

Life & Death Issues

BY KEVIN HIGGINS

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Edges

One of our core values in FV is to live “at the edges”, meaning that, consistent with our heritage of seeking to understand and promote frontier missiology, we intentionally want to pursue the cutting edge between what is and what is not yet.

There are many ways to look at those edges. Of course, our particular “edge” in FV and WCIU is the edge between where the Good News of life in Jesus is known and not yet known, experienced and not yet experienced, transforming lives and communities and not yet transforming lives and communities. That edge includes edges of thinking and imagination, edges of social and cultural distance and edges of spiritual opposition. Thus, I plan to try to highlight how this issue of *Mission Frontiers* is directing us all toward those edges.

Life and Death Issues

The lead editorial by R. W. Lewis gives an overview of the historic connection between evangelicals, revivals, social transformation and addressing evil. She outlines four specific “death industries” which will, in various ways, be discussed in this issue of *MF*. I won’t repeat what she says there or try to do my own overview. Instead I want to come to this from a slightly different angle.

Why is *MF* talking about this?

FV is focused on the least reached. **Our vision is tied to seeing movements to Jesus and expressing the fullness of the Kingdom within all peoples.**

Why is *MF* giving a whole edition to drugs (including legal ones)? Alcohol? Abortion?

There is a direct line between the “industries” described here and the frontier peoples.

While not all the articles draw the line as directly as our readers might be looking for, let me describe the line as I see it. And let me use a death industry that is not described in these articles, just by way of illustration.

I lived and worked in South Asia among Muslims. I was involved in an attempt at integrated aqua and agriculture, as a business. We had a real farm with real fish and real crops—and a lot of very real work!

Chemical insecticides and fertilizers initially made a huge difference in crop production and survival, and in the subsequent economic blessing for farms (not farmers, but that is a whole different topic). However, there was a consequence: increasingly barren soil, depleted of nutrition.

That is a form of death. Pesticide companies and chemical fertilizer companies were (in my context) death industries. And they succeeded because they seemed to work so well.

This disturbed me, so I began to experiment with organic approaches to both fertilizing the soil, so that crops could grow well but the soil could be safe, and also so that in the water the algae eating fish could benefit from protein rich green water. Local people told me about a tree oil that could be used in protecting crops from predator insects.

The farms I either managed or was consulting for were surrounded by villages, in which people from two different unreached people groups lived. This engaged me in almost daily interaction with those villagers, opportunities to share the gospel and pray for people and opportunities to grow in language and culture acquisition. It also seemingly gave the opportunity to bring blessing to these peoples.

I felt that this “green” approach to our farming was full of brilliant ideas and plans, and was a perfect fit for our desire to be a spiritual blessing as well. We had reasonably good execution. But these wonderful things only caught on at my farm, where I controlled the approach and values.

I will come back to this in my third question: Now what do we do?



Are there other life and death issues?

I am sure you are already assuming I will say yes, based on the above. Of course there are.

Death industries can be overtly in our face, as is the case with most of those highlighted in this issue. But they can also be beguilingly subtle. And the fact is that, in a fallen and broken world, almost every human enterprise has unintended, negative and even deadly, “butterfly effects.”

For example, Is it bad to try to make food convenient to purchase and prepare? I would argue it isn't. But observe the slippery slope from convenience to fast food and junk food and obesity (arguably an epidemic in the USA in particular.) And we all know the connection between obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and more, as well as the disturbing impact of all of this on our children.

Thus, is the convenience food industry potentially a death industry?

What about the automobile?

I don't mean traffic accidents, but the increasing consumption of fossil fuel, increase of polluted air and the consequential health issues. All of which, if unchecked, are going to kill people.

I see someone raising their hand wanting to ask, again, about the connection of these things to reaching the unreached.

Both of these examples are major exports to the major cities located within the major population centers of the largest unreached and frontier peoples.

A concern for seeing movements to Jesus among them, in which discipleship and obedience to Jesus and the fullness of the promised Abrahamic blessing don't include a concern for the health impact of such issues, hardly fulfills the great commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves. In fact, you will notice that within this issue focused on various death industries, we are still including our normal articles dealing with movements to Jesus among the least reached, and disciple multiplication in particular. In a sense this combination incarnates an important point: these two concerns belong together.

Now what do we do?

This is the hardest part, admittedly. And this is perhaps the most challenging aspect of this issue of *MF*.

If I might be permitted here to take off my FV General Director hat and don my field worker and WCIU President hats, perhaps I can offer some thoughts.

I won't comment here on the important role of Jesus' people in standing against evil and combating the sort of issues outlined in the articles. I would hope that within our own country new organizations and networks might arise, and that repentance in all sorts of forms might take root in deep and profound ways.

I want to address how this might be thought of in the field and from the field. First with my field worker hat on:

If I could transport myself back to our own field contexts again, I would tell myself first to seek to walk alongside those I was hoping to reach, prayerfully listening and seeking together to understand how they saw issues, and which issues they saw, that were counter to the fullness of life and blessing He intends. There might be a whole different take on “death industries” and on which to press against and how and with what resources.

Which leads me to my WCIU hat:

WCIU's degree is an MA in International Development. Critical to the whole process of development is to work with communities as they identify what issues are the most disturbing and troubling, which solutions seem most compelling, what resources of expertise, experience, skills, advocacy (if they have “voice”), finance, and others. In WCIU's case it's to do all this through biblical, historical, and cultural frameworks, which shape strategic action and response.

Conclusion

My hope would be that somehow from this issue of MF there might be two prongs of response. One might be called the “big system” response. By this I mean the sort of big picture, long term effort at gospel and blessing-rooted reform such as what the earlier evangelical revivals included and which played a great part in the end of the slave trade.

The other might be called the “local system” response that I have tried to describe near the end of this contribution to our discussion. Working down, alongside and in the nitty gritty of day-to-day and person-to-person life “in the field.”

It is the latter which might more directly bear fruit in Jesus movements, expressing the fullness of the kingdom.

