



## Hugh Ross and the Problem of Evil

To the editor,

In your article *Where Darwin Scores Higher than Intelligent Design* (IJFM Oct-Dec 2003) you said that “from the current discussion as seen in their written materials [it] would appear to be the case” [that] “some of our creationists are glossing over the surprisingly prominent reality of intelligent evil in nature...”

I am not an expert on ID [Intelligent Design], but I have listened to a lot of Hugh Ross and read a number of his books. It does not seem accurate, based on what I know, to say that Hugh Ross and his organization, *Reasons to Believe* (RTB), do not address the problem of evil, and particularly “evil” in nature.

A search for “evil” on their website brought up a lot of articles... Also, I have listened to their audio series called *Life and Death in Eden*, which addresses the “evil” of animal death before the fall. It seems to me that RTB addresses the issue quite thoroughly, and quite directly, as it has significant bearing on their Biblical creation model. In fact, “The Problem of Evil” is the theme of this year’s “Message of the Month,” a series of twelve audio messages that are provided exclusively for RTB’s financial supporters...

In the name of Christ who is “for our good always” (Deut 6:24 NKJV),

Jim Keefer

*Dear Jim,*

*I really appreciate your response to my article in IJFM....*

*I fully agree with you that RTB talks about evil. I have attended one of their three-day conferences, subscribed to their magazine from its inception to its demise. ... I recently bought and listened through the three-tape series on Life and Death in Eden: The Biblical and Scientific Evidence for Animal Death before the Fall.*

*While I am enthusiastic about their ministry in general, you can see my thinking below diverges in part.*

*However, back to my IJFM statement, “some of our creationists are glossing over the surprisingly prominent reality of intelligent evil in nature” I did not say “all creationists” since I would be including myself if I said that. By saying “some” I left ample room for both myself and RTB. However, in the case of Rana’s article he dismisses the violence of nature as not so much “evil” as essential to God’s means of regulating nature, thus, in my opinion he vastly and desperately underestimates the extent of evil.*

*Please feel free to respond.*

*Ralph Winter*

## Contextualization: No Panacea?

Dear editor,

My wife and I are involved in fulltime ministry with the ‘30 Days’ Muslim Prayer Focus, a natural progression for us after being involved in ‘face to face’ activity with Muslims here in Australia the last 7 years. We also lived in India (96-97) as outreach coordinators for International teams partnering with local churches.

We both, even before we married, had a calling over our lives to minister among Muslims and we believe this is what our life’s call is, though I’m sure will be expressed in a variety of ways as we get older. Our passion is Muslims—we’ve been blessed to have worked along side many types of ministries and to have met a wide variety of people who are seeking to bring the gospel to the Islamic world in many creative ways.

One of those ways, as discussed in a previous issue of IJFM, was the contextualisation approach, which I think is being widely embraced by churches/mission agencies around the world.

I remember living in India and my wife and I attended a particular church there regularly, which was everything that went against what we hoped to see in the unreached world. This church was Western in every way: shirt and ties, electric guitars, synthesisers—even the Pentecostal ‘two step’ was on show! It really grated me actually and I remember raising the issue with one of the worship leaders, wondering why they didn’t adopt a more ‘Indian’ feel with their services to attract those that lived around them. He was passionate up on stage, his shirt dripping with sweat due to all his dancing, and was bemused by the question.

This indigenous church in an unreached nation challenged me on a number of areas in regards to reaching the unreached. . . . It was (and remains) the fastest growing fellowship in a city of 1.3 Million, outstripping the more ‘Indian’ styles of churches by a country mile. The other, is that the worship leader is an ex-Muslim from Iran.

The C6 approach to reaching Muslims, which I have been so in favour of, is no magic wand. I’m still in favour of it, but I think what we are doing is wrongly assuming that this approach is the saviour of evangelic success among the Muslim world, which I think is too diverse to rely on [just one] . . . way of reaching them.

Some other examples that rocked my foundations: 31 Iranian Muslims, in Australia as refugees, walked into a AOG Church here in Brisbane during an evening service to find out more on the Christian faith. An Arab family did something similar and actually converted! I have heard

more Muslims coming to faith from a C1 approach than that from a more contextualised approach which is being so strongly advocated.

