

Navigating The Third Wave

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One of the interesting exhibits in Charlotte's Discovery Place, a children's science museum, is the wave machine. The exhibit's purpose is to show the effects of wave action on a sandy beach, a problem of great concern to scientists, environmentalists, businesspeople, residents and tourists along the North and South Carolina shores.

The wave exhibit also illustrates the properties of waves: how they roll in as swells, form a crest as the land rises under them, break on the beach and recede back to sea. This process repeats itself endlessly whether at high tide or low, daytime or night, summer or winter. Each wave has certain basic properties that make it a wave, but one wave may have distinguishing characteristics that set it apart from another.

Men have long used the analogy of waves to describe the action of various persistent movements. Generals send wave after wave of soldiers into the battle. Immigrants seem to flow into America in waves by ethnic or national groupings. Crime occurs in waves, as do business cycles, fashions and politics. The wave analogy helps us make sense of the ups and downs of human life.

It also serves to describe more massive transformations in human civilization. Unbeknownst to most people, we are living in the transition from one great era to another—from the Second to the Third Wave of human society. Trendwatchers, philosophers and now even politicians and business leaders are warning the Western world that we had better "catch the wave" or we will find ourselves pounded by the surf and drowned in the riptide.

Third Wave Basics

What is this "Third Wave"? It and its political sister, the "Third Way," have a fairly long history of describing alternative movements in thought, economics, politics, religion and other societal areas. In fact, Thomas Aquinas used the phrase "Third Way" in his philosophical discussions in the mid-13th century.

Most recently, the term "Third Wave" has been promoted and popularized by futurists Alvin and Heidi Toffler in several of their books, particularly *The Third Wave* in 1991 and *Creating a New Civilization: The Politics of the Third Wave* in 1995. In them, they break human civilization down into three major ages, which they call "waves."

The First Wave began in the distant past when men first began to sustain their societies by means of agricultural production. It is commonly called the Agricultural Age. Technological advances concentrated on new and better ways to farm or ranch, increasing yields and leisure time. Society was evenly balanced between rural and urban dwellers or tipped toward rural living. This wave held sway over most of the world until the 19th century.

The Second Wave took root during the period of the Enlightenment and sprang to life in England and America in the early 19th century. Industry soon became the means to wealth and power. Factories, mills and their associated businesses sprouted wherever opportunity presented itself, mostly in the

cities where large populations began to gather. Wealth and power soon accumulated in the hands of an elite group of magnates and aristocrats, and a huge middle class developed. This wave's common name is the Industrial Age.

The Third Wave took its first, uneven breaths with the inventions of the printing press, telegraph, telephone, radio, television and mainframe computer, but it did not blossom to maturity until the advent of the personal computer. The Third Wave is the Information Age, highlighted by instant communication, rapid transportation and ready knowledge or information on any conceivable topic.

It is the age of telecommuting, opinion polls, digital electronics, satellite dishes, global business, electronic warfare, sound bites, networks and wireless or remote devices. It replaces industry with information and services. Instead of mass-produced, one-size-fits-all consumer products, Third Wave business makes unique, customized products available to everyone. The Information Age, in the language of the Tofflers, is decentralized, de-massified, diversified, distributed and digitized.

Third Wave Society

This Third Wave has vast and far-reaching implications for human society, particularly because its philosophical underpinnings reside in postmodern thought or relativism (see "It's All Relative," *Forerunner*, May 1998). A facet of relativism is its emphasis on the individual. Dennis Polhill, a senior fellow with the Independence Institute, a think-tank in Golden, Colorado, writes regarding Third Wave society:

Individuals will feel the world shift under their feet in their lifetimes. The move to an information society cannot be stopped, slowed or steered. . . . [It] will produce even more economic and personal freedom for most people. . . . All of the systems that were made to look and function like factories for the industrial age must now be reshaped to respond to the unique needs and demands of individuals. The entire thought process upon which we built [Second Wave society] is no longer relevant.

