

**“THE FLAW OF THE EXCLUDED MIDDLE”  
AMONG THE  
CREE PEOPLE OF CANADA**

by  
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***From the author ...***

*This is an abridged version of my thesis written in 2004 for my Masters studies at Providence Theological Seminary.*

*I wrote it because I was frustrated with the lack of results in my ministry. I had heard about “cultural keys” that unlock people’s understanding of the Gospel which, when used, result in people responding enthusiastically and in great numbers. I had been looking for that “key” for over 20 years and never found it. Upon hearing about the dissonance between my worldview and that of the animist, I began to wonder if understanding and ministering in terms of animistic worldview would be the key. This research was done in attempt to answer that question.*

*I want to be as effective as possible. I want to reach as many people as possible for Christ and see them not only saved, but faithfully walking with Him and firmly established in His Body. I wanted answers as to why I was so rarely accomplishing these goals.*

*This thesis is probably most easily understood if read from start to finish. However, I realize that it is quite long. At the beginning is a Table of Contents helping the reader find sections that are of particular interest.*

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- A. Written
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### Additional Reference Material

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## CHAPTER I

### 1. Introduction to the Problem

The problem this thesis addresses is that of split-level Christianity. This problem occurs when animists accept Christ and turn to Him for answers to the ultimate questions of life – such as origins, purposes and destinies of the universe, mankind, specific people groups and individuals – but continue to rely on animistic answers to the questions of the spirit world and daily living (Hiebert et al. 1999, 15).

Christian missionaries use two extremes to deal with this situation. One is to reject of all previous ways of viewing and dealing with reality. The other is to accept all previous ways of viewing and dealing with reality. Neither solution is satisfactory.

Split-level Christianity is a worldwide phenomena that occurs when those of Western-European cultures minister to animists. Animists perceive more areas of life as spiritual than do these missionaries. When missionaries offer natural or scientific answers such as hospitals and schools, for example, to the problems of illness and unemployment - which animists consider to be mainly spiritual issues - their answers seem insufficient. To deal with that insufficiency, animists either return to the medicine men, who deal with these issues in a spiritual manner, or they begin to believe that science has all the answers and, therefore, Christianity and animism are both unnecessary.

If they take the first route, they will remain active in the church and actively animistic, but hide their double life from the missionaries who, they know, will disapprove. If they choose the second route, they will reject all religion and become secularists. Neither response is desirable. Therefore a workable solution must be found whereby animists who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Saviour will continue in their new faith, experiencing Christ as sufficient to meet all their needs in all levels of reality (Hiebert et al. 1999, 15-22, 74-75, 77-79).

Worldwide, missionaries have been working together with indigenous believers to find that solution. The solution they have discovered is called critical contextualization. The goal of critical contextualization is that local believers be fully Christian and yet fully native. They must identify with their culture, yet they must challenge their culture. Their faith in Christ must not

feel foreign or imported or like a “whiteman’s religion.” Yet their primary identity must be in Christ and His universal Body, rather than in an ethnic group. Hiebert et al. put it this way, “Our aim is not to destroy folk religions and to replace them with formal Christianity. It is to develop a vibrant Christian folk religion that is rooted in the gospel” (1999, 383).

The purpose of this thesis is to determine if this problem of split-level Christianity exists among the Cree of Canada. If it does, then this thesis will proceed to look for solutions that are uniquely Cree and uniquely Christian. This analysis specifically of the Cree people of Canada is necessary because “there is no standard formulas for dealing with folk religions. They vary greatly from culture to culture, and a different response must be made to each of them” (Hiebert et al. 1999, 383).

Paul G. Hiebert has done a great deal of work on this problem. His article, “The Flaw of the Excluded Middle” (1982, 35-47), outlines the problem and the cultural aspects that contribute to it. His article gave rise to the idea, title and terms used in this thesis. His later work, *Understanding Folk Religion*, in conjunction with R. Daniel Shaw and Tite Tienou, expands and refines the ideas in his article.

## **2. The Statement of the Problem**

Following are the main questions that this thesis seeks to answer: When the presentation of the gospel and consequent discipleship excludes consideration of the spirit world among peoples of animistic worldviews, what effect does that exclusion have on their receptivity to the gospel and their consequent walk with God? If this exclusion has a negative consequence, what can be done to change the presentation to include dealing with the spirit world in a biblical way?

## **3. The Statement of the Subproblems**

Since this dilemma of split-level Christianity has been observed to exist primarily among people of an animistic worldview, the first step is to determine to what extent the problem exists among the Cree. As a minority ethnic group, have they retained an animistic worldview? If so, does their animistic worldview affect the Cree’s response to the gospel and their consequent walk with God? How do the findings lead to a ministry strategy that follows the process of critical contextualization?

Three groups of Cree were interviewed concerning their concepts of, and interactions with, the spirit world. These three groups correspond with the first three subproblems. Chapter III then uses the information found in the three subproblems and answers the question of the how the information can be practically applied to ministry strategy.

### ***a. The First Subproblem***

How is the spirit world understood by the Cree peoples of Canada?

### ***b. The Second Subproblem***

How does the exclusion of the acknowledgment of the spirit world in the presentation of the gospel negatively affect its receptivity by Cree peoples?

### ***c. The Third Subproblem***

How does the exclusion of the acknowledgment of the spirit world in the presentation of Christian discipleship negatively affect Cree peoples' walk with God?

### ***d. The Fourth Subproblem***

How can the standard presentation of the gospel and Christian discipleship be changed to acknowledge the Cree perception of the spirit world in a biblical way?

## **4. The Hypotheses**

It is impossible to be completely objective. Honest appraisal of the findings of the research is only possible when the researcher acknowledges her own expected findings.

### ***a. The First Hypothesis***

Cree people view the spirit world as primary, view the spirit world and the natural world as interconnected, view power as more important than morality, and seek help from the spirit world to deal with the frequent crises of daily life.

### ***b. The Second Hypothesis***

Many Cree have rejected Christ and chosen Aboriginal Spirituality because the presentation of the gospel they heard did not adequately present ways to deal with the spirit world or how being a Christian would benefit them in the crises of daily living.

### ***c. The Third Hypothesis***

Those who have accepted Christ have later abandoned their walk with God for the same reasons as stated in the previous hypothesis. Others who have accepted Christ, without being discipled in the area of the spirit world, have looked to Christianity to answer the ultimate questions of life, but have also continued to rely on animism to deal with the crises of daily life.

### ***d. The Fourth Hypothesis***

The Bible has much to say about how to deal with the spirit world. God wants to show His power and love daily in the lives of Christians. A study of these two areas in the Bible, along with recommendations from Cree Christians, will produce a presentation of the gospel and the Christian life of discipleship which addresses the animistic worldview of the Cree people.

## **5. The Delimitations**

It is important to define the parameters of a study. Doing so helps narrow the research. It also helps determine whether or not the thesis has met its goals.

### ***a. The First Delimitation***

This study will not examine the theologies or practices of churches or denominations.

### ***b. The Second Delimitation***

This study focuses its research solely on the Cree people of Canada.

### ***c. The Third Delimitation***

This study will not provide an exhaustive treatment of Scripture on the topic, but will use the Bible as a standard by which to measure the recommendations arising from the research.

### ***d. The Fourth Delimitation***

This thesis will give little attention to the practices or rituals of animists, but rather focus on the motives, values and perceptions that engender them.

## **6. The Definition of Terms**

Several terms will be used frequently throughout this thesis. It is therefore necessary to define those terms for the greatest possible understanding to occur.

### ***a. Middle Zone***

Middle zone is a popular missiological term for the spirit world and corresponding concerns. The low zone is that of the material world; the high zone is God's domain. High religion corresponds to the high zone and addresses the ultimate questions of life: death, destiny, eternity, and purpose and meaning in life. Technology addresses the questions of the low zone. Folk religion addresses the questions of the middle zone such as: What is the spiritual cause of any particular incident? How can spirits be controlled? How can one protect oneself from the capricious acts of evil spirits?

The term middle zone was inspired by Paul G. Hiebert's classic article, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle." The following diagram depicts Hiebert's divisions of reality into high, middle and low zones (1982, 40).

Those who place high importance on the middle zone are looking for answers and help for the issues of daily living such as: getting a job, finding a spouse, dealing with a rebellious child, illness, death, achieving or maintaining good relationships, preventing accidents or misfortunes, receiving direction for the future and for making decisions - in summary, to live a more pleasant life in the here and now.

## AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS

### ORGANIC ANALOGY

Based on concepts of living beings relating to other living beings. Stresses life, personality, relationships, functions, health, disease, choice, etc. Relationships are essentially moral in character.

### MECHANICAL ANALOGY

Based on concepts of impersonal objects controlled by forces. Stresses impersonal, mechanistic and deterministic nature of events. Forces are essentially amoral in character.

**UNSEEN OR SUPERNATURAL**  
Beyond immediate sense experience. Above natural explanation. Knowledge of this based on inference or on supernatural experiences.

**SEEN OR EMPIRICAL**  
Directly observable by the senses. Knowledge based on experimentation and observation.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>HIGH RELIGION BASED ON COSMIC BEINGS:</b><br>- cosmic gods<br>- angels<br>- demons<br>- spirits of other worlds                              | <b>HIGH RELIGION BASED ON COSMIC FORCES:</b><br>- kismet<br>- fate<br>- Brahman and karma<br>- impersonal cosmic forces          |
| <b>FOLK OR LOW RELIGION:</b><br>- local gods and goddesses<br>- ancestors and ghosts<br>- spirits<br>- demons and evil spirits<br>- dead saints | <b>MAGIC AND ASTROLOGY:</b><br>- mana<br>- astrological forces<br>- charms, amulets and magical rites<br>- evil eye, evil tongue |
| <b>FOLK SOCIAL SCIENCE:</b><br>- interaction of living beings such as humans, possibly animals and plants                                       | <b>FOLK NATURAL SCIENCE:</b><br>- interaction of natural objects based on natural forces   |

**OTHER WORLDLY**  
Sees entities and events occurring in some other worlds and in other times.

**THIS WORLDLY**  
Sees entities and events as occurring in this world and universe.

### ***b. Cree Peoples of Canada***

The term Cree refers to a major linguistic and tribal ethnic group. Dialect divisions are not addressed by this study. Neither is the distinction between Status and Non-status Indians considered. The criterion by which this study defines a person as Cree is that the individual considers himself/herself Cree.

### ***c. Christian Discipleship or Walk with God***

Christian discipleship (or walk with God) is understood as faithful, continuous desire and effort to be in right relationship with God, and to be living a life in keeping with His character. Included under this generalized statement could be the specifics of: exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit, witnessing, practising the disciplines of daily Bible reading and prayer, attending church regularly, ministering to the body of Christ through the use of spiritual gifts, submission to the Lordship of Christ, and confession and repentance of sin.

However, for the sake of this study, the concept is self-defined by those interviewed. If they consider themselves to be walking with the Lord, that is all that is necessary for this study, since the aim is to understand the Christian experience from a Cree viewpoint.

#### ***d. Animistic Worldview***

The definition of animistic worldview is closely related to the definition of middle zone in that it addresses and excludes similar concerns. In its most general sense, it is a belief in personal active spirits. In terms of this general definition, Christians would be labelled as having an animistic worldview.

A narrower definition is that animists believe that the characteristics or powers of every part of nature are personified and correspond to the spirit of that aspect of nature. Individuals, usually as a rite of passage into adulthood, spend time in solitude and fasting, seeking a guardian spirit which will guide and empower them throughout their life. The spirit initially usually presents itself to the individual in a dream or vision. Although individuals have a particular guardian spirit, they must also, for example, pay homage to the spirit of the beaver when they kill a beaver, or to the spirit of the river when they draw water.

Even individuals who do not practice these aspects of the animistic religion, but have that religion in their background, retain the worldview which understands that the primary reality is that of the spirit world and that the natural world is an expression of it. Spirit interaction with daily life is considered normative and so is expected and recognized in events. People of other worldviews observing the same events would recognize only natural forces at work.

This spiritistic or animistic worldview places its primary emphasis on power rather than morality, on present life rather than eternal destiny, and on manipulation of higher powers rather than submission to the Highest Power. It views all of life to be interconnected. Therefore magical incantations, rituals, sacrifices, fetishes, charms, although material, affect the spiritual world and vice versa.

Some characteristics of an animistic worldview are consistent with the teachings of the Bible; some are not.

#### ***e. Indian Religion***

Indian Religion is the type of animism practised by the First Nations peoples of North America. Indian Religion is not specific to any one tribe or area but rather is a general, pan-Indian term. It is used interchangeably with Aboriginal Spirituality. Sometimes people also refer to it as traditional religion and its practitioners are called traditionalists.

#### ***f. Critical Contextualization***

Critical contextualization is the process by which Bible truths are presented in a way that makes sense to the local people within their context. It begins with a study of the local culture and the missionary's culture. Then both are evaluated in the light of Scripture. Next, specific issues are evaluated and wise judgments made as to which aspects of the old ways can be kept, which must be rejected, and which can be modified in order for the local expression of faith in Christ to fully meet their needs and be faithful to the teachings of Scripture. It must then be decided what steps will be taken towards change. This change will be both personal and corporate. Once the changes are implemented it will be necessary to reevaluate those changes to determine if the results are true to the Word of God and true to the local culture (Hiebert et al. 1999, 369-370, 383-384). The goal is not conformation to a Western-style church, but conformation to God's ideal for that particular setting. Their life in Christ must be both comfortable and homelike and

yet counter-cultural and challenging to any aspect of it that is not submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

## **7. The Importance of the Study**

Evangelicals expend a great deal of time, energy and money to reach Native peoples for Christ. It is a matter of stewardship of God's gifts of talents, resources, people and spiritual gifts to use them in a way that will have the most powerful and longest lasting effect.

Cree people who have heard the gospel are turning from the truth because, although God is able and willing to meet their daily spiritual needs, He is not being presented in such a way that they realize this truth in their mind, heart and practice.

It is of utmost importance that those seeking God and those seeking to represent God find common ground upon which both truth and relationship may begin and grow and become established and firm, and also stretch on uninterrupted into eternity.

Christ has the desire, ability, means and knowledge to save Cree people. He is able to keep them from falling and to present them "without fault and with great joy" (Jude 24). Missionaries must work with God as He accomplishes His purposes in the lives of Cree people.

Missionaries desire to do so but have frequently failed in their attempts due to underestimating the vast difference of worldviews. They have presented the gospel in the manner in which it was presented to them. Missionaries have assumed that what attracted them to Christ will also attract Cree people to Christ. Missionaries may rejoice that Christ answered questions in their own lives, but have neglected to understand that, although Christ also answers questions in the lives of Cree people, they may have different questions. Missionaries have wrongly assumed that their own reality and Cree reality look the same.

Missiologists have addressed these types of concerns with a wide range of people groups, but little has been done in regards to the Cree peoples of Canada. Anthropologists have made observations about the animism of the Cree, but it is time that Cree people are given a voice to express how they see reality. It is time for Cree Christians to tell what attracts them to Christ and keeps them in close fellowship with Him. It is long past time that a presentation of the gospel and subsequent Christian discipleship be designed that is formulated in accord with the Cree worldview and in co-operation with the strengths of the Cree culture and in answer to the questions left unanswered by animism.

This proposed study has practical value in that it will help missionaries understand the Cree worldview. With that understanding and with the suggestions of Cree people gained through this research, missionaries should be able to engage in ministry that will be more effective than their previous attempts at presenting the gospel, at discipling Cree believers in their walk with God, and at training them for leadership in the Cree church.

## CHAPTER II

### REPORTING OF THE DATA

#### INTRODUCTION

The bulk of the research for this thesis is based on firsthand interviews. As has already been stated, three groups of Cree people were interviewed. The first group was chosen at random in order to ascertain the Cree perception of the spirit world (Subproblem #1). The second group was chosen specifically for their exposure to the gospel to ascertain if their animistic concerns played a part in either their rejection or acceptance of the gospel message (Subproblem #2). The final group was chosen because they claim to have made a commitment to Jesus Christ. Their answers would reveal whether or not their animistic concerns had been dealt with as they were disciplined in Christ. If those concerns had not been addressed, was their ability to walk in obedience to God undermined? If those concerns were addressed, did doing so strengthen their relationship with and commitment to Jesus Christ? (Subproblem #3). Chapter II of the thesis reports the summaries and findings of the interviews of these three of the groups.

#### Twenty-four Markers of an Animistic Worldview

In order to determine whether or not the Cree people of Canada retain an animistic worldview, it is necessary to have a standard by which to make that judgment. Research on animism, as it is practiced worldwide, has revealed some consistencies in the way animism affects people's thought patterns and ways of perceiving reality. These commonalities, gleaned from the reading done in preparation for the writing of this thesis, are here reduced to 24 markers of an animistic worldview. These 24 traits are not exhaustive, yet paint a fairly detailed picture. The results of all three groups of interviews will be judged using these 24 markers.

##### 1. Animists believe in personal spirits.

One of the animist's primary beliefs is that personal spirits exist. Hiebert et al. state that, "In many folk religions, humans live in a world surrounded by spirits" (1999, 81). Van Rheenen confirms this statement (1991, 21).

##### 2. Animists believe in impersonal spiritual forces.

In the same quote Hiebert et al. add belief in supernatural forces (1999, 81). Ross does not state the matter so directly, but alludes to it when he writes of how the First Nations people of northern Ontario and Manitoba use "bad medicine" (1992, 52) and "magic" (1992, 54). These mechanistic methods would seem illogical except for a belief in spiritual forces.

##### 3. Animists believe that the spirit realm causes events in the human world and natural world.

Not only are these spiritual beings and forces thought to exist, but they are also thought to interact with and affect the human and natural realms. Ross writes of how animists view cause and effect not in a natural way, but in a spiritual way thinking, "that each acts as it does because that is the will of one of the greater or lesser spirits" (1992, 51). Van Rheenen says that animists believe that spirits have the power to control human affairs (1991, 21).

4. Animists believe that the spirit realm can at times be hostile.

According to Hiebert et al., spirits and spiritual forces are seen mainly as hostile (1999, 81). There are spirits that are considered kind and good but even they must at times be appeased because they can become angry (1999, 54).

5. Animists seek to find out which spirit or spiritual force has caused which event.

In response to an interactive and hostile spirit world, animists find it necessary to develop methods by which they can determine which spiritual being or force is causing which event. Van Rheenen calls these methods divination (1991, 21).

6. Animists seek to determine which spirits will cause which event in the future.

This world of hostile and active spirits also leads the animist to feel a need for supernatural guidance. The use of omens and premonitions help a person to know and deal with an uncertain future (Hiebert et al. 1999, 79).

7. Animists live in fear and need security.

Another natural response to a hostile, active spirit world is fear. Fear leads to attempts to find security (Hiebert et al. 1999, 87).

8. Animists seek spiritual protection.

This sense of fear and lack of security leads animists to take spiritual measures to protect themselves from hostile spirits. Some use amulets and fetishes to gain this protection. Hiebert et al. explain: "A person may go to a magician in the morning for a protective amulet" (1999, 84). Cree people tend to use such things as dream-catchers, medicine bags, stones, and sweet-grass.

Another form of protection comes in the keeping of taboos. Van Rheenen says that, "The prohibitions of taboos protect the careful observer" (1991, 211) and the breaking of taboos may be thought to cause illness (1991, 36).

9. Animists believe humans can control or manipulate these spirits/forces.

The animist does not seek a personal relationship with the powers. Rather he seeks to manipulate spiritual beings and forces to do his will (Van Rheenen 1991, 22).

10. Animists believe all aspects of reality to be interconnected.

In animistic thought there is fluidity between the barriers of different categories of reality. There is movement between, and even becoming of, the members of the other category: spirit, human, animal, plant, dead, living (Hiebert et al. 1999, 81). "In animistic worldview there is no watertight distinction between humans and animals or between animate and inanimate" (Hiebert et al. 1999, 86).

11. Animists are human-centered rather than God-centered.

"In contrast to high religions, which focus their attention on the cosmic order, folk religions are

human-centered. Humans ... are seen not only as actors in the universe but as the center of existence (Hiebert et al. 1999, 80).

12. Animists are focused on the present rather than the eternal.

Moreover, in contrast to the concern of high religions for eternal time, folk religions focus on the now, not some distant past or future (Hiebert et al. 1999, 83).

13. Animists are more concerned with power than with truth.

Animists tend to be pragmatic. They are concerned with what works and what is useful rather than what is true. This tendency allows them to “turn to several mutually contradictory systems simultaneously with the hopes that one will work” (Hiebert et al. 1999, 84). They have no problem going to a church for prayer for healing, a doctor and a medicine man.

Ross tells the story of a boy whose bow had “God Be With Me In the Hunt” and the heads of an eagle and a bear pencilled on it. He asked the elders if that was because the boy was making sure all the bases were covered and they agreed (1992, 52-53).

14. Animists tend to be highly relational people.

For many tribal peoples, group harmony was essential for survival due to the harshness of living conditions. They needed each other. “People find security in their kinship groups and joy in the community gatherings” (Hiebert et al. 1999, 87).

15. Animists are more concerned with social sin than theological sin.

Due to the highly relational nature of animists and the fact that they are human-centered rather than God-centered, they are primarily concerned with social sin rather than theological sin (Hiebert et al. 1999, 199-202). Sin is seen as that which threatens group unity. What does not hurt others is not thought to be sin.

16. Animists give a great deal of attention to death.

Hiebert et al. state that animists are so deeply concerned about death because, “Death challenges the human search for meaning” (1999, 78). Their concern has less to do with the dead than with the living who are coping with the death.

One way animists cope with death is by believing that the spirits of the dead continue to exist and to interact with the living. According to Harold Turner in *Eerdmans' Handbook to World Religions*, most tribal peoples also believe that the spirits of those who have died live on. These living dead have dealings with those still living in this world (1982, 131).

17. Animists assign significance to dreams.

Animists give significance to dreams because dreams are thought of as “channels through which spiritual powers communicate with the living” (Van Rhee 1991, 185). Due to this thinking, “People take dreams seriously” (Hiebert et al. 1999, 59).

18. Animists have a concept of a distant and benevolent high god.

According to Kraft in *Spiritual Power and Missions*:

Most animists of the world know that there is a supreme God who lives above the evil spirits and is more powerful than they are. They usually reason, however, that the supreme God will be good to them and so they need pay little or no attention to Him. On the other hand, they reason that the way to keep the evil spirits from bothering them is by sacrificing to them to appease them, rather than (as in Christianity) by obeying the God who is above them, allowing Him to protect them from the evil spirits (1995, 98).

19. Animists favor orality.

According to Hiebert et al., “Folk religions store and transmit their information orally; they are highly immediate, personal and relational” (1999, 85).

20. Animists focus on the local rather than the universal.

While Christianity and other high religions view themselves as being universal, primal religions view themselves as being local and specific to one people group. Turner says, “Primal religions are not religions for all peoples, and so do not become missionary, as the universal religions often do. They are the religion of one tribe or people who realize that other peoples have their own gods and systems” (1982, 130).

21. Animists believe in an impersonal cosmic moral order.

According to Hiebert et al., “There is a widespread belief in an impersonal cosmic moral order which guarantees that good deeds bring good results ... and that bad deeds have evil consequences” (1999, 65).

22. Animists believe that a person can be vulnerable to attack of evil spirits by proximity.

Animists believe that a person is more vulnerable to the activities of hostile spirits under conditions that have nothing to do with sin. They believe that a person is more likely to experience negative spirit activity if they accidentally wander into a geographic area dedicated to a specific spirit (Priest et al. 1995, 18) or if a person touches an object or accepts a gift that has previously been dedicated to a spirit (Priest et al. 1995, 14).

23. Animists believe that a person can be vulnerable to attack of evil spirits by curses.

Another way that animists believe they will be subject to an attack by a hostile spirit is if they have been cursed. It may also be thought that curses move impersonal spiritual forces against the cursed individual (Priest et al. 1995, 16).

24. Animists consider healing and sickness to be spiritual issues.

Animists tend to view healing and illness as spiritual issues more than do those peoples of Western-European cultures. They go to medicine men for both herbal remedies and to deal with the hostile spirits that may have caused the illness. Newell Booth says “In this way recreation, healing, politics and religion are all closely tied together in the traditional community” (1982, 161).

## **Interviewees Overall**

To help ensure the quality of the data supplied by those interviewed, the following criteria was stipulated. Those interviewed:

- were over eighteen years of age
- were not under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- were not under pressure to respond
- permitted the recording of the interview
- supplied informed and written consent prior to the interview

To ensure a wider perspective of the population, the total of those interviewed included:

- men and women
- adults of various age
- village and city residents

To ensure a fairly high level of accuracy, 30 people were interviewed. To ensure ethical practice, this interview process was approved by the Providence Theological Seminary Committee on Ethical Research. All interviewees gave informed and written consent prior to the interview. Data obtained by formal interview was augmented with data obtained from Cree people via informal conversation with the author. Participants in these informal conversations were asked for verbal consent prior to their names being used in the thesis.

All the interviews took place in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. One person was not a resident, but just visiting. Although all the interviews were conducted in an urban setting, at least two-thirds of the interviewees had grown up on reserves or in small Native communities.

Of the 30 interviewed, 10 have since moved, eight to rural or reserve settings and two to other urban centers. These transitions indicate that the information gained in the interviews is not exclusive to urban Cree. Those interviewed represent at least 15 different Native communities.

Prior to the interview each was informed that he/she was free to refrain from answering any question. Some took advantage of this offer.

### **A. Subproblem #1**

#### **How is the Middle Zone Addressed by the Cree Peoples of Canada?**

##### **Introduction**

Before reporting the data of Subproblem #1, it is necessary to give some background on those interviewed. The interview questions and the rationale used for choosing those questions can be found in the appendix B. For the sake of the purity of the data, the potential information contaminants are reported. Then the results of the interviews are reported.

##### ***Interviewees***

For Subproblem #1, 10 people were chosen at random without prior knowledge of their religious convictions, with the exception of the deliberate inclusion of one teacher of traditional Indian Spirituality in order to ensure a viable representative of that particular population group. All are

Cree adults. All but one have children. All but one are female. At the time of the interviews four were students, one was a stay-at-home mother and the rest held jobs.

### ***Information Contaminants***

The information gained in the interviews could have been contaminated by three means: the generality of the questions, the secretiveness of the topic, and the interviewees' willingness to please. All or any of the three may have tampered with the purity of the responses.

As with most interviews, the challenge was to get specific enough information to answer the main question proposed by the thesis without leading the interviewee. Frequently the interviewees asked about the definitions of both "spiritual power" and "spirits." In the act of defining these terms the interviewer recognizes that she may have influenced the answers of the interviewees. When asked, she defined "spiritual power" as a strong connection to God or the Creator, which is not entirely true to Van Rheenen's definition, in which spiritual power has more to do with controlling the spirits and making things happen, than in entering into relationship with them (1991, 22). The definitions of "spirits" were more random but included defining them as unseen beings.

Another challenge with approaching this subject is that Cree people realize that few Caucasians acknowledge the spirit world, and so might be reluctant to offer their insights on this topic. This area of their worldview is also considered by some to be secretive, not open to scrutiny by those of differing worldviews.

A final challenge in completing the interviews was the "Ethic of Non-Interference" as presented by Rupert Ross (1992, 12). Cree people highly value relationship and so try to please the other person as much as possible, even to the point of saying whatever they think will please the other person, whether they actually hold that particular conviction or not (1992, 26). In the presentation of the consent forms the potential interviewees became aware of the researcher's Christian convictions. This might have altered their answers in attempts to please the interviewer. This caution may be even more applicable to those interviewed for Subproblem #2, as most were also familiar with the interviewer on a personal basis.

### **Reporting the Data**

Subproblem #1 seeks to answer this question: How is the middle zone addressed by the Cree peoples of Canada? The information gleaned from the interviews for this subproblem fits into five categories which arise from the rationale behind the questions. The first category seeks to determine what is important to the Cree. The second category looks at what they rely on in times of stress. The third examines how they make decisions, and the fourth how they categorize reality. The fifth category reveals their relationship to the supernatural.

#### **1. Values**

The first category is that of values, principles for life and/or desires for life. Nine questions were used to approach this topic from different angles. The questions were designed to reveal the differences between generations, but all from the point of view of those who are now adults. The questions used to determine values were:

1. What are the five most important things in life?

2. What did your parents/grandparents teach you as principles for life?
3. Do you now live by those principles?
4. Why or why not?
5. What principles do you live by?
6. What do you desire above all else? What would you change about your life if you could?
11. What do you need most in your life and why? Rate top 5 in order of importance: freedom, joy, peace, love, self-control, forgiveness, spiritual power, money, job, faith, family, healing, confidence, wholeness, truth, hope.
13. How do you train your children? What is important for them to learn from you?
16. What are some of the proverbs of your people?

It was found that Cree people value relationships, emotional health, freedom from addictions, Indian Religion, and education. These are listed in descending order of importance.

#### ***a. Relationships***

The most important thing to Cree people is relationship. This finding is consistent with Marker #14 which states that animists tend to be highly relational. In the interviews, family was mentioned most frequently and included children, life partner and extended family, but children were by far the most important relationship. One interviewee said, “Definitely my children come first. I will never not be there for my kids. That is the one thing that I want to instill in my kids, that I will always be there as long as I’m alive.”

