

Árpád KULCSÁR¹ .

The Timely Character of Dialogue

The Problem of Creation in Theology and Natural Sciences. The Synthesis of László Ravasz

Abstract.

This paper discusses the necessity of dialogue about the topic of creation between theology, philosophy, and natural sciences. I argue that philosophy has a bridge-building role between theology and natural sciences. I aim to show why the mediation of philosophy cannot be neglected and why a holistic approach is such an important theme, as creation is necessary. I shall also invoke the ideas of László Ravasz (1882–1975) and point out that the synthesis he argued for in his scientific papers is still useful today.

Keywords: creation, theology, philosophy, natural sciences, myth, “theory of chaos”, missiology, László Ravasz

¹ Assistant Lecturer, Partium Christian University, Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, Oradea; e-mail: kulcsarpad@partium.ro.



1. Loss of Theological and Philosophical Space

The scientific study of the universe and our place in it, the Earth, goes back a long time. With the essential development of the natural sciences and mainly thanks to the views formulated by Charles Darwin, it has gained strength in the last one hundred and fifty years. This caused fierce debates on the part of Christianity against natural science and its representatives when the Church wanted to defend its dogmas, the authority of the Bible, or its place in society.

László Ravasz was not interested in natural sciences. At least, this is clear from his extant, rich lifework, but I have not read anywhere about him what would prove the opposite. For him, scientific interest developed in the triple circle of philosophy–theology–literature. However, it is certain that he was not against natural science. He had a calm attitude towards those subjects that today, through certain representatives of the natural sciences and theology, often lead to very heated debates. He respected the achievements of science, observing with sincere admiration the scientific and technical discoveries and realizations that unfolded in the 20th century.

Considering the above, only a very small fraction of his complete published lifework provides some clue based on which I will be able to respond to what is formulated in the title of the paper. If we examine his volumes of sermons, we can notice that until 1941 no preaching was published that would discuss the topic of creation. In the last two books published by Franklin Publishing House appears the first sermons on the subject, but these can be divided into two distinct groups: Sunday sermons and wedding speeches.² His inauguration speech at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences can provide further clues to the topic,³ as well as one or two chapters of his short dogmatic work, which were delivered in church Bible school and published a few decades after his death.⁴

² RAVASZ, László (1941a): *Isten rostájában* [In the Sieve of God]. Budapest, Franklin-társulat; RAVASZ, László (1943): *Korbán*. Vol. I–II. Budapest, Franklin-társulat.

³ RAVASZ, László (1928): *Pál Athénben* [Paul in Athens]. He read it at the ceremonial general assembly of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences on 20 May. Budapest, Magyar Tudományos Akadémia.

⁴ RAVASZ, László (1990): *Kis dogmatika. Hitünk igazságai* [Concise Dogmatics. The Truths of Our Faith]. Budapest, Református Zsinati Iroda Sajtóosztálya.

Seeing these modest sources, such questions may rightly arise: what can be the purpose of this research if so few primary sources are available on the given topic? Are Ravasz's ideas authentic? Can they be evaluated scientifically? Is it even possible to do something with Ravasz's thoughts on natural science? In the case of such an extensive lifework, with so few sources on the given topic, should this question not be closed simply by saying that Ravasz did not deal with creation in an appreciable way? Do his thoughts appearing here and there require further research?

Well, I must start answering these questions with two quotes. The first one is the idea of Stephen Hawking, theoretical physicist, who wrote the following in *The Grand Design*. "Traditionally, these [viz. questions about the genesis of the universe and the Earth] are questions for philosophy, but philosophy is dead. Philosophy has not kept up with modern developments in science, particularly physics. Scientists have become the bearers of the torch of discovery in our quest for knowledge."⁵

The second is from a sermon of László Ravasz delivered in 1941: "After forty years of learning, I can say with deep conviction that, from a literary point of view, not a single book can be compared with the beginning of the Holy Scripture, the epical telling of creation. After long reflections, I always conclude that these few chapters [from the book of Genesis] are on the highest level from a philosophical point of view. The human mind has never made so many decisive and summary statements about man and his world."⁶

In this paper, I will relate to these two seemingly only loosely related quotes. Although the authors of these quotes are separated by scientific eras – one quote comes from an internationally recognized and well-respected scientist, and the other is part of a sermon from a Hungarian Reformed pastor –, they still highlight how different their opinions are about which field of science has the authority to deal with the given question. The framework and the system of László Ravasz's theological thinking was provided by philosophy. In his remarkable work *Omnia sunt facta per ipsum. Darwin's*

⁵ HAWKING, Stephen – MLODINOW, Leonard (2010): *The Grand Design*. Bantam Books. New York, The Random House Publishing. 13–14.

