

From Dave's Laptop

Tuesday, June 10, 2014

Well, the *Cosmos* series on TV has now ended, and I must say that it was well done. The series billed itself as “a documentary series that explores how we discovered the laws of nature and found our coordinates in space and time,” and the special effects alone were worth watching. I looked forward to the show every week, and I expect that I'll buy the DVDs, too.

While our knowledge has expanded in remarkable ways since Carl Sagan's first *Cosmos* series some thirty years ago, and while Neil Degrasse Tyson did a very fine job hosting and narrating the series, the series discreetly continued Sagan's subtle affirmations that there is no God, no Creator, nothing beyond space and time. Wondrous as the cosmos truly is, the series took pains to quietly reaffirm that the cosmos is indifferent to our presence and that there is no real purpose to our existence apart from what we invent ourselves.

On the one hand, I can appreciate such a conclusion. If we limit our view to space and time, which the series clearly does (“A *Spacetime Odyssey*”), then such conclusions are imminently reasonable and have the advantage of avoiding the excesses, silliness, and outright horror perpetrated in the name of religion throughout the ages.

At the same time, if one's morals are bound entirely to the evolutionary enterprise, to the survival of the fittest, then one has no real moral grounds for objecting to that silliness or to those excesses and horrors. If one is ruthlessly consistent, as very few persons actually are (it appears to me that Peter Singer does attempt to be so consistent), the conclusions required by such a train of thought are quite uncomfortable.

C. S. Lewis argued that the cosmos is neither our Mother nor our Parent, but our Sister, being also created by God, who is beyond space and time. Though God resides outside the cosmos, the biblical affirmation is that God has chosen to enter space and time on planet Earth, redeeming us from ourselves and inviting us to participate in moving the cosmos toward its appointed end.

The validity or the falsehood of this Truth Claim cannot be determined simply by appeal to the creation itself.¹ In the end, it seems to me that this Truth Claim can only be validated through personal knowledge of and relationship with Jesus of Nazareth as granted through His Spirit. Paul described his own experience this way:

*For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and **last of all he appeared to me** (1 Corinthians 15:3-8).*

¹ See the handout attached with this *Laptop*, *Verifiable Knowledge: Avoiding Category Error in the Search for Truth*.



Beginning with those first believers, right down to this very day, thousands upon thousands of Christians have chosen to die rather than deny that Jesus is alive, that they had met Him, that they knew Him, that they talked to Him . . . and He talked back. Were all those thousands deluded and deceived, tricked by what they *wanted* to be true rather than facing what really *is* true? That you will have to decide by your own quest.

I submit to you that it remains true today as it has been for most humans from the very beginning, that “*this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I [Jesus] would heal them*” (Matthew 13:15). It also remains true that “Earth’s crammed with heaven and every common bush afire with God; but only he who sees, takes off his shoes; the rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.”²
What do you see?

Once we have personally discovered that the universe is *most emphatically not indifferent* to us, once we have met the Master and begun to know Him, then the most natural thing in the world is to invite others to meet Him, too.³ The more real, alive, current, and vibrant our own relationship with Jesus, the easier it is to tell others about Him. And when our friends meet Him, too . . . well, it just doesn’t get any better than that!

And that makes a handy segue to our congregation’s adoption of a new Strategic Plan at last Sunday’s Quarterly Business Meeting, together with a Vision Statement (we haven’t had one) and a slightly revised Mission Statement. You’ll notice that both have to do with introducing people to Jesus:



Mission Statement

*To express God’s love through our relationship with Jesus the Christ by going **deeper** in our worship, fellowship and discipleship and by going **wider** in our ministry and mission.*

Vision Statement

To nurture and maintain an inclusive, just, and caring community that reaches out to others through God’s love

You’ll hear a lot more about both of these in the weeks and months to come. Our desire is that we become, individually and together, ever more effective “introducers” of persons to Jesus. Some of the ways we’ll do this include doing more of what we already do well, looking for better ways to do what we’ve been doing, and being willing to make changes and to take risks where we believe God calls us to do that.

