



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.*

Neutrality or Alliance

ID: BK023-013

Father Robert Brungs, SJ
Director of ITEST
Associate Professor (Emeritus) of Physics
Saint Louis University



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 • E-mail: mariannepost@archstl.org

Neutrality or Alliance

[Robert Brungs, SJ, Director of ITEST, received his AB in Classics from Bellarmine College, Plattsburgh, New York and a PhL. From Fordham University. He earned a PhD in Physics from Saint Louis University and a Licentiate in Sacred Theology (STL) from Woodstock College in Maryland. Father Brungs has served as a consultant for the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Believers and the Committee on Science and Human Values of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. He has also held consultantships for several other organizations. He is the author of several books dealing with aspects of the faith/science relationship (see for example, **The Vineyard, Scientists in the Church**, co-edited with Eva-Maria Amrhein located on the ITEST web site) and many articles on the same topic. He taught physics and theology at Saint Louis University for several years before assuming full time duties with ITEST.]

There are many aspects to faith/science work. That work includes the high-level contacts between the Catholic Bishops' Committee on Science and Human Values and a national scientific organization. Another aspect is theology/science work, which, up to this time, has taken place largely between physicists and theologians. Another aspect can be seen in bioethics and environmental work. Still other aspects take a more evangelical approach, realizing that we greatly need the ministry of "bench scientists" pointing to the compatibility of religion and science simply by their lives in science. Another aspect is working with students in both science and theology, acquainting them with the intellectual and spiritual riches of their faith and the importance of scientific knowledge to that faith. The above is not an exhaustive listing of the "rooms in our Father's house." While only a partial list, it shows the multiple aspects of faith/ science work.

Beside the many things to be done there is another aspect of faith/science work to be considered. Why are these things to be done? What is the goal? Again, there are perhaps as many sub-goals as there are groups or individual members of those groups. Although the ultimate goal of all Christians working in this area is the glory of God through the strengthening of the Church, there are many sub-strategies and tactics to be pursued-all of them important to the total effort. For years a particular tactic and strategy was "clearing the ground" of the debris of a totally unnecessary conflict between scientists and the faithful. Two names dominate this struggle in the minds of scientists: Galileo and Darwin. Thus, it was (and is) important to "detoxify" the intellectual atmosphere. The "air pollution" in this particular neighborhood of the city of man and God is still far from eliminated. Nonetheless, the breathing seems somewhat easier. We can put it briefly: for a long time we were, among other things, struggling simply for a "truce" in the war between science and religion, some kind of neutrality.

Science is becoming aware that all is not well in its own bailiwick. There is no single cause for the growth of this awareness. But the complacency dominating that community shows some signs of wear -- if I may mix metaphors. This gives us in faith/science work another model to propose -- that of ally. It is an offer that will be resisted by those who couldn't accept even neutrality. But, more for our sake and for our goals -- for our love for science and our Christian faith -- we must offer an alliance to those beginning to feel themselves beleaguered. The faith is definitely able to help the newly more self-conscious scientists. Why would scientists want an alliance with believers?

It is best to begin with a major element in the new situation: the book entitled *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and Its Quarrels with Science* by Paul R. Gross and Norman Levitt. This is an important study and many of us who work in an academic milieu will recognize many of the references to university life in the latter 20th century. We may even recognize some of the authors' "demons." After a short description of what the authors call "muddleheadedness" they identify what (and whom) they mean by the "academic left."

The category, academic left, is mainly comprised of humanists and social scientists. Working natural scientists rarely show up in this group. What defines these academics as much as anything else is a deep concern with cultural issues and a commitment to the notion that fundamental political change is needed right now and can be had only through revolutionary processes rooted in a wholesale revision of cultural categories.

This apocalyptic break with things-as-they-are is supposed to displace a vast array of received cultural values and substitute an entirely novel ethos. In these new categories feminism, for example, means a complete overthrow of traditional gender categories, with all their conscious and unconscious postulates. By the same token, racial justice demands the forging of an entirely new culture, in which “black” (or “African”) values will have at least equal standing with “white” values. Similarly, environmentalism, as understood and preached on the academic left, ranges beyond concrete measures to eliminate pollution or to avoid extinction of species and elimination of habitats. Rather, it envisions a transcendence of the values of Western industrial society and the restoration of an imagined prelapsarian harmony to humanity’s relation with nature.

Please note apocalyptic break with things-as-they-are. We shall have reason to return to it later. The authors, then, pinpoint more exactly what they mean by the academic left and why it is of such concern.