⁶ RAVASZ, László (1941b): Az ember Isten képmása [Man Is the Image of God]. In: Ravasz, László: *Korbán*. Vol. I. Budapest, Franklin-társulat. 146. The translation of all originally non-English quotations belong to the author of the present article unless otherwise stated.

Influence upon the Faith in Creation. Theological and Human Questions, the author, Péter Szentpétery, devotes a separate chapter to László Ravasz's standpoint, basing on his short dogmatics from the mid-20th century.

Although Hawking admits that questions related to the origin of the universe used to belong to the scope of philosophy, he argues that today this is no longer the case. Since László Ravasz has no longer the opportunity to reflect on Hawking's statement, I ask the help of the contemporary mathematician John C. Lennox, who reflects in a short book entitled *God and Stephen Hawking* as follows: "The very first thing I notice is that Hawking's statement about philosophy is itself a philosophical statement. It is manifestly not a statement of science: it is a metaphysical statement about science. Therefore, his statement that philosophy is dead contradicts itself. It is a classic example of logical incoherence."⁷

Lennox quotes a little-known letter of Albert Einstein, written on 7 December 1944, in which Einstein argues:

I fully agree with you about the significance and educational value of methodology as well as history and philosophy of science. So many people today, and even professional scientists, seem to me like someone who has seen thousands of trees but has never seen a forest. A knowledge of the historic and philosophical background gives that kind of independence from prejudices of his generation from which most scientists are suffering. This independence created by philosophical insight is, in my opinion, the mark of distinction between a mere artisan or specialist and a real seeker after truth.⁸

Alister E. McGrath shares the same opinion when he reflects on the given question: "Science simply cannot answer questions about the meaning of life and should not be expected – still less, forced – to do so. [...] These questions are metaphysical, not empirical."⁹

⁷ LENNOX, John C. (2011): *God and Stephen Hawking. Whose Design Is It Anyway?* Oxford (England), Lion Hudson. 10.

⁸ HOWARD, Don (2015): Albert Einstein as Philosopher of Science. In: *Physics Today*. 58, 12. Cited in Lennox 2021, 10.

⁹ MCGRATH, Alister E. (2011): *Surprised by Meaning. Science, Faith, and How We Make Sense of Things*. Westminster John Knox Press. 15.

Einstein's letter aligns much more closely with Ravasz's position and is affirming in its insistence that philosophy must have a place within theological reflection, just as the two disciplines complemented one another for many centuries and remained in a relationship of mutual critique and engagement. A similar mutual reflection must develop natural sciences with philosophy and theology. If we dedicate ourselves to the actual search for truth within a specific scientific subfield, then the widely mentioned holistic vision would be greatly helpful. Previously, interdisciplinarity was only offered as an option, but today it has become an urgent requirement.¹⁰

We can observe a centuries-long deficit in theological thinking, when it tried with all its might to hinder the development of the natural sciences; and, instead of dispelling superstition, he often declared that they were up against the devil's machinations.¹¹ Thus, it is understandable that the aim of the natural sciences was, among other things, to distance themselves from Christian theology with the intention of self-protection and the search for their own scientific identity. Nowadays, this has reached such proportions that the gap seems almost unbridgeable. There will be no change in this matter until the intention of a mutual bridge building is formulated from both directions. A possible solution is for philosophy to provide the bridge between theology and the natural sciences. However, for this to happen, the theologian and the natural scientist must both recognize and accept this role of philosophy. By the end of this paper, I would like to have delivered arguments as to why I see philosophy as a possible bridge between various scientific fields – in this case, between natural sciences and theology.

