



# **Transfiguration: Elements of Science and Christian Faith**

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**Institute for Theological Encounter with Science and Technology**

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# Transfiguration: Elements of Science and Christian Faith

## Abstract:

This volume of eleven essays by Christian men and women in the fields of science and the humanities is for the beginner rather than the expert in faith/science issues. Christians working in branches of either science or the humanities will find it helpful in integrating their professional lives and their faith lives. Recommended as a text or supplementary reading for interdisciplinary courses in science and the humanities.

## Table of Contents:

Foreword	
Doctor Robert Brungs, SJ .....	i
A History of Science and Faith	
Fr. William A. Wallace, OP.....	1
Physics	
Dr. Thomas P. Sheahan .....	45
Faith and Chemistry	
Dr. Mary Virginia Orna, OSU and Dr. Angelice Seibert, OSU .....	73
A Brief History of Biology	
Dr. Robert J. Collier.....	100
Some Aspects of Molecular Biology in the Era of Jurassic Park	
Dr. Peter Leonard, OSFS .....	118
Computer Driven Science – Meteorology	
Prof. Benjamin F. Abell .....	136
Religious Faith and the Social Sciences	
Dr. John Cross.....	161
Theology: Method and Content	
Fr. Joseph A. Murphy, SJ .....	184
Orthodox Eastern Christianity	
Fr. Bryan R. Eyman .....	213
The “Protestant” Tradition	
Dr. Robert W. Bertram.....	233
The Catholic Faith: A Covenantal Approach	
Dr. Robert A. Brungs, SJ .....	245

## Foreword:

Every organization and every project has a perspective, a philosophy or a theology and a goal. Thus, this volume is born of a viewed need and an idea of what is necessary to help the Church in incorporating the beauty and blessings of creation into its ever developing understanding of God’s will. In brief, it incorporates ITEST’s estimate of the issues and its experience in the faith/science work to address what is required in the faith/science arena.

In the first volume of *The Lord of the Rings*, J. R. R. Tolkien puts the following statement into the mouth of one of his characters:

‘At least for a while,’ said Elrond. ‘The road must be trod, but it will be very hard. And neither strength nor wisdom will carry us far upon it. This quest may be attempted by the weak with as much hope as

the strong. Yet such is oft the course of deeds that move the wheels of the world: small hands do them because they must, while the eyes of the great are elsewhere.’

This volume commemorating ITEST’s 25th corporate anniversary is prepared in that spirit. It is not meant for the “great”; it is written for the “small hands” who will carry out the “quest” for the growth of science and the flowering of Christianity. It is offered more to the doer than to the thinker, more to the beginner than the expert. The expert in faith/science issues will find this volume little more than a refresher. Christians working in branches of either science or the humanities will find it helpful in integrating their professional lives and their faith lives. We offer this book to them. It is neither a scholarly work nor a how-to-live book. It is meant as a primer for those working in (rather than theorizing about) science and faith.

We have learned over the past quarter of a century that the faith/science effort should properly be concerned first with clearing away the debris of three centuries of seeming hostility between science and religion. Articles here and there proclaim that there is a new-found irenicism in the faith/science arena. Despite those reports, many Christians in science tell us that their being known as Christians casts suspicion on their scientific work. How can a believer be a good scientist? Probably both the irenic view and the suspicion are true reflections of the current situation. These essays, however, are particularly concerned with clearing the ground so that an edifice of cooperation and consecration may be built. The suspicion of a conflict, as seen by scientists or believers, must be overcome before anything solid or lasting can be achieved.

Much of the work currently being pursued in the faith/science area is concerned with issues in physical cosmology and philosophy and theology. A significant amount of good work, involving the epistemology and limits of scientific and theological method, is being carried out by a growing number of groups. Conferences, focusing especially on physics and theology, are being conducted at very high intellectual levels. This is a relatively recent phenomenon and a highly welcome one. Great things can and may come from this kind of rapprochement between scientists and philosophers and theologians. Still, physics is no longer the most significant discipline in science. Physics may still be the methodological paradigm of science, but it is no longer its crucial center. Astrophysics, quantum mechanics and physical cosmology are intrinsically interesting, but it will be a long time before we can alter galaxies. That is not true of the human (or plant and animal) genome.

Twenty five years experience in this work has convinced the ITEST Board of Directors and Staff that, as important and welcome as it is, high-level cooperation is not the central need in faith/science pursuits. The Board and Staff are united in their belief that the everyday lives of Christian men and women in science are the proper focus of this work. The work bench, in short, is the preferred arena, not the intellectual ivory tower. People are far more important than even the most profound idea. The heart is at least as important as the brain. Neither one is dispensable.

We have often and in many different places experienced a deep and abiding concern especially on the part of young Christians in science about personally integrating their life of faith with their scientific activities. To ITEST, that desire for personal integration and the effort to attain it is more significant than, say, agreement on scientific and theological perspectives on the Big Bang. It is in the hearts and minds of Christians in science that the Church will succeed or fail in this crucial ministry. The need for integration that Christians in science feel must be communicated to theologians and Church leaders if the Body of Christ is to grow and mature. We need only remind ourselves of St. Paul’s conviction that it is love that makes the building grow.

Thus, the Board chartered this volume. As was stated earlier, it is not written for the experts in faith/science theory. It is composed for those who work day by day in scientific laboratories and classrooms or corporate boardrooms. It is written for the Christian teacher who is concerned with scientific progress and its eventual application to human beings and their environment. At the same time it is not intended to be a how-to book. It is less about ethics than it is about opportunity and hope. It is written by practitioners about what they do from day to day, about their understanding of the assumptions, method, meaning and limits of their science or discipline

or life. It will yield little in the way of great new insights into theory. It is hoped that, while helping the “non-adept,” the volume as a whole will motivate individuals to rededicate their lives both to their science and to their faith.

We wish to thank Saint Louis University, especially Dr. Alice B. Hayes, its Executive Vice President and Provost, for encouragement and support in publishing *Transfiguration*. We are deeply appreciative of the University’s help in providing this modest volume to those interested in faith/science issues. The very fact that the University shows deep interest in this project is a source of encouragement to us. Generally speaking (though happily not universally), Church-related institutions of higher learning are relatively inactive in the areas where faith and science meet. For that reason especially we express our gratitude to the Administration of Saint Louis University for their most welcome cooperation in producing this volume.

We wish to thank each of the authors for their willingness to take time away from their busy lives to contribute to the education of all of us. To take the time from a schedule already overextended to help the Church in this way cannot but help them please the Lord. We are in their debt for their learning and their willingness to share their ideas and commitments with us. To a person they showed deep devotion to this project and were unfailingly cooperative in meeting deadlines. We owe each of them a great debt for providing us with the wisdom they have gathered over the years in their dedicated pursuit of truth and even more of Truth. We particularly wish to thank Dr. Peter Leonard, OSFS for taking on the challenge of doing a chapter for this volume with only a three week deadline.

We also wish to thank Dr. Helen Mandeville, Professor Emeritus of English at St. Louis University, and Dr. Virginia Kampwerth, PHJC, President Emeritus of Ancilla College, for invaluable editorial assistance. This book is far better than it would have been without their assistance.

We thank you, our readers, and pray that you will dedicate or re-dedicate your efforts to the growth of the Kingdom of God in this beautiful world of ours. As Fr. Robert Brungs, S.J. concludes the last chapter in this volume, rarely has any generation been blessed with such a magnificent challenge.

The Editors  
June 21, 1993



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