

## ANNIVERSARY

# FATHER STANLEY L. JAKI, OSB: A FIGHTER FOR TRUTH

An international conference in commemoration of Fr. Stanley L. Jaki, a great scholar, theologian and prolific writer, was held in Rome at the Pontifical Athenaeum *Regina Apostolorum* on April 13, 2010, one year after his death

■ BY ANTONIO COLOMBO AND DENNIS MUSK

Fr. Stanley Ladislav Jaki, OSB, born in Győr (Hungary) in 1924, entered the Benedictine Order in 1942 in Pannonhalma, and was sent to Rome in 1947 to obtain his doctorate in systematic theology at the Pontifical Athenaeum *Sant'Anselmo*. He was ordained a priest in 1948 in Assisi, and defended his doctoral thesis in 1950. His Order would not allow him to return to Hungary (a Communist country at that time), but instead sent him to the USA as a theology teacher. He soon realized that a background in science was necessary to properly treat scientific questions posed by theological studies. In late 1953 he underwent a severe tonsillectomy that deprived him for ten years of the effective use of his vocal chords. This obliged him to suspend his teaching activity, and in his words, he was thus *damnatus ad litteras*, or condemned to write. In 1955 he received a master's degree and in 1957 a Ph.D. in physics, having as a mentor Victor F. Hess, the Nobel laureate discoverer of cosmic rays. In 1960 he moved to Princeton (NJ), with a fellowship to the local university, and in 1965 joined Seton Hall, the Catholic University of New Jersey. He lived in or near Princeton for the rest of his life, mainly because of the fact that Princeton has excellent libraries.

In 1966 Fr. Jaki published his first important work, *The Relevance of Physics*, and then went on publishing books for over forty years, covering a wide range of topics, dealing with the history of science, cosmology, theology, ethics, philosophy and biblical studies. In 1987 he was awarded the Templeton Prize for "his immense contribution to bridging the gap between science and religion, and his making room, in the midst of the most advanced modern science, for deep and genuine faith." In 1990 he was appointed an honorary member of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences by Pope John Paul II. Of his books, we may recall here *Science and Creation* (about the birth of modern science), *Questions on Science and Religion* (about the most common objections on the subject), *Genesis 1 Through the Ages* (Genesis 1 seen as a way of enforcing the Sabbath rest), *Means*



In 2006, Pope Benedict XVI, during the papal audience for the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, said to him: "Father Jaki, I thank you for the books you write on science, religion, and creation."

*to Message: A Treatise on Truth* (his philosophical work), and *A Mind's Matter* (his intellectual autobiography). He also devoted several books to Cardinal Newman, to Pierre Duhem, a French physicist and historian of science, and one book to the conversion to Catholicism of Sigrid Undset (who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1928). He considered as his masters Cardinal Newman, G.K. Chesterton and Etienne Gilson.

Fr. Jaki happened to be in Europe in March 2009 to give a course at the Pontifical

Athenaeum *Regina Apostolorum*. He died of heart failure on April 7, 2009 in Madrid, while he was on his way back to the USA.

An international conference was held in Rome on April 13, 2010, to commemorate the first anniversary of his death. The conference was attended by participants from Italy, Hungary, Spain, France, UK and the USA. A guest speaker was His Excellency Msgr. Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences.

Recalling how his path crossed that of Fr. Stanley Jaki, Msgr. Sánchez Sorondo remembers, when he was dean of the Faculty of Philosophy at the Lateran University, asking the then-Cardinal Ratzinger who could be invited to a congress about the philosophy of nature, to be held in 1992. The answer was: "Ah well, there is a Benedictine, Jaki, who could help..." Their paths crossed again in 1998 when Msgr. Sánchez Sorondo became chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. Fr. Jaki was one of the honorary members of the Academy, invited at the suggestion of Paul Germain, a famous French scientist who had taken part in the development of the Concorde. Msgr. Sanchez Sorondo recalls that Fr. Jaki kept pressing the Academy about the importance of science in the modern world, and about the Christian origins of modern science, a fact that implied that the Church is not at all an enemy of science, contrary to the commonly-held view of the mass media and of the academic world.

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Science appears to have no limits, but in reality it is limited to what is measurable. What is not measurable cannot be an object of science, but falls into the domain of the humanities. In the words of Eddington (a famous scientist of the 20th century): “The cleavage between the scientific and the extra-scientific domain of experience is, I believe, not a cleavage between the concrete and the transcendental, but between the metrical and the non-metrical.”