As a result of our meeting on Sunday, we’ll be scheduling several opportunities for further conversation about our congregational goals, probably during the Wednesday evenings in August. Until then, I invite you to pray, listen, and imagine what BHAGs God might have for us that we haven’t seen yet.

If you’re not familiar with a BHAG (“bee-hag”), that’s a “Big Hairy Audacious Goal,” first identified by Jim Collins and Jerry Porras in their 1994 book, *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*. A BHAG “focuses an organization on a single medium-to-long-term

² Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*.

³ See John 1:43-46, 4:28-30.

organization-wide goal that is audacious, likely to be questioned by those outside the organization, but not regarded as impossible by those inside.”⁴

Two of the best-known BHAGs are President Kennedy’s challenge “to achieve the goal . . . of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to earth,” and Amazon’s goal of providing “every book ever printed, in any language, all available in less than sixty seconds.” Google’s BHAG is “to organize the world’s information and to make it universally accessible and useful.” Microsoft’s BHAG is “a computer on every desk and in every home” (some of these BHAGs may have been superseded).

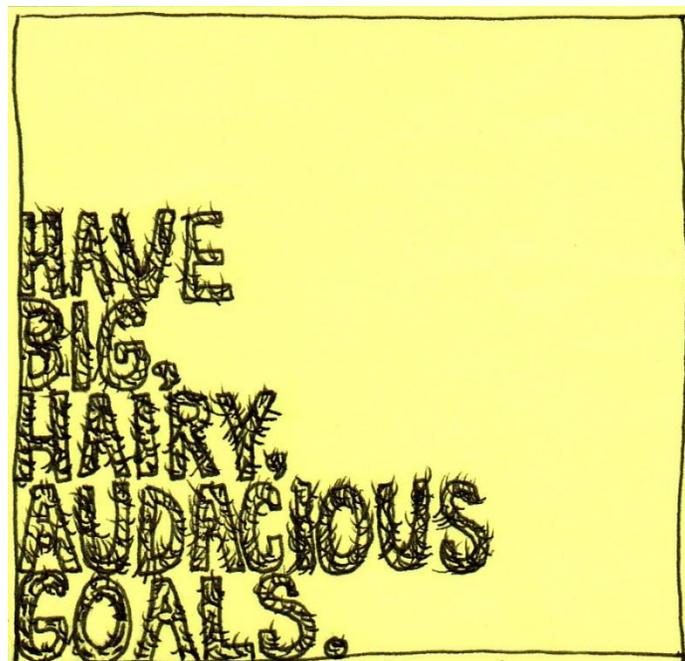
A BHAG is an audacious ten-to-thirty year goal that defines an envisioned future.

A religious example is the vision of the North Point Community Church in Atlanta “to become a church that unchurched people love to attend.” Collins and Porras note that “a true BHAG is clear and compelling, serves as a unifying point of effort, and acts as a clear catalyst for team spirit. It has a clear finish line, so the organization can know when it has achieved the goal. People like to shoot for finish lines.”

My request and invitation are not that you help us invent something to do. We don’t need ideas “pulled out of the air.” What we need is a sense of what God is up to through that part of the Body of Christ known as Columbia Baptist Fellowship. What we need is to connect in deeper and more passionate ways with the heart of God for our town and our time.

What do you see?

Dave



⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Hairy_Audacious_Goal

Verifiable Knowledge: Avoiding Category Error in the Search for Truth

St. Bonaventure (1217-1274) divided human knowledge into three hierarchical realms, which he designated by the “eye” that is able to observe them.

1. The **gross** (sensory/physical) realm is the realm of external objects and of sensory experience. It is perceived by “**the Eye of Flesh.**” The gross realm is the realm of empirical science, in which verification is by means of dualistic, inferential knowledge.
2. The **subtle** (intellectual/mental) realm is the realm of thought and of reason. This is the primary domain of philosophy and psychology, and is perceived by “**the Eye of Reason.**” The eye of reason perceives the sensory field, but also transcends it by means of imagination, logic, and abstract thought.
3. The third realm is the **causal** (ultimate/transcendent) realm, which is perceived by “**the Eye of Contemplation.**” This is the realm of direct, non-dual experience, and is the domain of religion and mysticism.