Postmodernism, however, is but one of the strands from which the academic left weaves its indictment (of science). Other notions both new and old enter into the cloth. The traditional Marxist view that what we think of as science is really “bourgeois” science, a superstructural manifestation of the capitalist order, recurs with predictable regularity, in its own right or refurbished as the doctrine of “cultural constructivism.” The radical feminist view that science, like every other intellectual structure of modern society, is poisoned and corrupted by an ineradicable gender bias, is another vitally important element. An analogous accusation comes from multiculturalists, who view “Western” science as inherently inaccurate and incomplete by virtue of its failure to incorporate the full range of cultural perspectives. A certain strain of radical environmentalism condemns science as embodying the instrumentalism and alienation from direct experience of nature which are the twin sources of an eventual (or imminent) ecological doomsday.

...It must be stressed -- and we are compelled to stress it throughout the discussion to follow -- that this is not a self-consistent body of doctrine...what enables them to coexist congenially, in spite of gross logical inconsistencies, is a shared sense of injury, resentment, and indignation against modern science.

This is the “the academic left” whom the authors see as the problem. Throughout the book the authors pay tribute to their own understanding of the Enlightenment. It seems that by Enlightenment they mean Progress, so beloved of 19th century intellectuals.

Although the authors bend over backwards to maintain their “liberal credentials,” they name names and pursue “postmodernists” relentlessly, though fairly. This book is important for those who love science. Despite that, the authors manifest an enormous blindspot toward Christianity and Judaism. It does not seem to enter their minds that their greatest ally in addressing the world of “things-as-they-are” are Christianity and Judaism. Whenever they mention religion they seem to sneer. As is de rigueur in their milieu, their greatest heroes are Galileo and Darwin. Having such heroes automatically, at least in their view of “things-as-they-are,” makes Christianity a villain. They give no indication of any understanding of Christianity. For example:

In its ineluctable dynamic, the science of the turn of the eighteenth century could not be contained within the shell of any theological system. It was, in important ways, already fully modern. Open-endedness is the vital principle at stake here. It constitutes the life-blood of ongoing science. Newton said it best: an ‘ocean of truth’ lies undiscovered before us. Unless we are unlucky, this will always be the case.

It does not seem to occur to the authors that this statement must be made as well about Christian theology. Christianity cannot be contained within the shell of any theological system. Further, two other aspects of Christianity seem to escape Gross and Levitt: first, the primary goal of Christianity is salvation, not reason; second, faith is not irrational. On this second point let me quote briefly from the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in its section on the Enlightenment:

Christianity was rooted in both reason and revelation, and, according to the Fathers and doctors of the church, these sources were not in conflict; revelation simply had the higher truth.

Christians have defined theology as *fides quaerens intellectum*, faith seeking understanding. One does not seek for something which one already has. Theology does not possess the truth. Christian thought, in reality, is more open-ended than science, since it sees a world beyond the methods and concepts of science. This is not the place to pursue this particular idea.

Whatever else we might say about Galileo and his famous “persecution,” we can at least say that it is more complicated than Gross and Levitt make it seem. It is curious that the authors, like many other scientists and their apologists, continue to go back 350 years to prove the Church’s “conflict” with science. Despite their going back 350 years, Gross and Levitt are put out because The Biology and Gender Study Group criticizes a book published in 1890. I am not suggesting that Gross and Levitt are incorrect in criticizing this Study Group. But should they stress that the book being attacked was written in 1890? That’s almost 260 years after the Galileo case. If they can criticize the Church for an event in 1633 they shouldn’t be so upset that others criticize a book written in 1890. Indeed, scientific understanding has changed over the years. But then, so has the church’s understanding changed. These authors give little indication of being aware of the fact, much less the content of that change. I wonder how scientists like Gross and Levitt would react if religionists went back to the writings and theories of Paracelsus or Descartes to show how benighted science is. We would not have to go back that far; we could go back to Laplace’s nebulosity theory at the beginning of the 19th century.

Things As They Are

Gross and Levitt are right to be concerned with those who think science’s study of the world-as-it is is merely a product of white, European male values and thus culture bound, sexist and so on. Strangely enough, Christians should also be worried about precisely the same phenomenon for exactly the same reasons. Neither science nor faith can operate properly in a world-as-it-ought-to be, in some utopia (or dystopia). As Christians we believe that God (WHO IS) created the universe. We believe he sent his Son to redeem that world. God having created the world, saved it after humans sinned. We believe that the Church is the body of Christ, that it is his historical (though sacramental) presence in the world. We must always be present to him in the world, the only world we have. Christianity is not some religious or spiritual never-never land. It lives and grows only in the world that is.

