Andrzej Siemieniewski

God is Love and Reason

Collected Essays

V&R

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List of abbreviations

d.	died (with dates)
FR	John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* (1998)
KJV	King James Version of the Bible
LXX	Septuagint
LexM	*Lexikon des Mittelalters*, vol. 1–9, München et al., 1980–1998
PL	*Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.P. Migne, vol. 1–217, Paris 1815–1875
Vlg	Vulgate
WSA21	The Works of Saint Augustine. A Translation for the 21st Century (series)

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Table of transcription

Hebrew

א – *’*	שׁ – *š*
בּ ב – *b*	תּ ת – *t*
ג – *g*	
ד – *d*	בָה – *bâ*
ה – *h*	בוֹ – *bô*
ו – *w*	בוּ – *bû*
ז – *z*	בֵי – *bê*
ח – *ḥ*	בִי – *bî*
ט – *ṭ*	בָ – *bā*
י – *y*	בֹ – *bō*
כּ ך כ – *k*	בֵ – *bē*
ל – *l*	בַ – *ba*
מ ם – *m*	בָּ – *bo*
נ ן – *n*	בֻּ – *bu*
ס – *s*	בֶּ – *be*
ע – *‘*	בִּ – *bi*
פּ ף פ – *p*	בֱ – *bă*
צ ץ – *ṣ*	בֳ – *bŏ*
ק – *q*	בֶֽ – *bĕ*
ר – *r*	בְ – *b*^{e}
שׂ – *ś*	*patach furtivum* – *a*

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Greek

Α α – *A*, *a*
Β β – *B*, *b*
Γ γ – *G*, *g*
– *N*, *n* (before γ, κ, χ, ζ)
Δ δ – *D*, *d*
Ε ε – *E*, *e*
Ζ ζ – *Dz*, *dz*
Η η – *Ē*, *ē*
Θ θ – *Th*, *th*
Ι ι – *I*, *i*
Κ κ – *K*, *k*
Λ λ – *L*, *l*
Μ μ – *M*, *m*
Ν ν – *N*, *n*
Ξ ξ – *Ks*, *ks*
Ο ο – *O*, *o*
Π π – *P*, *p*
Ρ ρ – *R*, *r*
῾Ρ ῾ρ – *Rh*, *rh*
Σ σ ς – *S*, *s*
Τ τ – *T*, *t*
Υ υ – *U*, *u* (after a consonant)
– *Y*, *y* (after a vowel)
Φ φ – *F*, *f*
Χ χ – *Ch*, *ch*
Ψ ψ – *Ps*, *ps*
Ω ω – *Ō*, *ō*
ῳ – *ō*(*i*)
ᾳ – *a*(*i*)
ῃ – *ē*(*i*)
᾽ *spiritus lenis* – not transcribed
῾ *spiritus asper* – *h*

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Foreword

'Science' is a concept that encompasses the enormous effort of the human intellect oriented towards learning about the surrounding reality, whereas the 'scientific approach' is directed more and more towards what is "inside" us, in our psyche. 'Religion' in turn, evokes associations from other fields of our activity: it connotes the acceptance of tradition on the basis of trust between individuals. The role of critical reason in religion seems to be of a lesser importance than in science, which poses quite a challenge when these two fields of human culture meet. This encounter generates questions that are put forward not only in the balanced debates of specialists, but more often in the heated social discussions, worldview disputes, let alone the turmoil of a social culture war.

The Christian Church has a certain advantage in these debates, though often not recognized and regularly underestimated. This advantage is two thousand years of Tradition. No other institution can boast an unbroken chain of generations of writers, thinkers, theologians, philosophers that would engage for twenty centuries in transgenerational dialogue. On the one hand, the Fathers and Doctors of the Church share common heritage of faith in the Gospel; on the other hand, they respond to the same challenges in constantly new social and cultural contexts.

How to understand the Biblical creation narrative? The Christian answer was first developed in the society of Greek culture during the persecutions by the ancient Roman empire, then taken up anew by Christians who identified themselves as citizens of "their state" in the Roman culture. The same question was afterwards addressed by thinkers inspired by early Islamic thought, and later taken over by authors of great scholastic syntheses. It returned to the agenda after the great sixteen-century geographical discoveries, which permanently changed many facets of the Christian worldview. During the famous trial of Galileo (1564–1642), both sides vied for the title of defender of the Church Tradition (and it is Galileo who seems to have been a better defender of this Tradition than the commission of cardinals). All this is worth keeping in mind when we ponder on the encounter (or is it a conflict or a dialogue?) between faith and science. The two-thousand-year-old tradition offers resources that are both captivating, enlightening and indispensable.