In connection, the values that they wanted for themselves and to pass on to their children, and some of the proverbs, had to do with treating others well. Respect, love and generosity rated very high. Although not stated explicitly, the flavor of Ross’s “Ethic of Non-Interference” (1992, 12, 26) came out in the definition of respect and freedom. Even fairly young children were given a lot of freedom to make their own choices. The same interviewee also said, “I believe our kids are things that are just loaned to us and it’s up to us to teach them ... after that it’s up to them, and so we only could learn from our mistakes because that’s what life’s about.”

Two other values required for good relationships also came into play. Forgiveness and truth were both valued quite highly. But these terms, too, were understood in a uniquely Cree way.

Not one interviewee who spoke of forgiveness thought of it in terms of needing it from God. It was always thought of as an aid to interpersonal relationships (Marker #15). When asked specifically about forgiveness from God, forgiveness was taken for granted, and therefore not worthy of concern (Marker #18).

Truth was not thought of as an abstract list of absolutes or a statement of faith to which one assented, but rather in terms of relationship. Experiencing the destructiveness of lies in a relationship made people see the value of telling the truth. Such a concrete, relational concept of truth is in keeping with the high value tribal peoples place on relationships.

Two of the proverbs mentioned held the message that it was necessary to treat others well or suffer the consequences. One proverb was, “What goes around, comes around.” The choice of this proverb is significant in that it uses fear as a motivator, as was seen in Marker #7. This proverb also points to the animistic belief in an impersonal cosmic moral order (Marker #21) in that it was assumed that righteous retribution would be played out in the universe without intervention by a person or by God.

### ***b. Emotional Health***

Healing was defined entirely in terms of emotional health, rather than physical health. The need to deal with grief and addictions and past hurts was cited. Healing was necessary for the health of the family, but the family also aided the healing process. An interviewee said, “The most important thing in my life is healing because I’ve been through a lot.”

Another interviewee used professional help, including a wide variety of psychotherapeutic methods. She went to grieving workshops, took anger management classes, kept a journal, was involved in inner child therapy, and practiced primal scream. She also mentioned that her path to healing was aided by admitting her own wrongs and forgiving others. Although these last two methods of dealing with pain are particularly Christian, she did not mention anything to give the impression that she had learned them in a Christian context. Getting well emotionally was very important to her.

Another evidence that Cree people are seeking emotional health is the value they placed on peace. Peace was needed for inner calmness and the ability to concentrate or think clearly. One person said peace was necessary for the enjoyment of life and for confidence, and that it was the opposite of anger and frustration. Another indicated that it was the opposite of being stressed, unhappy or sad.

Happiness may have been another word that was used to express this desire for emotional health. When asked what she desired above all else, one interviewee said, “Healthy, happy children and a healthy, happy me. I guess a healthy, happy family.” In answer to that same question, another interviewee said, “Happiness. I want to be happy in what I choose to do with my life and the decisions I make and the people I surround myself with, the things that I do.” The interviewer then asked, “Then in all your choices, happiness is your goal?” She responded, “Yes.”

### ***c. Freedom from Addictions***

Freedom from addictions is a goal and desire for many Cree people for themselves and their communities. One Cree lady said:

I guess alcoholism is a big factor in Native ancestry. I won’t say I haven’t tried it because I did try it ... Something bad always comes out of it. It’s not a good thing. That’s part of the bad spirit, I guess. I always try to teach my kids that alcohol isn’t something that you should look forward to or something that you think is cool, that you have to do. Because there is lots of alcohol in our family, both my family and my husband’s family ... lots of alcoholics and there was nothing but trouble. We’ve lost two nieces on account of alcohol and drugs. We just about lost ... my stepson because he shot himself. And that was because of alcohol, so I would like to see something written up about alcohol, that it’s not something easy to deal with and it’s something that should be recognized. I know there’s AA and Alateen, but lots of people are (too) proud to go to them. They don’t want to. They don’t think they need it. They can’t accept the

fact that it is a problem.

#### ***d. Indian Religion***

The interviews revealed that there is a renewed interest in and commitment to Indian Religion. Questions #3 through #5 showed that the present adult generation is purposely pursuing the knowledge and practice of Indian Religion in contrast to the past generation's allegiance to either the Roman Catholic or Anglican Church. One interviewee is an example:

Actually, when I did go to church I went to the white church. I did follow the Anglican church (but) it's really changed my life when I started going to school. Reading my books and getting educated, reading Cree philosophy. There's a lot of Aboriginal writers out there. Plus I took a Humanities class. And it's really changed my view on the white society and the Aboriginal worldview. I'm really into my spirituality. It's an Indian perspective: sweats, dream-catchers. I'm just into that right now. I knew it inside me that there was something else. I know that just by me partaking, that it feels good to know who I am now.

Another Cree lady switched from following a formal type of Christianity to Indian Religion. She said, "I believe that those are spirits that are taking care of me."

From these interviews there seem to be two strains of Indian Religion. For those who learned it from their grandparents, where the animistic worldview had continued throughout the generations, the spirits are viewed more malevolently. But where their animistic background had been lost due to a closer association with some form of Christianity, those who are now rediscovering it through school and the new revival of Indian Religion or, as it is also called, Aboriginal Spirituality, are reinventing a milder, warmer kind of interaction with spirits where there is less fear. In this newer form, the spirit is almost always considered a beloved dead relative come to help them.

#### ***e. Education***

The value placed on higher education became evident in Question #1, Questions #3 through #5, Question #6, and again in Question #13. This adult generation considers education as a tool necessary for themselves and their children to survive in today's society. When asked how her values differed from that of her parents, one interviewee said, "The only thing that I changed ... was that I kept going to school." Later when she was asked what she desired above all else, she said, "Getting my nursing degree." In answer to that same question, another said, "I want to be educated." When asked about her dreams for her children, a Cree lady said, "I'd say that putting them through school, education ... trying to make sure that they have that security that education brings a person."

Although Question #12 was not included in this section on values, it did reveal that getting a good education was a major factor affecting how people made their decisions. They chose where to live, when to move and even if they would continue living with their spouse depending on their or their children's educational opportunities.

## **2. Rationale of and Response to Crises**

The second category analyzes the Cree's rationale and response to crises. A lot can be learned about a people by the way they handle misfortune. What do they rely on? What enables them to

cope? What gives them the determination to go on? Where does their strength come from? How do they explain it? What is their rationale for its intrusion into their lives?

Four questions were used to approach this topic. The questions were:

7. Why do bad things happen?
8. Why do good things happen?
9. How can you prevent bad things from happening, and how can you make good things happen?
10. How do you handle crises? sickness, death, accident/loss, conflict.

#### *a. Causes*

Van Rheenen (1991, 21) and Ross (1992, 51) both state that animists consider hostile personal spirits to be the causes of life's misfortunes. However, the interviewees gave no mention of such. There were, however, abundant clues of impersonal spiritual forces being the cause. Events were also assigned human causes.

#### **1) Impersonal cosmic moral order**

As was stated in Marker #21, Hiebert et al. say, "There is a widespread belief in an impersonal cosmic moral order which guarantees that good deeds bring good results ... and that bad deeds have evil consequences" (1999, 65). The interviewees concurred. When asked why bad things happen (Question #7), six out of nine stated that bad things happened for a person's greater good, so he will learn or grow, or be better able to teach his children, or as a way for God to redirect him back to the right path. There was a sense of something bigger looking out for their good, or at least that they were free to make choices that would enable them to bring positive results out of the sorrows of life. One lady was even reluctant to call negative events "bad," since she thought of them as always having a good purpose. Not one person initiated the idea of events being accidental. One lady mentioned the idea of a person having "jinxed" themselves by wishing evil on others. This statement is evidence of taboo and a sense of magic, which are consistent with a concept of impersonal spiritual forces (Marker #2).

When asked why good things happen (Question #8), the main theme was more of a karma idea, in that somehow good comes to those who do good, and evil comes to those who do evil. No explanation was given as to how this payback came to be. A just universe was simply assumed. So, in both negative and positive terms, the idea of an impersonal cosmic moral order was verified.

#### **2) Human**

The findings for Questions #7 and #8 were fairly consistent with each other in that almost every interviewee attributed the occurrence of good things directly or indirectly to human choice. Two people mentioned the aspect of community choices as well as individual choices. Only one person stated that the occurrence of good events in a person's life were the blessings of the Creator.

The answers to Question #9 (How can you prevent bad things from happening and how can you

make good things happen?) were in keeping with the high value the Cree place on relationships. On the basis of the answers given, the question could have been, “How do you have good relationships?” Most of the responses centered on understanding others and not judging them, listening to them and talking with them, giving them teaching and support programs but not rules, being generous, raising one’s family right, being vulnerable in order to gain another’s trust, listening to the elders, and working with others.

One interesting sideline, in response to this question, is that even those people who blamed their suffering on the bad choices of others also stated that people are not inherently bad, but just lost, wandering, ignorant or not brought up well. Man is thought to be essentially good. This finding would also provide a basis for the animistic emphasis on social sin over theological sin as was stated in Marker #15.

### ***b. Emotional resources***

The main thing that enabled people to cope with the misfortunes of life was to find the good in the event, or the purpose, the reason for it, or lesson to be learned from the crisis. Five out of ten people gave such answers. Four out of ten said they talk to family or friends about the crisis. Three said they cry. Another three said they use the crisis to deal with the issues in their own lives or relationships. Two said they pray, another two seek professional help, and another two use avoidance as a coping mechanism.

Only two people found their emotional strength in spiritual resources. One man spoke of how he fasted (presumably seeking the help of spirits) and sought the advice of Native elders . The one overt reference to spirits was a woman who believed that the Creator had allowed her baby to be miscarried so that the baby could be her angel and guide. That same woman makes it a practice to speak to the dead so that they will know that they are not forgotten.

## **3. Decision-making**

The third category evaluates the resources people use to obtain the guidance they need to make good decisions in an uncertain world. The animist’s uncertain world is made all the more precarious because they assume the presence of hostile spirits (Marker #4). Only one question was used to assess this topic (Question #12), which asked interviewees: “What guides or motivates your decisions?”

It appears that Cree people tend to be less analytical about their decisions than their non-Native counterparts. In fact, the question had to be frequently explained, as if making a decision were a foreign concept. Several implied that they just did whatever they felt like doing at the moment. Several talked about the need to consult family and to make decisions that benefit the family.

One mentioned the he prays to his dead grandfather for guidance. This is a teaching of Indian Religion which is particularly interesting, in this case, as his now dead grandmother was the biggest influence of his life, but he barely mentioned his grandfather. The term “grandfather” seems to be more generic referring to any male ancestor.

There is an element of seeking guidance, especially among those returning to Indian Religion. However, in general, the desire for guidance seems to exist to a much smaller degree than indicated by Hiebert et al. (1999, 79) as common among animistic peoples, since the Cree seem to make decisions with almost no forethought. They are guided by the whim of the moment, by

their feelings at the time, rather than a time-consuming, carefully laid out ritual seeking guidance from a spirit or seeking an omen (Marker #6).

#### **4. Categorizing Reality**

Van Rheezen states that the way people categorize reality reveals their “differentiations of natural and supernatural, human and animal life, plants and animals, and animate and inanimate things” (1991, 47). He devised a question that reveals a people’s view of reality. It is as follows (Question #14): Organize these words into groups: God, rocks, virus, man, bushes, fish, deer, rabbit, woman, demons, angels, cow, lion, whale, grass, sand, trees. Why did you choose those groupings? (Van Rheezen 1991, 47).

Over half of those interviewed grouped demons and viruses together, sometimes with other things, as well, but mostly just these two alone together in one group. This finding is significant since one of the traits of animistic cultures is that they identify sickness as a spiritual problem more predominantly than a physical problem (Marker #24).

The animistic trait of considering the whole of reality to be interconnected (Marker #10) was also shown in the answers to this question in two ways. First, rocks were considered to be alive. Although only one interviewee stated this concept, other Cree people have been observed carrying stones and referring to them as their source of strength. Secondly, a couple of people refused to categorize reality. They believe that all of life is necessary, whether good or bad. Therefore reality must be viewed as a whole.

One interviewee excluded demons as she did not believe they exist. Instead she thought of all spiritual beings as spirits of dead humans, and thought that what others refer to as demons were actually ancestral spirits who were in pain. Her opinion is in keeping with Marker 16 of an animist, in which emphasis is placed on death.

#### **5. Relationship to the Supernatural**

Answers to the final three questions elicited the Cree’s response to supernatural and spiritual issues. They are: #15: How is spiritual power gained?; #16: What are some of the proverbs of your people? (although Question #16 was designed to determine values, and so was included in the first category, much of the information that arose from it fits more directly into this final category); #17: How have you reacted to an encounter with a spirit?

The interviews disclosed six aspects of the Cree perspective of the supernatural. Responses to Question #15 revealed that spiritual power is thought to be of more consequence than spiritual truth and that it is gained via prayer. The answers to Question #16 divulged the fear stimulated taboos that govern the lives of some Cree. The information gained from Question #17 revealed what the Cree consider as evidence of the presence of a spirit, how they respond emotionally to an encounter with a spirit, and what they do to try to rid themselves of the spirit’s activities in their lives.

##### ***a. Spiritual Power Valued over Spiritual Truth***

As was already outlined in Marker #13, animists tend to value spiritual power over truth. This tendency evidenced itself in two ways. First, the lack of absolute truth was shown in that all those interviewed thought that whatever worked for an individual was fine as long as it did not

cause conflicts in families and communities. One person could follow Catholicism, another Indian Religion, and another evangelical Christianity. All were acceptable as long as one followed what helped them cope and feel good. What caused conflict was any one of those groups claiming to be the only way. Tolerance and believing in oneself were the main things. Ross calls this tolerance the “Ethic of Non-Interference” (1992, 12, 26) which stems from the high value placed on the harmony of relationships as was explained in Marker #14. “Don’t rock the boat” might be a proverb that many Cree people would espouse. One interviewee exemplified this attitude when she told of her reaction to the turning of some of her village to evangelical Christianity:

I told my children that it’s up to you who you believe in. Even to my friends, I said, “Don’t get mad.” They’re curious. Let them choose for themselves. Even though they are at a young age they’ll still understand when you keep teaching them. There was a lot of bickering, a lot of fighting in the community over that. Because it was separating family and friends ... We asked them [to] have a meeting if you want to, so we don’t have any feuds or future conflict. Just talk to the people. Because there’s a Catholic church committee there. They are the ones that were fighting with them. Talk to each other. Settle things. But it separated. It created more bad feelings ... like in families, they didn’t go visit their family.

While telling this story the interviewee became increasingly angry.

Harmony is more highly esteemed than truth, as is spiritual power. This statement was verified by the account of an encounter with a troublesome spirit, told by an interviewee. She narrated a time in her life when she took action to rid her home of a spirit that was causing problems. (The details of the event will be analyzed in a subsequent section but, to make the point here, it is noted that she used a variety of doctrinally and philosophically contradictory methods.) She said that she tried to get help from the Anglican, Catholic and United churches, but that they did not deal with such problems any more since those problems belonged to the dark ages. Then she asked the help of a Native Charismatic Christian, but the spirit scared him away and continued causing problems. Next she called for a traditional elder, a leader in Aboriginal Spirituality, and that did not work. Her relief came in the non-religious act of yelling at the spirit. She would have been satisfied with anything that worked. Pragmatism was valued over truth. She really did not care who believed what, as long as the negative spiritual activity stopped.

### ***b. Prayer***

The answer to the question of how spiritual power was gained was via prayer. Almost every interviewee said they prayed daily. One person said there is only one God, so it does not matter how one prays, whether one uses sweet-grass or the rosary. The important thing was that prayer helped a person feel good, cope with the stresses of life, heal, and think clearly. Again the importance of pragmatism over doctrine is displayed.

### ***c. Taboos***

Some of the proverbs people listed were taboos. The most common was: do not leave out dirty dishes or they will attract hungry spirits, and do not whistle at the northern lights or they will come down on the person who whistles. One interviewee explained how these proverbs govern her life and those of her extended family. She told a story she had heard from her dad. He had been told that when his pants are frozen and caked in snow at the bottom he should not let them rub together as the noise angers the spirits. He did not really believe it so one evening when

walking home he let them do so and the northern lights came down all around him. He heard a whistling sound. He rolled into a ball and asked the spirits to forgive him for not believing. When he got up he was careful to walk with his feet far enough apart, and when he got home and told his grandparents what had happened, they said, "Now you believe."

This interviewee warned her kids to not whistle at the northern lights but, being kids, they had to go outside and test it. When they whistled at the northern lights they came down. The kids were so scared they ran into the house. And she said then they believed.

One time her mother invited bad spirits in by leaving dirty dishes out. In the night the interviewee woke up and heard her mom talking and saw her put out a plate of food and then burn it in the fire. Her sister said that she had heard their mother say, "I don't know what you're here for, but I'm going to feed you and so you better leave." At that same time the interviewee saw an old lady wearing a black scarf at their window. She went to look closer but her mom stopped her. She said the bad spirit had come and wanted to take the interviewee.

This same interviewee recalled a similar event of her own:

But one proverb that recently happened to me ... There's a saying that my grandmother always told me growing up, and also my father [told me], was not to leave dirty dishes out on the counter, especially not with food on the plates, or your lard or cooking oil or margarine -- never to leave them out because when you do that you are inviting the spirits to come into your house and to eat. You don't know what kind of spirits you're going to invite. It could be bad ones.

So just recently ... I went to the casino and I told my daughter make sure you get the dishes done and clean up. "Don't leave them out like that," I told her. "I should be back about midnight," I told her. So I left. I came home about two a.m. and the dishes were strewn all over. Being too lazy to clean up, I just went to sleep. And then I kept hearing a noise, sort of like a grubbing, whistling noise. It would be really loud and I'd jump out of bed. I was sleeping on the couch. I'd jump out of bed and I'd come walking over here and nothing. This (window) was open like that, and that's another thing they said ... don't leave your windows unblinded.

You have to always cover them at night time.

So I didn't find anything unusual, so I went back to try to sleep again and I heard that noise again ... so I came walking over here and I opened the window and I listened, but nothing. No noise. I couldn't hear anything. Just totally silent. And in the entire building in here, too. So I went to try to sleep again. I looked around and I thought maybe I should close it, and I did. I was looking around and I was thinking what my grandmother said, and my dad, and I figured maybe I should clean up this kitchen. So I put all the dishes together and then I covered them, and then I took the lard and put it in the fridge, and then I wiped up the counter tops. I took everything and put it away. Then I went to go sleep again and I still heard it. I thought to myself, "Oh-oh, I think I got the spirits mad. I shouldn't do that." So I started to get scared. I figured ... I'm going to go sleep on the other side now, so I went to go sleep on the other side and I put on my nature sounds. It's kind of a trickling of water and I covered my head and then I didn't hear it again.

Another interviewee was asked, "Was the message more about being a good housekeeper, or was the message more about spirit activity?" She responded, "I think spirit activity. My granny was a very religious person. I think she just wanted us to be safe. She didn't want the devil to come in and play in our house."

#### *d. Response to an Encounter with a Spirit*

All but two interviewees recounted an encounter with a spirit. First, the evidence they used to determine that a spirit was present is listed. Next, the emotional response to the encounter is examined. Finally the actions taken to rid themselves of the spirit is looked at.

The evidences that caused people to think they had been visited by a spirit were varied, as minor as a glimpse of movement or the sense of a presence, or as major as having the letters “HEL” scratched into a person’s back. Other evidences were stereos and televisions being turned on and off, walls being scratched, voices, unexplained noises, images at the windows, dreams of a dead relative, hair on the back of the neck standing up, drawers and doors being opened, northern lights coming down, an unexplained breeze or smell, and the feeling of being hugged.

Half of those who experienced the presence of a spirit found comfort in the contact and half felt fear. Two of those who experienced fear said they felt fear even though they did not believe the spirit was essentially evil.

Those who sought to banish the presence or the activities of the spirits, did so by having Native elders put bark at the four corners of the house, by calling for Native Christians who prayed through the house, by introducing oneself and politely asking them to leave because they were scaring women and children, by asking the spirits’ forgiveness for not heeding the taboos and for not believing, by attending a Sundance and having the elders there pray and bestow a Cree name, by making sure to not be kind to the spirit, by cleaning up dirt and remainders of food, and by leaving part of the kill from a hunt for the spirit. The one method that was mentioned most often was that of telling the spirit to leave. One said she “told off” the spirit. Another said she screamed at it. A man said he explained the situation and asked the spirits to leave.

#### **Conclusion**

The interviews reveal that the Cree are still animistic in worldview. Even those who have been exposed to years of formal Christianity still exhibit many of the markers of animistic belief.

Cree people believe in spirits and believe that spirits are active in human affairs. However, unlike some other animists, they tend to define spirits mainly as the spirits of people who have died. Almost every encounter with a spirit was recounted as with the spirit of a dead person. Some of those who were questioned further about the identity of spirits did admit to the existence of animal spirits, and spirits who were created as spirits, but by far the greatest emphasis was on spirits who are thought to be humans that are alive and active after their physical life has ended.

Although the evidence is more subtle, the Cree also believe in impersonal spiritual forces. Amulets and some of their taboos revealed this fact. They also believe in an impersonal cosmic moral order as was revealed by their response to adversity.

Although the desire for control and knowing the future is present among the Cree of Canada, it seems to be less so than among those peoples described by Hiebert and Van Rheezen. As Ross points out, the belief that spirits control the events of life still exists and there is some effort made especially by medicine men to control and influence and placate them. However, the Cree version of animism has a more fatalistic bent, in that people see that spirits will do what they want and therefore people have no control, and so must stoically accept the events of life (1992, 51,56).

This tendency showed itself in the interviews in two ways. First, in Question #12, about decision making, most people seemed to be almost confused by the question and, when they did answer, most implied that they simply did whatever they felt at the moment with almost no forethought or analysis, not as those of the Western-European mind set. Nor did they give any indication that they consulted the spirits or looked for omens. The second way in which this tendency showed itself was the lack of expression of regret. Even those who had suffered greatly through their lives had no wish that their past had been different, since that suffering had come to make them the people they were today. This sentiment was expressed in the second half of Question #6 when interviewees were asked, "What would you change about your life if you could?"

More in keeping with Hiebert and Van Rheezen, some of the Cree interviewed did turn to spirits for guidance. Even though omens were not actively sought, Cree people reacted strongly to an omen when it did present itself. They believe misfortune is ahead if certain signs are seen. They definitely believe that spirits can be hostile, and so live with an element of fear. They also seek protection, as was seen in their attempts to rid themselves of spirits.

Evidence of the Cree having an animistic worldview was also seen in their valuing of spiritual power and human harmony over truth. They also showed that they were more concerned with what worked than what was truth.

The markers of animism were repeatedly exhibited in the mind set of the Cree interviewed for Subproblem #1. Therefore the question that Subproblem #1 asks (How is the middle zone addressed by the Cree peoples of Canada?) can be answered in that the middle zone or spirit world is conceived of in a nature consistent to that of animists worldwide.

The spirit world is definitely an issue, but not the main issue. The main issue is relationship. When talking about the cause and effect of life's events, people thought primarily of improving relationships with others. When commenting on forgiveness, they thought primarily of interpersonal harmony, not a right standing with God. The response to the values questions revealed that the importance of human relationships far outweighs the importance of spiritual relationships.

## **B. Subproblem #2**

### **What is the Effect of the Exclusion of the Middle Zone in the Presentation of the Gospel on its Receptivity by Cree People?**

#### **Introduction**

Before the actual reporting of the data of Subproblem #2, it is necessary to provide background on those interviewed. The interview questions and the rationale used for choosing those questions are located in appendix C. For the sake of the purity of the data, the potential information contaminants are reported, followed by the results of the interviews.

#### ***Interviewees***

In order to qualify for Subproblem #2, interviewees had to either have heard the gospel message and rejected it, or just recently accepted it. This criteria was necessary in order to determine if the exclusion of the spirit world in the gospel presentation affected the response to the message.

Of the 10 people interviewed, two had just recently accepted the gospel, two had been in church when the gospel was presented but gave no indication of having accepted the message, and the remaining six were identified either by themselves or by born again Christian relatives as having heard and rejected the gospel message.

Half of those interviewed are men and half are women. All are adults with children. At the time of the interviews, six were employed, three were students and one was a stay-at-home mother.

### ***Information Contaminants***

Besides those contaminants listed for Subproblem #1, there are others unique to Subproblem #2. One assumption that did not prove reliable was the assumption that if a person had a born again Christian relative, then that person would have heard a presentation of the gospel. The other false assumption was that the Christian relatives would know where the interviewee stood in relation to Christ.

One man, whose wife had said he had rejected the gospel, revealed in the interview that he had accepted the Lord when he was a teen. Another man, who himself stated that he best fit the qualifications of Subproblem #2 prior to the interview, could not recall having heard a presentation of the gospel when asked about it during the interview. Another interviewee was part of a Christian cult.

### **Reporting the Data**

In order for the Subproblem #2 question, “How does the exclusion of the middle zone in the presentation of the gospel negatively affect its receptivity by Cree people?” to be answered, it must first be determined if any of those Cree people interviewed had heard a gospel presentation which included the middle zone. What was their perception of Christ and of how to become a Christian? Next, it must be determined what motivated those who rejected Christ and what motivated those who accepted Christ. Did their perception of Christ’s relationship to the spirit world play any part in their response? As background for making this judgement accurately, it must also be ascertained how this group of interviewees perceives the spirit world.

#### **1. Cree Perception of Christ and the Gospel**

In this section the Cree perception of Christ and the gospel will be analyzed. Once that is done, it will be specifically determined whether or not they had ever heard a gospel presentation which included the middle zone.

##### ***a. Cree Perception of Christ***

In order to ascertain the Cree perception of Christ, the interviewees were asked:

3. What does Jesus do for people?
4. What does Jesus not do for people?
7. Could Jesus meet any of the needs in your life? Why or why not?
8. What is Jesus/God like? Describe His character and abilities.

Those interviewed perceive Jesus Christ as loving, caring and active in their lives. They understood that He heals, protects, does miracles, answers prayer, gives eternal life, guides, gives strength, teaches, saves lives, forgives, blesses, helps, and saves from sin. Some themes presented themselves in both what was implied and what was stated explicitly.

What is significant about the results of the answers to these questions is that not one person mentioned that they needed Him for eternal issues. Every answer had to do with needing His help to get good things in this life and avoid bad things in this life. Therefore, if life was going well, they had no need for Him, or if life was going poorly, then it may have been construed that He had failed them. These traits affirm an animistic worldview (Markers #11 and #12).

This trend was also seen in the lack of concern for what Christ could do about their problem with sin. Although several mentioned that Christ died for their sins, the comment was made as if reiterating that teaching. The heart issues were what Christ could do for them in this life to help them get what they wanted. One interviewee stated how he was glad that Jesus had prevented him from sinning, as he had then not embarrassed his family as he would have had he gone through with his plans. He exhibited no concern about embarrassing God, which gives evidence to the animist's concern with social rather than theological sin (Marker #15). Those interviewed did not seem to take to heart the fact that their sin separated them from God and that Christ brought about reconciliation with Him.

One characteristic of Christ that seemed to be particularly precious to Cree people was that He was "always there." His constant presence is a source of great comfort to them. The value they place on this characteristic of Christ is consistent with the high value they place on relationship, as was mentioned in Subproblem #1.

Those interviewed struggled with how their perception of Christ interacted with their experiences with death. He troubled them as He was seen to be both the cause of death, and therefore by extension the cause of their sorrow, and at the same time the source of their comfort when they were grieving. One Cree woman told a story of how angry she was with God when her grandson died. The night after the funeral she slept in the room where she had slept previously with her grandson. She had a dream in which God comforted her by telling her that He was carrying her grandson so she need not worry about him, and then God showed her her grandson smiling, as he had been in a photograph. This dream brought great comfort to her and took away the anger she felt for God. Another interviewee also tells the story of a vision that his grandfather had in which he was clearing trees to make room for the people who were dying early deaths due to suicide and alcohol abuse. This dream/vision was considered to be a message from God telling the interviewee to quit considering suicide and to curb his drinking.

Both these stories also confirm the animistic tendency to focus on death as an assault on the living (Marker # 16). The point of both these recollections was that the living found new hope and purpose. Both these accounts also demonstrate the great significance animists place on dreams (Marker #17). Dreams are thought to be one of the ways that spirits communicate with people.

Obvious by omission was any mention of Christ as Creator. This absence is significant in that many of those interviewed for Subproblem #1 said that they prayed to the Creator and received strength and guidance from the Creator. Christian ministers need to do a better job of communicating to Cree people that Jesus Christ is the Creator, as is stated in Colossians 1:16.

Not one person indicated that Christ had any affect on or relationship to the spirit world. Neither was there any mention of how He defeated Satan or protects from demons or ghosts. Yet when asked specifically about the need for protection, half the interviewees for Subproblem #2 said they needed it. Obviously the felt need exists, but the perception that Jesus can help with this need is not.