As Fr. Jaki put it: “Exact science is nothing more and nothing less than the quantitative study of the quantitative aspects of things that move.” This definition may leave one wondering, but we should not forget that even if we feel we are not moving, the earth is moving, and the sun too is moving, as well as our galaxy and the universe as a whole. From this definition Fr. Jaki went on to state that exact science cannot be used as a basis for moral teachings: “When Randall Thomas Davidson, archbishop of Canterbury, asked Einstein: ‘Lord Haldane tells us that your theory ought to make a great difference to our morals,’ Einstein replied: ‘Do not believe a word of it. It makes no difference. It is purely abstract science.’”

Here is Fr. Jaki’s position, taken from his book *Impassable Divide*: “Between the two domains, science and religion, there arises a conceptually simple, though in its consequences a monumental divide, which may evoke vast mountain ranges, such as the Rockies, the Andes, the Himalayas, the Alps, and to a lesser extent the Pyrenees and the Apennines. Although they are no longer impassable they still form watersheds. All the water on their slopes must flow in one or another direction: east or west, north or south. No matter how far that water flows and in how great quantities, it cannot connect with the water that started moving on the other slope. On the two sides of the divide the water forms two forever separate basins. The situation corresponds to Kipling’s observation: ‘East is East, West is West, and never the twain shall meet.’ He did not notice that a specific use of quantities plays a crucial part in that distinctly cultural difference. The image of an impassable divide tightly fits the relation between the sciences and the humanities. Try as one may wish, it is not possible to squeeze from science a single value judgment which is part of the core of the humanities. Science cannot even justify the use of that most basic form of human discourse which is riveted in the use of the verb *is*, or any other statement about things existing and their actions. This is so because, to take a concrete and elementary example, in the statement, ‘This table is here,’ only the ‘table’ and ‘here’ can be subject to measurements which are the soul of exact science. This ‘soul’ manifests itself in numbers, perhaps the most ‘soulless’ of all words. The demonstrative pronoun ‘this’ does not have magnitude, regardless of the emotive emphasis laid on it. As for the statement’s pivotal part, the ‘is’ of all words flies most forcefully in the face of all attempts

to express it in numbers. The magnitude of ‘is’ cannot be given in grams, liters, and miles, or in frequencies, regardless of how frequently it is used by all. The deepest dimension of ‘is’ was conveyed in the words, ‘I am who IS,’ the name by which God wanted to be known. It should also be noted that by the time John the Evangelist had declared that ‘God is love,’ he had reported that Jesus, the greatest manifestation of God’s love for fallen man, a category which includes all scientists as well, had repeatedly identified himself as ‘I Am’ and did so at crucial junctures. This, of course, failed to impress modern existentialists whose aim was to escape from reality that transcends the moment by harping on the mere moment.”

Prof. Jacques Vauthier (University of Paris, La Sorbonne) explained the position of Fr. Jaki regarding science in much more detail than it is possible to report here. John Beaumont (University of Leeds), who collaborated with Fr. Jaki in the last several years of his life, described the latter’s day-to-day working life, pointing out that “he worked ardently to give Catholics the weapons with which to counter secular materialism and promote the Catholic faith” and that “‘Truth alone is worthy of our entire devotion.’ Never was such a statement more apt than in the case of Fr. Jaki.” Prof. Lucía Guerra Menéndez (Catholic University of Madrid) examined instead Fr. Jaki’s thoughts on bioethics: “Fr.



His Excellency Msgr. Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo speaks with Father Teodoz Jaki, OSB, one of the two brothers of Father Jaki. All three brothers became Benedictines

Jaki liked to quote Tertullian, who wrote that ‘Christians are forbidden not only to kill, but also to destroy the life in the uterus.’ Moreover, Jaki recalls that Tertullian is the first to invoke biblical passages against abortion. One of them, the salutation of Elizabeth to Mary and Mary’s reaction, confirms Tertullian’s argument: ‘Every mother recognizes her son, and is recognized by her son who is alive, being not only body but also soul.’ (...) In summary, Fr. Jaki appeals to Christian Revelation as the only knowledge which, in full harmony with reason and with science, can give us a valid response in matters of bioethics.” Fr. Jaki also noted that according to today’s common thinking about abortion, Jesus was eligible to be killed in the womb, as a “boy without a father,” son of a “poor mother.”

