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Articles

HANDLING A HOT TOPIC

By Tom Gilson

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'Expelled'

Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed hits theater screens this Friday. Already it's generating considerable advance controversy in the media and in blogs. The storm now swirling around it might be just a minor prelude, though, to what could happen when *Expelled* is released later this week.

The film's premise is that academics who support intelligent design (ID)—or even sympathize with it—are often severely maltreated by the educational establishment. The rancor over the past few weeks hasn't really been about whether the film makes that case successfully.

Instead, ID antagonists are complaining about matters ranging from the way producers obtained interviews with evolutionary scientists, to whether high-profile ID antagonists P.Z. Myers and Richard Dawkins should have been admitted to an invitation-only advance screening in Minneapolis.

They've brought a legal challenge (that was predictable, wasn't it?) against an alleged copyright infringement. Only one substantive issue has attracted much attention: whether *Expelled* overstates the contribution Darwinism made to Nazism. Yet even that is a minor theme in the movie.

If those side issues have raised such a furor, what will it be like when the film's real content is out there for discussion? That will depend largely on how Christians respond.

ID's relation to Christianity is far more complex than most people recognize. The two certainly share overlapping interests, as witnessed by the fact that many of ID's most vocal opponents (Myers, Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and others) are atheists, stridently opposed to all religious belief. Yet Christianity's truth is not dependent on ID's success, and ID's success as science must be judged in scientific terms, not religious.

Christianity and ID do overlap, however, in their shared rejection of philosophical naturalism, the doctrine that everything happens by matter and energy interacting in a closed system of natural cause and effect. For that reason, many Christians rightly have a strong interest in ID and in issues like those raised in *Expelled*. How then ought we to enter into this controversy?

Let's briefly survey some relevant Biblical passages. [2 Corinthians 10:3-5](#) (ESV) tells us to take our stand in a godly manner:

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.

[Colossians 4:6](#) tells us further that our speech should be "gracious, seasoned with salt, so that [we] may know how to answer each person."

What does this mean? First, we do not use fleshly methods. There is far too much name-calling and invective being tossed around on this subject. You'll see it if you look around the blogosphere a bit. I'm grateful to be able to say this is far less pronounced on the pro-ID sites than on anti-ID sites. As Christians speak to this issue, our speech should be marked with a difference: entirely gracious, so that

others seeing it will glorify God.

To be gracious does not mean to yield, however. The language in 2 Corinthians 10 is strong. We're called to destroy strongholds, arguments, and lofty opinions raised against the knowledge of Christ. We're taking captives—not people, obviously, but thoughts, false beliefs. We do it through firmly and persistently speaking the truth and countering error.

Which brings us to the hard part. To "know how to answer each person," we need to understand the issue from both sides. Arguments about ID have been riddled with over-simplifications and misconceptions. ID proponents and antagonists have both been guilty of this.

The controversy is so deeply adversarial that many have taken black-or-white stands on issues that actually are not so clear-cut. For example, "ID is nothing but religion!" answered by, "No, ID has nothing to do with religion at all, it's just science!" Both are absurdly one-dimensional.

There are at least two good ways to keep ourselves from this kind of error. The first is to do our homework. We need a solid understanding of the Biblical truths on which we stand. Then beyond that, we need to try to understand the issue's real complexities, which means learning both sides.

As one who does a lot of web-based debating against naturalistic (atheistic) evolution, I know I wouldn't stand a chance if I weren't studying what the best atheists and evolutionists have written, or without reading the most thoughtful Christian or ID-based responses.

The second protection against such an error is to know what we don't know, and be willing to admit it. Evolution and ID involve specialized studies in paleontology, radiometric dating, geology, biochemistry, genetics, and more. Does ID challenge some of the prevailing wisdom in these fields? Yes. Can we read about these challenges on the web, or find a good, trustworthy book about them? Certainly! Will that make us qualified to "pronounce" on them? Well, no.

But that's okay. We don't all have to be experts. It will take many years (at least) for those who are to work out their differences. We can still know what we do know. We know that God created the heavens and the earth and all that lives in them. The details and the debates go far deeper than that. We should dive into these discussions only as deep as we're prepared to swim—while at the same time always equipping ourselves to go to greater depths.

Finally, Biblical admonitions regarding any conflict apply here as well. Prayer must undergird all our efforts: prayer for God's blessing on our opponents, and for His victory in the battle of ideas.

This is a hot topic and getting warmer by the day. It really isn't much, though, compared to the "fiery trial" Peter's readers were facing ([1 Peter 4:12-13](#)). Still, the advice there applies to us today:

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

Translation for our situation: Is there a controversy? Yes. Should we be surprised? No. What ought we do? Handle it with a smile, do our homework, speak the truth, and be glad that God is accomplishing His purposes in it.

Tom Gilson is director of strategic processes in the Operational Advisory Services team for Campus Crusade for Christ. He maintains a blog at www.thinkingchristian.net.

For Further Reading and Information

Check out [Expelled: The Movie](#).

BreakPoint Commentary No. 080411, "[Myths About 'Expelled': Don't Believe Everything You Hear](#)."

Jeff Peck, "[Stein's 'Expelled': See It. Believe It.](#)," *The Point*, 5 March 2008.

Gina Dalfonzo, "[You'll Never Look at Ben Stein the Same Way Again](#)," *The Point*, 5 October 2007.

Gina Dalfonzo, "[Striking Back at Darwin Day](#)," *The Point*, 11 February 2008.

Kim Moreland, "[The Stirring Pot](#)," *The Point*, 9 November 2007.

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