

(English translation)

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Reflections after the Launches into Space

It isn't true that science and faith are incompatible — faith enlightens science and science can aid faith; both, in fact, seek one objective which is truth. Truth is the more transcendent and invisible when it comes to faith — it governs all creation; whereas for science, truth is tangible and doesn't complete its task unless it discovers the cause of whatever is investigated.

After the last moon expedition¹, somebody said that science has reached such unbelievable developments and is giving humankind such extraordinary possibilities that it may become an idol for some to worship and others to fear. But we must give science its proper place and see it, even though admirable, as the result of the labor of limited people. One can compare it to the sun hitting a lens. The sun's reflection in the lens is different from the real sun; yet, the lens is a mirror of the sun.

The same is true with human intelligence which increasingly understands natural laws and can therefore, in a certain way, understand creation. But what our mind can understand and reflect of creation is one thing and creation itself is another thing. The laws of creation are objective, therefore, they are true. And truth leads us to absolute truth which is God.

The day after the astronauts returned to earth, the Pope (speaking to the Pontifical Academy of Science) said that God wants to be sought and found also through science, while keeping the autonomy of human knowledge and that of faith. If the human being is the synthesis of the cosmos and in the past was called "microcosm," and if we meditate on the fact that God who is absolute Truth became man — in Christ, God-man, faith and science meet.

For this reason I believe that Vatican II had no doubt affirming that faith and science can be integrated in the unity of the human spirit.

We are convinced that if the exploration of creation and the study of Christ go together, science will make unthought-of discoveries and faith will find in the universe, continuously rediscovered, an increasing understanding of that which is mystery. The fact is that if we could see through the mystery of creation, we would find the One who governs everything, orders it, and gives it movement. And we would recognize and be dumbfounded at the unity in it, even in the distinction between the creature and the Creator.

Mystics often had intuitions or intellectual visions of what we normal people cannot see. What appears to be distinct and separated — a flower, the sky, the sun and the moon, the sea or a puddle — the mystics saw unified by a loving Light governing everything as if all of creation were one song of love; as if the stones and snow, the flowers and stars, were so united in their essence with that Light and with one another that they seemed to have been created as gifts for one another, being one in love with all the others.

We may better understand Francis of Assisi and the reason behind his *Canticle of Creatures*. When he called the sun his brother and the water his sister² he did not merely express something poetic or sentimental. He affirmed a truth that he had understood and which could therefore give a contribution to science. He acknowledged the unity existing in the universe and, having discovered the Creator of all things, he saw the relationship among them.

Scientists with faith have contributed to a greater understanding of Revelation. Galileo is a typical example. His discoveries made clear that the Scriptures should not be literally interpreted with regards to

1 On 21/07/1969 the two Americans, Armstrong and Aldrin, landed on the Moon, in the "Sea of tranquillity."

2 See St. Francis of Assisi, *Il cantico delle creature (Canticle of Creatures)*, in *Fonti Francescane*, I, Assisi 1977, p.178.

science. What we call "scientific phenomena" were described in terms that were familiar to the people of that time.

In the best moments of Catholic thought, theology and science were closely related. But often theology seemed to limit scientific freedom. Therefore, when science conflicted with a theology that was unfriendly to Christian humanism, science went its own way. We hope that in our time philosophy and science will converge. God would be glorified and mankind would certainly gain benefits. Jacques Maritain writes, "The problem of the era which is now beginning will be that of reconciling science and wisdom... in a distinct unity."³

In the meantime, with the recent discovery of space travel, science can shed some light on theology. Science, especially with its human relevance, makes us meditate upon the mysteries of the Church that are being emphasized now. For example, while the astronauts were in flight they had to follow a precise and complex itinerary. It was also imperative for the men in Apollo 13 to maintain a great harmony with one another, and to coordinate their actions and be perfectly obedient to Mission Control in Houston.

One of the most beautiful results of Vatican II, which studied the real countenance of the Church, was that of showing it to us not only in its perfect unity but also in its variety.

It's a sign of maturity that the Council should authorize and encourage a balanced pluralism. This will lead to new, unthought-of discoveries, showing the unique beauty of every local Church. Variety, of course, is possible only in unity, the same as in God, trinity and unity do not conflict.

Christ is asking the local Churches to have a two-fold attitude, in order to act as effectively as possible in performing their role in the Universal Church, for the good of humanity.

The first is an attitude of unity, of communion, of supernatural and human harmony among the members. The Pope recently addressed the Italian Bishops' Conference and expressed a wish that the Catholic laymen were what God wants them to be today. He said, "... the Church would then see a new era. It would see itself patterned on the early Christian tradition, stronger in brotherly love and active charity, with its spirit radiating in the world always in a wider and more fruitful way."⁴

The Pope foresees our going back to the witness given by the early Christians who were of "one heart and one soul" (See Acts 4:32).

The second attitude that the local churches must have is one of unity with their foundation, who is Peter. In our times, while the truth and relevance of collegiality is being stressed, we cannot forget that Jesus told only one person, "You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church" (Mt 16:18). The Pope, in fact, is "the visible source of unity among the bishops and the multitude of the faithful."⁵

We have seen that for the astronauts to accomplish their tremendous mission it was necessary to proceed according to the precise itinerary determined by Mission Control. And if the churches want to bring souls into the Kingdom of Heaven, they must follow the itinerary given by Christ, which is unity with the Pope.

Local churches, even if the dignity of their leaders and the contribution that they must give to the governance of the Universal Church has been recognized, cannot avoid humbly asking now and then the successor of Peter what Jim Lowell asked Mission Control in Houston, "How are we doing?" And it is the Pope who has the charism to say whether or not they are on the right track.

If there is this two-fold attitude of profound union among the members and with Rome, the result is that, because of the Mystery of the Mystical Body patterned on the blessed Trinity, wherever there is a church there is the Church.

³ See J. Maritain, *Scienze e saggezza (Science and wisdom)*, Turin 1964, p.79.

⁴ *The Teachings of Paul VI*, VIII, 1970, p. 300.

⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, 23.

If this is true for the churches instituted by Christ on the foundation of the Apostles, this is so much more necessary for every spontaneous group or movement that arises among the faithful.

In this way, surrounded by a general springtime, we will see come true, wherever there are Christians, what St. Bonaventure said: "Where two or three are united in the name of Christ there is the Church."⁶

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⁶ See St Bonaventure, *Coll. In Hex.*, I, 5, Florence 1934, p.2. See also Tertullian, *De exhort. cast.*, 7: PL 2, 971.