Because individuals are important rather than groups, egalitarianism—a social philosophy advocating the removal of inequalities among people—is a major theme of the Third Wave. The tell-all book is an example of how this works. Since so much information is available about an individual, he can quickly be made to look human and weak like the rest of humanity. The normal reaction to such revelations is, "I'm just as good as he is," and it puts the rich, powerful and intelligent on par with the average Joe.

In business, this level playing field creates weaknesses in the giants that the little guy can exploit. Trade secrets are much harder to keep within an elite group of powerful people or corporations, and eventually their monopolies are challenged by an upstart who puts a new twist on the "old" knowledge. Thus, a Steve Jobs or a Bill Gates, working out of his garage, can turn a whole industry on its head.

With its technological bias, the Third Wave simultaneously increases the means for communication while driving individuals toward greater isolation by its impersonal nature. People no longer have to speak to each other or meet at a common location; many would rather send an email or leave a message on voice mail. As one trendwatcher put it, people build cocoons around themselves to protect themselves from the onslaught of this new age, and while in them, they can conduct all their business without any disadvantage.

The emphasis on communication is also making the world far more critical than ever before. People feel free to express themselves no matter what the topic. Liberals have long clamored for an open society, and they have received it in spades: shock radio, fights on TV talk shows, flaming email, open discussions on sexual matters, pornography on the Internet, tell-all books and magazines and more. Everyone has an opinion, and most seem to feel a need to have it known far and wide.

Because everyone has an opinion, this age promotes the formation of splinter groups and minorities. On the Internet a surfer can find a chat room to discuss just about every conceivable topic. Once people of like minds meet and exchange information about themselves, they often form special interest groups, which lobby government to pass or repeal laws in their favor. One observer predicts that majorities are a relic of the past, and making coalitions of minorities or special interest groups is the ticket of the future.

Another hallmark of Third Wave society, as we see in the church, is distrust and antagonism for "vertical" organization and government. Proponents say the Third Wave makes better use of "horizontal" decision-making and consensus rather than "hierarchical control" and standardization. People today would rather associate with a group than join it, contribute to its decision-making than follow a leader, and open it to new ideas and processes than conform to a "rigid" policy.

From a societal point of view, the Third Wave is a liberal's paradise. It portends personal freedom without oversight, tolerance of all ideas and means as long as they are open to criticism, diversity and multiculturalism in every sphere of life and power in the hands of the masses (known in other times as "mob rule"). The question is, "How long could such a society last?"

Third Wave Religion

Such a major sea change cannot but affect religion, and it has already begun. Organized religion is viewed as First or Second Wave, and so it is not considered to be appropriate for the Third. What the Information Age has produced to replace it is "spirituality."

We can see this in the growing strength of the Pentecostal or charismatic movement around the world (see "Touched by the 'Spirit'?" *Forerunner*, January 1995). Its emphasis, criticized by leading evangelicals, is not on doctrine but on an individual's "spiritual experience." A person may believe in evolution, reincarnation and alien abduction, but if he feels "the spirit" moving him, he has been touched by God and is accepted.

The "Toronto Blessing," beginning on January 6, 1994, is a prime example. At this Vineyard church, biblical preaching has given way to allowing its members and guests to express "the spirit" during its service time. The floor is strewn with people laughing, swooning, staggering, trilling, flailing, whooping, jerking, wailing, roaring, barking, howling, screeching and generally making fools of themselves "for Jesus." This has been copied in many other places since, particularly Brownsville, Florida.

The "rock-and-roll churches"—many of them mega-churches—are a less conspicuous form of this. Formed to attract baby boomers and Generation X-ers to "the Lord," these churches preach pure, sugar-coated Protestantism with a rock beat. Attendees are told to "be yourself" and "let Jesus in your heart." It is really nothing more than a weekly pep rally.

Of course, beyond this are the New Age beliefs and practices that have little or no connection to "Christianity." Eastern religions, like Buddhism and Hinduism, are the fastest growing religions in America, along with Islam. If nothing else, this shows that Third Wave Americans, open to new ideas and with ready access to them, feel free to explore beyond traditional Western ideas (see Isaiah 2:6).

