



Readings II in Faith & Science

Publication Year: 2003

ID: BK023

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Some Elements of the Faith/Science Apostolate

ID: BK023-016

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Some Elements of the Faith/Science Apostolate

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What is the faith/science apostolate? Why should we be interested in it? Since faith/science is many things, it's best to start with what it is not. It is not the development of a "super-discipline" integrating science and theology. It is not the development of a science-based religion nor the formation of a religion-based science. The database for science must remain physical nature. Its methodology must remain what it is. Faith/science notwithstanding, the dielectric constant of sodium will remain the same and the human genome will not be different. The database of the faith must remain revelation. Our faith cannot rest, say, on a paleontological theory of human origins. Christian belief on original sin cannot be explained by anthropology or psychology.

Science, as Fr. Stanley Jaki, OSB defines it, is "the quantitative study of the quantitative aspects of things in motion." This definition, not surprisingly, is most apt for physics, but it applies to all the sciences in some measure. Faith, on the other hand, is, as St. Paul says, hearing God and responding to Him. Faith is a continuing reconstruction of our lives, gradually relating all things in our lives to God. These different human enterprises are not integrable in a single human discipline. They are to be integrated in a single human life. It's difficult to integrate sleeping and studying in a single act, but a single person is able to do both. A person can be a true believer in the Lord and very proficient in science. Should Catholics in science try to combine the two? If so, why? If not, should Catholics be scientists at all? What can science contribute to the Faith and what can the Faith contribute to science?

Strangely enough, one great contribution science can make to the Church (and the Faith) is its deep concern with matter. The Faith has not always been well served by theology. This is especially true of theologies that have overstressed the "soul" almost to the exclusion of the body. Christianity is very definitely NOT an ethereal religion. It is belief in a Mystery (God), yes. But it is belief in a God who has literally become human, of the same stock as ourselves. It is belief in God who is immanent in His creation as well as transcendent to it. It is belief in the Second Person of the Trinity who became and remains human.

St. Paul tells us in the 8th chapter of Romans that all of creation awaits the same freedom as the Sons of God -- creation looks forward to being saved along with us. Paul tells us that we wait in hope for the resurrection (redemption) of our bodies. He does not say that we are awaiting delivery from our bodies. We are called to be transfigured humans, enlivened by the Holy Spirit; we are not called to be angels.

Christianity is an "earthy" religion, concerned with the creation, which Paul assures us in the Letter to the Colossians, is created in the beginning in Christ and finds its unity in him. The Council of Chalcedon noted seven times that the Word (St. John's name for the Second Person of the Trinity) and Jesus of Nazareth, Mary's son, are one and the same. This clearly means that the cosmos was created in Jesus Christ in the beginning and that he, risen and physically ascended, is its unity. How "earthy" can we get?

Christianity, alone of all the great religions, began in a city. The scriptural authors, especially John, refer to the saved universe as the New Jerusalem -- a City, not a Garden. We can't prove much from that, but it is worth pondering. If we rely on scripture we do not get a harps-and clouds notion of heaven. It is a very old Christian orthodoxy that views heaven as an unending ascent of all creation back to God.

More than simply a corrective for the “over-ensouling” of Christian thought, science as we know it is concerned basically with specific things. (It would be a good session for scientists to discuss where modern science is heading, especially computer-simulated and computer-generated science.) We have no evidence in Scripture or authentic Christian Tradition that God is concerned with generalities. Our God is a God of specificity. Christianity is not concerned with generalities, even though we sometimes seem to state theologically that it is. It is concerned with individual people’s relation with God as members of a people-set-apart. In and through the response of the “chosen people” God is concerned about the salvation of all things. We can learn from science about God’s action in creation and in its destiny.

Further, if pursued correctly, science can help us in our efforts to make the world better for other creatures. We like to think that we are advanced scientifically and technologically, yet we still use “brute force” (melting and re-configuring) in handling most materials. Still, science is moving us into more sophisticated ways of using the beneficial properties of materials. Solid state physics (electronics) is an example of this. Science can aid our efforts to mitigate the effects of our activities on our environment. It can help us create beauty rather than create, or settle for, ugliness.

What, however, can faith add to our science? It will not create a “new science” nor make laboratory work easier or more successful. Again, let’s start with what it will not do. In talking about our life in Christ Romano Guardini states:

The person himself is changed by his daily contact with Christ, becoming more and more similar to his model. The believer remains in his profession; he remains the same trader, postman, doctor that he was, with the same duties. The machine does not function better in his hand than in that of another; the diagnosis is not easier than it was, yet work performed in Christ is somehow different. No longer over-estimated, but properly evaluated, it assumes a new dignity and earnestness; is performed with a new conscientiousness. . . . In Christ all things are changed.

