

WILLIAM CAREY
International Development Journal



The Problem of Evil

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NORMAN SOO

SUMMER 2013

William Carey International Development Journal
Published by William Carey International University
www.wciujournal.org • editor@wciujournal.org

A Note from the Editor

The problem of evil — one of the most persistent objections to God’s existence and one of the most debated topics within the Church — continues to be explored. How can a loving, omnipotent God allow so much evil and suffering in the world? Throughout the ages, theologians and philosophers have attempted to provide answers to these questions. At the founding of Roberta Winter Institute (RWI) in 2001, Dr. Ralph D. Winter passionately committed himself to the cause of “bring[ing] glory to God by ending our apparently neoplatonist truce with Satan in the realm of all his ingenious and destructive work” and “rectify[ing] our understanding of a God who is not the author of the destructive violence in nature and who has long sought our help in bringing His kingdom and His will on earth” (2008:177). Dr. Winter was not only concerned with the theological response, but also a practical one: Who is the author of disease pathogen, God or Satan? Are we called to eradicate diseases?

This current issue is based on the Ralph D. Winter Annual Lectureship held on campus in April, 2013, which focused on “The Problem of Evil.” The keynote speaker was Gregory A. Boyd, a prominent Christian scholar who has proliferated a number of books dealing with topics concerning the problems of evil and spiritual warfare, including *God at War* (1997), a book that was much appreciated by Dr. Winter. This year’s lectureship was co-sponsored by RWI. The RWI, on its website, “seeks to mobilize believers to discover and address the origins of disease, thereby destroying the works of the devil and glorifying God.” You will be able to enjoy, in video format, some key sections of the lectureship presentation by Boyd and panel discussion with Charles Kraft, Brad Cole, and Brian Lowther. At the same time, this issue seeks to expand perspectives on the topic, to include studies from other biblical scholars, medical professionals, cross-cultural practitioners, WCIU faculty and students:

Yalin Xin is Associate Professor of Intercultural Studies at William Carey International University, Research Fellow with the Center for the Study of World Christian Revitalization Movements and Senior Editor for William Carey International Development Journal.

“What is the Ancient Near Eastern Combat Myth and What Difference Does it Make?” by Joel Hamme.

“Where Darwin Scores Higher than Intelligent Design,” by Ralph D. Winter (reprinted with permission from *IJFM*)

“The Big Picture of Scripture,” by Beth Snodderly (originally published in *The Goal of International Development*, WCIU Press, 2011).

“Scary God or Scary People?” by Brad Cole (used with permission from the author).

“Plagues, Priests and Demons: A Critical Book Review,” by Steven Youngren.

“From Historical Drift to Necessary Return: A Book Review (从历史的漂移到必然

的回归——书评),” by Norman Soo.

I invite you to join the dialogue, discussion, and debate through commenting on the articles and blog postings, and sharing insights to your own social networks.

Reference

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International Development Journal

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Journal Information:

William Carey International Development
Journal (ISSN # 2162-2817)

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*William Carey International Development
Journal* was established in 2011 to pro-
vide a place for scholarly communication
and publishing for its students, faculty
and constituents.

Subscription Information

Published quarterly by
William Carey International University

All articles are available online free of
charge at www.wciujournal.org/journal.

Print copies are available for purchase
www.wciujournal.org/journal.

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What is the Ancient Near Eastern Combat Myth and What Difference Does it Make?

JOEL HAMME

The world is a place of conflict. There is no denying this, and as history moves along more evidence for this conflict exists, from wars that humans have continuously waged with each other since humans have organized themselves into groups to the individual struggles that people experience with starvation, disease and death. The basic problem with this conflict is that it disrupts what is necessary for the world to be life-sustaining. With this evidence for conflict come various ways that humans have sought to explain and to cope with it. In God's design, not only can humans cope with this conflict, but empowered by him, can participate in his overcoming the evil behind it.

The ancient Near East, in which the ancient Israelites were situated both geographically and conceptually, had their own ways of explaining the conflict, as well as solutions to it in the divine and human spheres. This paper will examine the most prominent way that the ancient Near East conceptualized and expressed the conflict in the world, and how they imagined this conflict to be solved. This involved the king establishing order onto the chaos.

The Old Testament viewed things similarly, but with striking differences, especially in the way this chaos and conflict was confronted in the human sphere. This conflict is articulated most clearly in the ancient Near Eastern combat myth. The value presented in the myth is that the sustenance of life must be maintained through effort and conflict against evil forces seeking to destroy it.

Humans, through various sociological mechanisms, have a large role to play in this. In most of the ancient Near East the mechanism was kingship, in Israel it was the community of the faithful.¹ Through Christ's victory in his death, resurrection and ascension, the fellowship of believers is the sociological mechanism. In the end of all things, in the New Heaven and New Earth, there is no more conflict, as the sea out of which creation comes, that primeval symbol of chaos, is no more. Jesus' victory as the Lion of Judah who conquered as a lamb slain ended the cycle of conflict that allowed chaos to continually threaten the earth. In Christ's death, conflict is ended by reconciling the world unto himself.

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The basic way that the ancient Near East depicted the conflict is as a struggle of a new-comer deity with the primordial and pre-existent older gods, often seen as a watery chaos. The new-comer deity defeats the older gods and is raised to king of the gods and produces new order out of the older chaos. The rule of the king in the human sphere is conceptualized along the same line, as the human king is the king of the gods' representative on earth. Although the Old Testament reflects the chaos myth and sees the function of the king in similar ways, there are marked differences due to the fact that there are no gods that existed before the LORD, and humans in general are God's representatives on earth, not just the king. The king confronts life-annulling forces and promotes life in most of the ancient Near East, whereas in the Old Testament, the faithful as a whole do it.

The ancient Near Eastern combat myth is significant in our understanding of the origins of evil, because certain scholars consider the language of the combat myth to be the natural way that the ancient Near East talked about spiritual warfare, thus it reflects conflicts with spiritual forces that oppose God. Other scholars explain evil in the world by saying that even in the Old Testament, the evil forces out of which God made the world were pre-existent. God fashions creation out of these forces.² Whatever the case, it is a common way that the ancient Near East, and the Old Testament, speaks about life sustaining order being created out of life nullifying chaos.

The combat myth is significant for reflection on the nature of evil in the context of Christian development, because the view of the relationship of the god and primordial chaos on which he establishes order prefigures the relationship of humanity and their relation to the world around them on which they are to establish order. In the ancient Near East, the human that counted as far as ordering the world was the king. In the Old Testament text, it is the human in general. If these divine representatives did not operate in their divinely appointed roles, chaos would overcome life on the human sphere.³ This has significant

relevance for Christian development, as it helps us understand how the Bible depicts forces that nullify-life's entrance in the world, and how God has commissioned the faithful to be agents that allow life to thrive in imitation of God's own efforts to create a life-affirming world.

In the ancient world, it seems that chaos and a nullification of life was the way of things, and the ancient societies exerted much energy and force to order their environment in a way that would sustain life. Chaos had to be held at bay or the precarious order that allowed ancient societies to exist would be destroyed as chaos reasserted itself. This ancient exertion to create order was enshrined in myth, ritual and art and has come down to us in the form of surviving texts, inherited worldviews and artifacts. The hero of the story on the human plane was the king who established righteousness and justice and ordered society. The antagonists are enemy peoples and destructive forces such as drought, disease, flood and so forth.

On the divine plane, the hero is the king of the gods who fights the watery chaos monster and establishes his rule. Generally, the king of the gods is a younger god that wrests sovereignty from eternal primordial powers from which the present gods had descended.⁴ In Mesopotamia, the king of the gods, Marduk in Babylon or Assur in Assyria, defeats Tiamat and from her corpse creates the universe.⁵ In Egypt, Ra the sun god, and a number of lesser deities defeat Apophis the chaos serpent as they sail through the underworld in the solar barge, thus daily re-establishing order in creation.⁶ At Ugarit, Ba'al defeats Yamm and establishes his eternal rule.⁷ Some myths that reflect this combat involve the creation of the universe, but not all of them. What they all have in common is an establishment of order out of disorder so that life may thrive. Levenson is quick to point out that in the ancient Near East, the fundamental act of creation was not creation out of nothing, but bringing life-sustaining order out of life denying disorder. If such is the emphasis, Levenson submits that one cannot make too large of a division between portrayals of the combat myth that reflect creation,

such as Enuma Elish, and those that do not, such as the Ba'al Cycle.⁸ Psalm 74:12-14 depicts creation as a primordial act of God's salvation, which provides a space for life in terms reminiscent of the combat myth. It also recalls the deliverance of Israel from Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea.⁹

Yet God my King is from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.

You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the sea monsters [fn] on the waters.

You crushed the heads of Leviathan; you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.

It is the salvific act of creation that the psalmist appeals to for deliverance from present enemies.

It is clear then, that the combat myth has left its imprint on the Old Testament as the activity of the LORD in establishing divine rule.¹⁰ An area of debate is whether or not this is reflected in Genesis 1. Many scholars see Genesis 1 as reflective of the combat myth. However, if it does, it has been sanitized of much of the violent language one would expect. God does a lot of separating and dividing in Gen 1, the waters above from the waters below, the dry land from the waters, day and night and darkness and light. The sea monsters with which gods such as Marduk and Ba'al fight in the combat myth are created by God (Gen 1:21). God does not do any fighting in Gen 1.¹¹ This is priestly language of distinguishing things that are different, setting things apart and separating the clean from the unclean, not violent language. Although the materials God uses in creation are similar to those used in other ancient Near Eastern creation stories, God's approach to his materials are different. In Genesis 1, God is Priest and Artisan, not Warrior.

All of that being said concerning Gen 1, other passages in the Hebrew Bible do depict God as a warrior against watery chaos and the sea serpent. It will be sufficient to only mention a few. Most clearly, see Isa 27:1,

In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea.

In the psalms, as well, we see the LORD battling the chaos serpent. Ps 89:9-10 reads,

You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them.

You crushed Rahab like a carcass; you scattered your enemies with your mighty arm.

In its larger context, Ps 89:9-10 may very well be referring to the foundation of the world by God. In Ps 74:12-17, it certainly does in similar language. To a certain degree, Ps 104:6-9 may reflect the subdual of waters in a creation text.

It is clear, then, that the idea of primordial, watery, chaotic monsters being slain by heroic gods has left its imprint on the ancient Near East and the Bible. Theologians such as Greg Boyd say that this language was how the theologians of the ancient Near East talked about the reality of spiritual warfare, and the restoration and preservation of creation.¹² In relation to humanity, humans were created to be God's regents on earth and participate in the re-conquest of the world from evil forces.¹³ This is a compelling reading of Genesis 1. However, as mentioned above, if there is a conflict in the background of creation in Genesis 1, then it has left little if any trace in its language. Jon Levenson considers Genesis 1 to pick up where the Enuma Elish and Marduk's slaying of Tiamat leaves off. Others do not see conflict in the background of Genesis 1.¹⁴

The congruence between divine rule and human rule is a crucial issue in understanding the human in relation to God and the human's God-given role in the world. What the gods do in the heavenly realm in establishing order out of chaos is reflected in the earthly realm through the activity of humans, in most of the ancient Near East particularly through the activities of the king. When

we look at the foundational texts that describe the relationship between the divine and human spheres, in the ancient Near East, the king is the main human actor. In Egypt, the king was the mediator between the divine and human spheres, the sun god on earth. He made sure justice grew and evil and disorder was opposed.¹⁵ In Mesopotamia, the king was the one who ordered society and promulgated the divine will. He had a special relationship with the gods, and the nature of that relationship is conceptualized in various ways depending on what text you are looking at in different locales and time periods. Whatever the case, the king was the primary agent for promulgating the deity's will and rule on earth, and the unwashed masses left leaderless are depicted as unable to fend for themselves.

Things are different in the Old Testament. Whereas human kingship is very closely connected with creation in the larger ancient Near East, in Israel, it is rooted squarely in history. Whereas in Egypt and Mesopotamia, the king is qualitatively different than the rest of humanity,¹⁶ in Israel, he was "one from amongst your brothers (Deut 17:15)," and the only positive command he is given in the rules concerning kingship in Deut 17 is to study Torah (vv. 18-20). He is first among equals and the consummate Torah scholar. Instead of promulgating a law, a chief function of ancient Near Eastern kings, the Israelite king studies Torah and is shaped, and shapes his rule, by it. The Israelite king leads the rest of the people in his promulgation of justice and conflict with injustice. Marduk and Ra empowered the king to promote justice and order and combat injustice and chaos; an earthly manifestation of their divine conflict to do the same, the LORD put this in the hands of humanity in general, through the sociological organization of the extended family. In the Old Testament, the whole community of God had a place in ordering society for life to thrive. The faithful one, in his or her Torah observance, had the prerogatives and responsibilities of the king.¹⁷

In the Old Testament, humans in general were

made in the image of God, and were called to rule over creation. The LORD has left a lot of work to do in human hands, with which to finish creation, as it were, and to make order out of chaos.¹⁸ Things did not quite turn out the way it was supposed to, and humans gave their rule of the world to Satan, so instead of God having a partner in creation, God has an adversary exercising dominion that humans are supposed to exercise.¹⁹

It is possible that God did not create the world in a state of perfection. It was "very good," but not "perfect." The conditions for evil were in the world from the beginning, and it was the human exercising dominion and subduing (Gen 1:26-28), and keeping and guarding (Gen 2:15) within creation that was to maintain a God established order and the flourishing of life. In the fall, humans forfeited that authority, and another, Satan, obtained it, using it to accomplish purposes opposed to God's original purpose. As God established order and imposed his will on unruly primordial forces in order for a life-giving space to exist, humans were called to complete that task as God's regent(s) on earth. They failed to do so, and the human condition is wracked with disease, poverty and oppression. Much of what is manifest on the human sphere is the result of a warped exercise of the authority that humans still have.²⁰

How the primordial forces came to be on which God exercised control in creating a world that was life-nurturing is a debate among scholars, as is the nature of the evil is so clearly evident in that world. Did God create the world perfect, and place the humans in a world set up for their relative ease? Or do we take the language of subduing and exercising dominion, keeping and working that we find in Gen 1-2 to mean that God left quite a bit of work for humans to do in maintaining and establishing order in the world? Evil enters the world, because God's regents did not exercise their authority under the empowerment of God, as was God's original plan.²¹ Humans have given their authority to another who can say that he has dominion over all of the earth's kingdoms, in his

temptation of Jesus in the wilderness (Luke 4:5-7).²² The Devil has used that authority to foster hatred, disease, famine and instability, the opposite of the life sustaining creation that God and a humanity empowered by him were to create.