It may seem to us that for many centuries, even for a millennium, the Church was more concerned with abstract things. How often have we heard the old canard about how many angels can dance on the head of a pin? (I have never been able to find that in the theological texts and I would deeply appreciate it if anyone who has come across it would send me the references.) We must remember, even if we are deeply hostile to the kind of abstraction in which the Scholastics engaged, that these were real people trying to answer real questions put to them by other real people. We, from our superior perch on the tree of knowledge (please note that knowledge is not necessarily the same as wisdom), may find the arguments ludicrous or perhaps scandalous. But, these were the questions that the learned culture was asking and which the Scholastic philosophers and theologians were trying to answer. We cannot forget that these scholars were convinced that their answers had important ramifications in the real world in which people were trying to live lives worthy of the Lord. That the arguments and methods proceeded into sterility cannot be denied. It is salutary for us to realize that future generations, from their (hopefully) still higher perch, may find our questions and answers equally ludicrous and sterile. A little humility is not out of place.

Almost from its beginnings Christianity has tried to answer the questions put to it by both the physical universe itself and the culture of the time. Within a dozen years of the death of Christ, the Church in Jerusalem faced an issue of enormous importance, whether or not to preach the Good News of Christ to the pagans. I doubt that we can begin to understand what a wrenching question this was. The Church was still young and, humanly speaking, fragile. Nonetheless, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the leaders decided that the pagans were indeed called to Christ equally with the Jews. That was a critical decision.

Other “paradigm shattering” discoveries (religious, political, scientific, intellectual) have occurred since the first century. I’d mention the “Christianization” of the Roman Empire and its later collapse, the non-occurrence of the “end-time” at the beginning of this millennium, the Black Death, the “discovery” of the New World, the Copernican model of the solar system, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, two World Wars, etc. The Church dealt with these issues. Whether or not she dealt well with any or all of them is a matter of judgment. But she was not living in an abstract never-never land when dealing with them.

We (along with our Jewish brothers and sisters) should know by now that God loves to surprise us. We need think only of Gideon or of Mary of Nazareth to be aware of that. I believe that most Christians would be enthralled by valid evidence of an artifact on Mars. That would sing of the greatness of God. I would be delighted to have a real-world opportunity to reflect on and learn from an unexpected appreciation of the universe and of God’s will for it. Christians (though not all would) should rejoice in any new, deepening understanding of the history of the cosmos and of its future.

We must emphasize that the primary concern of the faith is salvation. It is not primarily the knowledge that comes through reasoning. We should not forget Paul’s affirmation in 1 Corinthians: “We all have knowledge”; yes, that is so, but knowledge gives self-importance -- it is love that makes the building grow. . . . But any man who loves God is known by him” (1 Cor 8:1-3). Salvation is far more related to love (God’s love for us and our response) than it is to “knowledge.” To put it briefly, salvation demands knowledge (at least the knowledge that God loves us and sent his Son into this world); rational knowledge does not demand salvation.

Our cooperation with God in salvation is not simply an individual matter. By our baptism we are members of a consecrated race set apart to sing his praises. Do we sing more beautifully the praise of the Creator by learning as much as we possibly can about creation? The Church has thought so. Almost from the very beginning, Christianity’s relation to “the academy” has been an important part of spreading the Good News.

It would be helpful if scientists would look beyond Galileo for the foundations of their work and ideas. But we must realize that our Christian intellectual activity is carried on in the world-that-is to the best of our understanding. If the “academic left” (of the culture and the Church) gives real evidence of opening the “learned community” (of the culture and of the Church) to a deeper understanding of the world-as-it-is, we have an obligation to consider that evidence and ideas very thoughtfully. But, for the Christian, these new ideas and approaches must be primarily conducive to salvation. This is certainly the burden of recent papal statements.

Reasoning and faith are not in opposition. In 1893, in an Encyclical on Scripture, *Providentissimus Deus*, Pope Leo XIII wrote:

There can never, indeed, be any real discrepancy between the theologian and the physicist, as long as each confines himself within his own lines, and both are careful, as St. Augustine warns us, “not to make rash assertions, or to assert what is not known as known (Augustine, *In. Gen. op. imperf. ix. 30*.)” If dissension should arise between them, here is the rule also laid down by St. Augustine, for the theologian: “Whatever they can really demonstrate to be true of physical nature we must show to be capable of reconciliation with our Scriptures; and whatever they assert in their treatises which is contrary to these Scriptures of ours, that is to the Catholic faith, we must either prove it as well as we can to be entirely false, or at all events we must, without the slightest hesitation, believe it to be so (Augustine, *De Gen. ad litt. i. 21, 42*.)” To understand how just is the rule here formulated we must remember, first, that the sacred writers, or, to speak more accurately, the Holy Ghost “who spoke by them, did not intend to teach men these things (the essential nature of the things of the visible universe), things no way profitable unto salvation (Augustine, *ib. ii. 9, 20*.)” Hence they did not seek to penetrate the secrets of nature, but rather described and dealt with things in more or less figurative language, or in terms which were commonly used at the time, and which in many instances are in daily use at this day, even by the most eminent men of science. . .

