

## Less Understanding in an Age of Knowledge

Many futurists today talk about an age of knowledge. In the 1990s, this notion became very popular as Wall Street and its cousins around the world fanned up a massive technology investment boom. Anything to do with information — information technology (IT), the Internet, computer software, intellectual property rights, patents ... etc. — were (*and remain*) sought after investments.

Popular opinion was captured by a new virtual world where thoughts and information would represent the fastest growing area of wealth. The concept of the “information highway” was born. Knowledge is the future, said the seers, and having an occupation as a “knowledge worker” was the thing to do. Near the end of this craze, consultants and commentators were so ecstatic about the emerging information age that nothing seemed impossible. No factories or labor were necessary. Presidents and leaders of global organizations were preaching that the information and knowledge available through the World Wide Web would open up all mankind to enlightenment and solve the poverty of many third world countries. Simply by providing everyone access to the Internet, opportunity would be available to all of humanity — from the youngest school kids in America to the Bedouins of Arabia.

We now know that much of this talk was self-serving hype. However, new technologies and powerful information networks have indeed emerged that are radically changing the focus and mindset of the world. In fact, many of these new capabilities are surely facilitating significant endtime trends such as globalization and a world convergence in other key respects — ideologies of consumerism, humanism and ecumenicism. But has there really been a boom in knowledge? What does the Bible say? These are questions worth investigating.

### And Knowledge Shall Increase.

Information is definitely booming as studies show. The School for Information Systems and Management at the University of California, Berkeley, periodically produces a study that estimates the amount and growth of information in the world. Its most recent study was released in October 2003, providing their findings for the end of 2002. The report estimates that so much information was produced worldwide that year that it would amount to 30 feet of books for each person living on earth. This represents an increase of total information in the world of 30% in one year (*a similar rate to that of previous years*). At that pace, total information ever existing in the world doubles in less than 3 years.

How much data exists today? Researchers measure information in terms of what are called exabytes — an electronic storage unit. To get a sense of the scale of this unit, consider that one typical typewritten page would amount to approximately 2,000 bytes. The number of bytes in one exabyte would require 18 zeros. This number is so large it is difficult to conceive. How big is an exabyte? According to the study's estimate, all the words spoken by all human beings that ever lived would amount to 5 exabytes of information. Interestingly, for the three-year period surveyed by the above-mentioned report, total recorded information increased by 5.4 exabytes ... in other words, by more than all the words ever spoken in human creation.

A few more facts from this landmark study will help to frame the scale of the current information explosion. Berkeley's research group measures information stored in four ways — paper, film, magnetic (*computer discs, hard drives ...etc.*) or optical (*a recent form of storage.*)

- Information stored on paper is now the most insignificant of the three older technology formats, accounting for only 1 three-thousandth of all new recorded information. All the same, this form of information has grown approximately by a third between 1999 and

2002. Virtually all of this expansion has been in the category of office documents. Though some 300,000 new book titles were published around the world over this period, they only amounted to 3% of the information produced in office document form.
- Film accounts for a little more than 7% of all new information measured in digital terms. Photographs by far represent the largest component. Most of the rest of this category is in the form of visual media, such as films and TV series. If all movies ever made (*between 1870 and 2002*) were watched continuously, it would require, 2,108 years. Consider then that a little more than one-quarter of all film content was produced in the 3 years between 2000 and 2002. (*Who is watching all this new content?*)
  - The fastest growing form of stored information is magnetic (disks, tapes ...etc.) having grown 80% over the period reviewed. More than 90% of all new information is stored in various magnetic formats.

No doubt, information is booming.

### **Knowledge and Wealth**

Indeed, the world has been caught up in a KNOW economy (*short for knowledge and wealth*). The two are tightly intertwined in this day and age. Data management is a big industry today, taking many forms.

