



## The wise missionary will sense the high value God places on those few who truly seek Him.

Ralph D. Winter



Dear Reader,

Islam won't go away. However, Bush did not declare war on Islam, but against terrorists. Yet many people assume that we need to fight a war against the Muslim world.

Is all talk of "war" out of place? Is war against Islam out of place?

First let's revisit the whole matter of "war talk."

### Heaven is a side issue — War is central

We must understand that getting people to heaven is merely a by-product of missions.

Missions does not boil down to persuading people that they ought to say certain things, and go through certain motions in order to make sure they will get to heaven.

Rather, missions consists, first of all, of introducing people to the Living God. The best way to do this is to enable them to meet His Son, Jesus Christ, in the scriptures, and for them to yield to Him as their Lord and Savior.

What happens then? Do they just get a ticket to heaven to stash away in their wallets and forget until the day comes? No. They now have a *permanent family relationship with God the Father*. They inherit His love and forgiveness and His purposes, His mission, His task, *His war*.

*They have now enlisted in the army of the Kingdom of God* and if faithful and obedient to their commander in chief are thrust into the same knock-down-drag-out battle in which Jesus, Stephen, and Paul were persecuted.



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This battle is the same both before and after Christ, in which thousands of His faithful followers—due to their faith—have been "tortured ... faced jeers and flogging ... put in prison ... stoned ... sawed in two ... put to death by the sword ... went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them ... they wandered in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground ... we must therefore fix our eyes on Jesus ... who ... (similarly) endured the cross, scorning the shame (Heb 11: 36-38, 12:2)."

Oh, yes, of course, those people did (and they do) glorious things as well, and the defenses of hell will not be able to stand against them.

But the point here is that *missions is another label for a global conflict between the forces of God and glaring, rampant, unavoidable evil*.

*Each of us is a warrior in that conflict, with Eternal Life as a precious permanent possession, but with hardship and struggle and suffering in the meantime.*

Why then is our faith so often promoted merely as a means of wonder and prosperity? In this do we fail to understand the Bible? Yes.

### What about Muslims?

This issue of *Mission Frontiers* focuses on what might be called "the black hole of Central Asia." But to call it that would be a serious mistake. It would be the same mistake Abraham made when he said to himself before entering the domain of Abimelech, "these people have no fear of God."

After the massive new interest in Islam following 9/11, we find most Americans make two major mistakes when they think about Muslims.

1. They think Muslims are spiritually unresponsive, when in fact many are true, humble seekers of God who already highly regard Jesus.

2. They think the cultural and political background of Islam is ignominious when in fact it was illustrious, for centuries outstripping Western Christendom. (See my later comments.)

### 1. True Seekers?

Our normal theology does not encourage us to weigh properly the important fact that there are some true seekers after God among Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Mormons, Muslims, etc. For that matter, we recognize that there are some true seekers after God among Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, Episcopalians, etc.

Obviously, just to be a true seeker is not enough, although we tend to believe that if such a person is also a Presbyterian or Baptist he or she is probably going to heaven.

That is, we emphasize the intellectual, theological content of a Protestant denomination more highly, perhaps, than we do the value of a person being a true seeker after God.

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### The unwise missionary will not look especially for seekers, but for those he can get to assent to a set of intellectual doctrines.

The wise missionary will sense the high value God places on those few who truly seek Him, and will nourish those seeds of faith, expecting that effort to reproduce the Word of Good News.

### 2. Illustrious Muslim Background?

The bombshell of the Greek Bible influenced people in all directions. Thus resulted Greek believers, Latin believers, and Semitic believers. By Muhammed's day, however, the faith had been taken over and monopolized by the harsh, powerful, and hated Roman Empire.

So, Muhammed did for the Semitic peoples what Luther would later do (far more effectively) for the non-Latin European peoples. He initiated a Semitic and anti-Roman form of faith which immediately swept millions of Rome-shy, Rome-fearing and Rome-hating

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populations (many nominally Christian) into an alternate form of faith, theoretically Bible-based.

Copying hugely from the Christians, he was greatly limited by the fact that the only Christians he knew had only parts of the Bible and drastically misunderstood the Trinity, a view which Muhammed (rightly) rejected. Every word of the traditional Muslim liturgy in mosques was borrowed from Christian, Samaritan and Jewish sources. He prayed to Allah, as had Arabic Christians for 500 years before him.

Like Joseph Smith and the Mormons, Muhammed and the Muslims developed an additional "book," that is, they developed, respectively, the Book of Mormon and the Qur'an. The word "Allah" as represented in the Christians' Bible was fine but when embedded in the Qur'an took on a new twist. Today 30 million Christians still pray to Allah and read that word for God in their Bibles. But those who know only the Qur'an think of Allah differently.

The Qur'an is confusing. Muslims

who read only a few pages of the Gospels are powerfully surprised and attracted to the Bible. That's what they need! Truly seeking Muslims are usually eager to know more about Jesus.

But today the stress and irritation, the despair and fury of the Muslims is their lost empire, their lost greatness. It is something Christians long envied. Now the situation is (to Muslims) puzzlingly the reverse.

How about a scholarly assessment written prior to 9/11?

For five centuries, from 700 to 1200, Islam led the world in power, order, and extent of government, in refinement of manners, in standards of living, in humane legislation and religious toleration, in literature, scholarship, science, medicine, and philosophy. ... Muslim medicine led the world for half a millennium ... Only at the peaks of history has a society produced, in an equal period, so many illustrious men—in government, education, literature, philology, geography, history, mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, philosophy, and medicine. (Will Durant, *The Age of Faith*, pp. 341-343)

But then, weakened by the Crusades, ravaged by the Mongols, outdone by the Christians' printing of the Bible, they went from a number equal to the number of Christians in Luther's day to half the number of Christians today.

The Bible plus Gutenberg made the difference. Muslims could not make mass copies of the Koran with movable type, due to the way they wrote their letters. Massive reproductions of the Koran would not have done them much good anyway.

The Christians mass-produced the Bible. This powerful new factor slowly but surely elevated relatively primitive forest Christians into scholars and scientists and insights equal or greater than the Mediterranean civilization. Four hundred years thrust Christians way ahead—Muslims for the most part having no way to catch up.

Can we freely recognize how much we learned from them in the past? Can we share our Bible with them? Millions of them are waiting for this. 🌐

## Do Spanish-Speakers Deserve Operation World? **Yes!**

An Appeal and Invitation from the USCWM



Millions of praying Spanish-speakers would be blessed (and would extend that blessing) if they could read the acclaimed *Operation World* prayer handbook in their language. Therefore, we have been working with other ministries to see *Operation World* translated and printed in Spanish, hopefully to become available in early 2005.

*However ... a make-or-break question is whether we can assure sales of enough copies through pre-publication orders.* Such orders must be in case lots — an estimated 16 books per case, and an estimated \$6 per book, and therefore a projected cost per case of \$96 (shipping included).

Are you (or others you know) interested in a pre-publication purchase (one or more cases) of the Spanish edition of *Operation World*? We need to know no later than October 31 (but the sooner, the better). To place your pre-publication order or to make inquiries, write to [spanishOW@uscwm.org](mailto:spanishOW@uscwm.org). Thank you!

P.S. Let me clarify that the USCWM is not making any money on this project; in fact, we will receive no funds. Instead, we are contributing staff time and out-of-pocket expenses to promote the common good. If you are interested in helping financially to get this book to people who can use it, please e-mail us at [spanishOW@uscwm.org](mailto:spanishOW@uscwm.org).

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