



## **Readings II in Faith & Science**

*Publication Year: 2003*

*ID: BK023*

*Note: This book is out of print.  
This is one article from the book. All the articles are available for  
download as pdf's from the ITEST web site. A complete listing of the  
articles available from this book is shown at the end of this document.*

### **“What Is Science?” “What Is Theology?” Limits and Interrelationship: Science/ Scientism, Theology/Faith**

*ID: BK023-011*

*Carla Mae Streeter, OP*



**Institute for Theological Encounter with Science and Technology**

**Cardinal Rigali Center • 20 Archbishop May Drive • Suite 3400-A • St. Louis, Missouri 63119 • USA**

**314.792.7220 • [www.faithscience.org](http://www.faithscience.org) • E-mail: [mariannepost@archstl.org](mailto:mariannepost@archstl.org)**

# **“What Is Science, ?” “What Is Theology?”**

## **Limits and Interrelationship: Science/ Scientism, Theology/Faith**

### **Science and Theology: Friends or Enemies?**

Magnets are drawn to refrigerator doors. In like manner minds are drawn to the truth about reality. We cannot resist wanting to know, to understand, to find out. This irresistible longing is what Agatha Christie mysteries are made of.

The dynamism of human intelligence is triggered by questioning. The unanswered question keeps the scientist awake at night and drives him or her into the lab or the observatory the next morning. This same dynamism drives the theologian to pour over the scriptures and the ancient texts. It tantalizes theologians with new questions not even thought of when dogmatic statements were made in their moments in history.

### **What Is Science?**

In this quest for the truth about reality, science plays a key role. The truth sought by science is the truth about contingent reality, the observable, measurable, real. The natural sciences deal with the natural world, the human sciences with the distinct role of the human in that world. Genuine science deals with probability, and each science has its own distinctive method for pursuing the truth.

In general the scientific method is built on the “method” of the mind itself. The mind gathers data by means of images. As the images continue to be received, elements of the imagery come together. Such linkage causes flashes of insight or understanding, which move instantaneously into mental concepts. A concept or idea is an insight clothed with just enough imagery to make it clear. But bright ideas are not necessarily right ideas, and so careful experimentation is done to verify the correctness of the idea. Once verified, we have what is known as scientific fact: a probable conclusion reached after careful and repeated checking. The conclusion is probable because should new data appear, the process would begin again, with possibly a new conclusion. Such in very brief terms, is scientific method. Its object is observable data and its conclusions probable and always open to the discovery of new data. Its limits are the parameters of its own field of inquiry: the observable data about chemistry, biology, sociology or psychology.

### **What Is Theology?**

Theology is called a sacred science. This is true with some important distinctions. The truth about reality that theology seeks includes transcendent reality. This is the real that is observable primarily in its effects, the real that is beyond human measurement. Theology deals with religious reality and its dynamic within human culture. Theology takes religious faith seriously as a human phenomenon, and seeks to give an explanation for faith’s role as a part of authentic human living. In other words, from the perspective of theology, human life without faith is as incomplete as a human person without eyes.

But, it could be argued, the transcendent is only experienced through human consciousness and in human history. This is the key to a theology that is really effective: it deals with the impact of religious data on cultural struggle. If theology deals with religion outside of this relationship, it runs the risk of being disembodied. If it deals only with the cultural phenomena of religion historically, it becomes religious studies or the history of religion rather than theology. Theology’s object is to deal with human relationship with the holy, and how that faith relationship effects change and the human time and culture that houses it. Because theology deals with the broader reality of the transcendent as well as the contingent, it must listen attentively to the data presented by the natural and human sciences to be able to do its work.

Theology too has a methodology. But an important distinction in methodology comes in theology's object: it draws on religious data whereas the sciences do not. Theology's method reveals why this discipline can be called a sacred science. The research that theology does draws upon religious imagery and symbol. These must be interpreted to be understood. Careful attention must be paid to what is going forward religiously in history. Differing perspectives, conclusions and outcomes must be acknowledged and evaluated. The commitment that comes with a faith position must be explored in terms of the transformation it works in human behavior. How beliefs are worded must be critiqued. Beliefs to be understood, need to be related, forming a whole faith perspective rather than mere bits and pieces. Finally, the means of communicating what theology has exposed needs to be explored. Singing, preaching and teaching can be done effectively without proselytizing, the imposition of faith on others.

