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Ralph D. Winter



Dear Reader,

Few things have I followed more closely in the last 50 years than the attitude of the secular world toward the church and missions.

Talk about "Missions at the Edge," which is the theme of this issue (and the theme of the recent conference of mission executives mentioned in this issue).

In my opinion, the biggest single "EDGE" is the edge of the Evangelical tradition as it meets the secular world. This EDGE is the boundary (or wall) between two very different worlds. It is a boundary we have to cross.

When a few hardy souls from the secular world venture into ours, they feel strange with our specialized vocabulary and our unanalyzed practices. Meanwhile it is common among Evangelicals to pooh-pooh science as well as the scientists.

One man who crossed over this edge I heard about just yesterday. I received an email from a missionary in Jordan. It contained an article from last Sunday's *New York Times* (Sept 28). One of the *Times'* most liberal writers saw first-hand Evangelicals at work in Mozambique. His title for what he wrote about them is "God is On Their Side": very friendly, but very arms-length. Some good things have bled through the secular media lately.

But, for me, the colossus of bias today is a deeply ingrained negative attitude throughout the academic world, especially in history, sociology and anthropology.



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However, recently we saw a professor at Penn State, Philip Jenkins, come out with a worldwide survey of Christianity that is very appreciative—*The Next Christendom*. It speaks glowingly of the millions of Christians in the Third World.

Meanwhile, our millions of school children—whether in Christian schools or not—are exposed incessantly to a world barren of the work of God, or of honest, praying people. Why? Because the ruling texts in both kinds of schools have been prepared by publishers who hardly dare to raise the subject of religion. Yet religion, for better or worse, in every country of the world, is a truly mighty force. And it has been all down through the centuries.

Here in Pasadena, in our task-oriented fellowship, we have come to the conclusion that Evangelical students at every level, in every course they take, ought to be enabled to see the larger picture. We can't wish away the millions of dollars of investment in secular texts with beautiful pictures and graphics. They are what SAT scores lean on, whether you are in a Christian school or not.

What we can do, little by little, while setting an example for others to follow, is to compile "Supplementary Texts" (actually booklets) that add in these missing ingredients of the real world where the expanding kingdom of God is the principal reality. We are attempting to do this for specific widely-used textbooks.

The other day I went through the first 70 pages of a substantial text on American history and noted 22 places

where significant additional facts need to be added, and, in some cases, faulty understanding contradicted.

Trouble is, the average Christian school teacher has been brought up on secularized texts and simply does not know what is missing.

Meanwhile the growing number of truly outstanding Evangelical historians, like Mark Noll at Wheaton and George Marsden at Notre Dame, are producing superb treatments of American history that rarely cross the threshold of the average Evangelical family.

Nevertheless, our best missionaries are products of our secularized school world. But how can a missionary to intellectuals in India cope with harsh criticism of the Christian tradition when all he knows, and all the Indian intellectual knows, is a very jaundiced record of the facts?

If the Bible is responsible for the unending persecution of Jews, the Inquisition's burning of heretics, the Vatican's oppression of Galileo and the Salem witch trials, you would think that for anyone to accept our faith they would have to go schizoid into an intellectual "warp." That is, they might accept the nice people and the fellowship, but have

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to hold in reserve all kinds of intellectual doubts—or live in two disparate worlds.

One of the most popular and pervasive secular viewpoints is Darwinian evolution. Personally, I believe

that no "scientific" theory has ever been more unbelievable. I just can't see how the idea of random change, abetted by natural selection, remotely explains the incredible profundity of life on earth.

However, many Evangelicals who are devout believers in the Bible do not agree with me. In fact, there are a half a dozen alternative theories, and there are Evangelicals holding all of them. Now if earnest Bible believers hold some of these theories, whatever view we prefer, how can we insist that other believers or secular scientists must all be stupid or dishonest?

Can you still get to heaven if you

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don't understand the "right" viewpoint about the age of the earth?

Francis Collins is the tall, solid believer who was tapped by the U.S. government to head the massive Human Genome project. He frankly believes in unaided evolution. As the editor of the *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, I am running a brief spiritual testimony by him in the Oct.-Dec. issue of IJFM. In that issue we also have three articles by other Evangelicals who want earnestly to reduce the blood being spilled by crusaders for one position against another.

This whole fall issue of IJFM is on the frontier of science vs. missions. We cannot any longer take the Gospel into all the world without meeting highly educated leaders inside and outside of the church movements who have acquired essentially the same secularized education that pervades the United States. This is every day becoming more and more a major factor in missions. (You can get this issue of IJFM, plus all four of next year, for \$17.50 by phoning in your credit-card order to Betty, 626-296-7501.)

This is why we have been pushing the absolutely marvelous video *Unlocking the Mystery of Life*. It is still available for \$10 postpaid. (Call to the same number above.)

And now I have saved the very best news for the last. Not in my lifetime, to my knowledge, has any professor in a secular university produced such a ringing defense of Christianity and as cogent a correction of secular biases as Rodney Stark, in his three books published by Princeton University Press: *The Rise of Christianity*, *One True God*, and *For the Glory of God*. The latter is the best. The dust jacket boldly claims that

Whether we like it or not, people acting for the glory of God have formed our modern culture.

He gives 80 pages just to the essential dependence of the rise of science itself upon Christian belief. (I have written Princeton for permission to reprint those 80 pages as a separate

book.) He steps on a lot of toes. He shows how consistently biased most historians and sociologists are in the mainstream of academia. Astonishing. Every seminary student should have this book. Every student of science. Well, every student, period. Every Evangelical. (At one point he even quotes from *Mission Frontiers*!).

Quite honestly I regard this book to be one of the most valuable books I have ever owned. I would almost give my entire library for it. You can order it from Amazon.com or Half.com. There is nothing like it.

Stark's academic credentials are secure. For many years he has been on the faculty at the University of Washington. Now, in retirement, he

has recently agreed to teach at Baylor University.

Why am I so high on this book? Because it meets the EDGE head-on. It goes to bat with exhaustive hard facts to disprove a wide variety of myths that have flourished in the arid air of contemporary secularity. It, like the *New York Times* article mentioned above, is a credible case for overturning many negative viewpoints with which secular people are walled off from us. It sets the record straight. It will undergird the Supplementary Texts we envision. It can be cited with authority. It is truly a sensation without being sensational. 🌐



Announcement

In connection with the 25th Anniversary of the *Mission Frontiers* bulletin, we are soon to make available a nicely-bound, full-size first combined volume of 450 pages containing the first four years of existence of this bulletin. These four years are the period January 1979 through December 1982. They portray the most risky and exciting period of the founding of the Frontier Mission Fellowship and U.S. Center for World Mission.



By a miracle of modern technology this whopper of a book can be yours (and for your church library or missionary or mission-minded student) for just \$12 plus \$3.95 postage. But don't send any money. Just phone, mail, or email us your personal address and shipping address(es). When it is ready we will send it (them) and enclose a bill for \$12 + \$3.95 per copy. You then can pay by check or credit card.

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