What is changed in the way we do science? First, our consciousness and our motivation is changed. It is wondrously focused on Christ as the destiny of the material world. It motivates us to look beyond the actual work on the bench to consider the unity of all creation, including the part of it on which we’re working. This should enhance our respect for the matter on which we’re working as well as our realization that what we’re doing has an impact on the final state of the cosmos. It should help us see the beauty in (and of) the world and realize that it has a destiny like ours in God’s will for all created reality. We realize that the matter we work with (whether organic or inorganic) is more than a material substrate which we can manipulate in an arbitrary fashion. It gives a truer personal recognition of beauty, although not necessarily in an intellectual manner. We probably can’t define beauty more accurately, but we can relate to it better.

Second, Faith can help supply a sense of direction for science. Science rarely provides the direction of its advance. Science and technology are means to an end. What determines the direction of science, which sciences are in, what research is funded and what research is not? These are usually propelled by social or political ends, not by the needs of the discipline. Physicists recognize this when they recall that one of the great impulses for physics in the seventeenth century was the search for a way to measure longitude at sea (a great benefit for navies and merchant seamen) and more recently the Manhattan Project. At present, AIDS research is a prime example of this. The ends of scientific research are not a matter of the science as such. Scientific development now takes place in a kind of religious and moral vacuum. Neither the church(es) nor other religious groups have been willing or able to give any serious meaning or orientation to the accelerating growth of scientific discovery and its technological application. This situation can best be changed from within the scientific community by scientists imbued with the life of Christ.

In essence, Faith can be a great help in determining the end (the purpose) of science and its application. This less a function of religious organization than of the individual Christian in science working informally or formally

with others in science. The greatest contribution of the Faith to science is the Christian in science. Such people are Christ's gifts to science.

St. Paul assures us that, when we are baptized, we die and rise in Christ and live with Christ. Paul tells us that we live Christ's life, think his thoughts and love with his love. We are Christ now in the world to the extent that we are in union with him. The closer we are to him, the more he is present in us and in our work, including our scientific work. Is this something that is immediately evident to our colleagues and even to ourselves? No. It is evident to us only in faith. The important thing, however, is that it is evident to God. It will enhance our work and our science because it is now gifted with Christ, in us.

We have to realize that Christ's life in us makes us, ipso facto members of a people set apart to sing God's praises. That is what baptism -- our birth into Christ -- does. In us Christ is present in the scientific world and so is the Church. It is present not as a tyrant over science but as the leaven of science, helping it to achieve an end greater than itself. In us science is present in the Church as a gift back to God. It is this mutual gift that defines our role as Christians in science.

One of the most pernicious myths now abroad in the world is that science and faith (religion) are incompatible. The primary element in the faith/science apostolate -- the primary obligation and the primary opportunity -- is the destruction of this myth in and by our living our scientific vocation in the church and our faith in the scientific community. A corollary to the myth of incompatibility is the equally mythic "objectivity of science" and "subjectivity of belief." The Church's objective historical role in Christ in the return of the universe to the Father will be manifest in our work in the scientific enterprise.

Our scientific work done in union with Christ in the church is worship. Scientific work done by us in Christ is worship. It is part of the praise which "the people set apart" pays to God. Worship is our calling and privilege in God's world. It is our basic response to God's gift to us in creating the universe and sending his Son to redeem it from decay and evil and to return it to him transfigured by the Holy Spirit. This is our role. Our pursuit of science is a part of our worshipful response to God's will for a glorious and unending destiny for creation.

Questions

Is it appropriate to try to integrate Science and Faith into a single discipline? Why? Why not? What contribution, if any, can science make to faith (and the church) and vice versa -- can faith (and the church) make to science?

Father Stanley Jaki, OSB defines science as "the quantitative study of the quantitative aspects of things in motion." This definition, not surprisingly, is most apt for physics, but it applies to all the sciences in some measure. Is it a satisfactory definition of all empirical sciences? What does it tell us about "scientific information about creation, evolution, genetics, neurosciences, God?"

Faith is, as St. Paul says, hearing God and responding to Him. Faith is a continuing reconstruction of our lives, gradually relating all things in our lives to God. Can faith tell us anything about creation, evolution, or genetics? Does faith give us a position about the nature of man? Of the universe? Of God?

These different human enterprises are not integratable in a single human discipline. They are to be integrated in a single human life Christians can certainly pursue science and scientific interests with little or no concern for the place of faith. But can Christians feel the same way about "Scientism"? about a faith built on "scientific principles"? Are the "scientific principles" of such philosophies little more than personal prejudices clothed with language adapted from science and technology?

What does this sentence mean: "The greatest contribution of the Faith to science is the Christian in science. Such people are Christ's gifts to science"? Is it true? What more can Christianity give to science than living, breathing

people committed to its progress? Can Christianity also give to science a sense of purpose? Science does not have one of its own. Did trying to find longitude at sea at one time contribute a purpose to science? Did trying to build an atom bomb give a sense of purpose to the scientific community? Did trying to sequence and map the human genome (and after it other genomes) give a purpose to genetics?

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