¹⁰ "By now, interdisciplinarity has been taken for granted, so it is no wonder that the tendency is towards a 'clearly comprehensive language' by each field of science, and, in the interest of a faster and more precise flow of information these terms should become the means of expressing ideas in a straightforward fashion." GAÁL, Botond (2002): *The Truth of Reason and the Reality of the World. Historic Development of the Exact Sciences from a Christian Viewpoint*. Debrecen, DRHE. 8.

¹¹ See: LUTHER, Martin (1872): *Table Talk*. Chapter: *Astronomy and Astrology*. Transl. and ed. by Hazlitt, William. Bell & Daldy. 341–343.

2. Theories, Attempts, and Reflections

In what follows, I will examine some approaches. I am aware that this will appear very sketchy and even incomplete, but the frame of this paper does not allow to go any deeper. I cannot even touch a few quite important questions. For further profound studies, there are two essential works in Hungarian by two remarkable researchers: Botond Gaál's *The Truth of Reason and the Reality of the World. Historic Development of Exact Sciences from a Christian Viewpoint* and Péter Szentpétery's *Omnia sunt facta per ipsum. Darwin's Influence on Creationism – Theological and Human Questions*. These two volumes cover almost all important and current issues related to our topic with sufficient thoroughness and detail.

János Molnár in his sermon (which could be read as a shorter scientific study) entitled *The Beginning of Creation*, thematizes well the scientific (and pseudo-scientific) views on the issue of creation. Molnár describes the complex issue in four well-formulated points:

a) The entire biblical story of creation is a Jewish cosmogony that expresses the worldview of a bygone era.

b) The biblical story of creation told by the first chapters of the book of Genesis is basically a myth, of which images and ideas are copies of the Egyptian and Babylonian similar myths.

c) The biblical story of creation belongs to the literature of a philosophical school whose teaching is the so-called *creatio ex nihilo* = creation from nothing. The story of creation emphasizes this thesis of religious philosophy.

d) The entire biblical story of creation is an unscientific narrative that cannot be integrated into today's scientific worldview, in which not only the unscientific nature and features contrary to materialistic thinking are evident but also the structural superficiality of the narrative, the illogicality and confusion of the events.¹²

¹² MOLNÁR, János (1995): A teremtés kezdete [The Beginning of Creation]. In: Molnár, János: *Csillagsors. Prédikációk* [Fate of the Stars. Sermons]. Oradea, Királyhágómelléki Református Egyházkerület. 6–12.

This categorization, formulated in an easy-to-understand way, may seem simplistic in some aspects, but in essence it summarizes the criticisms that are usually levelled at the accounts of the first chapters of the Bible about creation. At the same time, it also affects the question with which the interpreters of the Bible approach creation. The method of textual criticism, which emerged primarily from the German scientific soil, and which promoted, among other things, the approach to religious studies within Christian theology, does not intend to refuse the claim that the biblical sources regarding creation are questionable, but, as they concluded, they are practically myths, reimagined elements taken from the mythology of others.¹³

The contemporary Protestant theologians' methods of approach on the topic of creation, without attempting to provide an exhaustive list, comes from the biblical-theological (or religious) studies, the missiological and the pastoral-psychological point of view. Some of them are trends of fierce debate and resistance to natural science (e.g. creationism) and the attitude of unconditional surrender to science at the expense of theology. In addition to these, methods are also approached in an interdisciplinary form.

Péter Szentpétery describes the creationist, i.e. anti-evolutionist view in a very useful chapter,¹⁴ and one of the basic works on this view is also available in Hungarian translation.¹⁵ I will also refrain from detailing the pastoral-psychological approach. The work of Gábor Hézsér, summarizing his pioneering research, is a good starting point for the topic.¹⁶

