



## **The Vineyard: Scientists in the Church**

*Publication Year: 1992*

*ID: BK018*

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### **Foreword**

*ID: BK018-002*

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## **About the Authors:**

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Father Brungs has written and lectured extensively on faith/science issues. He has published in *Thought*, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, *Theological Studies* and other major publications. He was the Executive Producer of two videos, the award-winning *Lights Breaking: A journey down the byways of genetic engineering* (1985) and *Decision* (1987), respectively.

Father Brungs has served as a consultant to many committees, among them the National Council of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) and the Vatican Secretariat for non-Believers. He was a delegate for the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting the Unity of Christians at the World Council of Churches' Conference on Science, Technology and the Future at The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, 1979.

## **Foreword:**

The accelerating development of science and technology in the twentieth century, especially in the last forty to fifty years is perhaps the greatest intellectual and cultural challenge facing the church. The evidence is all around us. It is found in the current spurt of development in astronomy and astrophysics, in space exploration and eventually colonization, in developments in almost all aspects of the life sciences, in computerization and the reach for artificial intelligence, in the awareness of the human environment, and so on.

In like manner, there can be no doubt that the church has responded to this challenge sluggishly at best. Apart from the Pope himself who sees the issues clearly, a few scattered bishops and a handful of theologians, almost no attention has been paid to this challenge. Except for the environmental movement (much of which is far from scientific or theological), the Catholic Press has been all but silent on these issues. Without being cynical, we can point out that Catholic communicators noticed these issues only after they became politically popular. We need more attention to problems that are intrinsically far more critical but are not as widely publicized in the mass media.

Interest in questions involving both science and theology is growing. There is talk of a relationship between scientific and theological methodology and of the compatibility of scientific and theological thought. This is important work, but it is of concern primarily to experts in such matters. The crucial work and the crucial integration is elsewhere. That integration must occur in the minds and hearts of scientists as scientists and theologians as theologians. It is much more concerned with the church's dogmatic tradition than it is with theologies. These, of course, are not the same. Some theologies, both contemporary and classical, have very little to do with the church's doctrinal tradition.

We believe, and so contend, that there can be no possible conflict between the church's doctrinal tradition and the results of valid scientific work. There can be, are and have been serious conflicts between science and various theologies. That shouldn't surprise us. There have, for the record, been serious conflicts between the church's tradition and its theologies. We do not believe that the most critical aspect of the faith/science apostolate is to be found in the clash of philosophies of science and any of the theologies. It is in the personal integration of faith and scientific activity in the individual in science or technology. Such an integration is necessary for one who would fulfil the personal mandate of baptism to preach the Word to all nations. We cannot be Christians-at-a-distance.

The only people who can seriously and gracefully promote the much needed efforts in the area of faith and science contact are we whom God has blessed with the Faith and with the desire, talent and opportunity to be scientists and technologists. We address this volume to this twice-blessed group.

As we point out in Chapter 5, it is the privilege and the responsibility of all of us baptized into the Lord Jesus and trained in science and technology to dedicate ourselves to bringing Christ's presence into the scientific and technical communities we call our own. No one else will do it; no one else can.

In chapter 5 we write:

We cannot let the entire direction of scientific advance rest in the hands of those who either are antithetical to the church or are massively indifferent. Without *being triumphal*, we can move to claim the inheritance that belongs to the children of God. We have no reason to be as defensive as we've been vis-a-vis the scientific community. We have a right and a duty as Christians to do what we can to direct the advance of science in ways that will directly contribute to the final Kingdom of the Father. Understanding what this implies is something we have to work on as well -- seriously and quickly.

If we are to enlist scientific and technical development in our work to help establish the final Kingdom of God, it is important for us to have a basic theological appreciation for the church as the sacramental sign of this Kingdom, for the work we do in and on God's creation and for our position and role as scientists in the church. In Chapters 3 and 4 we treat these topics sketchily, but with enough detail, we think, for us to begin to think about our baptismal calling and responsibility.