Jesus began to take dominion back from the Devil by force in his earthly ministry, and in his death and resurrection, a great victory over the cosmic powers over which he now reigns supreme. He has begun the work of realizing the victory that he won until he emerges in final victory over death and the establishment of a new heavens and new earth in which there is no sea and the nations are finally healed (Rev 21:1-22:2).²³ Jesus ends the conflict in victory, not by merely exerting his will over the old serpent (Rev 12:9-15; Rev 20:2), but by reconciling the world to himself as the Lamb slain (Rev 5:5-7). Reconciliation between God and a rebellious world nullifies the need for coercion by force to gain life-sustaining order. It is clear that believers have a role in that reconciliation (Rev 5:9-10). As we are redeemed and regenerated we are restored to the authority that we have in the beginning. This began in the ministry of the first disciples, and continues as we are transformed into the image of Jesus by the Holy Spirit. We exercise authority as believers to restore creation that has been ravaged by a warped use of God given human authority and by the Devil, who was until Jesus' death and resurrection, the god of this world.²⁴

What is unique concerning the Old Testament articulation of the ancient Near Eastern combat myth is its incorporation of the faithful into the work of God. The ancient Near Eastern combat myth depicts the king of the gods as defeating watery chaos and ordering reality to be life sustaining. It also served as a vehicle for communicating the legitimate role of the king in society in ordering the human sphere. Although Israel had a king, ideally, Israel was a holy nation comprised of a kingdom of priests (Exod 19:6). It would be difficult to imagine Marduk or Ra making such a statement about the Babylonian or Egyptian people. The Apostle Peter makes alludes to Exod

19:6 and applies it to believers in Christ (1 Peter 2:9). The conflict that believers have with the world is modeled after the Lamb who conquered by being slain, and ultimately reconciles the world to himself.

Ancient Near Eastern Combat Myth, Joel Hamme ABD

Endnotes

1. Ideally, it was the extended family. It was the extended family as a whole in Genesis 1-2. God then begins anew with the family of Abram in Genesis 12, which became the families of Israel. Now it is the family of Christ believers.
2. Some scholars do think that the Bible depicts God as creating from pre-existent matter. See, for example, Israel Knohl, who views the unformed and void earth, darkness and deep waters of Genesis 1 to be pre-existent entities that belong to what he calls the "evil sphere." See Israel Knohl, *The Divine Symphony: The Bible's Many Voices* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2003), 12-13.
3. See, for example, Ps 72, and the facets of human life that the just rule of the king was supposed to influence. Compare this to Assurbanipal's coronation hymn (Hallo, *Context of Scripture*, I: 473-74).
4. Marduk is a third generation deity, who becomes king of the gods by destroying Tiamat, the embodiment of salt water. Ra forms himself out of the eternal ocean. An exception is Yamm from the Ugaritic Ba'al Cycle. Yamm is a son of El, the High God, and does not appear to be eternal. It is clear in the text that El favors Yamm over Ba'al, whom El declares king and is called "the Darling of El."
5. See Benjamin Foster, "Epic of Creation (1.111) (*Enuma Elish*)," in Hallo, William H. and K. Lawson Younger, eds., *The Context of Scripture* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), I:390-402.
6. Ancient Egypt never developed any large epic myths, like we see from ancient Mesopotamia and Ugarit. What we have are numerous ritual texts and magic spells that refer to Ra's defeat of Apophis.
7. For Ba'al, the defeat of Mot, the demon of death, with the help of the goddess Anat is just as significant, if not more so, than Ba'al's defeat of Yamm. For a good and very accessible translation of the Baal Cycle, see

Michael David Coogan, *Stories from Ancient Canaan* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 75-115.

8. Jon Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 12.

9. For some representative positions on the equation of the Exodus from Egypt with creation, see Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms* (NIBC; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999), 307-08; James L. Mays, *Psalms* (Interpretation; Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994), 245-46; A. A. Anderson, *Psalms* (73-150) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 543-45. Anderson is more equivocal concerning a connection between the Exodus and the creation here, but lifts it up as a possibility.

10. To a lesser extent the activity of the Davidic king is described in such mythic terms. See, for example, Ps 89:25-27, in which the king is spoken of in terms reminiscent of Ba'al's defeat of Yamm in the Ba'al cycle.

11. Knohl, *Divine Symphony*, 14.

12. Greg Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 93-113. One critique of Boyd's position here is that the forces that are subdued in the ancient Near Eastern literature is the material out of which the cosmos is created. (This is not the language for demons, although from time to time these chaotic forces are seen to have spawned demons, making them not unlike the gods, which these chaotic forces also spawn.) This is reflected in the OT texts in a number of places, as well. Although chaotic and resistant to God's rule (thus the need to exercise control over it), it is too much to draw a straight line from the language of watery chaos and sea serpents in the Old Testament to the Devil in the New Testament in every instance. We are dealing here with a multivalent image, which has an exact meaning that is contextually driven in each of its instances. In Isa 27:1, the sea serpent is depicted as an adversary, in Ps 104:26 and Job 41, the Sea Serpent is God's creation in which the LORD takes joy and great pride. Another critique of Boyd's position is that the ancient Near East definitely had a rich vocabulary with which to talk about demons and spiritual warfare apart from the language of the chaos myth as seen in a number of their ritual prayer texts and other bodies of literature. Boyd is drawing on one stream of a vast and varied religious tradition.

13. Boyd, *God at War*, 110-13. Another interpretation would be that God left a great deal of the subduing and

exercising of dominion to humanity, which, as a result of the fall, never quite got subdued and put in order in the first place.

14. See David Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction: A Reappraisal of the Chaoskampf Theory in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 1-4. Whereas a number of scholars have seen the combat myth everywhere in the Old Testament, Tsumura seems to see it nowhere. Interestingly, although Israel Knohl does not see conflict in Gen 1, he still sees unformed and void earth, darkness and deep waters of Genesis 1 as evil entities out of which God fashions the world (Knohl, *The Divine Symphony*, 12-13). See also J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005), 235ff.

15. See, for example, this hymn from Pharaoh Hatshepsut's funeral chapel,

Re has placed King N
On the earth of the living
Forever and ever

Judging humanity and propitiating the gods,
Realizing order (ma'at) and destroying disorder (izfet).

He gives offerings to the gods
And mortuary offerings to the spirits.

The name of King N
Is in the sky like Re.

He lives in joy
like Re-Harakhte.

The elite rejoice when they see him,
And the subjects perform a dance of celebration,
In his form as a youth.

16. A clear example is in a particular Mesopotamian creation myth in which the Queen of the Gods (*belet-ili*) creates *lulu-amelu* (uncivilized, primordial humanity), and then creates *malik-amelu* (the circumspect human; the king) to rule over uncivilized, primordial humanity. See Hallo W, Younger K. Context of Scripture [monograph on the Internet]. Leiden: Brill; 2003, I.477. [cited June 19, 2013]. Available from: eBook

Collection (EBSCOhost). However, because of a divine anointing upon the King of Israel, and his adoption as son, he receives a divine grace of kingship in the biblical text, especially the royal psalms (See for ex. Pss 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132, 144). This idea later is developed into messianism, which shapes our understanding of who Jesus is.

17. This is apparent in the pairing of royal psalms with Torah psalms in the case of Pss 1 & 2, 18 & 19, and 118-19. Also Old Testament faithful are depicted as ones who advance the cause of righteousness and justice. See, for example, Isaac in Gen 18:19 and Job in Job 29:14. The temple in both the ANE and Israel had a large role in this, but there is not enough room here to discuss it.

18. This is the most natural way to interpret the forceful language in Genesis 1:26-28. For a discussion of this in relation to ecological concerns, see my paper, "Image, Creation and Family in Genesis," *William Carey International Development Journal* 1.2 (Spring 2012): 7-17. URL to on-line article: <http://www.wciujournal.org/journal/article/image-creation-and-family-in-genesis1>.

19. It is clear that humans are still creating, developing and ordering creatures, and reflect God's original purpose for them. Presently, this purpose quite often has been tinged with the Satanic. One of the works of Christ is to restore humans to this original purpose. The position I am taking raises a lot of issues that I do not have time to explore here. Some of these include whether or not the world was created perfect.

20. Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Margaret Kohl, trans.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 162-63; Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 235-36.

21. In this understanding, the first humans could have as easily cast the evil out of the garden as succumbed to it.

22. One can only go so far with this, however. The authority that Satan has in the world is only because the first humans gave it to him. Satan's authority is used in rebellion to God.

23. In this understanding, what we find in Rev 21:1-22:2 is not a return to the Garden of Eden. What we have in the New Creation is superior.

24. It is interesting to read Heb 2:6-9 in light of this idea. Although we do not see everything subjected to Jesus yet, they are nevertheless placed under his feet.

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Scary God or Scary People?

BRAD COLE

At the conclusion of the Fall Feasts of Israel, the Jewish High Holy Days, is the feast of *Simchat Torah* (“Rejoicing in the Law”), when traditional and Orthodox Jews passionately celebrate the gift of God’s Word. To witness the Scary God or Scary People?

In the movie “Annie Hall”, Woody Allen is waiting in line with his girlfriend to see a movie. Standing behind him is a very loud and arrogant man who is heavily criticizing a well known author. After several minutes of this, Woody Allen is pulling his hair out because what the man is saying is not true. Finally, he turns to the camera and says, “Wouldn’t it be wonderful if life were like this?” He then proceeds to walk behind a column and to bring out the real author who said to the man, “You know nothing of my work. You are completely misrepresenting me” – the man’s jaw drops open and he is silenced. Woody Allen, meanwhile, is intensely delighted.

The message of the Bible, as I understand it,

increasingly points to the character of God as being all-good, all-loving, and even incorporating supreme humility, service and kindness. In this setting, I’ve thought of some individuals who have loudly railed against the character of God that is presented in the Bible. Mark Twain and Richard Dawkins are two that come to mind.

If one were to attempt to use the Bible to make the case that “God is just like Jesus in character” both men would be itching to respond, Bible in hand, with the challenge, “You are using this book as ‘exhibit A’ to say that God is just like Jesus? This book?” Here is what Mark Twain had to say about the Bible:

“Our Bible reveals to us the character of our god with minute and remorseless exactness... It is perhaps the most damnatory biography that exists in print anywhere. It makes Nero an angel of light...by contrast.”

“To trust the God of the Bible is to trust an irascible, vindictive, fierce and ever fickle and changeful master...”

This article originally appeared on godscharacter.org on November 9, 2009. Used with permission from the author.

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And Richard Dawkins would say:

“The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal... pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.

We may be offended by these comments, but at the same time I think that even the most devoted follower of Jesus must face challenges in reconciling gentle Jesus with a violent Bible. Here is my fantasy! Wouldn't it be great if people like Twain and Dawkins had stood up and loudly made these statements about God, but then in response imagine that I could, like Woody Allen, walk behind a column and return with Jesus?

What would Jesus say to the charge that “The God of the OT is a vengeful, vindictive, scary, arbitrary, and fearsome deity?”

As I've tried to consider how Jesus would respond I became thoroughly frustrated with the disciples. They didn't merely have one brief opportunity to pull Jesus from behind a column — they lived with him for 3 and ½ years but yet so many of our theological dilemmas were not even on their radar screen!

Why didn't the disciples ask Jesus more questions about the scary OT stories? Just imagine the additional goldmine of information that the NT gospels would contain if the disciples had asked Jesus question like:

- Jesus, did you really drown all but 8 in the Flood?
- What about Sodom and Gomorrah and Lot's wife?
- What about the first born in Egypt? Were they bad boys?
- Did you really open up the earth to swallow Korah, Dathan, and Abihram — Jesus, how are we supposed to spread the Good News

about your character when you're doing things like that?

- Did you really make the sun stand still for Joshua not so that your people could have more time to serve and evangelize the heathen, but rather that they could have more time to kill them?
- Did you really give commands to wipe out entire villages, women and children?
- Why did Achan need to be stoned to death for stealing...and if Achan had to die, why did the children and their pets have to be stoned as well?
- Why the severe rules that commanded such things as stoning for Sabbath breakers and gluttonous children?
- Why did Uzzah die merely for reaching out to steady the ark?
- Did you really kill the 185,000 Assyrians?
- Did you really send the She-bears to maul the youths that taunted Elisha? Why?

“Jesus, we don't see you doing any of those things — why not?” But they never asked him any of these questions.

One reason for the disciples' failure to stop and consider the contrast between the humble carpenter of Nazareth and the God who sent the flood is that they were so pre-occupied with this idea that Jesus would establish a worldly kingdom of power and it would seem that they actually wished that Jesus would use methods of force and violence to accomplish that end. Their constant desire was to imagine sitting at Jesus' right hand in power and this self-centered fantasy blinded them to any real concern about the true character of the King or the true nature of his kingdom.

Amazingly, this destructive behavior continued right into the upper room, the night before Jesus died. The book of Luke describes that in the upper room, “An argument broke out among the disciples as to which one of them should be thought of as the greatest.” (Luke 22:24 GNB)

Now, how would you like this to be your legacy in the most widely read book in human history? God in human form is just about to allow his own children to torture him to death and you are standing around arguing about whether you are going to be the Vice President or the Secretary of State when Jesus finally gets over all this nonsense about service and humility and gets to the real business of establishing his earthly kingdom.

