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Theological Observer

Expelled

The recently-released movie-length documentary, *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*, has received considerable attention since its debut in April, 2008. Most of it has been negative. The National Center for Science Education (NCSE), for example, depicts it as anti-scientific propaganda designed to advance a creationist agenda. The notorious Darwinian atheist Richard Dawkins characterizes it as whiny, paranoid, and pathetic. And the mainstream media continues to make similar allegations.

For all its bad press, one thing is clear: *Expelled* touched a nerve. The film's thesis is that the scientific establishment—"big science"—refuses to acknowledge and in a dogmatic and *a priori* fashion dismisses any claim that the universe and its organisms exhibit some semblance of design. It also expels (denies tenure, refuses publication, etc.) the scientists who dare make them. Why? To suggest there is design in nature that cannot be accounted for by random natural causation also suggests that there exists an intelligent source behind such observable phenomena.

Proponents of intelligent design have been making such cases for decades. Recently, astronomer Guillermo Gonzalez (and his college Jay Richards) argued, in *The Privileged Planet* (2004), that the fine-tuning of elementary conditions necessary to sustain life found exclusively on earth is best explained by intelligent causation. Despite his stellar teaching and publication record, though, Gonzalez was denied tenure at the University of Iowa for his heterodox views. William Dembski, who holds two PhDs and is widely published, argues for the design inference on the basis of the information-rich nature of biological structures. When his views were made known he was dismissed from his position as director of the Michael Polanyi at Baylor University. Numerous other examples could also be cited.

But the Spartan war against intelligent design, argue organizations like the NCSE and a host of individuals like Oxford's Richard Dawkins and Tufts' Daniel Dennett, is necessary. Intelligent design, they claim, is nothing but a Trojan horse created by inheritors of the creationist crusade of Williams Jennings Bryan designed to sneak and then impose religious cosmology into science curricula. Thus, for the sake of science it must be resisted (even if it requires the abuse of power).

Expelled does a great job of elucidating this and what is, on a fundamental level, a worldview conflict, where the inferences of intelligent design present a threat to the presuppositions that underpin modern science: philosophical naturalism and methodological materialism. At the extremes of this conflict are theism, on the one side, and atheism, on the other. Unfortunately, the movie does not articulate well that not all evolutionary scientists are aggressive

atheists. This criticism notwithstanding, the movie draws due attention to the unintended yet logical consequences of atheistic naturalism by exposing its ideological links to the murderous social engineering of left-wing statist movements like German National Socialism, the international socialism of the Soviet Union, and its subtle import into America under the leadership of Margaret Sanger and the eugenics project of what eventually became Planned Parenthood.

These and other reasons, particularly the dry and subtle humor of its host, Ben Stein, an accomplished writer and thinker who is probably most memorable for his role as the monotone economics teacher in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, make the documentary worth viewing. It could also be put to good use in facilitating discussion, particularly among young adults, about some of the current cultural challenges Christianity faces.

One should not, however, think that the movie is "Christian." It is theologically neutral. It is a movie about science and the resistance of its establishment to anything that might be construed as theistic. It is, therefore, a good introduction to one of the many burning issues of the day.

Adam S. Francisco

The Death of a Christian: Membership Loss or Transfer?

As the annual ritual of completing the statistical report comes upon parish pastors once again, I am reminded of the times that I counted up the number of faithful members who had died over the past calendar year and placed that number in the "Membership Losses" column. I never felt right about it. Didn't someone once write, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain"? Sometime after these statistical reports have been mailed, an article usually appears in the *Reporter* on the net losses or gains in congregation membership within our beloved synod. In recent years, these articles have expressed understandable concerns about net losses. Whether there were losses or gains, however, there is usually no acknowledgment in such articles that some of our losses in the church militant were actually gains to the church triumphant. Even while it is the mission of Christ's church to proclaim the Gospel to unbelievers and baptize, it is also our mission to nurture the baptized in Christ until he brings them out of sin and death to await resurrection on the last day. Should we be concerned that some congregations are shrinking for various reasons, including deaths? Yes. Should we also rejoice that some of these membership losses are permanent gains to the church triumphant? Yes. Perhaps the statistical report should add a line for "Transfers to the Church Triumphant," and we should also rejoice in these "losses" that are heaven's gain.

Charles A. Gieschen