In Chapters 1 and 2 we make some rather more general observations about the church and science and technology. In the first chapter we deal with the so-called conflict between science and theology. Much has been made of this recently, especially by people like Carl Sagan who delight in trying to make Christianity look reactionary. Sagan's superficiality is exceeded only by his unflinching lack of competent historical knowledge. In Chapter 2 we touch upon issues of technology. The church by and large has been receptive to technological development. In fact, much of the technological development of clocks and farm implements, and the like, grew out of the needs of monastic communities for ways to tell the time for prayer and for labor-saving devices. Now, however, there are fears of technology "being out of control." We allude to such issues in this chapter.

For those who wish to use this as a how-to volume, we suggest beginning with Chapter 5. Not that you will find detailed suggestions for carrying out this apostolate. They are not there -- and they are not there for a simple reason. No two of us have the same background, the same talents and expertise, and no two of us face exactly the same evangelical situation. For this reason, each of us will have to "ad-lib" our apostolate, at least in its detail. We see this as all the more reason for an informal association of Christians in the sciences and technologies, for awakening and strengthening a sense of shared responsibility. Even though the *application* is different, we need a *common spirit*. Only a conviction shared by many can develop into a cultural force and influence the future of our society. As the Bishops said at the Fifth Synod in Rome in 1977 (See Appendix 4 for the full text):

In this connection, evangelization and catechesis by scientists who are men and women of faith are extremely important. They should be encouraged by the church. They constitute one of those small groups which will be responsible for so much of the mission of the church in the years to come. Scientists who acknowledge the reign of God should be encouraged to form communities where they may grow in their

own understanding, experience and response to their Catholic faith, and where they show their insights into how the mysteries of redemption can be presented to their brothers and sisters who are seeking answers to the dilemmas posed by their scientific research.

If we judge this book's audience correctly, you will be interested in the what and the wherefore. We know that most scientists are interested in the theory of their science, not just in how to approach its results. In faith issues of this seriousness we expect no less concern to know why evangelization is an important duty, what it implies and why it is asked of the baptized who are experts in science and technology. As you may well imagine, we do not recommend that you skip Chapters 3 and 4. These chapters contain the rationale for our obligation to dialogue within the church about what is happening in the scientific and technical communities and to make a conscious effort to evangelize these communities. Our duties as Christians in science and technology are basically the same duties incumbent on all of us to bring Christ's presence in the Eucharist to the whole creation, to leaven the universe with Christ who dwells within us.

In chapter 3 we mention the sacramental nature of Christ's presence to us in the church and develop the notion that the world we live in is sacramental, i. e., points to a greater reality toward which we are striving.

In chapter 4 we treat the gift of our baptism and the responsibility we acquire to "teach the Gospel to all nations." We explain that this is the task of *each and every* Christian in his or her milieu. Although many of us have been led to believe in practice that this is the task of the priest and religious, that simply is not true. That mentality is not only not normative, it is an aberration.

The apostolate of the scientific and technical community is still something of an experiment. A great part of the challenge we face is figuring out how to live and proclaim our faith (how to witness to our union with Christ) in our own particular circumstances -- not only on Sunday but throughout the week, at work or at home. As we said, we see that as one of the most attractive parts of the challenge we have from our baptismal union with Christ. It is a significant reason, however, for the forming of the communities the Bishops called for.

In today's church we go about saying that "this is the age of the laity" as if it were some great modern discovery. It is not! The laity has always had the mission of carrying the message of Christ's love to all the world. Vatican II explicitly promulgated this ancient truth. Since Vatican II an error, equally insidious as "letting Father and Sister do it," has crept into the understanding of the role of the laity. There is a current tendency to equate lay responsibility with becoming "little priests." Its promoters call it "lay ministry," and they seem to promote the idea that the laity's most important task is to minister in the church's cultic activity, i. e., in the formal liturgy. Neither author has difficulty with the idea of lay participation in the liturgical life of the church so long as it is made abundantly clear that this ministry is *not* a substitute for a mission out into the world, in our case the scientific and technical communities.