In this context it's incredible what Jesus did next. "Jesus knew that the Father had given him complete power; he knew that he had come from God and was going to God. So..."

So, what did he do? It would seem to me that perhaps this is precisely the time to exercise some scary OT methods. You know, call down fire from heaven, maybe the earth opens up and Judas is swallowed up, or maybe at least a she-bear walks into the room and growls. What would you do? You've had 3 and ½ years to reveal God's character and the nature of your kingdom to your disciples and now this is their self-centered concern the night before you are about to die? Here is what Jesus did with all that power:

"So, he rose from the table, took off his outer garment, and tied a towel around his waist." (John 13:3-4 GNB)

... and he washed a dozen pairs of dirty feet. Remarkably, he even washed the feet of his betrayer. A theme of this article will be to contrast God with everyone else and in this story we see the contrast between God in human form as the only one who left the upper room with dirty feet that night — with his disciples who would all betray him in just a few hours — but yet they left the upper room with clean feet.

And so, after this incredible display of humility and kindness, we just read on a few verses later in John where Phillip asks the natural question which brings us back to that scary "God of the Old Testament". Phillip said, "Lord, show us the Father; that is all we need."

In other words, "Jesus, we are both amazed

and puzzled at your 'off the charts' display of love, humility, and kindness, but what about that God of the Old Testament — you know, the real God, the one who did all those violent things — could we see him? Then we will be satisfied."

Don't miss Jesus' incredible reply:

Jesus answered, 'For a long time I have been with you all; yet you do not know me, Phillip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. Why, then, do you say, 'Show us the Father?'" (John 14:8-9 GNB)

"Phillip, the entire revelation of God to this planet is me! That God of the Old Testament — that was me and I have come in human form to clear up any and all misconceptions about God's character."

Now, that can't be true, can it? Gentle Jesus was the God of the Old Testament?

Many times Jesus referred to himself as the "I AM" — the same "I AM" that spoke to Moses at the burning bush. In fact, just a few hours later when the mob came to arrest Jesus in Gethsemane, Jesus said to them, "Who are you looking for?" They replied "Jesus of Nazareth" to which Jesus then responded "I AM." The "he" in your Bible's is added, he literally said "I AM" and it says in the gospel of John that when he declared himself to be the "I AM" that the mob collapsed to the ground.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul said that the God who went with the children of Israel was Christ himself!

"All ate the same spiritual bread and drank the same spiritual drink. They drank from the spiritual rock that went with them; and that rock was Christ himself." (1 Corinthians 10:3-4 GNB)

And Jesus would interpret the OT this way:

"You have your heads in your Bibles constantly because you think you'll find eternal life there. But you miss the forest for the trees. These Scriptures are all about me!" (John 5:39 MSG)

The entire Bible is the story of God — Who is God? The Son of God, Jesus Christ — who was God in human form. What Jesus is saying here that pertains to our question about the Old Testament God is that Eternal life is through a person, not a book, and this book is only helpful if we read it in such a way that all 66 books bring us to the Person of Jesus Christ.

So, Phillip is scratching the surface. He's beginning to ask the right questions, but yet it's very clear that the disciples could not handle all that Jesus wanted to tell them at this point. In fact, as the conversation continued the night before Jesus died, he said to them:

“I have much more to tell you, but now it would be too much for you to bear.” (John 16:12 GNB)

But now, as we turn to the Old Testament, I'd like to ask all of you to put on some glasses before reading any further.

Have any of you been to one of the new 3D movies that are becoming so popular? It's an incredible experience! Well, we need to put on glasses — let's just call them “Jesus glasses.”

We are going to look at the Old Testament now, through this lens of Jesus Christ dying on Calvary. This is our God as he really is. This is 3D, 20/20 vision — a clear picture of what our God is like.

In a 3D movie that I watched with my family recently, there was a slightly scary part of the movie where things were coming out at you, and my son got a little scared, so I told him, “just take your glasses off” and of course when you do, things are just fuzzy and not as scary. As we turn to the Old Testament, however, the only glasses that are safe to wear are “Jesus glasses” and I am warning you now that if you remove these glasses at any point in the remainder of this article you will very likely experience very serious side effects!

First, as we begin to adjust to our Jesus glasses, we see that Jesus very clearly told both the

religious leaders in his day and his own disciples that they had misread their Old Testament. For example, very early in his ministry he was asked to read from the book of Isaiah. What Jesus did to this passage is fascinating:

“When he stood up to read from the Scriptures, he was given the book of Isaiah the prophet. He opened it and read, ‘The Lord’s Spirit has come to me, because he has chosen me to tell the good news to the poor. The Lord has sent me to announce freedom for prisoners, to give sight to the blind, to free everyone who suffers, and to say, ‘This is the year the Lord has chosen.’ Jesus closed the book, then handed it back to the man in charge and sat down. Everyone in the meeting place looked straight at Jesus. Then Jesus said to them, ‘What you have just heard me read has come true today.’ All the people started talking about Jesus and were amazed...” (Luke 4:16–22)

— amazed or perhaps shocked would be a better translation!

What is so remarkable about this story is that right after reading from the scroll, the crowd suddenly flips out and they run Jesus out of the synagogue and try to throw him off a cliff. And you're reading this story and you wonder, “Huh? What just happened? Did I miss something?” So we scramble over to this passage in Isaiah and discover that Jesus omitted their cherished section about God's vengeance in this Old Testament passage. He just left it out! Here is the passage from Isaiah:

“The Spirit of the Almighty LORD is with me because the LORD has anointed me to deliver good news to humble people. He has sent me to heal those who are broken-hearted, to announce that captives will be set free and prisoners will be released. He has sent me to announce the year of the LORD'S good will and the day of our God's vengeance, to comfort all those who grieve.” (Isaiah 61:1–2 – GW)

What kind of a grade would Jesus receive in an upper level theology class for just leaving a part of the verse out? Here's why he left it out. The phrase, "the day of our God's vengeance" was the section of this passage where the religious leaders all stood up and gave each other a high-5. These were the words that they longed to dwell on, because in their mind, "God's vengeance" was something that was to be poured out on their enemies. They certainly had not read their Old Testament in a way that would lead them to love, serve and pray for their enemies — and they were deeply offended by Jesus' reading of this passage.

By the way, speaking of how to treat enemies, have you seen this Old Testament passage in Exodus?

"If you happen to see your enemy's cow or donkey running loose, take it back to him."
(Exodus 23:4 GNB)

I like to imagine Jesus as a boy reading passage and thinking, "Now there is the ideal."

The disciples were also plagued with this same false paradigm, because just a few chapters later in Luke, Jesus was rejected in a town, and the disciples, it would seem, longingly thought about some of the violent stories in the Old Testament:

"Lord, do you wish us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, even as Elijah did? But He turned and rebuked and severely censured them. He said, 'You do not know of what sort of spirit you are...'" (Luke 9:54-55 – Amplified)

They must have scratched their heads. "Jesus, come on, you know those OT stories, flex your muscles a little bit — have vengeance on your enemies!" It seems that they would have preferred a God who was that way, but Jesus strongly rebuked their desire for vengeance.

In fact, from the perspective of the religious leaders, Jesus seemed to be a perpetual contradiction to the scriptures. In the famous "sermon on the mount", Jesus' first major sermon in which he

would announce his platform as king (an inaugural address, of sorts), I'm sure that there was great anticipation to hear what he would say. Maybe some were hoping that he would declare open war against the Romans and that he would use his power to lead them to a miraculous victory — hadn't they read their Old Testament and concluded that this was the role of the coming Messiah?

But instead, he began his sermon with these words, "Happy are those who know that they are spiritually poor....Happy are those who mourn....Happy are those who are humble...Happy are those who are merciful to others...Happy are those who work for peace...Happy are those who are persecuted..." (Matthew 5)

"Happy are those who are persecuted?" "Jesus we are supposed to be the ones who persecute our enemies, not the other way around!" I get the strong impression that as Jesus is giving this remarkable speech that there is murmuring in the crowd. "This isn't what the Messiah is supposed to say!" The grumbling increases in volume until finally Jesus has to abruptly change the direction of his talk and perhaps raise his arms and shout above the crowd:

"Hold on, hold on: Don't suppose that I came to do away with the Law and the Prophets. I did not come to do away with them, but to give them their full meaning."
(Matthew 5:17 – CEV)

In other words, "I am not contradicting or doing away with the Old Testament. Rather, I have come to explain it to you." Or, "I have come to fill it full with meaning."

Now, listen very carefully to how Jesus would go on to explain the Old Testament:

"You're familiar with the command to the ancients, 'Do not murder.' But I am telling you that anyone who is so much as angry with a brother or sister is guilty of murder."
(Matthew 5:21,22)

Notice that Jesus is taking authority over and is adding meaning to the Old Testament. Because of course it was the Son of God who gave the command, “Do not murder” and he has the authority to add meaning to it, which is “Now I tell you, don’t even hate.” Just reading on:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But now I tell you: anyone who looks at a woman and wants to possess her is guilty of committing adultery with her in his heart.” (Matthew 5:27–28 – GN)

Just imagine that you are a Pharisee in the audience, and that for years you have looked at the 10 commandments on the wall before you go to bed such as “Do not murder” and you would probably think, “Man I’ve been good today, I didn’t kill anyone.” You look down the list and you see the words “Do not commit adultery” and again you pat yourself on the back. “It’s been a good day today because I didn’t commit adultery.”

Jesus fills these Old Testament passages with the much deeper meaning that what God really wants is the law of love written on the heart. But, of course, that message is in the Old Testament, the people just didn’t want to hear it.

“It was also said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a written notice of divorce.’ But now I tell you: if a man divorces his wife for any cause other than her unfaithfulness, then he is guilty...” (Matthew 5:31–32)

As he continues, these words should be very cutting to us as Jesus radically tries to move his people to the ideal (you’ve all heard these words before but please read them as if for the first time just now):

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ But now I tell you: do not take revenge on someone who wrongs you. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, let him slap your left cheek too. And if someone takes you to court to sue

you for your shirt, let him have your coat as well. And if one of the occupation troops forces you to carry his pack one mile, carry it two miles. When someone asks you for something, give it to him; when someone wants to borrow something, lend it to him.” (Matthew 5:38–42 – GN)

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your friends, hate your enemies.’ But now I tell you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may become the children of your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:43–44 – GN)

This is radical stuff and sadly it shows that Christians do not often follow the teachings of Christ, but the point to make for now, with regards to the Old Testament is this. Jesus’ repeated words in this sermon “You have heard it said....BUT NOW I tell you...” suggests something critically important to our understanding of the Old Testament. This may sound strange and perhaps even wrong, but please wrestle with this statement. Here it is: *There is a hierarchy of truth in scripture.*

Why does that sound wrong? Well, one view of inspiration is that since the scripture is God-breathed everything is on an equal plane of truth whether we are in the book of Judges or the gospel of John. But what did we just hear Jesus say? He said that the rules such as ‘eye for an eye’ were not the ideal. That rule is a very, very dim light compared to the very bright light of loving your enemies. In Jesus we can say that Gandhi was right, that “*an eye for an eye makes the world blind.*”

In fact, let’s consider the context in which many of these rules were given. You will recall that as the children of Israel traveled to Mount Sinai that there was continual rebellion and mutiny against the authority of Moses. We get a pretty good idea as to the state of these people standing at the foot of the mountain, by the rules that God had to give them. For example (reminder — keep Jesus glasses on):

“Do not have sexual intercourse with any of

your relatives. Do not disgrace your father by having intercourse with your mother. You must not disgrace your own mother...No man or woman is to have sexual relations with an animal; that perversion makes you ritually unclean” (Leviticus 18:7,23 - GN)

Would God give rules like this if they were not needed, and if those kinds of rules were needed, what does that say about the people? If I could be so bold, even the 10 commandments do not clearly reflect the ideal. For example, what would it say about your family if this morning you had to say to them at the breakfast table, “Listen, I am your only husband and father, please do not choose another! And another thing, children, please do not murder any of your classmates in school today. And, to my wife, please don’t commit adultery today.” Is your family very stable if you need those kinds of rules?

God’s family was very unruly at Mount Sinai and so he came in all of his glory, and he scared them — no question — but he did it for a reason. He told Moses:

“I will come to you in a thick cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will believe you from now on.” (Exodus 19:9 GNB)

God came in the way he did, in part, to suppress the very deep rebellion and to establish Moses’ authority in the minds of the people. Here is our question though, was God “too scary” by shaking the mountain in the way that he did? Did he over-do it? I mean, you would think that if God came to a major U.S. city in this way that most likely obedience and church attendance would pick up for a while. But what were the people doing 40 days after God’s incredible display of power, but dancing drunk around a golden calf. God did not go too far. What we see at Mount Sinai are a scary people, not a scary God.

But now, returning to the Sermon on the Mount, the Pharisees heard in this sermon a multitude of contradictions with the Old Testament.

For example, they remembered Jesus’ words about divorce, and in this they saw an opportunity to trap Jesus:

“Some Pharisees came and tried to trap Him with this question: ‘Should a man be allowed to divorce his wife for just any reason?’ ‘Haven’t you read the Scriptures?’ Jesus replied. ‘They record that from the beginning ‘God made them male and female.’ And He said, ‘This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.’ Since they are no longer two but one, let no one split apart what God has joined together.’ ‘Then why did Moses say in the law that a man could give his wife a written notice of divorce and send her away?’ they asked.