Contemporary philosopher **Ken Wilber** has noted that each of these sources of knowledge yields truth through the operation of the same three components⁵:

- (1) The **instrumental component** provides repeatable information which comes by following a set of instructions.
- (2) The **illuminative component** involves seeing the meaning of the knowledge gained by the instrumental component.
- (3) The **communal component** is the sharing of illuminative knowledge with those who are drawing on the same eye.

Each of these modes of knowing is subject to the scientific method’s test of reproducibility in order to validate its truth claims. Persons who reject the possibility of truth being mediated through any of these realms cannot be considered reliable critics of the knowledge located in that realm. For example, persons who reject the instrumental component of causal knowledge have thereby given up their right to critique its truth claims. Or to put that a bit differently, persons who refuse to admit the validity of “the Eye of Contemplation”/faith render themselves incapable of evaluating knowledge gained by means of this “eye.”

According to Wilber, a person commits “category error” if she tries to reduce all forms of knowledge to one “eye,” if he confuses *things* (“the Eye of Flesh”) with *thoughts* (“the Eye of Reason”) or *insights* (“the Eye of Contemplation”), or if she or he attempts to place one realm in a superior position to the others. The Cosmos series makes both of these errors.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ken_Wilber

⁵ Ken Wilber, *Eye-to-Eye: The Quest for the New Paradigm*, 3rd revised edition (Boston: Shambhala, 2001).

The Joshua Code: Fifty-Two Verses Every Believer Should Know **O.S. Hawkins (Thomas Nelson, 2012)**

Week twenty-three:

*“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your strength, and with
all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27).*

What is your primary purpose in life? Everything has a primary purpose. The primary purpose of an automobile is to transport us. I would rather have a Chevrolet that starts every time and got me where I needed to be than a fancy, shiny foreign car that only starts on occasion. The primary purpose of a pen is to write. I would rather have a cheap plastic one that writes well than a fancy German pen that skips and does not perform well. Our own primary purpose is found in the words of this week’s verse: *“love the LORD your God . . . and your neighbor as yourself.”*

All the commandments of God are pure, but only one is called “great.” And it is the one dealing with love for God and for our fellow man. This commandment is called great because it includes all the Ten Commandments within one verse. The first four of “The Big Ten” have to do with our relationship with God (Exodus 20:2–11). Thus, Jesus said, *“You shall love the LORD your God.”* The last six have to do with our relationship with one another (Exodus 20:12–17). Thus, our Lord continued, *“And [love] ‘your neighbor as yourself.’”* The first half of the Great Commandment has to do with our attitude and the last half with our actions. Here again is the principle of *being* coming before *doing* that we see woven throughout the fabric of Scripture.

OUR ATTITUDE

***“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul,
with all your strength, and with all your mind,”***

The Lord Jesus referred to this as a commandment. It is not an option, nor is it a suggestion. And it is important to note that this commandment is directed to those who know Christ in a personal way through the new birth. It is the Lord *your* God to whom He referred. You cannot truly love someone unless you really know that person, and you cannot know someone unless you spend time alone with that person. The emphasis here is on loving the One who first loved us and gave Himself for us.

We are to hold nothing back when we love God. We are to love Him with all our heart. Jesus once spoke of those who honored Him with their lips but not their hearts— they were far from Him (Matthew 15:8). We are to love God with our entire mind. A heart full of love is no excuse for an empty mind. And our attitude should reveal that we love God with all of our strength and soul. In other words, our entire person is to be given over to God in love.

OUR ACTIONS

“[love] your neighbor as yourself.”

If we truly have an attitude of love toward the Lord, then actions revealing our love for others around us will be as natural as water running downhill. This Great Commandment is given to us in the context of the story Jesus told of the Good Samaritan. He concluded this story of love for others with an admonition to “go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37). Love is always equated with action. Love is something we do. If our attitude is wholehearted love for Christ, then our actions will result in love for those around us.