

Chapter 15

The Relevance of Science– Religion Courses in the Educational Field: Science and Scientism – Theology and Science

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ABSTRACT

This chapter looks at the relevance of science-religion courses in the educational field, underlining the necessity of the tools in this domain in order to develop an encompassing consciousness of dialogue, meaning a consciousness of the dialogue structured on the comprehensive dimension, specific to the Ecclesial and Patristic Tradition. From this perspective it is important to avoid the prejudices given by different ideologies which have cultivated reductionist positions. To facilitate the understanding of course content, to diversify the opportunities for concrete educational application, and to offer optimal training of skills to prepare and adapt such knowledge for the different levels this chapter is structured in the synthetic manner.

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INTRODUCTION

Science and Scientism

Scientism is the ideology which, while concealing the requirements of authentic science, proclaims in the name of science the possibility to get to know the world and the life through science alone. In today's society, the sociologist Pierre Thuillier summarises the ideology of scientism in three postulates:

- Science is the only genuine knowledge.
- Science is able to respond to all questions and to solve all practical problems, provided that they are phrased in rational terms.
- It is legitimate and desirable to grant to the scientists the responsibility of coordinating activities in a variety of areas.

These premises are rarely explicitly formulated, while slogans cosmetizing ideological narrative are preferred in media coverage, such as 'science at the service of humanity, progress and liberty'. We can speak of a real myth of science, since through ideologizing science it is granted religious functions. This ideology disregards the need for a rigorous scientific approach, rather seeking to impose a materialistic perspective and a reductive method.

When science meets ideological environments, it is important to have a demarcation of specific narratives. The question of whether science can be exempt from any ideology has become particularly significant over the last hundred years in the context of ideologies devastating for humankind (such as communism) that have claimed to represent science (Marxist science). The ideological narrative is seeking legitimation, in contrast to the scientific one which is descriptive. An ideological position results from a representation of the world that motivates and legitimises certain human practices. The aim of an ideological discourse is not to describe and analyse the functioning of the world, but to achieve and strengthen the cohesion of a particular social group.

The interference between scientific discourse and ideological discourse is risky, especially when rigorously defined concepts with clear meanings are extrapolated to the more general realities. Ideological representations used in scientific discourse are sometimes independent from the authors' intentions. Therefore, a thorough analysis is required in order to discern the scientific content of the discourse from its ideological valences. Thus, the use and manipulate science for propaganda purposes may be avoided, preventing the deliberate spreading of particular ideologies.

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