

FOREWORD

I WARMLY COMMEND this book by Fr Paul Robinson highlighting the importance of the realist perspective in the dialogue between Science and Religion. Realism is the metaphysical bridge which guarantees the true relation between the mind and reality and is thus the right approach to link reason with Christian belief in God. An access to the true nature of the universe is needed in order to reflect properly on God's handiwork. Reality is rather like a mine in which understanding, like precious metal, has to be quarried at the cost of great effort. Or, in the analogy of Fr Robinson, it is like a hike into a high mountain range with all the challenges that this enterprise involves.

Christian tradition has always held that man is truly capable of understanding creation and gradually uncovering its meaning, within a realist perspective. In the prelude to his monumental profession of faith, Pope Paul VI stated:

It is of the greatest importance to recognize that over and above what is visible, the reality of which we discern through the sciences, God has given us an intellect which can attain to *that which is*, not merely the subjective content of the 'structures' and developments of human consciousness.¹

Pope John Paul II lay firmly in the realist tradition.² For him acceptable systems of philosophy must share the metaphysical realism of St Thomas Aquinas, including his position on the natural knowability of the existence of God:

It is the Church's duty to indicate the elements in a philosophical system which are incompatible with her own faith. In fact, many philosophical opinions—concerning God, the human being, human freedom and ethical behaviour—engage the Church directly, because they touch on the revealed truth of which she is the guardian. In making this discernment, we Bishops have the duty to

be “witnesses to the truth”, fulfilling a humble but tenacious ministry of service which every philosopher should appreciate, a service in favour of *recta ratio*, or of reason reflecting rightly upon what is true.³

Pope Benedict XVI gave a Christological foundation to his realism:

The real novelty of the New Testament lies not so much in new ideas as in the figure of Christ himself, who gives flesh and blood to those concepts—an unprecedented realism. In the Old Testament, the novelty of the Bible did not consist merely in abstract notions but in God's unpredictable and in some sense unprecedented activity. This divine activity now takes on dramatic form when, in Jesus Christ, it is God himself who goes in search of the ‘stray sheep’, a suffering and lost humanity.⁴

Pope Francis has also affirmed that realities are more important than ideas, and this flows from the doctrine of the Incarnation.⁵

Reality speaks to us, communicating its message through the senses of our human nature, shaped from flesh and spirit. A realist approach to the cosmos is essentially based on the Thomist axiom: ‘the being of a thing, not its truth, is the cause of truth in the intellect.’⁶ Common-sense realism involves a true partnership between man as a knower and the world and contrasts with nominalist, positivist, pragmatist, idealist and nihilist positions. Realism affirms the existence of universals against nominalism. Against positivism, realism proposes that reality extends beyond that which the natural sciences can measure. It affirms the validity of objective truth in its own right against a merely pragmatist or utilitarian view. Realism affirms against idealism that the external world is not simply the projection of the mind. Against nihilism, realism teaches that the world makes sense and has meaning.⁷

Moderate realism is the ‘cement’ in any synthesis of faith and reason; it stipulates the real existence of the external world independent of the mind of the observer, yet with a mutual relation between the mind and reality. This helps us to under-

stand better the beauty of the cosmos as inspired by the words of the great Doctor of the Cappadocian School, St Gregory of Nyssa:

As painters transfer human forms to their pictures by means of certain colours, laying on their copy the proper and corresponding tints, so that the beauty of the original may be accurately transferred to the likeness, so I would have you understand that our Master also, painting the portraits to resemble His own beauty, by the addition of virtues, as it were with colours, shows in us His own sovereignty.⁸

Fr Robinson succeeds in leading his reader into the highlands of truth concerning the relations between science and religion, and invokes many masterly figures like Fr Stanley Jaki, G. K. Chesterton and Étienne Gilson. He does so with skill but also in way which should enable the ordinary reader to engage this quest with relative ease; his use of diagrams and tables should help the more visual generations in this respect. It is my hope that this book will help many people to understand better the importance of the dialogue between Christian faith and the natural sciences.

Rev. Dr Paul Michael Haffner
President, Stanley Jaki Foundation
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Notes

- ¹ Pope Paul VI, *Credo of the People of God* (30 June 1968), 5.
- ² See A. Dulles, 'The Metaphysical Realism of Pope John Paul II' in *International Philosophical Quarterly* 48/1 (March 2008) pp. 99-106.
- ³ Pope John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, 50.
- ⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas est*, 12.
- ⁵ See Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 231-233.
- ⁶ St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.16, a.1: '... esse rei, non veritas eius, causat veritatem intellectus.'
- ⁷ See my book *The Mystery of Reason* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2001) pp. 12-19.
- ⁸ St Gregory of Nyssa, *De Hominis Opificio*, 5.1.