

*Book Reviews*

the attempts to base religion and even Christian philosophy on the new physics, and the over-optimism of those who claimed that science would soon be complete. Many scientists evoke evolution by chance and the explanation of everything. They treat chance as a causative agent, whereas it simply denotes our ignorance of the causes. While biological evolution provides a convenient overall explanation, and is fully in accord with Christian theism, very little is known about the mechanisms by which it takes place. Of crucial importance is the origin of man, where the evidence points to a decisive break. No animal has ever made symbols and lived by them; art is the signature of man. Materialist evolution not only denies God, it also abolishes man. Every religion implies a view about the universe, and Chesterton held high the universe defined as the totality of consistently interacting things. Contemporary thought about the proliferation of universes like so many bubbles fails to recognise that by definition any contact with other universes is logically impossible. Likewise, it is absurd to talk about universes coming into being from nothing. The universe is most specific and recent research shows that the initial conditions had to be exceed-

ingly finely tuned for the whole evolutionary process to develop in just the way that led to man. The universe does not explain itself; it must have a meaning and therefore someone to mean it. That meaning is found in its creation by God. Chesterton's writings on scientific method, *scientism*, evolution and cosmology show his uncanny insight into matters relating to science. They show a little-known facet of his thought that deserves more attention than it has so far received.

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*Stanley Jaki Foundation  
International Congress*  
Paul Haffner and Joseph Laracy,  
eds.  
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Born on 17 August 1924, in  
Gyor, Hungary, Father Stanley

Jaki was the third of five children, two girls and three boys, all three of whom would enter the Order of St. Benedict at the local Abbey of Pannonhalma. Whilst Jaki's brothers stayed in Hungary, the subject of our present review would enjoy a more mobile life. His superiors at the Abbey sent him to Rome to complete his theological studies just prior to Communism's restrictions on freedom of movement in and out of country. In Assisi, the Benedictine bishop Giuseppe Placido Nicolini, ordained the young Jaki and, in a few years' time, the now Father Stanley Jaki would earn a doctorate in Sacred Theology, writing a thesis on ecclesiology. His Roman superiors then sent him to teach in the United States at the Benedictine Archabbey of St. Vincent in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, a move that would play a determining role in the direction of Jaki's academic life. At Latrobe, the young monk-priest provided courses in French for the archabbey's university students, and theology for the seminarians. Father Jaki's academic pursuits then led him to philosophical and scientific studies, eventually resulting in his achieving advanced degrees, including in the field of physics. Jaki would go on to meet with many of the best scientists of the

twentieth century (including Einstein). Though he travelled and lectured widely, he spent much of the remainder of his life teaching at Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey, the Catholic university of the Archdiocese of Newark.

It was there, at Seton Hall, that Jaki's colleagues and friends gathered for the first "Stanley Jaki International Congress" in the spring of 2015. The conference showcased seven talks in total, drawing upon a diverse group of scholars from different disciplines reflecting Jaki's own academic and intellectual career, but primarily in the fields of the history and philosophy of science.

The published acts of the congress begin with Anthony Troha, Ph.D., of the Physics Department of Seton Hall University, who presents Jaki's early work in experimental physics, highlighting his doctoral research under Nobel-Laureate Victor Hess. Their work on the radioactive elements of radon and thoron in soil is unchallenged to this day. Troha provides a detailed summary of Jaki's research with Hess—often quite technical—noting that radon continues to be a serious health hazard.

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After Troha, Father Joseph Laracy directs our attention to the heart of Jaki's work: the correlation between faith and reason and the philosophical preconditions which, in Jaki's view, were necessary for the development of empirical science. At the foundation of these preconditions is the Biblical tenet of creation *ex nihilo*. Laracy notes the predominant technical societies of ancient civilization—Egypt, India, China, Mesopotamia, Greece, Islam, and the Pre-Columbian Americas—and acknowledges their accomplishments. The Egyptians's civil engineering feats seen in the pyramids and other works, their ability to solve quadratic equations, and even their circumnavigating of Africa mark them out as one of the great civilisations. Ancient Mesopotamian and Indian societies rival Egypt's mathematical prowess and the ancient Chinese are well-known for their technical accomplishments, including printing and papermaking. The intellectual aptitude of the ancient Greek world is well-established. Not only did Greek schools engage in a sort of pre-physics but, in the person of Aristotle, were able to reach a monotheism by reason alone. Yet, for all this, whether it was Egypt or India, Greece or the early Americas, none of these

cultures rose to the level of empirical science developed in Christian Europe. Jaki saw the reason for this in their respective worldviews: philosophical preconceptions which either viewed the universe and its material world as eternally cyclical, mere emanations of the gods themselves, or some combination thereof. In contrast, Laracy argues, Father Jaki saw in the Jewish and then the Christian worldview, a philosophical system rooted in a God who created all that is from nothing and as distinct from Himself.

This distinction between Creator and creation, and a balanced view of that Creator's freedom in creating—and in time—as well as the Christian concept of the Second Person of the Most Blessed Trinity as “Only-Begotten,” was a boon to the development of science in the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance. This reality receives ample treatment by Haffner in his lecture “Christology and the Cosmos in Stanley Jaki.”

Complementing Laracy's work is the presentation of Stacy Trancos, a research chemist and theologian. The title of her chapter, “Science was Born of Christianity” (which also happens to be the title of her book-length exposition

on the subject), sums up Jaki's often misunderstood work in the history of science. Towards the end of his life, Jaki lamented that all his efforts had been nothing more than "water running off a duck's back"—and unduly harsh self-assessment. Trasancos shows that his thought can be challenging and requires the use of proper distinctions. Amongst those nuances is his use of the term "exact science," by which he meant the study of quantitative realities of objects in motion. While some researchers want to discover what "science" meant to different times and places, Jaki's goal was to find manifestations of "exact science" in history and to show how these discoveries and advancements contributed to the growth of the discipline as we know it today.

The presentations are rather technical at times. For instance, the book opens with a detailed look at Jaki's doctoral work in physics under Victor Hess yet it does not give us a biography until the last chapter. The essays of Haffner, Laracy, and Trasancos should be placed consecutively. Those presentations which we might label "stand alone" (Troha's exposition of Jaki's doctoral work; Liddy's look at the relationship between Lonergan and Jaki;

Floriani's lecture entitled, "Newman, Chesterton, Jaki, and the Founding of the Ambrosian University") could then come later.

All things considered, however, it would be marvelous if this Stanley Jaki International Congress were the first of many. As it is, this one helps us to achieve the goal of Pope St. John Paul II's encyclical, *Fides et ratio* of using both Faith and Reason to discover Truth.

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*The Universe and Mr. Chesterton*  
**Scott Randall Paine**  
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The author, Father Scott Randall Paine, is a priest of the archdiocese of Brasilia, and professor of philosophy at the University of Brasilia. His recent book on "Chesterton the Philosopher," is a wonderful companion to the