

Science Must Not Attack Human Dignity

Following is excerpted from a recent address by Pope John Paul II to members of the scientific community, in particular the Pontifical Academy of the Sciences.

Cosmogony and cosmology have always aroused great interest among peoples and religions. The Bible itself speaks to us of the origin of the universe and its makeup, not in order to provide us with a scientific treatise, but in order to state the correct relationship of man with God and with the universe. Sacred Scripture wishes simply to declare that the world was created by God, and in order to teach this truth, it expresses itself in the terms of the cosmology in use at the time of the writer.



The Sacred Book likewise wishes to tell men that the world was not created as the seat of the gods, as was taught by other cosmogonies and cosmologies, but was, rather, created for the service of man and the glory of God.

Any other teaching about the origin and makeup of the universe is alien to the intentions of the Bible, which does not wish to teach how heaven was made but how one goes to heaven.

Any scientific hypothesis on the origin of the world, such as the hypothesis of a primitive atom from which derived the whole of the physical universe, leaves open the problem concerning the universe's beginning.

Science, cannot, of itself, solve this question: there is needed that human knowledge that rises above physics and astrophysics and which is called metaphysics; there is needed, above all, the knowledge that comes from God's revelation. Thirty years ago, on Nov. 22, 1951, my predecessor, Pope Pius XII, speaking about the problem of the origin of the universe on the micro-seism organized by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, expressed himself as follows:

"In vain one would expect a reply from the sciences of nature, which, on the contrary, frankly declare that they find themselves by an insoluble enigma.

"It is equally certain that the human mind, versed in philosophical meditation, penetrates the problem more deeply. One cannot deny that a mind which is enlightened and enriched by modern scientific knowledge and which calmly considers this problem is led to break the circle of matter which is totally autonomous — as being either uncreated or having created itself — and rise to a creating Mind.

"With the same clear and critical gaze with which it examines and judges the facts, it discerns and recognizes there the work of creative Omnipotence, whose strength raised up by the powerful 'fiat' uttered millions of years ago by the creating Mind, has spread through the universe, calling into existence, in a gesture of generous love, matter teeming with energy."

Members of the academy, I am very pleased with the theme that you have chosen for your plenary session beginning on this very day: "The Impact of Molecular Biology on Society."

I realize the advantages that result — and can still result — from the study and applications of molecular biology, supplemented by other disciplines such as genetics and its technological application in agriculture and industry, and also, as is envisaged, for the treatment of various illnesses, some of a hereditary character.

I have firm confidence in the world scientific community, and in a very special way, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, and I am certain that thanks to them biological progress and research as also all other forms of scientific research and its technological application, will be carried out in full respect for the norms of morality, safeguarding human dignity,

freedom and equality. It is necessary that science should always be accompanied and controlled by the wisdom that belongs to the permanent spiritual heritage of humanity and that takes its inspiration from the design of God implanted in creation before being subsequently proclaimed by His Word.

Reflection that is inspired by science and by the wisdom of the world scientific community must enlighten humanity regarding the consequences — good and bad — of scientific research and, especially, of that research which concerns man, so that, on the one hand, there will be no fixation on anticultural positions that retard the progress of humanity and that, on the other hand, there will be no attack on man's most precious possession: the dignity of his person, destined to true progress in the unity of his physical, intellectual and spiritual well-being.

There is another subject, which, during these days has occupied the thoughts of some of you; eminent scholars from different parts of the world: the question of parasitic diseases, diseases which strike the poorest countries of the world and are a serious obstacle to the development of man in the harmonious framework of his physical, economic and spiritual well-being.

The efforts to eliminate, as far as possible, the serious harm caused by parasitic diseases to a considerable part of humanity are inseparable from the efforts which should be made for the socioeconomic development of those same peoples.

Human beings normally need a basic minimum of health and material goods in order to be able to live in a manner worthy of their human and divine vocation. It is for this reason that Jesus turned with infinite love to the sick and infirm, and that He miraculously cured some of the diseases about which you have been concerned in these past days.

May the Lord inspire and assist the work of the scientists and doctors who dedicate their research and profession to the study and treatment of human infirmities, especially those which are the most grave and humiliating.

In addition to the question of parasitic diseases, the academy has been studying the question of a scourge of catastrophic dimensions and gravity that could attack the health of humanity if a nuclear conflict were to break out.

Over and above the death of a considerable part of the world's population, a nuclear conflict could have incalculable effects on the health of the present and future generations.

The multi-disciplinary study which you are preparing to undertake cannot fail to be for the heads of state a reminder and arouse in all humanity an ever more intense desire for concord and peace, a desire which comes from the most profound depths of the human heart, and also from the message of Christ who came to bring peace to people of good will.

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