



Science/Technology Education in Church-Related Colleges and Universities

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Why Church-Related Institutions Should be Involved in Science/Technology Education

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Why Church-Related Institutions Should be Involved in Science/Technology Education

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While it is not necessary to be a believer in God to be a scientist, to be a complete person, one needs to have developed some of the wonder and questioning that characterize scientists. The oft-quoted statement of Irenaeus: “The glory of God is man (and woman) fully alive,” implies that all human gifts and qualities be nurtured and developed. The pre-school child has the wonder and curiosity of the scientist. What happens to this child in school? Is this part of his/her human potential developed? If not, why not? What can be done to develop the wonder and curiosity of the next generation?

Why should church-related institutions train scientists and technologists? These schools have an edge on transmitting values and they have the capability to educate and form integrated, spiritual graduates. The scientific world, as much as the world of business, needs the presence of such individuals. Only in this way will there be leaven in the scientific community.

In most church-related institutions faculty have some advantages, over their peers in state schools. They have a great deal of latitude in developing courses and curricula. They also have true academic freedom. They can present values related to science and technology. They can openly discuss both opposing scientific views and opposing moral views. They can help students develop the skills of critical thinking in relation to science and its applications. Graduates who have had this kind of education should be able to see the possible dangers in certain aspects of research and to question how and why they are done.

While *The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* is addressed specifically to Roman Catholic Christians, it is not limited or limiting. Paragraph 5 states:

Christ’s redemptive work, while essentially concerned with the salvation of men, includes also the renewal of the whole temporal order. Hence the mission of the Church is not only to bring the message and grace of Christ to men but also to penetrate and perfect the temporal order with the spirit of the Gospel. In fulfilling this mission of the Church, the Christian laity exercise their apostolate both in the Church and in the world, in both the spiritual and the temporal orders. These orders, although distinct, are so connected in the singular plan of God that he himself intends to raise up the whole world again in Christ and to make it a new creation, initially on earth and completely on the last day. In both orders the layman, being simultaneously a believer and a citizen, should be continuously led by the same Christian conscience.

Among the “citizens” referred to above are many specialists. The increase in scientific knowledge and in its applications in this century has resulted in a larger percentage of citizens who are “expert” scientists and technologists. Science and technology permeate almost every aspect of our lives. We need to have those who are believers, citizens, *and* scientists in this world.

How are church-related institutions going to carry out this commitment, if it does not extend from the beginning to the end of formal education?

We not only need the believer scientists in the laboratories, but we need those who are believers, scientists, educators in our institutions. Church-related universities need to have strong graduate programs in the sciences and technologies both for the research and the development of young faculty. At the undergraduate level, colleges need to do the same thing. The faculty at this level usually have the added obligation to interest, excite, and instruct the non-science major (the believer-citizen).

Majors don't usually become interested in science as college freshmen. The wonder and curiosity of the small child and his/her interest in the world must be nurtured from pre-school through high-school. Therefore, the training of science-educators has to be part of the mission of some institutions.

As I was beginning to work on this paper, I spent some time reading catalogues of church-related institutions. Specifically I looked at the institutional philosophy and/or mission statement. There is great variety, but there is also much sameness! The quotations presented here are typical and apply to the whole student body. They show a verbal commitment to scientific and technological education:

“to develop humanistic, scientific, and computer literacy” (Chaminade, Roman Catholic)

“to develop critical awareness of the impact of science, technology, economic, literacy, political and social scientific developments on society” (Lindenwood, Presbyterian)

“to develop a strong understanding of the physical world” (William Penn, Quaker Christian)

“to show that there is no dichotomy between faith and ideas” (Valpariso, Lutheran).

To continue to have departments in the sciences and in technology is increasingly more expensive. If it is a priority, there will be a way found to continue and even increase institutional commitment to the sciences. As a group, or as individuals, ITEST members may be able to influence the trustees, administrators, and financial officers of colleges and universities to give an edge to science and technology.

No institution can be everything to everyone. Creative collaborative efforts may be a partial answer to the practical aspects of science education. Collaboration may also broaden the influence of church-related institutions.

If we cannot continue and/or increase our efforts, the gap between science and religion will continue to widen and the disunity continue to grow.

As a hopeful note, I would like to include the following opinion on religion and space technology.

*The article, “Religion and Space Technology,” on the following page is reprinted with permission, from **The Futurist**, published by the World Future Society, 4916 Saint Elmo Avenue, Bethesda, Maryland 20814.*

Future View Opinion

Religion and Space Technology

Man has always looked to the heavens for salvation. Where politics and religion have failed to achieve brotherhood, we look to space technology to provide an answer, as with the proposed joint U.S.-Soviet mission to Mars. Space technology, at least in the field of satellite communications, has probably done more to unite the world than many thousands of political and religious leaders could ever do.

The religious implications of the Space Age are awesome. Already, theories of “ancient astronauts” are challenging our theology. One proposed space technology, terraforming, would transform planets to make them viable for mankind. For example, Mars’s polar icecaps could be melted to create oceans and an atmosphere capable of sustaining human life. Such terraforming projects would make us nothing less than co-workers with God in the work of creation.

How will terraforming influence religion? If we can congratulate the child who aspires to be like his father, might we not also take pride when mankind, born in God’s image, tries to emulate the Creator? Clearly, our technology and our religion are at a crossroads. While the medical field now wrestles with the religious implications of euthanasia, reproductive technologies, and birth control, our “playing God” in space may create future religious controversy.

Will our conquest of space lead the world astray from God? I would suggest that our newfound powers are not leading us apart from God, but rather toward the day when we become a new legion of “angels,” doing the work of our Creator while still in awe of the divine intelligence that brought forth the cosmos out of chaos.

Space has become the new setting for religious experience, even in recent fiction. While church attendance dwindles, people line up in droves at movie theaters to see the celestials (i.e., angels) of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, 2010, and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and the Messiahs from heaven in the films *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* and *Superman*.

These “religious” space films parallel -- and in some cases were influenced by -- the dawn of our Space Age. The appeal of *Star Trek* is its optimistic view of a coming brotherhood of man (i.e., Kingdom of God). Author Robert Short, in his book *The Gospel from Outer Space* (1983), points out that in the *Star Wars* saga “many of the teachings that Ben Kenobi and Yoda give to Luke about ‘the Force’ sound as if they could have been taken directly from the teachings of Jesus.” Are space-related films replacing the spiritual inspiration traditionally found in the church? It would appear so.

Will the exodus of man into space be incorporated into some Scripture of the future? Are we too close to our own great accomplishments in space to understand their true religious significance? Is space the Holy Land of tomorrow?

Some space enthusiasts consider themselves disciples of a new era in human history. The new frontier promises to be an uplifting experience in more ways than one. Perhaps noted visionary Barbara Marx Hubbard said it best:

One school of futurist thinking sees mankind on the verge of a tremendous leap forward—a kind of leap into the cosmos, reminiscent of the emergence of the first amphibians onto land in primeval times. People of this school of futurist thinking have what might be described as a religious yearning for the future and for the transformation of man and his civilization into something of cosmic greatness.

For too long, the image of the space activist has been that of a technocrat at odds with anything seemingly religious in nature. But this is not the case. Let no one doubt the spirituality that empowers the space movement. In the name of our Maker, we shall pierce the darkness of space and bring forth light.

Mitchell Gordon
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