¹³ Without claiming to be exhaustive, here are some recent studies and volumes in Hungarian that discuss creation stories in a textual critical and/or mythical approach: ZSENGELLÉR, József (1999): A Genezis teremtéstörténete, avagy a teremtéstörténet genezise [The Story of Creation in Genesis, or the Genesis of the Story of Creation]. In: *Protestáns Szemle*. LXI, 4. 215–224; RÓZSA, Huba (2008): *Őstörténet. A világ keletkezése és az emberiség eredete a Biblia szerint* [Prehistory. The Creation of the World and the Origin of Humanity according to the Bible]. Budapest, Szent István Társulat; ESZENYEINÉ SZÉLES, Mária (2012): *Kezdetben. Az őstörténetek teológiája* [In the Beginning. The Theology of Prehistorical Biblical Texts]. Cluj-Napoca, Az Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület; CZÖVEK, Tamás (2007): *Teremtés és misszió. Isten győzelme a káosz felett* [Creation and Mission. God's Victory over Chaos]. Budapest, Kálvin Kiadó.

¹⁴ SZENTPÉTERY, Péter (2008): *Omnia sunt facta per ipsum. Darwin's Influence on Creationism – Theological and Human Questions*. Budapest. 390–494.

¹⁵ MORRIS, Henry M. (1985): *Scientific Creationism*. Master Books.

¹⁶ HÉZSER, Gábor (2007): *Pasztorálpaszichológiai szempontok az istentisztelet útkereséséhez. Elméletek és gyakorlati lehetőségek* [Pastoral Psychology Aspects for Finding the Way to Worship. Theories and Practical Possibilities]. Budapest, Kálvin Kiadó.

Since it meets all four criteria cited earlier, I would like to deal in much more detail with the attempt born out of the connection of biblical theology and missiology and include some critical comments. In recent decades, we could observe a paradigm shift in the science of mission, as David J. Bosch points out in his unique work about the science of missiology.¹⁷ I will highlight only one aspect of this, according to which theologians have recently recognized the missiological significance of the Old Testament. Previously, the biblical foundation of missiology was always provided directly by the New Testament, and the Old Testament only played an indirect, almost merely “here and there” role. The results can be observed in the missiological works published in recent decades.¹⁸

As an exciting chapter of this process, Tamás Czövek’s work *Creation and Mission – God’s Victory over Chaos* was written with the intention of making God’s creational work in fact a tool of modern mission, and quite differently than it was done by “creationist evangelization”, which appeared in recent decades and which the author calls an “American import”.¹⁹ According to the author, creation has disappeared from Christian thinking – and in the last one or two centuries, the majority of the scientific world has denied God’s creational work – to such an extent that it is not surprising that some kind of effective response had to come from the Christian side. He emphasizes that the doctrine of creation is not specifically part of our missionary thinking. It seems so because the church itself has given up on ever using this teaching of the Bible in the mission, and the fact that until evolutionism completely broke into the public consciousness and took over everything, it had not even “occurred” to the Church that the doctrine of creation could or should be missionary.

A biblical-theological examination is essential regarding the biblical texts dealing with creation to be able to exploit the missionary possibilities inherent in them and to be able to follow the connection points and possibilities between creation and mission

¹⁷ BOSCH, David J. (1991): *Transforming Mission – Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll (New York), Orbis Books.

¹⁸ For example: WRIGHT, Christopher J. H. (2006): *The Mission of God. Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative*. Downers Grove (Illinois), InterVarsity Press; FROST, Michael – HIRSCH, Alan (2013): *The Shaping of Things to Come. Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*. Grand Rapids (Michigan), BakerBooks.

¹⁹ CZÖVEK 2007, 14.

outlined by the author in the title of the book. However, this is done by him with the help of the classic tool of religious studies: religious-historical comparison, where the starting point is not even the Bible but religious texts from the time of the Bible and the ages before that, as well as the comparison with them. The author clarifies that there has been a misunderstanding of the term 'myth' in religious studies, which has for so long been erroneously said to have no connection with the Bible. There is no need to be wary of this expression, as it is not a negative qualification regarding the texts of the Holy Scriptures but rather just a term, as there are parts in the Bible that can be called historical, and there are also mythical ones.²⁰

There would be no problem with all of this, if it were not often proven that some parts of the text are primarily – like the Sumerian-Akkadian texts – describing the creation of the world or are almost literally identical with them. This brings us to the simple question of how to view the Bible. Is it a human creation, the creation of which seems to have taken place independently of God, when his enthusiastic followers, inspired by the culture of the surrounding folks and based on the collective memory and oral traditions of their own people, formulated and edited these texts according to certain ideas? Or is it a divine statement in which some other explanation should be sought and found for the similarities that are there in the religious and cultural textual monuments of others?

