

Science and Utopia

Science was to usher in a brave and new world. Characteristic of this pathetic faith is the following conclusion of F.S. Marvin whose words were widely read and believed in the early part of this century: "And now, of all consolidators, science is showing its supreme fitness and its kinship with the sense of a common humanity. It would be a fascinating and un-trodden path, to follow in the ancient world the extension of scientific knowledge and not its coincidence with the growth of a more humane spirit in religion, poetry, and law ...

Side by side with the growth of science, which is also the basis of the material prosperity and unification of the world, has come a steady deepening of human sympathy, and the extension of it to all weak and suffering things ... Science, founding a firmer basis for the cooperation of mankind, goes widening down the centuries, and sympathy and pity bind the courses together.

"This hope now seems to be unjustified. This confidence in science based upon the abounding optimism of the humanism of Marvin's days has now changed. The events of the last decades have made men more aware of their own limitations.

We know what has happened. The pages of history are for our reading. But what shall we do about the future? Some still express an optimism, though rather cautiously, in man's ability to create his own utopia, others believe that ours is the last civilization. Teilhard de Chardin wrote: "Everything that formerly made for war now makes for peace." Gordon Rattray Taylor showed a completely different attitude when he said: "Current indications are that the world is bent on going to hell in a hand cart, and that is probably what it will do."

Where are we going? One of the most fascinating fields of study is Futurology. This science has become the concern of universities as well as government agencies. On the basis of Futurology there is the possibility to predict what life shall be like in the year 2000. How can the tremendous scientific developments and possibilities continually opened up by technological advancements be used to make our world a livable place?

We are confronted with hitherto unknown challenges. Mind bending drugs can radically alter man's behaviour. Deserts can be irrigated and hearts transplanted. We are also faced with the problem of dehumanization, the threat of totalitarianism and very rapid social developments. Man can easily become the slave rather than the master of technology.

One book that has made a tremendous impact is Alvin Toffler's best seller *Future Shock* a book "About change and how we adapt to it." While focused especially upon the rapid changing cultural scene in the United States, it is highly relevant to the situation anywhere in the world. Alvin Toffler provides many insights into the deeper issues involved which makes the book important. *Future Shock* concerns itself with the

difficulties encountered by people who have to make sudden and dramatic changes and adjustments in successively new situations.

The author makes no attempt to relate his book to concerns of Christianity or any other religion. He makes it plain that his approach is very secular. Yet Futurology has also implications for the Christian. Of course it has! Christianity is more than attending church or making a few comments about morality. Christians should be involved in this new science, approaching it from their Biblical perspective.

The early church did "turn the world upside down" and put into motion forces which eventually made radical changes in society. What the early church did can still be done today. God is still very much alive and His Word is still powerful and life embracing. Futurology tries to prepare for the future and plan we must. Yet we can never build Utopia here on earth or recapture Paradise Lost. The Christian, while busily working in this world, expects the second coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. His future is in the God Who has said: "Behold, I make all things new." (Revelation 21:5)

Johan D. Tangelder
May, 1974