



Remembering 9/11 and 11/4

By Dr. George Murray
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Jesus said, "I will build my church," and Nov. 4, 2001 was a significant day in church history, because of what happened on that date in India.

In that Hindu country, there are over 250 million people who are classified as Dalits, or "untouchables." In the Hindu caste system, these people are at the very bottom. They are denied almost all human rights, including an education, live in dire poverty, and are relegated to the most menial of tasks. But in 2000, the Dalits "rose up" in protest and announced that on Nov. 4, 2001 they would hold a massive rally in New Delhi, India, at which time they would renounce Hinduism and adopt another major world religion. Their leader invited representatives of other religions especially Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity to meet with him prior to the rally and discuss reasons why the Dalits should "convert" to their religion. Islam was extremely attractive to the Dalits because the Muslim leaders were promising huge economic assistance based on their vast oil reserves.

And then, less than two months before the planned Dalit rally in India, the horrific events of Sept. 11, 2001, perpetrated by Muslim extremists, took place in America. At that time I was serving as the president of Columbia International University, and along with much of the world, the CIU family was

stunned at the events of that day.

In late October I learned of the Dalit rally that was being planned for early November. Several days before the rally, I told the student body

about the upcoming Dalit gathering, what was at stake, and asked any of them who could, to skip supper and join me that evening in Pamplin auditorium to fast and pray earnestly for the Dalits and their upcoming decision. I was hoping for a group of 20-30 students. To my surprise, when I arrived at the auditorium at 6:00 p.m., the auditorium's 200 seats were filled, with additional students sitting on the floor and in the aisles. The atmosphere was electric and Spirit-filled as the praying went on and on!

I had to slip out of the prayer meeting early for an off-campus meeting. When I returned at 9:00 p.m., I went back to Pamplin Auditorium and found many of our students still gathered in small groups throughout the room, continuing to pray for the Dalits. I eventually left the meeting to get a good night's sleep, and honestly don't know how late our students stayed and prayed. Did that time of fasting and praying have any effect on the Nov. 4 rally? I believe it did.

Several hundred thousand Dalits gathered, and listened to speeches from Muslim, Buddhist and Christian speakers. Significantly, even though Islam seemed to be "winning the day" in the period leading up to the Nov. 4 rally, when the terrorist attack on Sept.

11 took place, the Dalits said to the Muslim leaders "if this is how Islam operates, thanks, but no thanks." And they decided to NOT adopt Islam. If the Dalits had embraced Islam, India would have become the largest Muslim nation in the world since 160 million people in India are already Muslims.

On Nov. 4, the Dalits did renounce Hinduism as their "official" religion, but as a group, did not embrace another world religion. The leader of the Dalits at that time, Ram Raj, personally chose to convert from Hinduism to Buddhism, and many other Dalit people doubtless followed his example. But the official renunciation of Hinduism on the part of the Dalits as a whole has "opened a door" and given the Dalit people the freedom to choose a different religion, including the biblical, historic Christian faith.

This account helps to answer two important questions. The first is, "Does God hear and answer prayer?" The second question is: "Is God still in

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control, and can anything good have possibly been a result of the horrendous events of Sept. 11, 2001?" In the case of both questions, I believe the answer is a resounding "yes." And years from now, looking back, I believe that Nov. 4, 2001, and what happened in India on that date, will be a significant event listed in church history books. ❖

Photo courtesy of Gospel for Asia.