Please don’t miss Jesus’ spectacular reply:

“Moses permitted divorce only as a concession to your hard hearts, but it was not what God had originally intended.” (Matthew 19:3–8 NLT)

In the Old Testament, divorce was remarkably cruel. You don’t like your wife, get rid of her and bring a new one in the following week. You don’t like her, send her out on the streets and get another. It was the essentially the end of that woman’s life. Something had to be done and so we have Old Testament divorce rules. But notice, Jesus’ explanation of why the Old Testament divorce rules were given explains at least half of the hard to understand rules and stories in the Old Testament. Jesus admits in this explanation that his actions and rules in the Old Testament do not reflect the ideal — far from the ideal, in fact. What Jesus is saying is that “in your hard-hearted rebellion I had to say things and do things as a concession because it was the only way that I could reach you.”

Let’s give some specific examples of this principle. Does God approve of polygamy? Does he? What do you think of this command?

“If a man takes a second wife, he must continue to give his first wife the same amount

of food and clothing and the same rights that she had before.” (Exodus 21:10 GNB)

“*If a man takes a second wife...?*” Why didn’t God say, “I forbid polygamy — signed GOD”

There are two ways of looking at verses like this. One is to be offended that God would seem to allow for something that is so far from the ideal. Another way to view verses like this is to be amazed that God would condescend so dramatically in his attempts to bring his people out of moral darkness one step at a time and how do you bring someone out of a deep dark cave that has been there for many years? Do you bring them out into the noonday sun, or do you bring them first out at night and let their eyes adjust to the stars and the moonlight?

Another example of this principle would be the cities of refuge. In that time, if you were chopping wood and the blade flew off your axe and killed someone walking by, under the system of private vengeance it would be expected for the family of that man to hunt you down and kill you — even though everyone would acknowledge that it was an accident. And so God, rather than saying “I forbid private vengeance” created a safe place to flee. When the high priest died (which might be decades later), the obligation was fulfilled and finally the man could leave that city. Is this the ideal? Do we put this story on the same level of truth as Jesus washing the feet of his disciples?

Once again we see God patiently trying to lead his people to the ideal, but he had to take them just one step in the right direction. This verse in Hosea is very instructive for understanding the Old Testament God:

“The people of Israel are as stubborn as mules. How can I feed them like lambs in a meadow?” (Hosea 4:16, GNB)

In the Old Testament, God is reaching out to stubborn mules and to do that he must speak a language that only a stubborn mule could understand. The question we need to ask is this: “Who

looks good in these stories — humanity who needed such bizarre and sometimes severe rules or God who was willing to give them?”

Do we find a scary God in the Old Testament? I would rather say that in the Old Testament we find a scary people and that perhaps only a scary God can reach a scary people.

Alden Thompson once told the story of some missionaries who went a small country in Africa. In this area it was the tradition for men to beat their wives to show them that they love them! The missionaries were rightly offended by this and over time they were able to convince some of the men that this practice was wrong. But guess what the response was of the women whose husbands stopped beating them was? “Why don’t our husbands love us anymore?” Might you need to use some intermediate steps to reach people like this and does this not help us understand the challenges that God faced in Old Testament times?

We typically view God as inflexible and changeless and that every word and every action must reflect the absolute ideal. Rather, the Old Testament reveals God as saying and doing things that are light-years from the ideal.

As another example, did God approve of the monarchy? Instinctively we might say “yes” as we think of King David and that Jesus was a descendant of David, but yet this was not God’s plan. The people said, “We want a king” God said, “No you don’t. That’s a terrible idea. He will take your men to fight for him. He will take your women to join his harem? He’ll raise your taxes. Don’t do it!” The people said, “No, we want a king.” Now, God doesn’t change does he? He doesn’t give in to anything less than the ideal does he? Remarkably, God’s reply, after telling them that it was a terrible idea was to say, “Do what they want and give them a king.” (1 Samuel 8:22)

I believe that God’s choice again and again in the Old Testament was either to abandon his people entirely, or to stoop to meet them where they were.

What about the stoning of Achan? To understand this story, we need to back up and read one of the most stunning verses in the Bible. The people are about to enter the Promised Land, and, if you have ever had the opportunity to read through the Bible quickly, up to this point, you have struggled through 40 years of severe rebellion, chaos, and mutiny against the authority of Moses and God. Finally, against the backdrop of all this and as the people enter the Promised Land they give Joshua these very re-assuring words:

“They answered Joshua, ‘We will do everything you have told us and will go anywhere you send us. We will obey you, just as we always obeyed Moses...’ (Joshua 1:16–18 – GN)

“Just as we always obeyed Moses?” Wouldn’t you like to know the look on Joshua’s face when they said that? You just can’t make this stuff up!

But reading on, notice, what is the standard of justice that the people have? “Whoever question your authority or disobeys any of your orders (Joshua) will be put to death.” What did Achan do just a few days later? He disobeyed God. The standard of justice, in the people’s mind is that disobeying Joshua should result in death? So, what should the penalty be for disobeying God? Do you see the dilemma God is in?

Tim Jennings has a very good illustration of this point. A few years ago an Iraqi grocer and his family were killed and the grocery store was burned down because he had the audacity to place celery sticks next to tomatoes. What’s the problem with that, you ask? Some felt that this was highly offensive because it could be interpreted as an erect male and so he was killed!

Now, if you were appointed governor of this town and you were creating law, let’s say that you decided that drunk driving was serious and that you wanted a penalty that was sufficient to deter this behavior. Suppose that you chose a \$500 fine and 5 days in jail. What would this imply to the people? If celery sticks next to tomatoes results in

death, would this not suggest that drunk driving is far less serious? What is God to do when our sense of justice is entirely warped?

But, of course, the other difficult aspect of Achan’s story is that not only was Achan stoned to death, but also his wife, children...even the pets. Why? Once again, we are dealing with a culture and time that is so different from ours. In our time and society, we champion freedom and we are deeply individualistic, but this was not true in Achan’s time. During this time, one’s person and one’s personality extended to the entire family and so Achan’s sin, in the minds of the people, equally involved everyone in his family. And so, once again, God condescended to work within a system of justice that we cannot identify with and that was far, far, from the ideal – and I think it made God sick.

Once again, scary God or scary people?

What about all the fighting in the OT? Why didn’t God just say, “No fighting! I forbid it!”

Jesus, of course, said as much:

“My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world.” (John 18:38, NLT)

In Jesus we can say that God never wanted them to fight, but again, let’s try to identify with God’s dilemma in Old Testament times.

Imagine that the church next door to the one you attend was representative of the religions of the nations who occupied the Promised Land. What do we know about those religions? They were remarkably cruel — the church experience involved child sacrifice and meeting with temple prostitutes. What’s even more amazing though is that the children of Israel were continually drawn to and tempted by this false worship? Imagine that when you got up for church next week that you had a hard time deciding, “Hmmm...shall I go sacrifice my child to the god Molech and then meet with a temple prostitute, or should I go to

my regular church? Tough call!" That would not say very good things about you!

It's unthinkable that even king Solomon fell into this trap. Several times in the Old Testament God would say, "Do not intermingle. That would be fatal! That would be fatal!" And it was! God knew that his people were deeply drawn to this form of worship and so they had to stay away from them, but yet he did not want them to fight and kill these people. This is evidenced by his repeated words such as, "Let me send the hornet ahead of you to disposes the nations." Or "I will send my angel ahead of you." Or:

"Don't be afraid of them, for the LORD your God will fight for you" (Deuteronomy 3:22, GNB)

But they didn't trust God and so it would appear that God (once again as a concession to our hard-hearts) helped them fight, but yet the repeated message was, "I really don't want you to fight at all!" What God wanted was for them to learn step one: "Put your trust in me." For example, the first city they conquered was Jericho where the walls miraculously collapsed with a mere shout and some trumpets. Should not the people have realized, "You know what, seems like it's much more important that we stay connected to God than it is that we have a large army?" There are countless examples of this. Gideon and his 300 men threw an army of Midianites that the Bible describes as so large they were like the sand on the seashore into a panic with nothing more than torches, and God would summarize so many of their conquests this way:

"As you advanced, I threw them into panic... Your swords and bows had *nothing* to do with it." (Joshua 24:12)

And we read that when Joshua would conquer a people that: "...he crippled their horses and burned their chariots." (Joshua 11:9 – GN) How cruel, right? Yes it is, but God is trying to tell the people in the only language they could understand, "Please, don't have a large military and if you

would just put your trust in me, you won't be doing any of this fighting in the first place."

Even when David killed Goliath, we miss the words of David as he charged at the giant:

"You are coming against me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the Israelite armies, which you have defied. This very day the LORD will put you in my power; I will defeat you and cut off your head (those aren't the words I was referring to). And I will give the bodies of the Philistine soldiers to the birds and animals to eat. Then the whole world will know that Israel has a God, and everyone here will see that *the LORD does not need swords or spears to save his people.*" (1 Samuel 17:45–47 GNB)

After watching a boy defeat a giant, did Israel get the message which was "Hey, God does not need swords or spears to save his people!" Fantasize with me for just one second that this event caused the people to have an epiphany. They turned to each other and instead of chasing after the Philistines they proclaimed, "From this day forward we will place our absolute trust in the Lord. The Almighty One will take care of us. Instead of killing our enemies let's turn our swords into plows. Let's become a great light to the world about the kind of Person that our mighty God is.

Can you imagine how dramatically different the course of human history would have been? Of course, unfortunately, even David, the one who said those words to Goliath, spent most of his life fighting and killing. And so at the end of his life when David asked if he could build a temple for God, it's almost as if God had to get it on record, in print, that "I hate this fighting" and God did not allow David to build a temple for him because he was a man of blood.

The Old Testament reveals a scary people, not a scary God or perhaps we could say that only a scary God is capable of reaching a scary people.

To drive this point home, one last Old Testament illustration — what has been called the worst story in the Bible. A man is traveling with his servant and a concubine. It's getting late and the servant suggests that they spend the night in a heathen town, to which the master replies, "We're not going to stop in a city where the people are not Israelites. Come on, haven't you read the story about Sodom and Gomorrah and what the men wanted to do to those two angels? Let's travel to an Israelite town." Finally they arrive at Gibeah, a Benjamite city but no one would take them in. Finally an old man took them to his home, but then, God's people in an eerie parallel to Sodom and Gomorrah, surrounded the house:

"They were enjoying themselves when all of a sudden some sexual perverts from the town surrounded the house and started beating on the door. They said to the old man, 'Bring out that man that came home with you! We want to have sex with him!' But the old man went outside and said to them, 'No, my friends! Please! Don't do such an evil, immoral thing! This man is my guest. Look! Here is his concubine and my own virgin daughter. I'll bring them out now, and you can have them. Do whatever you want to with them. But don't do such an awful thing to this man!' But the men would not listen to him. So the Levite took his concubine and put her outside with them. They raped her and abused her all night long and didn't stop until morning. At dawn the woman came and fell down at the door of the old man's house, where her husband was. She was still there when daylight came. Her husband got up that morning, and when he opened the door to go on his way, he found his concubine lying in front of the house with her hands reaching for the door. He said, 'Get up. Let's go.' But there was no answer. So he put her body across the donkey and started on his way home. When he arrived, he went in the house and got a knife. He took his concubine's body, cut

it into twelve pieces, and sent one piece to each of the twelve tribes of Israel." (Judges 19:10–29 – GN)

Where is God? As you read this story in Judges, why is there no commentary from God? No fire from heaven. No action, it would seem. Remarkably though, God did comment on this story if we read on to the book of Hosea:

You got your start in sin at Gibeah — *that ancient, unspeakable, shocking sin* — And you've been at it ever since... When Israel was only a child, I loved him. I called out, 'My son!'—called him out of Egypt. But when others called him, he ran off and left me. He worshiped the popular sex gods, he played at religion with toy gods. *Still, I stuck with him.* I led Ephraim. I rescued him from human bondage, But he never acknowledged my help, never admitted that I was the one pulling his wagon, that I lifted him, like a baby, to my cheek, that I bent down to feed him... My people are hell-bent on leaving me. They pray to god Baal for help. He doesn't lift a finger to help them. But how can I give up on you, Ephraim? How can I turn you loose, Israel? How can I leave you to be ruined like Admah, devastated like luckless Zeboim? I can't bear to even think such thoughts. *My insides churn in protest.*" (Hosea 10:9; 11:1–10 MSG)

This is a great summary of the Old Testament. What did God do with the rebellion of humanity? "Still, I stuck with him." How did he feel? "My insides churn in protest!"

Now I ask you, in contrasting this terrible story with the tearful words of God in Hosea, are we dealing with a scary God or a scary people?

Obviously we are only scratching the surface on a handful of the challenges in the Old Testament. But let's skip all the way forward to the Babylonian captivity. Ezekiel writes from Babylon where the glory of Israel is gone. God's chosen people who were to be a light to evangelize the

entire world to the one true God, have failed. But notice how God described their failure:

“Wherever they went, they gave me a bad name. People said, ‘These are GOD’s people, but they got kicked off his land.’ I suffered much pain over my holy reputation, which the people of Israel blackened in every country they entered. ‘Therefore, tell Israel...I’m not doing this for you, Israel. I’m doing it for me, to save my character, my holy name, which you’ve blackened in every country where you’ve gone. I’m going to put my great and holy name on display, the name that has been ruined in so many countries, the name that you blackened wherever you went.’” (Ezekiel 36:20–23 MSG)

The terrible Old Testament stories reflect negatively on us (humanity), not God. We have ruined God’s reputation. It is in this context that we should consider the arrival of Jesus on the scene and we read in John chapter 1 that:

“No one has ever seen God (because God simply could not clearly reveal himself in Old Testament times — the rebellion and the chaos of his chosen people was so severe). But the unique One, who is Himself God, is near to the Father’s heart. *He* has revealed God to us.” (John 1:18 NLT)

God came in human form to clear up any misconceptions as to what God is like. Just the way he came should say so much to us about who our God is. The God of the Old Testament, the Creator of the Universe, moved into the neighborhood by transporting himself into the womb of one of his sinful creatures and then began the 9 month process of growing, cell by cell, into a baby boy.

As we consider the fact that God became a baby, fully dependent on one of his own creatures for milk and diaper change can we still seriously consider the possibility that God may be a severe, vengeful tyrant?

