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new  
oxford  
review

JUNE 2009 \$3.95



**PETER A. HUFF**

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THE TWO KEY WORDS OF HUMAN EXISTENCE

**ANNE BARBEAU GARDINER**

## **THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF FATHER STANLEY L. JAKI**

**F**ather Stanley L. Jaki died in Madrid on April 7, 2009, with an inoperable hole in his heart. I found it fitting that one whom I've regarded as a living saint should die like his Master, with a pierced heart during Holy Week. Fr. Jaki was 84 years old, yet had just given six talks in Rome. Right before he left for Europe he told me on the phone that he had nearly finished writing a commentary on the Litany of the Precious Blood and was going to do a last bit of research for it in Rome. I replied that I was eager to read that work, having had my devotion to the spouse of Mary rekindled by his commentary on the Litany of St. Joseph.

In his autobiography, *A Mind's Matter*, Fr. Jaki declares that in the culture war of our times, “One has only one choice: to fight.” Surely if anyone ever fought the good fight without intermission it was Fr. Jaki. The role so suited him that he was the equivalent of a spiritual General Patton leading the struggle to save the remnants of Christian culture. As a historian of science and a philosopher he fought against the encroachments of scientism, or science turned into an idol and demanding to be adored. As a theologian he fought to defend the supernatural, now represented mainly by the Catholic Church and under assault both from without and within, using science used as a weapon. In one of his last books, *Archipelago Church*, he compared the exponents of natu-

ralism in today's Catholic Church to the Arians of the fourth century.

Born in 1924 in Győr, Hungary, Fr. Jaki felt called to the priesthood from around age seven. As he grew, he said he longed “to understand, propagate, and defend my Roman Catholic religion, which, on the intellectual level, is a set of propositions with enormously wide ramifications. Indeed there is no theology so wide in its scope and reach as Catholic theology.” After studying with the Benedictines, he joined that order and from age 18 to 23 lived at Pannonhalma, a beautiful fortress-like Archabbey founded in A.D. 996 and situated on a hill near the Danube in Hungary. Fr. Jaki's brother Zeno still resides there as a monk, and there Fr. Jaki's body will finally rest. His other brother, Teodoz, is a Benedictine monk in Győr. I once asked Fr. Jaki, amazed at how hard he worked, “Father, when will you rest?” He replied with an old Hungarian proverb, “When I'm in my grave.”

He did his doctoral work in theology at Sant' Anselmo in Rome, where he was known as a defender of the papacy. His dissertation, published in 1957 — which Pope Benedict XVI has in a place of honor in his personal library — critiqued *Les tendances nouvelles*, or new tendencies in ecclesiology. In 1951 his superiors sent him to teach at St. Vincent's Archabbey in Pennsylvania, but he soon lost his voice in 1953 due to complications from a tonsillectomy. This affliction lasted ten years, during which time he earned a Ph.D. in physics at Fordham University under Dr. Victor Hess, a Nobel Prize winner. By 1965 he was on the faculty at Seton Hall University, where he remained till the end of his life.

I have known, admired, and revered Fr. Jaki for over thirty years. I first met him in the mid-1970s when he came to John Jay College and gave a brilliant talk on what he called the “stillbirths of science” in ancient India,

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Anne Barbeau Gardiner, a Contributing Editor of the NOR, is Professor Emerita of English at John Jay College of the City University of New York. She has published on Dryden, Milton, and Swift, as well as on Catholics of the 17th century.

China, Egypt, Babylon, and Greece, and on the “only viable birth” of science in medieval Christianity. His account of the rise of science was a Copernican turn in historiography. All those ancient cultures had come to a stop after making a few steps in the direction of the three laws of motion (the basis of exact science) because they viewed the world as an eternal treadmill, doomed to endless returns after every Great Year (represented by the swastika). For those cultures, the status quo was the most that could ever be achieved. Christians, by contrast, believed in a creation out of nothing and a single one-directional movement in time. No wonder a Christian scholar named Buridan formulated the first law of motion in 1348. Historians of science are mum about these “stillbirths of science” in pagan antiquity and of its “only viable birth” in medieval Christianity. The supposed darkness of the Middle Ages turns out to be the “dark recesses” of the biased minds of historians. For more on this, read Fr. Jaki’s *Science and Creation*.

