



The Vineyard: Scientists in the Church

Publication Year: 1992

ID: BK018

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Appendix 2: Science/Theology and Campus Ministry

ID: BK018-009

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Appendix 2: Science/Theology and Campus Ministry

Pope Paul VI, in his encyclical letter on Evangelization, called Catholic people to evangelize the culture and social fabric with the light of the Gospel. I always saw this as a special challenge to Campus Ministry. We are the people who are presently charged with the education and formation of those who will soon be in the decision-making positions of our society. How better could we influence the marketplace than to help those responsible for it to view their profession according to the Gospel? The primary responsibility of the Lay Apostolate is to enhance the world and all its concerns with the teaching and values of Christ Jesus. Unless they receive this formation from us, they will not know of their responsibilities and great opportunities.

I remember my days of science class in high school and college in the Catholic education system. I saw science as a discipline which unveiled the mysteries of God in the universe. Science was able to discover what God had created in the beginning. Science was a way to strengthen my faith.

For over 20 years I have been a Campus Minister in a public education setting. This provided a challenge for me to seek ways to bring the perspective of faith and spirituality to our young students in the sciences. Somehow I trusted that Campus Ministry could initiate a dialogue between science and faith, which could raise significant questions for both theology and science. Moral questions surrounding scientific decisions also opened the need for such dialogue. I knew that there would be present in that vast university population (over 25,000 students at the University of Kansas) others concerned with the same issues.

Where to begin? First the Catholic science students and faculty would have to be identified. On the registration forms for St. Lawrence, people were asked to identify their major. From that list, we were able to send invitations to attend a meeting for the formation of the group. People did indeed respond. We decided on an informal structure with a student coordinator organizing the programs. We would meet weekly to discuss relevant issues pertaining to the students' interests. Faculty and others would be invited to give presentations and lead discussions. Some examples of topics include: "The Church's Contributions to Science"; "Teaching Science as a Vocation"; "Artificial Intelligence"; "Ethical Responsibilities of a Scientist"; "Engineers Aiding Developing Countries" and many other interesting and important topics.

Students decide on the topics, speakers, and program format. They have been successful in engaging the Catholic faculty members to address particular topics and help them formulate specific concerns about the material presented. Faculty involvement has been very encouraging for the students.

The group functions as a support system for each other. Students studying science in a public environment encounter many challenges to the faith. They need support and affirmation from each other and the church as they evaluate and respond to these challenges. There has been more science than theology input into the sessions. We need more theologians who are involved in scientific issues to provide the special insight of theology. Scientific and technological discoveries raise new questions for theology today that require a more sophisticated understanding of theology.

The Bishop's Pastoral Letter on Campus Ministry relates the importance of theology in academia and quotes heavily from Cardinal Newman's book, *The Idea of a University*. It says:

Traditionally, theology has been known to the Church as the 'Queen of the Sciences.' Today, we must emphasize its continuing power to keep alive the great questions of meaning, purpose, and identity and to provide a coherent vision of life, which serves as a framework and unifying principle for all learning. Theological study helps to produce the kind of intellect described by Cardinal Newman 'which cannot be partial, cannot be exclusive, cannot be impetuous, cannot be at a loss, cannot but be patient, collected and majestically calm, because it discerns the end in every delay, because it ever knows where it stands, and how its path lies from one point to another!' The study of theology not only helps us gain this kind of perspective, but also helps us to understand in greater depth Jesus Christ who reveals to us the secrets of

the Father. In a well-rounded Christian education, the teachings of the Church are presented with fidelity to the magisterium and with the contemporary situation in mind. This kind of solid theological training enables the members of the faith community to achieve a genuine synthesis of their rich religious heritage and the best in the contemporary culture. (*Empowered by the Spirit Campus Ministry Faces the Future*)

One of the greatest benefits to our development was when we discovered ITEST. A very simple brochure came in the mail one day, and it was like a gift from heaven. We did not know that others were about the same concerns as ourselves and that they had made much greater progress. There was a sense of affirmation that we were on the right track and that our concerns were legitimate. Things became easier after this. We received scholarly papers we could use as the basis for our discussion; we were brought up-to-date on what are the important issues with science and theology; we could attend ITEST workshops and meet professional scientists and theologians personally.

I'll never forget the first time six students were able to participate in the ITEST workshop on Space Exploration. Their first comments when they returned were excitement over being able to discuss faith and theology and science. That was an opportunity their education process at the University did not afford them. In their day-to-day study and laboratory work they encounter either indifference or antagonism to their faith. But with ITEST there was the experience of freedom and openness.

The video *Decision* was a great boost to our group. It clearly outlined the question and the task for Catholic science students. It helped us understand how critical the issues of science and technology are today, as well as the responsibility of theology to engage in the debates.

It appears that many scientists fear that faith is inimical to science and the two have nothing in common: "The church is a 'closed system' with nothing to say to science." They often accuse the church of being opposed to scientific research and discoveries, limiting the free rein a scientist wants in research. For many, the autonomy of reason prevails and little concern for religious and moral value is present.

