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* Coordinating translation of the Bible for 3.7 million Wolof people
God's Word at work in S E N E G A L
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It's with a heart full of humble gratitude that I survey the past months of travels and visits. The Lord couldn't have raised up a more committed prayer team for the Wolof Bible translation project. The key to ministry in a Muslim context is long-term prayer and long-term presence. You have faithfully prayed for years (34 years, for most of you), and it was a joy this home assignment to report the explosive growth of the Serer church (16 now in the Diourbel area), the encouraging growth in the Wolof church, and progress in translation (2/3 of the Old Testament first drafted, even though we were set back by the first translator's death in 2000).

When I returned Stateside in August, the doctor discovered a lump which was dubbed "suspected malignancy." A biopsy ruled out malignancy. It was as if my full travel schedule had been taken away and given back again. And what breathtakingly beautiful country to traverse — from the Cascades through coastal sequoias to sierra sequoias — with opportunities to visit family on the way. As I write this, I'm with my folks for Christmas, and praise God that though their bodies are aging, their minds are still alert. It is a great help that my brother Glenn, a medical doctor, lives next door; and my brother Stephen 10 miles distant.

Some channels of God's provision this home assignment

Mary Anne's brother Jim and his wife, Carolyn, provided a home base in Orting, Washington. Tommy Underwood (New Beginnings Auto Sales, Puyallup, Washington) supplied us with reliable cars. A California couple provided a mobile phone. Riverpark Bible Church provided three days of personal spiritual retreat at Hume Lake, California. Many hosts and hostesses gave me lodging, food and travel orientation, and set my heart rejoicing on the road as I thought about answers to prayers you shared with me.



Answers to prayer requests mentioned in my August prayer letter

1. The five believers imprisoned in a restricted access country were freed.
2. God gave safe travels through Idaho, Washington, Oregon and California (over 10,000 miles).

Further prayer requests:

- January 4-6 WorldVenture Senegal field meets for strategy planning (Mary Anne will be there).
- January 5-25 After stops in Santa Rosa, California; Colorado; Ft Worth, Texas; Chicago area; Plymouth, Wisconsin; and Grand Rapids, Michigan; I am scheduled to return to Senegal January 27.
- Mamadou finished Proverbs and is translating the Minor Prophets. In order to prepare 2 Samuel for its consultant check in August, we must prepare a second draft to send to reviewers and checkers.
- Mamadou hopes to study 2nd year Hebrew in Israel, in the spring of 2008.
- Gerald and Alice Harkins continue studies and support discovery on the East Coast.

Long range plans

I'm not planning to retire until age 70 (6 1/2 years hence), health permitting. Mary Anne plans to retire in the spring of 2009. Before her retirement, we expect to move away from Diourbel, closer to the cooler coast.

In October, with the help of First Baptist Church of Eugene, Oregon, we purchased a house in Springfield, Oregon (directly east of Eugene), as an investment. A property manager in the church will manage it while we are in Senegal. Mary Anne is hoping to live there for awhile after she retires.

Long-term prayer

If there's one prayer request I wanted to share this home assignment, it is that God would reveal to Muslims their need for the Savior, and that Jesus Christ is the only Savior. Helps for praying for Muslims follow. Please do not release page two into the public domain. If you did not receive my e-mail Thanksgiving update in November, please send me your e-mail address. If you wish to receive the four-page document from which the following helps were abridged, let me know. May this new year draw us all into a closer walk with our Lord.

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Understanding Islam for informed prayer

(Koranic verses are from *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* by Marmaduke Pickthall, New American Library, Inc. [Q]).

Doctrinal issues

God loves those who are obedient Q 5:93. (In Christianity, God loves — sacrificially reaches out to redeem — the sinner.) Muslims believe man is basically good, though God created him weak. Q 4:28. This dulls a sense of personal guilt. After Adam ate the forbidden fruit, God punished him by banishing him from paradise, but man is able to earn his way back. All he needs is right guidance. Q 4:176; 5:16. He has no need of substitutionary sacrificial atonement. Sin has to do with commission and omission. (In Christianity, the thoughts and intentions of the heart are in focus).

In orthodox (pure) Islam, there is no room for an intermediary, savior or redeemer.