## **Science and Theology: More Than Friendship**

It is not difficult to understand the intimate need these two disciplines have for one another if we do a reality check. Reality is either limited to what our senses tell us is there or it is broader than the data the senses provide. It is clear that the senses cannot give a full account for such realities as love and hatred, heroism, goodness and beauty. Yet no one would deny that the love between two people is real. The type of transcendent reality that permeates life must be accounted for or we deny a part of what is really there. Theology opens up this possibility by dealing with that part of the real beyond the usual data of the natural and human sciences. Yet theology cannot do its work if it does not receive accurately the data on reality that the sciences present to it.

When these two sciences are divorced one from the other, the result is a deformation that can work havoc in a culture. Science can degenerate into scientism, which presents itself as all there is. Life is only about what can be measured, analyzed, seen, heard, felt. All else is "unreal." When science closes in on itself in this way, it limits the human spirit to the data of sense. It ignores the fact that the data of consciousness is aware of a broader reality, and seeks to give a responsible account of it. Likewise, when theology turns a deaf ear to the sciences, it can isolate itself in a fundamentalistic pietism that can appear irrational. Neither of these distortions need take place if each discipline recognizes the contribution of the other.

The fact remains, that for the man and woman on the street, faith and reason are intimately locked in a love affair, and it behooves us to explain how they interpenetrate, neither doing violence to the other. The mind must function as it has been shown, and move from data of sense and consciousness to a grasp of full reality. Anything less is unworthy of the human spirit's search. Science presents data that is about the real. Theology broadens the horizon of the real to include that which is transcendent. Theology completes the picture that the sciences paint. Reason must be respected as it does its work. Faith penetrates reason, broadening its work to include data beyond the purely phenomenological. Faith does not replace reason, but demands that it stretch its horizon and, at times, take off its shoes before Mystery.

## **Challenges**

Our society is often afflicted with a cultural schizophrenia. What is real is what you see. Anything else is unreal. This perspective creates a split worldview, and prompts a double standard for those who profess to be "religious." Those afflicted by this double vision have a set of standards for the day to day struggle (if I don't get you, you'll get me) and another set of values for "church" settings. The prime example of this is the Mafia member, who will be present at a granddaughter's baptism on Sunday and arrange for the assassination of an enemy on Monday.

Scientism is a real danger in our technological world. Scientific research can become a god, before whose results incense is burned by devotees. Its results are seen as the real savior of culture, often resulting in the irresponsible use of knowledge and power to destroy people and nature itself.

Religious addiction is equally destructive of the culture. It attacks the total person, subjugating him or her to an unthinking, unreasonable abdication of human responsibility to question religious authority. This abdication has led to the destructive force of a Jonestown, where 900 people drank cyanide at the direction of a religious leader, or Waco, where people died in flames because of a loyalty miscalculated and misunderstood.

For culture to be whole and human we have need of the sciences to provide us with an ever developing knowledge and understanding of the world in which we live. We also have need of a discipline that gives an account of faith, and how it broadens our sense of what the really real really is. Giving each its place and allowing it to call us to human fullness is our challenge. We can settle for nothing less.

## Questions

Should a definition of theology mention God? Faith is a gift from God. What relationship is there between faith (as a gift from God) and theology? Is there a necessary connection. If so, how would you re-phrase the definition of theology - faith seeking understanding. Does faith, then, precede understanding?

How do faith and reason “interpenetrate”? It might be instructive to do a brief search through the history of Christianity to research the interaction between “church and academy.” [A good book to use to pursue this question with respect to science and Christian faith is: *Creation and the History of Science* by Christopher Kaiser, published in 1991 by Eerdmans. Also, Pope John Paul II’s letter to Fr. George Coyne, SJ on the occasion of the celebration of the tercentenary of Newton’s *Principia* supplements this paper.] Is there “science” (in a somewhat broader sense) present in the Bible itself?

How does your own theology shape your understanding of science ? and vice versa? Can you formulate a coherent position on faith and science and on the relationship between them?

