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Ralph D. Winter



Dear Reader,

I made a big mistake last time. To some readers I gave the impression that I don't believe in the Trinity.

I was talking about Mohammed borrowing heavily from the Christian tradition—Islam's use of the word *Allah*, or even praying five times a day, etc. I said at one point,

Copying hugely from the Christians, he [Mohammed] 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.

That is, Muhammed rejected a heretical view of the Trinity. I said he did that rightly, just as we today also reject that same heretical concept of the Trinity (tritheism). But to some readers I seemed to suggest that I also reject the right view of the Trinity—which I certainly did not intend to do.

On Hating Islam

Other readers were quite upset about the nice things I said about some Muslims being great scholars, from whom Christians learned a great deal. (See the quote below.) Yet some Muslims today have an inferiority complex. Even if they know quite a bit about the eminence of much of their past, *they only know that most Americans know nothing about it and give them no credit for it.*

My thought last time was that as we approach Muslims today, they need to feel we appreciate much of their history. As it is, we hear about Muslim atrocities down through history and they hear about Christian atrocities down through history.



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Scholars who know both histories, such as Dr. Dudley Woodberry at Fuller Seminary, feel confident that on the whole the Muslims were more tolerant than Christians! I will paste in here my quote last time from an eminent scholar:

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)

I feel that we gain nothing by closing our eyes to the immense input we Christians received from Islamic and Islamic-sponsored scholars, both before and especially after the Crusades. The unerasable fact that we Western Christians could rise from a violent, forest people and then, with the Bible in print, go far beyond Islam in a short time is what extols and magnifies the Bible and our faith!

Can't we say we have nothing more important to boast about than the Bible? The distinct embarrassment of leading families in the Middle East (who for many decades have sent their young to Western universities for schooling) more easily proves the superior power of the Bible than it does an innate superiority of race. People in Great Britain started out as headhunters, and some were still drinking out of skulls as late as the 16th century.

The great irony is that while Muslims are puzzled and infuriated at how we got ahead of them, Christians in the West

also have no idea what lifted them out of savagery.

I recall the time I was in seminary at Princeton, and my wife Roberta was doing special-duty nursing at the Princeton Hospital. Her patient was the wife of the university treasurer. One day, when I came to pick up Roberta, this patient saw me and asked Roberta to invite me in.

As I crossed the threshold, she skewered me with, "So you're the one who's going to be a missionary." I groped for an answer and decided to change the subject. I said, "Tell me about your family background in Europe." (People on the East Coast are often fond of tracing their roots.)

She answered proudly, "My people are from Ireland." I suddenly found myself saying, "Well, you should have seen the Irish before the missionaries got there."

At that time I only knew the Irish were tribal people. Later I learned a lot more about their head-hunting raids, their skill at treating a skull so it could be used for drinking, etc. (Yet soon the Irish became great lovers and scholars of the Bible.)

We should take note that some of the Muslim terrorists are very devout people, just as many of the leaders of our Crusades were very devout. For example, our Bibles give

detailed instructions about stoning to death a refractory son, and the genocide of whole peoples—men, women, and children. The Qu'ran does similar things. But we have the New Testament, and that makes a huge difference.

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On Weighing the Remaining Task

Do write me with your comments. Email to rdw112233@aol.com. But I must get to the important theme of this issue of *Mission Frontiers*: finishing the task.

No matter how you take your Christian faith, you cannot escape the insistent question, "What does God expect you to do with it?" No Christian is expected just to survive and thrive as an individual. "He who saves his life will lose it," Jesus said.

Missions happens to be the peculiar, exciting, and puzzling task of working out God's will *within other cultures*.

Both before and after a seed fellowship or movement is planted, we need to be sure we see as much as possible of the larger task of all God wants us to be and to do.

Missionaries are especially blessed by the opportunity to see astounding results of their efforts.

But all of us believers everywhere are under orders to give "Our Utmost for His Highest." In this bulletin we highlight the least and the most-difficult-to-reach groups of people on earth.

In this issue and the next we present major run-downs of the task of creating a basic breakthrough into all of the world's remaining groups. It is a large but entirely feasible thing to complete such breakthroughs. Even though that is not the end of the task of the Great Commission, at least the establishment of a viable, indigenous, evangelizing fellowship within all the world's groups is a *finishable task*. Just counting up how many groups is an even earlier, finishable task. Unfortunately, some people think that is about all there is to do.