...in commenting on passages where physical matters occur, they [the Fathers] have sometimes expressed the ideas of their own times, and thus made statements which in these days have been abandoned as incorrect. . . . The Catholic interpreter, although he should show that those facts of natural science which investigators affirm to be now quite certain are not contrary to the Scripture rightly explained, must, nevertheless, always bear in mind that much which has been held and proved as certain has afterwards been called into question and rejected. And if writers on physics travel outside the boundaries of their own branch, and carry their erroneous teaching into the domain of philosophy, let them be handed over to philosophers for refutation.

Pope Leo, later in the same encyclical made statements that are still extremely important for those of us in faith and science:

It (defense of the Bible) is an enterprise in which we have a right to expect the cooperation of all those Catholics who have acquired reputation in any branch of learning whatever. As in the past, so at the present time, the Church is never without the graceful support of her accomplished children; may their service to the Faith grow and increase! [T]he bitter tongues of objectors will be silenced, or at least they will not dare to insist so shamelessly that faith is the enemy of science, when they see that scientific men of eminence in their profession show toward faith the most marked honor and respect.

In a message given at a ceremony of the tercentenary of Newton's Principia, Pope John Paul II called for dialogue and common searching between science and theology. While Leo XIII was concerned primarily with defense of the Sacred Scripture, John Paul II has a broader agenda:

By encouraging openness between the Church and the scientific communities, we are not envisioning a disciplinary unity between theology and science like that which exists within a given scientific field or within theology proper. As dialogue and common searching continue, there will be growth towards mutual understanding and a gradual uncovering of common concerns which will provide the basis for further research and discussion. Exactly what form that will take must be left to the future. What is important . . . is that the dialogue should continue and grow in depth and scope. . . . What is critically important is that each discipline should continue to enrich, nourish and challenge the other to be more fully what it can be and to contribute to our vision of who we are and who we are becoming.

Pope John Paul II has carried the apostolic faith/science effort far beyond that sought, legitimately, by Pope Leo XIII. Leo was primarily concerned with "neutrality"; John Paul is authentically desirous of alliance. The latter sees the need for at least some theologians to understand science in order that the development of doctrine occur. Again, that development can take place only in contact with the world-that-is, with the real thoughts of real people. Development of doctrine, like any other aspect of Christian living, can only take place in the real world-as-it-is. We have to work toward an alliance both for the sake of the Gospel and for the ultimate good (or betterment) of science. This is not to say that an alliance, even if accepted, will result in friendship -- at least in the foreseeable future. There is still a great deal of animosity and/ or arrogance in the scientific community, matched by an almost immovable apathy in the theological community. There is scientific one-up-manship and theological defensiveness disguised as indifference. Yet, both communities are being attacked by the same forces --deconstructionism, feminism, multi-culturalism, environmentalism and other contemporary isms in the sense that Gross and Levitt describe them.

Questions

It is clear that those of us in faith/science work should continue to work at "clearing away the debris" while at the same time we should begin to work at building an alliance. We have to do this at every level of the faith/science apostolate, "in season and out of season."

How can we best "build an alliance" between science and faith in an age of unbelief? Since faith and science

arrive at “truth” from different perspectives, would it be more “logical” to treat each entity separately and not try to effect an alliance? Why? Why not?

What does the current controversy over “Intelligent Design” portend for the relationship between faith and science? What do conflicts such as this bring to faith/science work, since many scientists are absolutely close-minded about even the possibility of some design? What does the “no intelligent design” say about creation? What does it say about human beings - the product of a “purposeless design - who act out of a sense of purpose? How does Aristotle’s statement that all agents act out of a sense of purpose come into the question? Does it matter? Final cause has dropped out of the argument? Does that make the argument fruitless and self-contradictory?

“Almost from the very beginning, Christianity’s relation to “the academy” has been an important part of spreading the Good News.” Has the academy really helped in the spreading the Good News? In the Middle Ages? In the Enlightenment? Now? Can the “Good News” be spread in a time of deep conflict? Why? How? Does it matter?

“We must emphasize that the primary concern of the faith is salvation. It is not primarily the knowledge that comes through reasoning. We should not forget Paul’s affirmation in 1 Corinthians: “We all have knowledge’; yes, that is so, but knowledge gives self-importance -- it is love that makes the building grow. . . . But any man who loves God is known by him” (1 Cor 8:1-3). Salvation is far more related to love (God’s love for us and our response) than it is to “knowledge.” To put it briefly, salvation demands knowledge (at least the knowledge that God loves us and sent his Son into this world); rational knowledge does not demand salvation.” What is the difference between knowledge that comes from regard (through love) and that which is discursive? Are there really at least two distinct ways of knowing? What is intuition? Is it valid knowledge. Discuss knowledge that comes from love and acceptance.

Readings II in Faith and Science		
ID	Article Title	Author
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