

Lecture 18

Indicators of the Future

Our lesson today speaks of the future and of various “indicators” which can help us anticipate the future - the future of “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” In our last lesson we actually talked about one of the major new features of the future, namely the spectacular and unexpected growth of those new types of Christianity which don’t readily classify as Christianity, if in fact we understand Christianity, by now, to be simply one of several cultural traditions imbued with Biblical values.

In this lesson, we will touch on some additional “indicators” of the future, such as science and faith, global agency networks, leadership development, university education, the unfinished task, new church planting movements, and the increasingly important concept of international development.

Science and Faith

In my perspective, the most serious of all features of the new future is the seemingly unresolvable polarization between science and faith.

Our global situation is this: it is as if millions of sincere and intelligent and believing scientists are genuinely awed into some sort of spirituality by the sheer wonder and infinite complexity of the nature they behold. Meanwhile, millions of sincere, intelligent believing people are similarly awed by the never ending riches and unexpected spiritual challenges they find in the Bible.

Modern man has gained such breathtaking new insights into nature that you might think there is nothing major left to be understood. However, the more we have learned about nature, the more we yet seem to need to find out. It is as though when the diameter of our knowledge increases, the circumference of our ignorance increases more than three times as fast.

Even the simplest things are still unfathomable. Take the attraction of a magnet to a screwdriver. What could

possibly be going on between those two objects - each pulling toward each other? There is absolutely no human being alive, or who has ever lived, who has even the faintest idea of what’s going on. All we can do is predict the power of magnetism mathematically and describe its behavior minutely. We have not the faintest idea what it is.

It is equally confounding that there is a top and bottom to our world. Discovering that we live on a huge ball hanging in space held into a gravitational orbit by a sun 80 million miles away is common knowledge, and once again, we can calculate very accurately how gravitational attraction functions. But its very nature, while quite different from magnetic attraction in obvious ways, is just as totally inscrutable. No one has the faintest idea how it actually works.

Whether it is in the realm of enormously large things like our own galaxy, which to fly across would require a spaceship going at the speed of light for a hundred thousand years, or the billions of other galaxies both larger and smaller, or whether it is the tiniest things which we can only see with an electron microscope rather than a telescope, once again, our knowledge is in many ways quite superficial.

Consider bacteria, of which there are 30 million different types. Upon invading the human body they are intelligent enough to bide their time until their number can be multiplied sufficiently to do significant damage. At that key point scientists say, they have achieved a “quorum” and they attack simultaneously. If they attacked before a quorum was reached, the human body would be more easily able to defend itself. Now, that is a lot of intelligence for so small a creature as a bacterium. Until recently, no microbiologist ever dreamed that bacteria could communicate with each other, count noses and attack in force.

Thus, it is easy to see how awestruck many scientists can be. It is equally easy to understand the earnest-

ness and the awe of those who pursue the pages of Holy Writ, where we find inklings of understanding of things that science can't say anything about, where we can find challenges to our morality and our very purposes for existence, where we can find sensitivities of love and compassion and the willingness to sacrifice, where we can understand how profoundly different humans are from animals, and where we can seek illumination in regard to our own personal existence and role in life.

The Polarization

How could these two sources of awe - science and religion - be polarized, be in opposition? I believe the fault is on both sides. Religious people have rightly been disturbed when science has been employed as a military weapon, when wild science fiction portrays totally horrifying futures, or when scientists have boasted, so often, of certain knowledge, only to be confounded by later insights which question their earlier audacities.

No wonder some Bible believing Christians insist that science is the enemy of the Christian faith. However, in my youth, science was considered a friend of faith and the Moody Bible Institute put out an incredible series of avant-garde color motion pictures probing the wonders of science and demonstrating thereby the glory of God.

If I type "Hugh Ross" into Google practically every thing on the screen beyond his home page denounces his work. On the other hand, many who write from a religious background denounce Hugh Ross for seeking to glorify God through the wonders of science. One of these religious web addresses actually insists that science is both dangerous and even useless because it says that while the heavens declare the glory of God and the earth demonstrates His handiwork, "there is no speech or language where their voice is heard." Of course the Bible says, "there is no speech or language where their voice is NOT heard." Do we need to twist the Bible to defend it? Misquote scripture to prove our points?

On the other hand, some scientists collect stories from history when scientists were actually opposed by religious leaders even though the Church, for example, has much more often promoted science than it has opposed it, even providing a theological basis for it! But, some scientists only remember the opposition and develop a sort of righteous indignation towards religion.

Furthermore, many scientists are simply unwilling to allow any divine authority to tamper with their lives.

However, other scientists are genuinely concerned over the fact that religious leaders like John Calvin and Martin Luther stated emphatically that the Bible teaches that the sun goes around the earth and that the Copernican theory of a heliocentric solar system is refuted by the Bible. These scientists don't stop to think that Calvin and Luther misunderstood the Bible. They assume Calvin and Luther were intelligently explaining what the Bible teaches, and that therefore the Bible cannot be trusted.

A similar situation exists today for all of those people who believe the earth is very old. Often, they oppose religion, because of course all religious people insist the earth is just 6,000 years old based upon the teaching of scripture. As I see it, the issue really isn't whether the earth is old or young, but whether the Bible is not to be trusted.

Many evangelicals today have somehow lost track of the background of the Evangelical movement in which it was widely taught that the geological ages preceded Genesis 1:1 and that the creation account in Genesis is a new creation, explaining the origin of human beings and noncarnivorous animal life of the kind that would be achieved at the end of time, when (in Isaiah 11) a lion will lie down with a lamb and the 24/7 violence we see in nature will have ceased. This "pre-Genesis" view was clearly explained in Unger's Bible Handbook published by Moody Press in twenty four editions over decades amounting to over 500,000 copies. A revision of it is still in print. Unger was the chair of the Old Testament Department at Dallas Theological Seminary.