After his talk at John Jay, I had the chance during the reception to introduce myself to him as a Catholic. I was already awed by his towering intellect and rock-solid judgment, but I found the transparent simplicity of his character most endearing. One could see that he didn’t care to please anyone, but wanted only to be faithful to the truth. I never lost touch with him in the ensuing years, profiting greatly from conversations with him. He was another *Athanasius contra mundum*, a defender of the Catholic Church as the “supremely living organism” with a firm skeletal structure (the ecclesiastical hierarchy) able to produce the “marrow” needed for “truly living flesh.” By contrast, as Fr. Jaki shows in *The Church of England as Viewed by Newman*, the “Anglican system” was a “palace of ice, hard and cold,” “the tomb of what was once living.” Far from being the patron of ecumenism as he has recently been miscast, Newman saw Anglicanism as corpse-like, and corporate reunion as impossible.

The prevailing dogma in academe was and is that science is the savior of mankind, but Fr. Jaki attacked this belief as far back as 1966, in *The Relevance of Physics*. He demonstrated in this seminal work the irremediable “incompleteness” of theories in physics by newly applying to physics Gödel’s 1930 “incompleteness theorems” related to mathematics. He also exposed the “regularly recurring illusions” of materialists who use science to issue overconfident statements about countless planetary systems, to speak of a Multiverse (many universes), and to boast of being able to launch universes from their labs. For more

on this, read his *Paradox of Olbers’ Paradox and Planets and Planetarians*.

Pierre Duhem, also a great fighter, was an inspiration to Fr. Jaki, who recognized the “quintessence” of his own “mind’s matter” in a letter he wrote in 1911 about how urgent it was to counter the false claim that the Catholic Faith had always been opposed to the progress of science. Duhem said we had to hurl in their face “the word lie! Lie in the domain of logic, lie in the domain of history!” While Duhem had argued some years before Fr. Jaki that belief in eternal returns impeded the rise of science among Greeks, cabbalistic Jews, and Muslim philosophers such as Averroes, he had not explored the “stillbirths of science” all across antiquity, nor had he investigated the role of Christ the Logos in the “only viable birth” of science. This groundbreaking work was left to Fr. Jaki. For more on this topic, read his *Uneasy Genius: The Life and Work of Pierre Duhem* and *Savior of Science*. In *Savior* Father explains that Christian belief in the divine Logos meant the universe could be approached as fully coherent. Also, where the Mover and Moved were always in contact in pantheism, in Christianity the Creator gave autonomy to the universe without lessening its dependence on Him.

Scientism was Fr. Jaki’s special target. This is the “ideology of those who define science as the art of eliminating God from the ultimate equation.” These manipulators of science included 19th-century promoters of an infinite Euclidean universe and 20th-century promoters of an eternal universe, both trying to debunk creation. One could also add all those infatuated with extraterrestrials — since Darwinism assigns a big role to chance,

