

ATHEIST'S TURN TOWARD **GOD WAS A 4-YEAR** **PROCESS, FRIEND SAYS**

Dec 22, 2004
By David Roach

Note from Pastor Kevin: I praise God for those Christians behind the intelligent design movement who, unlike Answers in Genesis (AiG) and Institute for Creation Research (ICR) - (who are for the most part preaching to the choir) are making great strides in tearing down the lies of evolution where it counts - in the minds of the unbelievers. How are they doing so? By using real science to show evolutionist and atheists the foolishness of their positions. Dr. Brown of the Center for Scientific Creation is also using true, ground breaking, science to help refute the lies of evolutionary geology. The reader is encouraged to visit the websites of these two organizations (www.illustramedia.com and www.creationscience.com).

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Christian apologist Gary Habermas had just finished debating noted British atheist Antony Flew about the existence of God and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The two friends rode an elevator together as they left the Californian university where the debate was held in January 2002. As Habermas exited the elevator, he extended his hand through the open door. "Tony," he said, "this is it for now. I enjoyed talking with you. When you become a Christian, I want to be the first one to know."

Flew laughed and responded, "I think you deserve that right."

The doors closed.

Most observers of the debate never thought that Flew would take steps toward Christianity. The former professor at Oxford, Aberdeen, Keele and Reading universities in Britain had argued against the existence of God for more than 50 years, publishing such books as "Atheistic Humanism" and "Darwinian Evolution."

But in December 2004 the unexpected happened when Flew took a step toward Christianity, announcing that scientific evidence led him to a belief in God.

Habermas was among the first people he told.

Habermas, chairman of the department of philosophy and theology at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va., had known that Flew was reconsidering his position since the fall of 2000 when Flew sent Habermas a letter in which the atheist acknowledged the strength of arguments for theism and Christianity.

"In September 2000, that's about the earliest indication that I had that he was changing," Habermas said in an interview with Baptist Press. "He wrote me a long letter, quite an incredible letter, where at several points he conceded the evidence for [theism and Christianity]."

When Habermas received the letter, he knew something was happening in Flew's life.

"I distinctly remember reading that letter when it came in the mail and thinking, 'Wow, something huge is happening with this guy,'" Habermas said.

Over a period of three years the two scholars corresponded about God. By January 2003 Flew began considering arguments from the "intelligent design" movement and was on the verge of belief in God.

Intelligent design is a theory arguing that some features of the natural world are best explained as the products of an intelligent cause rather than naturalistic evolution.

"He told me he was really rethinking theism and had corresponded with [naturalistic scientist Richard] Dawkins and was putting the ID arguments up against what Dawkins was saying and trying to compare the arguments," Habermas said. "And he was going back and forth as to whether he should be a theist or not."

By early 2004, Flew completed his transition to theism and indicated his change of mind to Habermas in a telephone conversation.

When media reports revealed Flew's belief in God in December 2004, some skeptics argued that the former atheist had changed his mind suddenly. But Habermas said such allegations are clearly incorrect in light of the four-year dialogue he had with Flew.

"The implications that he's just recently arrived at theism ... and that he hasn't had time to think through this aren't correct," Habermas said. "The first sign that I've seen of him changing goes back to the fall of 2000. So he's been thinking about these things for four years."

Flew currently holds a position known as deism -- the belief that God created the universe but is not actively involved in people's lives today, Habermas said. Because deism is traditionally a "tenuous" position, Flew could move closer to traditional Christianity in the days ahead, he said.

"Deism is a very tenuous position, and deistic belief is a short-lived movement in the history of philosophy over the last few centuries," Habermas said. "One reason deism is a troubled position is that it usually moves one way or the other."

Flew could revert back to atheism, Habermas noted. "Still, he has made a number of statements to me indicating that he is open, even to revelation," Habermas said.

"Three weeks ago I received a letter from him where he said that he was rereading my arguments for the resurrection and was very impressed with them," he said.

Despite his interest in the resurrection, however, Flew remains far from belief in Christianity, Habermas said.

"He's told me on many occasions that he was impressed with the arguments for the resurrection ... and he says it's the best miracle claim in the history of religions," Habermas recounted. "So he's impressed with them. Enough to believe? I don't think so, certainly not right now."

The dialogue with Flew highlights the need for Christians to engage non-believers in meaningful, caring friendships, Habermas said. Christian scholars in particular should bear in mind the need to build relationships with non-believing scholars, he said.

There are "benefits of carrying on a genuine friendship with people who do not agree with you on things," Habermas said. "I mean a genuine friendship where you're there for them in season and out of season. You're there for them when they're having bad days. You can tell them things that are on your mind. ... It's not connected to whether the people convert or not."

Christians should rejoice that Flew has adopted a belief in God but remember that mere belief in God falls short of the belief in Jesus Christ that Scripture requires for eternal life, Habermas said.

"His deism provides no relief for dying because he doesn't believe in life after death," he said. "It's not ... an 81-year-old who is embracing God so that he can come out on the good side when he dies. If you said that to him, he would say, 'I'm just going where the evidence leads.'"

An interview conducted by Habermas exploring Flew's conversion to belief in God will be published in the winter 2004 issue of *Philosophia Christi*, the journal of the Evangelical Philosophical Society.