



**Science**

**in the *Midst***

**of**

**the Religious Temple**

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**Translated by Peter Barry**

The Italian Renaissance scientist and philosopher Bruno was sentenced to be burned at the stake by the "Inquisition," in the year 1600, because he accepted and developed the heliocentric theory of Copernicus. Thus he became a martyr to Rome (ed. the Vatican). The Italian astronomer and physicist Galileo was sentenced to imprisonment in 1633 by the Vatican's "Holy Office" because he promoted scientific progress and opposed the geocentric system of Ptolemy. For many centuries, the Vatican's name has always been connected with darkness, cruelty and all else that is inimical to scientific development.

History has arrived at the eighth decade of the 20th century; and it seems that the situation has undergone some change. Not long ago, in a quaint Renaissance villa belonging to the Vatican, a hundred famous scientists, from many different countries, gathered together there and discussed such serious scientific issues as: "The Influence of Chemicals on the Environment," "Protein and Nuclear Biology," "The Use of Biological Techniques to Revolutionize Agriculture," etc. A Harvard University

scientist said not surprisingly, "When we were invited, I thought that we would only be touring the Vatican Museum and Saint Peter's Square, but the high quality of the scientific papers presented here really amazes me."

This was a scientific seminar which the Vatican's Academy of Science holds every two years. According to reports, in recent years the Vatican has become "more and more interested" in developments in modern scientific technology. "From nuclear war to the test-tube baby, and even including the evolution of man," the Vatican, with the personal participation of Pope John Paul II, "willingly listened to the opinions and ideas of scientists with worldwide reputations." In the very place where Bruno was burned at the stake, science - with head held high - proudly strode forward and entered the temple of religion. Even Galileo, who for 300 years was the victim of an unrighted wrong, obtained "rehabilitation" from the Vatican a few years ago. In these days, when science is so advanced and flourishing, it looks as if even the stubborn fortress of the Vatican must conform to the irrepressible current of the times and submit to the truth of science.



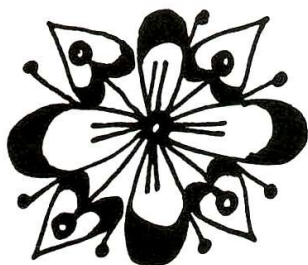
*Pope John Paul II willingly listens to the opinions and ideas of scientists with worldwide reputations.*

However, the matter is not that simple. One Western newspaper has written that today's Vatican is certainly not the same as that of the 17th century, when priests "went so far as to refuse to look through Galileo's telescope lest they see something at odds with their faith... Today's Vatican desires to keep up with the latest scientific developments of the time, so that no unnecessary conflicts arise between religion and science, and in order that science might be guided in a direction beneficial to man." This is a very penetrating statement. The Vatican's basic purpose for "upholding" science is to "lead" science to conform to religious doctrine, so that its (ed. Vatican's) interests will continue to be safeguarded.

Facts illustrate this for us. Two years ago, some astrophysicists pointed out that man is in a position very far from the center of the universe. The pope immediately and gladly announced, "We have nothing but the greatest respect for pure science...There is no conflict between this discovery and the Bible...The Bible does not teach people what form

heaven takes; it only desires to teach people how to get to heaven." As for genetics, abortion, family planning and such questions, the Vatican today still admits that these are "forbidden zones," which she cannot enter into.

Once, when Engels was talking about religion, he said, "If we say that our legal, philosophical and religious ideas are minor details, of the economic relationships which are dominant in a certain society, then these ideas will, in the end, not be able to resist the effects produced by complete change in the economic relationships...Religion, also, cannot for a long period be the protector of capitalist society." Development and progress in science are making tremendous and irreversible strides. It is an indication of man's future. The Vatican finally "cannot oppose" the influence of science, and so it grants all kinds of "concessions." If it begins to acknowledge the deserved position and usefulness of science, this is understandable. If it desires, however, to make use of science to fashion a new and modern coat to throw over the Church's vestments in order to adapt itself to 20th century conditions, then this is wishful thinking. Science, in the last analysis, is science. It is inconceivable and impossible that it becomes religion's protector.



*The Vatican's representative: New approach to evangelism or subtle conscription?*