

Dear Mission Frontiers,

I am responding to Ralph Winter's editorial comment in *Mission Frontiers* (January-February 2004 issue).

At present, there is no cure for autism. Nor do children outgrow it (see <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/autism.cfm>). There are a host of diseases and maladies in this world that are incurable. How does God view the incurable maladies, and how does He view our response to them when we are personally affected?

The point of your column is to identify a new frontier for Christian missions to seek eradication of diseases such as malaria or AIDS. The desire is to bring glory to God through saving lives from malaria and AIDS....

Eternal life in heaven far outweighs the sufferings of this world (Romans 8:18). Modern medicine continues its thrust with or without the mission money of Christ's church....

If it is God's plan to start a new mission frontier to eradicate malaria and AIDS, He will raise up people and resources to accomplish the task. Please adjust your tenor in this forum.

I have an adopted son who is 31 and mentally handicapped by chromosome defect. My wife died suddenly from pulmonary embolism three years ago. My mother passed away in 1989 from Alzheimer's disease.... God is sovereign over this world. Nothing can thwart His purposes (Job 42:2). Jesus is coming soon (Revelation 22:20).

Bozeman, MT

Ralph Winter's response:

It is obvious that this dear brother is absolutely besieged with tragic events over which he has no control, and he points out that autism (of which I spoke) has "no cure."

My response is, first, to point out that I made no reference to "curing"

diseases or "treating" disease, much less curing autism. My concern is for Evangelicals as a body to recognize an obligation to devote prayer and energy, maybe in lifelong calling, to discovering the reason so many millions of children in this country are suddenly turning up autistic. Granted, once autism appears, there is not a whole lot that can be done. However, is it not a clear responsibility to investigate the causes of autism?

This brother writes:

If it is God's plan to start a new mission frontier to eradicate malaria and AIDS, He will raise up people and resources to accomplish the task.... Nothing can thwart His purposes.

Do we leave this for the world to do? Is it not God's plan to destroy the works of Satan? Isn't He trying to "raise up people and resources (Evangelicals?) to accomplish that task"? Granted that God's purposes will not fail. Is He not expecting us to get at the causes? This case is likely where "without His help we can't, without our help He won't." (More in my editorial on pages 4-5 about the difference between unchangeable purposes and removable causes.)

Dear Dr. Winter,

[A letter concerning Professor Al Hammond's article on faith/science conflicts]

I would ask you to publish at least an excerpt of this letter.... I challenge you to publish it because I am confident that you.... may not want *Mission Frontiers* to be seen as taking sides.... Both the religious mainstream and the scientific mainstream are on the wrong paths currently ... Both communities are closing their ears to irrefutable evidence from God's universe if it does not confirm what they already believe....

There is no conflict between the Bible and science.

The underlying assumptions of such a statement are:

- 1) The Bible is without error.
- 2) Scientific evidence doesn't conflict with the Bible.
- 3) Where there is apparent conflict between scripture and scientific evidence, we are either misinterpreting the Bible, or we are misinterpreting the scientific evidence, or we are misinterpreting both the Bible and the scientific evidence.

This revolutionary idea is the foundation of Reasons To Believe [the ministry of pastor/scientist Hugh Ross]. It is also my own conviction.

Tallahassee, FL

Ralph Winter's response,

Well said. Your perspective is ours as well. For centuries Christian leaders have spoken of "God's Two Books, scripture and science." Psalm 19 clearly speaks of both. Theologians speak of both General and Special Revelation. Both, if rightly understood, are of God. From time to time we may tend to underestimate one or the other.

Dear Dr. Winter,

To say that God is not in control of children born with defects sounds too much like the "health and wealth theology." To call those who accept difficult situations from God's hand as "fatalistic hypercalvinistic" is not only unkind, but in our thinking, unchristian ... To talk about controlling the malaria parasite is unrealistic. To malign Christians ... for not doing more to research the disease was not fair.

Wheaton, IL

Ralph Winter's response:

God's sovereign control is not in question. My concern is for us to do what we can, because what we can do God usually expects us to do. He does not expect us to pray that He will paint the back fence.

