

Unhappy Cosmic Accidents

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Toward the end of my teaching career I witnessed a good-faith effort to bolster the self esteem of the students of a local high school. The faculty wanted the kids to know they were special.

Virtually every student who was capable of making it to school that day was given an award. After about the 800th award the students began drawing an inevitable conclusion: "All this means is that none of us are special." The event was followed by a minor litter problem.

Poor self-image has apparently become an epidemic. Educators rifle endless avenues seeking to solve this crisis. Instilling a sense of inherent value in a teenager is no small task. Telling them they're smart, pretty, talented, funny, is simply falling short. Our failures in this arena have been disastrous.

The third leading killer of teens is suicide, following only unintentional injuries (which may not be unintentional at all) and homicides. Our children are killing themselves. It's estimated that for every successful suicide, there are 8 to 25 unsuccessful attempts; thank God for this incompetence.

The teen suicide rate has tripled since the 60's. As one who was in school in the 60's and taught in the 70's, 80's and 90's, I offer my observation.

In the early sixties the 'God notion' was becoming an unacceptable hypothesis for government funded educational institutions. This created a black hole in the human soul. Something was gone with no replacement forthcoming.

My attempt in the early 90's to notify these young desperate minds that this vacuum simply cannot be filled by anything but God found me escorted out of my classroom by two gentlemen with walkie-talkies and dark glasses. I was not invited back until, shockingly, about a month ago.

I had access to their eager teenage thoughts for more than an hour. I felt like I was throwing buckets of water on a dry and thirsty land when I told them they were each fearfully and wonderfully made *by* God and in the image *of* God. Dare I go further? With one eye on the door I pressed on.

I conveyed that they, perhaps unwittingly, had been taught that their presence on this earth was a mere accident and they were themselves accidents. They were savvy. They seemed to pick up on the spiritual and psychological consequences of such a proposition.

We're notifying our youth that they are cosmic accidents then we're vexed regarding the genesis of their depression. That's like the host of the party informing a guest that she received her invitation by accident then being mystified at her sorrow, anxiety and desire to leave the party.

The late British theologian J Sidlow Baxter made a projection:

Those who believe we evolved from the primordial slime have destined themselves, and those who follow, to re-evolve back into the slime from whence they believe they came.

Slime may sound overly pejorative but I don't think Baxter meant this to be an insult. When his audience laughed, he rebuked them. "You should be weeping!"

Baxter's forecast was profound. Slime has no sense of inherent value. Who ever rejoiced that they were made in the image of slime? Slime doesn't care. It just slimes around. It's not concerned if it hurts itself or others.

Of course young people aren't slime. But we keep blasting this into their little psyches as if we're doing them a favor. Instead of being "fearfully and wonderfully made" in the "image of God"—the *Imago Dei*—they're cosmic accidents made in the *imago slime*.

Whatever one thinks of Intelligent Design, it must be admitted that the finest minds in the history of human thought, from Aristotle to Augustine to Aquinas to Galileo to Einstein to today's Alvin Plantinga, at some level, believed in Intelligent Design. It seems educationally dishonest to withhold from our children what some of the greatest thinkers in history believed.

Be that as it may, one astute young woman in the class made a startling observation: "Belief in the theory of evolution," she postulated, "requires faith." It requires faith in the scientists, in their instruments, in their observations and above all, in the conclusions they draw based upon those observations.

No materialist has ever managed to bring the Big Bang into their laboratory to scrutinize it according to the scientific method.

And the only virtue flowing from the Big Bang are a lot of little bangs taking the lives of children in our neighborhoods. I say we give the kids the good news.