### ***b. Cree Perception of the Gospel***

In order to ascertain the Cree perception of the gospel the interviewees were asked:

1. What does it mean to be a Christian?
2. Is there any difference between that and a born again Christian?

10. Which statement is most attractive to you?

-- You should surrender your life to Jesus Christ because He alone can forgive your sins.

-- You should surrender your life to Jesus Christ because He is more powerful than any spirit.

11. Has anyone ever asked you to consider giving your life to Jesus Christ? If so, what did they say?

As would be expected, the things that were noticed about being a Christian were the outward visible things like going to church, praying, reading the Bible and living right. But the relationship aspect was also noticed. In this regard, the definition of a Christian included being close to Him, belonging to Him, and believing in Him and doing so from the heart, and having Him "always there for you."

Most Native people have had encounters with Catholics, Anglicans and some brand of evangelicals. It was therefore assumed that the Cree interviewees would notice a difference between Christians and born again Christians, but this does not seem to be the case.

The message that the Cree interviewees heard when witnessed to by Christians included: being told to change their lifestyle; that they would receive help for their troubles; that they would be forgiven; that accepting the Lord would make them feel good or happy; that they needed to do so to avoid hell; and that something good had been seen in them. One interviewee said he and his friends talk about Christianity to keep the fear away. Another said he was told that God's relationship to him was like his relationship to his children: when they do something wrong he gets mad and sends them to their room, but soon thereafter his love prevails. One lady was asked either, "Do you have Jesus in your life?" or "Do you know the Lord?"

It is in keeping with the "Ethic of Non-Interference" that Cree Christians appear to be reticent to share their faith. Most of the respondents said they had heard the gospel message only in church, even though most of them have close friends or relatives who are Christians.

None of the respondents had been told of Christ's supremacy over spirits or that His death defeated Satan. None had been challenged to join Christ's battle against Satan. None mentioned being encouraged with the fact that Christ can protect them from hostile spirits. None had been admonished to surrender their goals and dreams for His.

The absence of a gospel presentation that included elements most attractive to those with an animistic worldview was dealt with by asking the interviewees Question #10: “Which statement is most attractive to you?”

-- You should surrender your life to Jesus Christ because He alone can forgive your sins.

-- You should surrender your life to Jesus Christ because He is more powerful than any spirit.

Although it was expected that the second statement would be most attractive to Cree people, 70 percent of the Cree interviewed for Subproblem #2 chose the first statement.

It must be remembered that the interviewees for Subproblem #2 were chosen for their exposure to the gospel message. Half those who chose the first statement probably did so because they found that statement to be more familiar or comfortable. The other half indicated they felt a need for forgiveness.

One person chose the first statement because he felt that it was “bragging” for Jesus to make the second claim. This hesitation could indicate that this person is aware of the vast powers of the spirit world and does not view Jesus as an authority over them.

Two people who chose opposite answers did so for the same reason. They both stated that it was common sense that Jesus was supreme over spirits since he created them. One interviewee thought that truth so obvious that it did not need to be mentioned. The other also viewed the truth as self-evident, but therefore worthy of proclamation.

It is interesting that one of those who chose the second statement had in the previous question stated that he had had no experience with bad spirits, and felt no need of protection from them. He did not indicate why he found that statement of Christ’s supremacy over spirits more attractive.

Of the three who chose the second statement only Interviewee #222 verbalized that she felt the need for protection from evil spirits. She recounted two events. One night her son heard dishes banging around in the kitchen. He concluded that the spirits were trying to tell him that they were hungry, and so a feast should be held in the honor of two relatives whose second anniversaries of their deaths were approaching.

Thinking of this event led her to recall one of those deaths. She said that the family had received repeated “Indian warnings” around the time of the death. First, a dog that was generally quiet would not quit howling. Her husband thought that he should kill the dog to prevent the death. She thought the howling was simply due to natural causes, since they had recently moved the dog from the city to the reserve. Second, there was a knocking at a window all night, with no physical evidence of anyone being there. Third, she knew some born again Cree Christians (whom she considered “not superstitious”) who were fearful because they saw an owl on the fence as they drove. Upon arriving home these Christians heard of the death. Another relative reported that an owl had remained on her fence all day.

## **2. Motives Behind the Acceptance or Rejection of Christ**

In order to ascertain the Cree motivation behind either their acceptance or rejection of Christ Jesus, the interviewees were asked:

5. Why do people become followers of Jesus Christ?

6. Why do they not?

12. Have you ever given your life to Jesus Christ? Why or why not?

For the accuracy of the information gleaned in answer to Question #12, half the interviewees have been culled. The reasons have been stated in the section on “Information Contaminants.” The interviewee responses included two women who had only recently accepted Christ, and three men who stated that they had chosen not be followers of Christ. However, for the answers to Questions #5 and #6, all interviewee responses will be taken into account.

### ***a. Rejection of Christ***

Two of the three men indicated that they were doing well on their own and so did not need Christ. One of those also indicated that the habitual sin of some Christians discredited the gospel. He said, “I kind of get mixed up with that why are they living common-law and have been for 15 years and yet have Jesus in their life. Like they try and instill those values on their children also. But isn’t living common-law supposed to be a sin or something? I find that kind of strange.”

The other man presumed on the grace of God. He believed God to be forgiving and loving, so assumed that he would get to heaven without having to make any major changes in his life.

The interviewees speculated as to why others rejected the gospel. Their most prominent answer was that people do not want to give up their sinful, fleshly desires; they want their own way. Also came the notion that disappointments and hurts of this life, and the deaths of loved ones, turned people against God.

Also highly important to the Cree was their connection with other people. If they felt that following Christ would bring separation or criticism from their friends, then they were not willing to make that sacrifice for the sake of Christ.

Two interviewees suggested that the hold of Satan kept people from choosing Jesus, which shows their awareness of the influence of spirits on the people and events of this world. One person assumed that people may have lost hope because they considered themselves “too bad.”

### ***b. Acceptance of Christ***

Of the two ladies who just recently accepted Christ, one did so out of fear of going to hell, and the other out of despair because of the personal destructiveness of her addictions. She said, “I know Jesus will help me out more than the addictions center.”

When the interviewees were asked to speculate about why others accept Christ, almost every person gave a different answer. The idea of having a better life for themselves and their families is the only answer that came up multiple times. Other responses included: wanting eternal life, simply being natural believers, expressing individual choice, following family history, needing greater power, seeking happiness, and God’s calling. The concern for family and power are in keeping with tribal values.

Again it must be noted that not one person stated that he/she accepted or rejected Christ for His involvement or lack of involvement in the spirit world.

### **3. Cree Perception of the Spirit World**

Do the interviewees for Subproblem #2 perceive the spirit world any differently than the interviewees for Subproblem #1? To determine the answer to this question, the interviewees for Subproblem #2 were asked:

9. Do you need protection from spirits? If not, why not? If so, how do you get it?

13. What part do spirits play in your life?

14. What gives you spiritual power? Do you want it? How do you get it? What would you do with it?

15. What are your primary spiritual concerns? How do these fit in with your day to day life/decisions?

This group of interviewees' exposure to the gospel is evident in their responses. Overall they viewed life more in line with biblical teaching. They dealt with the difficulties of life in a more Christian manner than did the Subproblem #1 interviewees. But they still held many of the animistic traits that were seen in the first group. They saw the necessity of protection from hostile spirits. They desired spiritual power to be used for their own benefit, and they gave great significance to dreams.

#### ***a. Protection from Hostile Spirits***

All the interviewees recognized the necessity of having protection from hostile spirits. However, not all felt the need of that protection at that particular time. One-half said they needed the protection. The other half did not feel that immediate need. Two felt Jesus was already protecting them, so they had no further need. One was not being bothered by a spirit at present but had been in the past. Another had a spirit active in his home but did not feel the need for protection from it as it was a "happy" spirit. If it did become troublesome he felt confident that smudging his house with the smoke of sweet-grass would provide him with the needed protection (Marker #8).

One lady thought the purpose of the spirits in her life was to get her to go along with her friends in sinful activities. She attributed her lack of power to stand up to them as the effect of evil spirits.

Interviewee #222 gave these two accounts of spirit activity:

My boy gets these bad dreams ... in (the house) here. One night I was sleeping ... he always stays up later than me ... I thought my door was open. All the lights were on and he was standing at my door saying, "Mom, I'm hungry." "Well, have some cereal," I said. Then I woke up and he was calling me, but everything was off and my door was closed. So I went to his room. He said, "Lay with me, mom. I'm scared." I said, "Why?" and he said, "My stereo turned on by itself." So I laid with him ... I shut [the stereo] off first. I asked, "Were you just standing at my door?" He said, "No." I was scared. So we prayed, but I could just feel that fear ... really scary feeling

in the house. And upstairs, those people are into cocaine. They walk around all night because they're on coke [and] stay up all night. I think they brought evil into the whole building. I told my boy, "You're not supposed stay up all night. That's when evil lurks in the dark." So I ended up sleeping with him that night. And then when we lived in Sandy Lake, he always saw this big tall man in the bush. We were there in the bush for two years before he even told me. A lot of people, mostly kids, see that guy. He's a tall guy. They say he's Wittigoo. He leads kids into the bush and makes them get lost. And they'll die. He's a dark, dark devil.

In the first story, spiritual darkness is connected with the proximity of evil actions (Marker #22). It is also connected to physical darkness. This connection shows that taboos (Marker #8) are in place in her mind. She thought and taught her son that he would be safer from the influence of evil spirits if he went to bed earlier and if they lived in a different house. This idea of being safer from evil spirits during daylight hours is a common one.

### ***b. Desire for Spiritual Power***

According to the previously cited research, animists tend to value spiritual power over truth (Marker #13). It is therefore necessary to determine whether this group of interviewees has this particular desire.

Of the nine who responded, all but one said he wanted spiritual power, and he then went on to describe two kinds of spiritual power: one that he wanted and one that he wanted nothing to do with. The positive kind was used to help others feel better and was obtained by talking and listening and relating about Jesus. The negative kind was like magic and was used to cheat people out of money and to heal broken bones by simply passing hands over. This type of magical supernatural power is more in keeping with what is usually thought of in relation to animists.

The other seven all thought of spiritual power more in Christian terms. It was gained via faith (3/8) in, belief in and commitment to Jesus Christ; church attendance (2/8); prayer (3/8); reading of and obedience to the teachings of the Bible (2/8); fellowship (2/8); and talking with others about Christ (1/8).

About half of the seven wanted to use their spiritual power to help themselves and the other half wanted to use it to help others. Those who wanted it for the benefit of others wanted to teach them, be a positive influence on them, help them through times of grieving, to make them feel better and help them with their needs.

Those who wanted spiritual power for their own benefit wanted it to help them establish their "own sense of being"(as one interviewee worded it), to help stay away from evil, to get forgiveness, to be connected with God, to get out of jail, to get out of physical danger, to deal with the pain of a death in the family, to have a "better life," and to get through everyday life. In almost all of these statements there is evidence of the animistic concern for the present over the eternal (Marker #12).

There were three stories of needing spiritual power to deal with the pain of death, which is another concern of animists (Marker #16). But there was no mention of needing spiritual power to ward off hostile spirits or to get them to do things for them. Only one of the seven showed any concern for God, but that may have only been a reflection of the way the interview question was phrased. All the rest showed concern for the human over the divine (Marker #11). The

responses demonstrate that while this group of interviewees is more Christianized than the previous group, they still retain a predominantly animistic worldview.

### *c. Significance of Dreams*

While expressing their spiritual concerns, many of the interviewees mentioned the same values as were reported in Subproblem #1. Families were of top priority. Emotional health and education also figured highly. But this group of interviewees also had the Christian spiritual concerns about eternal destiny, pleasing God, reading the Bible, going to church and having Jesus affect everyday life.

In relating her spiritual concerns, one lady also demonstrated the value of being free from addictions, which came up in Subproblem #1. However, it gained even more significance in her mind as her direction to work as an addictions counselor came via a recurring dream (italics added for emphasis):

I've got to tell you this dream that I had. Before I became an addiction worker I told you that I drank and that I had problems. I slowly stopped drinking and this dream came to me. I was walking in the bush and taking this shortcut towards the Band Office. And this person spoke to me. I couldn't see this person but I wasn't scared. It seemed like it was a familiar voice or a gentle voice. And it said, "Apply for this job." I didn't know what it was. I wasn't sure. Sure enough, the next morning I went to the Band Office and there was this job opening for an addiction counselor and I applied, of course. And I didn't make any connections to my dream. I thought it was just a dream. I kept thinking, "I wonder if I should apply for this job? I wonder if I'd get it? I wonder if I'll be able to influence people?" That kind of stuff I was thinking. Sure enough, that night I fell asleep again, and again I had the same dream, and this dream told me I would get this job. After I got into the NADAP (addictions counseling) position, it didn't come to me right away. But then a year after, I started healing from my own garbage and started relying on God and Jesus to help me out. And I started praying to the Lord to help me out each day. That dream sort of came back to me and I realized, "Wow, *God can direct people through dreams* or through just talking to yourself. That's God speaking to you, helping you make decisions in your life." I got into NADAP and I had people come to me. It took a while for them to start trusting me, a year or two. But then when they slowly starting realizing what I could do for them, how I could help them out, they started coming, they started coming to my office. They started trusting me. This lady didn't really trust me or anybody. If I'd mentioned anything about what she said to anybody else, that would have ruined my reputation. But then when she knew that I didn't do that, she slowly started coming around. Then other women started coming around. God used me as an example to reach out to people. *And the dream I had was a message from God to try and reach out to people and go into this kind of field.* And try and help as much people as I can. After that I started going into the schools. This one parent came to me at a community assembly and commended me for going into the schools and sharing the kind of life I had of dealing with alcohol and drugs and abuse at home. He said it was a good thing for the children to know, because they were bringing home that message and I knew that it was God's work. Somehow I'm in [this] field and I don't know why, but then when you hear people talk about the things that you're inspiring in their kids, you realize that it's God directing you in that way. I think it has a lot of influence, depending on where you want to go and how God helps you."

This story shows the significance that animists give to dreams (Marker #17). She applied for a job and career and education on the strength of this dream. The story shows the closeness of

community and family (Marker #14) and the concerns about living without addictions.

## **Conclusion**

The primary question addressed by Subproblem #2 is whether Cree people's response to the gospel message is negatively affected by the absence of the teaching of Christ's supremacy over the spirit world in the presentation of the salvation and the call to make an initial commitment to Jesus Christ.

The data revealed that there is indeed an exclusion of the middle zone in the presentations of the gospel. Not one interviewee had ever heard a gospel presentation that included some of the animist concerns, such as Christ's supremacy over spirits and ability to protect from hostile spirits.

At first glance the data seems to indicate that that absence does not negatively affect response to the gospel message. Not one person indicated that they or anyone they knew had ever rejected Christ because of His inability to deal with the spirit world, or accepted Him because of His ability to deal with the spirit world. The desires to keep harmony with family and friends and to continue living sinful lifestyles seem to be the main issues that keep people from making a commitment to Christ. Another important issue is God's seeming inability to deal with death, or the suspicion that He may even be the cause of it and, therefore, the cause of their great suffering.

When asked about their values, Cree people placed family high above every other value. This fact is shown in their emphasis on both family and love. The emphasis that was placed on forgiveness in both Question #22 and #10 indicate a desire to be at peace with other people more than a desire to be at peace with God (Marker #11).

However, these findings may not be leading to an accurate conclusion, since the interviews were designed to measure the absence of the teaching of Christ's supremacy over the spirit world. People's lack of response to this ability of His may be due, not to their lack of concern for those issues, but rather to never hearing a gospel presentation in which that truth of Christ was proclaimed. The interviews revealed that no one had heard such a presentation and so no comparison can be made of the response when this truth is included. However, Question #10 does so, and the findings on this question were also inconclusive since, although the majority did choose the statement emphasizing Christ's supremacy over sin more often than they chose the statement emphasizing His supremacy over spirits, it may have been due to the familiarity of the one message and the absolute neglect of the other.

The many references to spirit activity, particularly in Questions #9 and #13, indicate that, in fact, the spirit world is of major concern. Every person interviewed for Subproblem #2 indicated in either Question #9 or #10 that they had issues with the spirit world. All either had had an encounter with a spirit or had heard from friends or relatives who had.

Therefore, it is safe to say that, for Cree people, the spirit world is a concern, but it is not as big a concern as family, friends, death and addictions. The absolute lack of any evident teaching on Christ's relationship to the spirit world needs to be rectified. Presenting Christ's supremacy over the spirit world with a call to join Him in battle against Satan and his evil spirits may result in a higher quantity and quality of conversions.

The majority of those interviewed for this section had at one point in their lives made some type

of positive response to the gospel message. The problem seems to have been in sustaining that commitment and allowing the ramifications of that commitment to filter through to all areas of their lives. By and large, none of these were living in a manner that was pleasing to the Lord. The big deterrents to accepting the gospel were also deterrents for living in obedience to Christ — that of family, friends, happiness and addictions. This concern is the issue that is addressed by Subproblem #3 which is evaluated next.

### **C. Subproblem #3**

#### **What is the Effect of the Exclusion of the Middle Zone in the Presentation of Christian Discipleship on Cree Christians' Walk with God?**

##### **Introduction**

Before the actual reporting of the data of Subproblem #3, it is necessary to give some background on those interviewed. The interview questions and the rationale used for choosing those questions are found in appendix C. For the sake of the purity of the data, the potential information contaminants are disclosed. Then the results of the interviews are reported.

##### ***Interviewees***

The interviewees for Subproblem #3 were all required to be born again Christians who had by their own admission made a commitment to Jesus Christ. They needed not be living in obedience to the standards of the Bible in order to qualify for this group. All 10 interviewees were well known to the interviewer and had previously indicated their commitment to Christ.

All are Cree. One lady indicated that she is only part Cree. However, she is deeply entrenched in the Cree community and so was deemed within the parameters of the thesis question. Two of the 10 are men. All are adults with children. Four are married. The rest are single or living common-law. At the time of the interview three were employed.

##### ***Information Contaminants***

There are probably fewer information contaminants in Subproblem #3, as the interviewer and the interviewee knew each other well enough to overcome most possibilities of misunderstanding. Some cultural differences in communication style may have had some affect, since the interviewer and the interviewees are of significantly different cultures.

##### **Reporting the Data**

In order to answer the main question of Subproblem #3, several other questions must first be answered. What aids the Cree Christians walk with God? What undermines it? How do they make their decisions? What do they turn to for strength in a time of crisis? What are their concerns and desires? What is their perception of the spirit world? Once these questions have been answered, it is then possible to compare those who walk with God and those who do not, and determine if the lack of teaching and training concerning the spirit world contributes to a poor relationship with Christ.

## **1. Aids to a Close Walk with God**

### ***a. Enjoyment of the Relationship with God***

The first and most important thing that helps Cree Christians to have a close walk with God is their enjoyment of relationship with Him. When they discontinued their walk with God they returned because they missed Him.

Cree Christians highly value God's constant presence. They repeatedly state He is "always there" for them. It could be that the strong emphasis on relationships that occur among tribal peoples (Marker #14) creates a deep sense of loneliness when human relationships are found wanting. This loneliness is eased by God's eternal presence.

Cree Christians treasure being able to talk with Jesus anytime and anywhere. Mary said, "You don't have to call Him up and ask Him to come over. He's there all the time always." Another interviewee called Him her "confidante."

"Peace" was another way that they expressed their enjoyment of relationship with God. Tribal peoples want harmony in their relationships, as their survival depends on it. It appears they also want harmony with God. It is hard to be at peace with capricious, unpredictable spirits, so a sense of peace with the supernatural may be a relief.

Other interviewees expressed appreciation for His love, acceptance and forgiveness of them. But the enjoyment of unconditional love may be due to the animistic belief that the high god is safe, and therefore a person does not need to be concerned about pleasing Him (Marker #18). One interviewee said,

The fact that even when I screw up I think God still loves me. I don't know how many times I've done that. I always got scared that I was just testing Him and this is the time that He's not going to forgive you and He's going to kick you off. I think that really scared me. I realized that I can't be doing this all the time. So the best thing is that He will always love you. He's proven that to me. He's shown me that's how much He loves me. It's just been great. I can't imagine that people could have that much mercy and grace.

Her worry about testing God may negate this observation, but her continued life of knowing disobedience to Him would support this observation.

Animistic peoples tend to view sin socially rather than theologically (Marker #15). It is uncertain whether these Cree Christians value Christ's payment for their sins as important because they have violated relationship with God, or because they have violated relationship with other humans.

It may be that since forgiveness for sins, rather than security from spirits, is what is primarily preached to Cree people, they are responding to the repetitiveness of the message; or they may be moved in truth by a sense of the barrier to God created by their sin, and wanting restored intimacy with Him.

### ***b. Good Relationships with Fellow Christians***

The high value that Cree people place on relationships shows itself not only in their enjoyment of

relationship with Jesus when they become saved, but also in the importance that fellowship with other born again Christians plays in their faithful walk with God. Getting together once a week is not enough. They feel that Christians should be involved in each others' lives at least several times a week. They value having other Christians pray for them, befriend them, support them in their godly decisions and continue to accept them and stand by them in their ungodly decisions. Close relationships with Christians is what brought many of them to the Lord in the first place.

Although fellowship with any other believer is important for Cree Christians, it is more potent and precious when that Christian fellowship is with other Native Christians. This fact was revealed by a male interviewee. He attends a predominantly white church and is married to a white woman, yet he misses the ease of relating to people of the same culture. Sophia, an interviewee, misses the use of her Native tongue in church.

### *c. Knowing the Bible*

Cree Christians acknowledge the necessity of knowing the Bible. They know that to have a close walk with God they must read the Bible for themselves. They also enjoy being taught the Bible in a variety of settings, such as home Bible studies and Sunday sermons. They also understand that teaching others the Word is a good way to learn it for oneself.

According to Kraft (1979, 9), different people groups are attracted to different parts of the Bible for cultural reasons. He says that "the Bible is a multicultural book" (ibid.). He expands this idea by noting that the Old Testament was written to Hebrew audiences who were a tribal people. The New Testament was written to Greek-speaking peoples and therefore culturally closer to "Euro-Americans." This idea spawned Question #22: "What part of the Bible do you read the most? Least?"

It can be expected that, since the Old Testament was written to tribal peoples, it would be the most culturally attractive to Cree Christians. And since Cree people have a history of story telling, it can be expected that they would tend to gravitate to the historical books of the Bible. Although this expectation proved to be true in the New Testament, the Old Testament was by and large avoided, though it contains a greater number of historical books. This trend could be due to another trait of animistic peoples in that they are primarily pragmatists concerned about what works (Marker #13) in the here and now (Marker #12). Those who did not respond by mentioning the Gospels still chose the New Testament because they thought it spoke to their needs. Several mentioned that they sought out Scripture passages that taught them how to live and act or how to deal with issues such as anger or anxiety.

The Book of Revelation was avoided by most of the interviewees, but two listed it as one of their favorites. The Old Testament as a whole was stated to be avoided by two interviewees while others listed Leviticus, Psalms, and Numbers specifically.

It may be that the Old Testament is avoided, even though it contains stories and is written specifically for a tribal audience, because it takes some abstract thinking, and Cree people tend to be concrete thinkers (Hodgman, "Jesus is Better Than Spirits," 2000, 1) to extrapolate lessons, and then apply those lessons to the present situations. Although the Cree have an appreciation for indirect communication (ibid.) and a history of getting their message across via stories, this should not be a problem. Another possible reason for the avoidance of the Old Testament may simply be lack of exposure.

#### ***d. Obeying the Bible***

Cree Christians recognize that it is not sufficient to simply know the Bible. It must be obeyed as well. When asked, “What makes a person a strong Christian?” (Question #4), 70 percent of the interviewees mentioned obedience. Sophia stated that what made the difference in her and her husband’s lives, compared to the many who discontinue their walk with God, is that they chose to obey Christ whether they liked it or not.

#### ***e. Hope of a New Life***

It was mentioned repeatedly that Cree people are looking for a new life. They want a better life for themselves and their children. They want freedom from their various addictions. They want emotional healing after experiences of abuse and grief. They see that Christ can give them new life. When asked, “Why did you become a Christian?” (Question #13), the primary answer was that the person was dissatisfied with his/her life. They asked Jesus to change their circumstances and when He did, then they accepted Him.

Once they are saved, they are thankful for that changed life. With so much violence and destruction in the Native community, a person whose life has been changed is a powerful testimony to others and a relief to oneself.

Christ also gives a sense of confidence and hope that the future can be bright. One interviewee said, “You’re on the right track and that no matter what’s coming across your path, it’s always going to be okay.” This value of a good life in the here and now is high among those who hold to an animistic worldview (Marker #12).

#### ***f. Answered Prayer***

As all Christians, Cree Christians feel encouraged and inspired to go on with God when He answers a prayer. Many spoke of how His intervention for their benefit in the daily affairs of life gave them a sense of His love. One man described it as, “Like God was saying, ‘I’m still here.’” He also said he was thrilled with Jesus when “things I wanted to happen, happen.”

They were grateful to God when He helped them find a lost wedding ring or a lost boy, when the police helped them instead of giving them a speeding ticket, when they were healed, when the way He had changed their attitude improved their relationships with others, and when He blessed with the long prayed for baby girl and, as an extra bonus, without pain at delivery. In keeping with the animistic value of the present over the eternal (Marker #12), all the examples of answered prayer had to do with God making things easier or more pleasant or fulfilling their desires in this life.

#### ***g. Hope of Eternal Life***

Although it has been repeatedly stated in this thesis that animistic peoples are more focused on the present life than the eternal one, several Cree interviewees referred to concerns for eternity. They want to avoid hell and go to heaven.

#### ***h. Exclusivity of Christ***

Not many, but a few Cree Christians maintain a close walk with God because they see that Christ

is the only way. His claims are exclusive. He is unique. This belief is significant in that animists tend to think in terms of local rather than universal gods. Each people group has a god or gods which work for them and only them. Other people groups have their gods. Cree people can be repeatedly heard to say things like, “If it works for you,” or, “It’s what’s right for me.” For a Cree believer to consider Christ as the only way for all the people of the earth is evidence that he/she has experienced a paradigm shift and, at least in this respect, replaced his/her previously animistic worldview with a more biblical one.

### *i. Healing*

One of the respondents came to Christ because she was told He could heal her. She did, and He did. She has lived many years in a close walk with God due to her gratitude for that healing. One of the markers of an animistic worldview is that they consider health and illness spiritual issues (Marker #24).

## **2. Deterrents to a Close Walk with God**

### *a. Relationships*

All but two of the interviewees for Subproblem #3 said that the hardest part of being a Christian was that it put them at odds with their friends and relatives. The strained relationships tore at their souls. Margaret Morin said, “You love them but you can’t be with them all the time because they’re following a different religion and different ways.”

The next point is closely connected to the first, although it could not be considered a deterrent to a close walk with God. It grieved the hearts of Cree Christians to see those they loved so much reject Christ who they also loved, especially when they knew He was exactly what their relatives and friends needed. Sophia said, “It’s hard because they’re rejecting it and I know it’s what they need.” Another lady said, “When I see my own ... hurt themselves, then I hurt too.” Another concurred, “Especially with family, having them not believing what you’re believing, that’s probably the hardest part of it.”

Some women discontinued their walk with God in order to pursue a relationship with a non-Christian man. There are more Christian Cree women than Christian Cree men.

Most indications are that, since a commitment to Jesus Christ strains relationship with other people, the relationship with Jesus is downplayed for the sake of the ease of relationships with people. This high value on human relationships can undermine a close walk with God in another way, as well. One lady said that when her father was dying she took the time to invest in a strong relationship with him. They got so close that she no longer felt the need for a relationship with God.

The strong Cree emphasis on harmonious human relationships (Marker #14) should translate into a strong commitment to Christ’s Body, the Church, but in fact that does not seem to be the case. Disharmony or favoritism in the church is destructive in any culture, but particularly among the Cree. Several mentioned how disturbing they found it when there was rapid and frequent change in church leadership. They want to develop relationship with and depend on long-term, stable leadership. Cree Christians want a sense of relational security, so when a church is small and struggling, and there is a threat of it closing, they feel insecure and avoid that church, looking for another that has a greater sense of permanence.

When asked if they had considered switching churches (Question #19), the level of satisfaction was surprising, since Native believers do not appear to be very loyal to their churches. They tend to skip church services a lot. They church hop. They do not readily get involved in the running of the church. These tendencies seem inconsistent with their cultural traits, since they are very relational and value close knit communities. The answer could be that they do not appreciate the structure. Relationships are valued but not scheduled. Setting a time and place feels foreign and formal to them. They tend to just drop by without announcement. Cree Christians enjoy fellowship but do not see the value of it being at a predetermined time and place.

Another factor that causes tension in relationships in churches is the behavior of children. During a church service children are expected to sit and behave over a fairly long period of time. Cree children tend to be allowed to do whatever they want, whenever they want, especially prior to starting school. It is very stressful for parents to be expected to keep their children quiet and seated. It does not help for others to offer to come alongside to help in the task, as the children do not heed anyone. One lady said, "I don't think they would have listened to anybody," when asked if it would have helped her to have others try to help control her children. The "Ethic of Non-Interference" extends to children. They are given almost complete autonomy. Therefore, any moment they are restrained or told they cannot do what they want, they make a fuss. In this scenario it is extremely difficult especially for single parents to pay attention to the church service and their children at the same time. It takes a great deal of determination to continue attending services while learning to train their children. The lady quoted simply quit attending. Others attend but leave their children with sitters.

