



SCIENTIFIC PROGRESS: HIGHWAY TO A NEW SOCIO-RELIGIOUS WORLD ORDER ?

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VENTURING IN

We live in an age of science. Modernity and technology have changed our ways of living, thinking, reasoning and behaving. Changes have become inevitable. Machines have become indispensable. Modern facilities have improved the standard of living. The future too belongs to science. Yet, paradoxically, life appears to be more miserable than ever before. A cloud of unhappiness hovers over the earth. The future appears foggy. But rays of hope do appear in the form of religions, social movements, and efforts by philanthropists. And science has a vital role to play in creating a future for humanity on this earth devoid of this cloud and fog.

This paper attempts to rediscover this role of science while envisaging a new socio-religious world order different from the present. A future cannot be dreamt of independent of the present. A need therefore, arises to observe the present critically and this is presented in the first part. The second part of the paper analyses and scrutinises certain concepts, which form our understanding. Based on our present experiences (some pleasant and others unpleasant), there is a need to envision a new society. This is the task of theology and philosophy. The third part deals with this. Science holds an important task in the formation of this new society and the final part offers a blueprint. In short, we move from the present to the future through the highway of science.

PART I EXCAVATING THE PRESENT

Excavation is usually unearthing of the past. Yet, although we live in the present, we are blind to the obvious or what appears to be obvious is not exactly so. Therefore, there is the need to excavate the present and observe it as a scientist does through a microscope.

1. Pressures of modernity:

The influence of science can be found in almost every sphere of life. Traditional cultures and norms have succumbed to the pressures of modern life and have begun



to change. Religions have become more ‘secular’ due to this pressure. Positively, many superstitions have been shed off and many doctrines have assumed new interpretations. But there is also a fast growing tendency to regard God and religion as unwanted.

2. Nuclear Person:

“Nuclear man is the man who realizes that his creative powers hold the potential for self-destruction. . . In all this he suffers from the inevitable knowledge that his time is a time in which it has become possible for man to destroy not only life but also the possibility of rebirth, not only man but also mankind, not only periods of existence but also history itself. For nuclear man the future has become an option”(Henri Nouwen: p.5). Wars and crimes have increased and the trigger of a button can set the entire earth to destruction. The recent wars have made a mockery of human life.

3. Changing Morality:

Our concepts of morality are also changing. Technological development in the area of biomedicine has brought about drastic changes in our concepts of life itself. The value for life is now considered on the basis of its utility. New issues in morality pose real problems- euthanasia, abortion, cloning, artificial intelligence, etc. challenge the traditional ideas of the sanctity of human life. New diseases like AIDS have brought in new types of social ostracism. Relationships are also changing. Communication has become faster, easier, and cheaper. Yet, relationships have become worse. Loneliness, divorces, abandonment, etc. have increased. This age has an obsession with sex, thanks to the media. The culture of use and throw has extended to relationships too.

4. Widening Gap:

The gap between the rich and the poor has widened. Impoverishment and malnourishment are everyday terms in the dailies. Even now in remote villages, poor people die of starvation. The control over natural resources and knowledge system in agriculture, medicine, food, water management etc. by affluent nations are real dangers to the very survival of the weak nations. New problems in the realms of commerce have sprung up. In the name of liberalisation, globalisation, and privatisation, the poor have been made further poorer. In the name of development of dams, MNC’s, highways, zoos, parks, etc. large displacements have taken place, making the locals strangers in their own place.

5. Lack of basic growth:

Scientific development seems to have no impact in the ever-growing



communalistic and fundamentalist attitudes in countries like India. Minorities are being targeted everyday and narrow-mindedness is growing politically too. Corruptions are rising, scams and scandals are on the increase, politics of hate rate high. “Technologically, man has advanced incredibly. Yet man remains as he has been for thousands of years, fighting, greedy, violent, and burdened with great sorrow” (Krishnamurthi: p.4)

Science has brought in many changes, both positive and negative. Any effort towards the future will have to take into consideration this fact along with the challenges that it poses. Prior to this, it is necessary to identify some of these challenges, analyse them, clarifying our own terminologies (for we often assume meanings) and examine our progress.

