

The Pax Romana Science Secretariat (Siqs)

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Science affects our twentieth century culture in many ways. Most fundamentally, it affects the way we think about the world and our place and destiny within it. We are now aware that we are living on a relatively small blue ball poised in the vastness of space, circling around our splendid sun, which is in fact a rather ordinary star on an outer arm of a vast galaxy of billions of stars, and that this galaxy is one of billions of such galaxies in the whole universe. This is the cosmic background against which the drama of our Salvation is played. It can induce some humility, as we ask: "What is man, that You are mindful of him?". In the background is another question: "Is it really very likely that the Creator of the whole immense universe would become man on that insignificant blue ball?". The mental background to our thoughts is provided by modern cosmology, not by the cozy earth-centered views of the Hebrews and the Greeks that underlie the Old and New Testaments.

On a more direct but less fundamental level, science affects our lives through all the technological advances that it has made possible. Some of them, such as those concerning travel and communication, simply allow us to go on doing what we have already been doing, but more rapidly and efficiently. Others, particularly in the medical field, open up quite new possibilities that often have serious moral dimensions.

Within this modern scientific world view many activities, such as praying for rain, can look ridiculous. Do we really believe that God, in response to our prayers, will start moving the atmosphere around to give the result we want? In the same context, many of the Bible stories are simply unacceptable, and so-called miracles just cannot happen. If young people are brought up believing that the biblical story of the creation of the world in six days is literally true then, when they learn about the scientific account, they reject the Bible as naive and false. Einstein in his autobiography recalled that he abandoned his early religious beliefs at about the age of 12 when he realised that many of the stories in the Bible could not be true.

The Abbe Michonneau, a worker priest, found that the apparent conflict between the scientific experience and the six-day creation story was more effective in alienating the working classes from the Church than glaring social injustices.

Scientific culture thus exerts a powerful influence on young and impressionable minds, and gradually they drift away from the Church. What they need is a clear and convincing exposition of the Faith that takes full account of the latest scientific advances, and this can only be done by one who is familiar with both. It is a difficult task because to resolve and answer the difficulties mentioned above, and many others, requires many careful distinctions and analyses at a higher intellectual level. Is the average parent able to do this? Or the parish priest? Does the religious instruction in schools and seminaries equip the parent, teacher and parish priest to steer those in their charge through the treacherous shoals and minefields of modern secular culture, backed by all the resources of the mass media? The teachers may be well-instructed in the Faith, though even this is less likely today, but if they are not also familiar with the science required, this will immediately be evident to their students and excite their ridicule and destroy the last vestiges of their waning authority.

Can we rely on the Catholic Press, periodicals and books by Catholic authors, to provide the needed education? With a few notable exceptions, this is little more than a disaster area. Most of the Catholic Press simply adopts the views of the secular media on matters related to science, and sometimes even seeks to solve the problems by making fun of and undermining science itself. Are Catholic libraries, in schools and seminaries, well stocked with sound books? All too often, one finds books by Hawking, Dawkins and Capra, but not those of Duhem, Jaki and Crombie, devout Catholics whose writings are immeasurably superior both in quantity and quality, showing massive scholarship and a deep understanding of the relation between theology and science in the context of human history.

What can be done about this situation, which is causing havoc in the Church? The responsibility lies squarely on the shoulders of Catholic scientists. We have the necessary knowledge of science and we should know our Faith well enough to deal with these problems. We should be writing articles and books, lecturing and teaching.

There are large numbers of well-qualified Catholic scientists, but few are accepting their responsibilities. One

often finds excellent scientists who are devout Catholics but who never seem to connect their science with their faith. Scientific research is a full-time occupation, and it is not easy to acquire the necessary theological knowledge to understand accurately and clearly the relation between the two. By themselves, theological and scientific knowledge are not enough; they must be supplemented by a good knowledge of philosophy and history. Without this knowledge, it is easy to do more harm than good, and a consciousness of this inhibits many from even making the effort to gain the necessary knowledge.