### ***b. Group Identity***

Closely connected with group harmony is group identity. Another factor that put Cree Christians at odds with their non-Christian friends and loved ones was that they were viewed as having been disloyal to their ethnicity by becoming Christians. They were perceived as having rejected their heritage and their people to align themselves with the white men and their god.

Gerald Merasty said, "The hardest thing is expressing being a Christian, when you're Native, to other Natives, so that they understand that you're not trying to be a white man because you've adopted their religion." Sophia was told, "You're not a real Indian." Another interviewee said that her friends asked her, "Why are you trying to follow the white man's way?"

As was already stated, Cree Christians missed their language and the familiar methods of personal interaction when they were in church. The church had a foreign feel.

### ***c. Confronting Sin***

As was already noted, the "Ethic of Non-Interference" plays a significant role in the lives of the Cree, as does the emphasis on social rather than theological sin (Marker #15). It can therefore be expected that Cree people will be offended if someone confronts them about sin. It is thought that everyone should live however they choose, as long as it does not hurt someone else. This tone did pervade the interviews, although it was not stated directly. One interviewee said, "I don't particularly like to admit that I'm wrong when I do something." Cree Christians found it difficult to avoid giving in to the temptations. Those temptations were more powerful because giving in would have eased some of their loneliness for others, but then created a strained relationship with God who is also a close friend. Having victory over temptations eases the tension in their relationship with God, but puts them at odds with their friends and relatives.

Whatever they choose they will be in conflict with someone they love, and this tension pains them deeply.

#### ***d. Addictions***

As already manifested in the first two subproblems, addictions are a problem for the Cree community. Cree Christians also struggle to have continuing victory over their past addictions. Abuse of alcohol was mentioned particularly in regards to men, but it does affect women as well. However, it seems that women are more likely to stray from the Lord for the aforementioned pursuit of a romantic relationship.

#### ***e. Inability to Control Circumstances by Good Behavior and Prayer***

Cree Christians experience frustration when they are not able to control circumstances by praying or living right. Animists attempt to control the events and uncertainties of life by appeasing spirits (Marker #9). This concept continues even among born again Christians. As a result, when living for Jesus does not appear to be working to bring them their desired ends, they discontinue their walk with God. One woman proclaimed that she had given God five years to find her a husband and He had not, or could not, so now she was going to take matters into her own hands and try other methods of getting a husband.

If answered prayers are a source of encouragement, it is logical that unanswered prayers would be a source of discouragement. One particular prayer was repeatedly mentioned. When God did not answer the prayer for healing, the faith of Cree Christians was deeply shaken. This shaking of their faith may be felt more keenly due to their animistic belief that healing and illness are spiritual issues (Marker #24). Those who were able to effectively deal with this particular unanswered prayer were more likely to continue faithfully to walk closely with God.

#### ***f. Paternalism***

Although the issue of paternalistic non-Native Christians did not come up often, Gerald did reveal its negative affect when he gave some recommendations to missionaries, educators, politicians and the police force. He asked,

Why does it always have to be someone else from the outside telling us how to save our people? Why can't the Indian people do that? Why can't they be trained to that if they don't have the tools? It's the same with (his workplace). We see policies that, basically, I think they're flawed ... It's obviously not working but they just keep putting them on. It's like an insanity. They teach you in alcohol training; they say the same thing over and over. An alcoholic can drink every day and expect a different result, like banging your head on the wall every day and expecting that something different is going to happen if he bangs his head the next time.

Basically he was saying that the solutions offered for the Native community from outside the Native community have not helped. Native people should be given the opportunity of resolving their own problems.

#### ***g. False Religion in the Church***

This same Cree Christian man recommends that the church not use the rituals and objects used in Indian Religion, as to do so is to advance a false religion. He said that the church would not let

Hare Krishnas espouse their teachings or perform their ceremonies in the church, so why would they do so for the followers of Indian Religion?

### **3. Decision-making Process**

According to Hiebert et al. (1999, 79), animists seek guidance from spirits (Marker #6). It was noted in Subproblem #1 that those interviewed seemed to invest very little thought or effort in making decisions and getting guidance for those decisions. However, in Subproblem #3, we discover that becoming a Christian makes a significant difference in how Cree people make decisions and seek guidance.

Seventy percent of the Cree Christians interviewed said they ask God about what to do. Two of those only do so for important, not minor matters. Two mentioned consulting Scripture. Two said, "He's always there." One said he is always asking himself what Jesus would do. Another said she has determined to obey God, and that decision affects all her other decisions. One person talked of starting in a certain direction and then asking God to turn or stop them if they were going the wrong way. Another talked of purposely avoiding Him because she knew what she wanted to do would not please Him. Yet another spoke of how, when she would disobey Him and things would start to go bad, then she would ask Him to rescue her out of the situation she had created by her disobedience.

The major difference evident is that those who follow Christ closely consult Him about minor and major decisions. Compared to their non-Christian counterparts, they make their decisions with a lot more care and forethought and, of course, prayer.

### **4. Rationale and Resources for Crises**

The fourth category analyzes the Cree Christian's rationale and response to crises. A lot can be learned about a people by the way they handle misfortune. What do they rely on? What enables them to cope? What gives them the determination to go on? Where does their strength come from? How do they explain it? What is their rationale for its intrusion into their lives?

#### ***a. Causes***

The interviewees were not asked specifically about the causes of misfortunes, as were those interviewed for Subproblem #1. Neither did they offer much as to the rationale behind the question of evil, when asked how they deal with crises. The only comments made, as to cause, were that people recognized and took comfort in the fact of God's sovereignty and control over the situations of life. The cause of the misfortune was of concern for Cree Christians as they asked God to reveal that fact to them.

#### ***b. Resources***

When the interviewees were asked what enabled them to deal with crises, the number one answer, by far, was that they prayed. They asked God for healing, for the situation not to be as bad as it seemed, for safety, to give comfort and strength and guidance and peace, to give wisdom to know what to say or do, to keep themselves from feeling and reacting in anger, and to keep them from turning to alcohol or drugs for comfort.

People primarily found comfort in the presence of God. When a loved one died they found relief

in thinking that that person was in heaven or that they would some day see that person again.

They eventually turned to the Bible for answers and found that God spoke to them through this, and also through other Christians, and through songs. From God they found the courage to accept death. They also allowed Him to fill the emptiness they felt.

They dealt with the pain by ministering to others. Sandra Ratzlaff, a Cree Christian, told of how she was led by God to reconcile with her father and present the gospel to him as he lay dying:

When my dad died back in November I couldn't handle it for a while there. When I prayed for my dad, I just broke down and I talked to the Lord. I asked the Lord to heal my dad. And that he would get rid of his sickness and be healthy again. When I quit praying, the Lord spoke to me and said, "I am going to heal your dad, but I'm not going to heal him here." He was going to take my dad home where he'd never have to be sick again. For me, that was a turning point. I guess through my dad's death the Lord showed me that ... you know, in His Word where He says there's a time to live and there's a time to die. That's where He took me. He made me understand that we are not going to be in this world forever. We have to accept death, too. When I had asked Him to heal my dad, it was about a month before my dad died. He had told me to go to my dad and tell him you forgive him for everything he's done to you as a kid. And if you've hurt him in any way, you ask for forgiveness. Make things right with your dad. After He told me that, then He said, "You lead him to the Lord." So that's what I did. When I went home, I talked to my dad and I wrote him a letter because he couldn't hear. When he read the letter he cried and shook his head, "Yes." The next day, before we came home, we wrote him another letter asking him to receive the Lord in his life. He said, "Yes." But before that my dad was so scared of death. He would cry and cry and cry. He didn't want to die. After he accepted the Lord into his life, he was at peace. Total peace! As a matter of fact, he converted my mom and my other sisters. He told them, "I'm going home soon." He knew his time was coming when he was going to go home. That gave me a lot of peace. Right to when he almost died he called all of us home. That's when they put him in the hospital. The last time all of us were there ... he had his eyes open. He had a lot of peace knowing he was going. The Lord gave me such a peace in my life. It's easier for me to accept the news with having the Lord in my life. He's made me understand life and death. Life is passing on what you've learned about Him to other people. Witnessing. So they can have the same kind of life you're living ... and death, I hung on to the Lord when my dad died. He showed me there's life and death. We have to live and then we have to accept death too. And my dad lived a long life. It wasn't as hard for me because I knew my dad was going home to a better place.

Again the value placed on guidance and God's presence is evident. But it is not clear that the emphasis they place on these characteristics of God is any greater than those who are not of animistic background.

What does show the difference is another statement made by Sandra. She said, "I do believe that we are truly spiritual people. Once we grasp the truth, it's full bore from there." When she calls the Cree spiritual people, she is referring to their sensitivity to the supernatural. Her statement about the effect of that trait on their relationship with Christ makes sense. For animistic peoples, spirituality is not compartmentalized. It touches every area of life on an everyday basis. As a man said in Subproblem #2,

Why bother if you're going to just do it for one day of the week? What's the use? Why just do it one day when you've got all the rest of your life? To set a one day for your study, that should be

on an everyday basis, too. You should give up for God. And surrender yourself and your children and your community. That's a big step that people should do.

Yet he himself has not done so, as is typical of many Cree. If Sandra's statement is true, then he and the many like him have not grasped the truth, because they are not following Jesus "full bore." Those ministering to the Cree need to make some changes so that the truth is grasped and the Cree do go "full bore" into their relationship with Jesus Christ.

Two other issues that came out of this question speak to the Cree people's unique challenges in dealing with crises, but from a societal context rather than spiritual. Both concern alcohol and drugs. One lady talked of how both her friends and her past habits encouraged her to turn to these chemicals to help her deal with emotional pain. Another lady had to deal with the anger she felt when the police assumed alcohol had played a part in the accident. In fact, they were sober and being responsible with their care of the children when the accident happened. Although these are societal pressures, the increased pressure in crisis may affect their spiritual response.

Death is a colossal issue in the lives of the Cree. According to Arthur Holmes, author of *The Grieving Indian*, an estimated 80 percent of Native people die untimely deaths as compared to an estimated 20 percent of non-Natives (1988, 31). It is essential that Christian ministers develop a biblical theology of death.

## **5. General Concerns and Desires**

To gain an understanding of the concerns and desires of Cree Christians, interviewees for Subproblem #3 were asked what concerns they asked prayer for (Question #21), and what they wanted Jesus to do for them (Question #11). A few were also asked if there was anything else they would like to comment on that had not come up in the interview (Question #25).

The concerns and desires of Cree Christians are closely related and in similar order of importance as values in Subproblem #1, but they are expressed in different terms. Relationships, emotional health, freedom from addictions, and Indian Religion continue to be issues even after accepting Jesus Christ as Lord, but there are some new concerns that also come in to play.

### ***a. Relationships***

The high value placed on relationships continues, but is expressed in ways that show that Cree Christians see Christ as an asset to good relationships. They want to see their families saved. They ask prayer for the mending of damaged relationships. They ask God to give them the strength to forgive others. They want to see themselves and those they love changed by God.

### ***b. Emotional Health***

Cree Christians see emotional health as spiritual health. They believe God is their source of inner healing from past hurts and abuses.

### ***c. Freedom from Addictions***

Cree Christians want to be free from addictions and they want the same for others, as well. Gerald Merasty said he wanted God to release all Cree people from bondage, and then he

expanded that desire to include all the Native peoples of Canada. When asked what that bondage is, he said, “I have no idea. If I knew what it was that keeps them looking for something else ... why is it that Indian people drink so much ... why they gamble so much ... why is there so much evil in the Native communities. I don’t know. I don’t know what the bondage is.”

Gerald’s query expresses the same bewilderment at the lack of response to the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ that motivated this thesis. It does not give much hope of an outsider finding the answer if an insider is so baffled.

#### ***d. Indian Religion***

Cree Christians are concerned about Indian Religion, but not because they want to embrace it. Rather they are concerned that it will be embraced by the church in its attempt to contextualize. Gerald said, “Nowadays it’s so politically correct to have Native spirituality in everything, because European people believe that they’ve done it wrong by taking away the spirituality of the Native peoples. Now even the churches are compromising and saying, ‘Give them something back,’ and that’s wrong.”

#### ***e. Education/Job***

Not one Cree Christian that was interviewed mentioned education as a concern. One did, however, ask other Christians to help her pray for a job.

#### ***f. Sin***

Sin was not a concern for any of those interviewed for Subproblem #1 but figured fairly highly for those interviewed for Subproblem #3. They want to be forgiven and they also ask God for the strength to overcome temptations. This change in attitude towards their own sin is a major development since as has been noted Cree people tend to think of sin primarily as social but these Cree Christians think of their sin in terms of how it affects God as well as others (Marker #15).

#### ***g. Satan and Evil Spirits***

Interviewees for Subproblem #1 expressed concerns about hostile spirits, but only when asked about them specifically. Even when asked general questions, Cree Christians expressed their desire for God to protect them from Satan and evil spirits.

#### ***h. Guidance***

Similarly, interviewees for Subproblem #3 were more concerned than interviewees for Subproblem #1 to get spiritual guidance. There was also a difference in who they prayed to for it.

#### ***i. Physical Healing***

Cree Christians brought up the topic of physical healing more readily than did their non-Christian counterparts. They ask God for it. Both groups see it as a spiritual issue (Marker #24).

### **6. Perception of the Spirit World**

This section reports on the Cree Christian perspective of the spirit world. First, their angelology is examined. Next, their practice in relation to the spirit world is observed. Finally, the doctrine and practice of those Cree Christians who walk with God is contrasted with the doctrine and practice of those Cree people who claim to be born again Christians but whose lives do not give evidence of that commitment.

### *a. Angelology*

It did not appear that Cree Christians have a systematic doctrine of angelology. Their knowledge of the spirit world was piecemeal. Thirty percent of those interviewed said they did not know what the Bible taught about spirits. It was mentioned that they were created beings but, other than that, nothing was mentioned as to the origin, fall, classifications, nature or destiny of spirits. The interviewees did, however, speak of the characteristics and work of spirits.

They indicated that spirits were invisible. Other things that were mentioned were that they hinder people, that they make up a big part of reality, that they are from the enemy and that they fool people. Demons will come back and bother a person if he is not faithful to Christ. Christ cast them out. One person recalled two stories of Christ's interaction with spirits but combined them.

One quarter of those who responded equated nightmares with evil spirits. Again here is evidence of the significance that dreams hold for those of animistic backgrounds (Marker #17). These dreams were thought to actually be the means through which evil spirits attacked them.

It is also significant to note that three-eighths of the interviewees for Subproblem #3 associated demons with specific locales. Cree people almost exclusively view demons to be in places rather than in people. Bingo halls and casinos and other places known for being sites of sinful activity are frequently reported to be places where demons manifest themselves.

A Cree friend told Mary Whitehead of an experience of a mutual friend of theirs who works security at the casino. She said that this person had said that a shadow had appeared in the security cameras behind one of the machines, but when security staff went to check on it, no one was there. Mary and her friend's assumption was that it had been a spirit. This story caused Mary consternation, even though the alleged event had not taken place near her home. But her response to her fear was Christian in that she prayed and rebuked any possible spirits in Jesus' name and read her Bible. Then she was able to calm down and go to sleep.

Sandra associates "familiar spirits" with her home town:

I would have such a terrible time going back home, because in my teenage years that's where I spent my drinking and all those evil things that come with it. Being a Christian, I would have such an anxiety going back and I never knew what it was. I would just get like that all the time until I went to a pastor and asked, why do I get like this all the time? He told me it's familiar spirits. It's because when you were in the world it's where you were doing most of the things. Those spirits are still there, and you're walking into them going back where they are and that's what gives you the anxiety because they're taunting you. You know you don't want to go back there. So I've had to start praying against those spirits. The Lord has given me authority to cast them out. I really had to pray and cast them out and come against them. That's really helped me. Before I didn't know what they were; they just tormented me. I couldn't even have a good visit being at home. Now that I know how to do those things, putting your armor on.

Is there significance in that the Bible seems to predominantly view troublesome spirits as being in people? Does the Cree concept of demons being associated with places need to be corrected? Is it true that demons tend to manifest themselves in places where sinful activity regularly takes place? Does being in the wrong place make a person vulnerable to demon attack (Marker #22)?

Another animistic doctrine is that touching certain objects that have been dedicated to demons makes one vulnerable to demon attack. Interviewee #309 tells a story of when her and her daughter were at a drug and alcohol treatment centre. They had been told to stay away from this certain area because it was sacred. But her daughter got bored and curious and went to the forbidden place. She saw what looked to be the remnants of a sacrifice. She kicked at the objects with her foot, then left. After that, people started seeing and hearing strange things in the dorm. The daughter got very sick and they had to leave the treatment center. Interviewee #309 wondered if her daughter's illness and the spirit manifestations in the dorm were due to her daughter touching sacred objects (Marker #22). Is this concept biblical?

Both these questions of vulnerability by proximity are addressed in the next section on how to minister to those with an animistic worldview.

### ***b. Practice***

Doctrine informs practice. To determine practice, Cree Christians were asked "How does Jesus affect the way you relate to spirits?" (Question #10).

All but one of these Cree Christians have had encounters with evil spirits. But one of those nine said he had not had such an encounter since he became a Christian. All the other eight said that they used Christian means to deal with demons. All knew how to do so, whether they were walking with the Lord or not, but one said she had only learned to do so after having been a Christian for several years. This evidence suggests that knowing how to deal with spirits in a biblical manner does not ensure a holy lifestyle.

Half the interviewees spoke to the demons and told them to leave in the name of Jesus. Half indicated that being in right relationship with God provides protection from evil spirits. One quarter felt it was important to stay away from "wrong places." One was implying places where he would be tempted to sin. The other of these two said she will not go into sweat lodges because, "They said they hear evil spirits and they touch you and they hear bears and different animal sounds. I've never been to one."

One reported calling the elders of the church to ask them to come to the house and pray and deal with the spirit. One spoke of putting on the armor of God. One said, "I'll pray for God to pour Jesus' blood on my kids and myself. And it goes away." Another said that she had been taught that once a Christian repents of her sin, the demons run away. A Cree Christian man deals with the dilemma this way: "I either ask God to give me the strength to go through the situation, or if it's the devil, that the devil would be gone." One lady said she gets her strength from reading the Bible. Another said that they can be tested by asking if they acknowledge God.

Two-thirds reported fear at encountering a spirit. The fear dissipated when they dealt with the spirit in the power of Jesus Christ. Gerald Merasty said, "At one time I would have been very fearful of spirits; and at times I do, when I do lose faith and when I kind of doubt and start feeling fearful, but for the most part, knowing Christ, you're liberated from that fear. I'm talking about evil spirits." Sophia reported, "I feel that there's nothing to be scared of and I know that there is

power in His name; and I know that the spirits will flee just by saying His name, and then I feel secure and I don't have to be scared of anything. So I think His name is very powerful when it comes to that kind of stuff." These responses point to the fact that animistic peoples live in fear and have a need for security (Marker #7), and that they have found that security and protection from hostile spirits (Marker # 8) in Jesus Christ.

### ***c. Contrast of the Doctrine and Practice of Those Who Walk with God with Those Who Do Not***

When the doctrine and practice of those who walk with God and those who do not walk with God were compared, there appeared to be little difference. They each knew approximately the same amount of biblical teaching on spirits, and essentially they dealt with the presence of an evil spirit in the same way. Those who do not walk with God were the only ones who mentioned the biblical concept of testing the spirits (1 John 4:1-6), but they said they did not know how to use this idea in practice. They were also the ones who believed that evil spirits came to them in dreams.

### **Conclusion**

The primary question addressed by Subproblem #3 was whether born again Christian Cree people's victorious walk with God was negatively impacted by the exclusion of the spirit world in discipleship efforts.

Yes, the exclusion of biblical teaching on and biblical responses to the spirit world would negatively affect Cree Christians' walk with God. All have had encounters with spirits so all need to know how to deal with spirits in a Christian manner. There was also evidence that their biblical knowledge of spirits was sketchy. A thorough and systematic teaching of God's perspective of the spirit world is necessary in the early stages of discipleship in order to combat the false teachings that Cree people have received and accepted as truth prior to becoming Christians. Distinctions need to be made between demons, which the Bible speaks of extensively, and ghosts which are hardly referred to at all.

Cree Christians do, however, appear to have been trained in the practical aspects of how to respond to an encounter with an evil spirit in a biblical manner. But even those who have had this training, and have used it, did not necessarily walk in obedience to Christ.

As was seen in the conclusion of Subproblem #2, relational issues are more influential than are issues of the spirit world. Question #8 revealed that tensions in relationships caused by their faith in Christ were the most difficult aspect for Cree Christians to cope with. Most of the responses to Question #15 showed that people quit following Jesus due to relational pressures.

The other issue that Question #15 revealed was that of death and suffering. The misfortunes of life were seen as evidence that God was not effective in providing their heart's desires and, therefore, not worth the required relational sacrifices for His sake. Again, this finding is consistent with the findings of Subproblem #2. However, with Christians, this thinking shows that some of these Christians expect Christ to serve them, rather than them to serve Him ... for Him to fulfill their agenda, rather than them to fulfill His. Thus a call to the surrender of the will to God is essential for the longevity and quality of Cree Christians' walk with God.

This issue of control also showed itself in the areas of aids to a close walk with God and

decision-making. Those who had made the decision to obey Christ at all cost were more likely to continue to follow Him, even when confronted with death, suffering and misfortune. They also realized that that initial decision to obey Christ affected all other decisions that they made. The pivotal point was when Cree Christians became God-centered rather than self-centered (the opposite of Marker #11). This issue of control and of living to please Christ instead of self will be explored further under the section on control in the next chapter.

## **CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER II**

Throughout all three subproblems, when interviewees were asked general questions about values, desires and concerns, very little was mentioned about the spirit world. However, when asked specifically about spirits, almost all had had encounters with them. Three possibilities could account for this discrepancy.

First, there is the possibility that Cree people are concerned about the realm of spirits, but there are many other concerns of more importance to them. The second possibility is that, whether they use Christian or animistic methods or a combination of both, they are confident in their ability to deal with hostile spirits, so are unconcerned. The other possibility is that they are concerned about the spirit world, but do not think non-Native people would acknowledge or understand such a concern. It is most likely that all three of these possibilities are in effect.

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## **CHAPTER III**

### **SYNTHESIS OF THE DATA**

#### **SUBPROBLEM #4 - HOW CAN THE PRESENTATION OF THE GOSPEL AND CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP BE CHANGED TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE MIDDLE ZONE IN A BIBLICAL WAY?**

In this chapter the information gleaned and analyzed in the Chapter II is used to formulate a ministry strategy. This is done in attempt to answer the question of Subproblem #4: “How can the presentation of the gospel and Christian discipleship be changed to acknowledge the Cree perception of the middle zone in a biblical way?” The first step is to assess the “24 Markers of an Animist” in conjunction with the findings of the interviews, and then create corresponding ministry methods. Next, a plan is laid out for how to lead Cree Christians through the process of critical contextualization.

#### **A. Markers of the Cree Animist that Inform Ministry Strategy**

##### **Introduction**

The 24 markers of an animistic worldview are not all dealt with in this chapter. Those that do not have a direct link to the spirit world, such as orality, are omitted. The rest are grouped according to effect on ministry strategy. First, the belief that personal spirits and impersonal spiritual forces interact and interconnect with the natural and human worlds is analyzed. Next, the belief that the spirit realm can at times be hostile is considered. One of the things those hostile spirits do is afflict people with illnesses. If the spirit world is made up of both good and evil spirits and impersonal forces, then it proves necessary to begin by determining which

spiritual power affects which event. Once that is determined, then a person can choose whether to seek some type of protection, or seek to have some control over these spiritual powers so they will not bring harm to him. Finally, the idea that death sparks a flurry of spiritual activity gives Cree animists a reason to be particularly concerned with death.

## **1. Belief in Personal Spirits and Impersonal Spiritual Forces that Interact and Interconnect with the Natural and Human Worlds**

### ***a. Explanation and Evidence of the Belief***

It is obvious from the interviews that Cree people believe that personal spirits exist and that they interact with humans (Markers #1 and #3). Almost every person interviewed recounted an encounter with a spirit.

However, evidence in a belief in impersonal spiritual powers (Marker #2) was not obvious. The signs were subtle, but did exist. In Subproblem #1, Question #8, an impersonal cosmic order (Marker #21) was assumed. Good actions were thought to eventually bring good rewards and bad actions bad consequences. This belief was again shown in the answers to Subproblem #1, Question #16, in that “What goes around comes around” was an oft-quoted proverb. The use of amulets and herbs and smoke to provide protection (Marker #8) and affect the course of events (Marker #3) also demonstrates the concept of active impersonal spiritual forces.

Barriers between spirit, human, animal, material and immaterial, living and dead, animate and inanimate are considered permeable (Marker #10). Dead infants are thought to guide their parents. Stories are circulated of men with hooves, who are also evil spirits. Rocks are thought to be animate. This sense of interconnectedness allows for the belief that dream-catchers can block the entrance of evil spirits into a child’s bedroom.

Unexplained events are considered to be caused by spirits (Marker #3). A movement is detected out of the corner of the eye, but when the head is turned, no one is there. The smoke alarm goes off but no one is cooking. The sound of footsteps can be heard when home alone. The dishes rattle in a room where no person is present. There is the smell of food but no one is cooking. It feels like someone is watching but no one is there. Lights, stereos or televisions go on and off without a person flipping a switch. There are scratching sounds from an empty closet. There is a shadow with no body casting it. A shiver runs up the back of the neck. All these incidents are thought to be the activity of spirits. Any sound, sight, smell, sensation that does not have an immediately identifiable natural cause is thought to have a spiritual cause.

For over a hundred years entire Native communities have been predominantly Catholic or Anglican. For a hundred years Native children were removed from their parents and all possible Native cultural influence and put into a situation (residential schools) where assimilation efforts continued every hour of every day. Individuals have been committed to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and disciplined in the teachings of the Bible for many years. Even after all this time and effort to bring Christianity to the First Nations people of Canada, this animistic interpretation of reality persists.

Patricia Nekurak, who has been a Christian for over 15 years, reported that she had to get her hair bangs cut because every time she caught a glimpse of them out of the corner of her eye, she frightened herself by momentarily thinking she saw a spirit. Even after hundreds of hours of systematic Bible instruction via Theological Education by Extension and countless hours of

informal visitation and informal discipleship over the past 18 years of her relationship with Jesus Christ, Mary, when another resident in her apartment block recently died, still feared that that neighbor's spirit would come to her apartment and bother her.

This animistic worldview must be faced. Time has not eradicated it. Neither has teaching. After salvation people still retain much of the same worldview. It is a fact to be addressed and dealt with. This worldview is not evil in itself. Much of it is closer to biblical teaching than is the worldview held by many Western-European Christians. According to Del Tackett's article, "What's a Worldview Anyway?" in *Focus on the Family* magazine, the Barna Research Group discovered that only nine percent of Americans who claimed to be born again Christians held a biblical worldview (July/August 2004, 7-9). Tackett propounds that a biblical worldview is one in which people believe and live their lives based on these eight truths:

- Absolute moral truths exist.
- Absolute truth is defined in the Bible
- Jesus Christ lived a sinless life.
- God is the all-powerful and all-knowing Creator of the universe and still rules it today.
- Salvation is a gift from God that cannot be earned.
- Satan is real.
- A Christian has a responsibility to share his/her faith with others.
- The Bible is accurate in all of its teachings. (ibid.)

The point is that ministers of the gospel, whose worldview does not recognize daily interactions with the spirit world, cannot ignore that many of those they seek to minister to have a worldview that recognizes daily interaction with a spirit world. Ignoring this difference in how reality is perceived produces negative results in both the presentation of the gospel and the discipleship of believers. In Carolyn Butler's article "Applying God's Grace to an Animistic Society," she states that one of the mistakes missionaries make is that they fail "to recognize the reality of the spiritual world" (1993, 384).

Another group that may be failing to recognize the reality of the spiritual world are those Native Christians who take contextualization seriously. By incorporating some of the practices, rituals and objects used in Indian Religion into the worship of Christ, they may underestimate the reality of the evil spirits that were once summoned using these methods and objects. That concern has been expressed by other Native Christian leaders who have experienced the reality of hostile spirits and are concerned certain attempts at contextualization may treat that reality too lightly.

### ***b. Ministry Strategy***

As was seen in the responses to Subproblem #3, Question #9, Cree Christians' biblical knowledge of spirits was patchy. They had picked up bits of information here and there but did not have a thorough understanding of the spirit realm. Therefore it is recommended that early in the new life of believers, they should be taught systematically what the Bible teaches about the nature, origin, characteristics and destiny of spirits. One method of determining which areas need more teaching, and which do not, would be to administer a quiz developed by Trevor McIlwain. It could be used for pre-evangelism as he planned, or later for discipleship of new believers, as is recommended here.

