

Editorial Comment

Ralph D. Winter



How, in this world of universal pain and violence, can anyone for a moment question the existence of a Satanic campaign to reduce and distort the true glory of God?

The “Other” Terrorists

My wife’s final ordeal (see p. 37) right in the middle of all this consternation about the new global war on terrorism has meant a double upheaval for me. At times the panic on the TV screen (in the waiting room at the Intensive Care Unit) could hardly distract me from another very different kind of “distraction.” “Things would never again be the same.” Right: in my case, for two reasons.

I found myself during the first 28 days of October, every day almost all day in that Intensive Care Unit, thinking, praying, consternating, as my wife of almost 50 years steadily passed out of this life. I could not avoid pondering two different kinds of terrorists, big and very small, the latter being far more dangerous.

The “big” terrorists, the human-sized terrorists, thanks to September 11, are well-known by now. They are apparently sincere but aggrieved and deadly-dangerous Muslims. Passions are now inflamed on both sides. You need to be careful as you read the articles in this issue. Most of them effectively try not to see only evil within Islam. Yet few bother to make comparisons with similar historical evil on the Christian side of the fence.

The actual facts on both sides are not well-known to the average American. But as with Pearl Harbor, Americans are in for a crash course, this time a course on Islam (and maybe a parallel course on a comparably-mixed Christian record).

But while the world is now shocked into consternation about the “big” terrorists, I wish there could be as lurid an awareness of the far greater danger of another kind of “terrorists” too small

to see with the naked eye.

Yes, our Center in Pasadena, this bulletin, my life, the life of the new Roberta Winter Institute will all be radically different, irretrievably.

In my case I am now in the early stages of a new and major activity I want to tell you about, that is, what may now

happen as a result of my wife’s five-year ordeal—I am very sure she did not die in vain. First, it may be helpful to the reader to note some of my earlier “major projects.”

Project One

I gave several years to developing, with others, the global movement called Theological Education by Extension, which has been aimed at the plight of at least two million “functional pastors” in mission lands being neglected while 4000 mission schools train young, untried youth to replace them.

Project Two

I gave a hunk of time to developing, with others, a major center in Pasadena (from which this bulletin derives) designed to focus on the frontiers of missions, that is, to discover and to tackle major dimensions of need in the mission movement. The most prominent need we recognized was to refocus missions from working in *countries* to work specifically with “*peoples*.”

A second need was to reclaim in people’s minds the Old Testament as the starting point of missions, the Abrahamic Covenant to be seen as the beginning of the Great Commission. A spin-off of that idea has been the now large network for the course called Perspectives on the World Christian Movement. (See pp. 38, 39.)

Basic to this period was not only the establishment of the Center and the acquisition of related property but the founding of a mission society which would be the owner and operator of the entire project—now a highly dedicated community of 56 families in some ways more important than the Center itself.

Project Three

However, once the Center in

Pasadena was established, my next ten years were mostly invested, with others, in the rewriting of the content of the entire liberal arts and seminary curricula into a single, integrated 4,000-year story. This novel new curriculum employs 100 textbooks and hundreds of additional chapters and articles, but is essentially a single picture putting together the jigsaw puzzle pieces of what is otherwise a long list of “courses” which are unintegrated fragments of that picture. This new way of being educated, designed to be a more efficient way forward for national leaders around the world, is now already in use by various colleges and universities in this country and abroad as an M.A. degree, an undergraduate final two years, and in a reduced form as a first college year. Very exciting.

Final Project?

I’m getting old. My 50-year companion is gone. My perhaps “final” task is to tackle the most difficult-to-explain problem of all, and to explain the reasons for the Roberta Winter Institute.

This is where my wife’s long-drawn-out illness and suffering has played a major role. Even before she was waylaid by a mysterious bone-marrow cancer, I had puzzled over the artificial separation in our theological and missionary heritage of the “natural” world from the “spiritual” world, and especially our dulled senses to the truly horrifying amount of violence which is seen at every point in nature. That violence comes home to human beings, and particularly on the mission field, in the form of crime and terrorism, but *especially in the form of the tiny terrorists of rampant and dangerous disease*.

Sure, Christians along with others have been wonderfully active in *curing* or *treating* disease, even in the *prevention* of disease. But our theological heritage begins to stumble at the question of our declaring war, in the Name of Christ, on all disease, and seeking the total *eradication* of all disease-causing pathogens. Why? Yet, along with a widely acknowledged new understanding (of DNA and all that) we have now inherited vast new opportunity and *unacknowledged new responsibility*.