Since individualism is such a force in this age, the Third Wave's greatest impact on religion will be the weakening of standards. Doctrine, seen by Third Wavers as unyielding and constricting, is the first thing to go, as illustrated by the television drama, *Touched by an Angel*. The actors make references to "values" and "God," but points of doctrine or the Ten Commandments never come up. Again, individuals having a spiritual experience—a feeling or emotion—is the important feature of Third Wave religion.

Third Wave Politics

In "A Magna Carta for the Knowledge Age," (*New Perspectives Quarterly*, Fall 1994, Vol. 11, No. 4), authors Esther Dyson, George Gilder, Jay Keyworth and Alvin Toffler write:

Eventually, the Third Wave will affect virtually everything government does. . . . Government should be as strong and as big as it needs to be to accomplish its central functions effectively and efficiently. The reality is that a Third Wave government will be vastly smaller . . . than the current one. . . . But smaller government does not imply weak government. . . . Indeed, the transition from the Second Wave to the Third Wave will require a level of government *activity* not seen since the New Deal.

Of all the areas of life affected by the transition to the Third Wave, Information Age politics, termed the "Third Way" by British Prime Minister Tony Blair, may have the greatest impact on the average citizen. On its face, the Third Way seems to describe a political strategy that blends the best features of capitalism and socialism, of conservatism and liberalism, of right and left, into a moderate, bipartisan, humane policy for progress into the next century. However, syncretistic systems rarely, if ever, borrow equally from both ends of the spectrum, and the Third Way follows the rule.

Tony Blair himself, in an interview with the London newspaper *The Guardian* on May 15, 1998, admits this is the case:

My view of this idea is very very clear. It is that it offers a way between not merely the politics of the new right—laissez-faire, leave everything to markets, social indifference—and the politics of the old left—state control, run everything through the center—but that it also offers a way forward between the two types of left politics—traditionally, one of which was principled, but was based on the old left positions, and the other of which was "pragmatic" but which basically involved saying we just want to get the same things more gradually. It's an attempt to say there's a principled position which is also entirely sensible, and it is about taking the values of the left—social justice, solidarity, community, democracy, liberty—and recasting them and reshaping them for the new world. I think you can see very clearly the outlines of the third way in each of the various areas of policy. On the economy, for example, the embracing of globalization as inevitable and also as desirable actually, in terms of greater trade and international exchange and saying that the role of government is not to pile up big budget deficits and hope for the best, but is to run a prudent financial policy and combine that with

government intervention to equip people and business to survive and compete in this new global market.

He says this conclusively in his book, *The Third Way: New Politics for the New Century*:

The Third Way is not an attempt to split the difference between Right and Left. It is about traditional values in a changed world. . . . [Margaret Thatcher] asserted the primacy of individual liberty in the market economy; [Karl Marx] promoted social justice with the state as its main agent. There is no necessary conflict between the two, accepting as we do that state power is one means to achieve our goals, but not the only one and emphatically not an end in itself.

To paraphrase, Blair wants to implement a Marxist/socialist state with elements of capitalism thrown in to accommodate Third Wave economic realities. And those realities are Third Wave: "Services, knowledge, skills and small enterprises are its cornerstones. Most of its output cannot be weighed, touched or measured."

Elsewhere in his book, he emphasizes the need for government intervention:

In all areas, monitoring and inspection are playing a key role, as an incentive to higher standards and as a means of determining appropriate levels of intervention. . . . The Government will have powers to intervene where performance indicators or inspectors' reports show that there is a serious or persistent failure in the delivery of services.

What may be the worst part of the Third Way is that it is built upon nothing; it has no underlying or foundational principles to guide it. Blair writes:

A large measure of pragmatism is essential. As I say continually, what matters is what works to give effect to our values. . . . There are even claims that it is unprincipled. . . . Our approach is "permanent revisionism," a continual search for better means to meet our goals, based on a clear view of the changes taking place in advanced industrialized societies.

This is merely a confusing statement of "the ends justify the means." Students of history know where such thinking has led in other times.

An International Movement

If this were confined only to Great Britain, it might not be that significant to the rest of the world. Unfortunately, the Third Way reaches far beyond the British Isles into the most influential nations on the planet! Most Americans are unaware that President Bill Clinton propounds the Third Way because he is here called a "New Democrat," a cipher for this new political movement. In fact, many political scientists credit Clinton as the Third Way's "father."