The holistic view of John C. Lennox leads in this question to the opposite conclusions. According to him:

The Genesis account, though not written as a polemic, is therefore diametrically opposed to all idolatrous interpretations of the universe, whether of the ancient pagan kind or the modern secular variety. Genesis clashes head-on with the Babylonian, Canaanite, and Egyptian polytheisms, just as much as the gospel of John contradicts their Greek and Roman equivalents. Ancient Near Eastern accounts typically contain theogonies, which describe how the gods are generated from primeval matter. These gods are, therefore, mere deifications of nature and its powers. This means that such ancient worldviews stand much closer to contemporary materialism than it might first appear.²¹

²⁰ Op. cit. 16–23.

²¹ LENNOX, John C. (2021): *Seven Days That Divide the World. The Beginning according to Genesis and Science*. Zondervan Reflective. 36.

Here, Lennox relies on the views of K. A. Kitchen and Alan Millard, according to whom they show no real points of connection either in terms of content or purpose or from a theological or philological point of view.²²

László Ravasz's starting point in this matter is that man wants to know God, but he can do so through revelation alone. By the statement, he does not mean the Scriptures but the Word; but the Bible must have authority because it is the only authentic account of the Word, and therefore it does not matter how we think about it.²³ "The Holy Scriptures are not a norm in natural science requests, only in the religious truth of creation; the Scriptures are not a norm in medicine, only that God is a healing God; the Scriptures are not a norm in social theories, only in the fact that man is the image of God, that we must love each other and carry each other's burdens."²⁴

In other words, the Scripture is an authority, but not an absolute authority. Absolute authority belongs to God, who has revealed himself in the Word. The Scripture is the vessel that contains the revelation that carries it into this world. Based on this, László Ravasz can relate to textual criticism and religious history approaches in the spirit of the 16th century reformers.²⁵

One of the key terms in Tamás Czövek's books is "chaos".²⁶ Although this word is usually uttered in the context that God has defeated chaos or primordial chaos, it also includes the fact that it is not completely defeated, because this victory is not the complete destruction but only the suppression of chaos, keeping it under control, and

²² According to K. A. Kitchen, "The common assumption that the Hebrew account is simply a purged and simplified version of the Babylonian legend (applied also to the flood stories) is fallacious on methodological grounds. In the Ancient Near East, the rule is that simple accounts or traditions may give rise (by accretion and embellishment) to elaborate legends, but not vice versa. In the Ancient Orient, legends were not simplified or turned into pseudo-history (historicized) as has been assumed for early Genesis." – quotes Lennox.

²³ RAVASZ 1990, 8.

²⁴ Op. cit. 11.

²⁵ "The existence of God's statement is not affected by any question of literary history. [...] Contemporary history, literary history, philology, spiritual science in general, even with the most radical criticism, can only help with the conditions under which the individual books were created and how correct their text is; but what the Word speaking in them, that is, God's personal conversation with us, says to the believing souls: he cannot interfere in that." Op. cit. 12.

²⁶ CZÖVEK 2007, 13.

it means an exercised rule over it. Chaos is still here with us, but hence we can conclude that not all evil can be traced back to original sin, so, ultimately, we are not to blame for everything in this world, but there is something that chaos can do to this day.

However, emphasizing the importance of chaos to such an extent leads to the creation of a kind of “chaos theory” in the book, according to which chaos was and is something unknown in terms of origin. God has sovereign authority over it, and therefore we have nothing to worry about. Even if this chaos is unleashed onto the world and can rule it, it is by no means equal to or above the power of God. I call this approach “chaos theory” because it introduces a complete and novel way of looking at God and creates a picture of God that is different from traditional conceptions. The experimental nature of the author’s work is already evident in this expression.

