

# Editorial Reflections

## *Evangelical Missions and Anthropology*

If you got bogged down in the early history of anthropology in the last issue, you ought at least to go back to where Wheaton College hoves into view carrying the flag. The first professor of anthropology at Wheaton is not as well known as a Wheaton anthropology major named Billy Graham. The first anthropology professor at Westmont is even less well known.

But what started in Christian colleges, and with the help of Moody Press—which published *The Missionary and Anthropology* in 1945 (a book that profoundly affected me)—really mushroomed in mission circles. As early as 1948, Wycliffe’s Summer Institute of Linguistics included a course on cultural anthropology, and the American Scientific Affiliation published a book (*Science and the Christian Faith*) whose longest (165 page) chapter was on anthropology by William Smalley and Marie Fertzey Reyburn, a then professor at Wheaton. That chapter also influenced me greatly.

You can thus pick up at that point last time and then more fully appreciate the rest of the story this time. Whiteman has done us all a great service.

Wheaton, in a fit of folly, actually closed down its anthropology department in 1975. But that is what took James Oliver Buswell III, son of an earlier Wheaton president, freshly relieved of a job, to the position of Academic Vice President for the next 23 years at the William Carey International University. For all those years he kept track of the Evangelicals he knew who went into anthropology.

Whatever the story of the past, for the rivers of young people flooding out into short term missions today, anthropology is just as crucial as ever.

## *Science and Insanity*

A fascinating quote comes to us from *Areopagus Proclamation*, a monthly one page newsletter (“thoughtletter”) published by Daryl E. Witner’s AIIA Institute, Box 262, Monson, Maine 04464.

Witner is quoting in turn a columnist George Caylor in dialogue with a scientist:

*Caylor:* “Do you believe that the information [in the DNA code] evolved?”

*Scientist:* “George, nobody I know in my profession believes it evolved. It was engineered by genius beyond genius, and such information could not have been written any other way. The paper and ink did not write the book. Knowing what we know it is ridiculous to think otherwise.”

*Caylor:* Have you ever stated that in a public lecture, or in any public writings?

*Scientist:* “No, I just say it evolved. To be a molecular biologist requires me to hold on to two insanities at all times. One, it would be insane to believe in evolution when you can see the truth for yourself. Two, it would be insane to say you don’t believe in evolution. All government work, research grants, papers, big college lectures—everything would stop. I’d be out of a job, or relegated to the outer fringes where I couldn’t earn a decent living.”

*Caylor:* “I hate to say it, but that sounds like intellectual dishonesty.”

*Scientist:* “The work I do in genetic research is honorable. We find the cures to many of mankind’s worst diseases. But in the meantime we have to live with the elephant in the living room.”

*Caylor:* “What elephant?”

*Scientist:* “Creation design. It’s like an elephant in the living room. It moves around, takes up an enormous amount of space, loudly trumpets, bumps into us, knocks things over, eats a ton of hay, and smells like an elephant. And yet we have to swear it isn’t there.”

This dialogue sounds like another conversation I heard about but cannot document. A Chinese paleontologist visiting the USA was questioned when he made an off-hand comment about the unworkability of the Darwinian theory. He was surprised, but then analyzed the situation as follows: “In China we can’t criticize the government but we can criticize Darwin. In the USA you can criticize the government but you can’t criticize Darwin.”

One lesson from the Chinese scholar is that overt pressures are one thing. Covert, cultural pressures are equally as strong, perhaps stronger. The one is visible and external. The other is greatly invisible and comes with and within society itself. The latter is the power our children, teenagers and college students run into, often unknowingly, since it is covert.

### *Stunned into Silence?*

This comment rightly ought to be in the letters to the editor section. But it is a query by the editor not to him concerning the total absence of response to the highly provocative piece last time by Jonathan Rice, “The Tragic Failure of Britain’s Evangelical Awakening.”

Please don’t miss that because it may prophetically define the future of our globe’s now “mile wide inch deep” Evangelicalism. His most poignant quote was:

Between 1780 and 1850 the English ceased to be one of the most aggressive, brutal, rowdy, outspoken, riotous, cruel and bloodthirsty nations in the world and became one of the most inhibited, polite, tender-minded, prudish and hypocritical.

That is, the unquestionable transformation of Britain by the Gospel was in many respects short lived. Rice applies this ominous observation then to the church in India.

Here is a more recent, definite transformation which may become short lived. It is a quote from *Atlantic Monthly’s* redoubtable Robert Kaplan, whose global fling this time was to follow a U.S. Army Colonel (Wilhelm) around in Mongolia for a few weeks. Never mind why the U.S. Army was in Mongolia. If you want to read Kaplan’s whole article it is in the March 2004 issue. But Kaplan records a whole lot of off-the-cuff comments by this colonel about the U. S. Army. One of them is the following unexpected comment out of the blue (unexpected since neither is remotely an Evangelical Christian):

The full flowering of the middle ranks [of the US Army] had its roots in the social transformation of the American military, which according to Wilhelm (a liberal who voted for Al Gore in 2000), had taken place a decade earlier, when the rise of Christian evangelicalism had helped stop the indiscipline of the Vietnam-era Army. “This zeal reformed behavior, empowered by junior leaders, and demanded better recruits,” he said. “For one thing, drinking stopped, and that killed off the officers’ clubs, which, in turn, broke down more barriers between officers and noncoms, giving the noncoms the confidence to do what majors and colonels in other armies do. The Christian fundamentalism was the hidden hand that changed the military for the better. Though you try to get someone to admit it! We could never have pulled off Macedonia or Bosnia with the old Vietnam Army.

Is this transformation going to be short-lived, too? Once the soldiers encompassed by Evangelical beliefs muster out and face insistent intellectual questions is International Journal of Frontier Missions

their emotional faith going to cave in as the quote about Britain implies?

### *Face to Face?*

Here is something new. We would like to move distinctly beyond simply shipping out information to readers around the world. We would like to begin to encourage local, face to face, dialogue—and in the process more feedback and response to us that can embellish our Letters section.

In this we are admittedly taking a cue from the respectable monthly journal, *First Things*. Each month since last November they have listed the names and addresses of those who have volunteered their homes where monthly or so readers can gather and chew over together what is in the journal.

Who will be the first to open their home for this kind of dialog? One home in one place is enough to begin. This can grow gradually or rapidly depending on interest. We will immediately post on our web site (and in the next issue) the phone number people need to call to find out when and where to go.

We can cross over with readers of *Mission Frontiers*. Many times long articles in *IJFM* are stripped down for *Mission Frontiers*, which is a lighter version of some of the *IJFM* content with far more readers. But the more serious readers of *IJFM* will undoubtedly lead the way.

This does seem to be the way to go these days of rapidly opening new opportunities (and roadblocks) for missions, challenging goals, unsolved problems, in a word, Frontiers of mission.

So, think about it. You can try it just once or twice. Maybe no one in your area will call you up to find out about the meeting. Or, over time you may grow a nice periodic party that can meet in different places and you can meet some really nice people.

The timing of *IJFM* is quarterly, *Mission Frontiers* is bi-monthly. No matter. You can choose the times you meet. When you do meet, by prearrangement you can phone in toward the end of the meeting and one of us here can talk with you about your ideas, conclusions, questions, points of view. Who will go first?