But in closing, the story of a scary people and

a loving God has a very disturbing twist.

God could have come at any time in human history. In fact, how do you think Jesus would have been received by any of rebellious generations that I have described? Of course, we would expect that a kind and humble God would be killed by a group of rebels, and he would have only learned that a group of rebels hate a loving God.

But God waited until, it would seem, that perhaps he had the most devote followers and rule keepers that ever walked the planet. Did they attend church? Every week without fail. Did they pay their tithe’s and offerings? Jesus even commented on the fact that they even tithed their seeds, they were so careful. Were they still intermarrying with other nations? No, they had completed separated themselves from the heathen. Did they keep the law? They even made an extensive additional list of rules in their zeal to keep the commandments that God had given. Were they involved in mission and outreach projects? Yes, Jesus commented on the fact that they would send missionaries all around the entire world to win one convert. Did they not eagerly await the 1st coming, just as many of us await the 2nd coming? Did they keep the Sabbath? It is one of the most stunning verses in the entire Bible!

“Then the Jews, since it was the day of Sabbath preparation, and so the bodies wouldn’t stay on the crosses over the Sabbath (it was a high holy day that year), petitioned Pilate that their legs be broken to speed death, and the bodies taken down.” (John 19:31 MSG)

Why did they petition Pilate to break the legs of Jesus on Friday night, just as the sun was setting? Because they were afraid that he wouldn’t die fast enough before the Sabbath began and so they wanted to break his legs to speed death. And so they rushed home from the Cross to keep the Sabbath – to worship God. Who is God? *The One they had just crucified.*

Insanity!

The most devote rule keepers of all time

tortured to death the Son of God — once again, a scary people not a scary God.

How is it possible that rebels in the Old Testament, and rule keepers in the New Testament could all hate God so much? “Eternal life is to know God” (John 17:3) and what we see in the Bible is rebels in the Old Testament and rule keepers in the New Testament who both missed the one key essential ingredient: they did not know the truth about what God is like in character. Both groups did not have an intimate relational knowledge of God. They did not know the truth that sets us free, which is the knowledge about the character of the true God — that God (though he is limitless in power) is also the kind of Person who loves his enemies, that God is also kind, gentle, humble and supremely forgiving. They did not know God as a friend.

It seems to me that religions worldwide today place much emphasis on God’s sovereignty, power, and holiness, but as Christians we should come to the world with the message about God’s character that Christ revealed. *Doctrine #1 and the foundation of everything else that is important is this: God is exactly as Jesus revealed him to be. Is our picture of God Jesus Christ? That is 20/20 vision.*

We who call ourselves Christians, those of us who are wearing the Jesus glasses, have such a unique message for the world. Do you see the one humbly washing the feet of Judas? That is our God. Do you see the one hanging out with tax collectors and prostitutes? That is our God. Do you see the one that chose a group of fishermen to be his disciples? That is our God. Do you see the one dying on a cross and forgiving those who did not even ask to be forgiven? That is our God!

The Big Picture of Scripture

BETH SNODDERLY

The image at the center of 1 John conveys an image that is found throughout Scripture, the cosmic war, the battle for earth: “The Son of God appeared for the purpose of undoing/destroying the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). From Genesis to Revelation, the consistent theme of Judeo-Christian Scripture is God’s purpose to win a people for himself back from the ruler-ship of Satan (see 1 John 5:19). This summary of the biblical story presents the big picture of the biblical narrative from the viewpoint of the Johannine community of believers.¹

A. Big Picture: Prior to the Coming of Jesus

Before the appearing of Jesus, no one had ever seen God (1 John 4:12, John 1:18). The Gospel and First Epistle of John show that God wants to be known to people who choose to be in fellowship with him (1 John 1:3, 4; John 1:12), but the people

to whom he chose to reveal himself in most detail, the people of Israel, did not recognize him, in the form of his Son Jesus, when they saw him (John 1:11.) What was blinding and deceiving them, keeping them from recognizing their Creator (John 1:1-4)? The beginning of Scripture, Genesis 1:1, 2, points to the answer.

The first thing recorded in the Hebrew scriptures, with which the Johannine community would have been very familiar, is that God is having to rebuild a world that was in chaos following some sort of disastrous judgment (“*tohu wabohu*”)². This was apparently due to the sinning of the devil “from the beginning” (1 John 3:8a), prior to the sin of the first humans. Could it be that in an earlier period of time before Genesis 1:1, Satan had turned against God and distorted God’s good creation into the suffering and violence now seen throughout nature? According to Genesis 1:26, God created humans to take charge of the creation on his

This article was originally published in The Goal of International Development, William Carey International University Press, 2011.

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behalf. But at some point the devil, who is a liar and has been a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44), deceived the first humans into joining him in rebelling against God's will. The devil's murderous, hateful nature is illustrated by Cain, who was of the evil one and killed his brother because his deeds were evil, while his brother's deeds were righteous (Genesis 4:3-8; 1 John 3:12). The success of the devil's pervasive influence is seen by the fact that the whole world is said to be under the influence of the evil one (1 John 5:19), who is called the "ruler of this world" in John 12:31.

God's plan to reverse the evil one's influence (Genesis 3:15), as recorded in the Pentateuch, called for humans to freely choose to obey him as their rightful ruler. This plan was delayed numerous times by humans making wrong choices and experiencing the consequences, such as the Flood, or when the Israelites asked for a human king and ended up in Exile. Each time judgment was followed by a fresh beginning.

B. Big Picture: Jesus' Life and Death on Earth

Finally, at the right time, God made a radical new beginning: the Word became flesh (John 1:14). Jesus appeared to take away sin and to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:5, 8b), loosing people from slavery to sin (John 8:34-36), and making it possible for people to choose obedience to God as their father. (See John 1:12: he gave them the authority or the power to become sons of God.) First John emphasizes two commandments requiring obedience from true children of God: love for one another, and belief in Jesus as the Christ, the Savior of the world (1 John 3:23; 4:14).

The author of 1 John and his inner circle were eyewitnesses that the Father had sent the Son to be the Savior of the world (1 John 1:1-3, 4:9, 14; John 4:42). Jesus' ministry began with his baptism by John (1 John 5:6-8; John 1:32-34) and his temptation by the devil, whom he successfully overcame (Matthew 4:10, 11). His ministry included defeating the works of the devil by casting out demons

and healing the sick while demonstrating a life of love and obedience to God.

Jesus' life set an example for the believer to follow (1 John 1:7; 2:6; 3:2, 16). His command to his disciples "from the beginning" was to love one another (1 John 4:7, John 13:34, 15:17), one demonstration of which was washing his disciples' feet (John 13:14-16). Not only would his disciples ideally follow his positive example, but they would also experience similar negative consequences. Jesus warned that since the world hated him, it would hate them also (1 John 3:13; John 15:18-24). But the ruler of this world had no hold on Jesus (John 12:31; 14:30) and ultimately will have no hold on Jesus' followers (see 1 John 5:18 which promises that the evil one does not "touch" the believer). Jesus' successful accomplishment of the Father's will led to the driving out and defeat of the evil one. Jesus appeared to take away sins (1 John 3:5) and in doing so, broke the hold that the devil had on humankind (1 John 3:8b, 5:18). Jesus' atoning death on the cross (1 John 2:2) was the turning point in the battle against Satan.

C. Big Picture: After Jesus Returned to the Father

As a result of the devil's works being undone in the lives of Jesus' followers, believers are able and obligated to follow his example by laying down their lives for those in need (1 John 3:16, 17). These demonstrations of love are intended to continue in a chain reaction of destroying the devil's works across time and culture by bringing love where there is hatred (1 John 3:11-17), truth where there is falsehood (1 John 4:1-6), and life to overcome death (1 John 3:14). The missiology of the Frontier Mission Fellowship recognizes that humans were created to join God in rescuing Creation from the kingdom of darkness, including the physical and social results of intelligent evil, and in bringing transformation that represents the advance of God's kingdom.

D. Big Picture: The End of History

At the end of the New Testament, in the Book of Revelation, the fulfillment of God's purposes in history is described in terms showing that the state of "*tohu wabohu*" has finally been reversed: there is no more death, crying or pain; and darkness and night have been permanently replaced with "good" light (see Revelation 21:3, 4; 22:5). By describing the opposite of God's intentions in the context of the Creation account, "*tohu wabohu*" points toward the goal of that creation—a place that can be inhabited by humans in purposeful fellowship with God. An adversary that is hostile to life and who opposes God's intentions exists. The biblical story shows humans are to fight back against the enemy who orchestrates disorder and chaos in opposition to God. The rest of Genesis 1 points the way in showing that it is possible to restore order with creativity and patience, showing how to overcome evil with good. John Sailhamer's insight on a play on words illustrates this theme: "*tohu*" describes the land before God made it "*tob*," good.³ As believers follow God's and the Son's example, and as they demonstrate what God's will is and what He is like, the peoples of the earth will be attracted to follow that kind of God and experience His blessing.

Endnotes

1. All interpretation is filtered through the ideology of the community or communities with which an interpreter identifies. The present author identifies with the missiology of the Frontier Mission Fellowship, founded by Ralph D. Winter, which includes the necessity of intentionally fighting to destroy the works of the devil in order to accomplish Jesus' mission on earth: to release captives, open the eyes of the blind, free the oppressed (Luke 4:18).

2. The condition of the earth prior to creation is described in Genesis 1:2 as "*tohu wabohu*," which can be translated "destroyed and desolate," or "topsy turvey," or, traditionally, "formless and void." A comprehensive study of the context of the 17 occurrences in the Hebrew Bible of the Hebrew word, "*tohu*," reveals that in each of the other 16 occurrences of the word "*tohu*," the context is judgment on rebellion against God. It seems

logical that the first occurrence of the term, in Genesis 1:2, would also have been in the context of judgment, setting the tone for the remaining usages of the term in the Hebrew Bible. (The word "*bobu*," never occurs alone, perhaps because it was coined to rhyme with "*tohu*".)

3. J.H. Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah, 1996), 63.

Where Darwin Scores Higher than Intelligent Design

RALPH D. WINTER

According to Deborah Cadbury's book entitled *The Terrible Lizard*, which tells us about early dinosaur hunters, the tumble of new bones being dug up right in England soon became a significant factor in a vast and widespread shift away from what came to be called a "bondage to Moses," that is, bondage to the Bible.

Cornelius Hunter's book, *Darwin's God: Evolution and the Problem of Evil*, demonstrates conclusively that even Darwin, only a little later, was still concerned about the Christian faith in that he was pained until the day he died by the intellectual task of explaining how a good and all-powerful God could have authored the cruelty which he saw so pervasively in nature, and which many of the discoveries of dinosaur bones dramatically highlighted.

Both Hunter and Cadbury show that in the 1820s Biblical perspectives were major factors filtering interpretations of the bones being discovered of earlier life forms. This was true at Oxford University, for example, which was in that era a citadel of defense of the literal text of the Bible, somewhat of a Moody Bible Institute.

Today we have the wonderful and effective work of the Evangelical pioneers in the Intelligent Design (ID) movement, a perspective portrayed magnificently in the Illustra Media video, *Unlocking the Mystery of Life*. But neither the writings of these pioneer ID people nor this magnificent video reflect any stated concern whatsoever for the perplexing presence of pervasive evil, suffering and cruelty throughout all of nature. Strange, because the lurid presence of evil ("Nature red in tooth and claw") was a major factor in Darwin's thinking and the thinking of quite a few other key people who in his day were confused about how the existence of violent forms of life could be congruent with the concept of a benevolent Creator.

Thus, it would appear that some of our present-day creationists are so eager to give God all the credit for all of creation that the virtually unavoidable presence of evil to be seen there has become strangely less important than it was in Darwin's day and even to Darwin himself. Would it not be very ironic if the man we usually accuse of destroying faith in a Creator God were to turn out to be more

Originally published in IJFM, Issue 20, Volume 4, Winter 2003. Reprinted with permission.

Ralph Winter (1924–2009), was the founder of William Carey International University.

interested in preserving the good reputation of that God than are we?

In saying that some of our creationists are glossing over the surprisingly prominent reality of intelligent evil in nature, I don't mean that any of these ID people really deep down are unwilling to confront the enigmatic reality of evil. I just mean that, from the current discussion as seen in their written materials that would appear to be the case.

As a matter of fact, I myself have all my life believed in what C. S. Lewis called "that hideous strength." Yet only recently have I begun to reflect on the possibility that this hideous and intelligent evil must not reasonably be dealt with among us any longer merely by superficial references to the philosophical concept of sin and to a fall of man. Why? Because the mere idea of sin is not personifiable. Sin as an abstraction is defined by some as the departure from what is right. In that case the concept itself does not necessarily imply the potent and powerful existence of a diabolical personality any more than would a wrong score on a third-grade arithmetic test. The key question is, "Does it make any practical difference if we conceive of ourselves, on the one hand, as tempted by the freedom to sin or, on the other hand, fighting against an evil one who tempts us intelligently?"

Note, for example, the huge difference, back in the days of the Second World War, between, on the one hand, the often nearly invisible icebergs that sent many ships to the bottom of the ocean and, on the other hand, the stealthy, intelligent submarines which caused far greater damage. What if the sinking of thousands of ships had been conceived of as merely the result of inanimate forces? What if scientists had not figured out a way to bounce underwater sound off steel-hulled submarines in such a way as to distinguish the difference between an iceberg and a submarine? This technique, to be called sonar, came late in the war, and implementing it took even longer. By that time not a thousand ships had been sunk, not two thousand, but six thousand intelligent ships crossing the Atlantic, loaded with food and war materiel, had

gone to the bottom. It may be hard to believe but the outcome of that enormous war turned on the subsequent success in fighting these submarines.