Note that if this view were correct - and I am not saying it is - there would be no conflict whatsoever between modern paleontology and the Biblical text. However, everybody, from *Time* magazine to the kindergarten teacher has been persuaded by earnest Christians that the Bible certainly teaches that the universe is no older than 6,000 years.

Obviously, huge obstacles exist for anyone who would seriously attempt to evangelize in a scientifically-oriented society. Christianity has clearly succeeded among rural populations and among uneducated people all over the world, but in its own backyard it is facing increasing opposition because of religious teachings which may have no foundation in the Bible whatsoever.

We probably need to go back to the days when the Moody Bible Institute promoted its now-closed Moody Institute of Science, and try to understand science anew so that it does not oppose but actually upholds the Christian faith.

Nothing we have said thus far prevents the continued expansion of the Christian faith for the present. It can expand in areas where science is not well understood, or is not considered an obstacle to faith. There are new church planting movements described by David Garrison all over the world, especially among rural people. The Unfinished Task is very nearly finished, if in fact we measure that task by geographical or even sociological penetration of the Christian faith in one form or another.

Where we are gaining...

and where we are losing...

But all such gains are temporary where a population will soon become educated by the dominant form of education today which is highly secularized both in science and history, and where poverty is not taken seriously by all mission agencies. We already see The William Carey International University adopting International Development as its theme, as of 1977, and the Fuller Theological Seminary adding a course in International Development in 2005.

But, as long as scientists, who are genuinely awed, denounce Christian leaders who are genuinely awed, the Christian leaders will tend to reject the source of awe of the scientists. It is equally, and even more importantly true, that when Christian leaders (who are awed by the Bible) denounce scientists (who are awed by the works of God), the scientists will tend to deny the legitimacy of the source of awe of the Christian leaders.

Neither side will win unless both sources of awe are understood, both the Book of Nature as a revelation of God and the Book of Scripture as a revelation of God.

We, as Christian leaders, must take the initiative of knowing both books. The Christian leadership development pattern around the world and in the USA normally omits science from its curriculum altogether. Our curriculum does not lean at all, as the Bible itself would urge it to, upon this important additional source of awe and revelation—the works of God in nature.

This leads us to another future indicator.

Christian Leadership Education

Indeed, our leadership education is flawed in several different ways. I have often spoken of three levels of failure: *wrong students*, *wrong curriculum*, and *wrong packaging*.

We have already spoken of the *wrong curriculum* when it leaves out the earliest book of revelation, namely the Book of Nature, whose voice is heard in all languages. An almost more serious problem of global leadership development within the Christian tradition is our overwhelming emphasis on book learning and other training programs instead of on selection. By and large, the students at Bible schools and seminaries around the world are not gifted as pastors or missionaries no matter how many A's they earn in school. They were well trained but not well chosen. Selection is the problem.

It is a simple fact, grim as it may seem, that every church movement that depends on residentially trained pastoral leaders ends up foisting off on the church all kinds of highly trained, but ungifted people. This produces non-growth, or actual decline in membership, as can eminently be seen in the United States where every denomination depending on residential training for pastoral ordination is declining.

Meanwhile, around the world, every rapidly growing church movement depends on an entirely different system of selection-- not who goes to seminary, but who is gifted. Training people who are gifted is remarkably different from trying to develop gifts in those who are already trained.

The third flaw in leadership development is rather simple. Wrong students, wrong curriculum. How about *wrong packaging*? While missionaries are expected to speak the language of the native, our ecclesiastical structures mindlessly continue to ignore the accepted university pattern of education and continue to call their schools "Bible Schools" or "Seminaries" and continue to wound the future of their graduates with nondescript degrees, such as M.Div.s or D.Min.s, degrees that mean nothing in the everyday world and thus impede graduate studies.

Another indicator to note is the extensive birth of new evangelical universities around the world. Joel Carpenter, Dean of Calvin College, did a quick internet survey and found at least 41 new evangelical universities in the mission lands. These universities, curiously,

have not been the result of missionary initiative. Their existence proves the importance, in the eyes of the national believers, of the university pattern over the seminary pattern. But since these schools are not the result of missionary initiative and are not linked to mission agencies, they are, in many cases, wandering in the world of secularized curricula and are not directly contributing to leadership development in the Christian sphere. We must come to terms with the University pattern of education.

Networks of Mission Agencies

Speaking as we are, of globally-true phenomena, another important indicator of the future is the emergence of a new and unprecedented network of mission agencies on the global level.

This was founded in April of 2005 and is called the Global Network of Mission Structures. There are already associations of mission agencies at the national level and, in some cases, at the regional level, but until the establishment of the GNMS, there has never been, on the global level, an association of Evangelical mission agencies. The closest thing to it is the Third World Mission Association, but you can tell by its name that it is not a global association.

The GNMS now faces the challenge of networking on the global level in an age of absolutely unprecedented population interchange. A recent study indicates that the number of migrant workers in the world today is so large that the financial remittances that they send back to their families amount to something like 380 billion dollars a year, which is greater than all foreign aid and foreign investment put together.

Very specifically, the GNMS will be able to track the migration of individual people groups. It may find 10,000 in London or Los Angeles from a group which in the new situation is open to assistance and friendship, compared to the relatively closed attitude of its own people in the foreign situations from which they come.

This is not to say that migration is necessarily a good thing. Probably there is no single phenomenon in world history that has torn apart more families. The evangelization of migrant workers is not an entire solution, but leading people to Christ is certainly an essential foundation for whatever further solutions may appear on the horizon. But that horizon is not simple. An even more important factor in the future will come up in the next lesson.