

A Special Vision To See Beyond Tomorrow

A SUNDAY SCHOOL STUDENT, AFTER SOME HESITATION, ASKS: “IS THERE a difference between a revelation and a prophecy?” His teacher pauses and then responds: “Yes, there is a notable difference. A revelation is an act of disclosing, of making something presently apparent that had not previously been apparent. A prophecy, on the other hand, is a foretelling of events that have not as yet happened; it is a disclosure of future happenings.

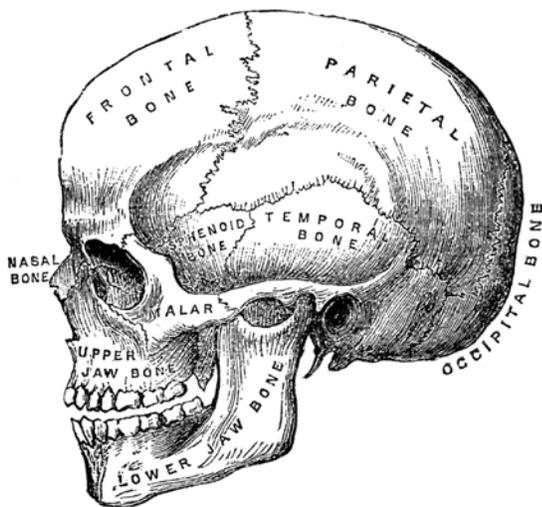
The student remains confused but does not immediately pursue his thoughts further, allowing his mind to dwell more on next Thursday’s basketball game. Yet, the doubts persist as he recalls a vagrant thought from a prior Sunday School session when he learned that revelations, meaningful revelations, required a divine intervention, while the other kinds of revelation, those in the secular realm, were but speculative gossip.

Days later, his doubts about the nature of prophecy and revelation return and he now speculates: “If I lose my house key, search for it and eventually find it by overturning yesterday’s newspaper which had been hiding it, was this an inspired revelation or merely an accidental disclosure? And is revelation, then, nothing more than an uncovering—accidental rather than inspired—of a reality waiting to be realized?”

So, this student concludes, a revelation is a disclosure which can be accidental, fortuitous – or, alternatively, guided by divine instruction. And given the many multiple-choice tests at his school, the student now prays for more divine guidance during examination time.

Days later, just prior to the SuperBowl, this student offers a prediction on its outcome based on a mixture of hope and an appraisal of each team’s past performance. And he then asks himself: “Am I making a prediction or, alternatively, a prophecy?” And so, through in a different arena, the wonderments about the dimensions of revelation and prophecy return.

The SuperBowl goes badly and this student’s thoughts persist in reviewing not only the many lost opportunities during the game, those dropped forward passes for example; but further, uninvited reflections on prophecy, revelation; and whether, perhaps, one is merely a disguised form of the other.



The furtive seeds of skepticism, of demands for rational explanation, lurk as this student strives for clarity. His active mind gathers a cluster of vaguely similar words regarding the future, words such as speculation, informed conjecture, wild guess, even prophecy; and then wonders about the meaning—and weight—of each.

The word, prophecy, intrigues him. It brings forth visions of mystery, astrology and wizards wearing conical hats. The dictionary—a book that he uses rarely—tells him that the word, prophet, is based upon an ancient Greek compound word, meaning one who speaks in behalf of another, a spokesman in other words who transmits predictions and judgments derived, generally, from some higher source. By this rigorous definition, then, a prophet is a transmitting vehicle, a passive message-carrier; and thus the gift of prophecy is not primarily within him but merely passes through him.

He recalls his aunt, a physician in general practice, who regularly predicts her patients’ futures: those who may some day be burdened with heart disease, those who may develop diabetes, those whose current occupation may lead to occupational diseases in the foreseeable future. And this student remembers that she employs certain predictive tests, that give her estimates an air of reliability. These predictive elements all seem quite pragmatic, down-to-earth, to this striving adolescent; and certainly free of any messages from higher sources. And he remembers stories, told by his aunt, of the great 19th Century physician, William Osler, who would stop strangers on the Baltimore streets to tell them, in the most courteous of terms, that they have—or will shortly have—certain terrible diseases but which are not as yet evident to the casual eye. And so the student wonders: “Was Osler a prophet or merely a well-informed physician who visually inspected the passing strangers for signs of physical ailments? And further, can prophecy be little more than a happy exploitation of premonitory signs (discerned by only a few avid seekers) and a bit of random good luck?”

And so, thinks this lad, the need for prophecy, may shrink as revelations become more exactly sensitive. And since all consequences seem to have their own causes, might not the day arrive when the tomorrows will be revealed beforehand by uncovering all of the secret causes hidden in the todays? This adolescent logic seems to work with weather predictions. Maybe, some day, this credulous youngster concludes, the results of future SiperBowls will also be foregone conclusions.

– STANLEY M. ARONSON, MD

Stanley M. Aronson, MD is dean of medicine emeritus, Brown University.

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The author and his spouse/significant other have no financial interests to disclose.

CORRESPONDENCE

e-mail: SMAMD@cox.net