

Alumni Report

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necessary step in the continuing search for truth and the advancement of knowledge.

Today every school child is aware that our small planet, its neighbors in the solar system, and even our Sun itself, are in what someone has described as the suburb of a minor galaxy in a dynamic universe populated by galaxies and super galaxies in numbers that probably surpass our comprehension.

The average citizen today, of course, has far more scientific information at his disposal than did those greatest of intellects of earlier times. Yet paradoxically, I think there has never been a greater need for increased understanding and appreciation of science and technology.

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The noted educator, Dr. Lindley J. Stiles of the University of Wisconsin, addressed himself to this question of scientific literacy some years ago.

Dr. Stiles said that, although the choice of direction for our civilization will be determined through the democratic process, it is there that the problem begins. To make rational choices, he pointed out, the average citizen must understand the nature and role of science at a time when its breadth and complexity are increasing almost exponentially.

Conversely, the scientist, at a time when he can barely keep up to date in his speciality, must not isolate himself in his parochial interests. Instead, he should see his profession as a part of the larger world, to evaluate himself

and his work in relation to all forces, especially the humanities, which shape and advance society.

The need, then, is for an educational process resulting in more scientific literacy for the layman, and more literacy in the humanities for the scientists. It is also important that the layman not attach too much importance to the scientists' opinions on issues outside their special disciplines. Scientists are not experts in everything just because they are scientists.

Man in this scientific and technological age is free only to the extent he has a grasp on himself and his surroundings. Freedom -- the ability to speak, think, act and vote intelligently -- is based largely on our ability to make choices growing out of our understanding of the issues involved. With each advance of science, and with each invention of technology, and its uses, there is an invitation to more understanding. This is the essence of the burden borne by all peoples since the dawn of humanity and toolmaking. This is the imperative for scientific literacy and, we should add, technological literacy. There must be widespread understanding of the role of science and technology in modern society, both as to their limits and our dependence on their basic function as tools for our survival.

How do we encourage scientific and technological literacy? I think the problem is how to instill in students a permanent desire to learn.

All youth is endowed with curiosity from the very beginning. What can the education process do, not only to keep this natural curiosity alive, but to make it a permanent part of the individual drive?

Professor Okey of Indiana University offers one approach: "In addition to learning facts," he wrote, "students should learn to examine facts, how to answer questions or solve problems using facts, and how to produce facts."

This is essentially the scientific method. By learning the scientific method, students will understand its role in society and at the same time learn to think for themselves. Learning to think for oneself, in turn, imparts a deep sense of freedom. Once tasted, an appetite for it is formed which may well endure throughout life.

But if our young people are going to gain this appetite, our schools, our colleges, our universities, must bear an ever greater responsibility. All too many times in the past, education -- particularly in the scientific disciplines -- has placed extremely heavy emphasis on transmitting the established knowledge of the past. There has been a tendency for teachers to assign reading, and to encourage rote learning, instead of taking the admittedly more difficult path of encouraging students to think for themselves.

As I said before, the main-

spring of science is curiosity. Since time immemorial, there have always been men and women who felt a burning desire to know what was under the rock, beyond the hills, across the oceans. This restless breed now wants to know what makes an atom work, through what process life reproduces itself, or what is the geological history of the moon.

But also, there would not be a single great accomplishment in the history of mankind without faith. Any man who strives to accomplish something needs a degree of faith in himself. And whenever he takes on a challenge that requires more moral strength than he can muster with his own limited mental and spiritual resources, he needs faith in God.

But many people find the churches, those old ramparts of faith, badly battered by the onslaught of three hundred years of scientific skepticism. This has led many to believe that science and religion are not compatible, that "knowing" and "believing" cannot live side by side.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Science and religion are not antagonists. On the contrary, they are sisters. While science tries to learn more about the creation, religion tries to better understand the Creator. While, through science, man tries to harness the forces of nature around him, through religion he tries to harness the forces of nature within him.

Some people say that science has been unable to prove the existence of God. They admit that many of the miracles in the world around us are hard to understand, and they do not deny that the universe, as modern science sees it, is indeed a far more wondrous thing than the creation medieval man could perceive. But they still maintain that since science has provided us with so many answers, the day will soon arrive when we will be able to understand even the creation of the fundamental laws of nature without a Divine Intent. They challenge science to prove the existence of God. But, must we really light a candle to see the sun?

Many men who are intelligent and of good faith say they cannot visualize God. Well, can a physicist visualize an electron? The electron is materially inconceivable and yet, it is so perfectly known through its effects that we use it to illuminate our cities, guide our airliners through the night skies and take the most accurate measurements. What strange rationale makes some physicists accept the inconceivable electron as real while refusing to accept the reality of God on the ground that they cannot conceive Him? I am afraid that, although they really do not understand the electron either, they are ready to accept it because they managed to produce a rather clumsy mechanical model of it borrowed from rather limited experience in other fields, but they wouldn't know how to begin building a model of God.