

Divine intervention

By Ruth Ostrow

IT'S been a very hard few weeks sifting through the debris of reality, but ultimately America's hurricanes have deepened the insight provoked by last year's devastating tsunami – that our might is nothing against the might of Nature and that to presume otherwise is pure arrogance and folly.

Just days before Katrina hit, a prominent Western scientist was quoted as saying, "We can cure anything." Such is the hubris of Homo sapiens. We can give and take life, we can genetically engineer, mess with our delicate ecology, claim whole slabs of land and call it "real estate ownership".

As America was being battered by storms, there was a metaphorical storm raging across the US as to whether schools should teach Intelligent Design – the veiled form of creationism which claims that life on Earth is at least partly the work of a designer. The rationalists, intellectuals, scientific communities have been up in arms, and the debate has recently arrived in Australia, taken up in columns such as Susan Maushart's (September 10-11).

The New Yorker magazine points out that, contrary to belief, ID does not flatly reject evolution. Though allied with conservative Christian groups, the movement's main positive claim is that living organisms are too complex to be explained by any mindless process. Instead, the beauty, mystery and unanswered questions of the Universe, can be accounted for by invoking a clever designer.

Previously horrified by the possibility, I'm now softening to the idea of ID being taught in Australian schools. Not as a substitute for science but as profound ideology alongside it. In this age of chronic materialism, science has failed to give us the reverence for Nature that she deserves.

In the name of science we modify crops, torture animals, play at God, ignore the value of Mother Earth. Yet hasn't Katrina taught us that all is nothing in the face of her great fury? We live on this planet by virtue of grace – whether we believe grace to be luck or divine intervention.

There's an arrogance in us that needs to be tempered. ID may well inspire a gratitude and humility that are not currently part of our psyche. And if that leads to children of tomorrow acting with more respect for the environment, in using science to protect not destroy our planet and our climate, then even this whale-hugging libertine may back the Christians on this one. Goddess help us all!

www.ruthostrow.com

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