

Free Zone - Comparing physics and biblical exegesis. Conceiving the origin **by Marco Pavan**

In a recent work published in this newspaper, F. Tomatis and R. Cetera discuss the possibility of building a "new alliance" between philosophical and theological thought or, more generally, between theology and science. (...)

The scientific approach and the faith-based approach seem to give two apparently incompatible answers or, at least, two basically distinct answers based on different assumptions to the universal question about the origin. From the Christian point of view, we can say that "biblical" and "scientific" men look at the same problem from two different perspectives - not always peacefully, one would be tempted to say. (...)

It is therefore necessary to respect the common origin but also the methodological autonomy of the two approaches in order to avoid gross errors, as shown by the dispute over the Copernican system. So, is it possible to find a common ground between the two approaches? The paths of biblical exegesis and experimental science have developed in a manner that is essentially different: the biblical text apparently differs from the cosmological vision of scholars in the natural sciences, and the latter claim autonomy from religious thought in order to operate effectively and objectively. While there have been and still are attempts to mediate between the two spheres, exegesis has developed above all a historical approach to the biblical text, by identifying at the cosmological level "historical" evidence of pre-scientific thought in some specific passages – in an attempt to explain the creation of the world through "myth" and a fundamental "religious" reference, under the influence of similar efforts made by the cultures of the ancient Near East. Such evidence may have archaeological or cultural interest in a broad sense but no real "normative value" - at least as far as cosmological conceptions are concerned. The first Genesis account of creation, however, may provide a novel perspective on the relationship between faith-based and scientific approaches to the question of origin. In Genesis, 1, 1-2, 4a, in fact, there is an attempt to represent the beginning of the cosmos and its structure in terms of numerical harmony and correspondence. (...)

To recognize or investigate the harmonious distinctions and separations that make up all of creation implies hearing the original "word" that supports that narrative. That word also places its interlocutor - man, in fact – at the center and calls him to be a participant in the unfolding of the story.

The mathematical language (...) and the narrative language, which is inclined to give a special value and direction to the whole cosmos - the controversial "theory of purpose in nature" - seem to coexist in the account of Genesis. Therefore, behind the apparent imprecision and simplicity of the images used – aimed at the mere affirmation of faith in the uniqueness and omnipotence of the Creator (on the surface) - the text of Genesis seems to imply that the two fundamental approaches (the narrative/mythical approach and the scientific one) are not mutually exclusive. If these seminal intuitions are correct, is it possible to imagine the two languages reaching out to each other and cooperating in an ever deeper understanding of the mystery and miracle of the cosmos? Since there are already attempts to do so in the history of Western thought, it is worth relaunching this issue. © L'Osservatore Romano – Vatican Media

(Original text: Italian. Translated by Leonardo Stefanucci)