It could be alleged that I am missing a main point. A conversation I had with Philip Johnson several years ago brought this forcibly to my attention. I began by congratulating him (and Michael Behe) on the potent logic of the ID movement, but I said, "When you look at your computer screen and if it says suddenly, 'Ha, I just wiped out your hard disk,' you have not the slightest difficulty in concluding that you have suffered the onslaught of a computer virus concocted by an intelligent, real person. Curiously, then, when we contemplate a real biological virus which, though only a tiny assemblage, assails the health of an enormously larger human being, why do we have trouble concluding that we are dealing with an intelligent EVIL design?"

His answer, essentially, was, "Ralph, in my writings and public appearances I can't even mention God much less Satan. I have a very specific battle to fight, namely, to take apart the logic of unaided evolution. That is all I am trying to do." Okay, I have respected that response. I have not pestered him further. In fact, I am not even now endeavoring to fault the ID movement and its objectives.

Rather, I would ask a larger question. There are very many people, even Bible-believing Christians (not just non-Christians), who are to this day profoundly puzzled, perplexed, and certainly confused by the extensive presence in the created world of outrageous evil, created apparently by what we believe to be a God who is both all-powerful and benevolent. In coping with this, they may frequently attribute to God what is actually the work of an evil intelligence, and thus fatalistically give not the slightest thought to fighting back.

- When my wife died in 2001 more than one person tried to console me by observing that, and I quote, "God knows what He is doing."

- When Chuck Colson's daughter concluded that her brain-damaged son was, and I quote, "ex-

actly the way God wanted him to be,” the impressively intelligent and influential Colson actually applauded her conclusion.

- When Jonathan Edwards fatally contracted smallpox in his effort to try out a vaccine that might protect the Indians in Western Massachusetts, the vast majority of the hyper-calvinistically trained pastors of Massachusetts concluded that God killed him because, to quote them, “he was interfering with Divine Providence.” These pastors went on to organize an anti-vaccination society.

- Going further back in time, a Mother Superior in Spain woke up one morning and detected a small lump in her forehead. She concluded that it must be God who was doing something to her presumably to deepen her devotion and nourish her character. When it finally turned out that a worm was burrowing there, and had broken the surface so you could see exactly what it was, she concluded that it was God’s worm. When she would stoop over to pick something up, and it would occasionally fall out, she would replace it so as not to obstruct the will of God.

These are, however, only a few examples compared to the thousands of times a day among even modern Evangelicals that some blatant evil goes unattacked because it is resignedly if not fatalistically assumed to be the initiative of God. I am not so much interested in the philosophical or theological aspects of this situation as I am in the resulting passivity before eradicable evil, the practical fatalism.

I will go one step further. If we are dealing with an intelligent evil, even our thinking about that fact may likely be opposed and confused by that same evil force, that evil power, that evil personality. Is there any evidence of this additional complexity? In what form would it appear? How could we identify it?

The human period of history is paper thin when compared to the vast expanse of the previous story of the development of life on earth. But even in the few thousands of years of the existence of homo sapiens, it would seem clear that the growth

of human population is directly related to the degree of acquired human knowledge of, and intentional resistance to, microbiological pathogens. A whole flood of books have appeared in recent years commenting on the plagues of history and on the general conquest of disease through medicine. Both war and pestilence have long been noted to be an impediment to population growth. But pestilence appears to be the greater problem.

The Second World War, we understand, was the the first war in history during which more people died from military action than from war-introduced disease. Progress has been slow and even today, as antibiotics seem to be running their course, it has been a story of reverses and plateaus, not just triumphs. But the calibration of our conquest simply and crassly by population growth (or non-growth) is roughly workable. The phenomenon of population growth, however, is not widely understood or easily measured.

If the estimated 27 million world population in Abraham’s day 4,000 years ago had grown at the present rate of the world population, there would have been six billion people only 321 years later. Had it grown at the rate of Egypt’s current rate the six billion would have been reached in only 123 years. What actually happened was a growth so slow that 2,000 years later, at the time of Christ, world population was not six billion but only one thirtieth of that.

Again after three centuries of literacy during Roman occupation of southern England, the Roman legions were withdrawn to protect the city of Rome itself. Soon Britain lapsed back into illiteracy and into horrendous war and pestilence to the extent that its population did not increase in the slightest for the next 600 years (from 440 AD to 1066 AD).

At that point the tribal backwater that was Europe began gradually to crawl into conquest of both war and disease. The rest of the story of cascading increase in Western populations, as well as colonially affected global populations, is common knowledge. This increase, as already noted,

is a rough and ready measure of the conquest of disease, a story which, as I say, is documented very clearly in a recent flood of books on plagues and the history of medicine.

Curiously, what is perhaps the most enduring characteristic in this conquest is the removal of false ideas about the nature of disease. The very discovery of unbelievably small pathogens was long in coming. Our major western theologians, whether Thomas Aquinas or John Calvin, knew absolutely nothing about the vast world of microbiology. They, in turn had been influenced by Augustine, who is credited with giving God the credit for much of what Satan does.

Thus, even our current theological literature, to my knowledge, does not seriously consider disease pathogens from a theological point of view—that is, are they the work of God or Satan? Much less does this literature ask the question, “Does God mandate us to eliminate pathogens?”

The recurrent pattern of attempts at discovery is disturbingly often a matter of looking for the wrong solution. A parallel would be looking for icebergs not intelligent submarines. Again and again medical authorities have confidently defined the causes of certain diseases as passive conditions rather than intelligently devised (and constantly revised) pathogens. For example, again and again it was “discovered” that stomach ulcers were caused by an infection, not stress. This happened in the 1880s, again in 1945, again in 1981 (in Australia) but the wrong solutions held sway unquestioned in this country for ten more years until the New York tabloid, the National Enquirer, ran a cover story on ulcers and infection describing the Australian breakthrough. Even so, after ten more years a survey of medical doctors in the state of Colorado revealed that less than 50% had yielded to the right solution.

A similar history is displayed in the case of tuberculosis, a major global killer. It was long thought that chilly and damp conditions were the cause. Eventually it became clear that the cause is a very clever pathogen that has recently been modi-

fied to become even more difficult to defeat.

But this pervasive and curious confusion about causes is not just a matter of past history. In February of 1999, *Atlantic Monthly* published a lengthy cover story confidently presenting the theory that heart disease, cancer, multiple sclerosis, Alzheimer’s, and even schizophrenia are the result of infections, not the usual “passive” factors such as diets high in fat or salt or whatever. Evidently in Europe such perspectives have been more widely pursued.

Now, you would think that so prominent an exposure of an idea so enormously significant would have reverberated back in 1999 in newspapers and other periodicals. But there was nothing in the *Los Angeles Times* for another month, and then only about three inches that did not recognize even remotely the import of the theory. Three months later a fairly long article on the subject appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, although it did not mention the *Atlantic Monthly* article nor any of the researchers to which it referred.

Then there was mainly silence—for three years. Finally, in May of 2002, *Scientific American* sported a cover story that calmly and boldly declared that the passive factors in heart disease and the normal explanation of the progressive build up of plaque in arteries is little related to our nation’s biggest killer. There is a totally different mechanism, which, it says, has been known for 20 years. It points out that gradual reduction of arterial channels would presumably produce gradual weakening in the person afflicted, and that heart attacks are characteristically most often sudden, and 50% of the time occur in people whose bodies do not display the usual symptoms. For the record, heart disease is not only the biggest killer but the most costly. At \$1 billion per day the cost of dealing with people afflicted with heart disease could rebuild the New York towers every three days.

Note that this new perspective is a total upset of long-standing assumptions (similar to the idea that stress causes ulcers), namely that passive conditions of life, diet, exercise, salt intake, etc.

produce heart attacks. Now we hear that the actual explanation is not within the arteries but from within the walls of the arteries, namely, inflammations producing sudden and unpredictable eruptions that instantly block an artery totally. These inflammations are, furthermore, now feared to be the result not of inanimate, passive conditions, but of intelligent pathogens. Not icebergs but intelligent submarines.

The same general story, but far more complicated, could be described for the sphere of cancer. Very gradually, with uphill opposition again, the recognition of viral causes has gained steam.

We can ask why is it so hard for intelligent evil to be recognized. We can also ask why it is that almost all attention to cancer is focused on treatments of the results of cancer and less than one tenth of one percent of the billions ploughed into cancer goes toward understanding the nature of cancer, and even there the theory of intelligent pathogens is slighted and even resisted.

Everything I have said sums up as the problem of the failure to recognize intelligent evil. It is by no means simply a philosophical or theological issue. By far the largest human effort in America today relates directly or indirectly to the presence of disease and of the distortion of Creative Intent in the area of human life. It is a major error to look in the wrong direction for the cause of a disease. It would seem to me to be an even more serious error not to notice the existence of intelligent evil at all, which the published materials of the Intelligent Design group uniformly ignore. Darwin did not do that. Instead, he invented the wacky theory of unaided evolution. But Darwin at least recognized the presence of evil if not intelligent evil, and even the need to protect the reputation of a benevolent God. In that sense he scored higher than what we see in the written materials of Intelligent Design.

Plagues, Priests and Demons: A Critical Book Review

STEVE YOUNGREN

Introduction

“Plagues, Priests and Demons”, I responded to someone who was asking me about what book I was reading at the moment. The look I got back was invariably the same... crooked smile, raised eyebrow, and that look of curiosity that begs to have someone say more. In reality, this is a good way to describe Daniel Reff’s book *Plagues, Priests and Demons* (Reff, 2004). As one opens its pages, his premise is both intriguing and impacting. His thesis is that much of the processes used by both the Mendicant and Jesuit orders for reaching the indigenous populations of Mexico during the late 1500s and early 1600s were very similar to those used in the early stages of Christianity in Europe even though separated in time and space by more than a millennium and thousands of miles.

In supporting his thesis, Reff sees many parallels between these two endeavors which include 1) the role that disease played in the advance of Christianity in both Europe and Mexico, 2) both pagans in Europe and the indigenous population of Mexico were attracted to Christianity because of its ability

to understand and cope with the devastation caused by epidemics, 3) the strategies and structures used by the Catholic orders were especially effective in light of the devastation to the social order caused by these epidemics, 4) both the European advance among pagans and the advance in Mexico utilized an emphasis on the cult of the saints and relics as a means to both suppress and accommodate indigenous beliefs, and 5) the hagiographic writings of the early mission efforts among the pagans of Europe were utilized by Jesuits in Mexico as a means to give meaning to the work being done among the indigenous Mexican as well. (Reff, 2004, pp. 1-2)

Thesis

It is the attempt of this paper to analyze Reff’s thesis both from his own work as well as from various writings that treat this same time period. I will attempt this by first by analyzing those aspects of Reff’s thesis that seem to be well supported and then continue this discussion by factoring in other considerations which may or may not lend to Reff’s overall proposition.

This critical book review was originally written as part of the requirements for the MA in International Development at William Carey International University.

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Analysis in support of Reff' thesis

We will begin by analyzing the individual “parallels” which Reff lays out; the first being that of the role of disease. The proposition behind this parallel is that the onset of infectious disease and epidemics took a huge toll not only on lives, but also created an upheaval both socially and culturally; this being true in both pagan Europe and in Mexico. In my opinion, there is little doubt that infectious disease and epidemics played a large role both among the pagans of Europe as well as among the indigenous of Mexico. Rodney Stark points out in *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World's Largest Religion* the tremendous devastation caused by disease in early Rome, with families abandoning loved ones, doctors fleeing the sick, and wagonloads hauling out the dead from the cities (Stark, 2011, pp. 113-114). This same kind of devastation and social turmoil was evidenced in the devastating onslaught of the Black Plague during the 14th century, destroying anywhere from one-third to one-half the population of Western Europe and nine out of every ten key Christian leaders (Winter, 2007, p. 262). Other more detailed accounts are especially noteworthy in regard to the overall effect that the Black plague had on the infrastructure of so many urban centers in Europe. Of note is the book by Alexandra and Noble Cook in their book, *Plague Files: Crisis Management in Sixteenth-Century Seville*, in which they document the tremendous toll and constant need for social and political adaptation in meeting the needs and dealing with the effects left by the plague (Cook & Cook, 2009). In all these historical situations, Christians were the ones who continued to minister to the sick in spite of the personal toll that it brought to their own lives. As Stark points out, “In the midst of the squalor, misery, illness, and anonymity of ancient cities, Christianity provided an island of mercy and security.” (Stark, 2011, p. 112)

In light of the above, it seems logical that Christianity would have a similar effect on the lives of those in Mexico, playing a key role in their willingness to accept this new faith. As Reff points out,

The Jesuits followed in the wake of disease, and like early Christian deacons, monks, and clerics in Europe, they reorganized economic, social, and religious life. In doing so, they followed strategies that were over one thousand years' old, reconstituting indigenous systems as well as introducing beliefs and practices, especially the cult of the saints, to deal with unprecedented realities. (Reff 2004, 123)

This leads us to the second and third “parallel” that Reff draws between the work among the pagan population of Europe and that among the indigenous of Mexico. The second parallel focuses to a greater degree on the psychological and spiritual benefits that Christianity was able to bring to both pagan European and the Mexican indigenous alike. For the pagan, there seemed to be no answers available in their religious worldview that would help them understand the onslaught of the plagues of the second century. From priest to slave, all were affected and the gods were silent. Stark, quoting Thucydides, writes,

Useless were prayers made in the temples, consultation of oracles, and so forth; indeed, in the end people were so overcome by their sufferings that they paid no further attention to such things.... [T]hey died with no one to look after them; indeed there were many houses in which all the inhabitants perished through lack of attention.... The bodies of the dying were heaped one on top of the other, and half-dead creatures could be seen staggering about in the streets or flocking around the fountains in their desire for water. The temples in which they took up their quarters were full of the dead bodies of people who had died inside them. For the catastrophe was so overwhelming that men, not knowing what would happen next to them, became indifferent to every rule of religion and law.... No fear of god or law of man had a restraining influence. (Stark 2011, 115)

It was into this fray that Christianity left its mark not only as the religion in which the gods don't abandon their followers, but that their followers themselves reflect the same mercy that has been given to them. For the Christian, it was not only their duty to care for their own, but also for those outside the faith. Christianity not only gave an ethic of love for the here and now, but also their hope for beyond the grave which allowed them to minister to the sick without fear of the personal consequences that they might face. In this sense, Reff notes how the Jesuit community not only responded by giving care to the sick, but also by giving a theological framework which helped the indigenous to understand the "why" behind these epidemics. Much of this theology centered on God using these plagues to help the Indians to see the true gospel, and choose truth over the deception of their shamans and Satan, himself. Through baptism, they would have the assurance of heaven and the promise for many to be cured of their sicknesses. In addition, these Jesuits utilized other Holy Sacraments and the cult of the saints in order to produce miracles. It is not surprising that for many of the indigenous Mexicans, the Jesuit priest simply became a new type of shaman. (Reff, 2004, p. 178)

The third parallel that Reff points out is the similarities between the types of organizational strategies used both in Europe and Mexico in answer to the sociopolitical devastation caused by the diseases. Within this organizational restructuring the Jesuits looked for ways to accommodate the various needs that were left in the wake of the plagues. Taking their models from previous monastic orders, they organized their missions to aid the local indigenous population in nearly all aspects of life. Their missions were centers of care for the sick, help for the poor, as well as economic and trade centers. Following the example of Jesus, their communities practiced sharing and reciprocity and all were involved in the process. In this respect, as Reff points out, these Jesuit missions functioned to a great degree like the medieval monastic communities, "organizing economic and

social life within and without the religious community or mission." (Reff, 2004, p. 186)

Economic recovery seemed to gain ground rather quickly due to the restructuring led by the Jesuits. But this represented only a small part of the total work to be done. Socially, hundreds of children were left without parents and entire communities were left without near kinship. Into this environment, following the example of Medieval monasticism as well, Reff notes the institution of both oblation—the adoption of children into the monastic community (Reff, 2004, p. 116) as well as fictive kinship systems which were implemented through rites of baptism, as well as the adoption of entire communities where needed (Reff, 2004, p. 179).

