

Editorial Reflections

Evolution Again

All it took was an off-hand comment by Bush about Intelligent Design and we now have *TIME Magazine* coming out the very next Monday (Aug. 8, issue dated Aug. 15, 2005) with a cover story entitled, *Evolution Wars: The push to teach "Intelligent Design" raises a question: Does God have a place in science class?*

A couple days before the *Christian Post* newspaper (www.christianpost.com) quotes Dr. Rana of Reasons To Believe (Hugh Ross & Co.) as saying that Intelligent Design (ID) thinking is "ludicrous."

And *Discover* (magazine) runs a long article entitled, *Darwin's Rottweiler: Sir Richard Dawkins—Evolution's Fiercest Champion, Far Too Fierce*.

In this latter article *Discover* does not show Dawkins in a very favorable light at all. His views are not stridently questioned but his manner and approach is displayed as grotesque.

Neither *TIME* nor *Discover* are normally sympathizers with any sort of "softness" on Evolution critics. But Bush has raised ID to a new level of respectability—or to a new level of the necessity to pay respects to it. Yet Rana harshly distances himself from it! Very strange!

But even the *TIME* cover story is remarkably lenient regarding Intelligent Design. A paste-in, running more than two and a half pages, quotes two against two on the question "Can You Believe in God AND Evolution?" The two saying "Yes" are Francis Collins, head of the U. S. Government's Human Genome project and Michael Behe, the microbiologist who kicked ID into orbit with his famous book, *Darwin's Black Box*. Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary at Louisville and Steven Pinker, a Harvard professor, say no.

I do think that the question on *TIME*'s cover is unfair to proponents of ID. They do not raise the question about God—any more than the zealots manning those huge

radio telescopes in Florida seeking signals from outer space that would indicate intelligence "out there."

But two days after Bush made his comments, PBS ran an interview with Behe in which he pointed out that only a few years ago the editor of the most prestigious science journal in the world, *Nature*, complained that proponents of the Big Bang theory of the origin of the cosmos were merely trying to smuggle religion into astronomy. But today most cosmologists accept the Big Bang theory as the best explanation of their data.

However, in none of this flurry of discussion is the presence of evil brought up. ID people don't apparently mind trying to prove that the intelligence they discern is a good or friendly intelligence. The one person who brought up the evil issue in all this is, ironically, not a theologian but the Harvard psychology professor, who is not clearly a Christian. He states, eloquently,

The moral design of nature is as bungled as its engineering design. What twisted sadist would have invented a parasite that blinds millions of people or a gene that covers babies with excruciating blisters?

Thus, it seems to me that ID only gets us out of the frying pan and into the fire. It proves *intelligence*, allowing a belief in a Superior Being, but does nothing to protect that Being from being branded with the incredible cruelty exhibited 24/7 in a nature which is shockingly "red in tooth and claw." Where is our doctrine of Satan when we need it?

Before Genesis 1:1?

In my opinion the most reasonable assumption concerning the appearance of life—and then of evil—on this planet is to suppose that God decided to employ intermediate beings (angels) in the development of life—that's why it took so long. He wanted them to learn, and they did? But toward the end of the learning process, when the intermediate beings had come as far as cellular life, one of the top intermediate beings (IBs) exercised the free will both angels and men have been conferred to react savagely and to attempt to tear down the glory of God by distorting and destroying the forms of life that

were being created. This would seem to have happened fairly recently in the so-called Cambrian Explosion of life, where predatory forms of life first appeared.

From that point on, destruction and cruelty reigned in all of nature from the tiniest forms of life, viruses and bacteria, to the largest dinosaurs. This then is the setting in which the Genesis story begins.

Does anyone believe that the geologic ages with their suffering and cruelty preceded Genesis? Scary question when you think of something espoused by no one else you know of. But consider the long-time Dallas Theological Seminary professor, Merrill Unger, writing in a widely respected Bible commentary (*Unger's Bible Handbook*) published by Moody Press. He states without criticism,

Some scholars prefer to envision a relative beginning, allowing events such as Satan's fall (cf. Ezk 28:13-14; Isa 14:12) and the geological ages of the earth to precede 1:1 or 1:2 (the Gap Theory) ... The phrase, 'Now the earth was formless and empty,' has been rendered, 'and the earth *became*...' to portray a chaotic visitation of divine judgment upon the original earth. To place a gap in 1:2 is untenable by the Hebrew text ... If a gap exists it must occur prior to 1:1 rather than after it. Gen 1:1-2 appear as a unit ... Although the gap theory framework seems to be declining in support, it does commend itself as a potential explanation for the fall of Satan and for the findings of modern science that suggest long geological ages of Earth's prehistory (Unger 1984:10).