At the conference, Prof. Alexandra von Teuffenbach spoke about Fr. Jaki’s ecclesiology, comparing his 1957 book *Tendances Nouvelles de l’Écclésiologie* with the Second Vatican Council, and noting that “Stanley Jaki was thus a prophet when he wrote, five years before the Council: ‘The analysis of the contemporary trends [of ecclesiology], should also help in identifying, up to a point, the roads on which should remain the future ecclesiology. It is absolutely necessary to establish an ecclesiological methodology: in other words, it is necessary to put in place a safe system, even if not severe, about the several aspects of the Church. And this is because between the topics of the theological reflection, it is the one relating to the Church that has the most numerous and different aspects. The Church is at the



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same time terrestrial and celestial, temporal and eternal, present and eschatological, human and divine, active and contemplative, personal and communitarian, united by love and governed by laws, visible and invisible; she needs, in order to be carefully considered, a system able to balance all these aspects.' To find a balance between all these aspects turned out to be the real problem for the commission charged with reviewing the text about the Church, the Council Constitution now known as *Lumen Gentium*, from its first words: '*Lumen gentium cum sit Christus*' — i.e. the Light of nations, which is not the Church, but Christ. The starting point is Christ, or as Jaki wrote in his dissertation thesis: 'The dogmatic treatise must be thought of as a continuation of Christology, and be connected, in particular, to that aspect of Christ for which He is the Head of the Church.' (...) Stanley Jaki put at the end of his doctoral dissertation a quote from St. Augustine, which in my opinion is the true key for understanding the Second Vatican Council: '*Tenete ergo carissimi, tenete omnes unanimiter Deum Patrem et Matrem Ecclesiam!*' — 'Have, therefore, dearly beloved, all being of one mind, God as Father and the Church as Mother!' It seems to me that we can imagine the Church not as a cold building, but as our Mother. She wants what is good for us, even if we do not always understand it or accept it easily. Or, as Stanley Jaki puts it: 'It is only in this way that ecclesiology will not forget that all his work has only one purpose: to protect and to develop the supernatural love in the Church and for the Church.'"

Fr. Pedro Barrajón, LC, examined *Apologetics as Meant by Newman*, one of the several books Father Jaki devoted to Cardinal Newman. Far from being a champion of liberalism, Newman put at the basis of his apologetics the idea of sin. Fr. Barrajón concluded his speech stating: "Fr. Jaki has had the merit of pointing [to Cardinal Newman] as a model of a true apologist for our contemporary world, so eager in seeking the true face of God, and also as a figure who invites us to a humble and sincere quest for truth, as evidenced in Newman's famous prayer *Lead, Kindly Light*, which marks the end of my presentation:

LEAD, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom  
Lead Thou me on!  
The night is dark, and I am far from home—  
Lead Thou me on!

Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see  
The distant scene—one step enough for me.  
I was not ever thus, nor pray'd that Thou  
Shouldst lead me on.  
I loved to choose and see my path, but now  
Lead Thou me on!  
I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,  
Pride ruled my will: remember not past years.

So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still  
Will lead me on,  
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till  
The night is gone;  
And with the morn those angel faces smile  
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile."  
(*At Sea. June 16, 1833*)



Father Stanley L. Jaki in 2007, during a visit to St. Catherine's Hermitage on Lake Maggiore (northern Italy)



Some of those who attended the Father Stanley L. Jaki conference in Rome in April. Father Jaki's brother is on the left

During the conference, the Stanley Jaki Foundation was set up. The aim of this foundation is the promotion of Catholic culture through the life and works of Fr. Stanley Jaki. The president of the Foundation is Fr. Paul Haffner, who is Fr. Jaki's first and principal biographer with the work *Creation and Scientific Creativity: A Study in the Thought of S.L. Jaki*. Paul Haffner is a priest and professor of theology at the Pontifical Athenaeum *Regina Apostolorum* in Rome, visiting professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University, and adjunct lecturer at Duquesne University Roman Campus. He has been teaching philosophy and theology for over 20 years in the Eternal City. Author of over 30 books and 150 articles on philosophical and theological themes, he is also a regular contributor to *Inside the Vatican*.

The secretary of the Foundation is Antonio Colombo, a friend and collaborator of Fr. Jaki, who translated some of his works into Italian.

The Stanley Jaki Foundation is an open venture. Interested people are welcome to join. More information about Fr. Stanley Jaki

can be found on the Internet at [www.sljaki.com](http://www.sljaki.com) and [www.realviewbooks.com](http://www.realviewbooks.com).

More than one speaker during the day quoted the following as the favorite biblical passage of Fr. Jaki. It well describes the character of the man: "Even to the death fight for truth, and the Lord, your God, will fight for you" (Sirach 4:28). ○