

THE CHALLENGE OF THE 21ST CENTURY

Our theme for this meeting, "Magnifying the Vision," has an inherent challenge. The Bible itself says, "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Prov. 29:18, KJV). And while seeing may be believing, believing is the first step to seeing.

If the church were ever to die, it wouldn't be because of attacks from the radical right or the Laodicea of the liberal left. It would be because those of us in the middle of the road have lost our vision.

One frustrated Protestant leader said of his own organization: "[Our denomination] has all the vision of a wiperless windshield in the middle of a squall!"

May that never be said of our church. But to make certain that it never happens, we must constantly recognize that times are changing.

Business as Usual

It is expected that more scientific and technical advances will happen during the next year than during the entire decade of the 1970s. Human-

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kind's cumulative knowledge doubled during the past decade and may double again every five years. In such times, we'd better not plan to do business as usual. And if we are going to magnify the vision for the future, we'd better not forget where we came from.

A moment ago, I used the analogy of an automobile in a squall. Let's use it one more time. As I drive down the road, I need to occasionally check the rear-view mirror to see where I've been. On the rear-view mirror of my car are the words, "Objects may be closer than they appear."

Likewise, the lessons of our

past—our failings and our triumphs—should not be relegated to the distant past. "Discover it again for the first time" and "going back to the future" should be more than clever advertising jingles.

We can have confidence for the future only as we do not forget how He has led us in our past.

The fundamentals of our doctrines, the pillars of our faith, the providential history of our beginnings, and the beautiful insights of the Spirit of Prophecy must ever guide our vision for the future.

Staying Focused

Further, we must recognize that

as we magnify a vision, we run the risk of losing the focus. As a church—as leaders in that church—you and I must constantly be adjusting the focus.

It is increasingly easy for a multi-ethnic, multicultural, multi-generational, multi-lingual church to have so many programs that the fundamental focus of God's remnant can be lost.

Good things can sap our energy and resources, yet not contribute to the direct accomplishment of our mission. Sharing the good news of Jesus Christ is still the only rationale for the existence of the prophetic remnant church.

Let's not forget that we have, indeed, been fed to feed and led to lead.

Unity

Finally, if we are to magnify the vision in the 21st century, we must do so with a renewed sense of unity. I'm reminded of the supply of ball-point pens we received for this session for use by the delegates. The first batch arrived with the erroneously imprinted words "Magnifying Division." We sent the pens back. There's no room for "division" in this church. When God provided a way of salvation for Noah and his family, He said, "Build an ark," not a thousand canoes.

To meet the challenge of the 21st century, we need the energy of our

youth. We need the strength of our women. We need the creativity of our progressives. We need the fervor of our conservatives. And we need the insights of our former members.

"I learned in politics," President Clinton said recently, "that you'll be useless if you have no vision. But you can also be rendered useless if you ignore everybody else's vision."

Whether in theology or polity, this church has a tradition of strength because it has a tradition of unity, despite its lack of uniformity. When the family speaks, the members of that family had better listen.

Today, thousands are being dashed against the roots of isolationism, dying from lack of fellowship, and drawn into the whirlpool of individualism. And the coral reef of sin is littered with shipwrecks of those who have ignored the wise man's advice: In a "multitude of counselors there is safety."

The Call

Oswald Chambers said, "It is easier to work for God without a vision and without a call because then you are not bothered by what He requires."

I want to publicly acknowledge my realization of that vision—and with much prayer and struggle, my acceptance of that call. □