One of the recommendations that Carolyn Butler makes is that "Missionaries can and must have a biblical understanding of the spiritual forces they are up against" (1993, 388). Not only do

those of animistic backgrounds need their preconceived ideas of the spirit world corrected by God's Word, but so do those of cultures that, for all practical purposes, deny the existence of the spirit world. A systematic biblical study of the spirit world would also greatly benefit missionaries.

## UNSEEN SPIRITUAL POWERS

Are there unseen spiritual powers in the world?  
What are their names?  
Who are they?  
Who is their leader?  
From where did they come?  
Do they have bodies?  
Are they male or female?  
Are they big or small?  
Are they good or bad?  
Are they strong?  
Are they stronger than God?  
Are they God's friends?  
Can these spiritual powers see people?  
Do they hear what people say?  
Do they know people's thoughts?  
Do they love or hate people?  
Do they get angry with people?  
What makes them angry?  
What do they want people to do?  
What do they do when they get angry?  
How can they be appeased? (McIlwain 1988, 10).

The Bible teaches the existence of a vast realm of personal spirit beings created by God. There is, however, no teaching of impersonal spiritual forces. This distinction is critical to the vitality of the faith of Cree Christians. The idea of mechanistic, impersonal spiritual forces is what feeds the idea that magic can be used to harness and use these powers for one's own benefit. Ruling it out helps rule out those attempts to use God to get His blessings and protection without having a relationship with Him.

Cree people need to know the truth about spirits. They need to know what God says is happening in the unseen realm, especially since He is the only reliable source of such information. But, as has already been pointed out, biblical knowledge alone has not changed the Cree perception of spiritual reality. In the "ministry strategy" sections biblical teaching is paired with practices that work together to help align the Cree animistic worldview with a more biblical worldview.

## **2. Belief that the Spirit Realm can at Times be Hostile**

According to Hiebert et al., spirits and spiritual forces are seen mainly as hostile (1999, 81) (Marker #4). There are ones that are considered kind and good but even they must, at times, be appeased because they can become angry (1999, 54). These statements were verified by the findings of the interviews. Most of those who had encountered a spirit, experienced fear. Even those people who deemed the spirit harmless and merely lost or hungry, still took measures to rid

themselves of those spirits. Obviously they were thought to be capricious and untrustworthy. Patricia Nekurak, a Cree Christian, verifies this conclusion. She stated that if the visitation of a spirit was good and from God, why would there be a sense of fear and the need to use sweet grass to smudge (with the implication of trying to get it to go away).

As was already stated, the response to potentially malicious spirits is to either seek protection (Marker #8) or seek to control them (Marker #9), and to seek spiritual guidance to prepare for an uncertain future (Marker #6). Ministry strategies are considered under each of those sections.

### **3. Illness Viewed as a Spiritual Issue**

#### ***a. Explanation and Evidence of the Belief***

One of the things that the hostile spirits are believed to do is to inflict people with illness (Hiebert et al. 1999, 147) (Marker #24). In Subproblem #1, Question #14, when Cree people were asked to categorize reality, almost all put demons and virus in the same group. Often these two were placed in a category completely by themselves. This finding leads to the conclusion that diseases are thought to be the work of evil spirits.

Hiebert says that, “Deeply committed Christians faithfully attend church services and pray to God in times of need, but felt compelled during the week to go to the local shaman for healing” (1999, 15). Sophia, an interviewee, confirmed this statement in a story about her grandmother:

I didn’t have any kind of church teaching. It was all from my kokum (Cree word for grandmother) and that’s the stuff she taught me. When I was about Grade Four, sitting at her feet when she was sewing moccasins, she would tell me things about life. “When you marry, you stay with the man till you die and you never leave him. When you get married you live only with one man and not other men.” And I used to ask my kokum, “Why are you telling me this?” when I was [only] in Grade 4. And these lessons about life ... things like that ... it was the fear of God that she put in me. My family claimed that she did that. I lived with her when I was 14, 15, 16. Close to the end she went to a medicine man for healing from diabetes.

This type of story is not uncommon. Others have reported asking for prayer for healing in church and then gone to a medicine man for healing. Bill Jackson confirms this trait among the Cree when he writes, “One area the traditional religion is very much involved in is healing” (1992, 9). He further states that herbal medicine is often combined with the active involvement of spirits (1992, 10).

#### ***b. Ministry Strategy***

According to Thiessen, this animistic belief is consistent with Scripture (1949, 208). Demons do in fact cause illness (Job 1:5-10; Matt. 9:33; 12:22; Luke 9:37-42; 13:11, 16). But the Bible also teaches that not all physical ailments are the result of evil spirits or sin. The story in John 9, about the man born blind, would be a good starting point, especially as (in verse 3) the reason for his blindness was “so that the work of God might be displayed.”

Hiebert et al. propose that the blessings of illness be taught (1999, 377). God at times uses suffering and sickness to build godly character into the lives of His people (Job 42:5-6; Jas 1:2-4). They also remind believers that there are times when suffering and sickness are a direct result of being persecuted for their faith in Christ. In those situations believers are sharing in Christ’s

suffering and thereby experience the benefit of closely identifying with Christ (Phil 3:10).

Another step is to take James 5:14-16 very seriously. Sin does at times have a connection to sickness. When the elders of the church pray for healing, the issue of sin must be at least addressed.

Most definitely Christians should be praying for healing. With the increase of incurable diseases, more people than ever are realizing that science alone is insufficient. It is also necessary to pray not only for supernatural healing, but against demons that may be the cause. In the Gospels it is clear that Jesus' ministry included both healing and exorcism. Many times the two were connected. Obviously Jesus also viewed evil spirits as a possible cause of illness.

#### **4. Consequent Necessity of Determining Which Spiritual Power is Affecting or Will Affect Which Event**

##### ***a. Explanation and Evidence of the Belief***

This section is divided into three related topics: divination, guidance and dreams. Divination is the attempt to know which spirit caused which event (Marker #6). Guidance refers to peoples' efforts to know which events spirits will cause in the future. Dreams are examined, as they are thought to be a means by which spirits communicate with people (Marker #17).

##### **1) Divination**

Before a person can know how to respond to a spirit he must first determine which spirit is causing which event and why their anger has been aroused. Then an appropriate course of action can be taken. A sacrifice, ritual or amulet may be in order. Two interviewees were each brought to a Sundance after they had encounters with spirits.

In Subproblem #2, Question #9, one interviewee described a way to tell the difference between a good spirit and a bad spirit. When the hair on the back of the neck stood up, then a bad spirit was thought to be present. A spirit was deemed good if it did not bother the family, especially the children.

##### **2) Guidance**

The capriciousness of the spirit realm also makes a person desire spiritual guidance in order to avoid possible difficulties, and in order to better deal with an uncertain future. Almost all peoples would like the edge of knowing the future, but if a people group does not have the assurance of a loving, trustworthy, good and all-powerful Being holding that future, then the need to give oneself a better chance at success by knowing what is coming is all the more urgent.

Hiebert et al. also indicated that guidance is highly important to animistic peoples who often seek signs and omens in order to foretell and manipulate the future (1999, 175-176). Van Rheezen states the same (1991, 22-23).

The interviews repeatedly showed Cree people's desire for supernatural guidance. One interviewee said her miscarried baby guided her. Many pray to receive guidance, especially in how to react to a crisis when their usual coping mechanisms are tried and found wanting. Of those in Subproblem#1 who choose spiritual power as a quality they would like for themselves,

most did so because they wanted supernatural guidance. Some said they prayed to the creator for it, and another (142) asked his “grandfather” (meaning an ancestral spirit, not his living grandfather) for it.

### **3) Dreams**

“Dreams, as a methodology of divination, are channels through which spiritual powers communicate with the living” (Van Rheenen 1991, 185). Therefore, “People take dreams seriously” (Hiebert 1999, 59).

The interviews with Cree people showed that they, too, placed a great deal of significance on dreams. Gerald Merasty, an interviewee, was told that he was very powerful, spiritually, as he had a dream about three grandfathers when most spiritual elders only have a dream of one grandfather. One Cree lady was comforted over the loss of her grandson because of a dream. Another was taken to a Sundance because an elderly friend who had passed away appeared to her in a dream and told her that, when she reached her early twenties, she would come and take her to be with her.

#### ***b. Ministry Strategy***

##### **1) Divination**

###### ***a) Scripture on divination***

*Funk and Wagnall’s Canadian College Dictionary* defines divination as “the act or art of foretelling the future or of discovering by supernatural ... means that which is hidden or unknown” (1986, 389). Therefore, the idea of discovering the unknown spiritual cause behind a past event, and discovering the coming of a future event, would both apply. The Bible clearly prohibits all forms of divination. Leviticus 19:26b says, “Do not practice divination.” Verse 31 of that same chapter says, “Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists for you will be defiled by them. I am the Lord your God.”

1 Samuel 28 recounts Saul’s seeking out a medium in order to speak to Samuel because he desperately wanted guidance to know how to proceed in the coming battle. Although there is much to be explored in this story concerning the spirit realm, what is most revealing is the writer of Chronicles’ explanation of why God acted as He did in response to Saul’s actions. 1 Chronicles 10:13-14 says: “Saul died because he was unfaithful to the LORD; he did not keep the word of the LORD and even consulted a medium for guidance, and did not inquire of the LORD.”

God does not want people to inquire of anyone but Him. He alone is the One who should be sought for all supernatural needs. He alone is the One who knows the future, so He should be the only One people inquire of. In Isaiah 46:9b-10a, God says of Himself, “I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come.” He alone knows what is happening in the spirit realm and the causes of events, so He alone should be sought for those answers. Isaiah sets up a test of godhood. It is that of knowing the future. He challenges peoples to present their idols and perform this test: Isaiah 41:22-23 says, “Bring in your idols to tell us what is going to happen ... Or declare to us the things to come, tell us what the future holds, so that we may know that you are gods.” The Lord God Jehovah is the only One to pass this test.

### ***b) Gifts of discernment and prophecy***

Fully aware of people's need for understanding of the unseen and for guidance, God meets those needs. He does so by giving His Church the gifts of discernment and prophecy.

Deuteronomy 18:14-15 says, "The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the LORD your God has not permitted you to do so. The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him."

God substitutes prophets for diviners. They spoke for God. Their words were recorded and therefore the Bible is now the source of God's guidance. But God also gives the gift of prophecy to His Church today as is stated in 1 Corinthians 12:10. In the same verse God says that He also gives the gift of discernment or, as the NIV translates it, "distinguishing between spirits." The Bible gives little indication, however, of how these gifts are exercised and what methods are used.

### ***c) Christian methods of "divination"***

How does a Christian go about determining which spirit is causing which event? This is the subject of much debate among missiologists who are seeking to address this "flaw of the excluded middle." Edward Rommen, editor of *Spiritual Power and Missions*, collected three articles that each present three different views on this subject.

The first article, which comprises Chapter 1, "Missiological Syncretism: The New Animist Paradigm," is written by Robert J. Priest, Thomas Campbell, and Bradford A Mullen. Their main point is that the animistic worldview has been given too much credibility and that, in efforts to become effective in dealing with spirits and peoples' perception of spirits, missionaries have accepted unbiblical animistic teachings (1995, 9).

They further contend that not only have unbiblical animistic teachings been accepted, but that the methods used to gain the information on which these teachings are based, are faulty. One method for gaining information about the spirit world has been to interview demons, which is prohibited in Scripture (1995, 26). They further state "that Jesus, on a single occasion, asked a demon to speak and give its name (Mark 5:9; Luke 8:30) should not be used to justify the practice of interrogating demons in order to discover new truth about demons." In addition, the fact that demons are liars proves them poor sources of trustworthy information (1995, 30).

What others call the gift of discernment, Priest, Campbell and Mullen call "inner Geiger-counters" (1995, 50). They question,

Does the Bible give any support to the idea that we have a natural capacity or spiritual gifting to emotionally sense and accurately perceive the demonic? No. Passages referring to testing the spirits and to discernment of spirits speak of discernment and testing based on doctrine, not of a free-floating emotional Geiger-counter which will automatically go off when in the presence of the demonic (1995, 51).

In Chapter 2, "Christian Animism or God-given Authority?" (1995, 88), Charles H. Kraft defends himself and like-minded missiologists. He believes that the spirit world can be researched just like any other science because it works within fixed principles and therefore has

regularities (1995, 89). But he concedes that Scripture gives “little direct information concerning how he (Satan) operates or the rules by which his activities are governed” (1995, 103). Kraft then justifies further exploration that is in line with Scripture, though not stated directly in Scripture, saying, “I believe that all parts of the universe – the material part, the human part and the spiritual part – are governed by God according to rules and principles that He has embedded in His creation. Some, but not all, of these principles are indicated in the Bible” (1995, 113).

But is the spirit world open to exploration via scientific methods, since it is outside the scope of the human five senses? Would it not be more accurate to presume that God reveals everything about the spirit world that is necessary to know and that exploration beyond that is presumptuous?

One of Kraft’s methods of exploration is talking to demons. He asserts that even Satan at Christ’s temptation told some truth and that, when put under the authority of Holy Spirit, demons have to tell the truth (1995, 117). Is this true? Is this practice shown in Scripture?

In Chapter 3, “Biblical Intercession: Spiritual Power to Change Our World,” Patrick Johnstone (1995, 137) emphasizes the importance of prayer in the Christian’s battle against Satan and his forces. He warns against getting caught in one of two extremes, in either under-emphasis of the spiritual nature of the conflict, or too great a preoccupation with the enemy (1995, 138). He maintains that, “The world is going to be evangelized only through prayer. This is the ultimate weapon, the master strategy for overthrowing every plan, argument, power structure, bondage and even the gates of Hades that are in opposition to the King of kings and Lord of lords,” and that “Intercessory prayer is the means by which we exercise the authority of Christ in the world” (1995, 149).

#### ***d) Tests for the causes of supernatural phenomena***

Animists want to know the causes of supernatural events in order to know how to best respond. So do Christians. It would then be logical that especially Christians from animistic backgrounds find a diagnostic tool helpful. Such a diagnostic tool is found in the following summary sheet taken from Denise Hodgman’s paper entitled, “Tests by Which to Evaluate Teaching, Experience and Supernatural Manifestations.”

## TESTING THE SUPERNATURAL

### Introduction

True Miracles (Acts 2:17-21, life of Christ - Mark 5 and 6)

False Miracles (Matthew 24:23-24; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-11; 2 Corinthians 11:14)

## TESTS

1. Is Jesus Christ exalted? (1 John 4:2,3,15)
2. Are sin and Satan opposed? (1 John 4:4-5; 2:15-16)
3. Is the Bible held in high regard? (1 John 4:6)
4. Is there growth in truth? (1 John 4:6)
5. Is there love for God and man? (1 John 4:21)
6. Is there the lasting fruit of the Spirit? Are people being conformed to the image of Christ?

(Galatians 5:22-23; Romans 8:29)

7. Is it orderly? (1 Corinthians 14:40,33)

8. Are people getting saved? Is there a strong emphasis on evangelism? (2 Peter 3:9)

9. Is the Church edified? (1 Corinthians 12:7)

10. Are families strengthened?

11. Is it God-centred or self-centred? Is God glorified? (1 Corinthians 10:31; James 4:3-4)

## Conclusion

These tests can be applied to almost anything you wonder about, including teachings and experiences as well as supernatural events, to see whether they are from God or not (1999, 20-22).

### *e) How to respond to an encounter with a spirit*

As was already noted, Cree Christians displayed practical experience and good understanding in dealing with a spirit encounter in a biblical manner. The Bible gives little methodology for dealing with the presence of evil spirits, but places the focus squarely on relying on Christ (See Denise Hodgman's paper "Exorcism in the Gospels: A Counsellor's Guide," 2000). Hodgman says, "The efficacy is in Christ Himself." Cree Christians seem to recognize and depend on this truth particularly in dealing with the presence of evil spirits in their homes.

Not one interviewee mentioned anything like the demon possessions recorded in the Gospels. In this context they may not have the depth of teaching or practical experience necessary to deal with such an encounter. It may be significant that Crees only think of evil spirits in terms of being in their surroundings, and not in their bodies, especially in comparison with biblical accounts of Jesus' interactions with spirits which almost always involve Him casting them out of a person's body.

All the Gospel accounts of Christ's interactions with demons seem to indicate that no follow up is necessary after an encounter. The demon is gone and that is that. But as is mentioned in the introduction to this section, the Cree sometimes view an interaction with an evil spirit as an indication that a more elaborate intervention is necessary. During the Sundance, Native elders come alongside and spend an extended time of fasting, singing, praying, and at times the giving of a new name to the one who was visited by a spirit. Would a Christian equivalent be helpful or would it take away from the understanding of Christ's total supremacy and immediate victory? Would, in their minds, a ritual replace the person of Christ?

## **2) Guidance**

Hiebert gives this example of seeking guidance: "When new converts ask when they should go to hunt for much needed game – should they go tomorrow or the next day, and should they go north or east – how should missionaries respond?" (1999, 189-190). This example would not be of concern for the Cree. As was pointed out in Subproblem #1, Question #12, the Cree seem to give very little deliberation to decision making. They tend to act on whim rather than to analyze and agonize over decisions, particularly daily ones. But, as was acknowledged at the beginning of this section, some do pray for guidance about the major decisions in life.

Hiebert states that if missionaries supply natural rather than spiritual avenues of guidance, newly

converted animists will return to those who do supply spiritual means of gaining guidance (1999, 190). Hiebert then encourages ministers of the gospel to train new believers to determine God's will in the ways commonly used by Christians via study of Scripture, prayer, wisdom gained from the counsel of other believers, and circumstances (1999, 193).

He then cautions that those relying on modern prophecies, words of knowledge and the like, to supply answers to the daily decisions, may in fact be continuing in their animistic approach to guidance. Instead, they need to be growing in the freedom offered by God within the broader jurisdiction of moral obedience to His expressed will in the Bible (1999, 193).

### **3) Dreams**

Although the Bible, in both the Old Testament and the New, gives much evidence that God uses dreams to communicate with people, not all dreams are messages from Him. In Jeremiah 14:14b God says, "They are prophesying to you false visions, divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds." Since dreams and visions can be from God, Satan, or one's own mind, it is necessary to teach people to test their dreams with the same tests that were given for other supernatural phenomena.

## **5. Seeking Protection from Evil Spirits**

### ***a. Explanation and Evidence of the Belief***

A logical response to a hostile spirit world that actively intersects with the human world would be to seek protection from that potential hostility. Hiebert et al. say,

A final worldview theme that runs through nearly all folk religions belief systems is near constant fear and the need for security. In a world full of spirits, witchcraft, sorcery, black magic, curses, bad omens, broken taboos angry ancestors, human enemies, and false accusations of many kinds, life is rarely carefree and secure (1999, 87).

Cree people acknowledge these dangers and, as a result, tend to live with a heightened sense of fear. Many people speak of their fear of going down to their own basements. Many either sleep with the lights on or cannot fall asleep until daybreak. Joy at the sight of the glorious beauty of the northern lights is marred by the remembrance of admonitions not to whistle at them lest they come down and take a person away.

Another factor that contributes to their fear are the stories of more obvious spirit activity. Stories are circulated of hoofed feet being seen under bathroom stalls, dishes being thrown and smashed, electronics turning on and off without human manipulation, figures appearing in rooms, scratches spelling out "hel" appearing on a back, convulsions and strange voices.

Cree hang sweet-grass or eagle feathers in their homes and cars. They smudge themselves and their homes. They carry medicine bags or stones. They place dream-catchers in the windows of their children's bedrooms. They avoid breaking taboos such as not allowing the bottoms of snow encrusted pants to rub together lest spirits be angered by the noise. All these efforts are motivated by the desire to procure spiritual protection.

### **1) High god versus lesser spirits**

### ***a) Explanation and evidence of the belief***

According to Kraft in *Spiritual Power and Missions*,

Most animists of the world know that there is a supreme God who lives above the evil spirits and is more powerful than they are. They usually reason, however, that the supreme God will be good to them and so they need pay little or no attention to Him. On the other hand, they reason that the way to keep the evil spirits from bothering them is by sacrificing to them to appease them, rather than (as in Christianity) by obeying the God who is above them, allowing Him to protect them from the evil spirits (1995, 98) (Marker #18).

Some evidence of this mentality did show up among the Cree. It was most obvious in Subproblem #1, Question #11. When people spoke of wanting forgiveness in their lives, they spoke almost exclusively of interpersonal forgiveness. When one lady was asked about God's place in the idea of forgiveness, she indicated that forgiveness from Him was a given, so not worth even thinking about.

### ***b) Ministry strategy***

A Christian response to this worldview may be to teach God's intimate knowledge and interaction in the details of life. Psalm 139 is particularly strong concerning this truth. God is shown to care and be involved in every aspect of the development of the fetus. He sets out a path for each day of life. He knows people's daily routines and whereabouts. This passage demonstrates that God is not distant but it still teaches His goodness, which animists may see as safeness and therefore still not worthy of attention.

What may be needed is a view of God that C.S. Lewis portrayed in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* when the beaver said of Aslan, "Course he isn't safe. But he's good" (1950, 76). Passages on God's wrath and the limited opportunities of getting right with Him may be necessary, but it will be a balancing act to not then return them to their original state of fear.

## **2) Proximity vulnerability**

### ***a) Explanation and evidence of the belief***

In *Spiritual Power and Missions*, Priest et al accuse Kraft and his colleagues of buying into the animistic doctrine of proximity vulnerability (1995, 14,19) (Marker #22). This idea is that a person can accidentally expose himself to demon activity by touching an object, accepting a gift or entering a geographic space dedicated to evil spirits. Others have even extended this idea to that of demons being transmitted by sex and/or birth.

The Cree do hold this belief. It is demonstrated by Interviewee #309's interpretation that her daughter's touching a sacrifice to spirits with her foot caused demon activity in the dormitory and her illness. It is also shown in Mary's fear of living in the neighboring apartment when an elderly woman died, and in Interviewee #222's evaluation that they sensed evil presences in their basement suite because the people upstairs used cocaine regularly.

Another evidence that the Cree hold to this belief of proximity vulnerability is that all the accounts of encounters with hostile spirits were with those spirits being in a specific location, usually a bedroom or basement. Not once was the idea of possession mentioned. Neither was

there any indication that demons affected individuals after they left that location or that the demon was attached to the person rather than the location.

This doctrine is also held and propagated by many members of Northern Canada Evangelical Mission. It was advanced in the candidate training tapes in the early 1980s. It was also been taught by Native evangelist Craig Smith at a workshop in Prince Albert, SK. But is this doctrine biblical?

### ***b) Ministry strategy***

Although there is a great deal of anecdotal evidence for the truth of this idea of proximity vulnerability, is there biblical evidence? All life's experiences need to be understood in the light of Scripture in order to get God's viewpoint of reality, especially supernatural experiences.

Priest et al set about to demonstrate that Scripture in fact opposes this notion. They point out that whenever objects were used as if they had supernatural power in and of themselves, God rebuked this action, such as when the sons of Eli took the ark of the covenant into battle (1 Samuel 4) thinking that would be their way of manipulating God into fighting for them (1995, 59). They then reason that if holy objects do not have power, why should evil objects have power? Their power comes, rather, in the meaning that people assign to them:

When those people act wrongly toward such objects based on these meanings which the objects have for them, Satan has power in the lives of those people – just as he always has power in the lives of those whom he successfully deceives, tempts and seduces. But it is altogether a different matter to infer that the object itself transmits power, that quite apart from its meaning for the individual and quite apart from any associated wrong cognitive, moral or spiritual response on the part of the individual, its mere physical presence creates a vulnerability to demonic power – a vulnerability not otherwise present (1995, 60).

They contend that the power is in the meaning people assign to these objects and places, which is quite different than people experiencing demon activity when they innocently and without knowledge come in contact with an object or place that has been dedicated to evil spirits.

They further explain,

We do not, strictly speaking then, deny that a demon can enter an object or inhabit the same space as an object. What we deny is that the demon gains a tactical advantage by doing – so that by entering meat, let us say, the demon is able to enter and gain a power over the person who happens to eat the meat, a power not otherwise available (1995, 63).

In 1 Corinthians 10:25-27, Paul encourages believers to avoid finding out whether or not meat was offered to idols or, as he calls them in Verse 20, demons – but rather to just eat whatever meat was available. However, if they were informed that it was offered to idols, they should abstain from eating. He would not have given these instructions if a person could be made vulnerable to demon activity by merely coming into contact with it, much less actually taking it into their bodies.

There are also many examples in Scripture where God's people are commended not for avoiding places dedicated to evil spirits (idols), but for forcefully desecrating those places and objects (i.e., Gideon, Hezekiah, Josiah). This courage and confidence is the opposite of the fear that

Interviewee #309 experienced when she was told at the treatment center to stay away from their sacred area for sacrifices, and when her daughter disturbed them.

It appears that all accounts in the Gospels of Christ's encounters with evil spirits record Him dealing with evil spirits in people. None of the accounts of encounters with evil spirits mentioned in the interviews with Cree people involved the spirits being in people. Such a stark contrast cannot be without significance.

The doctrine of proximity vulnerability feeds the fear so common among people who hold to an animistic worldview (Marker #7). It would greatly increase Cree believers' security in the Lord if they were taught that they did not need to fear inadvertently stumbling into the jurisdiction of evil spirits. Bill Jackson confirms the confidence that can be had in Christ. He writes,

Sometimes people are hesitant to accept gifts from persons involved in traditional religion. The reluctance comes because the gift may be used as a medium in affecting or sending a curse. A believer should grow in the knowledge of Christ and His Word (1 Peter 3 :18) so that no matter what is involved as far as gifts are concerned he is safe if he fully realizes his position in Christ. Because of Calvary, Satan cannot harm him if he is not in any way involved or fascinated by this system. I never have refused gifts and I have not been affected in any way by them because I fully realize that, "Greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world" 1 John 4:4. I have thanked the one who gives the gift and thanked the Lord (1992, 11-12).

Another danger exists if Cree people are allowed to continue in the belief of proximity vulnerability. It allows people to avoid dealing with their sin. If the demon activity is limited to a specific location, then a solution is to change locations rather than change behavior. The solution Cree people most often seek is to have someone exorcize the room or their house. When their choice of lordship is confronted they become uncomfortable and avoid the issue. See the case study in "6. Seeking control over the spiritual forces which can bring harm," as an example. In another instance, one of the interviewees mentioned that they were having problems with supernatural activity in her daughter's bedroom. She requested that a Native Christian come and deal with the problem. He asked to speak with the daughter. He was attempting to do what is recommended here. He was dealing with the person rather than the location. The mother dismissed the notion that the daughter's choices had any affect on the situation.

### **3) Curses**

#### ***a) Explanation and evidence of the belief***

The same type of fearful mentality exists concerning curses (Marker #23). Although the interviews did not ask about curses, and no information was found concerning them, it is common knowledge that Cree people do fear curses. One Cree lady, not in the interview group, reported that she feared another woman had put a love spell on her husband.

#### ***b) Ministry strategy***

Priest et al use much of the same teaching to eliminate the fear of being cursed (1995, 64-66). Included is the added encouragement of Proverbs 26:2: "Like a fluttering sparrow or a darting swallow, an undeserved curse does not come to rest." In Chapter 3, "Biblical Intercession: Spiritual Power to Change Our World," Patrick Johnstone says of the Christian's position in Christ, "I cannot be affected by witchcraft when walking with God. I cannot be harmed by curses

when walking in obedience to God” (1995, 151).

## ***b. Ministry Strategy***

### **1) Teach the supremacy of Jesus Christ over all spirits**

The primary teaching which Cree Christians need to believe and act upon is that Jesus Christ is supreme over spirits and so He is able to provide ample protection from any hostile spirits. His supremacy over them is based on at least five truths.

The first is that Jesus Christ created spirits and therefore has supremacy over them. Colossians 1:16 says of Jesus: “For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.”

The second is that, in terms of abilities, His power, strength, and greatness far surpass that of all spirits. Referring to 1 Corinthians 8 and 10, Kraft says, “Paul’s point is that strong Christians do not need to fear the influence of an enemy kingdom that is infinitely less powerful than the Kingdom we represent” (1995, 110).

The third is that Christ has been given authority over spirits. “Christ, who is the head over every power and authority...” (Col 2:10b).

The fourth is that by His death and resurrection He triumphed over them. Colossians 2:15 says, “And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” And Hebrews 2:14b says, “So that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil.”

The fifth is that, in this battle between Satan, his army of the evil spirits, and his people and God, His army of angels and Christians, God is the ultimate victor. Even in the present battle, God’s power is strong enough to enable the Christian to stand up against Satan’s attacks. And, in the end, in the final battle, God finally and thoroughly disposes of Satan:

Satan ... will go out to the nations in the four corners of the earth ... to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God’s people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur ... They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever (Rev 20:7-10).

According to Gailyn Van Rheenen, in *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, the image of Jesus that stirs the animist’s heart is Christ the triumphant one who defeats Satan and his powers. There is, “Therefore not simply personal salvation but also ‘cosmic redemption’ from powers” (1991, 141).