Perhaps the most significant "ministry within the church" we can perform is educating of the faithful in the church about what is happening in science. All Christians need an understanding of what is happening and a Christian interpretation of it if they are to live good Christian lives in a high-technology society. The Bishops at the Fifth Synod made this explicit:

Finally, all the faithful should be made aware of the implications to the faith of what is taking place in these scientific investigations. They should be helped to become more familiar with the teaching of the church concerning the proper role of scientific research; the limitations of scientific discoveries; the positive and negative aspects of technological progress; the sanctity of life; the respect due the human person regardless of physical, intellectual or psychological characteristics; the supremacy of grace and the need to respond to unwarranted use of scientific discoveries with a resistance which may sometimes have to be heroic.

We can look around and easily see, for example, the heroic demands being made on both the ill and their families by discoveries in medicine and their technological applications.

To respond to this challenge is the task of all of us in the church. There can no longer be a question of this apostolate as the prerogative of the clergy or of consecrated religious.

As was said at the beginning, this apostolate of “like on like,” as Vatican II calls it, is perhaps the greatest challenge and most exciting intellectual apostolic opportunity of our time. Because of the love we Christians have for our science and for our church, it does not seem possible to us that it will go unaccomplished. We are called in love by Christ to share the great bounty that he has given us in his life, death and resurrection and in his continued Eucharistic presence to us.

In conclusion let us summarize this foreword with a statement from Vatican II’s Constitution on the Laity:

The apostolate of the social milieu, that is, the effort to infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality, customs, laws, and structures of the community in which a person lives, is so much the duty and responsibility of the laity that it can never be properly performed by others. In this area the laity can exercise the apostolate of like toward like. It is here that laymen add to the testimony of life the testimony of their speech; it is here in the arena of their labor, profession, studies, residence, leisure, and companionship that laymen have a special opportunity to help their brothers.

Even a glance at this Foreword will indicate that this book is written by Catholics. Thus, we have reserved our treatment to the Catholic Church, the only one we know intimately. We believe, however, that this approach can be helpful to a Christian of any tradition working in science and theology. We presume a level of Christian understanding in the likely readers of this volume that would be quite able to translate what is said in a Catholic mode to the reader’s own Christian tradition and circumstance. With that caution, we believe that this book has value to all members of ITEST\* and to the broader community of Christian men and women in the scientific and technical world. See Endnote 1 in Chapter 1 for a description of ITEST.

Moreover, this is an area where ecumenical cooperation is needed and, judging from the present state of things, is very likely to occur. It has been the experience of both authors that we Christians in science and technology -- though we come from different Christian traditions -- have been able to work together harmoniously and fruitfully. That in itself recommends this apostolate as a gift of the Spirit to us and to the world.

Thus, we ask our non-Catholic readers to tolerate our limitations and to make up for them both in charity and with their Christian commitment to carry this work forward for Christ’s sake. We can make this a common gift to the Father for all his love for us.

Finally, we wish especially to thank the scientists and technologists who took the time to read and criticize in detail the first and second drafts of this work. We are grateful for their help. Whatever failings are still present in this book are, of course, solely the responsibility of the authors. Certainly, there are many fewer of them because of the suggestions and criticisms given in great charity.

Let us carry this work forward together as our response to the One who loved us so much as to send his only Son to save us in the gift to us of the Holy Spirit.

| <b>Science/Technology Education in Church-Related Colleges and Universities</b> |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <b>ID</b>   | <b>Article Title</b>   | <b>Authors</b>                                     |
| BK018-001   | Table of Contents  | Dr. Eva-Maria Amrhein<br>and Fr. Robert Brungs, SJ |
| BK018-002   | Foreword   |  |
| BK018-003   | Chapter 1 Scientific Considerations  |  |
| BK018-004   | Chapter 2 Technology   |  |
| BK018-005   | Chapter 3 Theological Considerations   |  |
| BK018-006   | Chapter 4 The Task of All Christians   |  |
| BK018-007   | Chapter 5 The Task of Christians in Science  |  |
| BK018-008   | Appendix 1: The Word “Covenant”  |  |
| BK018-009   | Appendix 2: Science/Theology and Campus Ministry   |  |
| BK018-010   | Appendix 3: The Church and Scientists Synod ‘77  |  |
| BK018-011   | Appendix 4: Letter Of Pope John Paul II To The Reverend George V. Coyne, SJ, Director Of The Vatican Observatory |  |
| BK018-012   | Appendix 5: Suggested Further Reading  |  |