Within this religious, economic and social structure, Reff also sees another parallel between the work done in pagan Europe and that of Mexico, namely the emphasis on the cult of the saints and relics. In an atmosphere of shamanism in which these *hechizeros* were the power brokers among the indigenous peoples, the Jesuit came, in a sense, with his own "magic", in the form of ritual and holy relics. As Reff notes, the fact that the Jesuit priests did not die, their European lineage having built up resistance over the centuries, made their words and rituals even more powerful (Reff, 2004, p. 185). Baptism came to be seen as a means to cure the plague or, at least, ensure entrance into a better afterlife. In addition, the use of religious relics and medals, especially those attached to the Virgin or specific saints were also used to "cure disease". All of this was combined with basic medical care (Reff, 2004, pp. 181-82).

Yet, in speaking of the power that the cult of the saints had in the minds of the indigenous, there is perhaps no greater evidence of this than in the huge significance that the Virgin Mary, and specifically the Virgin of Guadalupe has played in the mind of the Latino. Her place in the Latin mind had not only significance as a source of prayer, but of all the "saints" she was the one who could so relate to the place of women in Latin Christianity.

It was women, and over time, girls who were just barely able to conceive, who suffered most during epidemics and who bore the burden of replacing an ever-diminishing population during the colonial period. Writing in the mid-eighteenth-century, Father Joseph Och noted that he often was asked to marry thirteen-year-old girls, who promptly became pregnant.

Like women in early medieval Europe, who also died prematurely trying to halt a population collapse, Indian women were especially attracted to the mother of the Christian God. Mary knew the experience of childbirth and motherhood, including the heartbreak of watching her son die. (Reff 2004, 191)

Given the above, it is little wonder that the Jesuit community drew much from the literature of the early and medieval Church fathers. Finding themselves in many ways working among an animistic people whose shamans somewhat resembled the ancient Druids; one can understand the role that the hagiographic literature would have for these Jesuit priests. As mentioned above, the theme of “warfare” seemed to permeate the ways in which the Jesuit interpreted the plague onslaught of disease to the indigenous mindset. It was the true God against the alliance of Satan and his servants, the shamans. These types of references seemed to abound in Jesuit writings and, according to Reff’s research reflect a heavy reliance on Early and Medieval hagiographic literature. This was especially noted in Pérez de Ribas’s *Historia* as well as numerous other Jesuit narratives (Reff, 2004, p. 4). Without a doubt the Jesuit community found themselves in situations that were very similar to those of their European and historic counterparts.

Analysis: Other Considerations

At the same time as one can truly appreciate the premise of Reff’s thesis, there are other thoughts that I believe should be considered when

exploring the success of the Jesuit enterprise in Mexico. I will keep my thoughts to three primary considerations: 1) The role that the Reformation and the Counter Reformation played in the “way” in which the Jesuit community accomplished their missionary enterprise, 2) the exploitation that was transpiring in Mexico and how this would have contributed to the attractiveness of the Jesuit mission, and 3) the role of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

At no other time in history was so much coming to a boiling point both inside and outside the Church. Mankind was moving forward faster than the Church could keep up with and for the first time since Constantine, the Church was losing its firm control both religiously and politically. Though promoting the sciences, the Church now had to wrestle with the implications of scientific method and new discoveries with the effects that this might have on doctrines long held by the Church (Applebaum, 2005, p. 109). Also during this period, as a reaction to the moral corruption throughout the Catholic Church, there was a movement stirring to set the true Church free from the political machine that it had become. Men like Wycliffe and Huss were the forerunners for what would become the more historical reformation, beginning with Luther and then Calvin. As a reaction to all of this, the Catholic Church began its own reformation known as the Counter Reformation or Catholic Reformation. It is out of this second reformation that the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) was formed with a strong emphasis on scientific study and academic knowledge in general. Though academic, they were highly involved in the promotion of Catholicism in a variety of ways, but mainly through learning (Applebaum, 2005, p. 108).

Reff’s references to the Counter Reformation’s influence on the Jesuits’ use of hagiographic literature and imagery is very convincing and yet I am left wondering what other aspects of the Counter Reformation were involved in the Jesuit enterprise in the Americas. According to Reff, much of what we see in the progress of Christianity in Mexico focuses on imitating the past and not necessarily

the implementation of new knowledge in the present. For instance, what other aspects of learning were also being promoted and implemented in the advance of the Jesuit enterprise in Mexico? Was it only that which resembled the Celtic and Medieval monastic learning that seemed to have its effect on the indigenous acceptance of Christianity? With Jesuit foundations being so focused on higher learning, and especially desiring to gain from the studies of the Renaissance, how might this have contributed also to the advance of the missionary effort among the indigenous in Mexico? Did their learning of language and culture contribute to a greater understanding of the Mexican mind and how to communicate truths? While not downplaying the tremendous influence of the early fathers on Jesuit literature, which Reff supports well, I am intrigued as to how much of their newer learning was also affecting their mission in Mexico.

As a second consideration, it was also during this time period that international economy was flourishing, and with this, so too, was the exploitation of lands and people. “Globalization was about competitive advantage; the weak, the nonwhite, and the poor became fair game... As a driving force, competitive advantage was need blind and culture proof.” (Sanneh, 2009, p. 121)

Mexico was not exception to this type of exploitation. And this kind of exploitation was not reserved only for those outside of the Church who owned vast plantations, but also was reflected in the rivalries that existed between the orders themselves. Again, Sanneh quotes the archbishop of Mexico’s letter of 1556,

There is great rivalry among the Orders... Each defends its territory as if the villages were its own property. There has been and is great feeling between the Orders, not about which can best care for the flock, but which can have the greatest number of places and provinces in its hands; and so they go, occupying the best centers, building monasteries close together . . . not wishing to live in the difficult and needy places. . . . So

great is the fear which the Indians have of the friars because of the severe punishment they practice upon them that they do not dare to complain. And if this is true of the province of Mexico, what of the mountains? [On account of this,] very little fruit, it may be suspected, has come of the gospel among the people. (Sanneh 2009, 90)

This seems to be in stark contrast to much of the description given by Reff regarding the overall picture of the mission frontier in Mexico during this time period. While not discounting that Reff’s account is also based on factual history, in light of the ongoing exploitation, one wonders if some of the success that these early Jesuit communities experienced was more due to having a safe and or trustworthy place to live in community. Might it be that in addition to the influence of disease that caused openness on the part of these indigenous Mexicans, there was also the openness to embrace a type of mission which was based on sharing and reciprocity instead of oppression and exploitation. To what degree did this contribute to the success of the Jesuit enterprise as well?

As a final consideration, I would like to suggest that Reff’s emphasis on the cult of the saints employed by the Jesuits falls short. While there may have been some local benefit to this emphasis, I believe that one of the strongest impacts on Mexican (and Latin) Catholicism came through a peasant’s vision of the Virgin of Guadalupe in 1531. It was this vision of a grave, noble, and dark-skinned peasant Virgin that forever lifted Catholicism from the confines of a European power religion to a religion of the oppressed peoples of Latin America (Sanneh, 2009, p. 93). While the Jesuit enterprise saw the value in approaching their mission through the language of the people, and even accommodating much of the cult of the saints to fit within the existing religious worldview, having worked in both Mexico and now in Ecuador, none of this compares to the impact that this “apparition” had in shaping and advancing the mission of Christianity both in Mexico and all of Latin

America. Though Reff recognizes the impact that this incident had on Latin American Catholicism, and especially as it relates to the role of women, I do not see the kind of treatment that this deserves and how much this probably contributed to the Jesuit enterprise itself.

Conclusion

In conclusion we have seen that Reff's premise of similarities between the early fathers and the Mendicant and Jesuit orders in Mexico have remarkable similarities. Those similarities, in Reff's appraisal, are rooted strongly in the effects that disease had on both Europe and Mexico and how both the early fathers and Jesuit missionaries responded to this in similar fashion though removed by centuries and great distances both in proximity and culture. Reff has been convincing in the parallels that he sees regarding the approaches of these two enterprises (Early/Medieval European and Jesuit Mexican). These parallels involved similar responses to a Christianity which could help the pagan or indigenous understand and deal with the effects of disease. A second parallel was the strategic use of organized sharing and reciprocity which attracted those left in the aftermath of sickness. Thirdly, was the use of relics and the cult of the saints in both suppressing old belief systems as well as accommodating the new. Finally, Reff noted the tremendous use of hagiographic literature in the Jesuit's attempt to write about their experiences among the indigenous of Mexico.

Though all of Reff's arguments are well supported, I believe there is also a need to explore other influences that may have contributed to the attractiveness of Christianity under the Jesuit mission. Areas that would be worth exploring in more detail would be that of other effects from the Counter Reformation on the mission enterprise within the Jesuit context. Secondly, it would be a worthy consideration to investigate the correlation between the Spaniard oppression in the Americas and the Jesuit communities as a "refuge" from exploitation both within and without the Church

during this time period. Finally, it would be of great value to see how far-reaching the indigenizing effects of the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe had on the Jesuit enterprise.

Having worked in a Latin context (Mexico and Ecuador) I found Reff's material, as well as all the related readings to be both fascinating and extremely helpful to further understand the history and culture of the people God has called me to. To see both God's sovereignty and man's intentionality in the history of the Latin peoples continues to humble me and cause a deep sense of awe at the mission of God in this world.

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The Devil in the Details: Intelligent Design and Evolutionary Arguments and Their Effect on Theodicy

JEFFREY HAVENNER

Abstract

The German mathematician and philosopher Leibniz introduced the term “theodicy” in 1710 in an effort to justify belief in a good God who appears to preside over a world that manifests evil. Theodicy since that time has remained an ongoing problem. Attempts to rationally demonstrate God’s good presence to an increasingly skeptical world has often appealed to the evidence of design in nature. However the Intelligent Design argument has not answered the theodicy issue. Some have claimed that Intelligent Design has made this problem worse because the argument fails to distinguish between good and evil design and requires value judgments to be assigned that appear arbitrary. The following paper examines the limitations of Intelligent Design and its theological parent Natural Theology in light of New Testament claims for the witness of creation. The paper explores whether the evolutionary narrative has more in common with the Bible narratives than has been acknowledged previously.

The Problem of Discerning Natural Evil

Ralph Winter, the founder of the USCWM and the Roberta Winter Institute, once asked whether pathogenic bacteria, other invasive disease causing organisms and viruses all represent examples of evil intelligent design. Winter made an analogy with computer viruses being intelligently designed programs that execute a malevolent purpose on an infected computer. Why should we not acknowledge the presence of evil intelligent design in nature? Winter put this question to an advocate for Intelligent Design. He was told that it was difficult enough to put forward the basic idea of “design” as a rational challenge to the theory of unguided evolution through the process of natural selection. Differentiating between the designs of God and those of the devil would be too much for people to understand.¹

Winter’s analogy to computer viruses is similar to Michael Behe’s comparison of the “molecular machinery” of cells to the complexity of familiar

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mechanical devices that are composed of specific parts. If the device is to function properly all the required parts must be present and fully functional themselves. Behe referred to this as “irreducible complexity.” He has applied the irreducible complexity principle to living cell and organ structures to advance the notion that an intelligent designer necessarily has assembled these biological machines at some point so that evolution could continue the process.² The resort to human designed objects to make points about intelligent design in nature is generally credited to William Paley’s “Watchmaker Analogy.”

Paley used the watchmaker analogy in his 1802 book *Natural Theology* to assert that design in nature made it necessary to believe in a divine designer. The watchmaker analogy claimed that if one kicked up a rock while walking in a field one would not tend to ask where the rock came from. One might conclude that it had always been there in the field from the beginning of time. If on the other hand one kicked up a watch in the field one would attribute its presence to someone who had placed it there and ultimately to a watchmaker who had purposely designed the watch for the specific function of measuring time.³ Paley argued that plants, animals and human beings, are possessed of such structural complexity that is analogous to the watch that it gives natural testimony to the hand of a divine creator who had both designed them and placed them on the earth. Paley’s argument that design revealed God’s necessary involvement in creation appeared to conflict with the growing concern over the observable indifference of nature with regard to life. Did this mean that God too was indifferent to life? This question lay at the heart of the problem of theodicy.