The great value of this interpretation is that it does not burden Genesis 1 with explaining the incredible complexity and apparent length of time in which a thousand times more species came into existence and then went extinct than now exist. We are today rightly concerned that, say, 20% of existing species are endangered. That is nothing compared to the 99.9% which have already come and gone.

Rather, it allows the sequence of events of Genesis 1 to describe accurately and historically what typically happens following a major asteroidal collision with the surface of the earth. It harmonizes the "old earth" and the "young earth" theories which are splitting Evangelicals right down the middle today.

Putting the geologic ages before Genesis 1:1 allows an understanding of how nature has become so violent and full of suffering and premature death. Something evil was already far along when Adam succumbed to Satan's devices. Apparently both animals and humans were already distorted and carnivorous. Now the new (non-car-

nivorous) humans made in God's image and the non-carnivorous animals reverted and intermarried with those which were already fallen.

Finally, it allows a very different understanding of the "plan of salvation" which is so central to Evangelical thinking. Namely, instead of just being *rescued* from the penalty of sin and being provided with a positional righteousness allowing entrance into heaven, we are rescued from sin and *recruited* to God's side in the ongoing battle against Satan. Our post-new birth suffering is more like casualty in war than punishment or simply the "mysterious will of God" who, in any case works, all things for His glory (Rom. 8:28).

Last Sunday the sermon at my church emphasized that we are rescued "from" sin and boredom, etc., but we are also rescued "to" a life—here on this earth!—of being soldiers in the army of the Kingdom of God. I take that to mean the defeat of the works of Satan (distortion, disease, etc.) that commonly reflect negatively on God's glory. I talked to the pastor afterwards, and suggested that instead of talking simply about "ruin and rescue" he ought to add a third R—"recruit." Also to his trilogy of Bible content—Creation, Fall, Redemption—he ought to add "Conquest."

Misleading Donors?

It is painfully difficult to report that a gross misunderstanding of the mission situation is being unrelentingly pushed by some well-meaning people who are either profoundly confused themselves or willfully deceptive. Many of these misunderstandings can be found in Christian Aid Mission's 50th anniversary issue of its magazine, *Christian Mission*.

It is not as though sending money and no missionaries never has any merit. Without any reference to the work Christian Aid does on the field, the biggest problem is the steady stream of misinformation to which people back home are being exposed regarding standard missions.

Take, for example, the half-page statement you see on the left as you open the magazine, headed, "The Mission and Ministry of Christian Aid." This brief article points out the fact that fifty years ago foreign missionaries were not allowed in Nepal. At that time, however, Christian Aid got behind a Nepalese national financially. The article concludes by saying,

Foreign missionaries are still not allowed in Nepal, but with the help of Christian Aid the number of believers has grown to over a million.

This sentence gives a great deal of credit to Christian Aid! But the facts are that during those same 50 years the United Mission to Nepal has been an umbrella organization for dozens of standard foreign mission agencies working all over Nepal, maintaining hundreds of foreign missionaries in that country.

No doubt what Christian Aid has done for Nepal has helped, but well over a thousand different foreign missionaries have also been faithfully at work during those 50 years. Not none, as the Christian Aid statement reads.

Isn't that misleading?

Across the page is something much more subtle—and forgivable—attempting to describe the reason underlying Christian Aid's different approach of sending no missionaries, only money,

When William Carey went from England to India as a missionary in 1792 he found no churches or native missionaries. When Bob Finley traveled throughout India in 1948, 1951, 1973, 1974, and 1975 he found thousands of Evangelical churches and tens of thousands of native missionaries. He soon came to realize that a new day had dawned in the history of missions.

What this statement does not reveal is that India is a huge continent of ethnic and cultural diversity. These thousands of churches in India (which really are there) are 95% within a stratum of culturally oppressed minority peoples.

Sending them money to reach the rest of India is not the only thing that has to be done. A parallel would be if *the only Christians in the USA* were among native Americans, that is, Navajo, Choctaw, Apache, Cherokee, etc. Suppose also that Japan was mainly Christian and Japanese believers wanted to spread the Gospel in the USA. Would it be sufficient simply to send money to Navajo believers and expect them to fan out and effectively reach the huge US population of non-Christian caucasians? And, would it be fair to say that no other method is valid?

It goes on in the next paragraph to say,

By 2005 Christian Aid Mission has made contact with about 6,000 indigenous missionary ministries based in "mission field" countries. They have deployed a combined total of 400,000 native missionaries who are winning souls and

planting churches in almost every country on earth, including those now closed off to missionaries from America.