You may have heard about the impact *The Passion of the Christ* is having in the Middle East. I received an e-mail by long term missionaries last week that this two hour movie did more in that time than what they have been able to do in five years! Another testimony [is] of a group of girls coming out of the theatre and asking a Westerner how they might be able to find several New Testaments in Arabic so they can read it for themselves. All this, I might add, by a beer drinking Catholic Hollywood star, who has never done a course in Mission in his life!

I recently went to an information night where a hundred people gathered to hear a couple share on their work in Uzbekistan. All the 'tut tutting' on hearing about the local church looking like a western transplant was very audible among those listening and I began to think to myself, why are we reacting this way? People are coming into the Kingdom for crying out loud! What is more important—the souls of men and women being transformed by the gospel or us having post-colonial guilt because they are adopting a style more like our own?

Please don't misinterpret that I'm advocating a style of fellowship that should adopt Western similarities. My very strong preference is that people would be able to express themselves in the framework of their cultural identity—but more so, I want people saved. I don't want to get so hung up on the method that I miss opportunities to see people come to faith in other ways.

Not only that, with the majority of the world's Muslims being nominal, my feeling is the C6 approach will only be beneficial to a certain segment of the population. My new conclusion is: no one way is the best way. If it's

moral, done in a spirit of humility and there is a tangible fruit, let's not get too worked up on the method.

There are people in my own mission that would disagree with me, but my Iranian friend in India, along with dozens of other Muslims I know have come to faith, are turning my presuppositions on reaching Muslims upside down.

Thank you for publishing a great journal!

Craig Merriman

Queensland, Australia

Dear Craig,

*The editor has asked me to respond to your letter, which I am happy to do. Like you we all rejoice in Muslims coming to faith in God through Christ by whatever means, contextualized or not! But allow me to offer additional considerations.*

*When he presented his Contextualization Scale (C1-6), John Travis agreed with you when he acknowledged that "Muslims are coming to faith in many different contexts worldwide all along the C1-C6 spectrum. C5 is neither the greatest thing nor the only thing God is doing in the Muslim world..." (IJFM 17:1, p. 54). But even though no one way is best for all people—approaches do matter! For some are more appropriate and fruitful than others. And I would contend that those that are most compatible with the mainstream of society are more likely to bear greater fruit and result in people movements.*

*I believe it has been the experience of most evangelists to Muslims that it is those who are on the fringes of Islamic society who are the most likely to respond to the Gospel. Since they are already marginalized, they have less to lose by a "conversion" to "Christianity" (which is what C1-3 looks like). This seems to have been the case with many Iranian converts—they were often "fed up with Islam" and wanted to nothing to do with anything resembling it. The C1 end of the spectrum was actually more attractive to them. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of evangelistic witness to Muslims has*

*been of the less contextualized variety. We would expect it to bear some fruit. Anthropologists, such as Charles Kraft, assert that although the laws of communication are extremely important, in the case of those who are desperate, almost any method of presentation will be received.*

*Unfortunately, those who convert to Christianity at the C1-3 range generally experience "transplant rejection syndrome" and their witness to their community is minimal in its duration and impact (if they are not first "extracted" by the "Christians"). If we hope to see mainstream members of a Muslim society come to faith, such as in people group movements, then followers of Christ will generally need to adopt approaches at the C4-6 end of the spectrum.*

*You state that the majority of Muslims are nominal and therefore a C6 approach would be limited in its appeal. While their nominalism may be true of their religious performance, I do not believe it to be true of their communal affiliation and loyalty. These "nominal" Muslims are most unwilling to do anything that would jeopardize their belonging to the Muslim community—being irreligious will not do that, but adopting Western or "Christian" culture will.*

*You believe that "no way is the best way" as long as it is "moral done in a spirit of humility and there is tangible fruit." To be sure, contextualization is not the only issue—bold and abundant proclamation of the Word, demonstrations of love, humble service, transformed lives and relationships, and manifestations of the Spirit's power (including healings, visions and dreams) are of paramount importance. It is these realities that bring Muslims to Christ—and we rejoice with this fruit that we are seeing. But if greater contextualization will lead to more fruit or much fruit, then it is certainly worth harping about.*

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