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**FAITH AND SCIENCE,  
A COMMON RESPONSIBILITY FOR HUMAN DIGNITY\***

I should first of all like to greet His Excellency Msgr Josip Bozanić, Archbishop of Zagreb, His Excellency Msgr Giulio Einaudi, Apostolic Nuncio in Croatia, Their Lordships the Bishops, the authorities both civil and academic, the teaching and non-teaching staff, the students, my fellow Jesuits, and all the colleagues and friends present at this solemn opening of the new Chair in the Faculty of Philosophy and of Theological Study of the Society of Jesus at Zagreb.

I thank heartily all those who have in any way helped to bring this project to completion. I hope that it will enable us to render a valuable service to the Church in Croatia and to the culture of the Croatian people, a service that the Society of Jesus has held dear from its very beginning, striving to contribute, through its intellectual endeavours, to the understanding of the work of creation.

**A Disquieting Question**

This tradition of intellectual work, which has led us to esteem greatly the rightful autonomy of human research, has assumed a particular significance in our days vis à vis the burning problems we face, as we try to serve the mission of Christ. In fact, we notice the coexistence in our world of two contradictory tendencies, that render fruitless the understandable tension between faith and science. On the one hand,

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pietism or fundamentalism makes us prey to the temptation to minimize the capacity of the human mind; on the other, the secularist atmosphere we breathe feeds a conviction that reduces faith to a superstition bound to disappear with the advance of science.

Were it not for the fact that reason has suffered a setback with the crisis of Philosophy, no longer held as the Queen of Science, one could feel tempted to see in this contradiction a mere repetition of the cultural situation that characterized modernism since the Age of Enlightenment.

The field is thus left, on the one hand, to a scientific rationality with no metaphysical and moral concerns; and on the other, to a manner of living and understanding religion that risks digging an ever deeper breach between it and culture (including one's own intellectual tradition!). Is this not the disquieting background that sheds light on the dramatic relevance of the encyclical of His Holiness John Paul II „*Fides et ratio*” of 1998? The Holy Father notes the existence of „an ever deeper mistrust with regard to reason itself”, „which led some to focus more on faith and others to deny its rationality altogether” (n. 45). In the scientific field this crisis of reason has led, according to the Pope, not only to shying away from any reference to the religious vision of the world, but to giving up any appeal to a metaphysical or moral vision. As a result, „certain scientists, lacking any ethical point of reference, are in danger of putting at the centre of their concerns something other than the human person and the entirety of the person's life. Further still, some of these, sensing the opportunities of technological progress, seem to succumb not only to a market-based logic, but also to the temptation of a quasi-divine power over nature and even over the human being” (n. 46). It is in this context and in the more vital interest of the human person, considered in the wholeness of its personal and social life, that the relationship between faith and science must be reconsidered. On the one hand, because old conflicts are likely to be revived in the present cultural climate; and on the other, because the complex problems facing humanity today do require a renewal of the trust in sane reason, thanks to which man will again be able to follow truth when truth shows itself without the old trappings.

### **The Classical Solution**

Having thus settled the point of departure of our reflection, we do not wish to imply that no conflict is possible between faith and science. It continues to be true that faith cannot declare false a scientifically established fact; knowledge acquired in a laboratory does not depend on the domain of faith.

On the other hand, however, faith is allegiance to the person of Christ, to his message, and to his mission amongst us. Even when Christ makes meteorological remarks about the rain or expresses a biological opinion about the mustard seed, his teaching does not belong to the scientific order. According to a very ancient and well known saying, the Good News of faith does not tell us how the heavens work, but how we must work our way into heaven! There are, therefore, two different levels of knowledge: faith and science; and the believer who is also a man of science operates in two distinctly different modalities of knowing. No conflict will occur provided they are not mixed.

All the same, science and faith, even though moving in two different spheres, easily turn one against the other or one tries to get the better of the other, if they are not referred to a rationality geared to the service of the human person and in search of the meaning of life. On a purely impersonal level, it would be possible, theoretically at least, to keep a neat and precise division between the knowledge of science and that of faith.

But the man of science is a person and so is the man of faith, and neither lives outside the context we have sketched at the beginning of our reflection. It is at this precise level that we come up against the problem of the relationship between faith and science, that is, as a problem of the *status* of human reason.

### **The New Approach**

This is further complicated by a veritable stumbling block: fidelity to the magisterium. As long as it remains within its own bounds, science makes no reference to the magisterium; whereas faith that seeks understanding attains its purpose in this referral to the magisterium. Curiously enough, it was a mystic who some 500 years ago posed this question in a manner that is most radical and at the same time extremely contemporary. In the *Spiritual Exercises* St Ignatius of Loyola takes a stand against Erasmus of Rotterdam, who had said: „White would not become black even if the Roman Pontiff were to decide so, which I know he will never do”.

