Introduction

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Of the many descriptions that G. K. Chesterton has enjoyed over the years, one of the most intriguing is that he was a "seer of science." Chesterton was not a scientist, of course, but he had profound things to say about science and scientism, both of them intriguing and occasionally disturbing to him, the latter especially. He would not have been surprised, although he would have been dismayed, that the phrase that has defined the last twelve months is "follow the science." In a broader sense, it is the phrase that has defined the last three hundred years. Since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the natural sciences have gone from triumph to triumph, leaving other disciplines struggling to catch up. Alexander Pope had it right when he noticed that "Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night/God said, 'Let Newton be!' and all was light." Ever since, it is the natural philosopher—the scientist—who has been seen as the bearer of light, the scatterer of darkness. The other disciplines, to the extent that they wish to be taken seriously, must adopt the methods of the natural sciences: thus "political science," "social science," "legal science," even "domestic science." To be a "seer of science"—it would seem—is no small matter.

"Follow the Science" is a slogan but also a philosophy. As a slogan, it is a demand, in essence, to suspend critical inquiry at precisely the moment when we need it most, telling us not to think but to obey. As a philosophy, it is scientism pure and simple, an effort (as the historian Richard Olson defines that term y) "to extend scientific ideas, methods, practices, and attitudes to matters of human, social, and political concern." Neither as slogan or philosophy should it command uncritical assent. After all, scientists themselves "follow the science" by questioning it. What makes their discipline compelling is not its certainty but its

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Father Stanley L. Jaki. Photo: Courtesy of the American Chesterton Society.

uncertainty, its epistemological openness, its willingness to be proven wrong. Good science exhibits what Chesterton called "healthy hesitation and healthy complexity," a degree of caution in making claims about the physical world that, even at their best, are necessarily provisional. Bad science throws that caution to the winds, mistaking its models of reality for reality itself, insisting that the coherence of a theory is proof of its correctness. Chesterton advised against that hubris a century ago. "Complete self-confidence is not merely a sin," he wrote in *Orthodoxy*. "Complete self-confidence is a weakness." That is good advice for all of us. Too often, he hinted, scientists (certainly the mad ones) live in the neat and well-lit prison of one idea.

It was Father Stanley Jaki who called Chesterton a "seer of science," writing a fine book about him with that as its subtitle. It is fitting, then, that a special issue of *The Chesterton Review* should be devoted to a priest and physicist with a world-wide reputation, a man who did much to promote Chesterton's scientific thought inside and outside the world of the natural sciences. Combining an exceptionally powerful intellect with a certain polemical pugnacity, Jaki resembled Chesterton as one who could convey difficult ideas in a very direct manner. Awarded the Templeton Prize in 1987 "for his immense contribution to bridging the gap between science and religion," at his death in 2009 he was described by the *New York Time*s as a "relentless scholar" with over forty books to his credit, including studies of the French physicist Pierre Duhem and John Henry Newman. His best-known book is probably *The Relevance of Physics*, published in 1966.

Relentless is the word. Jaki was not only a prolific but also, in some respects, an argumentative writer. He was a soft-spoken man—at one stage of his life, he was literally speechless—but his views always came across loud and clear. Writing of those he admired (Chesterton, Duhem, Newman), he could be warm and affectionate. Writing of those he disliked (Transcendental Thomists, Karl Rahner, Bernard Lonergan), he could be dismissive. Jaki did not suffer fools gladly but some of the people he did not suffer were not fools. That said, his contribution to a better understanding between religion and science was indeed immense. He was twice Gifford Lecturer at the University of Edinburgh (the purpose of the lectures being to "promote and diffuse the study of natural

theology in the widest sense of the term—in other words, the knowledge of God"). He held prestigious appointments at Princeton, Oxford, and Yale. For many years, he was Distinguished Professor of Physics at Seton Hall University.

One reason for this widespread intellectual acclaim is that Jaki was an historian of science as well as a working scientist. He recognised that science itself, however much some scientists may deny it, carries the cultural forms of the time in which it is conducted. *The Relevance of Physics* is an extended examination of how our ways of seeing the world have changed over time—how sometimes we have understood material reality as a pattern of numbers and, at other times, as a biological mechanism. Galileo was not the first or last scientist to think that if his mathematics worked, his theory was correct. Such faith in numbers, Jaki asserted, is a form of superstition, a belief in the model as an end in itself to be protected at all costs. (St. Robert Bellarmine, contending with Galileo, had little difficulty in showing how this kind of thinking rests on a simple logical error.) Thomas Kuhn's famous book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, explores the same notion at greater length, speaking of the 'paradigm shifts' that enabled new ways of doing science in the early modern period. Kuhn wrote as a philosopher and historian of science but in many ways his best-known work is a sociology of knowledge. Scientists work in groups and are as susceptible to group think—what Francis Bacon called the "idols of the market"—as the rest of us.