PART II SCRUTINY OF OUR UNDERSTANDING

The process of the progress of humanity needs to be understood and scrutinised in order to visualise a better future. The term ‘scientific progress’ in the context of the present circumstances (as presented above) needs explanation.

Due importance needs to be given to Science owing the fact that it has been responsible for the gradual evolution of today’s humanity. Science has always been understood as an extension of the human body. This close association of science with humanity needs to be given prominence because today science appears to be a ‘growing monster’ waiting to gobble up the entire humanity. Various branches of science such as Astronomy, Astrophysics, Animal husbandry, Artificial intelligence, Agriculture, Biotechnology, Botany & Biology, Chemistry, Information Technology, Entomology, Embryology, Electronics, Ecology, Genetics, Geology, Genetic Engineering, Medicine, Nuclear Technology, Oceanography, Physics, etc. have made permanent imprints in human history. They have evolved in the recent past and they continue to be closely associated with the growth of the society. Therefore, science cannot be understood apart from human society.

This close association calls in for certain responsibility too. Science may have a never-satiating hunger to invent and experiment new and newer things but it should go only to that extent to which human life is not endangered or not degraded. For the purpose of science was to *help* human growth and nothing more. However, our experiences with science seem to be different. The autonomy with which science appears to be functioning is not without consequences. Could the maxim: power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely, fit in here? The danger of dealing with unlimited power could be devastating.



Progress is to be understood in this sense, that it develops the human society, enhances human life and animates or regulates human behaviour. It takes humanity into new frontiers of development while retaining the fundamental human-ness. A conscience-less (even consciousness-less) development is not to be understood as progress. It is digress. Progress is always towards a higher elevation, while a development could be mere sophistication and complication. Progress is a growth, an endeavour towards nobility. Science needs to become noble.

In the process of development, if Science refuses to commit itself to the cause of the growth of the society, or if a few anti-humanitarian forces abuse it, the term 'Scientific Progress' will no longer be applicable. Hence, scientific progress is intrinsically linked with human society's growth and maturity.

It is not our concern here to discuss the various instances in which Science had digressed itself, and it would suffice to mention that over the past few years, science has been hijacked by a few selfish persons/societies/nations. These concerns need to be addressed while envisioning a new world order.

PART III ENVISIONING THE FUTURE

While envisioning the future of the human society, we wish to reform the present (part I) and take into consideration the responsibilities and the central role of science in human life (part II). The past is a lesson to proceed to the future, breaking free from its binding clutches. Furthermore, a future cannot be envisioned without the hopes and aspirations of ideal societies presented by religions and various philosophies. The interaction of philosophy, science and religion cannot be avoided while envisioning a future for this earth. Restricting ourselves to a few general philosophies and to the Christian theology, we embark on a new project of visualising a future for humanity.

A. A theological perspective:

We envisage a new socio-religious world order where

1. Harmony prevails:

The world is full of variety. The Creator wishes harmony everywhere on this earth. God appreciates variety and that is the reason why he made it; else he should have made only monotype species. Humankind, however, has been very selfish and has brought about disharmony leading often to disasters and calamities. All the prophets worked towards pointing out this disharmony. The role of Jesus himself was towards bringing back this harmony. It is in this harmony that God reigns.

The reign of God on this earth is a fundamental longing to all Christians and



to others. In one of the basic prayers of the Christians, the Our Father, this longing finds expression in these words: “Your Kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”(Mt 6:10).

This longing is found in the basic prayers of other religions too. In classical Hinduism, this longing is expressed in succinct terms: *vasudheva kutumbakam*-the world in one fraternity. In Judaism, the concept of one family originating from God is strong. The idea of fraternity is also found in the Muslim prayers. There can be no harmony without this fraternity. The wise sages of the Indian tradition had at their core of their theology *sarve bavantu sukinaha* i.e., let all be happy, healthy and peaceful.

Rm 14:17 expresses this view in more explicit words: For the Kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The entire Bible comments on this aspect of righteousness. The message of everlasting peace and joy within each human person is important. The Reign of God is beyond boundaries and nationalities. God’s reign should find expression in every intention and act of the human society.