We do not learn much about the act of creation in the third chapter, which forms the backbone of the book, because the author is interested in how God has conquered and is conquering chaos (or keeping it under control), and shows less interest on whether the universe is really God’s creation or not? Because if not, then ultimately what is the answer to how the universe came into being? The biblical passages listed in this chapter are interpreted according to God as the Power that eliminates chaotic conditions on Earth. But we do not know at all why there is chaos on Earth, and why and how it came about. In this “chaos theory” it is also not clear that, according to the author’s interpretation, the ancient religious texts speak of the same God as the Bible. Or did the people who drafted the books of the Bible know about it as little as other peoples had written before them, and so they mostly borrowed their ideas from them?

In the case of Genesis 1, the author also notes that this is one of the completely demythologized passages, and since it is almost impossible to find any point of connection between the mythological and biblical texts, this text is the least relevant. It is of later origin, such as Psalm 74 or Job 38 or even the relevant parts of the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah.²⁷

Taking the above into account, we can conclude that the people of Israel did not know anything about God since they took all the concepts and expressions related to God, even the name of God, from some neighbours. Would it be just such a simple takeover?

²⁷ Op. cit. 40–48.

When the Israelites interacted with other peoples, everything they heard from them was related to the God they had known. There was no doubt for them that the things which survived in the collective memory of other peoples were the deeds of the one God who had revealed himself to them, and not the idols they worshiped and believed to be gods. Regarding the similarity between various ancient texts, it is not an untenable point of view that all similarities arise only from the recognition of this: we also know what you know, and we only know for sure who really is behind all of this. On the part of a small, nomadic people who were politically and militarily undeveloped and had no influence at that time, this statement could not particularly shake those peoples who were strong and large. Israel's missionary task was rooted in this very fact: it was necessary to introduce Him, who had made himself known to them.

At this point, in the unfolding of the theory, we can already perceive that the subtitle is the main title of this work. The author sees that the narrators and poets who wrote down the relevant parts of the Bible were not interested in creation and how the world had come into being: they talked about God's victory over chaos.²⁸

According to the punctuation technique of the medieval Masoretes, Genesis 1:1 can be translated not only as it has been known in Hungarian for nearly 500 years, but there is another option. These suggest that the word "beginning" does not refer to the beginning of the creation of the world (universe) but *to the beginning of (something) that was created by God* or *to the beginning of God's creation*.²⁹

Based on this, it is even more unclear whether it is about God creating something out of nothing or whether God appeared during the already existing chaos (the origin of which is unknown) and brought order, i.e. suppressed the chaos. This does not mean "creation out of nothing" (*creatio ex nihilo*), which, according to the author, has become an overemphasized doctrine in Christian theology thanks to Augustine, but rather "creation without resistance". God's main attribute is not so much that he is "Omnipotent" but rather that he is "Irresistible". He knows something that nothing and no one in this world can resist, no matter where its irresistibility comes from.

²⁸ Op. cit. 140.

²⁹ Op. cit. 43.

In other words, Genesis 1 does not talk about creation but only about how God repressed the chaotic forces against life, and how he then ensured that the Earth became a liveable environment for man and the living creatures around him. However, the sea is not God's creation either (just as, following this line of reasoning, neither the Earth nor the universe), and God's relationship to the sea is "overcoming", "reining", "limiting", "dominating", because he has power, he is "Irresistible".

Even if the author does not question by any chance the fact that God has sovereign power over anything that was known to the people of that time, or even known to the present, we can still easily come to the point of asking the question: if it was not God who created everything (since the Bible does not even mention it), then where does his power over everything come from? Until now we could have thought: God's sovereign power over the universe stems from the fact that he created everything (for example, he endowed the primal elements with free will in the same way as man, but everything that is not in accordance with his plans and abuses his free will can be curbed at any time, including the sea), but if this is not the case, then where does his power come from? Who is God in the first place? Just a heroic warrior who fights and always triumphs over the forces of nature? What is his origin?

László Ravasz approaches the question from the perspective of faith. The Scriptures are a collection of fundamental statements "that only faith can grasp and embrace".³⁰ In this sense, we can speak of a metaphysical position if we translate the previous statement into the language of philosophy. I am free to believe that God created the world, but I am also free to reject it. László Ravasz's position coincides with the position of some contemporary scientists whom I have already referred to, and whose positions I will cover in the rest of the paper.