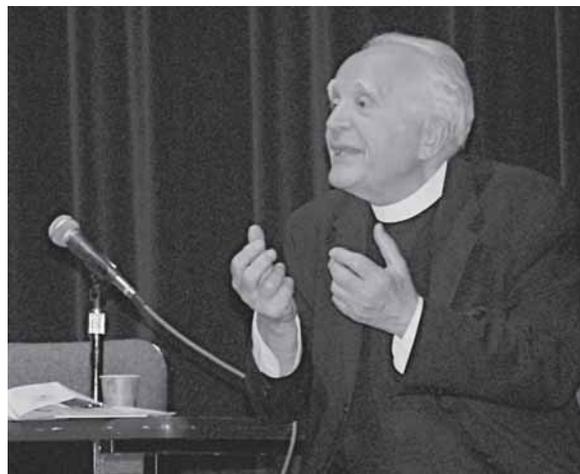


Photo Courtesy American Chesterton Society

some want to believe that a species like ours can arise by chance *everywhere* in the universe. Fr. Jaki has no quarrel with the science of evolution because the Creator can endow matter with sufficient power to obviate His need to intervene in material transformations. At the same time, Fr. Jaki does have a quarrel with spurious philosophies that parade as science — that is, with arguments against the existence of a “non-material directive force in nature” just because that force cannot be observed scientifically. As he puts it, “The evidence of design, indicative of some purpose, is overwhelming everywhere in nature.” But the evidence is philosophical, not mathematical. One is doing philosophy, not science, by arguing for or against design and purpose. For more on this, read *God and the Cosmologists* and *The Purpose of It All*, as well as *Is There a Universe?*

In the last phase of his life, Fr. Jaki became more and more convinced that while quantities play a decisive role in science, it’s an error to let them play that role elsewhere. When we erase the “irreducible difference” between quantities and qualities, or between science and the humanities, we turn human beings into one-dimensional creatures. Unfortunately, even humanists today have been seduced by the false doctrine that science is the savior of mankind. Fr. Jaki points out one common and important example of this error — the misinterpretation of quantum mechanics. While Max Planck and Albert Einstein kept their physics separate from their philosophy, Neils Bohr attached a philosophy to his theory and promoted it for the rest of his life. Werner Heisenberg’s principle of indeterminacy was “good physics,” but not when it was given an interpretation that amounted to an “elementary misstep in philosophy.” This consisted of the following leap from the operational to the ontological — “an interaction that cannot be measured exactly, cannot take place exactly.” Fr. Jaki says that this confusion has become endemic in literature that touches on quantum mechanics. Many humanists have embraced the “indeterminacy principle” as if it were a “vindication of free will”; but it is nothing of the sort because a mathematical formula cannot have an ontological meaning. Sadly, the excessive respect for quantitative considerations in the West has bred an “insensitivity” to philosophical questions, so that the pseudo-ontological interpretation grafted onto quantum mechanics by Bohr now carries the day, even in theology. This error becomes particularly lamentable when Catholic theologians present Christ as a disembodied spirit conjured up by the community of the early Christians

and lace their interpretation with references to a supposedly “non-materialistic spirit of modern physics.”

Fr. Jaki notes that he has sometimes earned “more resentment than favors” from those for whom he was “fighting” — that is, from Catholics fearful of standing apart from the secularist mainstream. In the following lines he implicitly compares them to Esau selling his birthright and maybe even to Judas: “A Catholic intellectual should not have for his or her prime objective the gaining of the applause of secular academics. The latter are interested only in Catholics in whom they can spot real or potential traitors to Truth. If only such Catholics suspected the value of enduring riches which they barter for very transient handouts! I mean intellectual riches, valid very much even for science.” Thus, Fr. Jaki pleads for cohesion among Catholics in the great fight that lies before us. Newman, he remarks, predicted that different “forms of Protestantism” would collapse ahead of the “great battle” between “the Holy Roman Catholic Church and Antichrist” — i.e., atheism. Surely we have lived to see it.

Starting with the prestigious Gifford Lectures given in Scotland in 1974–1976, published as *The Road of Science and the Ways to God*, Fr. Jaki became engaged in a broad philosophical fight partly inspired by the Thomistic philosopher Etienne Gilson. Fr. Jaki argued that the same philosophical realism underlay both the classical proofs of God’s existence and science’s greatest steps. One had to begin not with the mind, but “with objects, with facts.” Tragically, however, the primacy of facts and objects has declined in the West at the same rate as has adherence to Christianity. The subjectively perceived has replaced the objectively real (as seen in the justifications for, and legal rulings on, abortion). For more on this, read *Means to Message: A Treatise on Truth and Universe and Creed*.

