual Report of the Burma Christian Council, 1951, p. 8.
2. Charles, op. cit., p. 9.

Christian customs which may replace non-Christian ones are being planned and have been instituted in some places. In place of offerings to the spirits when a new house is being built, Christians now have a service of dedication of the foundations of the house. After a death in the home, Christians hold a prayer meeting, in which the departed one is remembered with love. In non-Christian homes a feast is held on such an occasion, and at the grave a dismissal is given to the spirit of the deceased, and he is asked never to return to his home.

To make their religion more vital and more applicable to every area of their lives is their aim. The support of their work of evangelism has largely come from the West towards the Burman Christians. More sense of stewardship should be developed among them, that they may reach the same measure of self-support as has prevailed among the Karens from the first. A realization that they are stewards of God's liberality, and therefore have a responsibility before Him, for the use of money and lands should be stressed, and should be differentiated from the Buddhist doctrine of "Merit."¹ Only when the full support of the indigenous church has been undertaken by the members of the church can the full equal partnership to which they are working be achieved. Then they can continue the work on their own even without the help of the older churches, in the event that they are cut off from the West, as happened during the World War.

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1. Cf. "The Missionary Obligation of the Church," The Annual Report of the Burma Christian Council, 1951, p. 4.

Another objective laid before its members by the Burma Christian Council is this: Christians should study the social, economic, cultural and political movements going on in their country, and should strive to exert a Christian influence on them, and give a Christian interpretation to them.¹ In particular, they feel that the challenge of Communism is one that the Christians should attempt to meet. A special study of this question is urged. To meet the Communist with arguments, or with efforts to provide the oppressed classes of the world with better social and economic conditions is of no avail. "The one thing which impresses the Communist is to talk to him out of the Bible and to open up for him the significance of the Biblical revelation of Jesus Christ."² The liberation which Christ brings to humanity, the world brotherhood which comes through Him, and the totality of Christ's Lordship over life are the Christian answers to Communism. "Jesus Christ is Lord." This should be proclaimed in word and deed, and in every area of life.

What should be the answer of the church to the forces opposing it

such as other religions, Materialistic Atheism, Scientific Scepticism, and Nationalism or Racialism that amounts to or is identified with Religion, or compromising attitudes or appeasement policy such as Religious Syncretism, Humanism and Rationalism?³

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1. Cf. "The Missionary Obligation of the Church," The Annual Report of the Burma Christian Council, 1951, p. 11.
2. John A. Mackay: "Theology, Christ, and the Missionary Obligation," Theology Today, Jan., 1951, pp. 433, 434.
3. "The Missionary Obligation of the Church," The Annual Report of the Burma Christian Council, 1951, p. 3.

Here again the answer is "Jesus Christ is Lord." A revival of doctrine is needed---not the beliefs in which the Christian religion is like other religions, but the things in which it is different.

The Atonement, through the work upon the Cross of Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God; salvation by grace through faith; the power of the living and ascended Lord in the hearts of His people by the Spirit,---¹

these great themes must be stressed again and again, and they alone. No compromise can be made, and no universal faith or mixture of faiths can be contemplated. The work of the Spirit must be seen in the lives of Christians, so that non-Christians may be attracted and come to them to learn their secret, as they came during the World War.

The Christians of Burma, foreigners and nationals together, have thus studied the problems of the country, and have tried to solve them in their plans for the future of the work. They have been bold and courageous in meeting the challenges which have been presented to them. But one problem remains which they have not considered, perhaps because it applies only to certain groups and is not of general concern,---the problem of the animists, and the Christians out of animism, which is the specific problem of this thesis.

"Jesus Christ is Lord" has been suggested as the answer to Communism and Religious Syncretism. The same answer may be given to Animism and the weak Christian who is tempted to relapse into it. The evil spirits before whom the animist cowers were subject to Christ

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1. Harris: op. cit., p. 212.

when He was on the earth and obeyed His every command. He is still able to control them as has been testified by Christian workers in China, India and America.¹ The same power is available to the Christians of Burma if they will only claim it in faith, believing in His Name.

Instead of malicious vindictive beings who must be feared and propitiated, there is a Person full of love and compassion, who longs to protect and help, if only His followers come to Him and yield themselves completely to Him. Instead of fear and despair there is trust and hope; instead of weakness there is strength; instead of a miserable wretched existence, not knowing where to turn or what to do, there is a free full life with the Holy Spirit beside one, to guide and hold one up without any stumbling or straying from the path. Instead of a God too far away to hear and to care, there is God, a loving Father, who is ever near, ready to hear when His children call upon Him in prayer, and ready to supply their every need; instead of dependence on priests to tell one what to sacrifice to the spirits, there is dependence on the answer to prayer which God Himself sends. Instead of death and after it becoming spirits to annoy and provoke the living, there is eternal life and the company of the greatest Friend of all.

The Christian Karens, for whom Christ died, must be led to cling to Him and never depart from Him. They should read their

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1. Cf. John L. Nevius: Demon Possession and Allied Themes, p. 244.
Cf. J.A. MacMillan: Modern Demon Possession (a pamphlet)

Golden Book, and not neglect it, as they did their Leather Book, and so lost it. They should realize that they are not Israelites, but that as Christians they have been given a fuller and a perfect revelation of God in Jesus Christ. They should learn of Christ and really know Him as He went about healing, preaching and teaching. Their sick souls may thus be healed, and they may hear Christ say to them also, "Son, thy sins are forgiven thee." Christ would become "luminous and dynamic"¹ to them, shining upon their paths through life and lighting up the way; also filling them with energy that they may do as He commands them, no matter how high His standards may be. They may then advance further and climb higher day by day.