The term “theodicy” which is Greek meaning “justifying God” entered usage by way of the German mathematician and philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. In 1710 Leibniz published his *Essays on Theodicy: The Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil* in which he postulated that the observable universe created by God constituted “the best of all possible worlds.”⁴ His

argument originated from perceived design and the interactions of nature and the mechanisms revealed in the motions of the cosmos moderated by gravity. The modern view of Leibniz’ theodicy tends to be colored through the lens of Voltaire’s caricature of him as the naively optimistic Dr Pangloss in the novelette *Candide*. Leibniz reasoning began with the assumption that God is good. He also held that God, being omniscient or all knowing knew absolutely what would constitute the optimal universe out of all possibilities. Leibniz further assumed that because God is omnipotent He had the power to create whatever He desired and would not have created anything less than the best that was possible. Therefore in Leibniz’ view, the earth and the universe we know could only be “the best of all possible worlds.”⁵

Leibniz wrote that “God is the cause of all perfection in the nature and action of the creature, but the limitation of the receptivity of the creature is the cause of the defects there are in its actions.” Thus evil and sin are caused by the limitations and free will of God’s creatures both human and angelic that can act in opposition to God.⁶ Other writers suggested that what might be called “evil” actually held a divine purpose. Just four years before the publication of Paley’s *Natural Theology*, British social philosopher and clergyman Thomas Malthus had argued that population increases geometrically while subsistence or food supplies increased only arithmetically given the farming methods then in use. In light of this unalterable imbalance Malthus put forward the idea that disease, famine and disaster were the means instituted by God in order to keep populations in check and promote the continued industry of mankind.⁷

New Testament Origins of Natural Theology

New Testament writings of the Apostle Paul do make an argument for natural theology. Paul’s letter to the church in Rome refers to God’s evident working in the natural universe as being obvious for man to observe. Paul wrote: “For what can be

known about God is plain to them (those who have no other revelation through the word) because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1: 19-20).

It is important to note that according to this statement the visible creation only gives only limited truth about God. Specifically only two aspects or attributes of God’s being are revealed. The first attribute is God’s eternal power that can bring into physical being the vastness of the universe. The second attribute of God that is revealed in creation is the majesty of his deity through the vastness of both the earth and the heavens. Paul says nothing of any of the other attributes of God being revealed to man by creation. These attributes made visible in creation are to inspire man to what the Bible elsewhere calls the fear of The Lord.

Thus we can ascribe infinite but otherwise inscrutable majesty to God by virtue of the vastness of His creation. No further enlightenment is provided to us. It is not possible, according to Paul, to know any more than the attributes of power and majesty from what is observable in nature.

William Dembski essentially agrees and argues that issues of theodicy should not enter into the scientific discussion of Intelligent Design. He writes:

“Critics who invoke the problem of evil against design have left science behind and entered the waters of philosophy and theology... The existence of design is distinct from the morality, aesthetics, goodness, optimality, or perfection of design.”⁸

Thus Dembski equates any attempt to distinguish good from evil through intelligent design as going too far.

The attempt to use design and complexity in nature as a midway point between Darwin’s natural selection and the Creationists’ seven days remains unsatisfying to either side in the debate between sci-

ence and faith. Indeed Dr. Winter with whose paper we began, expressed more preference for the Darwinian argument that makes natural selection the reason that predation and disease have come about in nature rather than being the specific creation of God. Ralph Winter’s original question was whether or not a theodicy could be found for pathogenesis that preserves the character of God as good and loving. If an appeal to design itself does not offer help then where else might one look? We turn to the evolutionary narrative to ask if mechanisms can be found that helps us better understand the origins of pathogenesis in relation to the biblical narrative besides the attribution evil influence.

An evolutionary narrative of Pathogenesis

The study of molecular genetics has shown that pathogenesis is a combination of genomic gains and losses in bacteria and to a similar degree in the host. These gains and losses in genetic information have enabled the bacteria to become more invasive while at the same time narrowing their host range in many cases to human beings only.⁹ It is estimated that human restricted pathogenic microorganisms began to appear in human populations 30,000 to 40,000 years ago and thus many species are believed to have “co-evolved” with man over that long period of time.¹⁰ The time span corresponds roughly to the upper paleolithic appearance of modern human ancestors termed Cro Magnon man.¹¹ Somewhere in this time significant changes began to occur in bacterial Genomes. This has been recognized by formation of what are called pseudogenes or disabled genes in bacterial DNA. Pseudogenes are disabled genes that are still present in the genome but are no longer capable of being expressed. Patterns of pseudogene formation in the genomes of various bacterial species show they have undergone changes in their environmental niche. The belief is that changes in niche made the expression of certain genes unnecessary. In many cases of human adapted pathogens, the genes that have been lost appear to be those that once enabled them to live in a broad range of hosts or independently.¹²

The disabling of genes represents evidence of some sort of environmental “event” that the organisms themselves could not control but to which they adaptively responded as a result of competition. The host range for these bacteria was narrowed by the accumulation of pseudogenes in their genome. At the same time their virulence or invasiveness was increased by the acquisition of new genetic information through horizontal gene transfer mechanisms between closely associated bacteria sharing the same environments like human skin, the human gut or the nasopharynx.¹³

The biblical narrative and the evolutionary narrative are not mutually exclusive with respect to accounting for the rise of the phenomenon of pathogenesis. Both seem to agree that there was a time however brief, in human history when both bacteria and man may have gotten along either independently or had established commensal relationships. Then something happened, a “massive event” or events occurred that caused humans or bacteria or both to rapidly change environmental niches. At that that point the evolutionary model says that recent environmental changes are reflected in the formation of large numbers of pseudogenes in the genome.¹⁴

Biblical Points of Agreement with the Evolutionary Narrative

The biblical record gets specific about the occurrences of periodic environmental changes that resulted from “massive events.” These include the expulsion of man from the garden of Eden or that point at which everything in nature was “getting along.” The Flood narrative from the time of Noah and the scattering of mankind into separate nations and tribes resulted in man occupying vastly differing geographies and climates. The Bible suggests that these changes were traumatic reflected in the continual decline of human life spans from upwards of 900 years in the first 10 generations from Adam to Abraham’s life span of 175 years.

The life experience of Abraham’s family group particularly also may reflect the outcome of accu-

mulated changes at the genomic level. The narrative dispassionately states “Terah became the father of Abram (Abraham) Nahor and Haran and Haran became the father of Lot. While Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, in the land of his birth” (Genesis 11: 27-28). The fact that this alone of the generation narratives from Adam specifically contains a record of a father outliving his son is possibly a reference to fatal disease and would be the first such in the biblical narrative. In fact it may be a reference to epidemic disease from which the family fled to reach a well watered area of Mesopotamia beside the Euphrates River in the Fertile Crescent. The Genesis narrative indicates that when the family left Ur it was with the intent of going to Canaan with its established cities and lucrative Bronze Age trade with Egypt and other culture that was similar to the Sumerian culture of Ur. “But when the clan of Terah came to “Haran” (on the Euphrates) they settled there. Terah lived 205 years and died in Haran” (Genesis 11: 31-32).

Understanding Evolution as Language

The narratives of the Bible and of evolution have some essential commonalities. It is appropriate to ask whether Darwinism and its elements of natural selection, genetic mutation and the like should be understood as a type of human language instead of being regarded as a belief system that is intrinsically opposed to God. Technically, anything that is of human origin can be thought of as being intrinsically opposed to God. Can the language of evolution become a starting point from which to aid people in understanding that truth revealed is not antithetical to truth discovered? By contrast, if we assume that nothing good can come from evolution, we will move in a different direction. Creationists have tended to take the latter path by establishing an alternative science of Creationism. The result of this has been to deepen the rift and intensify the rhetoric with the objective of one side to defeat the idea of evolution and of the other to uphold it at all cost.

The rift between faith and the sciences has

been to solidify the notion that religion and science are irreconcilably opposed to one another. In addition as with all conflicts the rift between religion and science consumes both intellectual and material resources that could be directed toward practical efforts for the good of mankind.

Cross-cultural workers spend a great deal of time and effort studying the language and culture of the society to which they are sent. This is with the intention of working successfully in that society and also to be able to present the gospel in a culturally appropriate way within that society. The Christian's effort to learn language goes far beyond simply understanding the one to one meanings of words so as to translate a message from the missionary speaker to the cultural hearer. The effort is to understand the cultural context of the language speakers from which to draw what have been called "redemptive analogies" that speak specifically to the cultural longings of those in that society.¹⁵

Conclusion

The curse that God pronounced upon Adam after his disobedience in the garden declared that man would no longer live in an environment that would serve him. Rather man would have to compete for his living in an environment that would not willingly yield to his efforts. The land would yield thorns and thistles that would harm him as much as it would yield bread that would sustain him. This radical change in man's environment and in effect in the environment of all creatures established competition between all species from the microbial level all the way to man. That competition would be dominated by the forces of adaptation and natural selection. In other words nature would be allowed by God to take its own course and not be interfered with by God. Nature would be governed as a rule by dispassionate natural law. Only on an exceptional basis would God intervene by miraculous intrusion. Man would have to make the choice between relying on his own ingenuity or of relying upon God through the application of faith.

As it turned out, Man's capability for reliance on himself and his own ingenuity is quite prodigious. Man's technical advancements through science have in large measure overcome the gloomy assertions of Malthus who theorized that poverty among people can only be cured by disease, disaster and war. Modern agricultural methods and modern medicine have enabled mankind to overcome the effects of famine and even to bring some dread disease like Smallpox to extinction and Polio to near eradication. However despite this effort, suffering and death still accompany man's existence and prove the ultimate truth of God's pronouncement to the first disobedient humans that "Dust thou art and to dust thou shalt return" (Genesis 3:19). As long as the curse is in effect, the physical frame of man remains under the serpent's power to turn it to dust and consume it in death. Jesus however, has come to destroy both the works of the devil that are manifest in sin and death (I John 3:8) and ultimately to destroy the power of devil himself through our turning back to God in faith. (Hebrews 2:14).

Endnotes

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Reviewed (in Chinese) by Norman Soo, London, ON, Canada

书评：《历史的漂移：我的教会一定会死去？如何发现、诊断、逆转这种趋势？》
[加拿大]阿纳德 L. 库克著；Wingspread Publishers 出版社 2000 年第一版. xvii + 346 页

从历史的漂移到必然的回归
宿涛

大凡有生活经历的人都会发现，有些东西“可遇而不可求”。《历史的漂移》一书可归于此类。

作者阿纳德 L. 库克博士集 14 年在南美作宣教士和多年领导加拿大宣道会（会长）的丰富经验，为此书的写作从深度、广度和历史跨度上奠定了扎实根基，同时，从实用操作方面，它也为寻道的同路人提供了有效的行动指南和借鉴。

此书本于圣经，着眼于教会的历史、现实和未来，从教会不是一般的组织和机构而是独属基督的生命体这一独特视角，从六方面（六部分）对教会生命体的“历史漂移”现象做出了深刻剖析。包括：第一部分：历史漂移的界定；第二部分：历史漂移（趋势）的诊断；第三部分：历史漂移的（早期）发现；第四部分：历史漂移的遏制；第五部分：历史漂移的逆转；以及最后的第六部分：历史漂移的审视与回顾。在全书的十八章中，每章都包括“好像是”负面的“病情”诊断和分析，但同时也给出正面的“医治”案例或开出药方。作者以约翰·卫斯理 (John Wesley) 的难题开始：难道没有办法阻止纯正宗教的这种持续的衰败？(P.1) 而以“惟有基督是这种（无法避免的）“历史漂移”的终极遏制’ (P.300) 的答案来结束。

诚然，著者关注的焦点是教会，但他的眼光绝不局限于教会。在借鉴多位社会学家（包括 Elmer L. Towns 和 David Moberg 等）社会学周期理论，著者发展出自己独特的“历史的漂移曲线”，指出：周期和曲线的基本观念（同理）保持不变的就是随着时间推移带来的生命力的丧失 (P.46)。就此而言，所有的组织和机构，无论是民族、国家、企业，甚至文明，从古罗马的兴盛到衰亡；进而从大英帝国的日不落到日难升，再看今日美国作为超级强国的衰退，甚至不妨眺望中国期盼中的崛起和民族复兴之后，也不免将重蹈历史的覆辙，遵守这一“历史的漂移”的铁律。

然而，难能可贵的是著者持守的信念和盼望。基于此，他重点突出了第四部分——关于如何遏制这一现象、扭转这一“乾坤”对策研讨。其中包括强调圣经的绝对权威；圣洁的生活；婚姻和性关系的圣洁等等。一句话，他开出的还是回归圣经真理这一既古老又常新的医治历史痼疾的秘方。

“无可奈何花落去，似曾相识燕归来。”华人读者不难有感想起这些古诗。但从生命的意境上“落红不是无情物，化作春泥更护花。”任何生命体都有兴衰乃至死亡的周期，但教会——这个根植于基督的特殊生命体终将奇妙的从历史周期性的衰败中一次、再一次的复兴，而这复兴的根源和原动力就是基督。表面看教会也脱离不了历史的漂移的“宿命”，但基督必将把属他的教会回归、复兴——这就是此书向我们展示的教会生命路线图。

凡有心之人和有识之士，特别是关心教会前途和人类命运的朋友们，《历史的漂移》就是为你们准备的。如果你有过“妙手偶得”的经历，你会对这本书爱不释手。尽管它在有些细节的论证方面仍有不足，但瑕不掩瑜。作为一本必读书，一经打开，你会不忍放手。开卷有益，此言不虚！