

July 9, 1967
Isaiah 40:12-18
Norman S. Ream

GOD IS NOT OUTDATED

"Fear thou not; for I am with thee."

Isaiah 41:10

One of the chief architects of the atomic bomb, a nuclear physicist, was wandering in the woods one day with a friend, when he suddenly came upon a small turtle. Overcome with pleasure, he picked it up to take home, thinking to surprise his children. After a few minutes, however, he paused, slowly retraced his steps and put the turtle back on the ground where he had found it. "What's the matter?" asked his friend. "It just struck me," he replied, "that perhaps for one man I have tampered enough with the universe."

This little story told by the science writer, Loren Eisely, is not a denial of science but an indication that science is not enough. Man has studied his environment far more than he has studied himself. The mere existence of man is the greatest argument there is for the existence of God, and the greatest need of man is to know God.

It is difficult to agree wholly with Alexander Pope who argued:

"Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
The proper study of mankind is man."

or with Plato, who in the Phaedrus, insisted:

"Trees and fields tell me nothing: men are my teachers."

Science, trees, fields, man's total environment, can tell him much about himself and his place in the universe. He must study all of these. But his passion to explore the mystery of his environment has often blinded him to the greater mystery which is in himself.

This was graphically called to my attention the other day by a good friend who is an engineer with an aircraft company. He pointed out that scientists working with computers used to talk in terms of milliseconds. A millisecond is a thousandth of a second. Then scientists began to talk about microseconds, then nanoseconds. Now they speak in terms of picoseconds, and a picosecond is to one second, what one second is to about 30,000 years. A computer can, therefore, think much faster than can man, but the human brain has a vastly greater capacity than any computer. All the computers in the world couldn't equal the capacity of one average human brain. Then my friend went on to point out that the human being possessing this brain is the one product in our society still produced by unskilled labor.

Did you see that cartoon wherein the computer operator is shouting at his computer saying, "I'll smash you to bits if I once more get the answer, 'To err is human, to forgive divine'."

One can easily see how it is that man has become so fascinated by computers that he has forgotten to marvel at himself. He will believe everything offered him in the name of science, but he constantly doubts his own potentiality. Tell him there are a hundred million million stars in the universe and he will believe you. Put up a sign saying 'fresh paint' and he'll have to check it himself.

II

One of the things which makes man such a fascinating mystery is his unique freedom of will. The inanimate objects of the universe are dependable. Even animals other than man can be counted on to act in a certain way under certain conditions. Man is free to act and react in numerous ways. Statistics can tell us how most men will act under specified conditions, but they can never tell us how any particular man will act or react. We call this the law of the higher numbers and the freedom of the lower numbers. It is part of man's uniqueness, it is a gift made possible by his unique brain.

A few months ago a group of scientists tried to delve into the distinction between brain and mind, brain and consciousness. They agreed, of course, that the brain is an anatomic fact. It can be seen, handled, weighed, studied. The human mind, however, is a much more elusive quality. No scientist comprehends it or how it works. Professor John Eccles, 1963 Nobel prize winner, pointed to the distinction between man and the other animals by saying:

"An animal knows, but only a man knows he knows."

It is an important distinction, indeed, and another scientist, Dr. Seymour Kety, of the National Institute of Mental Health, has made this significant observation:

"The biochemical approach will no more lead to a complete understanding of the human mind than will the grinding up of a book and analyzing the chemical composition of the paper and ink reveal the contents of that book."

III

Keep all of this in mind and then add to it the fact that man's brain, his intellectual capacity, is far greater than he can at the moment possibly use. At the end of the 19th century the evolutionists were admitting that they were puzzled by this frustrating reality. One of them wrote:

"How was an organ developed so far beyond the needs of its possessor? Natural selection could only have endowed the savage with a brain a little superior to that of an ape, whereas he actually possesses one but little inferior to that of the average member of our learned societies."

More recently Chance and Mead, two modern scientists, have admitted to the same puzzlement. Say they:

"No adequate explanation has been put forward to account for so large a cerebrum as that found in man."

IV

And so we return to the greatest mystery of all--man himself. It is within man and his own mind that we must look for truth about this mysterious universe that will give meaning and understanding to all the observable facts.

Certain scientists have suggested that man's great unused mental capacity has been provided him as an indication of his future potentiality. Knowing that a better future is possible, man will strive for its accomplishment. The instrument by which that future will be made a reality, the human mind, has already been given him.

It is a fascinating possibility. There is, it seems, evidence for its support. It is the mind of man which has been able to grasp the concept of God. It is the mind of man which has seen all the order and meaning in the universe which points to the necessity for a Supreme Creative Intelligence. It is the mind of man which can examine the natural universe and see in it more and more truth that can assist man toward the accomplishment of his own finer destiny.

For example, there is a process in nature known as symbiosis. It refers to the living together in mutual helpfulness of two different organisms. One of the best examples is the relationship between the sea anemone and the hermit crab. The sea anemone plants itself on the crab and captures food with its long tentacles. It conveniently drops some for the crab. When the fishing gets poor in that particular spot, the hermit crab moves off to a better location, with the sea anemone attached to its back. Together they serve each other's needs in a symbiotic relationship.

One wonders why it is that if two such lowly organisms as these can work out such a convenient and mutually helpful arrangement, man with his giant intellect cannot do more of the same and solve nearly every human problem. But it is, you see, the mind of man that can comprehend this symbiotic relationship and learn from it. He doesn't seem to learn very fast, but he is capable of learning.

V

This magnificent creature who is man, is man's best evidence for God. Man cannot be the result of chance. Only a God could imagine a man; only a God could create a man.

But equally, if not more important, is the fact that man needs God more than he needs anything else. His mind demands answers only God can give. Not only his heart, as Augustine suggested, but his whole being, is restless until he finds rest in God. This mind of his has made him capable of fear and Isaiah knew the only answer to that fear when he wrote: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee." It is only man's comprehension of and understanding of God that can remove his fear and enable him to attain his full potentiality.

God is not outdated and obsolete in the 20th century. Because men who are called scientists have probed into the secrets of the universe and can now repeat some of the things which God did before them, man has not made God unnecessary. The most that man ever does is to re-think God's thoughts after Him. God was the pioneer and he is infinitely greater than man who only copies what he has done.

I leave you with this. The greatest thought of all is that the Supreme Intelligence behind all the universe invites us to know and love him by revealing himself in Jesus Christ and in other, lesser men who seek God with all their mind, heart, soul and strength and testify to the fact that man never seeks God in vain, even when he does not find Him.