

THE STUCK SYNDROME

ARTICLE 7: VISION BEYOND THE INEVITABLE

When I was a boy my mother brought home an old pair of dark-rimmed glasses that had belonged to someone special. The lenses were as thick as the bottom of a Coca Cola bottle. It was hard to imagine anyone could actually see out of them. But they had belonged to a beautiful spirit in missionary lore of Japan, and Irish lady named Irene Webster Smith. Most Christian leaders in Japan have likely entered Ochanomizu Christian Center the home to more than a dozen ministries, thousands of ministry events, and the former sight of her house, a strategic and visionary acquisition. Irene had miraculously bought that property, which could have sold for over ¥7,000,000, when she had less than even ¥6,000.

My mother salvaged those glasses from Irene's house just before it was razed to make room for the new OSCC (OCC) building. They became a memorial to me that although Irene could barely see with her eyes, she saw clearly with her spirit. It reminds me of the statement of Helen Keller when asked about blindness. She said there was something much worse than blindness, that being, sight without vision.

People also remember my father as a man of vision. It was said that he had a "distant view". He saw the future and then everything became a path to it. This was in an era when "vision" was largely ignored. But today, even though the idea of vision quite popular, it is often misunderstood. Sometimes we mistake vision for mere plans or programs, or even for excitement, but it is none these. If tradition is our bridge to the past, then vision is our bridge to the future. Tradition ensures continuity, however, vision creates reality.

A person with vision might face great hardship (and misunderstanding) but always with a gleam in their eye, because a part of them already exists in the future, and dances in the victory. Visionaries know the inevitable future, but they also see another separate future. Oswald Sanders classic definition of vision states that vision means both foresight and insight. In foresight visionaries see ahead, in insight they rearrange the future. Visionaries face the inevitable reality, and create a new reality, which is God's reality.

There is a fascinating practice in the secular realm called scenario creation. First, in scenario creation, an organization will observe the roots, of currents trends, three to five years back . Then it will ask, "What do I wish I knew about today, back then?" In light

of this perspective they will make a list of current and potential trends. These trends naturally fall into groups, and these groups of trends that are woven into a story or the future. These stories, or scenarios, help an organization prepare for, and create the future, so as to win the game.

Is there a biblical example of this? Not really, but for a Christian, scenario creation can be likened to prophetic meditation where God is the director. A major fruit of scenario creation is an expectancy that God will write the future through us. A church with this focus busts through barriers of stuckness.

So where will Japan be in five years- what will be the spiritual climate? What will be the opportunities and challenges? How are we preparing for it? How are we altering it? Let me share with you four scenarios- scenarios that are influencing the way I am preparing for the future. They describe a very different Japan from today, and have huge ramifications:

Scenario 1 Finding Connection

The long term and far reaching level of bonding between people and computers has created a vacuum in lives. Despite the many advantages of computers, and even the communication options they provide, they are viewed as having stolen the simple goodness of life. There is great hunger for connectedness to the real world. People are longing for connection with themselves, with others, as well as with nature. Though many people seek bonding through promiscuity, many others now seek a deeper and morally based sexuality. Many companies and organizations seek to capitalize on this need for connection. Organizations that assist a better connection for families and friendships, flourish.

Scenario 2 The New Self

The focus on the individual has become dominant. Fitting into the former mould and patterns is viewed as dull and restraining. Education has taken a huge turn in valuing the unique gifts of the individual. Companies seek the gifted as opposed to the academically proficient. People seek to grow themselves to their potential. Self-awareness is the rage. Many are becoming keener to their emotional lives and begin dealing with recovery issues. Awareness of emotional pain has overwhelmed many people, and this continues growing with the rampant disintegration of the family structure. People seek to understand themselves and grow socially and spiritually as never before.

Scenario 3 Quest for Identity

Japan is in the full swing of an identity crisis. With the challenge to traditional values,

the influx of, and intermarrying with foreigners, and the lack of a great task (such as an international war or an economical war) Japan is forced to face itself. There is a quest for what is the “Japanese soul” and what it means to be Japanese, as the “pure Yamato race” has been radically altered. This new priority of identity and meaning brings revulsion for the empty addictions of the past. Brand fixation is viewed with disdain and compulsive consumerism is shaken. In this identity crisis Japan finally begins to seek a connection with its Asian neighbors, who have been estranged or bitter ever since the war. A new humility is the sign of maturation of the country. There is also a return to the simpler qualities of an older Japan. The power of myth grows. The bond with nature blossoms.

Scenario 4 Spiritual Tsunami

The country has finally broken into a full-fledged spiritual awakening. This, however, is not strictly a Christian spiritual awakening but quite a hodge podge of traditions. The defining principle for people being attracted to spirituality is divine encounter. People are starved on an emotional and spiritual level. They are seeking deep, inner refreshment, and a sense of the divine. Strangely, marginal spiritual groups (new religions) are not trusted as before, instead there is a scrambling for traditional faiths, Shintoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and particularly Christianity. Two forms of Christianity that have attracted the majority are mystically oriented Catholicism and supernaturally oriented Pentecostalism. In fact, it is this mystical element in any religion that appeals to people. Even some unexpected faiths with this orientation gain a foothold in Japan, such as Asian tribal religions and Western paganism. Traditional Evangelicalism has gone from plateau to down turn and is losing significant numbers.

Four scenarios of big change. Are we ready? Are we the ones recreating the inevitable future? Without a doubt, the ones vigorously creating the future now are from a very different world view, namely: philosophers, and then novelists, and then media. Some say, “But we Christians are only a minority!” that really has nothing to do with it, and besides history usually pivots on the mind of one man.

In the words of Leonard Sweet, “These are the best times of ministry. These are the worst times of ministry.” Woe to him who does not foresee the opportunities as well as the dangers, woe to him who moves forward without insight. Oh God, never let it be said of us as in 1 Samuel 3:1, “In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions.” Flood us with the mighty torrent of *dabar* and *logos*, and create Your reality.