These are difficulties to be overcome, not excuses for inaction, and the Science Secretariat of Pax Romana (SIQS) exists to help and encourage Catholic scientists to play their full part in the life of the Church. Pax Romana is the world-wide Organisation uniting Catholic intellectuals in universities and colleges of higher education, in industry and in a wide range of other occupations. The Science Secretariat is responsible for matters concerning the physical and biological sciences, and provides an Organisation and a forum to assist and stimulate Catholic scientists to fulfil their vocation.

In order to do this, contacts are maintained with Catholic scientists worldwide, and the aim is to have in each country a representative who seeks out Catholic scientists and encourages them to undertake the necessary extra studies. Annotated book lists are provided to facilitate these studies and meetings and lectures are arranged. Close contacts are maintained with the Pontifical Council for Culture, which is concerned with the same problems in a much broader way. The Pontifical Council has worldwide contacts at the highest level and thus facilitates communication between the Science Secretariat and Catholics in many countries.

A particularly important contribution is made by priest scientists, as they have the necessary theological training. The extensive writings of the Benedictine Professor S. L. Jaki are of inestimable value, as they provide essentially all that is necessary for Catholic scientists to become familiar with all aspects of the relation between theology and science. There are too few such people in the Church, and yet there could easily be many more. There are many priests who were trained as scientists before embarking on their theological studies, and they have the potential to make a vital contribution to the life of the Church. Unfortunately they are seldom given the opportunity to undertake further study, and so are not able to integrate their theological and scientific knowledge to the highest scholarly level. Instead, they are frequently given teaching and administrative duties that are certainly important but could be done just as well by many others. If they were given the opportunity for higher studies they could return as teachers in seminaries and universities and exert a powerful influence on the whole Church.

Particular importance is attached to the extensive writings of the Popes, especially of the present Holy Father, on science and technology. In many addresses he has reflected on most of the current problems and encouraged scientists to carry out their work for the glory of God and for the benefit of humanity. Most of these were addressed to meetings of scientists organised by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. The Proceedings of these meetings are a valuable resource, but they are very seldom given the publicity they deserve. There are plans to publish a collection of some of the Holy Father's most important addresses on scientific questions.

An important activity of the Science Secretariat is the day devoted to scientific matters that is part of the large international Pax Romana Conferences that take place every three or four years. The last one took place in Warsaw in 1995 and was devoted to the theme of the nature of material reality. The next one will be on *The Place of the Scientist in the Life of the Church*, and will address both the responsibilities of scientists themselves, and the ways we can cooperate with teachers in schools, seminaries and universities, and also with the media, to ensure that scientific questions are treated with objectivity and accuracy, and that moral problems are tackled in accord with Catholic moral principles. Five sessions are planned. In the first two, physicists and biologists will reflect on the scientific, technical and moral problems raised by their work. Some of these, for physicists, are the most recent cosmological discoveries, the choice of energy sources and the consequent effects on the environment. In the biological sciences there are problems raised by evolution, the origin of humanity and of life. The remaining three sessions will be devoted to the problems of bringing sound

knowledge of scientific matters to the Church as a whole. Consideration will be given to the place of science in schools, in universities and in the formation of priests and religious. A vital role is played by the Catholic Press, including the weekly newspapers and the more scholarly monthly or quarterly periodicals, and it is planned to discuss ways of improving coverage of scientific matters. In addition to the main speakers, written contributions will be welcomed, and the texts of the principal lectures and a summary of the conclusions will be published and widely distributed.

There is still much to do to develop contacts between Catholic scientists worldwide, to encourage them to play their full part in the life of the Church, and to provide the means necessary for them to do so. All Catholic scientists are welcome to contact the Secretary of SIQS, Professor W. Derkse (Postbus 37, Radboudstichting 5260 AA Vught, The Netherlands) and he will ensure that they receive the Bulletin on the activities of SIQS. Scientists of the Orthodox tradition, who are so close to us, are most welcome to share in all our activities. If you are not yourself a scientist, please pray for us, and tell any Catholic scientists you meet about our work.