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Fiction or Fact?



Russell H. BOWERS, Jr.

I recently read the best-selling novel *The Poisonwood Bible*. It imagines the story of an American missionary family in the Congo during its 1960 struggle for independence.

Endorsed as it is by Oprah's Book Club, *The Poisonwood Bible* predictably paints a pessimistic picture. The missionary husband and father, Nathan Price, is ignorant, bigoted, chauvinistic, proud, harsh, self-centered, insensitive, and irrelevant. The family isolates itself from the villagers, who in turn ignore the father's skewed and jingoistic "gospel." Price's wife and four daughters at first fear and then loathe the man.

Although critics wax rhapsodic about the beauty and incisiveness of the story, it is actually a threadbare litany of popular stereotypical misconceptions of what believing Christian people are like. Nothing novel in this novel. And not only is it not new, it is arguably not true. Barbara Kingsolver in her Author's Note thanks her parents "for being different in every way from the parents I created for the narrators of this tale." She is right—she created them. They are also "different in every way" from the flesh-and-blood missionary people I know.

An example? Not long ago I crossed the Mekong River with Jeff and Heather Williams and my wife Glenna to a poor village opposite Kompong Cham. We went to conduct tuberculosis screening among the children. The other three were doing the work; I just watched. Jeff and Heather had become alarmed over the extent of TB infection there, and were pushing to enroll its children in a government-sponsored treatment program. To qualify they first needed to have a health professional perform screening injections, so Glenna had come to help with that.

In the weeks preceding our visit, Heather had painstakingly surveyed the village's households, enrolling each child by name and age. Now we walked the winding ways from house to house. Jeff and two Cambodian associates kept records, Glenna injected serum, and Heather explained the process to skeptical children and then comforted them after their shots.

I cannot imagine a contrast greater than that between the fictional Price and the living Williams families. Jeff and Heather chatted with villagers about everyday concerns as they strolled from house to house. Heather modeled love and patience as she cradled each child, explained the test, and calmed their fears (well, the fears of most—two or three out of the one hundred twenty-seven we tested that afternoon remained terrified.). As I watched her talking heart-to-heart with naked boys and cuddling scabies-infested girls, I pictured the busy and important Jesus taking children into his arms and blessing them.

Sure, Jeff and Heather would like to introduce these people to Jesus. But last Sunday afternoon I don't remember hearing his name mentioned. Last Sunday was instead devoted to loving these people and providing essential health care for them that they could not get for themselves. No one forced the Williams to do that; they took it on themselves out of the kind of genuine concern that prompts practical deeds.

No one will write a *New York Times* bestseller and Oprah Book Club selection about Jeff and Heather Williams on a sunny Sunday afternoon near Kompong Cham. Too many readers prefer ill-informed and indignant poisonwood fiction.



*Heather Williams comforts a Cham girl
who has just received an injection*



ស្រីលព្រមិត បុ បាតការណ៍ពិត?

ବ୍ୟାକିତ ଗୀତ୍ସେବିଳ ଧାର୍ଯ୍ୟେଲ୍

៣៩ សំណុះដឹកច្បែក/១ (អូនាម ២០០៤)

នោះ ១ ប្រធានរបស់ព្រៃ និង ក្រសួងបច្ចុប្បន្ន ត្រូវបានគេត្រួតខ្សោចព័ត៌មាន មកកើតស្មើប់ឡើងខ្លួន ឬតុករបស់ខ្លួន។

ខ្ញុំសូមបើកឱាធារណ៍៖ ចិនយុរីបុគ្គលិកនៅពេលដឹលខ្លួនឯងកាត់ទឡូមេគតុ ជាមួយថោរ និង ហើតខ់ ស្រីលិាយ និង ប្រព័ន្ធរបស់ខ្ញុំ ក្នុងឈាម ធ្វើដីណើរទៅក្នុងឯកសារ ក្នុងឯកសារ សង្កែតអំពីជីវិះបេងក្តុងចំណោមក្នុង ។ ចិនកំពើតកំពុងធ្វើការចំណោក ខ្លួន តែមិនបានបាន ។ ថោរ និង ហើតដើរ ពីជាមានការយកចិត្តទុកដាក់ ចំណោះការកើតជីវិះបេងនៅទីនេះ ហើយព្យាយាមបញ្ចប់ក្នុងការអស់នោះ ទៅក្នុងកម្មវិធីជំនួយព្យាបាលរបស់រដ្ឋបាតិបាល ។ ដើម្បីរៀបចំការបញ្ចប់ នូវការនេះបានលុះព្រាតធ្វើការស្រាវជ្រាវដឹលមានអ្នកជំនាញដែល ដើម្បីចាកច្ចំបង្ការ នូវថែរ ក្នុងឈាម កីឡាដូរនៅក្នុងការដាក់នោះ៖

ប៊ូនសប្តាហ៍ក្រាយពិយីដីទីនោះ ហើតខ្លួនជាប្រធានការស្រាវជ្រាវ យ៉ាងលំបាកដល់ត្រសារនៅក្នុងក្នុងនោះដោយកត់ឈ្មោះ និង រាយការណ៍ក្នុង និមួយ។ តុល្យរួមឱ្យដោរកចំចុះកាថែទីនៃដីផ្លូវដីផ្លូវពាមផ្លូវក្នុងការ ចេហ្ខ និង សហការដែលជាតិទូទាត់នឹងការកំពុងដីផ្លូវកត់ត្រាក្នុងបញ្ហី ចំណោក

Times Square Book Club, Inc., New York

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ឡាយនិលក្បាសេដីករណី

၂ ခါန္ဒိုမှုနေဆာမြေပြုလျှင် အောက်ဖော်လွှာမှုနည်းလမ်းလျှော့လှုပ်နည်းလမ်း တောင်းဆိုရန် လုပ်နည်းလမ်း

៣៦ សំណុះដែលមានច្បាស់ ៥/១ (អនុមា ២០០៤)

រឿងលាមទេនវិរស័យលម្អិតស្របតាមកំណើនថ្មីជាតិទីនូមខេត្តកំណែងមាន មានអ្នករាលជាថ្មីនិងច្បាស់រួមទាំងបានប្រើប្រាស់ពីរបៀវត្ស ឬនិង រឿងដែលប្រាមិត របស់ ពាយសិទ្ធិ Poisionwood ។



ហើតខ្ញុំ រឿងលាម នានាកំណើនល្អឥន្ទរាលជាតិទីនូមខេត្តកំណែង
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