Meinardus Claims Islam Winning Battle For Converts In Africa

BY RICHARD BEST

The Christian has common cause with the Communist for the material betterment of mankind and with the Muslim for the spread of theism.

This was the conclusion of Otto Meinardus, Professor of Religion at The American University at Cairo, when he spoke last Thursday in the Rice Chapel on “Christianity and Islam in the 20th Century.”

IN AFRICA, Christians are witnessing the rapid advance of Islam among the “pagans” and animists. Christianity itself, claimed Meinardus, is unable to penetrate Islam in spite of years of mission work. The Methodists and Presbyterians have, since 1864, been operating hospitals and schools in Egypt but have made only 60 conversions.

MEINARDUS attributed this failure to non-theological factors, primarily the “clothing of the church in western garb” which made it unintelligible to the Islamic world. Christian mission to the Arabs has been “a constant knocking on a fast-closed door,” because it tried to import issues relevant only to 16th century Europe.

The church has forgotten that for its first century, Christianity was a product of an oriental milieu.

THE SUCCESS of Islam (the word means “submission”) is the result of its high ethical monotheism, which avoids the guilt emphasis of Christianity, together with the fact that it requires no radical cultural break for the Afro-Asian.

According to Meinardus the Christian’s response should not be a striving to dominate by “winning souls” but rather to serve as Christ served, to express concern and love and to leave the rest to the Holy Spirit.