

Editorial Reflections

An Israeli William Carey?

Honestly, knowing the opposition and reluctance faced by the original William Carey, and the unique new venture he proposed, it is very difficult not to think of him as you read the gripping testimony of Gavriel Gefen.

One apparent difference is that, unlike Carey, Gefen is able to be aware of the entire missionary movement in which Israeli followers of Messiah are missing. Also, his Biblical exegesis is more thorough than was Carey's at first.

Gefen is very candid about his situation. How ironic that Israelis are noted today for sending "missionaries" over land and sea to garner aid for Israel but not until that's mission agency was formed in 1999 was Israel a sending people out to evangelize the world. Gavriel, may your tribe increase!

Come to think of it, the Jewish people were sending out missionaries "over land and sea" in Jesus' day, and even before Jesus was born. They then thought that their growth in numbers as Jewish people was what God wanted. What a predicament for them to understand that they really were expected to "give away" their faith. That is the perplexing situation we face today as we see our faith reappearing in strange garments around the world.

Vicious Animals and Missions

Is it a hazard to evangelism to be unable to explain why God's creation pervasively contains so many violent elements, so much horrible suffering and pain? Reviewed earlier, Ruth Tucker's book, *Walking Away From Faith*, implies that to be the case.

The "good creation" of Genesis One describes both animals and humans as eating plants, not each other. The lion lying down with the lamb seems to be the kind of creation which could be attributed to God without qualification.

On the other hand, most people have simply grown accustomed to the violence of the streets and the forests. Some people believe that everything—violent, painful or not—is of God and will someday be seen as part of His "mysterious purposes."

Muslims ask God's permission to kill a wild animal. Americans have to ask the local ecology group when any kind of animal life is endangered. Many people in India do not believe it is right to kill any form of life.

Do Christian missionaries need to think seriously about the apparent incongruity between the Bible's "good creation" and a violence filled nature?

I think so.

Now that we have inklings about how DNA might be altered to produce carnivorous animals from herbivorous animals, is it possible to hypothesize that fallen angels have been hard at work? And if intermediate beings have no more than the amount of intelligence and creativity of humans (probably far more), you would think they would have amassed the knowledge both to create and distort.

In the latest issue (June 2004) of the American Scientific Affiliation's journal, *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*, David Snoke, a physics and astronomy professor at the University of Pittsburgh, writes a very detailed and comprehensive article entitled, "Why Were Dangerous Animals Created?"

He suggests (page 119) three possibilities: 1) fallen intermediate beings are responsible for dangerous animals, or 2) God is, or 3) some process out of God's control (like an unaided evolution?) is the cause.

I vote for the first of the three. He takes the second. Darwin, I suppose, chose the third.

But the phenomenal significance of all this for mission is plain. If God created dangerous animals and (thus logically) dangerous pathogens as well, we have no "mission" to restore carnivorous animals to a herbivorous state, or to eradicate dangerous viruses, bacteria and parasites. And, in that case we have a perplexingly dangerous God to preach. What do you think?

The Irrational Power of Culture

Do you ever sense that culture is carrying you in a strange direction? Missionaries are almost always up against invisible cords pulling people in directions that seem unexplainable. Culture is very hard to fight. Two Islamic countries, Morocco and Turkey are trying to get into the European Community and find it very difficult to change in key ways. And Turkey has been struggling in that direction for a long, long time.

So what is this power of culture?

Why would intelligent Chinese bind the feet of tiny girls so that as adults they would have to be carried? Why would intelligent African tribal leaders file their teeth into points like a lion's and then be terribly hampered all their lives in eating ordinary food?

Is this stupid or what? But tell me why Americans can act just as strangely with no rational purpose or cause.

Usually the inscrutable power of culture creeps up on us. That kind of gradual subversion is the most difficult for the human being to detect. Would an example of this be the gradual lengthening of the detention of young people in school rooms from the time in American history when three years was good enough for Thomas Jefferson, to 12, then plus four, plus graduate study?