The Second Vatican Council, in its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World states the responsibility of people of the church to the culture, noting that people who apply themselves to philosophy, history, science and the arts help "to elevate the human family to a more sublime understanding of truth, goodness, and beauty and to the formation of judgments which embody universal values." This call to integrate our faith and professional lives is clear. It is of the essence of our faith to produce it in our daily work lives and to bring the light of the Gospel to bear on critical issues facing the human family today. It's the responsibility of campus ministers, particularly those in secular education institutions, to enable science students to add the dimensions of faith to their education process.

This past year we were able to sponsor our first annual "Science and Faith Conference." Fr. Robert Brungs, S.J., and Sister Marianne Postiglione, RSM gave the presentations and led the discussions. We invited science students from other colleges and universities in Kansas. It was a wonderful day!

We hope to inaugurate, within the next year, an annual lecture on the Campus dealing with faith and science. Our goal is to let scientists know of the church's experience, interest, and concern for science, and to listen to their concerns and needs. We hope that this will broaden the dialogue and open further doors to collaboration.

I asked some students to write their understanding of the Science Group for this paper. Martin Huss, a graduate student in biology writes: "Science and theology study different subjects, work off a separate set of premises and achieve different goals. For this reason, each field can only competently speak to certain issues within their realm of expertise. The problem that exists today is that as technological advances cause the restructuring of our society, we are becoming faced with ethical problems and moral dilemmas which neither the scientist nor the theologian can competently deal with or face alone.

The role of the St. Lawrence Science Group is to bring together people motivated by faith, who are willing to

bring their technical training in science to bear on social, ethical and moral issues. We hope that by generating a dialogue between science and faith, we can help lay a foundation from which to address modern concerns in a competent way with a Christian perspective.”

Chris Hardin, a graduate student in aerospace engineering, and Peter Capella, a graduate student in chemistry write: “When God created man he endowed him with some very unique gifts, including reason and curiosity. Through the centuries, curiosity has motivated man to become more knowledgeable about the behavior and laws that govern all of nature. The gift of reason has helped us sort out facts from fantasy as myths and magic crumbled under century old layers of basic research. However, there is one more gift from God that is frequently seen by men and women of science as unrelated to those previously mentioned, the gift of faith. It is our job as Christian scientists to help each other realize and understand the relationship between the science we study and the faith we live.”

The Catholic Science Students group of the St. Lawrence Catholic Campus Center at the University of Kansas, is one of the first college student groups in the country organized to explore questions related to the interaction of faith and science. In the past 50 years, giant advances in technology have clearly been challenging Christian faith. Before we, as scientists, face this challenge there are several questions to be kept in mind. Is there a dialogue between our faith as Christians and the science and technology that we work with each day as scientists? If a dialogue exists, why is it necessary and what is being said? How are the ethics we face as Christians related to those we follow as scientists?

The members of our group have come to the conclusion that there is definitely a dialogue between faith and science. This dialogue is based on the knowledge that our God has not created a universe of chaos and conflict, but instead one of unity and order. Those things previously seen as random are now seen as orderly and predictable. The things we now see as a mystery may soon also be seen to reflect a higher order. The uniformity we see was given to creation by our God. As scientists, it is important that we keep this in mind and respect the laws of nature and creation as God’s law.

As scientists living on the brink of the Twenty-First Century, we find ourselves almost constantly exposed to social environments which more-often-than-not diverge rather than coalesce. Of these settings, that of working in a scientific mode and being a follower of Christ seem the most remote from each other.

One goal of our group is to help science students deepen their understanding of how their scientific efforts can be enhanced by, and in turn help develop, their personal faith in God. Through discussions and presentations in our meetings, both broad and narrow, common ground on which science and faith can co-exist is easily found. As following with the common rule of both Christianity and Science, it is our duty to pass on to others not in the field of science, any discoveries and/or insights we have gained. This is truly a necessary task as it will result in valuable feedback from the people who will work and live with tomorrow the technology we develop today.

It is our hope as a group to help other science students view their choice to become scientists as a call from God. We hope that this, in turn, will someday give them the ability to make wise decisions when faced with personal, cultural, and professional moral dilemmas.

It is disheartening that groups such as the KU Catholic Science Students, while very beneficial to those involved, are rare. Whether this fact is due to apathy or to the ‘I just can’t find the time’ 1980’s attitude, is uncertain. Hopefully, this letter will draw attention to anyone with enough authority or ‘push’ to ring some bells for this important notion. Students thinking about such things will eventually become decision makers in society, building the connection between theology and science.

This new alliance which is forming between science and theology is indeed exciting. The dialogue with scientists and theologians is challenging to both. It is our prayer that we are only at the beginning of what will be a partnership for many generations to come. It is in a spirit of thanksgiving that we are able to play some small part in this development thanks to ITEST and their invaluable contributions to our faith.

Monsignor Vincent E. Krische served as the director of St. Lawrence Catholic Campus Center at the University of Kansas for over 20 years. He became the pastor of St Ann Parish in Prairie Village Kansas in 2005. As pastor of a parish school he shares his interest in and dedication to the faith/science mission and ministry with the students at St Ann's and with the adult members of his parish community.

Science/Technology Education in Church-Related Colleges and Universities		
ID	Article Title	Authors
BK018-001	Table of Contents	Dr. Eva-Maria Amrhein 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	