One tool that could be used to teach Christ’s supremacy over spirits is Hodgman’s, “Jesus Christ is Better Than Spirits” curriculum. It was designed particularly for Native youth, taking into consideration their learning styles and the issues they confront. A list of the lesson titles follows:

## Section A – Jesus Christ is Stronger Than Spirits

Lesson #1 – The Lord God is more powerful than all other gods

Lesson #2 – The Holy Spirit is a better personal guide than other spirits

Lesson #3 – God is better than other spirits at knowing and controlling the future

Lesson #4 – Jesus frees us from the fear of evil spirits

## Section B – Jesus Christ meets our daily needs better than do spirits

Lesson #5 – Jesus Christ is better than spirits at healing us

Lesson #6 – Jesus Christ is better than spirits at providing our needed food

Lesson #7 – Jesus Christ is better than spirits in His relationship to nature

Lesson #8 – Jesus Christ is better than spirits at loving us

Lesson #9 – Jesus Christ is better than spirits at meeting our need for ritual (2000c, 1-2).

## 2) Teach Cree Christians to go to God for spiritual protection

These truths need to be not only acknowledged, but also acted upon. The most obvious response is, as Kraft states, “Going to God for protection” (1995, 108). And, as was seen in the answers to Subproblem #3, Question #10, Cree Christians are going to God for protection. Four out of eight spoke to the demons and told them to leave in the name of Jesus. Four out of eight indicated that being in right relationship with God provides protection from evil spirits. They recognize their need for protection and the source of that protection.

## 3) Cautions

As is important in all missions endeavors, caution must be taken to ensure that converts are not simply replacing Christian symbols for animistic ones while retaining the animistic functions. This danger is present in the area of protection from hostile spirits.

### *a) Amulets*

One of the methods animists use to gain spiritual protection is to use amulets. Converts have been known to continue to trust in objects rather than the work and person of Christ. Crosses, pictures of Christ, crucifixes, rosary beads, and Bibles have all been used as amulets. One Cree Christian lady reported sleeping with a Bible on her chest to give her a feeling of safety. Northern Canada Mission Distributors receives frequent requests for Bibles with the stipulation that those Bibles must bound in black leather, have gold-edged pages, and be in the King James Version. This version has been rated as needing a Grade 12 reading level in order to be understood. Although many Cree people have a Grade 12 reading level, most of these requests came from people who did not. Therefore it could be concluded that they did not desire to understand God’s message, but rather to use the Bibles as a magical means of spiritual protection. This conclusion is speculation, but does point to the need to exercise caution and to be diligent in reminding new converts that their protection is not in the Bible materially, but in the reality of its message.

### *b) Rituals*

Another method that animists use to gain spiritual protection for themselves is to engage in rituals. Two Cree interviewees were taken to Sundances after being approached by spirits. There

is a continued danger that new converts will place their trust in a ritual rather than Christ. New Life Indian Alliance Fellowship (NLIAF) of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, developed a rite of passage ceremony for its teens to encourage them to be godly adults. Great care was taken to ensure that this event was unique and thoroughly Christian. After the ceremony one family never again attended church. Had they placed their trust in the ritual, now believing that their teen daughter was now spiritually safe, so no longer needed to attend church?

Another ritual that seems to be surrounded with misunderstanding, regardless of how carefully and repeatedly the meaning is communicated, is that of baby dedication. Recently Denise Hodgman received a five o'clock a.m. phone call from a young mother very distraught because her baby had not been baptized, and wondering if NLIAF would perform the baptism. Hodgman told her that NLIAF did not perform baby baptisms but rather dedications, and explained the difference in meaning. The mother insisted that she herself had been baptized there. Hodgman had attended that ceremony many years previous and assured her that it was not a baptism. When Hodgman tried to pursue the conversation the next day, the young woman was not interested, as she had no desire for a change of lifestyle for herself – only a quick assurance that her children would be made spiritually safe by a ritual.

At present Hodgman is in a quandary as to how to respond to one of the interviewees who is not a Christian. She has recently moved into a new house and asked Hodgman to come and bless it. Hodgman has presented the gospel to this woman and her common-law husband, and they have chosen to continue to live without submitting themselves to Christ. At present Hodgman stalled her and is praying about how to respond, but she does plan to meet with this Cree lady and explain that God is interested in relationship, not in being used as a magical security blanket. But even after that explanation, if Hodgman does pray God's blessing on the home, will the couple still continue in their present understanding and actually use the event as security to continue to live in rejection of Christ's call for their allegiance to Him?

Rituals play an important part in the health of any society, especially one as stressed as the Cree. Yet rituals seem to continue to promote a mechanistic rather than a relational understanding of God, even after great care has been taken to relay the biblical meaning of those rituals. God commands certain rituals in His Word so a way must be found to incorporate rituals into the Cree community without causing the Cree to trust in the ritual itself rather than in Christ to whom the ritual points.

### *c) Incantations*

According to Unger's Bible Dictionary, the cure for the troublesome activity of evil spirits is always the same. It is the word of power spoken by Jesus or those He gives it to. Demons must then always obey (1966, 261). The Cree Christians interviewed all knew that using the name of Jesus Christ was what gave them the power to deal with hostile spirits and they effectively used it with power. The danger comes when His name or a set wording is used as if it were a magical incantation.

One of the first pastors of NLIAF taught the congregation to say these words, "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ I command you to leave," when addressing evil spirits. He stressed that it was necessary to use those exact words and the full name of Christ in order that the demons obey. Yet Paul in Acts 16:18 only uses "Jesus Christ," not "the Lord Jesus Christ."

Magic is mechanistic (Hiebert 1982, 40). The more that relationship is ignored, the greater the

chances that a mentality of magic is in effect. This truth can be seen in the Scriptural account of the sons of Sceva in Acts 19:13-16. The demons recognized that even though these men were religious, and even though they used the name of Jesus, they did not have a relationship with Him and so did not have His authority to command them. The words used to deal with evil spirits must not be used as if an incantation.

## **6. Seeking Control Over the Spiritual Forces**

### ***a. Explanation and Evidence of the Belief***

According to Hiebert et al, one of the central concerns of animists is how to gain good fortune in this life and how to avoid misfortune. All peoples probably have these concerns but, while some cultures might be content to assign luck, fate or accident as their causes, animists assign spiritual causes to these events (1999, 76, 133) (Marker #3).

Many animists then take the next step of trying to control the spiritual forces which, in turn, control the events of life (Marker #9). According to Van Rhee, "The animist does not seek a personal relationship with the powers. Rather he seeks to manipulate spiritual beings and forces to do his will" (1991, 22). Augsburger concurs (1986, 274-275), "These middle zone issues – life, health, suffering, fortune, safety, success in love, status, prosperity, control of weather, healing of disease, death – are all 'power' issues."

However, for the Cree, the idea that these events have spiritual rather than natural causes, may at times lead them to a fatalistic approach to life, rather than to attempt to control spiritual powers. Ross states:

In the magical or supernatural explanation of the universe, it is my guess that people believe that things-out-there do not owe their existence or their activity to chains of discernable, controllable causes and effects. Instead they believe that those phenomena simply are, and that each acts as it does because that is the will of one of the greater or lesser spirits. There are no "natural" chains of cause-and-effect which can be discerned or altered; there is in each case only a supernatural cause for the way things are and for the way different creatures behave. There is, as a result, little perceived scope for human intervention or control, except through supplication to that spirit world and, in rare cases, through direct intervention by people who wield some portion of its magical power. In most cases, though, one simply accepts that life passes as the spirits ordain (1992, 51).

Ross then continues to give several examples from his work of how Native people have not tried to change circumstances even when they did not like them.

The interviews revealed some evidence to support his findings. In Subproblem #1, when asked, in Question #6b, if there was anything they would change about their life, most said, "No." They indicated that the events of their life, even though they had caused suffering, had gone into making the person who he was today and so would not be changed. Most Westerners would not have been so passive in their responses.

In Subproblem #3, Question #23, Sophia communicated the concept this way: "But I can't really say that I was disappointed (in God) because I just think for myself as a person, as an Indian. The spiritual life growing up, there was always someone higher than you in the spirit world. You don't have a right to get mad at what happens. You just accept it."

Although it appears that the Cree accept life's events, there is still evidence that attempts at control do exist and exert some force on the culture. Ross does indicate that spiritual forces can be influenced by prayer or magic. The interviews also gave evidence of attempts to control the spirit world when people burned sweet-grass and smudged themselves or their homes, or when they used herbs to evade the police (Subproblem #2, Question #9).

### ***b. Ministry Strategy***

The challenge of Christian ministry among animists, who want to manipulate spiritual powers to their own benefit, is to instead help them develop a desire to surrender their will to God's will. Personal control must give way to acknowledging that God is in control and deserves to be so. All Christians struggle with trusting God when He does not seem to be fulfilling the desires of His children, but instead seems to be bringing harm to them. But for the animist, who has felt that he can control spiritual powers, or for the Cree who has felt that spiritual powers will do as they please and unwilling compliance is the only way to avoid angering them and thereby bringing further harm upon oneself, that place of willing submission is even harder to find. Both must come to a point of trusting an almighty, good, loving, sovereign God. Both must surrender their wills to His. Both must seek to advance His agenda instead of their own.

In order to come to this point, ministers of the gospel among the Cree must first challenge them to pledge their allegiance to the King of kings. Next they must sacralize the causes of event. Third, they need to define the difference between surrender and fatalistic acceptance. Fourth, they must use caution in ministering to felt needs. They certainly must not promise what God does not promise. Music can be chosen which will encourage surrender instead of manipulation or fatalistic acceptance. To illustrate some of these ministry strategies a case study will be presented.

#### **1) Fatalism versus surrender**

This fatalistic streak in the Cree cannot be misconstrued as surrender. The major difference between fatalistic acceptance and surrender to the will of God is that the first is based on fear, while the second is based on trust in God's love and goodness.

In the example of Sophia's reticence to express disappointment in Christ, it was due to her past training to not anger the spirits by expressing disapproval of their decisions and actions. She thought, "Maybe He will hear me," and feared God's reprisal. Later she stated, "I'm just starting to learn the concept now that I am special and that He does hear my prayers and that I do depend on Him. It's been about eight or nine years and I'm just catching on." Sophia recognized the difference between her previously fearful sense of lacking control over the events of life, and her now joyful, empowered choice to surrender to God due to the quality of His character and His love for her.

#### **2) Call to allegiance**

There is a battle. Each person must choose sides and be faithful and obedient to their commander. Each person must fight against the enemy. Each person must work to expand the territory of the kingdom that he is in.

There is a battle. In *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, Van Rheenen encourages missionaries working with animists to present them with a call to allegiance to Christ and to

teach God's sovereignty over the spirit world. He writes (1991, 61), "In an animistic context the message must center on the cosmic conflict between God and the gods, between Christ and the demons, between the church and the principalities and powers (1 John 3:8, 4:4)."

Choose a side. Van Rheezen says there needs to be a definite break and a total allegiance, as is said of the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 1:9: "You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." Colossians 1:13 shows that there are two kingdoms and a person can only be in one or the other: "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves." Carolyn Butler points out that there are two sides to this issue. Choosing a side also means rejecting a side. She writes, "In ... our mission work here in Zaire, people were required to renounce Satan at the same time they confessed Christ as part of the salvation process" (1993, 387).

Be faithful and obedient to the Commander. "Christian conversion is the enthroning of Christ at the center of a person's life and allowing him to control every aspect of it" (Van Rheezen 1991, 88). It is not using Christ's power to gain one's own control. Van Rheezen notes (1991, 107) that a major theme in the Old Testament is allegiance (1Kgs 11:4; Josh 24; Pss 82, 86, 89). "The reign of Christ must be seen in every aspect of life" (1991, 141). "The issues of every day life are dealt with in relation to the reality of God's sovereignty and our allegiance to him" (1991, 62).

Fight the enemy but only under the orders and in the authority of the Commander. Ephesians 6:10-13 says:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

Van Rheezen goes so far as to encourage Christians to break the taboos of animism to prove Christ's superior strength, but also expresses the need to be careful to do so for God's glory, not for one's own (1991, 86-87). In the Cree context, doing so would be, for example, to whistle at the northern lights or to leave out dirty dishes at night. Doing so privately would increase the individual's sense of security and sense of allegiance to Christ who is stronger than any hostile spirits. Public displays would need to be demonstrated to have affect on others.

Expand the King's kingdom. In Hodgman's research paper, "Aboriginal Spirituality as a New Religious Movement," she interviewed First Nations people to determine their motive for choosing Aboriginal Spirituality as their religion. The number one reason was the desire for positive Native identity (2000a, 5). Cree Christians need to know that they have a purpose, that they are needed in Christ's kingdom to advance His cause and that their contribution is unique. They can reach the world for Christ in a way that no other people group can.

A practical tool to communicate this concept of allegiance was developed by Hodgman. In "God's Gang", a Bible study for the youth group of NLIAF, she compared becoming a Christian and being loyal to Christ to joining and remaining loyal to a gang. Similarities and differences were gleaned from Deuteronomy 7 and 8.

### 3) Sacralize

One of the problems in the past has been that missionaries, who have been unwilling to agree with the animistic interpretation of life's events having been caused by spirits, have sought to dispel this notion by offering natural causes. Hiebert says, "Most missionaries taught Christianity as the answer to the ultimate and eternal questions of life, and science based on reason as the answer to the problems of this world" (1999, 19).

In so doing they have actually led to the secularization of spiritual peoples. In *Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures*, David Augsburg, presents the problem this way:

To secularize the counselee's problem and seek to provide naturalistic explanations is to miss the central issue of power encounter, faith struggles, and the collision of values, or worldviews, and of ultimate visions of reality. On the other hand, to accept the patterns of magical manipulation of God is to betray the central concepts of faith that empower Christianity (1986, 276).

He continues to explain the problem and then offers this solution:

The pastoral counselor follows the tradition of the prophets in demystification of the natural world. Where wind, storm, fire, pestilence, and earth quake were seen as the work of animistic gods or demonic powers, the Old Testament prophets declared that these were natural forces under the dominion of the Creator. This process of reframing the middle zone can result in secularization, as more and more is included in the zone of natural science, or it may sacralize, as all of life is seen as sacred, all of creation as entrusted to our care, and all natural forces as evidence of the Creator's work (1986, 312).

To sacralize the events of life, the minister of the gospel must stress the sovereignty of God. God is the ultimate cause of all things. All things are under His control. Nothing happens without His knowledge and approval (Isa 45:9; Rom 9:20-21; Job 1-2). All creation exists for His sake (Col 1:16). Yet this truth must be balanced with the truth of man's free will so that the Cree believer does not return to fatalism.

### 4) Case study

The following anecdote is told by Denise Hodgman:

On April 29, 2004, Erica Whitehead phoned me after midnight concerned about her three year-old son who had been in the bathroom alone. When she went to check on him he was cowering in the corner and crying and looking up at a spot on the wall. She tried to figure out what he was looking at but there was nothing unusual about the area. He would not tell her what was bothering him and when she tried to get him closer to the spot so he could show her what was upsetting him, he became highly agitated and resisted going near the spot.

She wanted to know if she could effectively pray for the situation. I asked her about her relationship with the Lord. She said it was not good. I told her Jesus' name is not like magic that just anybody can say like a formula and get what they want – that He wants relationship, and that those in relationship with Him can have His power and authority. But you cannot just use His name and reject His relationship.

I then anticipated that she would ask me to come and pray to remove the spirit from the bathroom, since her son was still refusing to enter the bathroom. I told her I could get rid of the spirit but that that would not fix the situation. I mentioned the Scripture passage where Jesus tells about the spirit who left and wandered around and then came back and found the house clean and swept. The spirit brought seven more demons back in with him and the situation was worse than before (Matt 12:43-45; Luke 11:24-26).

I told her the house represents a person's life. There's no sitting on the fence. There's no middle ground. A person is either full of the Holy Spirit or is vulnerable because of being in Satan's territory. She had to make a choice – Jesus or Satan. She started to cry. She said, "I know. I know. But it's so hard." I told her that was correct. It's a simple decision but not an easy one. There are consequences with whatever choice she makes.

Erica's mom, who was there with her, then asked why Satan would pick on a little innocent kid. Erica stayed on the phone and I told her that she and the father of her children are their children's authority and protectors. They are to be like an umbrella of spiritual protection for their children. I told her, "You know that your decisions affect your children. It's true financially. It's true physically. It's also true spiritually."

I then told her that the choice is hers. I could not make it for her. She again said she knew what she had to do. I told her I loved her and she said goodbye. During the time I was talking about the parents being a spiritual protection for the children, I heard the grandmother in background say, "It makes me so mad that he (Satan) would pick on my grandson."

This event is significant in that it points to the animist's desire to get what he/she wants from whichever spirit, even God, and then have no further relationship with it/Him. Erica and others want Jesus to provide the power and the protection, but in no way want to live in fellowship with Him. He requires too big of a change of lifestyle. He requires them to give up their own way and they are not willing to do that. They want to continue in their own sin and then have Him bail them out when the consequences of their sinful choices get too costly. As Van Rheezen says (1991, 22), "The animist does not seek a personal relationship with the powers. Rather he seeks to manipulate spiritual beings and forces to do his will." This mentality carries over into the animist's interactions with Jesus. They want Him to do their will rather than they do His. But this trait is not exclusive to animists; it seems to be present in many people groups.

Kraft (1995, 108) says, "Going to God for protection is the answer." But that is only a partial answer. As can be seen by this incident, Erica was more than willing to go to God for protection. But if she received momentary relief from a troublesome spirit, she no longer wanted anything to do with God. The bigger solution is to surrender one's will to God and to enter into daily relationship with God. Augsburg quotes Vinay:

Magic is based on a mechanistic view – a formula approach to reality that allows humans to control their own destiny. Worship, on the other hand, is rooted in a relational view of life. Worshipers place themselves in the power and mercy of God. The difference is not one of form, but of attitude. In religion we want the will of God; in magic we seek our own wills (Augsburger 1986, 94).

Erica was raised in a Christian home. Her mother became a faithful follower of Jesus when Erica was only two years old. However, when she was seven her mother discontinued following Jesus, saying she had given Him five years to find her a husband and He had failed, so now she was

going to get one for herself. Erica is now 21 and her mother is still unmarried. Having found Satan ineffective at providing a loving husband, and missing the constant availability of relationship and closeness with the Lord, she has returned to Him but still wavers.

The issue of lordship is still up for debate. Erica has latched onto the animist magic mentality of using God to get your needs met, but not the Christian mentality of surrendering wholeheartedly to Christ whether felt needs are met or not.

The passage of Scripture that Hodgman used in this incident is significant because it warns that momentarily getting rid of the bothersome spirit is not only just a temporary fix, it also leads to greater vulnerability to even more hostile spirits. A person must be full of the Holy Spirit to avoid being vulnerable to the presence of hostile spirits. This passage helps draw the battle lines. We are at war. There is no middle ground, no safe zone, no way to get one's own way without making oneself open to Satan's attacks. The only safety is in total surrender of the will to Jesus Christ.

There is, however, one caution in applying this passage. In the many recorded accounts of Cree people encountering spirits, not once did they state that the spirit was in a person. Every time the spirit was reported to be in the house or at some other location outside the human body. Especially since Cree people tend to be concrete thinkers rather than abstract thinkers, it will be necessary to point out the use of the word "house" in the passage is figurative for a person's life.

As has already been pointed out, Cree people tend to think that the activities of spirits are not related to sin issues in their lives, or at least that spirit issues can be dealt with without dealing with sin issues. It is therefore necessary to prevent them from using the term "house" in this passage to distance themselves from the fact that their choices of obedience or disobedience to Christ affect their success at dealing with spirits.

Erica cried and found her conversation with Hodgman so emotionally intense because she desperately wanted relief from spirits. She knew of Jesus' supremacy over them and, in fact, saw Him as her only hope for getting that relief. Yet she also desperately wanted her own way, and Jesus seemed an obstacle to that goal. She was between a rock and a hard place. She felt incredibly torn because her two deep longings were in opposition to each other. She wanted both, and was reluctant to give up one to get the other.

Until those of animistic worldview are brought to this difficult, mutually exclusive point of decision, the teaching of Christ's supremacy over spirits will only lead to syncretism and split-level Christianity. The worldview that Erica displayed is a step closer to true Christian faith than other types because she does not view Christ as just one of many spiritual powers she can seek for help. She accepts that He is the only One. Neither is she going to medicine men or burning sweet-grass for protection. She is seeking Christ alone for protection, but it is still syncretistic in that her animistic desire to manipulate spirit powers for her own benefit has not been abandoned.

## **5) Ministering to felt needs?**

In Hodgman's ministry, she has been guilty of reinforcing the perception of using God to get one's felt needs met. When people phone into "Tribal Trails" television program (spiritual help offer) Hodgman asks them, "What would you like Jesus to do for you?" When she witnesses to people she tells them of all the good Jesus can do for them. But if she wants to encourage them to be God-centered instead of human-centered, would it not be better if she asked, "What does

Jesus want you to do?”

The New Life Indian Alliance Fellowship ran a radio ad on Missinippi Broadcasting Corporation, saying that if a person’s marriage was in trouble, they could find a solution for that problem at the church. The ad was effective in drawing to church a new couple who were having marriage problems. This is another example of ministering to felt needs.

Evangelism training has often communicated that, in order to be effective in ministry, it is essential to understand people’s felt needs and to show them how Christ can meet those felt needs. That philosophy was at least partially behind the motive in choosing the subject of this thesis. Hodgman wanted to better understand the felt needs of those with animistic worldviews and then learn how to tailor evangelism and discipleship to meet those felt needs.

Is this desire wrong? Is it a totally wrong approach? Is it acceptable to start with “felt needs” in evangelism but then move to correct this self-centeredness during discipleship? Is it fair to give people false hope and then knock it down? Where does the minister of the Gospel draw the line between being sensitive to the needs of the people and being faithful to the message of the Gospel (that “every knee should bow ... and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father” Phil 2:10-11), which teaches that Christ must be followed and worshiped and obeyed whether or not felt needs are met. Yet unless people’s felt needs are addressed it is unlikely that they will respond positively to the gospel. It may still be necessary to meet felt needs in order to gain the credibility to address the real need of submission to God’s supremacy.

Help for sorting out this quandary may come from examining the Church universal. How do missionaries in Muslim societies attract people to the Gospel? Do they say, “Come to Christ and lose your job, your extended family, your wife, your children, your good standing in the community and quite possibly your life”? That statement does not sound too attractive. So what compels people to accept Christ when there are few earthly benefits? The truth of the message? (animists are interested in power more than truth, Hiebert et al. 1999, 84; Marker #13 ); the hope of eternity? (animists care mostly for the present with little concern for eternity, Hiebert et al. 1999, 83; Marker #12); the forgiveness of sins? (when animists think in terms of morality, they are mainly concerned with those sins that break down relationship in the community and the family, rather than those that break down relationship with God, Hiebert et al. 1999, 199-202; Marker #15). What is the drawing card?

Worldwide many animists have come to Christ. Christianity offers answers to the questions they are asking but their folk religion is not answering. High level religion (Christianity) answers the questions of origin, purpose and destiny, about the world, humans, people groups and individuals. What is ultimate truth? How did the world begin? What is the purpose of existence? When will existence end? (Hiebert et al. 1999, 74-75). But for the questions of the here and now, newly converted animists returned to animism for those answers. Folk religion supplied these answers and the Christianity taught by missionaries did not.

One ministry strategy is to keep Cree believers informed of how Christians in other parts of the world suffer for their faith in Christ. Their commitment to Him costs them worldly benefits, yet they continue their walk with God. Hodgman once asked a Cree Christian why these suffering believers would be so faithful to God in spite of the circumstances. The Cree person had no idea. The pastor of the New Life Alliance Fellowship reads stories of suffering saints to his congregation almost every Wednesday evening when they meet for prayer.

## 6) Promise only what God promises

In *Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures*, Augsburg writes, “These middle zone issues – life, health, suffering, fortune, safety, success in love, status, prosperity, control of weather, healing of disease, death – are all ‘power’ issues” (1986, 274-275).

These issues that are so close to the heart of the animist are not what God promises. So when an animist is saved, he expects God to deliver on these points and, when God does not, then he leaves God. A Cree woman who says that she has accepted Christ as her Savior, asked if it was right for a Christian to go a counselor to get the help for marriage and personal problems. She stated that if a person could get secular help for relational problems there would be no need for God (Informal conversation, 2004. Prince Albert, SK).

Ministry to animists must include not only showing how God can meet their needs, but also be corrective when concern for those needs is not in line with God’s concerns. The minister of the gospel must be extremely careful to not make promises which God did not make. Nowhere in Scripture does God promise a husband to His followers. Neither did the spiritual mentor of Erica’s mother promise that God would give her a husband, yet she assumed that would be the case. Therefore the minister must not only refrain from making unfounded promises, but he must purposely dash false hopes.

## 7) Music

Cree churches need to sing worship songs that promote the worship of God regardless of life’s circumstances. One such song is “Blessed Be Your Name” by Matt and Beth Redman (Copyright 2002 Kingsway’s Thankyou Music. All rights administered by EMI Christian Music Publishing):

Blessed be Your name in the land that is plentiful  
Where Your streams of abundance flow; Blessed be Your name  
And blessed be Your name when I’m found in the desert place  
Though I walk through the wilderness; Blessed be Your name  
Every blessing You pour out I’ll turn back to praise  
And when the darkness closes in, Lord; Still I will say

Blessed be the name of the Lord ...

Blessed be Your name when the sun’s shining down on me  
When the world’s “all as it should be”; Blessed be Your name  
And blessed be Your name on the road marked with suffering  
Though there’s pain in the offering; Blessed be Your name  
You give and take away; You give and take away  
My heart will choose to say; Lord, blessed be Your name

This song takes its cue from Job’s words in 1:21: “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, may the name of the Lord be praised.” These types of songs must be sung in Native churches. Cree Christians also should be encouraged to write their own songs expressing their praise of the their sovereign Lord, Jesus Christ.

## **7. Emphasis on Death as a Time When Spiritual Beings/Forces are Particularly Active**

### ***a. Explanation and Evidence of the Belief***

The interviews revealed that a great deal of thinking and emotional energy is invested in the topic of death (Marker #16). Almost every interviewee gave accounts of how the deaths of loved ones affected them. This tendency is not surprising considering the high rate of unnatural deaths among the Cree population. Arthur Holmes, in *The Grieving Indian*, estimates that 80 percent of Native peoples of North America die of unnatural causes compared to 20 percent of the non-Native population (1988, 31). Hiebert claims this preoccupation with death is common among animists:

Death challenges the human search for meaning, and if humans cannot account for it satisfactorily, their explanation systems fail. How do people explain the sudden, tragic death of infants or of young adults in their prime? On the folk religion level, the problem of death often has less to do with what happens to the person who has died than with the pain and meaninglessness that death brings for the living. How can the living deal with the devastation caused by the death of a loved one? ... On this level ... the real questions are, "Why and why now?" and "How will this affect me and my family?" (1999, 78).

The Cree have three spiritual methods of dealing with the loss of loved ones. First, they believe that they receive advance warning from a supernatural source. Second, they believe that the spirits of the dead continue to interact with the living. Third, they have a practice of feeding the dead. These three methods will be analyzed biblically and Christian responses will be offered.

Cree Christians have two increased difficulties dealing with death once they are saved. They worry that their ancestors are in hell. When prayers for healing are not answered and death results, their faith may be undermined by the suspicion that the hostile spirit that caused the illness proved stronger than Christ.

### ***b. Ministry Strategy***

Ministry strategy will be developed point by point to gain an overall Christian response to the animistic emphasis on death.

#### **1) Premonitions of death**

##### ***a) Explanation and evidence of the belief***

The interviews produced no evidence that Cree people seek out omens, as is common among other animistic groups (Marker #5). It does not appear that they read bones, entrails or such (Hiebert et al. 1999, 185), but it became apparent that Cree people believe that they receive advance warning of a death. It is not clear who sends these warnings, or whether they are just one aspect of an impersonal cosmic moral order. It is simply accepted that they come. Jessica Buck called them "Indian warnings." She also stated that believing in such things was not superstition.

Jessica's evidence for this idea was that on one occasion her home's smoke alarm went off without cause. At first the family did not assign any significance to this event but merely puzzled over it until word came of her young uncle's unexpected death. Then she realized the

significance. Jessica does not follow Indian Religion and is vocal about defending the Christian faith to those who do. Her family is strongly Anglican. Her beliefs are evidence of the animist worldview coexisting with formal Christianity.

Interviewee #222 said that her family received many warnings prior to her grandson's death. Her brother and his wife and children and, on one separate occasion, her aunt all saw an owl that did not fly away as they passed. Owls are thought to be bearers of bad news. Their dog also howled for a long period of time, which was not its custom. At first she thought the dog's strange behavior was due to a change of location, but once her grandson died she knew the real reason it had acted so. Another heralding of that same death came when a different family member heard knocking at a window all night long. In the morning, investigation yielded no tracks or any other evidence that the knocking had a natural cause.

Glen Johnstone, a Cree man who has been a Christian for almost 20 years, reported that another premonition of a death is a bird hitting the window and dying. He also said there is a Cree proverb that everything comes in threes, meaning disastrous events. Glen also reported that the community pressure to take animistic action in response to these omens is decreasing. He thinks the belief in omens is dying (June 25, 2004).

### ***b) Ministry strategy***

What is the Christian response to premonitions of death? Although this cultural trait is not the same as actively seeking guidance through the use of omens, it is associated, since it is based on foreknowledge of events yet to come. God is the only being, supernatural or natural, who knows the future.