This says Christian Aid has "made contact with about 6,000 indigenous missionary structures." That "about" figure at best implies a database with names and addresses. However, the real misinformation is to call the 400,000 "deployed" workers "native missionaries." They are no doubt winning souls and planting churches as missionaries in years past faithfully taught them. But for the most part they are winning, their own people, who speak their own language. It says further on, "... because they already know the language and customs of their people." Under a picture it says, "Native missionaries are much more effective in reaching their own people than are foreigners from a diverse culture."

This is fine. It is excellent evangelism. It is the sort of thing which missionaries always depend on once a beachhead has been made in a new cultural basin. But local pastors and evangelists are doing a very different thing from extending the Gospel into a group where, as in Carey's day, there are not yet any believers or churches. Indeed, the little known fact about missions is that most of the peoples of the world are seriously alienated from groups nearby that are ethnically different. It would be much better for a Navajo evangelist to go to Norway to reach out to the Laplanders than for a Norwegian to go from the mainstream culture in Norway. It would be better for a Norwegian missionary to come to the USA to reach the Pueblo Indians in Arizona than for a white citizen from Phoenix. This is simply the way it is and it is one of the most unavoidable obstacles in missions.

In any case, all missionaries are native in their home culture and foreign in their field culture. You are either a "native" where you are or a "missionary" where you are. The phrase "native missionary" is a contradiction in terms. If you can already speak the language and understand the culture (as those supported by Christian Aid are purported to be) you are native, not a missionary. If you can't speak the language and have to learn the culture where you are, then you are no longer a "native" in that situation, but a missionary who faces cross-cultural barriers of communication. Real, cross-cultural missionaries, are not merely pastors paid to reach their own people for less money. They

often face greater local prejudices and barriers of culture and communication than would a missionary from afar.

Often foreign missionaries soon come to be the most trusted people in the situation. Very often groups do not trust a group just one language barrier away from them. This is why rarely in the Middle East are the thousands of Christians (surrounded by millions of Muslims) the best ones to win those Muslims. You can understand that Christians living in minority enclaves through centuries of oppression are often the last ones even to wish that the Muslims would come to Christ, and if one here and one there does, they are not allowed to enter a Christian assembly!

Compare what I have just said with this statement on page nine in the Christian Aid report,

Generally, with a few notable exceptions, those who go from one country to another as missionaries end up hindering rather than helping the cause of Christ.

This statement is found just below a big picture of Finley's new book, *Reformation in Foreign Missions*. The book is described in part as follows:

We have patiently explained how the foreign missionary movement of the past 100 years is a church tradition that has no basis or precedent in the New Testament, since there is no record there that our Lord ever sent an apostle to a foreign country where he did not know the language.

For one thing, note that he apparently is willing to grant the legitimacy of foreign missionaries at work prior to one hundred years ago. As a result of that work by foreign missionaries, Finley was able to encounter "thousands of churches" in India. They were there precisely because of the work of foreign missionaries in the previous hundred years! (But even today 95% of the churches are confined to a single social stratum.)

Secondly, the phenomenal spread of the Gospel into the Roman empire in Paul's ministry was specifically due to the fact that for hundreds of years "foreign" Jewish believers had established maybe a thousand synagogues throughout the entire Roman empire. Their strangeness of diet and culture did not prevent their integrity and worship of the true God to go unnoticed, and in Paul's day there may have been as many as a million non-Jewish "God-fearers" and "devout persons" sitting in the back rows of the synagogues. They were there because they

were attracted by the integrity and clean living of the foreigners, the Jews, that had come to live among them.

Those Jews had to learn the language and the culture of their new locale. They were no doubt often misunderstood. Nevertheless thousands of Gentiles were attracted to their synagogues (such as Cornelius in the NT).

This shows that not just money coming from a distance but that people of integrity coming from a distance are very basic. Indeed, if the people need to witness the way Christian family relationships are supposed to be, the unspoken witness of a missionary family is often the most impressive thing.

Thomas Wang is one of the most widely known and respected Chinese Christians today. His grandmother was allowed by her family to work in a missionary home. She was warned not to listen to the teaching of "the foreign devils." But she saw the husband opening the door for his wife and treating her as an equal. That did it for her. Sending money cannot take the place of sending godly people, godly families. This is what it means to respond to Jesus' call for us "to be my witnesses," not just words, not just money. Sending money is not sending witnesses. In all of the remaining untouched people groups there are not yet any local pastors to pay to evangelize.

The Nigerian Evangelical Mission Association (with dozens of agency members) reports that there are 500,000 pastors in that country (with the largest population in Africa). But there are still at least 100 languages in Nigeria within which there are not yet any pastors to pay to reach their own people. And their next-door neighbors are not necessarily the ones most likely to reach them.

[Note, a more complete description of the kind of misleading information mentioned here can be found in the November-December issue of *Mission Frontiers*.] **IJFM**