D. Summary and Conclusion

Truly Christians in Assam and Burma today, whatever their race or former religion, "must out-live, out-think and out-die non-Christians."² Many have suffered persecution for their faith in the past and have even died for it. Others now are willing to suffer for it. Come what may in this life, confidence in the ultimate victory of Christ over the forces of evil is sure and complete.

Christian layman, evangelist, pastor and missionary should all point to Christ,

The One who stands erect, His arms outstretched, His eyes alight. The need is not the calm of death but the light of a living love. Burma, coveted of man for their selfish purposes,

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1. Mackay, op. cit., p. 430
2. "The Missionary Obligation of the Church," The Annual Report of the Burma Christian Council, 1951, p. 9.

is coveted by the Master for quite other ends. Will He possess it?¹

The answer may be found in the Gospel of Matthew: "I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will. All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."²

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1. Howard: Baptists in Burma, p. 157
2. Matthew XI:25-30.

CHAPTER V

GENERAL SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

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A. General Summary

The purpose of this thesis has been to study the Christian approach to animists in Southeast Asia and to attempt to discover a solution to the problems of Christians out of animism, that their faith may be stabilized and that they may meet the future in trust and confidence.

In the first chapter the background of Animism was surveyed, and the customs of the various animistic tribes of Southeast Asia, the Karens and Kachins of Burma and the Garos and Nagas of Assam in India, were noted. It was found that throughout, a melancholy gravity was the dominant characteristic of this religion with a fear and dread of evil spirits, seeking to harm humans and needing to be placated by sacrifices. There seemed to be no hope of escape from their cruelty. Even God Himself, (and their ideas of Him were dim and vague) was too far away to care, or do anything in their behalf.

When the beginnings of Christian Missions were considered in the second chapter it was discovered that the message of Christianity to these animists was essentially a message of deliverance from bondage to the evil spirits through Christ, who was able to subdue them and free all believers from oppression. Happiness was substituted for sorrow and dread. A hope for eternal life took the place

of the belief that after death they also might become evil spirits to torment others. They learned that God was not far away, but near them, even in them, and that He cared so much for them that He had sent His only Son to die for them as the supreme sacrifice, and so redeem them from bondage to their sins.

It was noted that the Christian appeal has met with a remarkable response from Animists, that more converts have been made among them than among those of other religions with more organized systems of beliefs.

Another discovery was made in the special study of the coming of Christianity among the Karens of Burma. This race seemed to have been waiting for the Gospel message for several generations, as a legend of theirs, that a Golden Book would one day be sent by God, was understood to be fulfilled when the Bible was brought to them by the Christian missionary. It was also noted that these Karen Christians have been especially devoted to their new faith, propagating it among other races and supporting their work, both evangelistic and educational, from their own funds. It was found that missionaries were advisers only, and that they were released for other service when individual Karens were capable of taking over the full responsibility of the administration of their fields.

But disturbing factors were also seen in the development of these people in the Christian faith. The chief of these has been the rise of prophets among them, who have formed strange cults with a mixture of Christian doctrines and beliefs of other faiths. Another weakness has been their unwillingness to give up various customs of their own, that they might attain to the high ideals of the Christian faith.

When the problems of the present were considered in the third chapter, it was found that the political unrest and uncertainty which have prevailed in Southeast Asia have influenced the spiritual development of these Christians out of Animism. Persecution which has arisen has been seen to have strengthened the faith of true believers, but to have caused the weakening of the faith of other Christians, and even loss of faith of a few.

It was also noted that the presence of animists among them has been a temptation to them to relapse into their old faith, especially into the belief that God is too far away to care and to help them in their great sufferings.

In the fourth chapter plans for the future of the indigenous church in Burma were considered. These plans were formulated by both foreign missionaries and nationals. It was clear that nationals are not yet equal partners with foreigners in the task of the Church, but an increasing share in responsibility and administration is to be given to them, until finally the foreign missionary may withdraw, that nationals alone may carry on the task of the Church.

It was found that the Christian nationals fully realize their limitations and the magnitude of the task before them. To solve the problems, which have been discovered in this thesis, they know that they must remain firm in their belief that Jesus Christ is Lord of every area of life, and so they must endeavor in all their contacts with their non-Christian neighbors, to bring them to Christ, so that their country may increasingly be possessed by Christ, who called all to come unto Him.

B. Conclusions

From this study of the Christian approach to Animists in Southeast Asia, it has been apparent that the Christian message has had a very special appeal to these primitive peoples suffering from superstition and fear of evil spirits. Many have accepted this deliverance through Christ from bondage and oppression, and have a record as Christians of which they may justly be proud, as they have shared and will continue to share with others the freedom in Christ which they have received. As the conduct of the work is increasingly turned over to the Christian nationals, their knowledge of the psychology of their own people will enable them to solve the problems of their weak brothers, that they may be stabilized in the faith. As each Christian feels his own responsibility to make Christ known to his non-Christian neighbors, the country may be won to Christ in the future more than in the past.

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