As a Christian, Glen said he believes in premonitions of death because the Bible teaches it, but he could not recall what the Bible said about this topic. It was unclear what passage he was referring to.

However, he also went on to say that he still has a moment of temporary fear every time one of these Indian warnings occurs, but that he reminds himself that a fearful response shows a lack of faith. He reminds himself that Christ is his protector so he does not have to live in that fear. He said he has to correct himself by recalling what the Bible teaches (*ibid.*).

Jackson writes that the main problem with the belief in premonitions is that it incites fear.

Premonitions or knowing that something bad is going to happen usually brings torment to the person involved. His or her soul is troubled and there is fear of what is coming -- a helpless feeling about it all because in his or her thinking there is nothing to stop the gloom and doom that will come sooner or later. The Scripture says, in 1 John 4:18, "...fear involves torment" (NKJV). It is not difficult to discern that premonitions described above come from the enemy Satan. This is evident because of the trouble, especially the fear that it brings to the person's life. (1993, 24-25)

He then recommends that Christians "get matters right with the Lord" and renounce the occurrence of the premonition.

## **2) Spirits of the dead**

### ***a) Explanation and evidence of the belief***

In the mind of the author, as she approached this thesis research on the spirit world, demons and angels were the spirits she thought she was exploring. However, it soon became apparent that the spirits most prominent in Cree thinking are the spirits of the dead. There is acknowledgment of other spirits, such as is common among animists. They believe in spirits ascribed to different aspects of nature (such as the spirit of the river, spirit of the bear, spirit of a stone), but dead humans are the kinds of spirits that occupy most of their thinking. When asked about spirits, there was confusion, as the author had one type of spirit in mind while the interviewees had another.

At one point the confusion became so great that the author asked if there was such a thing as spirits for whom that was their entity (i.e., they were created spirits and had always been spirits and always would be spirits) (Subproblem #1, Question #17). Although that category was affirmed to exist by interviewees, it became increasingly clear that most peoples' encounters with spirits were thought to be encounters with the spirits of dead humans:

Interviewer: Is a spirit always a person, a human that has passed on?

Interviewee: It's a mystery. You feel a presence but you don't know what it is. I know it's not a person ... It's a feeling I get that it's going to be okay. It's a warm feeling. It's just like a presence that's there. I'm aware of it. And that smell. I can smell my dad. It's a good feeling. I'm not afraid. I know he's there.

September 11, 2002, Patricia Nekerak talked of how it is simply ingrained from youth that there are spirits of dead people around and that they are her ancestors, including her mother and her brother who died at age seven. She says when a person feels a presence, she thinks that an ancestral spirit has visited.

Hiebert et al. explain the rationale behind the belief in ancestors:

A second explanation that mitigates the pain and meaninglessness of death is that the departed become ancestors who continue to live in another world, but whose relationship to the living on earth does not cease at death. Ancestors are vitally interested in the well-being of the family to which they gave life. They help those who care for them, and punish those who bring disgrace and harm to their kinsmen. In turn, the living must care for the ancestors by revering them on special occasions (1999, 119).

### ***b) Ministry Strategy***

This concern about the spirits of the dead has not been effectively addressed by the Church. This could be due in part to the absence of biblical teaching on the subject. It is commanded that the dead not be consulted (Isa 8:19; Deut 18:10-12). It may be that many Cree are not aware of this command but, even if they were, the command alone would not satisfy their concern for the spirits of the dead.

There are those who actively seek out the spirits of the dead for help. One interviewee said he consulted his grandfathers and asked advice. Another said her miscarried baby was her guide.

As was already observed with the advance of the new Indian Religion, which promotes the idea of helpful spirits, the number of Cree who seek help from spirits will increase.

However, most of the Cree interviewed did not actively seek out the dead, but instead felt that the spirits of the dead had come to them unbidden and in many cases unwanted. Mary, a longtime Christian and well taught in Scripture, was still anxious that the spirit of her deceased neighbor might bother her on its way out. An interviewee from the first group spoke of spirits who had lost their way or gotten stranded and needed to be helped home. Feasts are held on the anniversary of the deaths of loved ones to feed them so that they will not feel the need to come around the living to get food to satisfy their hunger. Spirits are thought to be attracted to left out food for this reason. Actually, the Cree are quite active in trying to diminish their contact with the dead, so these Scriptural commands would not seem relevant to their plight.

The Scripture that might prove most helpful is Jesus' story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). This story holds some teachings that uniquely answer the concerns of the Cree about the dead. First, although not stated directly, there is the impression that both the rich man's and Lazarus's spirits went directly to the afterlife. They did not dally along the way to bother or comfort the living or even to bid farewell. When Scott's (fictitious name) aunt died he reported that her spirit had come to him to say goodbye. He knew this, since he had heard scratching on his closet door and then felt the bed depress as if someone had sat on it. He then felt warmth on his cheek as if she had stroked it.

Another concern is answered by Verse 26 which says, "And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm is fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over to us." It may bring comfort for the Cree to know that the dead cannot travel about at will, but are actually bound in their respective eternal places. The rich man understood the words to mean that there could not be movement between Hades and Abraham's side. However, he assumed there could still be movement between Abraham's side and earth since he then asked Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brothers. Abraham then replied that the endeavor would be ineffective, and so would not happen, but he did not overtly say that it could not happen.

The main thrust of this passage is that one needs to prepare for the afterlife prior to death. It is not intended to answer the Cree concern about the wanderings of the dead. For those of Catholic background it may also help dispel the idea of purgatory.

On September 1, 2002, a woman phoned into "Tribal Trails" and said she could see spirits of dead people. She identified herself as a born again Christian and was disturbed by what she saw. The spiritual helper, Denise Hodgman, read her the Lazarus and rich man story in Luke 16. Upon hearing it, she concluded that what she was seeing was not dead loved ones, but demons trying to trick her.

The Cree need to be taught what the Bible says about the dead. In both 2 Corinthians 5:8 and Philippians 1:23, Paul indicates that his spirit being out of the body means his spirit is with the Lord. Genesis 5:24, Psalm 49:15 and Psalm 73:24 all indicate the same for those who have trusted in Christ.

There are also a few Scriptures that speak of the condition of the wicked who have died. Isaiah 14:9-10 speaks of the spirits of the departed greeting an evil king who has recently died and telling him that he is now weak like they are. The inference is that he cannot affect the living as he once did. And since he is greeted at the grave, it would imply that the effect was immediate.

Isaiah 26:14 says, “Those departed spirits do not rise,” and, later in the verse, that no one remembers them. Again the inference is that they do not bother the living.

However, the Scriptural command not to consult the dead could indicate that, though it displeases God, it can be done. The next logical step would be to assume that the dead can interact with the living. Saul’s interaction with the dead Samuel (1 Kings 18) would also give such evidence. The general tenor of Scripture seems to be that the dead are incapable of interacting with the living, but it can not be stated without a doubt.

Beyond biblical knowledge, the Cree then need to know how to interpret their perceived experiences with the dead. If the dead do not interact with the living, then why do they seem to do so? Two possibilities are: either the sensations they have indicating the presence of a dead person’s spirit have a natural source which they cannot readily identify, or their experiences are no more than products of their imaginations and distraught minds at times of high stress. These natural “answers” may satisfy peoples of Western-European cultures, but may not be entirely true.

Another option is that these experiences are, in fact, activities of spirits: either demons sent by Satan to disturb and mislead them, or of angels sent by God to help them through times of turmoil and heartache. Should Scott have been told that it was not his aunt touching his cheek, but Jesus or an angel? Should Interviewee #222 have been told that it was not the hungry dead searching for food in her house, but a demon?

Will either the natural or the revised supernatural explanation of their experiences satisfy them if they are fully convinced that they are dealing with the dead?

### **3) Feasts for the dead**

#### ***a) Explanation and evidence of the belief***

One animistic practice among the Cree is the feeding of the dead. Feasts for the dead are held at funerals and even more commonly a year after the death. A feast can also be held on subsequent anniversaries of the death, at any time someone dreams repeatedly of the relative, or when a relative experiences spirit activity in their home, especially if that activity involves the rattling of dirty dishes or pots.

These feasts also perform a social function. They provide an occasion for the family to get together and honor their deceased loved ones. They provide group cohesion in that each person present takes food from the serving bowl, puts some on their own plate and some in a paper napkin to be later presented to the spirit of the dead relative. Christians find these feasts difficult to deal with. They desire closeness with their extended family and they desire to remember and honor their ancestors, but they do not want to compromise their faith by appearing to give support to false spirituality.

Sophia says,

I still struggle with some things like feasts because ... at the feasts the elders pray over the food and they use sweet-grass to bless the food ... the women sit on one side and men sit on the other ... they usually pass out the food ... sometimes in remembrance of a person that passed away, a mother or grandmother, and you want to remember them. So a feast can be for them, but all the

food is set in front of you and you can't eat it until you get the go ahead from the elders ... They usually bring soup and bannock and all that stuff and you can't eat it ... it sits there and before you eat it you have to take a scoop of everything, like a scoop from the soup and put it in a bowl, a piece of bannock and put it in a bowl, some of their tea, put it in a bowl.

Every person has that in a bowl and after the feast they take it to the grave site or wherever and offer it to the spirits of the person. They're having the feast in honor of [a loved one] and I'm wondering ... "How far can I go in this? Can I come and show up after the food has been prayed for or after the meal is half done [or] show up at the end, or go through the whole thing?"

It's always a struggle, anything to do with my family, cause they do that a lot. My brother's into that, my uncles, my aunties and I don't want them to feel rejected because I'm a Christian. Yet I just struggle. Do I go? How far do I get involved? How do I show them the love of Christ without being judgmental. It's an unsaid thing. They know I'm a Christian and I know what they're doing I'm against. They don't say anything. It's just the tension there.

So basically I just stay away [and] even when I'm asked, I don't say anything. It's always a struggle. I want to be with my family but yet I don't want to get into the spiritual things when it comes to feasts and things like that ... It's easy for me just to stay away, but while I'm away I'm kind of frustrated because I want to be with all my family, all my uncles, my cousins. I know there's laughter there, there's fellowship. It's all there, what I long for, but what they're doing and what they're praying for and to, I don't believe in that any more and it's just frustrating. It's always a struggle for me."

#### ***b) Ministry strategy***

Following this story the interviewer asked, "You feel like you haven't found a satisfactory solution to that yet?" She replied, "I think I know. God has shown me Scriptures about not to eat food given to idols and I thought about feasts right way, and I know the answer is don't go there. It kind of hurts cause, like I said, the family is there."

Sophia was most likely referring to 1 Corinthians 10:19-22a. In this passage Paul says that the issue at stake is loyalty and allegiance to the one true God:

Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy?

But a few verses later Paul gives another reason for abstaining: the witness it is to the unsaved person who knows of the Christian's commitment to the Lord and that the food is offered to a spirit being other than He: "But if anyone says to you, 'This has been offered in sacrifice,' then do not eat it ... for the sake of the man who told you" ( 1 Cor 10:28).

Pam Dorion recently lost her two year-old daughter. The anniversary of her death is approaching and Pam wonders what she should do. She does not believe in feeding the spirits, but it is a family and community practice to have an event at that time. When asked, Pam said she thought she would like to have a barbeque with some of her closer family and her Christian friends present.

Pam's thought gives rise to the idea of creating an uniquely Cree Christian ritual. Cree Christians could meet together and express the concerns and frustrations that Sophia and Pam expressed. Then they could study the relevant Scriptures. Next they could decide how they will fill the void they feel in a Christian manner. Each family and each church could handle this question in a different way but, if they acted in unison, it would contribute to the group cohesion that is so important to the Cree.

Developing this Cree Christian ritual to honor the dead relative on the anniversary of their death would be part of the solution, but it would not eliminate all the frustrations. Extended families who practice Indian Religion would still meet and Christians would still feel left out and painfully separated from their families. As has already been stated, in the hearts of the Cree, the issues of the spirit world are pale in comparison with the relational issues. The church must become surrogate family as much as possible.

Hiebert et al. give the example of some Asian churches who have developed just such a memorial service: "The focus is on the worship of God and thanking God for the life of the ancestor ... Above all, Asian churches openly discuss how they can model Christian family loyalties and love to non-Christians without compromising their understanding of Scripture" (1999, 131).

Hiebert also suggests that Christians make occasions in which to be thankful for and remember their spiritual ancestors who lead them to life in Christ (1999, 132).

#### **4) Destiny of non-Christian ancestors**

##### ***a) Explanation and evidence of the belief***

Cree Christians have a concern for the spirits of their dead relatives that non-Christians do not. When they come to believe the teachings of the Bible, they worry that their ancestors may be in hell. Mary said that the first time a relative died after she had become a Christian was very difficult for her. She was deeply pained by the knowledge that he was in hell.

##### ***b) Ministry strategy***

Hiebert et al. suggest that, "Proclaimers of the gospel should take a pastoral approach by encouraging the living to follow Christ, and to commit their ancestors to God knowing that His judgments are totally loving and just" (1999, 131).

#### **5) Doubt caused by unanswered prayer for healing which results in death**

##### ***a) Explanation and evidence of the belief***

The research reveals that animists and the Cree specifically believe that illness can be caused by hostile spirits (Marker #24). Research also reveals that animists and the Cree specifically place an emphasis on the significance of death. Although the interviews did not reveal it, the next logical conclusion would be that Cree Christians would struggle with the suspicion that Christ is not supreme over hostile spirits if their prayers for healing were unanswered and their loved one died.

## ***b) Ministry strategy***

Sandra Ratzlaff's account of her father's death in Chapter II reveals many nuggets of truth that were used by God to help her deal with her unanswered prayer. First, God told her that He had answered her prayer and had healed her father, but He had done so in heaven not on earth. Cree people need to be reminded that there is life beyond this life. Their most natural way of looking at reality does not include much appreciation for eternity (Marker #12), but it is a truth that can comfort them.

Second, Sandra recalled from Ecclesiastes 3:2 that people die. God has appointed a time for death. Death must be accepted.

Third, God encouraged her to use the time of her father's illness to reconcile with him. God told her to tell him she forgave him for the hurts of her childhood.

Fourth, God wanted Sandra to lead her father in to relationship with Himself. Approaching death is a strong motivator for the Christians in the family to witness of Christ's sure salvation, and a strong motivator for the dying to deal with God and prepare for the soon meeting with Him.

Fifth, her father then lead other family members to Christ. The last words of a dying person hold much significance in Cree culture (Marker #19). The highly relational nature of Cree people (Marker #14) spur them to make decisions that will strengthen the cohesiveness of the group.

## **Conclusion**

Ministry strategies must be developed that both build on the strengths of an animistic worldview and challenge the weaknesses of that worldview. Where the Cree worldview is consistent with biblical teaching, those aspects of the culture can be kept. Where the worldview is inconsistent with Scripture, certain cultural traits must be rejected. At times some modifications to a specific cultural trait is all that is needed to bring it in line with God's purposes for a people group.

## **B. Plan for the Process of Critical Contextualization**

### **Introduction**

As was stated at the beginning, the issue of this thesis concerns split-level Christianity. This condition occurs when animists accept Christ and turn to Him for the answers to the ultimate questions of life – such as origins, purposes and destinies of the universe, mankind, specific people groups and individuals – but continue to rely on animistic answers to the questions of the spirit world and daily living (Hiebert et al. 1999, 15).

Two extremes have been used to deal with this situation. One was to offer a blanket rejection of all previous ways of viewing and dealing with reality. The other has been to accept all previous ways of viewing and dealing with reality. Neither of these work.

The solution is more complex and thoughtful than either of these extremes. The solution involves studying the local culture as well as the missionary's culture. Then both cultures must be evaluated in the light of Scripture. As specific issues are analyzed, converts to Christianity, new and old, will see the need to reject some of their old ways, have the freedom to keep some

other beliefs, values and practices of their past, and modify others. Then steps should be taken to bring both individuals and groups into line with God's expressed will and character. Constant reevaluation is necessary. This process is called critical contextualization.

### **1. Study the Local Culture**

The bulk of this thesis has been an attempt to complete the first step of studying the local culture of the Cree, specifically in northern Saskatchewan, and even more specifically in the City of Prince Albert. The study of the Cree culture has been narrowed to values and beliefs particularly in relation to the realm of spirits.

Each locale and each people group has their own distinctives which need to be discovered and analyzed in light of their affect on ministry. Questions such as those used in this thesis could be used, and others developed. The aim is to understand the "categories, assumptions, and logic the people use to construct their world" (Hiebert et al. 1999, 22).

The interviews revealed information that had not previously been disclosed through years of close friendship, multiple hours of intimate Bible study and prayer, or casual conversation. Those seeking to be effective cross-cultural ministers of the gospel are strongly urged to ask many questions and to engage in systematic study of the culture of the people they are seeking to reach. The rewards are worth the effort.

### **2. Study the Missionary's Culture**

It is necessary for the missionary to study his own culture since it is so familiar to him that he is blind to its pull on him and his interpretation of Scripture. Both his beliefs and practices need to be analyzed anew to determine if they are as consistent with Scripture as he previously thought (recall the results of the Barna survey mentioned at the beginning of this chapter of the thesis). One of the benefits of being in a cross-cultural situation is that the differences in culture and worldview cause a person to reevaluate his own preconceived assumptions. This thesis does not engage in this step of analysis, but encourages the missionary to do so.

### **3. Evaluate Both in the Light of Scripture**

Both the local culture and the missionary's culture are products of mankind and, as such, have been influenced by both the depravity of man and the image of God in man. Both need constant correction in the continuing light of God's Word.

Hiebert et al. propound that this constant correction is done on the basis of the absolute infallibility of the Holy Scriptures in their original languages. Unless the Bible is accepted as a reliable account of God communicating with man, there is no standard by which to judge all cultures, beliefs, values, practices and worldviews (1999, 384). They continue by stating that the process is also aided by the enlightenment that the Holy Spirit gives both the local believers and Christians from other people groups. Every person and every group's understanding of Scripture is only partial, so all need divine assistance in the task (1999, 385).

Also needed is the assistance of the community of faith. As individuals and groups correct and challenge each others' understanding of Scripture, all grow closer to the original intent of God's mind. He gave the Church universal as a gift to all the members of His body (Hiebert et al. 1999, 385).

In the earlier stages of a church's development, as it evaluates its culture in the light of Scripture, the missionary plays a large part in teaching the Word of God. But even in the early stages, the local believers have a better idea of how the application of those Scriptures affects their culture. The missionaries also help explain the meanings of Scripture. Ultimately they must encourage local believers to take their questions to God Himself and search the Scriptures for themselves (Hiebert et al. 1999, 385).

#### **4. Evaluate Specific Issues**

##### ***a. Keep, Reject, or Modify***

Once local believers are equipped with an understanding of Scripture, they can begin to deal both individually and corporately with issues, particularly those that are causing problems. They know their own culture, they know the Bible, and they have the Holy Spirit, so they can determine which parts of their culture can be kept, which must be rejected, and which will need to be modified. The goal is for local believers to be fully Christian and yet fully Native. They must identify with their culture, yet they must challenge their culture. Their faith in Christ must not feel foreign or imported or as if it is the "Whiteman's religion." Yet the primary identity must be in Christ and His universal body rather than in an ethnic group. Hiebert et al. put it this way, "Our aim is not to destroy folk religions and to replace them with formal Christianity. It is to develop a vibrant Christian folk religion that is rooted in the gospel" (1999, 383).

This process of choosing which aspects of the culture can be kept, and which must be rejected or modified, is not an easy or obvious one. Most times these decisions come with much angst and soul searching. Recall Sophia's story of how she struggled to continue to relate to her family and to honor the memory of a dead loved one without appearing to go along with the false religious practice of the feeding the spirits of the dead.

Where the Bible commends and encourages certain practices and beliefs, or where the Bible outrightly condemns certain practices and beliefs, it will be more obvious. There is no question but that the Bible outlaws communication with the spirits of the dead, so the Christian response to this practice is to reject it. But even in such obvious cases there may still be a great deal of deliberation and discussion in trying to proceed in such a way as to avoid offending those of the family and community who have not yet come to faith in Christ.

This thesis has taken some steps towards evaluating those issues arising out of the Cree perception of the spirit world. Some were offered in the realm of theory only. Other ministry recommendations grew out of experience. All need to be continually tested and reevaluated.

##### ***b. Practical Tools and Suggestions***

The following paragraphs will offer practical suggestions to help believers work through the application of Scripture to culture. The first is to approach issues on the basis of function rather than form. The second is a grid of questions by which debatable issues can be tested. Another tool is the assimilation scale. It is important to allow the local believers to make the final decisions. The missionary would be wise to intense emotion during this corporate evaluation of issues. Consensus is the ideal, but an unlikely goal. All involved need to keep in mind those overriding precepts by which all Christian thought and practice is governed.

## 1) Consider function over form

The following real life account contrasts one Cree man's reactions to two different attempts at critical contextualization. One attempt focused on practices and material culture. The other focused on the meaning and function of the practice. The results of these two approaches were quite different.

In this first attempt at contextualization, a workshop was held at a Native church to discuss the possibilities of using the Indian hand drum, the medicine shield, the talking stick and the eagle feather in worship of Jesus Christ. One Cree lady attended and became excited about the possibility of doing so and went home to tell her husband. He reacted negatively and that family quit attending that Native church for a time. Later, as their concerns were addressed and when they saw that these practices were not implemented, they returned to the church. Below are his comments on the subject when asked Subproblem #3, Question #19: "Have you ever thought of switching churches? For what reasons?"

What got me thinking about changing churches, there was the director's message when he came in to talk about Native spirituality being okay. It was okay to play a drum and use a medicine shield and all these other things. It didn't sit right with me because, as much as I can understand, they're trying to reach out to the Native people ... Maybe it's my Pentecostal background. These things are very powerful in the mind of the Cree person. When you tell them that it's okay to play their drum, you're saying that ... involving Native spirituality and giving a false message ... that Native spirituality is good and that we have to encompass that in the church doctrine to get Native people to believe. I don't believe that's the case.

I believe that the Bible states that if you're called, you're called. It doesn't mean I don't believe that God is a respecter of man. He's not going to go and bow down to your god just so that you'll believe in Him. I didn't believe that and I still don't believe that God would do that. It would be the same thing as if a Hare Krishna wanted to join and we said that it was okay for him to dance around with his tambourine and believed in his own god as long as he was in our church. It's not politically correct, but ... that's what I believe.

He felt that using practices and objects that are used in Indian Religion was idolatry and therefore could not be used in worship of Christ. In his mind the two were diametrically opposed.

This same man was involved in another attempt at contextualization, but with a different approach. Instead of the Indian Religion practice being presented as a practice that could be modified and used in the worship of Christ, he was presented with the heart, meaning and function of the practice. His reaction was totally the opposite. In this second attempt he participated enthusiastically.

The second attempt began in the mind of a missionary as she read about the Indian Religion vision quest. She also had read in *Understanding Folk Religion* the importance of rites of passage, particularly initiation rites (Hiebert et al. 1999, 100-101). She put these two concepts together with a problem that she had noticed in many Native churches. The Native churches that she had been familiar with seemed to lose children as they entered their teens. Most Native churches she had observed were made up of young adults with young children. As these children grew up in the church they quit attending as they approached their teen years. In attempts to deal with this loss, a youth group had been started, but she wondered if a modified vision quest might not help Native teens cement their commitment to Christ and keep them in the church right

through from childhood to adulthood.

She was also concerned about the messages that her culture was sending to her own young teen boys that drinking excessively, driving fast and being sexually promiscuous were signs of being a man. It was on this basis that she presented her idea to those of the Native church to which she belonged. She started by noting the problem in the church and in society at large. She also mentioned that many cultures have a coming of age rite of passage. She may not have mentioned the vision quest at all.

Four families, two Native and two non-Native were involved in developing a rite of passage that would be thoroughly Christian and thoroughly in keeping with their local context. The main question was, "What do our young teens need to be able to become godly adults?" The four couples had several meetings in which they talked about what it meant to be a godly adult and how that could best be communicated to their teens. Since this was the first time this Native church had ever had such an event, they decided that it would be open to all teens 13 years of age and older. Those teens who did not have Christian parents would be assigned a godly adult to act as a surrogate parent for the event.

The four couples decided that they wanted to stress four aspects of godly adulthood: salvation, self-discipline, service and sexual purity (four "Ss"). They asked themselves what they could give their teens that would be a symbol of adulthood. They decided to give each teen a key with four stylized "Ss" on it. They contemplated having Saturday as a day of fasting, praying and intense biblical instruction, but rejected that idea. They, with their teens, instead planned a Sunday to honor and challenge their teens.

It began with the parents taking the teens out to breakfast over which each parent would talk to his own child about the significance of the four "Ss." The usual Sunday afternoon service was dedicated to the teens. They were presented with letters from their parents envisioning how God would in the future use their special gifts and abilities to advance His kingdom. The pastor spoke on the four "Ss." Programs and certificates were printed for the occasion. The teens were presented with their keys and prayed for. Afterwards they went downstairs for a pizza and sundae supper with their families. The event was considered a success.

The difference in reaction was in how the subject was approached. When the heart issues of values, meaning, and purpose were presented, then the objections and previous uses and meanings of practices and objects did not get in the way. Without the preassigned meanings, people were free to deal with cultural problems in ways consistent with both their culture and their faith in Christ.

Another specific example of how function over form helps in the evaluation process can be found in the use of smoke in the worship of Christ. Some First Nations believers, in attempts to contextualize, have used smoke in their worship. Smoke of the cedar, sweet-grass or sage, is used by various tribes of Natives peoples. The Cree tend to favor sweet-grass. Smoke has three functions. Its purpose is to carry prayers up to the Creator, to spiritually cleanse a person, and to provide protection from hostile spirits. These are also the functions of the blood of Christ. Using the function over form guideline would clarify that the use of smoke in Christian worship would undermine the supremacy of Christ, since His blood is replaced by smoke. On this basis, the practice would be rejected.

## **2) Use evaluation grids/charts**

Below are two grids/charts that are helpful in evaluating the application of Scriptural principles to cultural issues. The first was composed by Adrian Jacobs. It is entitled “Dealing with Old Ways.” The second was received from Lyle Anderson. It is entitled “How Do I Deal With the Grey?”

## DEALING WITH OLD WAYS

Description:

Type:

Region:

Tribe:

Traditional \_\_\_ Indigenous \_\_\_ Foreign \_\_\_

Purpose:

Social \_\_\_ Religious \_\_\_ Spiritual \_\_\_ Prayer \_\_\_ Worship \_\_\_ Ritual \_\_\_ Form \_\_\_

Ceremony \_\_\_ Healing (cure) \_\_\_ Chants \_\_\_ Hygenic \_\_\_ Drugs used? \_\_\_

Stimulants? \_\_\_ Fasting \_\_\_ Thirsting \_\_\_ Hallucinations \_\_\_ Visions \_\_\_ Myth \_\_\_

Proverb \_\_\_ Fable \_\_\_ Story \_\_\_ Artistic \_\_\_ Aesthetic \_\_\_ Practical (useful) \_\_\_

Political \_\_\_ Humanistic \_\_\_ Family Oriented \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

Class: Poor \_\_\_ Rich \_\_\_ All \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_

Values taught:

Inspiration: God \_\_\_ Demons \_\_\_ Animals \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_

Physical Symptoms:

Tranquility \_\_\_ Rest \_\_\_ Lust \_\_\_ Abusive \_\_\_ Hurts (cuts, bruises, wounds, lacerations, etc.) \_\_\_ Addictions \_\_\_ Illness \_\_\_

Emotional Reactions:

Fear \_\_\_ Joy \_\_\_ Peace \_\_\_ Anger \_\_\_ Loneliness \_\_\_ Depression \_\_\_ Guilt \_\_\_  
Grief \_\_\_ Inferiority \_\_\_ Anxiety \_\_\_ Stress \_\_\_ Worry \_\_\_ Tension \_\_\_

| HOW DO I DEAL WITH GREY?                                   |   |     |    |
|--|---|-----|----|
| BIBLE PRINCIPLE GUIDELINES TO FOLLOW                       |   |     |    |
| GREY ACTIVITY:   |   |     |    |
| AS APPLIES TO (NAME): ..... (GOD’S CHILD)                  |   |     |    |
| REFERENCE  | PRINCIPLE   | YES | NO |
| Heb 12:1   | EXCESS - it doesn’t slow me down spiritually        |     |    |
| 1 Cor 6:12   | EXPEDIENCE - it is profitable and useful            |     |    |
| 1 Cor 6:12   | ENSLAVEMENT - I can be Spirit controlled in this    |     |    |
| Rom 14:13  | EXAMPLE - it can allow me to be a good example      |     |    |
| Col 4:5  | EVANGELISM - it can help spread the Gospel          |     |    |
| 1 Cor 10:23  | EDIFICATION - it can help other Christians          |     |    |
| 1 Cor. 10:31   | EXALTATION - it can glorify God                     |     |    |
| 1 John 2:6   | EMULATION - I can invite Christ in this             |     |    |
| Lev 19:18  | REVENGE - this has nothing to do with avenging      |     |    |
| Matt 18:21   | FORGIVENESS - I can demonstrate forgiveness here    |     |    |
| Luke 12:37-48  | STEWARDSHIP - I can be a good steward in this       |     |    |
| Rom 12:2   | CONFORMITY - this will not conform me to the world  |     |    |
| Rom 12:10  | PREFERENCE - I can put others before mein this      |     |    |
| Rom 12:18  | PEACE - I can keep peace with others in this        |     |    |
| Rom 13:1   | SUBJECTION - it can show my subjection to authority |     |    |
| Gal 6:10   | GOODNESS - I can show goodness to others in this    |     |    |
| 1 Cor 6:19   | BODY - this does not harm God’s temple any way      |     |    |
| 2 Cor 6:14   | YOKE - this will not bind me to unbelievers         |     |    |
| 1 Thess 5:22   | APPEARANCE - I’m free from evil appearance in this  |     |    |
| 2 Tim 2:22   | LUST - I’m free from any chance of lust in this     |     |    |
| Therefore this activity is ___ (right) ___ (wrong) for me! |   |     |    |

**3) Use an assimilation scale**

Issues of contextualization are closely connected to issues of identity, particularly group identity. Most contextualization debates might start with a question something like this: “Before we were Cree, and we knew what that meant. Now we are Cree Christians. What does it mean to be so?”