2. Justice governs:

Justice is one of the central themes of Christian theology. “Thus says the Lord: Maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed” (Is 56:1). The prophets were sent out by God when injustice and sin prevailed over the human society. Yhwh is known as a God of Justice, a God who wishes that justice rules the world. This justice however, is not to be equated with punishment. Reconciliation and repentance are parts of this process of Justice. God wants every human person to LIVE. There can be no justice without equality. Equality and justice are two sides of the same coin. A world containing the poor and the rich is an unjust world. It is against God’s wish and plan.

3. Love is law:

The crux of Christ’s message was love. He was God’s love incarnate. He reached out to everyone especially to the weak, the sick, the oppressed and the needy. Although he was a Jew, he neither hesitated to approach the ostracized (e.g. the Samaritan woman- Jn 4) nor did he dissociate himself from the company of women, sinners, and lepers (Mk 14:3, Mt 9:13 etc). He found the reflection of God in each of them. Love till it hurts (the famous saying of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta) was true in the life of Jesus. He wanted to bring back everyone into the blanket of God’s family, a family of love wherein hatred and enmity had no place, where justice and peace flourished. His love was not exclusive but



inclusive. Everyone had a place in his love-fold. The central command governing our life is found in the little but powerful command of Jesus: love one another (Jn 15:12). In love everyone has power, not authority. The Good news of Jesus revolved around the power of love to everyone. Love is against the abuse of authority which is aplenty today.

4. Life is treated sacred:

The creation accounts found in Genesis is a reminder of the sacredness of life. God calls the entire creation to life and he found them to be good (Gen 1:31). Human beings were more precious than any other creation since they were made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26). Each one is precious in His sight (Isa 43:4) for each has a purpose to fulfil. He envisaged a world dynamic and charismatic as He was, witnessing His unconditional love. The sacredness with which God holds life is revealed in the episode of Cain and Abel (Gen 4). This sacredness extends to the body too. "Your body is the temple of the Lord" (1Cor 6:19). This sacredness is in the service of the other too. It is the service of the others that will be judged on the last judgement day (Mt 25:31-45).

This new socio-religious world order is in religious terminology, "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev 21:1) where justice, peace and harmony reign supreme. It is a world of perfect co-existence (Is 11). Equality, and not patriarchy, will be the guiding principle. In short, the divine elements of humankind will blossom in this new heaven and new earth.

B. A philosophical perspective:

New paradigms should be considered while envisioning a new socio-religious world order. Philosophically, an anthropo-cosmic centric approach is needed to make the world a better place to live. Some of the guiding principles could be:

1. Humanism:

There needs to be a paradigm shift in understanding human life. The world is meant to LIVE humanly. In a fast changing world, the tendency to treat humans as mere machines is highly prevalent. Therefore, we dream of a new order where humanising attitudes gain importance. Exclusivistic tendencies find no place here. Barriers arising out of race, caste, gender, cultures, and nationalities are broken. We want a world that is against neo-liberalism, a world where workers, peasants, women, youth, students, dalits, indigenous peoples, minorities, immigrants- all find a place to live. We visualise a world which has no migrants, no asylum seekers, no xenophobists, no exclusivists, no refugees- in short, a world of real human persons.



2. Being and Having:

The world craves for more and for this reason, it is ready to bully anyone or anything. But it is in being more that contentment grows. A world that will ensure the basic 'haves' of everyone (such as food, shelter, clothing, healthcare, education) while emphasising on being is the need of the hour.

3. Freedom and Responsibility:

Freedom fashions a person. But freedom is always intrinsically linked with responsibility. Freedom would include freedom of thought, speech and deed. This would be a freedom that would recognise that we are in the process of growth (already and not yet). Therefore, it is with a greater sense of responsibility that we move ahead with freedom and responsibility that comprises of justice, personhood, democratic participation in the world's affairs, increased eco-consciousness, etc.

4. Greater Morality:

This responsibility also calls for an increased awareness of morality. The dignity of each individual should be upheld and the communitarian aspects of morality should be underlined. Morality cannot be seen in isolation. It should pervade in the realms of commerce, science, medicine, etc. The logic of Profit and the commercialisation of every commodity will not find a place in the new social order. Communalism, Fundamentalism, Extremism, Exclusivism, etc. will be non-existent in a new order because of the emphasis on social responsibility.

