



## CONFERENCE

**A**s we approach the tenth anniversary of the passing of Fr. Stanley Jaki OSB, the great philosopher of science and theologian, Distinguished Professor at Seton Hall University, member of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and Templeton prize-winner, we do so first with gratitude for the great legacy which he has left both in his writings and his lectures as well as in his example. We are especially grateful to have with us today Professor Dr. Ines Murzaku, Director of Catholic Studies Program, Seton Hall University.

In a world swirling with relativist and materialist notions concerning the origins of the cosmos and of the human person, Stanley Jaki has offered scientists, philosophers and seekers alike a way out of this morass. He explains how the idea of the beginning of the cosmos, which is so much part of Judaeo-Christian tradition, stands in sharp contrast to the scene outside of biblical revelation where many world religions and world-pictures had great difficulty in maintaining that the world actually began. Even for many people today, the world is eternal in the sense that it simply *is*. The world was often regarded as eternal in seven principal ancient cultures: Chinese, Hindu, Meso-American, Egyptian, Babylonian, Greek and Arabic. From the cosmic imprisonment represented by all these world pictures, Christianity was to bring liberation. All ancient cultures held a cyclic view of the world, and this was one of the beliefs that hindered the development of science. This cyclic pessimism was decisively broken by the belief in the unique Incarnation of Christ; thereafter time and history were seen as linear, with a beginning and an end.

If science suffered only stillbirths in ancient cultures, this implies that it arrived more recently at its unique viable birth. The beginning of science as a fully-fledged enterprise can be said to have taken place in relation to two important definitions of the Magisterium of the Church. The first was the definition at the Fourth Lateran Council, in the year 1215, that the universe was created out of nothing at the beginning of time. The second magisterial statement was at local level, enunciated by Bishop Stephen Tempier of Paris who, on 7 March 1277 condemned 219 Aristotelian propositions, so outlawing the deterministic and necessitarian views of the creation. These statements of the teaching authority of the Church expressed an atmosphere in which faith in God the Creator had penetrated the medieval culture and given rise to philosophical consequences. The cosmos was seen as contingent in its existence and thus dependent on a divine choice which called it into being; the universe is also contingent in its nature and so God was free to create this particular form of world among an infinity of other possibilities. Thus the cosmos cannot be a necessary form of existence and so has to be approached by *a posteriori* investigation. The universe is also rational and so a coherent discourse can be made about it. Thus the contingency and rationality of the cosmos are like two pillars supporting the Christian vision of the cosmos.

In the Middle Ages, ideas about the created universe had developed which were greatly conducive to scientific enterprise. The philosophical vision of the Christian Middle

Ages perceived the cosmos as demythologized, free from the capricious whims of pantheistic voluntarism reified in pagan deities. This world vision included the idea that the cosmos is good, and therefore attractive to study. Also the universe was considered to be a single entity with inner coherence and order, and not a gigantic animal which would behave in an arbitrary fashion, as was often believed in antiquity. The unity of the universe offers a challenge to investigators to search for the connections in nature and make them explicit. Further, the cosmos was seen to be rational and consistent, so that what was investigated one day would also hold true the next. This encouraged repetition and verification of experiments. The world picture also involved the tenet that cosmic order is accessible to the human mind, and needs to be investigated experimentally, not just by pure thought. The world was considered to be endowed with its own laws which could be tested and verified; it was not magical or divine. In addition to these ideas, medieval Christendom also was imbued with the concept that it was worthwhile to share knowledge for the common good. Finally the cosmos was seen as beautiful, and therefore investigation of it gave a participation in such beauty which elevated the mind and heart of the believing scientist to the Creator.

In short there is truly a mine of wisdom in the teaching and example of Fr Stanley Jaki in a form which may be readily digested by today's public, also at the intellectual peripheries of society, which are hungry for the truth of the Gospel, as Pope Francis expressed it.<sup>1</sup> Today we have offered Holy Mass for Fr. Jaki, we now commemorate his life and work with gratitude to God, and we look to the future work which he has inspired. God bless you all!

Rev. Dr. Paul Haffner,  
President, Stanley Jaki Foundation  
Rome, 15 March 2019  
The Ides of March

---

<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 1: "Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the 'peripheries' in need of the light of the Gospel."