But if the person or group did not know what it meant to be Cree prior to becoming Christian, that confusion would complicate the debate even further.

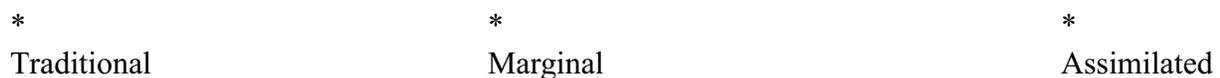
In doing the research for her paper “Aboriginal Spirituality as a New Religious Movement,” Hodgman noticed that there were two groups of people most likely to be involved in Aboriginal Spirituality. The first was those who had grown up with it all their lives. The second were those who had grown up in urban settings or in non-Native foster homes. The second group was attracted to Indian Religion because they were looking for their Native identity. They were unsure of who they were as Native people and adopting a religion associated with an ethnic group gave them a stronger sense of ethnicity.

Those who had grown up in a northern Native village where Indian Religion was not widely practiced were immersed in Native culture constantly. They felt no pressure to do extra things to help them feel Native.

In the same sense it appears that those who are most fascinated with using the forms of Indian Religion in Christian worship have been immersed quite extensively in the white society and are insecure about their Native identity. They are, therefore, searching for ways to exhibit their Native identity while retaining their faith in Christ.

In *Whiteman’s Gospel*, Craig Smith diagrams an assimilation scale (1997, 118):

#### ASSIMILATION SCALE



If these observations about a search for Native identity affecting the present contextualization debate are accurate, then one’s position on the assimilation scale affects how one deals with contextualization issues. Native churches and individuals entering these debates would do well to analyze where they are on the assimilation scale. They would also do well to determine not only what forms are meaningful to people, but why they are meaningful. It may be that if more work was done by the church to ensure positive Native identity, the debate surrounding contextualization issues would not be as volatile.

Those who have seen evil spirits at work in the context of Indian Religion, and have come out of that system of fear in order to follow Christ, are less likely to be interested in using those same forms to worship Christ. The association with evil is too strong. Those who have had no experience with evil spirits in the context of Indian Religion will not have those meanings and, therefore, those misgivings about modifying those forms to worship Christ.

Those who are totally assimilated would have little interest in using forms of Indian Religion to worship Christ since their group identity has been rooted in mainstream society.

#### **4) Allow local believers to make these decisions**

It is absolutely essential that the local believers be the ones to make the final decisions after the issues have been debated and the Scriptures examined. They are most qualified to do so since

they know the culture most intimately. They know the meanings behind the forms. Hiebert et al. say,

The missionary or leader may not always agree with choices the people make, but it is important, as far as conscience allows, to accept the decisions of the local Christians, and to recognize that they, too, are led by the Spirit of God. Leaders must grant others the greatest right they reserve for themselves, the right to make mistakes. The church grows stronger by consciously making decisions in the light of Scripture, even when the decisions may not always be the wisest, than when it simply obeys orders given by others (1999, 28).

Not only is it necessary that local Christians have the final say, because they best know the culture, but it is also necessary because it eliminates the need for leadership to act as a policing force. The following quote makes this point. It also highlights the additional benefit of local believers growing in their ability to interpret, apply and discern God's will in regard to their daily choices:

The gospel is a call to change, but if the leaders make the decisions about change, they become police enforcing their decisions. If the people make the decisions, they will corporately enforce them. To involve people in the process of critiquing their own culture in light of new truth draws upon their strength. They know their old culture better than do outsiders and are in a better position to accurately judge it after they have been biblically instructed. To include them in the decision-making process also helps them grow spiritually by teaching them discernment (Hiebert et al. 1999, 386).

At times the missionaries may feel that the local believers are making decisions that compromise Christianity by identifying too closely with the culture. Equally it may happen that missionaries think old forms may be useable in the worship of Christ when the Native believers, who are more aware of the idolatrous meanings behind those forms, find them unusable.

Local believers will make mistakes. Missionaries will make mistakes. Both groups need to stay painfully aware that those mistakes may have eternal consequences. The unsaved are watching. Their view of Christ is based on what they see in Christians. Young believers may return to their old ways as a result of those mistakes. The freedom to make mistakes in this decision-making process should not be taken lightly.

## **5) Expect intensity of emotion**

Hiebert et al. encourage churches to discuss how to deal with aspects of the culture. Those entering these discussions, however, must realize that, in so doing, emotions will run high. Even in opening the opportunity to examine such issues, there will be strong reactions, as in the previous account of the Cree man's decision to pull his family out of the Native church. He did so prior to any decisions being made. To even discuss the possibility of using the implements of Indian Religion in worship of Christ produced a swift and strong negative reaction. He was not open to such discussions, for to do so was, in his mind, to engage in idolatry.

In the same church, one Native elder resigned his position of leadership over the same issue. The fact that the director of the denomination was willing to consider such practices was seen as a sign of compromising the faith. Again, it must be said that these discussions must begin on the level of worldview, meanings, feelings and values rather than objects, practices and rituals. First, one must decide how to meet the longings of the heart. Then one can deal with the observable

results that come out of that.

## **6) Work towards consensus**

Cree Christians are a diverse people. This truth was alluded to in the discussion on assimilation. Assimilation does play a part but, beyond that, Cree Christians come from a variety of backgrounds. Denominational connections, education, age, family religious history, personal preference, private interpretation of Scripture and level of assimilation all play a role in these contextualization debates. How will the Native church come to a point of consensus?

Consensus may even be more important to Cree Christians than other ethnic groups since traditionally the Cree form of group decision-making was that of consensus. To have a majority was not sufficient. Long periods of time were taken to make decisions since it was highly desired that every member of the group be in agreement. Group harmony was essential for survival, given the harshness of living in the wilderness. It may be just as true for the Cree Church which finds itself in the difficult situation of being a minority within a minority.

The contextualization debates cannot be avoided, but they will not be without fallout. The First Nations Alliance churches are split down the middle on this issue. There are eight churches within the denomination, four on one side of the debate and four on the other. Even within the individual churches, there is not consensus. As has happened in non-Native churches, it may be that, in the future, Native denominations will develop on the basis of how these debates unfold. Due to the small number of Native churches and the cultural desire for consensus, this likely scenario may not be in the best interests of the Native church of North America. The ideal goal is consensus. Hiebert et al. say even mother-daughter churches will disagree.

One attempt at entering into these contextualization debates and coming to consensus was taken by the Native American (U.S.) District of the C&MA. Their delegates worked together in the summer of 2000 and came up with a position paper which has become standard for their congregations. It is called *Boundary Lines*. It was also published by Northern Canada Evangelical Mission and distributed by C.H.I.E.F. (Smith 2001)

Another group of First Nations Christians that is also attempting to contextualize the gospel for Native people is the North American Institute of Indigenous Theological Studies. They meet every 18 months. Ray Aldred, mentioned in the “Review of Related Literature,” is a member of this group.

## **7) Keep in mind the overriding precept**

The overriding precept that must permeate all discussions is the supremacy of Christ, the efficacy of His work, and the uniqueness of His position as the means of salvation. Any practice that in any way undermines these tenets of the faith must be abandoned.

## **5. Take Steps Toward Change**

Once the decisions have been made, steps of action must be taken. They must be taken both individually and corporately.

Individual Native Christians make choices about how to apply Scripture to their specific context. Some Cree Christians refuse to have dream-catchers in their homes or cars, as their function is to

provide protection from hostile spirits. They know that only Christ can provide that protection. Other Native believers have dream-catchers in their homes and cars stating that their presence opens up witnessing opportunities. A possible modification, that seems not to have not yet been considered, would be to weave the name of Jesus Christ into the center of the webbing. This modification may better communicate that Christ provides the protection. Or it may be that trust will be transferred from the person of Christ to the object itself.

“On another level, transformation must also occur in social and cultural systems. Corporate transformation must begin in the church” (Hiebert et al. 1999, 388). Cree Christians have the power through God to change their families, communities, tribe, country and the world. They uniquely represent God’s character. Their efforts to deal with cultural issues in godly ways can lead the way for other people groups.

#### ***a. People not Programs***

“Ministries of transformation must focus on people, not programs” (Hiebert et al. 1999, 389). This statement is true of all people groups but particularly of Cree and other tribal groups which are so highly relational. Gary Quequish, in his thesis, “Effective Biblical Counseling Among Ojibway People” (1994), concurs. Gary is himself an Ojibway pastor (a tribe closely related to the Cree) and a trained counselor. He says that Christian ministries in Canada have been ineffective, as they have been based on activities and buildings rather than on relationships.

#### ***b. Types of Ministries of Transformation***

There are four types of ministries of transformation. All four must be included in the work of the Cree church. Hiebert et al. encourage the cultivation of evangelistic ministries, pastoral ministries, teaching ministries and prophetic ministries (1999, 389-391).

### **6. Reevaluate**

As is true of all believers, Cree Christians must constantly reevaluate their previous decisions about how to apply Scripture to their culture. God’s Word does not change. But cultures do change, and human understanding of God’s Word changes. As individuals and churches continue to immerse themselves in the Bible, God will continue to speak and to refine and redirect in those decisions that need modifying.

For example, the Native church’s initiation rite of passage. Care was initially taken to create an event that would be uniquely Christian and unique to the local context. The event seemed a success. But afterwards one Cree family never came back to the church. That is not a desired result. This family needs to be questioned as to why they have made this choice and it needs to be done prior to the next teen initiation event, which is scheduled for this fall. Modifications may need to be made so that the same thing does not happen again.

### **Conclusion**

Although this step by step process of critical contextualization may seem long and tedious, it is worth the effort. It takes time to know the culture and worldview of the people to which the missionary is sent. He spends his entire life reevaluating his own cultural norms and purifying them to bring them closer and closer to godlikeness. Every issue and point of tension must be evaluated. Then steps of change must be taken both by individuals and by the church and by the

society. Those steps of change will then yield results, some of which will be desirable and some of which will not. Those undesirable results then lead to reevaluation. Each step leads the Cree Christians and society as a whole closer and closer to the kingdom of Christ as He planned for it to be expressed by the Cree people that He created for His own purposes and His own glory.

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## CHAPTER IV

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has addressed the issue of split-level Christianity, an observable worldwide phenomena that occurs whenever missionaries of a Western-European worldview seek to present Christ to peoples of an animistic worldview. When this phenomena occurs, animistic peoples gladly accept Christ, as He is seen as the answer to the ultimate questions of life in relation to origins, purpose and destiny of mankind. But when the missionary does not take into consideration the spirit world in his explanation of and reaction to the events of this present life, then the newly converted animists return to their folk religion for the answers. Ministry is negatively affected by the exclusion of the middle zone of the spirit realm. Converts go to Christ and the Bible for one aspect of life, and to animism for another aspect of life, hence the term split-level Christianity.

This thesis sought to see whether this phenomena exists in ministry among the Cree of Canada. To determine this three groups of 10 Cree people were interviewed.

The first group was a random sampling of people without prior knowledge of their religious convictions, preferably those without much exposure to Christianity. They were interviewed in order to find out what the Cree perception of the middle zone or spirit world was. They were mainly asked about values. The findings of these interviews revealed that Cree people still have an animistic worldview. They still believe that spirits interact with people and nature. Almost all interviewees had experienced an encounter with a spirit. Unexplained events were given spiritual causes.

The second group was composed of those who had heard the gospel message and had either rejected it or had just recently accepted it. They were asked about their perception of the Christian message to determine if they were more likely to reject Christ if the spirit realm was not addressed. While it was found that they held animistic views and considered spirits an active part of their reality, it was not proved that Christ's supremacy over this spirit world was vital to their response to the gospel. The inability to prove this point was due to the fact that not one interviewee from this group indicated that they had ever heard a gospel presentation in which Christ's supremacy over spirits was included. The question therefore remains open as to how they would respond to such a gospel presentation. However, their interactions with spirits cause speculation that they would respond more positively to this type of gospel presentation.

The third group was made up of those Cree who considered themselves to be born again Christians. Subproblem #3's main question was, "How does the exclusion of the middle zone in the presentation of Christian discipleship negatively affect Cree peoples' walk with God?" They were asked about what drew them to Christ and what kept them faithful to Him. They were asked what the Bible taught about spirits and how their relationship with Christ affected their reaction to spirits. It was found that their biblical knowledge of spirits was patchy, but their

practical dealing with encounters with spirits was Christian.

Overall it is concluded that the exclusion of the middle zone does negatively affect Cree response to Christian ministry. But it is only one of many factors. Dealing with this issue biblically would not necessarily be the cultural key that would throw open the floodgates of many Cree turning to Christ and following Him faithfully, but there would be a notable improvement in ministry results.

However, the other issues that were discovered to be important to Cree people would also have to be dealt with biblically. Cree culture is too complex to be dealt with on a single issue approach. A multifaceted approach is necessary. Ministry strategies need to be developed and gelled with the ministry strategies recommended in this thesis concerning how to deal with their animistic perception of the spirit world. These strategies need to include building a Native Christian identity that does not deny their Nativeness. A method of dealing with addictions also needs to be developed. There needs to be a strategy for how to expand the Cree perception of social sin into one that includes theological sin. But, finally, and most profoundly, the cultural aspect of the highly relational nature of the people has to be dealt with.

Far and above all other concerns, Cree people want to have harmonious relationships. Their primary concern, when considering choosing to accept Christ or choosing to obey Him in the daily events of life, was how those decisions would affect their relationships. As was encouraged by both Quequish and Hiebert, ministry must focus on building relationships rather than building facilities or programs. Much must be done to approach ministry with the Cree communally rather than individually.

To summarize the entire thesis in one sentence, ministry to the Cree of Canada must biblically address the spirit world, but the highly relational nature of the people must also be addressed at the same time.

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## **APPENDIXES**

### **APPENDIX A**

#### **Twenty-four Markers of Animistic Worldview**

1. Animists believe in personal spirits.

One of the animist's primary beliefs is that personal spirits exist. Hiebert et al. state that, "In many folk religions, humans live in a world surrounded by spirits" (1999, 81). Van Rheenen confirms this statement (1991, 21).

2. Animists believe in impersonal spiritual forces.

In the same quote Hiebert et al. add belief in supernatural forces (1999, 81). Ross does not state the matter so directly, but alludes to it when he writes of how the First Nations people of northern Ontario and Manitoba use "bad medicine" (1992, 52) and "magic" (1992, 54). These mechanistic methods would seem illogical except for a belief in spiritual forces.

3. Animists believe that the spirit realm causes events in the human world and natural world.

Not only are these spiritual beings and forces thought to exist, but they are also thought to interact with and affect the human and natural realms. Ross writes of how animists view cause and effect not in a natural way, but in a spiritual way thinking, “that each acts as it does because that is the will of one of the greater or lesser spirits” (1992, 51). Van Rheezen says that animists believe that spirits have the power to control human affairs (1991, 21).

4. Animists believe that the spirit realm can at times be hostile.

According to Hiebert et al., spirits and spiritual forces are seen mainly as hostile (1999, 81). There are spirits that are considered kind and good but even they must at times be appeased because they can become angry (1999, 54).

5. Animists seek to find out which spirit or spiritual force has caused which event.

In response to an interactive and hostile spirit world, animists find it necessary to develop methods by which they can determine which spiritual being or force is causing which event. Van Rheezen calls these methods divination (1991, 21).

6. Animists seek to determine which spirits will cause which event in the future.

This world of hostile and active spirits also leads the animist to feel a need for supernatural guidance. The use of omens and premonitions help a person to know and deal with an uncertain future (Hiebert et al. 1999, 79).

7. Animists live in fear and need security.

Another natural response to a hostile, active spirit world is fear. Fear leads to attempts to find security (Hiebert et al. 1999, 87).

8. Animists seek spiritual protection.

This sense of fear and lack of security leads animists to take spiritual measures to protect themselves from hostile spirits. Some use amulets and fetishes to gain this protection. Hiebert et al. explain: “A person may go to a magician in the morning for a protective amulet” (1999, 84). Cree people tend to use such things as dream-catchers, medicine bags, stones, and sweet-grass.

Another form of protection comes in the keeping of taboos. Van Rheezen says that, “The prohibitions of taboos protect the careful observer” (1991, 211) and the breaking of taboos may be thought to cause illness (1991, 36).

9. Animists believe humans can control or manipulate these spirits/forces.

The animist does not seek a personal relationship with the powers. Rather he seeks to manipulate spiritual beings and forces to do his will (Van Rheezen 1991, 22).

10. Animists believe all aspects of reality to be interconnected.

In animistic thought there is fluidity between the barriers of different categories of reality. There

is movement between, and even becoming of, the members of the other category: spirit, human, animal, plant, dead, living (Hiebert et al. 1999, 81). “In animistic worldview there is no watertight distinction between humans and animals or between animate and inanimate” (Hiebert et al. 1999, 86).

11. Animists are human-centered rather than God-centered.

“In contrast to high religions, which focus their attention on the cosmic order, folk religions are human-centered. Humans ... are seen not only as actors in the universe but as the center of existence (Hiebert et al. 1999, 80).

12. Animists are focused on the present rather than the eternal.

Moreover, in contrast to the concern of high religions for eternal time, folk religions focus on the now, not some distant past or future (Hiebert et al. 1999, 83).

13. Animists are more concerned with power than with truth.

Animists tend to be pragmatic. They are concerned with what works and what is useful rather than what is true. This tendency allows them to “turn to several mutually contradictory systems simultaneously with the hopes that one will work” (Hiebert et al. 1999, 84). They have no problem going to a church for prayer for healing, a doctor and a medicine man.

Ross tells the story of a boy whose bow had “God Be With Me In the Hunt” and the heads of an eagle and a bear pencilled on it. He asked the elders if that was because the boy was making sure all the bases were covered and they agreed (1992, 52-53).

14. Animists tend to be highly relational people.

For many tribal peoples, group harmony was essential for survival due to the harshness of living conditions. They needed each other. “People find security in their kinship groups and joy in the community gatherings” (Hiebert et al. 1999, 87).

15. Animists are more concerned with social sin than theological sin.

Due to the highly relational nature of animists and the fact that they are human-centered rather than God-centered, they are primarily concerned with social sin rather than theological sin (Hiebert et al. 1999, 199-202). Sin is seen as that which threatens group unity. What does not hurt others is not thought to be sin.

16. Animists give a great deal of attention to death.

Hiebert et al. state that animists are so deeply concerned about death because, “Death challenges the human search for meaning” (1999, 78). Their concern has less to do with the dead than with the living who are coping with the death.

One way animists cope with death is by believing that the spirits of the dead continue to exist and to interact with the living. According to Harold Turner in *Eerdmans' Handbook to World Religions*, most tribal peoples also believe that the spirits of those who have died live on. These living dead have dealings with those still living in this world (1982, 131).

17. Animists assign significance to dreams.

Animists give significance to dreams because dreams are thought of as “channels through which spiritual powers communicate with the living” (Van Rheeën 1991, 185). Due to this thinking, “People take dreams seriously” (Hiebert et al. 1999, 59).

18. Animists have a concept of a distant and benevolent high god.

According to Kraft in *Spiritual Power and Missions*:

Most animists of the world know that there is a supreme God who lives above the evil spirits and is more powerful than they are. They usually reason, however, that the supreme God will be good to them and so they need pay little or no attention to Him. On the other hand, they reason that the way to keep the evil spirits from bothering them is by sacrificing to them to appease them, rather than (as in Christianity) by obeying the God who is above them, allowing Him to protect them from the evil spirits (1995, 98).

19. Animists favor orality.

According to Hiebert et al., “Folk religions store and transmit their information orally; they are highly immediate, personal and relational” (1999, 85).

20. Animists focus on the local rather than the universal.

While Christianity and other high religions view themselves as being universal, primal religions view themselves as being local and specific to one people group. Turner says, “Primal religions are not religions for all peoples, and so do not become missionary, as the universal religions often do. They are the religion of one tribe or people who realize that other peoples have their own gods and systems” (1982, 130).

21. Animists believe in an impersonal cosmic moral order.

According to Hiebert et al., “There is a widespread belief in an impersonal cosmic moral order which guarantees that good deeds bring good results ... and that bad deeds have evil consequences” (1999, 65).

22. Animists believe that a person can be vulnerable to attack of evil spirits by proximity.

Animists believe that a person is more vulnerable to the activities of hostile spirits under conditions that have nothing to do with sin. They believe that a person is more likely to experience negative spirit activity if they accidentally wander into a geographic area dedicated to a specific spirit (Priest et al. 1995, 18) or if a person touches an object or accepts a gift that has previously been dedicated to a spirit (Priest et al. 1995, 14).

23. Animists believe that a person can be vulnerable to attack of evil spirits by curses.

Another way that animists believe they will be subject to an attack by a hostile spirit is if they have been cursed. It may also be thought that curses move impersonal spiritual forces against the cursed individual (Priest et al. 1995, 16).

24. Animists consider healing and sickness to be spiritual issues.

Animists tend to view healing and illness as spiritual issues more than do those peoples of Western-European cultures. They go to medicine men for both herbal remedies and to deal with the hostile spirits that may have caused the illness. Newell Booth says “In this way recreation, healing, politics and religion are all closely tied together in the traditional community” (1982, 161).

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## **APPENDIX B**

### **List of Interview Questions for Subproblem #1 and the Rationale for their Selection**

#### *Interview Questions*

Subproblem #1 — How is the middle zone addressed by the Cree peoples of Canada?

Are you Cree?

1. What are the five most important things in life?
2. What did your parents/grandparents teach you as principles for life?
3. Do you now live by those principles?
4. Why or why not?
5. What principles do you live by?
6. What do you desire above all else? What would you change about your life if you could?
7. Why do bad things happen?
8. Why do good things happen?
9. How can you prevent bad things from happening and how can you make good things happen?
10. How do you handle crises? sickness death accident/loss conflict
11. What do you need most in your life and why? Rate top 5 in order of importance.  
freedom joy peace  
love self-control forgiveness  
spiritual power money job  
faith family healing  
confidence wholeness truth  
hope
12. What guides/motivates your decisions?
13. How do you train your children? What is important for them to learn from you?
14. Organize these words into groups:  
God, rocks, virus, man, bushes, fish, deer, rabbit, woman, demons, angels, cow, lion, whale, grass, sand, trees. Why did you choose those groupings? (Van Rheenen, 1991, 47)
15. How is spiritual power gained?
16. What are some of the proverbs of your people?
17. How have you reacted to an encounter with a spirit?

## ***Question Selection Rationale***

The questions were chosen to determine the degree to which Cree people hold an animistic worldview. Questions #1 through #6, #11, #13, #16 were general questions designed to determine values.

Most of the other questions arise from the book *Understanding Folk Religions* by Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw and Tite Tienou, which highlights aspects of that worldview. According to the authors animistic people tend to try to manipulate reality to ensure their own benefit. (1999, 133-134). Gailyn Van Rheenen, in *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, says the same (1991, 21-22). In *Dancing With a Ghost*, Rupert Ross says that they also tend to see spirits as the cause of events (1992, 51). These two tendencies gave rise to the questions about the causes of and responses to life's negative experiences (Questions #7 through #10).

Hiebert et al. also indicate that guidance is highly important to animistic peoples who often seek signs and omens in order to foretell and manipulate the future (1999, 175-176). As does Van Rheenen (1991, 22-23). This characteristic motivated the inclusion of Question #12.

Question #14 was taken directly from Van Rheenen as a tool to determine view of reality (1991, 47). He states that the way people categorize reality reveals their "differentiations of natural and supernatural, human and animal life, plants and animals, and animate and inanimate things."

Question #15 arose from the statement in *Understanding Folk Religions* that animistic people are more concerned with spiritual power (power over other people and over spirits) than with spiritual truth (Hiebert et al. 1999, 84 ). The final question related specifically to the primary question of the prevalence of perception of the spirit world in daily living.

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## **APPENDIX C**

### **List of Interview Questions for Subproblem #2 and the Rationale for their Selection**

#### ***Interview Questions***

Subproblem #2 – What is the effect of the exclusion of the middle zone in the presentation of the gospel on its receptivity by Cree people?

Are you Cree?

1. What does it mean to be a Christian?
2. Is there any difference between that and a born again Christian?
3. What does Jesus do for people?
4. What does Jesus not do for people?
5. Why do people become followers of Jesus Christ?
6. Why do they not?
7. Could Jesus meet any of the needs in your life? Why or why not?
8. What is Jesus/God like? Describe His character and abilities.
9. Do you need protection from spirits? If not, why not? If so, how do you get it?
10. Which statement is most attractive to you?

- You should surrender your life to Jesus Christ because He alone can forgive your sins.
- You should surrender your life to Jesus Christ because He is more powerful than any spirit.
- 11. Has anyone ever asked you to consider giving your life to Jesus Christ? If so, what did they say?
- 12. Have you ever given your life to Jesus Christ? Why or why not?
- 13. What part do spirits play in your life?
- 14. What gives you spiritual power? Do you want it? How do you get it? What would you do with it?
- 15. What are your primary spiritual concerns? How do these fit in with your day to day life/decisions?
- 16. What are the five most important things in life?
- 17. What did your parents/grandparents teach you as principles for life?
- 18. Do you now live by those principles?
- 19. Why or why not?
- 20. What principles do you live by?
- 21. How do you train your children? What is important for them to learn from you?
- 22. What do you need most in your life and why? Rate in order of importance.

freedom joy peace  
 love self-control forgiveness  
 spiritual power money job  
 faith family healing  
 confidence wholeness truth  
 hope

### ***Question Selection Rationale***

Questions #1-8 and #10-12 were designed to determine a person's perception of and response to the gospel. Questions #9, #13 and #14 asked specifically about the spirit world's relevance to their experience. Question #15 was a general question about spiritual concerns. Questions #16-22 were also included in Subproblem #1 and relate to the general values of the interviewee.

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## **APPENDIX D**

### **List of Interview Questions for Subproblem #3 and the Rationale for their Selection**

#### ***Interview Questions***

Subproblem #3 - What is the effect of the exclusion of the middle zone in the presentation of Christian discipleship on Cree Christians' walk with God?

1. Are you Cree?
2. Are you a follower of Jesus Christ? A born again Christian?
3. Describe your relationship with Jesus?
4. What makes a person a strong Christian?
5. What has kept you faithfully walking with Jesus Christ?
6. How do you handle crises? Sickness? Death? Accident/loss? Conflict?
7. What is the best thing about being a follower of Jesus Christ?

8. What is the worst/hardest?
9. What does the Bible teach about spirits?
10. How does Jesus affect the way you relate to spirits?
11. If Jesus would do anything you asked, what would you ask Him to do?
12. How does your relationship with Jesus affect your decision-making?
13. Why did you become a Christian?
14. What is the most helpful thing you have learned from the Bible?
15. Have you ever discontinued your walk with Jesus? For what reasons?
16. What caused you to return to Him?
17. How is your church meeting your needs?
18. How is it not?
19. Have you ever thought of switching churches? For what reasons?
20. If you could change anything you wanted about your church, what would you change?
21. For what concerns have you gone forward for prayer or asked the elders to come to your home?
22. What part of the Bible do you read the most? Least?
23. Tell of a time when you were disappointed with Jesus Christ?
24. Tell of a time when you were thrilled with Jesus?

### ***Question Selection Rationale***

Questions #1 and #2 were asked in order to determine if the individual qualified for Subproblem #3. They needed to be Cree born again Christians. Question #3 was asked to determine if he/she was walking with God, since the main question of Subproblem #3 is whether or not being trained concerning the Christian response to the spirit world affects a person's walk with God. Questions #4-5, #7, #13-14, #16-17, #22 and #24 were designed to discover what aids Cree Christians in a strong walk with God. Questions #8, #15, #18-20, and #23 were designed to discover what deterrents undermine a strong walk with God. To determine if Cree Christians used animistic or Christian methods of receiving guidance, Question #12 asked about their decision-making. To determine what resources they turned to in a crisis, Cree Christians were asked Question #6. Questions #11 and #21 asked general questions in order to determine the concerns and desires of the Cree Christians. Questions #9-10 asked specifically about the spirit world.

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