PART IV MAPPING A HIGHWAY TOWARDS THIS VISION

Scientific progress can indeed be a step towards the realisation of this vision. If this vision is clear, then there can be no loss of sense of purpose. It can serve as a highway through which people can smoothly travel looking forward towards this goal. Some of the ways and means of laying this highway are discussed here.

1. Gearing towards life:

The primary aim of the human society is the protection and promotion of life. Human life is sacred and precious. The intrinsic value of human life should be explored. Degrading humans is deplorable. Inventions and experiments need to aim at improving life. Research and experiments should be aware of the sanctity of life. Areas such as cloning, warfare technology etc. should be divested of its importance. Instead, more concentration on basic medicine should be given.

2. Creative Collaboration:

Religion and philosophy are necessary aids in the mapping of a highway. They will provide constant conscience necessary for science. A close collaboration



is needed to move into the right direction. “Religion is all pervasive in the experiences of ordinary people. It is futile to think that we can build a society that has no place for religion” (K.C.Abraham in *Socio-Political Pluralism and Global Solidarity- a liberational perspective*, Andreas Bsteh: p 229)

3. A life in Community:

“Post-modern science has taken us back to more ancient notions that are conducive to and supportive of community” (Mathew Fox: p.64). This needs to be explored more and utilised to foster the growth of communities. Humanity is also on a journey towards the transcendence. Science should help humans to “interpret the books of nature written by the finger of God, to unravel the universe in its marvellous patterns and symmetries and to bring it all into orderly articulation in such a way that it fulfils its proper end as the vast theatre of glory in which the Creator is worshipped and hymned and praised b its creatures” (Thomas F. Torrence: p. 5)

4. Channelising Energy:

Science has made inroads in almost all areas of life. Yet, sadly enough, the lives of millions of people continue to be in abject poverty, sickness and insecure. On the one hand, nations boast of the latest technological advancements but on the other hand there is a dearth of basic needs to the masses. The need of the day is not sophisticated and costly technology but simple and alternative technologies accessible to everyone. Displacements arising out of big dams could be avoided if alternative technologies are used. Improvements in the agriculture sector will bring about a food revolution today when millions still die of starvation. Technology increasing our dependency on other nations (terminator seeds, for example) should give way to technology increasing our self-sufficiency. Moreover, instead of living in harmony with nature, we have endangered lives, both human and animals. This should be one of the important concerns, namely, to create an atmosphere of harmony with Mother Earth.

5. The effect of communication:

Information Technology has improved very much, yet communication has not reached all. “Communication implies sharing together, creating together, working together, not merely listening to a lot of words and ideas” (Krishnamurthi:p.102). Illiteracy still prevails. Science needs to address this problem and develop mechanisms to make all literate and educated.

6. Understanding Limits:

Science needs to understand that it is limited. Not everything in the world



can be proved empirically. There is a realm superior and different from that of science. Science can indeed be of help to touch the transcendental element (for instance, the discovery of the human genome code places us in awe and wonder). Science should not step beyond its limits. It should also help us to realise that we are also limited and not entirely free. It is not the search for immortality that is a driving force but the acceptance of mortality and to work towards its enrichment that the horizon of science lies.

In short, in the mapping of a highway, science needs to consider the spiritual and the social thrusts. It should assume responsibility for its abuses and should lead itself with life promoting principles. At the same time, this journey of science is accompanied by religion and philosophy.

WISHING WELL

A new socio-religious world is possible, if only there is a creative collaboration among philosophy, religion and science, each admitting its own strengths and limits. A new culture of love and life needs to flow into each structure existing in the world. It is not merely live and let live, but a harmonious living. What we look forward to is an integrated approach to life and sustained efforts on the path of science in creating a new world order. Creative tensions between modernity and tradition, reason and belief, will continue to exist, but allowing the past to go, our eyes and efforts should be focussed on the future. Walking hand in hand, steadily and confidently, we can with the help of science and religion, create a new world order.

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