



Written in Our Flesh: Eyes toward Jerusalem

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Institute for Theological Encounter with Science and Technology

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Astronomy Cosmology Breakthroughs and the God Question

Abstract:

This book provides a guide to the vision of the late Fr. Robert A. Brungs, SJ, in his nearly four decades of study and reflection on the faith/science&technology dialogue. Co-founder and Director of the Institute for Theological Encounter with Science and Technology (ITEST) in 1968, Father Brungs almost singlehandedly furthered the faith/science mission and ministry to people throughout the world. The immediate need he addressed in 1968 was to alert Christian Churches to the scientific and technological advances being made in scientific laboratories around the world and their imminent affect on Christian belief. Through his personal letters, messages from the quarterly ITEST bulletin, reflections and articles found in this volume, he combined his love for science and technology with his love for the Church and the Christian Faith. This book is best enjoyed as an experience of meditative reflection and prayer. The title is an excerpt from a letter to a friend "... Our history before God is written in our flesh...we strain forward toward the New Jerusalem to discover whom we are truly meant to be ..."

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Foreword:

By Marianne Postiglione, RSM

Over a decade ago I hesitantly suggested to Fr. Brungs that we should edit and publish a compilation of his writings: articles, letters, reflections and excerpts from the ITEST conferences as an archive of the work to which he had devoted so much of his life.

After smiling somewhat benignly, he wondered out loud who would be interested in reading such a volume. And, even if anyone could be found, who among them would be capable of choosing the “best” of his efforts over the years. He immediately eliminated himself from the task, saying that in his experience the author should be the last person to judge what should be published. I decided then that the answer was not a definite “no” but perhaps a “maybe” or even “We’ll know more later.”

The impetus for this volume arose from that short conversation, sprinkled with so many “if’s” and allowed to marinate in the “juices” of time.

But after Father Brungs’ death in May of 2006, the idea for publishing a remembrance surfaced with more and more frequency, nudging me ever more insistently to get to work on this project as a tribute to the memory of Fr. Brungs and his dedication to the Church and science, both of which he loved.

John Cross, a long-time ITEST Board member and a professor emeritus of psychology from Saint Louis University, agreed to work on this volume with me. John concentrated on the book, *You See Lights Breaking Upon Us: Doctrinal Perspectives on Biological Advance*. I focused on Fr. Brungs’ (mostly personal) letters, opening messages from the *ITEST Bulletins* and excerpts from workshops and conferences that highlighted his thoughts and concerns in the faith/science dialogue.

Dr. Cross found it difficult to categorize Fr. Brungs either as theologian or scientist -- though he was both; he characterized him rather as a religious thinker - one deeply in love with God. And, like Fr. John Kavanaugh, SJ, he saw him: a “romantic scientist” - simultaneously a physicist, a theologian, and “a seer of mystic realities in the sacrament of the cosmos.”

The letters I chose to include span from 1988 to 2006 - until just a few weeks before his death. Surprising - to me at least - is that most of the letters were written to women, more than 30 of them, and many were intensely personal. With only a few exceptions, we include just his letters, not those sent to him. And we omit the names of his correspondents in all but a very few instances where the reader would benefit by knowing the identity of the person Fr. Brungs was addressing. You may recognize a letter he sent to you many years ago - or perhaps one from within the last few years. In any case, we have protected the privacy of those to whom he wrote.

Why did we choose the letters? Perhaps more than in any of his other writings, the letters reveal the “heart” of the man who cared for the individual. In his letters he shared his wisdom, his humor, and his playfulness. His letters include accounts of his almost constant physical pain - often making light of it but at the same time conveying his concern over whether he would be well enough and strong enough to continue serving the Lord in his Church for many years to come.

The opening messages from the *ITEST Bulletins (Benchmarks in Faith/Science)* posed a different challenge. From 1969 or so Fr. Brungs had written close to 140 messages. I chose to include those that apply most appropriately to our world today - for example, evolution, the seasons of the church, war, biotechnology and many others; fifty in all.

Most difficult of all for me was choosing the Forewords to conferences/workshops and excerpts from the discussion sessions of those meetings. The sheer amount of material - ranging from 1988 to 2005 - was overwhelming. And I found gems of wisdom in all of them. My charge, however, was to select the brightest of the gems and allow them to illuminate the rest.

Shortly after his death in May 2006, we received many messages of condolence, most of them addressed to me, as a member of the ITEST staff. We printed most of them in the Summer Bulletin 2006, but we thought that, like good music, art or poetry, they could be enjoyed over and over again. Hence, we decided to reprint excerpts from these messages as “script text” on pages throughout Chapter 2. We’ve also included photos of the Klosterman/Brungs family and the ITEST family.

We’ve also included three of his articles that best summarize Father Brungs’ outlook and attitude about the faith/science mission and ministry. To me, they are his “last will and testament” - his legacy - to the faith/science community.

Also included is his chapter on the priesthood from an unpublished manuscript on the body. In this chapter he explains how he heard the call of his vocation. He shares his growing up in Cincinnati and his years in seminary and novitiate. While he doesn’t mention it in this chapter, had he not entered the Jesuits upon graduating from Gonzaga High School in 1949, he would have been awarded a scholarship to The Catholic University of America to study architecture. Rather than designing and erecting buildings, however, he spent his life crafting a spiritual architecture of science and faith. He built no skyscrapers to honor human achievements in the secular realm; rather, he built other spiritual structures that touched the very heavens, supported by spiritual girders and I-beams rather than concrete, mortar and steel.

A word about the use of “inclusive” language. We decided not to change Father Brungs’ use of *he* and *him* in referring to God since a portion of his material dates from an earlier time when referring to God in masculine terms was commonly accepted.

We hope that this book finds a place in your home - if not at your bedside table, at least on your bookshelf. We view it as more than a book of memories or a perspective on Father Brungs’ 40 years of service in the faith/science apostolate. We hope you will pick it up from time to time, either as a companion to prayer and meditation or as a “good friend” - as books so often are - to be savored and cherished.

How did we arrive at a title for this book? Because Fr. Brungs devoted much time, prayer and effort to the reality of “the body” in God’s plan of redemption and salvation, *Written in Our Flesh* emerged as the most appropriate opening phrase. A sub-title also from Brungs’ writing also suggested itself: *Eyes toward Jerusalem*. A letter to a friend and editor from Rhode Island who often provided valuable assistance and encouragement for his many forays into this rich and fruitful area of tradition highlights his thinking on this issue:

Our history before God is written in our flesh. As members of Christ’s body, and sharers in his divinity, we look back neither to Eden nor to the Palestine of Christ’s earthly life to discover the fullness of our human identity. Instead we strain forward toward the New Jerusalem to discover whom we are fully meant to be. . . . Scripture opens in a garden and closes in a city - the New Jerusalem.

- Letter to Jean Cavanaugh in the 1980’s