Among the other nations with Third Way leaders are Germany (Chancellor Gerhard Schröder), France (Prime Minister Lionel Jospin), Canada (Prime Minister Jean Chrétien), Italy (Prime Minister Romano Prodi), Japan (Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi) and Brazil (President Fernando Henrique Cardoso). Thomas B. Edsall of the *Washington Post* writes in the June 28, 1998, edition:

President Clinton and British Prime Minister Tony Blair are seeking to take advantage of the unprecedented number of Western governments controlled by center-left parties to turn their "third way" political strategies in the United States and Great Britain into an international movement.

The goal is to give formal direction to the general trend in which liberal, labor and socialist parties are abandoning government ownership of major industries and tax and spending programs that aggressively seek to redistribute income.

. . . [T]he long-range aim would be to set up a middle-ground counterpart to the Socialist International on the left or the International Democrat Union on the right.

President Clinton said in an interview with Argentine reporters on October 17, 1997, "What I'm trying to do is to promote a process of reorganization of the world." The November 25, 1997, *New York Times*, quotes him as saying, "There are a lot of very brilliant people who believe that the nation-state is fast becoming a relic of the past." Terry Mollner, a consultant to corporations on Third Way economics, agrees with Clinton:

The Third Way position, at the other end of the continuum from capitalism, does not yet have a place in the public mind. However, the Third Way is here. Our focus needs to shift away from the differences between capitalism and socialism. The next major development in human culture will be from nationalism to planetarianism based on the Third Way. . . . Together, only together, can the planet move into the Third Way and a steady state of peace. . . . If capitalism and socialism are not the end of history, and if the Third Way . . . is in fact the next phase in the social evolution of the human species, then as people come to see this as true, the transition will become inevitable. Let's not let America continue on a blind course, ignorant of the emergence of the Third Way for so long that a debacle much worse than a stock market collapse becomes necessary to stimulate our leaders. ("The Third Way is Here," *In Context*, 1988, 1997).

In the end, the Third Way is nothing other than the latest scheme to bring about humanistic one-world government!

The Fourth Wave

What is missing from all discussions of the Third Wave is that it will itself be replaced by a far-better Fourth Wave, the Kingdom of God. The first three waves are nothing more than human attempts to create a viable society apart from God, while the fourth is the divine blueprint for a perfect one. It will be the only one that really works!

Rather than trying to transition gradually from the old waves to the Fourth, God will forcibly implement His way by destroying man's systems and restoring His government upon the earth at Christ's return (Isaiah 9:6-7; Daniel 2:44; Acts 3:19-21). It will be entirely new and completely foreign to mankind because humanity has never followed God (Revelation 21:1-5; Romans 8:7; I John 2:16-17; 5:19).

The Fourth Wave is based, not upon the knowledge of good and evil, but upon the knowledge of God: "For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9; see also Isaiah 33:6; Habakkuk 2:14). This includes His perfect and just law (James 1:25; Romans

7:12) and a relationship with God that produces eternal life (John 6:68; 17:3; Philippians 3:8-11, 20-21). This will be the ultimate in human "social evolution"!

How long the Third Wave has before it is superceded by the Fourth is obviously unknown. The prophet Daniel was given foresight into this time by an angel:

"But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase." . . . Although I heard, I did not understand. Then I said, "My lord, what shall be the end of these things?" And he said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand." (Daniel 12:4, 8-10)

This time certainly appears upon us, and if we are wise, we can understand what is happening in the world. Events will continue to intensify until "the crisis at the close of this age"—that "time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation" (verse 1)—shakes this world to its foundations.

We can do little about it, but we can wait patiently (verse 12; Luke 21:19), watch events closely (Matthew 24:42; Luke 21:34-36), and prepare ourselves for Christ's return (Matthew 24:44; Revelation 19:7). As Abraham did (Hebrews 11:10, 14-16), we have to look to the glorious future God has promised us because the only Wave that is worth catching and riding is the Fourth!