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Battling academic elites for the universe: Q&A with 'Expelled' producer Mark Mathis

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Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed associate producer Mark Mathis took time to speak with the *Tribune-Herald* on Friday. Here is a Q&A from that discussion:

Q *Expelled* opened in the top 10. Are you happy with the early numbers?

A Yeah, when you look at documentary films, it's pretty rare for any documentary film to debut in the top 10, and certainly on 1,052 screens, which is pretty significant for a documentary film. So, to finish (in the top 10), I think we did exceptionally well. The other thing to keep in mind is that, typically, when you think back to some of the documentary films that have done well, *Fahrenheit 9/11* and Al Gore's film, these films get massive amounts of free publicity from a mainstream media that is favorable to their position. So, really, tens of millions of dollars of free publicity to pump the film up before its release. We received the exact opposite of that, which is just a pummeling by the secular press, ignored by the big press, which fawn over leftist films, and then a pummeling by the critics because this film contradicts their world view. So, to do the numbers that we did in that atmosphere I think is pretty remarkable.

Q So you feel the mainstream media went out of their way to bash the film?

A Absolutely. Michael Moore does a film and he's all over every network, getting minutes of time to promote the film in a very accommodating atmosphere. We didn't get that kind of treatment from the big networks. We did get some entry on cable shows like Glenn Beck or Bill O'Reilly, but the big heavyweights pretty much ignored us. And then, on the secular side, reviewers (from) *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, those kinds of folks, it's almost as if they were in a competition to see how severe a critique they could bring. I've got my own theory about that which is, number one, they do this because it is offensive to their world view. They're atheists, or agnostic secularists who look down their nose at religious people, at the very least. So it offends them personally, so they need to go overboard in their critique. Or, they're a little concerned about, 'What are others in my world going to think if I don't just bloody this film?' So I think the treatment we get from the media is a wonderful example of the hostility and suppression that the film exposes going on at the academic level. As we point out in the film, big media and big science go shoulder to shoulder on this stuff because they're coming at it from the same world view.

Q What kind of reactions have you gotten from everyday people who see the movie?

A We did some market research, and 1,100 people were interviewed after they had seen the film in, I

think, six states. That research showed that 97 percent of the people who saw the film enjoyed it, liked it. Ninety-six percent were going to recommend it to a friend. Again, this is showing what's going on within the culture. People who are going to see it predominantly agree with the position that we're bringing and they just think it's a great film. Then the others are on the opposite side. There's almost no middle ground, which is fascinating. It just shows again that you've got this polarization of people on this issue.

Q What sort of negative backlash have you received, outside of film reviews, particularly in the science community?

A It's been constant since we announced the film, from getting attacked repeatedly in the *New York Times* to scientists themselves becoming unhinged. (Noted Darwinist and atheist) Richard Dawkins wrote some 3,500-word screed called "Lying for Jesus." It's almost comical — it is comical — the absolute flopsweat that these people are in because we're exposing what's going on in their world.

Q Early in *Expelled*, some of the intelligent design scientists go out of their way to explain that intelligent design is not necessarily trying to prove the existence of God or is not a religious endeavor, per se. But later in the film, it seems to get into a religion versus Darwinist evolution debate. How do you reconcile those two things?

A I think, on the surface, it might seem inconsistent, but I don't believe it is. When you look at the science of intelligent design, all this science is saying is that we can, using scientific methods, identify evidence of intelligence in the universe, intelligent causation. But once you get deeper into the film and we start talking about this world view battle, this battle over philosophy, essentially, that's why the passions run so high. That's why Richard Dawkins writes some pitiful 3,500-word document, "Lying for Jesus," because it's not about the science, it's a philosophy and his philosophy is being challenged. And Darwinism is the foundation of that philosophy, so his response is in the extreme. So we try to be careful to point out in the film that intelligent design is a scientific proposition and it should be treated as such. By extension, though, there is a secondary question, which is a philosophical question and that's where this big war is being waged in the name of science that's really a philosophical war. And so, intelligent design does bring metaphysical implications. If there is design, then who or what is the designer? This is what makes the Darwinists so uncomfortable, because that designer for most people in America is either the Christian or Jewish god. And that is very appropriately addressed in the film. The thing that doesn't get the attention that it needs to is that a Darwinian philosophy, which is taught in our schools and our universities, also comes with a metaphysical implication: If there is no design, then therefore there is no designer. Therefore, atheism rules the day. So this is the part of the debate that I wish got a little more attention. America is predominantly a very religious country, and yet we're allowing elitist academics tell our students in high school and college that there's really only one way of looking at life, from a materialist philosophy, and that if they have any religious sensibilities, those really aren't science. And so we're teaching, by default, an atheistic philosophy and the evidence that would support that kind of structure in our educational system is, at the very least, greatly lacking. What we are advocating for is freedom: Freedom of inquiry, freedom of speech, freedom of ideas, and not allowing a singular philosophy to have a monopoly in the academic world in this area, because it is not justified.

