

Faith and Science

By Metropolitan Saba (Isper)

The scope of science is the tangible and perceptible. Science deals with concrete reality. It is built on analysing, scrutinizing, and unveiling the different components of what it studies. For instance, science attempts to know the body's components, the functions of its organs and their coordination, its diseases and the reasons for its deterioration or growth, in addition to all its mysteries that surpass our human understanding. Science deals with concrete reality, to improve it, to beautify it, to enrich it, etc.

When science reaches beyond concrete reality and encroaches on the spiritual realm, dreams, motivations, and inclinations, when it deals with the inner person and studies the existential problems such as love and hatred, inner peace, anxiety, pain, meaning, death, life, evil, and good—then science abandons its strict scientific rules and enters into the realm of conclusions, deductions, theories, and reflections. Science does not thus remain as science, but it becomes philosophy or metaphysics.

Science helps me know what is suitable for my health and what is suitable for my practical and economic affairs. It provides me with healing and treatment for my illnesses and facilitates my movement from one place to another. However, it doesn't give meaning to my life. It doesn't explain to me the existence of death, evil, pain, or injustice. From a human perspective, these issues fall under the scope of philosophy, faith, or religion.

If we want an integrated vision, we find in science and faith two complementary, not contradictory, fields. The first makes the life of human beings easier at many levels; and the second gives them the motivation, meaning, and inner power to live life in its fullness. "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). Man is a physical-psychological being. He is composed of spirit and matter. Christian theology calls him a "psychosomatic being"—i.e., a soul-body being. The body has its demands and needs, and so has the soul. Only satisfying what is of the body makes humans instinctive beings, similar to animals. History has shown that humans are not satisfied with the material, nor do they only seek material things, except when they lack what is necessary for life. However, as soon as they fulfil their basic needs of life, they move on to the deeper needs, the needs of the soul and the spirit.

Science has its realm, and so does faith. The realm of faith is more comprehensive and general than that of science; faith incorporates science to improve human life, and it cooperates with God in creativity. The most important aspect of faith is that it provides the guardrails that give science its values and guard against its impulses, which humans may direct toward destruction and devastation rather than toward building a better life.

Who sets the ethics of science? Who prevents science from producing super humans (the “posthumans” of transhumanism) and annihilating weak humans? Who prevents science from establishing a new human slavery? Who gives human meaning to scientific achievements? Who establishes the ethics of biological sciences (bioethics)? Who satisfies the human soul that thirsts to find love and security? Who empowers the human being to achieve a better life and gives him meaning and fulfilment, which he has pursued throughout his existence on earth? Science cannot now find, nor has it ever been able to find, answers to these and many other questions.

Science has lost the glamor it had in the twentieth century. People have started to perceive science realistically after dreaming for a long time of a paradise promised by science. People once expected science to change everything for the better; however, they have discovered that it is only a tool that may equally change things for the worse, in evil hands.

Science and faith have struggled with each other a lot in the past. Perhaps one of the reasons for their conflict is the dominance of religion and its utter hegemony over European societies during the Middle Ages, which was accompanied by contemporaneous scientific concepts founded on narrow and literal understandings of religious texts.

Scientific development has contributed to the liberation of faith from human religious frameworks, shaped within a specific time and place. And after centuries of conflict, both science and faith have begun to take their natural places without encroaching on each other. Scientists have come to understand that their knowledge is limited to what is concrete and can be improved and that their theorizing on the intangibles betrays scientific rules and encroaches on contemplation, philosophy and faith. Believers, on the other hand, have recognized that the Holy Bible is a theological book that tells humans about God through the culture within which it was inspired and that it does not offer scientific knowledge, even if sometimes it was expressed in scientific terms as understood by its contemporaneous audience.

Faith is personal, and it is related to many things, such as humility, openness, obedience, the wholeness of man, and the integrity of his mind and heart. That's why we may find both faithful and atheistic scientists, just as we find both faithful and atheistic philosophers.

It is time for us to put God in His own category above our human abilities, however big they may seem, since He is immeasurably beyond our understanding.