<b>Readings II in Faith and Science</b>		
<b>ID</b>	<b>Article Title</b>	<b>Author</b>
BK023-001	Table of Contents	
BK023-002	Foreword	Father Robert Brungs, SJ
BK023-003	Campus Ministry Involvement	Father Vincent E. Krische
BK023-004	A History of Science and Faith	Father William A. Wallace, OP
BK023-005	Letter of Pope John Paul II	
BK023-006	The Church & Scientists: 1977 Synod of Bishops	
BK023-007	Religion and Science: Must There Be A Conflict?	Father William A. Wallace, OP
BK023-008	The Christian Notion of Freedom	Bishop John Sheets, SJ
BK023-009	The Worldview of Genesis 1-11	Reverend Hugh Beck
BK023-010	Contemporary Biotechnology in The Context of Conflicting Theological Perspectives	Donald Demarco, PhD
BK023-011	What is Science? What is Theology?	Sister Carla Mae Streeter, OP
BK023-012	Science/Religion Not on Speaking Terms in Today's World	David Byers, PhD
BK023-013	Neutrality or Alliance	Father Robert Brungs, SJ
BK023-014	Apostleship	Father Robert Brungs, SJ
BK023-015	Science Versus Religion: A Conflict of Ideas or a Clash of Wills	Richard Blackwell, PhD
BK023-016	Some Elements of the Faith/Science Apostolate	Father Robert Brungs, SJ
BK023-017	Some Historical Items	Father Robert Brungs, SJ
BK023-018	And I Will Make You Fishers of Men...	Evelyn Crump, PhD
BK023-019	The Spirituality of The Scientist	Evelyn Crump, PhD
BK023-020	An Intellectual Gap	Father Robert Brungs, SJ
BK023-021	Literalness	Father Robert Brungs, SJ
BK023-022	Praise	Father Robert Brungs, SJ
BK023-023	The Theological Task	Father Robert Brungs, SJ
BK023-024	History and Myth: The Inquisition	Robert P. Lockwood
BK023-025	Galileo and The Catholic Church	Robert P. Lockwood
BK023-026	When Faith and Reason Clash: Evolution and The Bible	Alvin Plantinga, PhD
BK023-027	Christianity and Modern Science	Rudolf Brun, PhD
BK023-028	Reflections on the Mission of a Catholic Scientist	Lucien Morren, PhD
BK023-029	Sociology	William Monahan, PhD
BK023-030	Truth for an Artist	Leonard Buckley
BK023-031	Issues of Concern	Father Robert Brungs, SJ
BK023-032	Environment and the Believer	Father Albert Fritsch, SJ
BK023-033	What Kind of Salvation?	Father Robert Brungs, SJ
BK023-034	Some Environmental Issues	Father Robert Brungs, SJ
BK023-035	The Freelands Project	Father Robert Brungs, SJ
BK023-036	Altered Perception	Father Robert Brungs, SJ
BK023-037	Theologians Visit the Environment	John Kinney, PE, DEE
BK023-038	Consumption of Natural Resources	Gregory Pouch, PhD
BK023-039	Reproductive Biology	Allyson Chavez Larkin, MD
BK023-040	Holistic Sexuality: A Proper Focus for the Scientist	Hanna Klaus, MD, FACOG
BK023-041	Sociobiology: The New Religion	Richard Blackwell, PhD
BK023-042	Animal Research	Father Robert Brungs, SJ

BK023-043	Patenting of Biological Materials	David Saliwanchik, Esq.
BK023-044	The Inner Environment	Robert Z. Greenley, PhD
BK023-045	What are the Possibilities of Human Cloning?	Robert Collier, PhD
BK023-046	Cloning	Father Robert Brungs, SJ
BK023-047	Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research Ethics in The Face Of Uncertainty	Father Kevin Fitzgerald, SJ
BK023-048	Time: The Falsest God Of All	Thomas Sheahen, PhD
BK023-049	Six Magic Numbers in Physics	Thomas Sheahen, PhD
BK023-050	On The Domestication Of Science	John Matschiner, PhD
BK023-051	Chance/Chaos Versus A Planned Design in The Universe: Pointers To God?	Robert Z. Greenley, PhD
BK023-052	Nuclear Waste	Father Robert Brungs, SJ
BK023-053	Seeming Discovery On Mars	Father Robert Brungs, SJ
BK023-054	The Information Superhighway	Bishop Mark Hurley
BK023-055	Is Secular Education Adequate for the Pursuit of Truth in Science?	Robert Z. Greenley, PhD