Martin Luther and John Calvin did not know about germs. Had

they known, I do not doubt that they would have recognized Satan's distorting intelligence in that area as well and would have incorporated in their theology the human obligation to do all that can be done, as knowledge increases, to eradicate dangerous germs.

Time was when tuberculosis and duodenal ulcers were both considered the result of conditions (dampness, stress), not infections. Now we know that we need to specifically eliminate the deadly infections that cause them.

Today, for example, there is substantial evidence that infections, not merely conditions, underlie heart disease, cancer, multiple sclerosis, Alzheimer's, and schizophrenia (see the cover story, February 1999, *The Atlantic Monthly*, pp.41-53). However, our medical/pharmaceutical colossus is being paid to focus almost exclusively on the healing of these diseases, not the elimination of their infectious origin.

Many devout believers simply say, when one of these diseases appears in their circle of friends, "Too bad, but God knows what He is doing," or "No doubt God has some reason for this; we must trust Him." Obviously, God has His reasons, and can draw much good out of terrible tragedy. But that is no excuse for us not to do what we can to track down and eliminate the infections causing all the enormous pain, suffering, and death dealt by these five diseases alone.

Furthermore, we undersell and misrepresent our God if we blandly assume that He is the one in the business of making people suffer from disease. Where is Satan in all this? Do we do well to leave this fight to the world to deal with? Does He really want us to concede that we can do nothing about the emergence of autism in our country, or the persistence of malaria in Africa?

Dear *Mission Frontiers*,

Thank you for the "Editorial Comment" by Ralph Winter in the March-April 2004 issue of *Mission Frontiers*. He has said

very eloquently what we have believed for many years. While I believe that short-term missions is a valuable door to long-term service, I have felt that many churches and certain agencies have overemphasized short-term to the detriment of career commitment to missions. May the Lord, through your wise counsel, stimulate the Evangelical community to reevaluate what we have been doing in missions and bring about a refocus on long-term involvement.

Ed Moran
SIM (Serving In Mission)
Rocky Mountain Regional
Director

Dear *Mission Frontiers*,

I read with great interest Mark Snowden's article, "Orality: The Next Wave of Mission Advance," in the January-February issue of *Mission Frontiers*. Great stuff, but it raises a concern: that this Orality thrust may well have a negative impact on the Bible translation effort. In my view, this would be a most unfortunate consequence. The Orality people need to be aware of this likelihood and use their influence to counteract such a potentially negative response.

The challenge to all Bible translators is to take into account the insights and experience that the Orality people bring to the discussion and to apply them in their translation effort. The final product of Bible translations intended for giving God's Word in audio (or written, for that matter) must be the dynamic equivalent of how people in that culture speak and communicate. I am speaking from my personal experience as a Bible translator....

My hope and prayer is that the Orality movement and the Talking Bible movement will encourage and supplement a total effort which must be made

in our time and which is represented by these two complementary movements. May God give us eyes of faith and daring spirits to obey all He shows us.

Harvey Hoekstra
(Author, *From "Knotted Strings" to Talking Bibles*, see pp. 20-21)

Dear Rev. Parsons,

I have just read your article in the March-April issue of *Mission Frontiers*. I have always enjoyed the articles. Missions is my passion.

You asked a question: "Does your favorite North American author really know what to say to suffering believers in Myanmar? Or any other foreign mission field, for that matter?" I would like to suggest that not only do our favorite North American authors not know what to say to suffering believers, but I believe it is presumptuous for us to even try....

Elsie Mayyasi

Dear Editor,

Thanks for your excellent editorial in the March-April 2004 issue. Your illustration from Islam was particularly well-chosen. As to the approaches you mentioned, one could also make the same points regarding ministry to Muslims in this country. The harm done is often far greater than we are willing to admit!

Anonymous

Would you like to tell us your response to what you read in *Mission Frontiers*? Send E-mail to mission.frontiers@uscwm.org or postal letters to *Mission Frontiers*, 1605 Elizabeth Street, Pasadena, CA 91104, USA 🌐