Knowledge from a commercial point of view is called intellectual property (IP). Amongst the biggest areas of IP are media (*television rights, ownership of movies, music rights... etc.*), medicine (*mainly drug patents but also genomes — for example, patents on human genes are a new growth area with over 800 patents established, approximately three-fifths of them held in the US*) agriculture (*patents on biotech, plants, genetically modified foods ...etc, again the majority these held in the US, approximately two-thirds owned privately*) and computer software.<sup>i</sup>

Much of the battles on global trade policy has centered on the issue of intellectual property in recent years. Why? As mentioned, knowledge is wealth. Patent ownership has increasingly taken on a global dimension. The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) is now experiencing rapid growth offering protection in over 70 countries around the world. Some 412,000 international trademark registrations were in force with this organization at the end of 2003. Amongst the biggest users of this system are pharmaceutical and electronic companies.

In view of the popular definitions of knowledge, various surveys rank the United States as the most “knowledge intensive.” According to the Knowledge Competitive<sup>ii</sup> Index compiled by Robert Huggins Associates (a British-based consultancy) the United States possesses the world’s top 14 knowledge economies (regions).

Various commentators on world affairs talk of the “knowledge gap” between rich and poor countries. At a recent United Nations’ summit on the “information society,” solutions to close this gap were again cited as an important means to halving world poverty. A main solution to this problem is simply to make more information available to the poor countries. Mostly, this means providing greater access to the Internet.

But do any of these statistics about trends and developments in information tell us anything about true knowledge? Where is the state of knowledge in the world today?

### **The Bible’s View on Knowledge**

The Bible has the first and last word on knowledge. *“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.”* (Psalm 19:1-4)

Knowledge has always existed. It has never changed and finds its complete genesis in God and His physical creation. Knowledge of eternal significance concerns the knowledge of God and His purposes. The only thing that has changed is man’s understanding, and more importantly, mankind’s willingness to understand. And understanding begins with the recognition of God’s

sovereignty and truth says the Bible. *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline."* (Proverbs 1:7)

Scriptures allow us no excuse for lacking this type of knowledge. All of creation points to God. *"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse."* (Romans 1:20)

Here we clearly see that knowledge is the foundational information that matters for an eternity.

### **Prophecy: Words on Knowledge**

Is an endtime boom in knowledge prophesied in the Bible? Some teachers suggest that the Bible prophesies an increase in knowledge in the last days. Bible prophecy may indeed provide some insights on the phenomenon of an endtime information boom. However, as we shall see, rather than prophesying a rise in knowledge, it is a boom in ignorance that will mark an endtime world. An increase in information — trivia, distractions and cares of this world — is definitely in alignment with last day trends and developments. As we have reviewed, information — the vast, vast preponderance of which is total trivia — has definitely boomed.

As mentioned, some do interpret scripture as predicting an endtime boom in knowledge. A popular proof text is found in Daniel 12:4. *"But you, Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge."* Some also infer from this verse that not only will knowledge increase but also travel. For a number of reasons, it is not likely that this text refers to such phenomena at all. In the first instance, it would be difficult to conclude that this passage refers to more knowledge in the form of new revelation. Here the original word used for "knowledge" is more aptly defined as the "act of knowing." In this sense, it is not knowledge that increases but rather the knowing of it. Also significant is the fact that this statement is mentioned right after the point that Daniel is instructed to "seal up the words." As such, this would indicate that the explanation of the vision Daniel received is closed until such time that "knowing" would unlock its message. We are safer to interpret this passage as referring to an increase in understanding of historical prophecy and scripture, not an increase of knowledge in its original sense.

Probably the most convincing argument is that since all of Daniel's prophecies are concerned with the object of the Jewish people and their future, that the statement applies purely to them. Just as the scripture, *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge"* (Hosea 4:6) is expressly spoken to the Jews, so is Daniel's prophecy of an increase of knowledge only applies to the Jews. The word knowledge here does not refer to technical and scientific information but rather to the knowing of God's plan and His laws. The prophets had often castigated the Hebrews for their lack of knowledge. *"Israel's watchmen are blind, they all lack knowledge [...]"* said Isaiah. (Isaiah 56:10) Hosea confirms that the knowledge being lacked refers to the ignorance of God and His Laws. *"Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children."* (Hosea 4:6)

During the last days, the Jewish people will again come in to an increasing understanding of their destiny and purpose. Finally, at the end of the Great Tribulation, a remnant will come into a full understanding. *"Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding. In those days, when your numbers have increased greatly in the land, declares the LORD."* (Jeremiah 3: 15-16)

Today's boom in technology and science certainly provides evidence of increased understanding (*and in that sense a body of human knowledge*). However, this phenomenon would not qualify as the meaning of the prophecy of increased knowledge. If anything, the Bible much more clearly talks about increasing ignorance and forsaking of knowledge.