The best of mission insight tells us that deciding what is a coherent group only *enables* the making of the "missionological breakthrough" mentioned above. Both before and after such a seed fellowship or movement is planted, we need to be sure we see as much as possible of the larger task of all God wants us to be and to do.

Curiously, we cannot even make that breakthrough *effectively* if we don't see the larger picture.

When I was a teenager I used to haunt the bookstore of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (now Biola University). I was convinced the most important verse in the Bible was "*He that winneth souls is wise.*" Now, as I look back, I perceive actually four levels of strategy, all valid, but all interdependent.

As a teenager I was thinking most about the first level:

Level 1: Getting people saved, getting them a ticket to heaven. This is where "the angels of heaven rejoice when one sinner repents." Bedrock.

Later I began to realize how much more is implied by the phrase:

Level 2: Winning people to Christ. This phrase says nothing about getting to heaven but it focuses on a new and eternal relationship as part of God's heavenly family. This is even more powerful.

Years later the Bible itself began

to press home to me something even more basic:

Level 3: Glorifying God in all the earth. How?

First, by displaying His glory—in the face of Jesus Christ. That is, knowing Him as a person, His character, His purposes, His unexpected sensitivities with the sick, the poor, women, Greeks (Gentiles). Also, "All Thy works shall praise Thy Name." "The heavens declare the glory of God and the earth displays his handiwork ... there is no speech or language where their voice is not heard."

But presenting God's glory is difficult if we misunderstand His person. If, in fact, we forget or underestimate the power of the opposition ("the god of this world"), people may think that all hardship, suffering, and violence is God-initiated, so:

Level 4: Destroying the works of the Devil.

"The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the Devil (1 Jn 3:8)."

In my old age it has become forcefully obvious that as long as many believers and non-believers attribute all bad things to God (instead of the Devil, as works of the Devil), our attempts to glorify God are blunted, muffled, weakened. Hear the words of a pastor with a doctorate in science from MIT:

According to Scripture, the universe was originally good and the glory of God is still evident in it (Rom 1:20). But something else—something frightfully wicked—is evident in it as well. Of their own free will, Satan and other spiritual beings rebelled against God in the primordial past and now abuse their God-given authority over certain aspects of creation. Satan, who holds the power of death (Heb. 2:14), exercises a pervasive, structural, diabolic influence to the point that the entire creation is in bondage to decay. The pain-ridden, bloodthirsty, sinister and hostile character of nature should be attributed to Satan and his army, not to God. Jesus' earthly ministry reflected the belief that the world had been seized by a hostile, sinister lord. Jesus came to take it back.

Are we willing to help Him "take it back"? Can we help restore glory to God? Won't that empower evangelism?

This little-known strategy needs a bit of explanation because in much of

Evangelicalism "the Christian calling" really only affects our lives "after hours." That "new life" has to do with meeting in small groups for Bible study, in work groups to paint dilapidated school buildings, in helping ghetto kids after-hours. Everything is *after-hours* and as such is often in the category of "band-aid," cosmetics, token assistance. It's all to the good, but, meanwhile, Biblical integrity is not being stressed for believers in their eight-hour day.

Were some of the Enron cheaters Sunday School teachers? Did their faith carry over into the work day?

How about the fact that between 70 and 80 percent of California Highway Patrolmen retire with a pension *and* a hefty disability income? Are some of these officers of the law in church every Sunday?

After hours band-aid is not enough. It does not address the fact that the *LA Times* has run an article of four full pages over two days, beginning on the front page, about the incredible wealth, the lavish spending and the alcohol-drenched executive meetings of the Trinity Broadcasting Network—the most extensive Christian network—while the legal corporation behind all this is essentially a mom-and-pop outfit.

We must go further than part-time Christianity if the essentially unregulated pharmaceutical industry is going to go on paralyzing our Congress, the National Institutes of Health, and even the FDA with its enormous financial power and extensive deceptions. This is now well established by a recent flurry of serious books and articles. See the book by the outgoing editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine*—Dr. Marcia Angell's *The Truth about the Drug Companies*.

We read all the time about believers all around the world losing their lives for holding to their faith. Yet we don't hear very often of U.S. churchgoers losing their jobs for sticking up for the truth.

Glorifying God is not just singing, "Glory, glory, glory," it is *demonstrating* that glory, making our work our ministry and our ministry our work. *If we do that, we will run into opposition, accusations and trouble—a war!* That is Level 4. ☺