Rector's Essay

Stewardship of the Future

By Jarrett Kerbel (11/13/26)

Who speaks up for future generations?

This question is the premise of an acclaimed science-fiction novel called The Ministry of the Future by Kim Stanley Robinson. In the future world depicted by this page-turner, a Ministry of the Future is established to look out for the interests of future generations. After all, the vast majority of humans who will ever exist will exist in the future. What do we owe them?

In my opinion, we owe them a healthy environment, the opportunity for meaningful vocations, adequate and accessible health care, excellent education available for all, and a functional democracy where voice and vote are meaningful for all people and human rights are protected. We also owe the future our humble admission that we do not have all the answers and solutions.

When I worked on an archaeological dig in the Galilee region of Israel, I learned an important lesson regarding future research. We dug three holes, three meters square and three meters deep, by hand. But we did not dig up the whole site and we did not use bulldozers or power tools. Our dig leaders advised us to show restraint so future archaeologists - who might have better skills, methods, and technology - could do their own excavations in hope of better results.

We owe future generations humility and restraint. We cannot use up the resources of our world guided by personal avarice, whether that be avarice for material gain or the accumulation of experiences. I say experiences, because we may need to consider less travel to protect the planet and I say that in full knowledge that such sacrifice may hit us hard in our entitled souls.

Which leads to the question, what are we willing to sacrifice for the well-being of future generations? Sacrifice is not a popular word in an age of excess and indulgence. Rather than show humility and restraint, inventors such as Elon Musk want to entrance us with interplanetary colonization. The not so hidden premise is that we can burn up our planet and move on.

As a Christian, I have a few things to say about this: 1. God did not gift us with a good creation for us to burn it up and dispose of it. 2. Wherever humanity goes, we will bring the corruption and destruction that is endemic to the children of Adam. We call this sin. History teaches us that new frontiers are false utopias, no 'new innocence' is achieved by invading new spaces. Instead, we find another excuse for exploitation and a distraction from real spiritual conversion.

The stewardship of the future is also a concern of the church. Do we leave behind a church that fits our needs but is not responsive or adaptable for future generations? Do we practice planned giving to endow the church for future generations who may struggle financially? How are we including future generations in our prayers, in our evangelism, in our formation, in our decision making? What is our ministry of the future?