

## Thesis Abstract

Iban religion is another expression of animism—a religious way of life that believes in spirit worship, fetishism and the worship of nature. The Iban believes that although manifested itself in different ways, everything in nature has a soul and that there is a spirit or force residing in every living and inanimate object, including animals, rocks, trees, mountains, rivers, spiritual beings or other created objects. Every thought, word, prayer or dream has an individual spiritual meaning and magical power that can aid or hinder them in the course of nature. Since these things have an effect upon their lives, they must be endowed with souls or spirits and these have become their gods.

Likewise in Iban religion, man seeks to control his environment toward practical ends. Each "inanimate object" (spirit god) is a powerful spirit that can be manipulated toward specific objectives. In general the Iban worships the creation rather than the Creator. They use incantations, rites, magic, prayers, sacrifice of live or dead animals, fetishes, amulets, divination, charms, spells, and anything else that the ignorant mind can think of to move a spiritual force. The Iban consults the religious specialists like *manangs* (shamans), *lemambang*s, magicians and diviners to intercede for them. Individual gods can mean victory or defeat in battle, blessings or curses, feast or famine, illness or cure and in general bring good or bad luck.

There are many among the Iban who have yet to hear the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Where is our true God in all these? If done in ignorance, the scriptures suggest that God can overlook these false practices. After all, if He is truly a loving God and sent Jesus to die for the whole world, God could honor these entreaties to false gods if done in innocence, a pure heart and without malice. God should be a blessing to them. Don't be misled by this teaching, however, for if we have been exposed to truth, there is no excuse for us to walk in ignorance. The big problem with the church is the false prophets telling the people what they want to hear. The Iban people are living in bondage or are destroyed for lack of knowledge of who the true God is.

However, we as Christians and as communicators of the gospel today should be careful in our communication. The Iban who is raised in a world which believes in many spirits and old black magic will not believe otherwise just by preaching against it. By trying to convince the Iban that their religious practices are wrong and the work of evil worsens it. The magic, the charm, the power of *manang* and the impact of their religious rites are all too strong and they have experienced the power. The only way to cast out these kinds of "demons" is through the power of the Holy Spirit with sufficient charisma to overcome the negative power. We who do not have this power have no business trying. Therefore it is our responsibility to bring to the Iban people the gospel about true the God and our Lord Jesus Christ.