Q An interesting moment in the movie comes when Ben Stein sits down for a discussion with Richard Dawkins. During that discussion, Dawkins said one possibility for the origin of life on earth came from life elsewhere in the universe seeding the earth. Would you say that during the course of that discussion Stein was able, in a sense, to get Dawkins to admit the possibility of an intelligent designer?

A I think we quite directly demonstrate the double-speak of Richard Dawkins. On the one hand, an

intelligence from elsewhere in the universe seeding life on earth is, to use Richard Dawkins' words, an "intriguing possibility." That intelligence being God is delusional (according to Dawkins). The power of that moment is not lost on the audience. Audience after audience just roars with laughter because they see the blatant inconsistency in Dawkins' argument. They see his blind spot, (saying) "There could be an intelligence, so long as it's not God." One of the other interesting moments that nobody's really talking about that I like is Dawkins talking about it being a freeing experience to release this idea that there is a God, that people feel a sense of relief. Ben then asks him a very basic question. He says, "How do you know that? You're a scientist, what's your data?" Dawkins says, "Well, I've gotten a lot of letters." And Ben asks how many letters he has gotten and Ben says there's eight billion people in the world — I think there's like 6.5 billion people in the world — and, well, "How many letters have you gotten?" And Dawkins immediately concedes the point, saying, "You're quite right, quite right." It shows the sloppiness. If you're going to say that people feel a great release when they give up God, you ought to have data to quantify that if you're a scientist. It's sloppy.

Q Was it difficult to get Baylor University professor Robert Marks to speak to you for the film?

A When we came down, it was following his Web site being shut down and all the big dust-up had already happened and I think at that point he apparently had made the decision that he was going to talk about it. We wanted him to talk about it, of course, because it's hard to get people to talk. They don't want to talk. Why would I want more of this grief, because the Darwinists are going to come after me in the most strident and vicious ways. Who would want to heap that upon themselves? You've got to be a pretty tough, courageous person to do that. Good for Robert Marks, that he has the courage to stand up for his principles.

Q Was the film's intent to bring academic freedom and suppression into the national discussion?

A The general public needs to know this is going on and the people in the academic world know it's going on, from both sides. The Darwinists are very quick to deny it's going on, but they know it's going on. But people outside that world don't know and don't know how important it is. They haven't thought through the implications of what that means. This means you have state-sponsored endorsement, by default, of materialism, using their tax dollars and their tuition dollars. What does that mean? How does that impact your culture? And why is it that, in this area of science, you can't be free? Why does Darwinism enjoy this sacred ground and you can't challenge it? And people are having their careers ruined and destroyed for simply challenging a scientific idea. That is offensive to the vast majority of the American people. America is filled with people who are fair-minded, who want free and open discussion of ideas, even ideas they don't like. They'll stand there and let a communist talk all day long. They want to disagree with them, most people, but they'll allow that person their right to speak. The right to lay out their evidence. But you can't do that in science, where freedom of inquiry is supposed to be so highly treasured?

Q Have you been successful in raising awareness of this issue?

A We've been very successful in putting this issue on the radar screen for people who have never ever had the chance to consider it. And to also encourage those people who have just been exasperated for years, who have seen this going on, and are furious that we're allowing it. We give them encouragement and hope that we can raise the level of awareness of this problem so that it can be dealt with. That's the first step — awareness. You can't fix a problem unless you're aware of it unless you can apply enough pressure that the people who are causing the problem are forced to acknowledge it. We're nowhere near that point yet, but I think this film does a lot in heading us in that direction.

Q Where does intelligent design fit into your world view, personally?

A I think that intelligent design is an entirely reasonable, rational scientific proposition that should be fully investigated and that Darwinism should have to compete against it. Let's see which one of these theories is going to stand. More than anything, I stand on the side of freedom. Let's put the cards on the table. Let's have a free and open discussion. Let's not allow a group of elitists, who are unaccountable, dictate to people who pay the bills what is and is not science, what can and can't be discussed. That's my big conviction. When I look at the world, I see a design. A Darwinist would say, "We know Mathis, he's a Christian. Clearly he sees design and his designer is the Christian God. So we know where he's coming from so we can pretty much throw him out of the mix." And they'll say that about anybody. Wait a minute, this is the big point for me that I want people to come away with. Why is it that people like me should be disqualified from the debate because we have a religious belief? The people that are in control on this issue have a religious position, as well. It affects their philosophy. It is their philosophy. It is an anti-religious, atheistic philosophy. They are as impacted by their world view as I am by mine, but should we disqualify them from the debate? If we did, no one would be left to have a debate. That's the point I'm making. To me, it's insulting that these people can act as if they're standing on some kind of sterilized scientific high ground where they are not impacted by their philosophical and political baggage. That is a joke. Every human being is. So how about, let's try this one: Let's admit our biases on both sides and then let's do our best to attempt to push those biases to the side and just talk about the science and have a good, healthy discussion where we're respectful of one another. Let's try that. Everybody on the (intelligent design) side will want that because they don't have any power in this debate, or they have very little. Some of the Darwinists will do that, but we need many more of those.


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