In folk Islam, God is irrelevant to meeting man's felt daily needs. Instead, one seeks an intermediary to whom God has given power to contact and manipulate the spirit world. Thus God's power may be manipulated magically, apart from any relationship with him personally. This is the primary form of Islam in Senegal and many other countries where the traditional religion has been mixed with Islam. In Senegal many Muslims are members of Brotherhoods, where they commit their eternal destiny to their Muslim teacher, who is expected to intercede for them on judgment day. A woman depends on her husband to intercede for her on judgment day.

The Islamists are inspired by the totalitarian ideology of Sayyid Qutb (born in Cairo in 1906). Their aim is to attack false Muslims, unite the Muslim world under one state based on the Qur'an and Shari'ah (Muslim law), and take this rule of theocrats to the rest of the world. The Islamists stand against the "Christian" West and against moderate Muslims (such as one finds in Senegal, where a majority [95 percent] Muslim population is ruled by a secular state).

Misunderstandings a Muslim may have concerning Christians

1. Many Muslims view Christians as idolaters, who believe in three gods: God the Father, God the Son, and Mary. Q 4:171; Q 5:116.
2. Muslims perceive Christians as blasphemers, because Christians call Jesus the Son of God (which the Muslim interprets to mean God physically begat Jesus as a human father begets his son.) Q 5:72, 75.
3. Christians are immoral. They smoke, drink alcoholic beverages, and eat pork, all of which are forbidden to the Muslim.

Obstacles for the Wolof to becoming a Christian

1. The perception is that to become a Christian is to lose one's cultural identity. To be Wolof is to be Muslim.
2. To become a Christian is to be ostracized by family and friends, and so lose one's livelihood and network of social security.
3. Many a Wolof ties his practice of traditional African religion to his practice of Islam. His source of power is in the realm of spirits, and in intermediaries who can manipulate them.
4. Christians are resented, because the Roman Catholic French colonized Senegal, with a policy of assimilation ("you have no legitimate culture and language; we will teach you ours.").

Why the Wolof people are more resistant to the gospel than the Serer

1. The Wolof are more hierarchically structured than the Serer. Many have committed their eternal destiny to their Muslim teacher.
2. The Wolof are more thoroughly Islamicized than the Serer. There are a percentage of Roman Catholics among the Serer that one doesn't find among the Wolof.
3. Wolof are higher on the political and economic scale. They feel no need for upward mobility, as do the Serer. (A follower of traditional African religion feels a need to become a member of a world religion such as Islam or Christianity.)

Scripture to turn into prayer (adapted from the NIV)

John 16:8: Convict them of sin. Ezek. 11:19, 27: Remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh, an undivided heart ... Put a new Spirit within them and cause them to walk in your statutes. Dt. 30:6: Circumcise their hearts that they might love you. 2Ti. 2:25: Grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth. Ac. 16:14: Open their hearts to believe. Mt. 16:17: Reveal to them their need of a Savior and that Jesus is the only Savior. Ro.10:2-3: Overcome the hardness that's in them (cf. 9:16: ... depends not on man's will but God's mercy).

Suggestions for relating to Muslims:

1. Learn from Jesus. He witnessed in a context similar to that of the Muslim context: monotheistic, preoccupied with external ritual purity and performance, having little concept of a suffering Messiah. To teach, he asked questions, spoke in parables, and used words that were deliberately ambiguous.
2. Begin with hospitality, greatly valued among Muslims. But do not serve pork, alcoholic beverages, or cook with lard or alcohol.
3. Give and receive with your right hand or both hands. Carry your Bible in your right hand, holding it above the waist. Use an unmarked Bible in your witness to Muslims.
4. Don't be reticent about praying before Muslims. They think Christians don't pray. Some come to Christ after seeing God answer prayer offered in Jesus' name.
5. Ask your Muslim friend to share what he believes about God. Religion is a welcome, open topic in Muslim circles.
6. Avoid giving negative commentary on Mohammed. Emphasize that you believe in the one true God. Rather than arguing about issues (such as the Trinity), encourage your friend to read the Bible, and let it speak for itself.
7. Use the chronological approach. 24 Biblical characters are mentioned in the Koran as "prophets." Build a bridge from what you have in common — the prophets — to where you differ — that the prophets foretold the coming of the Savior, who would die to take the punishment for the sins of the world. Avoid saying "our sin," which the Muslim would interpret as meaning "sins of Christians." Emphasize the assurance of salvation a believer has in Christ. A book written for Muslims which follows the chronological approach is *All that the Prophets Have Spoken*. Order at www.goodseed.com or by phone: toll free (Idaho) 1-888-654-7333.

Marilyn Escher, December 2006.