

Editorial Reflections

Spiritualized Spin?

David Thomas wrote a three page article in the Westmont College magazine (Winter 2006), "Surviving Tragedy—and Spiritualized Spin." The article tells of incidents in which friends and well-wishers tried to console him, or "educate" him, about tragedy. His responses later (on paper) constitute the bulk of the article.

He is convinced that those who have never lost a child find it difficult to understand those who have.

As a father who lost his only son ten years ago, I had hoped to find some measure of relief from the burden of unanswered questions, sorrow, bewilderment, and disillusionment my wife and I have carried year after year. So I began reading a recent book slowly and deliberately holding it like a cup of cold water to parched lips ... Like so many well intended but disconcerting observations directed my way ("God must have had a special assignment for your son"), the book brought me no relief.

The author offered a disclaimer but I missed one small word: "not." "While I have not suffered to the extent others have endured" should have warned me that the "collective storm of suffering" compelling the author to write fell far short of my experience. She speaks of losing 102 trees in her backyard in a hurricane, having the daunting task of planning three weddings for her children in eight months and dealing with a home-remodeling project that never got off the ground. Compared to losing a child, these events don't seem earth shattering.

The article is full of examples of superficial response to much more serious problems than the friendly commentators realize.

In my own case, I have never lost a son, although one of my grandsons didn't just die, he has now for twenty-some years been an invalid due to brain damage. My first wife died after fighting cancer for five years. I am now fighting the same cancer. Nevertheless, I find much in this article which resonates with my own experience. Without trying to repeat the article, however, the thing of interest to me in this reflection is that no one in their comments ever blamed Satan for the tragedy, and, most of them assumed that God was involved in doing something mysteriously good. I find that to be an unacceptable and superficially concealed Evangelical fatalism.

Worse still, such fatalism cuts the nerve of any "fight-back." Why, if cancer is an initiative of God, would we want to fight cancer, except in healing those afflicted where possible. The reason that less than one percent of all the enormous outlay for cancer goes to the investigation of sources of cancer, the reason that reports of viruses causing cancer trickle into the news so sluggishly, is because the all-essential investigation of sources is not a healing but a preventive

matter and there is virtually no commercial money available for such pursuits. Once more, here is a massive problem of social structure with apparently no solution in sight.

Economic Success, Development Failure

The whole world from Bono to Schwarzenegger is talking about ending poverty, forgiving debts, expanding entrepreneurship, introducing micro enterprise, etc.—basically *economic* development. As we see in Iraq, however, corruption, deceit, greed, lying, hate can paralyze any society.

Furthermore, suppose everyone in the world actually had a substantial income? What then? Would that provide the proper definition for "development"? In the United States we consider ourselves one of the "developed" nations. Yet, 9 out of 10 Americans still die prematurely from disease alone.

Well, suppose, also, there were enough hospitals and doctors for everyone in the world. Do hospitals cut down on disease? Does the commercial medical-pharmaceutical industry work at the causes of disease? Hardly. I exclude some of the work done at University-related hospitals.

Obviously, economic development is only one aspect of poverty, only one aspect of the definition of development. **IJFM**



God had a wonderful plan for her life...

Six months in Iraq.

"I'm not comfortable using the little Arabic I know. I'm not comfortable telling the gospel when I don't have every word just right, and I'm not comfortable wearing foreign clothes, and I'm not comfortable offering to pray for people whose suffering goes far beyond my own.

Yes, in general, I'm not comfortable. Isn't that great! In many ways, this is what I came here for, and what I think we're all here for. We want to grow and be changed and see how He is strong when we are weak. Pray He continues to give us strength, as we meet with people and work toward creating ways to practically help the Iraqis."

– Email from a Frontiers Gap Team member in Iraq

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