It is for this very purpose that this book has been written. Certainly, there are many notable works that illustrate the views of individual authors or even of entire historical eras (such as the late Middle Ages) in a more detailed and finer way. Moreover, increasingly numerous studies have been devoted to the latest research findings, be they astronomical, biological or archaeological. This publication, however, was intended to accomplish another objective, namely, to illustrate twenty

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centuries of history in this aspect by means of the method of "historical images". A single detail extracted from an analysis of the work of any of the Church Fathers or medieval thinkers becomes a piece of stone inlaid into a mosaic. And the entire mosaic forms then an overall image of Christian thought oriented towards one relatively well-defined direction. Obviously, there are exceptions to the rule; it is true, there will also be times when the pace slows down or even the thought veers away. But the underlying tendency of the march through the centuries becomes clearer with every page as the reader will assimilate the successive elements of this great historical mosaic.

This intention is reflected in the two-part layout of the book. The first part is *Theology vis-à-vis the sciences before the scientific revolution of the sixteenth century*. The journey through the centuries with the question of how the biblical creation narrative (Gen 1–2) meets the views of the Greek philosophers begins with St Basil the Great, an early Church Father. The perspective then broadens to explore the issue through the eyes of other great pillars of the ecclesiastical Tradition, among whom St Augustine turns out to be an unparallelled master (it is difficult to stifle the sigh how much paper and ink would have been saved in history if all the commentators had known Augustine's findings concerning the dialogue between theology and the sciences).

The passing mention of the anecdotal "flat Earth" was only intended an aid on the way to more serious topics. And one of these is certainly the fascination of the early Middle Ages with mathematics. Evidently, no special development occurred in this period, but what the Greek ancient masters had achieved never ceased to attract the minds of the Christians of the first millennium. Further on, from the writings of Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas, this collection of essays shifts the focus to Galileo, who – unexpectedly for many readers – deserves the title of a true defender of the Tradition of the Catholic Church. At the end of this part, reference is made to the age of Darwin and his theory of evolution, in order to prove, by means of this randomly selected illustration from a decidedly later time, that theology's approach to the natural sciences was consistently uniform.

The second part, considerably shorter, explores a similar issue, though in a narrower aspect: *The learned Christian woman: from the history of the problem*. It was not intended as a study of the role of women in the whole history of the Church, for dozens of excellent works by many distinguished authors have been devoted to this issue. The scope was narrowed down by this one word: '*learned*'. This term has taken various forms throughout history. When we go back to the tradition of interpreting biblical data, the terms 'prophetess' and 'prophesying' prove to be more useful initially. Although it was already noted in the commentaries to the Old Testament that the only person worthy of being called an interlocutor of the sage Solomon turned out to be a woman, the Queen of Sheba. In this part, too, one of the essays expands beyond the boundaries of the scientific revolution to highlight the

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historical influence of the Catholic Tradition in this matter even in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The method of "historical impressionism" applied here consists, as we can see, in an accumulation of images from many centuries, diverse backgrounds and numerous cultural circles. The superior purpose is to show that the image of God dominant throughout the Christian Tradition is God who is Love and God who is Reason. And that it is the same God.

The Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Wrocław, where the Author of this publication is a long-tenured employee and professor, issues this publication as a kind of tribute to the Author. In recognition of his indisputable and outstanding contribution to the theological thought, the Pontifical Faculty of Theology republishes these texts, which had previously been included, in the Polish language, in commemorative and anniversary books, now almost unavailable to most readers.

Undoubtedly, Bishop Andrzej Siemieniewski's deep and accurate reflections on theology understood integrally will offer a valuable insight into the condition of theology in Poland, especially in the academic community of Wrocław.

Sławomir Stasiak
Rector of the Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Wrocław

Editor's note

Quotations from source texts are generally taken from existing translations in English-language literature, as indicated in the footnotes and bibliography. The absence of bibliographical references to translations means that the Author provides his own translation of the texts. In such cases, the original texts are given in the footnotes.

Due to the type of the publication (collected essays), some themes may be repeated in subsequent essays.

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PART I
THEOLOGY VIS-À-VIS THE SCIENCES BEFORE THE SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

1. The Church of the First Centuries in the service of *fides et ratio*: the example of St Basil the Great

> Grand phenomena do not strike us the less when we have discovered something of their wonderful mechanism.[1]
> (Basil the Great, *Hexaëmeron* I,10).

The combination of *fides et ratio* is not new in the history of Christianity. On the contrary, John Paul II, on the question of faith and reason, writes explicitly about the Church Fathers that:

> They fully welcomed reason which was open to the absolute, and they infused it with the richness drawn from Revelation. This was more than a meeting of cultures, with one culture perhaps succumbing to the fascination of the other. It happened rather in the depths of human souls, and it was a meeting of creature and Creator (FR 41).