Fr. Jaki speaks of Christ as the “greatest fact of history” and laments bitterly that some recent Catholic scholars write as if the narratives of His Nativity and Resurrection had “no strikingly factual character to them,” though many with “at least the same intellectual credentials as the best of them” laid down their lives for the truth of those supposedly “mythical” events. Father demands to know “what remains of the Christian faith if it is no longer anchored in reverence for facts as demanded by Christ?” He grieves over “Aquikantian” theologians who fuse Aquinas and Kant, as well as over fog-making theologians like those called the “Concilium,” who have a “bewitching influence” on teachers in seminaries. He finds

an “almost farcical aspect” to the “tragic necessity” of the publication of a document such as *Dominus Iesus*, which “casts a dark light on what Vatican II unwittingly brought about.” What would one think if the Royal Society were to issue a warning “that the multiplication table remains valid in spite of all advances in topology, non-linear equations, and chaos theories?”

In several of his last books, Fr. Jaki defends the objective reality of miracles both from a philosophical and theological viewpoint. He does this in *Miracles and Physics* and in his Introduction to the 1994 edition of *The Voyage to Lourdes*, Nobel Prize-winning biologist Alexis Carrel’s account of a miraculous cure he witnessed at Lourdes in 1902 of a woman dying of tubercular peritonitis. In addition, Fr. Jaki presents Newman as an “advocate of the reality of miracles,” because the “reality of a supernatural dispensation” must result in “ever fresh” miracles throughout history. Doubtless, however, his most important book in defense of miracles is *God and the Sun at Fatima*. In this work, Fr. Jaki collects all the eyewitness accounts that survive and shows that what happened on October 13, 1917, was an “essentially meteorological phenomenon, though still markedly miraculous.” When the sun appeared through thin clouds and turned into a wheel of fire, the physical core of the phenomenon was, he conjectures, an air lens full of ice crystals refracting the sun’s rays into various colors as the wheel descended and re-ascended along an elliptical path with small circles imposed on it. This is not to discount the miracle — far from it. God often employs natural material when performing a miracle, greatly enhancing “its physical components and their interactions.” This phenomenon was not observed in Fatima before or after. And besides, the miracle (which had been predicted by the child seers) re-energized the Portuguese Catholics and rescued their country from communism.

In his works on Newman, Fr. Jaki engages in yet another big fight, this time against the claim made by theological liberals that Newman was one of them when, in fact, Newman himself said he had spent his whole life fighting “liberalism” — i.e., the claim “that all religions are equally good,” that there is no original sin and so no need for “a supernatural salvation.” Fr. Jaki shows that Newman was totally dedicated “to supernatural realities,” called devotion to the Blessed Virgin “*the* ordinary way to heaven,” and deplored “the meddling of men of science in matters theological.” In his *Newman to Converts*, Fr. Jaki again does groundbreaking research, analyzing nearly 700 pages of hitherto neglected letters Newman wrote to

Anglo-Catholics on the brink of conversion. What Fr. Jaki states about Newman regarding his submission to the Church may also be said about himself: “Newman never regarded his theological views as superior to the official teaching of the Church. And he was always able to distinguish authoritative teaching from theological fashions, to say nothing of mere fads in theology” (“Newman: Myths & Facts,” NOR, Nov. 2001).

When I received the news on April 6 that Fr. Jaki was dying in Madrid, I was reading his recent booklet *Hail Mary, Full of Grace: A Commentary* and — was it a coincidence? — I had just paused at “Now and at the hour of our death.” Regarding “Now,” Fr. Jaki writes that man has no better means for strength and light in order to conform to divine grace than to turn to our Blessed Mother: “She is present at every moment or *now* when a decision is to be made. This role surely befits the one who made the most decisive decision ever and at a moment’s notice. Mary received no advance notice of the Annunciation.”

On “the hour of our death,” Fr. Jaki states, “The only true satisfaction in life comes from seeing it in retrospect and seeing that one has done something good for others. It is in that sense that the moment of one’s death may be the finest moment in one’s life.” And yet, he then immediately calls to mind the death of St. Stephen Harding, the founder of the Cistercians, who, when he lay dying and heard monks extolling his virtues and saying that he “would enter fearlessly into the presence of God,” rebuked them with his last breath: “I assure you, that I am going to God as trembling and as anxious as if I had never done any good at all, and if any fruit has been produced from my littleness, it was through the help of the grace of God: and I fear greatly lest perhaps I have husbanded that



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