This has been long in coming. Certain scholars have recently pointed out that Augustine, 1600 years ago, was the one who prominently failed to understand disease and violence as something 1) not only within God’s

This new challenge for missions ... may radically add power and beauty to the very concept of the God we preach, and thus become a new and vital means of glorifying God among the nations.

sovereignty, since “He has not ceased to rule from the galaxies to the atom,” but 2) *essentially the initiative of a superhuman, evil person.*

Reacting against Manicheism, Augustine went too far in theologizing that it is good enough to think merely of a sovereign God who in some sense sends all harm and suffering, and *not also to fight against the works of a Biblical Satan whose destructive intelligence differently explains violence and suffering in nature.*

It makes a difference. When the famous theologian, Jonathan Edwards, sought to defeat smallpox, the pastors of Massachusetts warned him that in doing so he would be “interfering with Divine Providence.” When he tragically killed himself tinkering with the newly-developed vaccine, they assumed that he was fighting against God, who thus had to kill him.

To condense a long story

I have come to believe that my wife might not have died of cancer, Robertson McQuilkin’s wife might not have been knocked out by Alzheimer’s disease for the last twenty years, John Wimber might not have died of heart disease, if if if if!!!! Christian believers had properly and biblically taken seriously a search-and-destroy mission for the pathogens producing these diseases.

God *could* have healed these dear people, but maybe He has expected us to draw some conclusions and “declare a war” on tiny terrorists as well as big ones. The small/invisible terrorists attack and kill more people every day of the week than were put to death by the collapse of those New York city towers. *In a year they torture and kill 365 times as many.*

But Calvin and Luther were unaware of germs. We know things they did not know. Yet, we Christians, we missionaries have not sought to engage this enormous enemy with anything like the vigor with which we teach our young people to throw balls through hoops and our retired people to bat little balls across meadows.

Thus, the Roberta Winter Institute

Twenty thousand dollars has already come in to get it started. Roberta and I

www.missionfrontiers.org

pledged a \$5,000 prize we received three years ago. Christy Wilson on his death-bed urged a \$5,000 gift in his memory be given to this project. A staff member here wrote out a personal check for \$1,000.

Well, of course, we do not yet spend sufficient time to know exactly what to do with certain tiny global terrorists, like malaria. Missions spend at least \$500 million per year raising children up, only to see four die of malaria every sixty seconds. Why not raise an extra \$5 or \$10 million for an all-out war against the source of this pathogen which terrorizes 300 million new people each year, and is lapping at our doorstep in the United States. *Would this not glorify God? Is our God properly described as unaware of these tiny terrorists?*

Many friendly people have implied to me and to my wife, before she died, that Jesus could heal any disease and that it only takes faith to make it happen. Okay. Why did Jesus heal? One missionary reminded me that healing people does not get them into heaven. But what *can* attract people to heaven is preaching a God who was, and still is, deeply concerned about physical deformities and disease and suffering, and is not simply in the business—perish the thought—of inflicting people with pain to deepen their spiritual lives. *If that is God’s initiative, why did His Son go around relieving people of pain?*

The primary focus of this new institute will not be laboratory science but public and mission awareness of the need for a new theological sensitivity for destroying the works of the devil.

It is truly astonishing how much greater we can make the impact of our missionary evangelism if the true spectrum of concern of our loving God is made clear and is backed up by serious attention not only to treating illness but to eradicating the evil causes, the works of the devil.

If it is true that “the works of God are to declare His glory”, then every missionary needs to carry with him both a telescope and a microscope!

For example, missionaries in West Africa for a hundred years have merely “lived with” an evil microbe called Guinea Worm. This pathogen starts out as a tiny bundle in your drinking water,

too small to see with the naked eye. Within your body it grows destructively into a 32-inch snake, eventually breaking the skin and winding out slowly over a period of weeks. You can’t pull it out or it may break off and kill you. You must gradually “spool” it out, winding it on a stick. *Did God design this?*

Honestly, *has anyone ever identified this pathogen as a work of the devil to be destroyed in the Name of Christ?*

Apparently not. Our passivity declares that God doesn’t know or care or is unable to do anything about such things! All we normally offer to our followers around the world is 1) sympathy, 2) a suspension of criticism of a good God for the evil in this world, 3) admonitions to be resigned to the pain and suffering while awaiting God’s making some good out of the evil, and 4) a way out of this world into eternity.

However, in the case of Guinea Worm, 600,000 people were afflicted twenty years ago. Yet the number now is almost down to zero. Why? Because one Christian layman visiting in West Africa — not a missionary, not a pastor, not a theologian — decided to return to the U.S. and muster efforts to eradicate this pathogen, “to wipe it from the face of the earth.” That was Jimmy Carter.

This new challenge for missions could lead to a drastic reduction in our annual outlay to care for diseased people (it being the chief factor in poverty). And it may radically add power and beauty to the very concept of the God we preach, and thus become a new and vital means of glorifying God among the nations.

Let’s be realistic

Many honest souls, both on the mission field and also in our secularized world, are not dramatically impressed by a God that cannot be bothered to conquer and exterminate the evil bugs that cause disease, but can mainly only offer a ticket to heaven. Declaring war on disease may be the only way to restore the full power of true evangelism.

Why? It may readily be that young people on the mission field (and here at home) will grow up and ask the embarrassing questions,

(continued on page 37)