Another example could be the increasing luxury of college campuses and the college experience requiring ever more

debt with which to begin life. Few of the additional luxuries which cause tuition to go up actually contribute to a better education, and the artificial exposure to all those magnificent college staffs and plants may actually pervert perspective of the real world. Ah, the dangers of non-functional luxury!

But the most dumbfounding and bizarre cultural forces are nevertheless not gradual developments that sneak up on us but phenomena which fairly explode in our midst.

Recall, the human animal is drastically different from all other forms of life in the sense that it can't rely very much at all on instinctively guided behavior compared to learned behavior. Animals are mainly instinctive. Humans are mainly encultured. This means that for humans intergenerational transfer is the major mechanism of guidance. That, in turn, means—with rapid social change—that the transfer may not work. Newer generations can then do better or do worse very easily and quickly historically speaking.

Culture can both restrict and demand new paths. Think of the little girl who is desperately allergic to wheat gluten but who is solemnly told that a communion wafer made of rice simply won't do. No change possible (and for no good reason).

At the same time think of the Beanie Baby mania in the 90s, which I just read about for the first time in the paper today (LA Times, Aug 26, 2004). Intelligent adults by the thousands would “lay siege to gift shops that were expecting shipments of Beanies.” Husbands and wives would “post themselves at different McDonald's outlets to buy stacks of Happy Meals in hopes of scoring a few of the Teenie Beanie Babies they did not already own.”

Think of it. When slight changes were made, “an orange Digger the Crab gave way to a richer red Digger...suddenly collectors swooped on the scarcer original edition, eventually bidding it up to \$600.”

Am I reading about sane Americans? Shall we now talk about ear trinkets?

Ten years later, chests full of Beanies Babies are worthless. One suggestion in the article is to use them for insulation in walls.

J. B. Phillip's translation of Romans 12:2 is “Don't let the world press you into its mold.” The same Apostle also was saying in Romans that the cultural power of a legalistically interpreted “law” was to be abandoned. Culture both prevents change and forces change—if we don't have higher values than social flow.

Remember, neither Turkey nor Morocco have had access to the Bible, which has been the unique transforming force in the history of Europe. There is where we find the constant distinction between human culture and Divine will.

Saved!

The recent movie, that is. The appearance of this cleverly disparaging spoof of a Christian high school is one

more example, as I see it, of a considerable number of Americans reacting in fear of the increasing awareness of the Evangelical movement.

The hero of *Saved!* is Cassandra, a chain-smoking Jewish girl who somehow is enrolled in this school. Cassandra disrupts worship times with feigned speaking in tongues and generally reacts against the faith of the students and teachers. In the end, she is the one who is a truly understanding, caring, “real” person. Everyone else, every other lead character, is a phony or is terribly confused and torn by faith.

Evangelicals can learn something because it is not true that all Evangelicals are genuine. But it seems to me that the main function of the movie is to harden the anti-Christian attitudes of a lot of fearful Americans. That is a bad sign of a good truth: the faith in America is on the increase, or is at least increasingly visible.

How about Shadowmancer?

This book, which is sweeping England, is a refreshing alternative to the seriously ambiguous world of Harry Potter. In the vein of C. S. Lewis' contributions to children's literature, it too is written by an Englishman, G. P. Taylor. Taylor—a man with a background in the world of music, the police force, and more recently an Anglican clergyman—sold his motorcycle to finance a small local printing. Somehow word of mouth took it out of control, one of Britain's major publishers picked it up, and now *Shadowmancer* is a huge hit in the larger world.

Face to Face

Well, in response to our suggestion that local discussion groups might be helpful, we already have two of our readers who have stepped forward:

Bob Johnson
9608 S. Sandmon Rd
Lake Nebagamon WI 54849
715-374-2199

John Arthur Perazzo
3112 W Washington Ave
Las Vegas, NV 89107-2254
(702) 498-7735
perazzo@aol.com

I can happily add my own name to this short list:

Ralph and Barbara Winter
1469 Bresee Avenue
Pasadena, CA, 91104
(626) 794-5544

In all three cases the time of meetings will be determined by whoever phones in and what their schedules will permit.

Would you like to try it for a while? Would you like to be a host for a handful? Do send us your name, address, and phone!