

VISION – Seeing with Eyes of Faith¹

Reflecting on and discussing this essay will help you to appreciate that “vision” has to do with seeing, how we see, and what we accept as really real.

Seeing What Is Really Real

The way in which we anticipate and participate in the future is shaped by our vision of what is really real. Sarah and Abraham believed that God’s promise of new life was more real, more trustworthy, than the empirical evidence of Sarah’s infertility. It is because the Christian community believes in a “God of Hope” (Romans 15:13), a God who declares “See, I am making all things new” (Revelation 21:5), that its vision can be hopeful and even imaginative. Not limited or determined by the facts, figures, and trends of the current situation, to have hope is to imagine a new state of affairs not yet existing.

As we see with the eyes of faith, we are able to know the unknowable, to think the unthinkable, and to experience the not yet. We are given the ability to imagine—to visualize—God’s dream for humanity: a time when the lion and the lamb will lie down together, when swords will be pounded into ploughshares, when war will be no more, when the captives will be freed and the blind will see, when the hungry will be fed and the naked clothed. In other words, when all of creation will be transformed into a new heaven and a new earth.

Yet Christian hope is not naïve or foolish. Indeed, it alone is truly realistic for it sees reality in light of the possibilities, the promises, and the power of the God who creates and sustains all that exists. Rather than human progress or development, it is God’s freedom and God’s faithfulness which is the source of the new things that are to come. As declared by Jurgen Moltmann in his classic *Theology of Hope*: “When we have a God who calls into being the things that are not, then the things that are not yet, that are future, also become ‘thinkable’ because they can be hoped for.”²

The way in which the church is called to visualize or see the world does not come naturally. Humanity is a blinded race, and can no longer see what is real. Separated and alienated from God, preoccupied with our own desires and plans, we have become barren in our thinking. Because we believe the lie of the serpent that we can have life and knowledge apart from God (cf. Genesis 3:1-6), we live in unreality and illusion.

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² Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (Harper & Row, 1967), p. 30.

Trusting in our own wisdom, we put forth our own gods (success, wealth, power, happiness, etc.). As we offer them our allegiance—our worship—these gods present us with their own visions of the meaning and purpose of human life. They tell us how to understand ourselves, how to determine our true worth, and how to relate to others.³

Learning how truly to see—to discern a faithful vision of reality—is at the very heart of what it means to be Christian. God has granted the Christian community a special sight, a spirit of wisdom and revelation that enlightens the eyes of our hearts (cf. Ephesians 1:17-18). Only as we are transformed by the renewing of our minds (cf. Romans 12:2), are we able to see the world as it really is: the creation of a loving God who will not leave us to our own pride and rebellion, but is faithful to the divine promise of full and abundant life.

Engaging in processes of surfacing, testing, and transforming vision is not a periodic planning effort, but is, rather, central to the ministry and mission of the church. We all too often stress the importance of ideas and actions, while neglecting the power of vision to shape and determine that which we think and do. John Navone underscores the formative and substantive role of vision:

“Vision permeates our thoughts, desires, interests, ideals, imagination, feelings and body language; it is our worldview, our sense of life, our basic orientation towards reality. Our vision gives rise to our character, to our style of life, to our tone of being in the world. Vision is the way we grasp the complexity of life; it involves the meaning and value that we attach to the complexity of life as a whole and to the things of life in particular.”⁴

Questions for discussion and reflection

1. Read Genesis 3:1-6; and Ephesians 1:3-23. What do these texts say about humanity’s ability to see what is really real?
2. What does it mean to “see with the eyes of faith?”
3. What is the power of vision? Illustrate from your own experience. Illustrate from the experience of the church.

³ Robert E. Webber and Rodney Clapp, *People of the Truth* (Morehouse, 1988, 1993), pp. 23-25.

⁴ John Navone, *Theology and Revelation* (Mercier Press, 1968), p. 116.