Reflecting on the possibility of following the path of *fides et ratio*, we will refer to a bishop figure from the fourth century of Christianity, from the golden age when the Church Fathers were active. We will see whether the great shepherds of that time can still teach us a lesson today. We will choose the biblical account of the creation of the world (Gen 1–2) as our object of reflection because it is a particularly controversial issue for the contemporary Christian mind.

St Basil the Great (329–379), author of the Homilies on *The Six Days of Creation* (*Homiliae in Hexaëmeron*), is one of the more important Christian writers who wrote profound reflections on the description of creation as presented in Genesis. Those modern Christians who read the biblical creation of the world literally are in for a surprise: the aforementioned saint, the Father of the Church, viewed many of the descriptions found in the first three chapters of Genesis as figurative. For him, they were not at all a source of information about how the cosmos is constructed; he did not believe that the creation of the world took place in six days, nor did he think that man was fashioned from the clay of the earth. Rather, the biblical stories told him about God's character. If we are still, eighteen centuries later, confronting the achievements of science (astronomy, biology, physics and others) as contradictory with a literal biblical account of the beginning of the world, then in the light of the

1 Basil, *Hexaëmeron* I,10, English transl. B. Jackson.

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interpretation presented by St Basil we should feel ashamed that we are on a lower intellectual level than the Church Fathers of the fourth century.

The Creator of the world appeared to be the Divine Artist. The Bible encourages us, Basil assures, to regard the world in which we live as a most magnificent work of art, and concurrently an unfinished work because its development and embellishment have not ceased, because the Holy Spirit still plays his role. The literary picture – let us admit it – surprises the present reader, for it shows that God's Spirit broods the world like a hen who gradually brings her chicks to maturity. With this outline in mind, let us take a look at the details.

1.1 Creation by design

St Basil was absolutely convinced that God's creative act was the work of a Divine Artist. He was not led to this understanding of creation merely by sentimental admiration for the beauty of the sunset or the singing of larks. He was led to this understanding of creation by the intellectual discovery that there are laws of nature which bring order to the world and which govern it. This fact makes the world intellectually accessible to man, who, through scientific observation and the principles of logic, gradually discovers the supramaterial arrangement of natural laws. Since this arrangement is perfectly logical and harmonious, it is characterised by an intellectual beauty that delights both the senses and the exploring mind.[2]

God's first act of creation was order: one can see in it mathematical and physical principles to which the material world has been subjected. For that matter the terms 'before/prior' and 'after/subsequent' denote not a temporal succession, but a rational order. Why? Because before the creation of matter, time did not exist. Time appeared with the emergence of the cosmos: time is after all measured by the movement of objects in space. Basil, the great fourth century champion of Christianity, expressed it as follows:

> It appears, indeed, that even before this world an order of things existed of which our mind can form an idea, but of which we can say nothing, because it is too lofty a subject for men who are but beginners and are still babes in knowledge. The birth of the world was preceded by a condition of things suitable for the exercise of supernatural powers, outstripping the limits of time, eternal and infinite. […] "In the beginning God created"; after the invisible and intellectual world, the visible world, the world of the senses, began to exist. "In the beginning God created"; that is to say, in the beginning of time.[3]

2 Cf. J. Szaefer, *Appreciating the Beauty of Earth*, "Theological Studies" 62 (2001), no. 1, p. 23–52.

3 Basil, *Hexaëmeron* I,5.

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Therefore, before discussing the beginning of the world, it is necessary to discuss the existence of an astonishing order to which created things are subject.[4] Starting from such an assumption, one can reverse the scientific cognition of the world, one can reverse the order of cognition: from created things one can move on to discover the order according to which they exist; thus, one can arrive at the Creator Himself:

> If sometimes, in the day, you have studied the marvels of light, if you have raised yourself by visible things to the invisible Being, then you are a well-prepared auditor […] I am going to lead you, like strangers, through the mysterious marvels of this great city of the universe.[5]

The act of creation began with the establishment of the laws of nature, after which (in the sense of logical succession) material entities appeared which were subject to these laws. When we think of human cognition, we observe the opposite process: man first perceives the material world, after which he painstakingly discovers the laws governing it and becomes convinced that they are mathematical in nature, and therefore timeless and unchangeable. It is in this way – following one thing that leads to another – that the question of the source of creation, both visible and invisible, of the laws of physics, logic and mathematics, arises for man. Gradually, science allows the mind the opportunity to deeper understand the world and to query about the origin of both material entities and the regular and unchanging laws that govern them:

> You will thus find what was the first movement of time […] and afterwards that an intelligent reason, as the word beginning indicates, presided in the order of visible things. You will finally discover that the world was not conceived by chance and without reason, but for an useful end and for the great advantage of all beings, since it is really the school where reasonable souls exercise themselves, the training ground where they learn to know God; since by the sight of visible and sensible things the mind is led, as by a hand, to the contemplation of invisible things. "For", as the Apostle says, "the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made (Rom 1:20).[6]

This a rather longer passage from St Basil's homily is worth highlighting. The Father of the Church quotes a phrase from St Paul's letter to the Romans, which was very often used by ancient and medieval theologians to vindicate the need to explore

4 Cf. ibid. I,1.
5 Ibid. VI,1.
6 Ibid. I,6.

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the natural sciences. The world as God's creation can be comprehended by the mind, while knowledge of the world will make it easier for man to understand such invisible qualities of God the Creator as omnipotence, goodness and wisdom. It is in the same way that we come to the source of the future European scientific revolution in the mathematised astronomical and physical sciences… In those days, too, St Basil had to tackle questions similar to those with which modern Christians are constantly confronted.

> [Some] imagined that atoms, indivisible bodies, molecules and ducts, form, by their union, the nature of the visible world. Atoms reuniting or separating, produce births and deaths and the most durable bodies only owe their consistency to the strength of their mutual adhesion.[7]

Does the sentence quoted above express the achievements of twenty-first century particle physics or molecular biology? No, this sentence was formulated by ancient materialists and summarised in the fourth century by the Christian writer, St Basil. "It appeared to them that nothing governed or ruled the universe, and that all was given up to chance".[8]

Let us peruse the texts, which speak explicitly of the world as the artful work of the Divine Artist. Seeking to clarify his thoughts, St Basil explains that artistry is a broad and ambiguous concept. A work of art can be a fleeting movement of the human body, like dance or music; such a work is ephemeral: it passes away the moment the movement ceases. A work of art can also be the intellectual effort that accompanies the formulation of a theory; here the work of art are the imperceptible mental processes. Finally, there are tangible and permanent works of art, the fruit of creative arts:

> In creative arts on the contrary the work lasts after the operation. Such is architecture – such are the arts which work in wood and brass and weaving, all those indeed which, even when the artisan has disappeared, serve to show an industrious intelligence and to cause the architect, the worker in brass or the weaver, to be admired on account of his work.[9]

Such an enduring work is the world that was created by the Divine Artist.

Having explained what he meant by a work of art, St Basil presented the second step of his reasoning. It is from this point of view that he analyses the text of Genesis. The first three chapters can be interpreted in the following way: Moses, the human

7 Ibid. I,2.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid. I,7.

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author of the first part of the Bible, wants to show that the world is an exhibited work of art to be admired by all men, so that they can know Him who is its Creator. The description is structured so that the reader can learn as much as possible about God.

> Being good, He made it an useful work. Being wise, He made it everything that was most beautiful. Being powerful He made it very great. Moses almost shows us the finger of the supreme artisan taking possession of the substance of the universe, forming the different parts in one perfect accord, and making a harmonious symphony result from the whole.[10]

Such was the meaning of St Paul's phrase in his letter to the Romans: "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen" (cf. Rom 1:20). The world is a marvellous collection of creatures; it is a cosmos – that is, a beautiful and harmonious arrangement of the various parts into a whole, as the meaning of this Greek word reminds us. Christians in the Hellenistic world were fond of this theme and remembered the words of the Bible celebrating the creative wisdom of God: "Thou hast disposed all things by measure and number and weight" (Wis 11:20).[11] Arguing with those who separated the work of God the Creator from that of the God Artist, St Basil instructs:

> God, before all those things which now attract our notice existed, after casting about in His mind and determining to bring into being time which had no being, imagined the world such as it ought to be, and created matter in harmony with the form which He wished to give it. He assigned to the heavens the nature adapted for the heavens, and gave to the earth an essence in accordance with its form. He formed, as He wished, fire, air and water, and gave to each the essence which the object of its existence required. Finally, He welded all the diverse parts of the universe by links of indissoluble attachment and established between them so perfect a fellowship and harmony that the most distant, in spite of their distance, appeared united in one universal sympathy [Gr. *sympatheia*, Lat. *concentus*].[12]

10 Ibid.

11 Cf. I. Miller, *Idolatry and the Polemics of World-Formation from Philo to Augustine*, "The Journal of Religious History" 28 (2004), no. 2, p. 126–145.

12 Basil, *Hexaemeron* II,2.

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