

# UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE

Thoughts from September 11th, 2001

by Paul Carden

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Last week I watched the World Trade Center collapse on live television. None of us can — or should — ever forget the horror of that moment, or its implications for the future of the free world.

In the days that followed, as the reality of America's new war on terrorism sank in, I was struck by the many parallels between that conflict and the Church's spiritual struggle against cultism — or the lack thereof. As President George W. Bush has so bluntly stated, America's battle against terrorism is a war unlike other wars; we must alter our assumptions accordingly. And as we consider the spiritual battle thrust upon us by the cults, we would do well to reflect on the following similarities:

**Most of us have haven't realized how extensive the danger is — and how high the stakes are.**

As in the war on terrorism, this is not a mere test of wills, but a true "clash of civilizations" — the kingdom of darkness vs. the Kingdom of Light. Many spiritual counterfeits hope to one day cripple or conquer the Body of Christ (or biblical Christianity), and their leaders have said so.

**There is no single human "enemy" — the war must be fought against multiple foes, on multiple fronts, often with a surprising variety of methods.**

Confronting Scientology with the gospel requires different strategies (and entails different risks) than does Christian Science. Approaches that work with Mormons won't necessarily win Moonies.

**Our opponents' identities are not always clear.**

They often use different names in different places, disguising their true affiliations. (The Children of God/Family cult is but one example.)

**Our opponents' footsoldiers have been surprisingly successful in infiltrating our territory — and are often aided by those we might consider our friends.**

When evangelical spokesmen like Jerry Falwell give credibility to Rev. Sun Myung Moon, or black pastors join hands with Moon in mass marriages and projects like this month's "Family Flag Day," the cause of Christ suffers genuine harm.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, unsuspecting Christians in Africa, Latin America, and the former Soviet Union are easily taken in by cultic groups offering heretical "Bible study" materials and other harmful "helps."

**Unconventional warfare calls for superior intelligence capabilities.**

I cannot overstate the importance of “apologetics research,” much of which requires us to monitor the strategy, tactics, and internal communications of cultic movements.

**Our opponents’ cause thrives on disinformation.**

At their worst, cult leaders misrepresent what the Gospel teaches and callously convince their followers that the Church is basically evil and worthy of destruction. For example, Mormonism teaches that God has condemned all Christian churches as “apostate,” and the Watchtower cult denounces “Christendom” (including your church and mine) as headed for history’s ash heap. We must oppose such lies with truth.

**We face a difficult balancing act — namely, overcoming the threat without alienating the people we hope to make our allies.**

America’s military strategists are rightly concerned about “collateral damage” — that is, violence unintentionally done to noncombatants in the course of defeating the true enemy. Similarly, none of us has the right to combat cultism by wounding with sensationalism and caricature, as some countercult apologists have done (to their shame). Such tactics harden cultists’ hearts and undermine the credibility of Christians who reach out responsibly with the gospel.

Nevertheless, there are dramatic dissimilarities that we dare not overlook:

**First, we war not against flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:12).**

The weapons of our warfare are spiritual (2 Corinthians 10:4–5), and placing false confidence in carnal wisdom and weaponry will ultimately set back our cause.

**Second, the casualties of this spiritual conflict are seldom visible to the natural eye.**

Rarely is there a demolished landmark, or images of corpses piled high, to be seared into our memories. Instead, the spiritual toll taken by cultism is in the millions — but how few mourn the victims!

**Third, in most cases, our opponents’ footsoldiers profess to wish us no harm, but trust that the counterfeit hope they offer will bring us life and happiness.**

Be sure to remember this the next time a dedicated Mormon or Jehovah’s Witness appears unexpectedly at your doorstep.

**And finally, our mission is not to capture and destroy the enemy’s footsoldiers, but to make them our beloved brothers and sisters!**

At the dawn of the 21st century, the church has yet to take seriously the threat represented by the cultic movements spreading across the world. But as well as Christians may know

a handful of hostile groups, many other enemy organizations thrive in little-noticed lands, their spiritual violence seldom opposed by those of us in the West who have the spiritual and material resources to intervene on behalf of the weak.

In the aftermath of the World Trade Center disaster and the assault on the Pentagon, most of us realize how serious future attacks on our nation could be. When will the Church awaken to the danger of cults to this — and the next — generation? Jonestown seems very far away; even the horrors of Aum’s poison gas assault, the Solar Temple suicides, Heaven’s Gate, and the Uganda massacre fade easily from memory. What catastrophe is needed to stir us to action?

My intention is not to oversimplify a profoundly serious matter; instead, I hope to remind you, as I have been reminded during these dreadful days, of the seriousness of the conflict we face: a conflict which will require much of us if we commit ourselves to it wholeheartedly — and for which we will pay an even more terrible cost if we neglect it.

We are at war! Is your arsenal rusty and covered with a fine layer of dust? Are you prepared to grasp God’s Word in combat (Eph. 6:17), believing it to be sharper than any earthly sword (Heb. 4:12)? And are you willing to render aid to God’s people in the developing world who face myriad deceivers with such meager means?

The threat is all too easy to ignore. There are many ways in which we can respond, to God’s glory and the building up of His kingdom. The question is, will we? 🗣️



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