Never mind the authority of the petrine office; white is scientifically white, even if the Pope declares it to be black. *Contra facta non valent argumenta*. Faith cannot constrain a reasoning man to deny what is objectively true. As a matter of fact, says a commentator of the last century on the *Exercises*, calling black what is obviously white is quite strange; but, from another point of view, is it not stranger still to hold as the Body and Blood of Christ what our senses tell us to be bread and

wine? (P. Jude, 1818) Why does then Ignatius set the rule: „To keep ourselves right in all things, we ought to hold fast to this principle: What seems to me to be white, I will believe to be black if the hierarchical Church thus determines it” (*SpEx* 365)? By setting this rule, Ignatius seems to give to faith an authority that invalidates scientific knowledge and allows no reference to common rationality. Nevertheless, it is not tantamount to killing human intelligence. Ignatius does not question reality, the objective fact, but the understanding of this fact by a human person in an inevitable subjectivity. What was an impersonal problem for Erasmus becomes a personal issue for Ignatius: „I see white and the Church tells me that what seems white is in fact black”. Ignatius, who for God’s greater glory has pushed his companions into the world of science and theology, as in this city of Zagreb, had no intention to discard man’s natural knowledge, nor to humiliate his intelligence, which is in God’s image. Ignatius has the fullest respect for science, but he does not hesitate to point out, with his admittedly hyperbolic rule, that the light of faith – after all for the good of reason - can show the limits of human knowledge and especially the tendency to lock oneself in one’s certitude, to become the slave of one’s theories and of the products of one’s cleverness. To capture the scope of this Ignatian approach, one has to opt for the principle: accept faith not as an abdication of science or as an absurd ideal, but as opening to what the human being cannot attain through science, an opening to what truly constitutes reality or the promise of the fullness of reality. In the face of a scientific rationality too closed to transcend towards ultimate hope, faith can open out radically our views and ideas as men of science and lead us to accept reasons that contain the promise of a higher significance. In the face of real risks of a fideistic religious sentiments, the believer must justify his faith. Faith challenges science less than it does the man of science, it challenges theology less than it does the believer. This faith awakens the intelligence of the man of science to the meaning that can be the foundation of hope. This faith prevents the believer from shutting himself in his certainty by ignoring whoever questions its reason.

### **The Autonomy of Science**

The autonomy of earthly reality and hence that of science has been fully recognized by the Second Vatican Council as being in conformity with the will of the Creator: „For by the very fact that they have been created, all things are endowed with their own stability, truth, goodness, proper laws, and order” (*Gaudium et Spes* 36). Faith acknowledges „the rightful autonomy of the creature” and protects it „against

any kind of false autonomy" (*GS 41*); it does so not because it defends *a priori* an abstract moral law, but because it so values the dignity of the human person that reason itself must strengthen and serve it, acknowledging no other masters.

Therefore, it must be stated in the name of sane reason that science is autonomous as regards faith, but not independent from faith. The distinction may seem subtle, but it is essential if science is to be science, faith is to be faith, and man is to remain rational. Science must work out its own autonomy demanding proofs, through methodical doubts, technical efficiency, recourse to experience, by applying the criteria to find out their truth or their falseness. Within its own autonomous domain science retains its right and duty to go as far as it can in its endeavour to explain everything through its own methods. Science continues to be the normal and necessary means not only to know the world but also to transform it.

We have to admit that the spectacular progress of modern technology, while fostering the advance of human society, focuses so strongly on the urge to have and to have ever more that it contributes, without the shadow of a doubt, to an allergy for theoretical thought and for the search of meaning, and favours the total oblivion of the ultimate questions in the absence of any speculation or thought.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, at the end of our reflection we note that the relationship between science and faith, in terms of content, runs the risk of causing conflict on account of fundamentalisms, obstacles that can block the opening needed by faith and science to gaze the reality of God and man, heaven and earth, each according to its specific approach, each at its own level of rationality. Such an opening may be seen in this statement by a man of science: „No one is more helpless than the man of science to think up his science. The question «what is science?» has no scientific answer”, and in this confession by a theologian: „the more the men of science show me the immensity of creation, the more immense becomes my sense of God”. It may well be that the articulation between science and faith will always remain a mere project, difficult to bring to completion because of the distinctions to be maintained between the two approaches to reality and because of the ever possible claims, justified or false, to the possession of truth. But it is the man of science who makes science, and it is the believer who receives the faith.

It is therefore within man, within the human person, that the alliance of faith and science may be achieved under a common perspective of a rationality at the service of the dignity of the human person.

One more step however has to be taken because this man of faith belongs to a scientific community without which his scientific work would not be able to go forward. and because the man of faith today also belongs to a living Church, called to respond in the name of the Gospel to the new challenges of the world. Hence, in the measure in which the scientific world keeps discovering the values that its progress and research entail or claim, in the measure in which, under the leadership of John Paul II, the Church opens its eyes to the challenges of our time, in the same measure reason enlightened from on high must link faith and science in a common responsibility for the destiny of the human person, created at the image and likeness of the Creator.