



Real problems are bad enough. But artificial hopelessness is destructive and poisonous.

Ralph D. Winter



Dear Reader,

Why go into all this stuff about “unreached peoples” when most of them are actually oppressed minorities and as a result many are poor, fearful, frantic and maybe dangerous? Especially *if we can't really help them transform their conditions in this life?* What is actually true?

What can we believe?

I am fascinated by a recent book, *Plagues of the Mind: The New Epidemic of False Knowledge*. This represents a crucial subject! Christian decisions are no better than the facts on which they are based. False knowledge is deadly.

This book is the research of a history professor at a California state university. Among many other things, he debunks some myths about U. S. history, specifically white contact with American Indian tribes.

A similar book, *Constant Battles: The Myth of the Peaceful Noble Savage*, says much the same thing – that our society has given us too rosy an idea of the “noble savage.” But this book includes far more than American Indians. It indicts the entire human race!

Coming closer to the present, I have also been acquainting myself with a new (November 2006) book, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, drawn from recently-released Israeli

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government documents – actually quoting Ben-Gurion's personal diary, for example. (It is too bad Jimmy Carter did not have this book available as a source when writing his much-criticized *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*.)

Ethnic Cleansing, if valid, drastically revises the popular slant on the conflicts in Palestine. Amazingly, it is the work of a reputable historian on the faculty of Haifa University in Israel. It begins by meticulously documenting the first six months of Israel's new lease on Palestinian territory in December 1947, when 800,000 Palestinians were violently forced out of 513 towns and villages, homes blown up in the middle of the night as people still slept in them, masses summarily shot, etc.

Whether all this will be further substantiated or not, the book is an example of the differences in conclusions that inevitably arise from differences of basic data. It is a warning not to blindly accept conventional views.

That's Just Background

Recently I encountered two highly-reputed articles and one highly-acclaimed movie, all three presenting degrees of hopelessness, something people who believe in Christian mission ought to recognize as dangerously less than the full picture. I fear that readers and viewers are being poisoned by hopelessness. Half-truths seem to be rolling over us like huge, unstoppable tanks!

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1. Consider the movie first (*Darwin's Nightmare*). Highly professional, amazingly detailed, it tells how an

alien perch was introduced into one of the largest lakes in the world, Lake Victoria, bordered by three countries. This fish is gobbling up and eliminating all other fish. It is a huge, edible fish, and so a robust industry has grown up to harvest, fillet, and air-ship 200,000 lbs per day to Japanese and European markets.

Understandably, this industry at the south end of the lake has been a magnet, drawing impoverished workers from rural areas into what looks something like the lawless, ramshackle Gold Rush camps in California in the middle of the nineteenth century. Many of the workers, living in terrible conditions, prostitution, etc., are killing themselves on alcohol gained by their comparatively high wages. The film also shows nearby congregations of African worshippers, but only in a pathetic, impotent role.

The upshot is that Europeans are stealing Africans blind, stripping them of their resources and creating nothing but woeful conditions. Hopelessness is the message.

2. A current article in *National Geographic* zooms in on the coast of Nigeria. It portrays thousands of oil wells, the attendant oil pipes, over 8,000 spills per year, land and water soaked by oil, and village populations without food, electricity, sanitation, or jobs. The spectacular oil income is mainly misused – portrayed as an absolutely hopeless situation. Read it and weep.

But churches abound, preachers are futilely trying to help. Armed gangs of disenfranchised youth are killing scores of foreign workers – really hopeless.

3. The January-February 2007 issue of *Foreign Affairs* contains a lengthy article, “The Challenge of Global Health”, which objectively, comprehensively and authoritatively presents detailed statistics of the grim realities of global health. It acknowledges a veritable explosion of interest, good will, and money from the West. A new concern for health is now virtually a fad in the Western world, providing totally unprecedented resources – the Gates Foundation, Bono's actions, Madonna's adopting an African child, etc.

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But the article deplores the harmful effect of donors demanding to guide at a distance what is to be done, the sporadic and unorganized efforts, and the virtual absence of an infrastructure of health workers in the most needy countries.

Worse still, astoundingly, the few nurses' programs and medical schools in poor countries are mainly producing workers who are whisked off to work in Europe or America as fast as they can be trained.

This is a picture even more hopeless than the others.

Therefore?

If these were not misleading glimpses, missions would be doing their work in the face of true hopelessness. But artificial hopelessness is destructive and poisonous. Real problems are bad enough. But I'm afraid that many of the 1.5 million annual short-term mis-

sionaries come home with a conscious or subconscious feeling of hopelessness. Their glimpses of *apparently ineffective churches* – whether in Nigeria, bordering Lake Victoria, or proliferating in other countries around the world – stunt and blunt all kinds of potential support for the absolutely crucial work of the gospel in the darkest situations.

What none of the popular media convey is the simple fact that none of the many (and nowadays massive) infusions of Western aid has any chance of succeeding unless missions do, in fact, produce a new kind of truly transformed person. And they do! They are the only type of agency in that business.

Secular projects are often launched on the basis of perspectives gained in Christianized countries. There a measure of honesty and good will is assumed. Working abroad with those assumptions is very unlikely to succeed.

I once asked a factory owner in Guatemala why he and others advertised in the newspapers for Evangelical workers. Without a split-second's hesitation he replied, "Well, they don't booze, they don't chase the women workers, and they come to work." Also, the mountain towns in Guatemala, though mainly Christo-pagan, invariably employ Evangelicals for their town treasurers.

Yes, there are exceptions, but the only hope of anything substantial coming out of these dark spots is the existence of transformed people. And secular interest focusing the searchlight today on these dark spots is largely unaware of this new element.

Unreached peoples would indeed be hopeless if there were not millions of renewed souls almost everywhere today. That crucial factor is missing from virtually all such reports. 🌐



Stephen K. Bailey
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