### **Points to Ponder**

Information is flooding the world — technology, entertainment and media, communications networks ...etc. But only a very small fraction represents true knowledge; the knowing of God's

cosmic plans. Most of it is total trivia. Information, of course, has its uses — both good and bad. Quoting an observation on this point, *“Every increase in knowledge [information] may possibly render depravity more depraved, as well as it may increase the strength of virtue. It is in itself only power; and its value depends on its application.”*<sup>iii</sup> More information simply increases the power for good or bad.

If anything, today’s information boom is an assault upon knowledge — a distraction to its recognition and understanding. It is this aspect that finds alignment with Bible prophecy that applies to the entire world. Scripture clearly indicates that in the last days that people would be taken up with the cares and anxieties of the world and its things. (Timothy 3:1-5, James 5:1-5) It clearly is a world that is distracted and far from knowing and fearing God.

Despite this mind-jamming and diversionary onslaught, true knowledge is there for the knowing by anyone. We are given the ability to discern and to acknowledge it and to willingly respond. The Bible calls this ability prudence and wisdom. It is given to both Jews and Gentiles, and is operative in both the old and new covenants.

The truths of eternity and God’s plan for the cosmos and salvation remain secure. God preserves knowledge ... it does not change. *“The eyes of the LORD keep watch over knowledge, but he frustrates the words of the unfaithful.”* (Proverbs 22:12)

There is another prophetic aspect of today’s information explosion that speaks to us living in the Western world. It is significant that information is expanding and more accessible than ever before in these last days. Even though we live an age of institutionalized corruption and deception, anyone wishing to pursue truth can do so as perhaps never before. Key, crucial facts are all found in the public domain today — a surprising amount available free over the Internet from even the remotest parts of the earth. When this cosmos finally wraps up and humanity sits in front of the Judgment Seat, there will be no excuse for the world not to have recognized the signs of the times ... the season of Christ’s soon-coming return. There won’t be any clemency offered to the pleas of involuntary delusion, blindness, misinformation, and organized agendas of deception. The information was available all around. There will be no excuse for not being able to recognize the season of Christ’s soon coming return.

Its interpretation is unlocked by the messages and warnings found in God’s informational data base — the Bible. This information, too, has been more available than ever before — ignoring some of its corrupted versions — and its gospels more broadly accessible to the average person ... to even lambs and the simple minded. After all, the world’s population has more literacy skills that ever in history and the Bible is more available in more forms (*electronic text, recordings, printed ... etc.*) than ever in history. Moreover, understanding the most important truths of the Bible doesn’t require theological training, mysticism, allegorizing, ordainment, an ecclesiastical intermediary, secret revelation or knowledge of what certain theologians or early Fathers may have said. The Bible says what it says and God knows how to say what He means. *“You do not need anyone to teach you”* other than the Holy Spirit. (1 John 2:27) If it were otherwise, the very character of God would be in question.

The Psalmist had this prayer: *“Do good to your servant according to your word, O LORD. Teach me knowledge and good judgment, for I believe in your commands.”* (Psalm 119:65)

May we increase in knowing and understanding these very last days.

**About the Author:** Wilfred J. Hahn is a global economist/strategist. Formerly a top-ranked global analyst and one-time head of a large global investment company with worldwide operations, his writings focus on the endtime roles of money, economics and globalization. He has been quoted around the world and his writings reproduced in numerous other publications and languages. His most recent book is [The Endtime Money Snare: How to live free.](#)

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<sup>i</sup> Wired magazine, The Free and the Unfree, June 2004

<sup>ii</sup> The Financial Times. US ranks highest in knowledge economies' index. April 13, 2004.

<sup>iii</sup> Sydney Smith.