

IS OURS A HOPELESS CAUSE?

Freeing the captives is costly...but worth it.

by Paul Carden

Centers For Apologetics Research
P.O. Box 1196
San Juan Capistrano
CA 92693 USA
TheCenters@aol.com
www.TheCenters.org

Tel: 949.496.2000
Fax: 949.496.2244

*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.
Luke 19:10*

In the last couple of weeks, two compelling chapters from African history have challenged and encouraged me by their startling relevance to our calling. I discovered the first in the missions newsletter *Pulse*. Editor-at-large Jim Reapsome recounts that “One of the magnificent late 19th-century British military expeditions conquered no new lands for Queen Victoria. You won’t find it mentioned in standard history books, but because of the monumental logistics [involved], military historians compare the landing in Ethiopia in 1868 to the Allies’ invasion of France in 1944.” To most modern minds, the motivation behind this effort must seem astonishing. He explains:

In 1868 Emperor Theodore III of Ethiopia held a group of 53 European captives (30 adults and 23 children), including some missionaries, in a remote, 9,000-foot high bastion deep in the interior. Among them were a British consul and a special diplomatic emissary sent to secure the release of the prisoners. By letter, Queen Victoria pleaded in vain with Theodore to release the captives. Finally, the government ordered a full-scale military expedition from India to march into Ethiopia — not to conquer the country and make it a British colony, but simply to rescue a tiny band of civilians who had suffered in prison for more than four years.

The invasion force included 32,000 men, heavy artillery, and 44 elephants to carry the big guns. Provisions included 50,000 tons of beef and pork and 30,000 gallons of rum. Engineers built landing piers, water treatment plants, a railroad, and [a] telegraph line into the interior, plus many bridges. All of this to fight one decisive battle, after which the prisoners were released, and everyone packed up and went home.

Reapsome concludes: “Their expedition was courageous, tough, and very costly. To the British, the prize was worth the cost. When the church realizes that obedience to Jesus, and the lives of the prisoners, are worth the cost, Christians will mobilize rescue operations to bring their full power to bear on the fortresses of fear, desperation, and darkness.”

The second example came to me in an article in the December 6 *Los Angeles Times*. Its author, historian Adam Hochschild, recently wrote an account of the Congo Free State entitled *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa*. Hochschild tells the amazing story of the Congo reform movement, an unprecedented international campaign to end atrocities in central Africa committed by rapacious Belgian authorities under Leopold II who were bent on stripping the vast colony of its natural wealth and subduing its native population by any means necessary.

(Due to their mind-numbing barbarity, between 1880 and 1920 the territory's population "was slashed in half," from some 20 million to 10 million.) Hochschild writes:

For a time, the outside world knew little about what was happening in the Congo. One remarkable man changed this. Edmund Dene Morel was in his mid-20s, a junior official of a British shipping line that had the monopoly on cargo traffic to and from the Congo. Every few weeks, his company sent him to the Belgian port of Antwerp to supervise the loading and unloading of ships on the Congo run. Morel noticed that vessels arrived laden with enormously valuable cargoes of ivory and rubber but returned to Africa carrying no trading goods. Instead, they ferried mainly soldiers, firearms and ammunition. With horror, he realized there could be only one possible source of all this rubber and ivory: forced labor, on a massive scale. He was right. Morel quit his job and, within a few years, became the greatest British investigative journalist of his time. A man of torrential energy, he devoted a decade of 16-hour days to putting the story of Congo rubber slavery on the world's front pages....

Morel and his fellow reformers found themselves up against a sophisticated international public-relations machine that cynically used celebrities like explorer Henry Morton Stanley to portray Leopold's rule as benign — even humanitarian; one writer has aptly likened it to "genocide with spin control." In combating these lies, the Congo reform movement "was crucial in establishing the template for the way organizations such as Amnesty International...operate today. This method includes the careful gathering and sifting of evidence; reliance on sworn testimony by eyewitnesses; the use of photographs and physical evidence to prove atrocities; and the faith that such methods of truth-telling can move large numbers of people to demand action." Morel was also a "masterful organizer," and eventually, "Everyone from the archbishop of Canterbury to U.S. university presidents joined the crusade. Between 1904 and 1913, the brutalities in the Congo were denounced at more than 1,000 mass meetings in the United States and Europe." While Hochschild readily acknowledges that, "Like most great human-rights agitators, the Congo reformers...did not quickly accomplish their aims....Nonetheless, it was the first time that millions of people in the United States and Europe concerned themselves with the fate of people in Africa" — and the Congo reform movement became the catalyst for human-rights efforts worldwide.

*...that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil,
having been taken captive by him to do his will.
2 Timothy 2:26*

In both these cases, the parallels to the mission of the Centers are striking:

First, the captives are worth reaching — and they can be reached! But unless our commitment is equal to the challenge (John 15:13), we cannot hope to succeed.

Second, the deception that holds people captive — and keeps would-be rescuers from acting — can only be countered by a bold, persistent proclamation of the truth (John 8:32).

Today, Joseph Smith, Charles Taze Russell, Mary Baker Eddy, Moses David, and L. Ron Hubbard enslave their spiritual victims from beyond the grave, and a host of celebrity spinmeisters sustains their evil cause through clever public relations. But the reality behind the marketing is stark: Over a million are ensnared by the Watchtower system in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The Mormon church is doubling in size worldwide every fifteen years — expanding by 963 percent in Africa alone between 1978 and 1993 (compared to just 82 percent in the U.S.). Countless lives are held in other spiritual prisons large and small, and the number of captives increases daily. To fully grasp the magnitude of our task, we must think not only of the millions now in bondage, but of the generations ahead. As E.D. Morel saw so clearly, such knowledge brings responsibility (Prov. 24:11–12).

From Eurasia to Latin America, the Centers are equipping Christians for the task. This outreach is still the only one of its kind. And it's making a difference.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus came to us in what must have seemed, to many, a "mission impossible." We are the fruit of that sacrificial outpouring of His love. We are His fellow-workers — if we are but willing to count the cost. 🌐



Paul Carden is the executive director of the Centers for Apologetics Research (CFAR), an international network of cult research and education agencies serving eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, Latin America, and Africa. To contact him, write to TheCenters@aol.com.

CFAR equips God's people across borders and cultures for discernment, the defense of the faith, and cult evangelism. To learn how you can help, call CFAR at (949) 496-2000 or visit our web site at www.TheCenters.org.