As an historian of science, Jaki was interested in the paradigm shifts. But he also asked an even more fundamental question: How and why did science emerge in the first place? His explanation is famous. Referring to the ancient Hindus and Egyptians, he insisted that "their common failure to reach the level of both scientific and historical thinking" was not a coincidence:

> Science and historiography are but different types of a causal and rationally confident probing into the space-time matrix in which external events run their irrevocable courses. To achieve science, one has to recognise that these courses are not returning on themselves in a blind circularity.

He was particularly critical of the ancient Egyptians:

> Much of their intellectual history had been a long stagnation in the morasses of an animistic and cyclic world view, which in turn rested on their conception of the Watery Abyss as the ultimate entity, one from which there could not emerge an unambiguous and effective pointer suggesting the presence of clear, rational laws in the universe.

To achieve science, in other words, we must participate creatively in the Divine Intelligence which is itself supremely creative. We need a Creator God and a Creation contingent upon Him:

> Intricate patterns, the business of science, must, in order to exist, inhere in beings or things that exist. [Too many theologians] have grown insensitive to the totality of beings, the universe, although it remains, insofar as it *exists*, the only safe road for the theologically-tuned intellect to the Being that gives existence to any and all. [Stanley Jaki, *The Savior of Science*, 1988, p. 80]

To speak intelligently about physics, he insisted, we must speak first about metaphysics. In a very Chestertonian passage, Jaki explained why:

> Whatever true progress has been made in the history of science, it was always an advance from one stage of specificity to a stage where things appeared even more specific, that is, even more incomplete in their ever greater completeness…Only since Einstein has science achieved a contradiction-free discourse about the totality of consistently interacting things, and in so doing it revealed most specific universe. It is in that sense that science can be seen as carrying on with the speed of light to the supernatural and touching on it as does a champion on the finish line. The exact shape of that line will see many further refinements, but they will all bear witness to a most specific cosmos, which is therefore radically contingent on a supracosmic choice for it existence.
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> To acknowledge the contingency of the universe is hardly a natural move. It has never been natural for fallen man to fall on his knees. Science, or rather the so-called scientific establishment and its pseudo-philosophical consensus, will keep itself light-years removed from the point where scientific cosmology readily becomes

> metaphysical cosmology and natural theology. Every trick of the trade—from multiworlds to cosmic quantum flips—is being tried out so that the metaphysical sting may disappear from modern scientific cosmology. Most leading scientific cosmologists swear by the universe only to discredit that outlook on it which Chesterton celebrated under the caption: 'The Flag of the World.' There is that old pagan view that makes God part of the universe and then turns Him into the universe itself. That today there are self-styled Christian theologians who do the same would not surprise Chesterton. Rather they, overawed as they are by an unjustified sense of originality, would be surprised on finding Chesterton decry a phenomenon very noticeable in the first decade of this century, the first heyday of modernism. In speaking of the Christian answer to the pessimism of pantheism, Chesterton defined it as the answer 'which was like a slash of a sword; it sundered; it did not in any sense sentimentally unite. Briefly, it divided God from the cosmos.' And he added: 'That transcendence and distinctness of the deity which some Christians now want to remove from Christianity, was really the only reason why anyone wanted to be a Christian. It was the whole point of the Christian answer to the unhappy pessimist and the still more unhappy optimist.'
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> If this was true, its contrary had to be no less valid, for, as Chesterton aptly put it, 'a religion means something that commits a man to some doctrine about the universe.' [Stanley Jaki, *Chesterton Seer of Science*, p. 111]

Jaki hoisted the "flag of the world" with the same passionate intensity as Chesterton. There was no mistaking his metaphysical system, or the firmness of his grasp of it.

The issue contains an unpublished article by Jaki, along with memories of him by a former colleague, Monsignor Richard Liddy, and a former student, Dr. Bill Cheshire. There are other articles by Fathers Paul Haffner and Joseph Laracy, and by Professors Landon Loftin, Geir Hasnes and Dermot Quinn. As with all issues of the *Review*, there is a good selection of Chesterton's writing, along with News and Comments items, many of them scientific in nature.