"It is the greatest folly to believe that the Bible conveys scientific truths. But it is foolish to imagine that any history of development could replace, make redundant, refute these religious truths of the creation story [...]".³¹

However, from his point of view, a holistic vision is missing. A more superficial knowledge of the natural sciences and an understanding based solely on the symbiosis

³⁰ RAVASZ 1990, 27.

³¹ Op. cit. 31.

of theology and philosophy lead him in the direction of the reduction principle, which is easier to handle according to the degree of intellectual seriousness. The American palaeontologist Stephen Jay Gould also states based on this principle that religion and science belong to two separate fields or magisterium. According to this, science and the Bible have nothing to do with each other; the topic does not require further discussion.³² Here we perceive the lack of interest in the philosophy of science, which also blocks the way to a holistic vision; and his metaphysical position is only limited to rejection.

In the beginning, God created the sky (heaven) and the Earth (Genesis 1:1). Since the King James and the first Hungarian Bible translations also provide this version – setting aside the scientific hypotheses and speculations related to the verse – why should this not remain the starting point to the thesis: God is the Creator. Verse 2 is not in contrast with Genesis 1:1 where, according to the description, God is the only living being at the dawn of creation; apart from Him, there is no other living being, since what he created does not yet have life in it. The expressions “barren”, “desolate”, and “darkness” support just that. There is already water, but that alone is not worth anything. If there are no light and no land, then water does not contain the possibility of life.

Based on Genesis 1, the Creator could be described with the terms “Owner” rather than “Irresistible”. The proprietor puts order on His property: on the one hand, He precisely defines the purpose of everything in the world; on the other hand, He establishes rules, eternal laws, which from then on nothing and no one can break.³³ Land is not water, darkness is not light, plants are not animals, and animals are not humans. Which natural scientist would dispute these basic laws? We get a simple, clear picture of why everything in this world is what it is. If we accept the Bible’s answer, then everything is what it is because God created it that way.³⁴

³² LENNOX 2021, 36.

³³ On the significance of the term ‘order’, see: KREINER, Armin (2006): *Order – God’s Fingerprint or the Work of Chance?* It was delivered in the form of a lecture at the conference of the Regensburg District Catholic Adult Education Institute on the topic *Natural Science and Faith: Einstein and the Universe* on 26.10.2005 and published in Hungarian: KREINER, Armin: *The Order – God’s Fingerprint or Coincidence?* In: *Mérleg* 42, 1. 39–48.

³⁴ Natural science “has not yet found the creature that connects man with apes. They have not yet been able to observe a process in which the lower class evolves into the higher. They have not yet been able to catch an ape that has become a man or a fish that has entered the order

László Ravasz in Chapter 6 of his *Kis dogmatika* (Concise Dogmatics) touches again on the issue of creation. The truths of the Holy Scriptures, as closed, final statements, conflict with science because the latter is under constant revision: new hypotheses lead to new experiments, and new experiments lead to new scientific insights. In the process of scientific labour, many contradictions must be eliminated until one point of view is crystallized through proofs. Opposing scientific points of view compete, all of which are proven to be wrong, except for one. And this is dominantly valid until a new, once again far-reaching realization pushes science further along its path of discovery.³⁵

Seen from this point of view, compared to the dynamism of science, the Holy Scriptures are on a static course, with little room for manoeuvre. However, if we see this question from the point of view of revelation, we can observe the most definite dynamism: this is the dynamism of the Holy Spirit, which is manifested through the written Word. According to Ravasz, “[...] natural science has the right to say that man evolved from the animal world, through the highest class. However, this is not yet a fact but only a conclusion.”³⁶

Since God created everything, it can be studied, we can talk about the diversification within species, even evolution in this sense, which can at least be reasonably proven, but there are still no more arguments, just a theory that not everything comes from God.³⁷

As I mentioned earlier, the dogma of *creatio ex nihilo* does not fit into this theory either, although Tamás Czövek does not reject it completely. According to his view, instead of “creation from nothing”, it is better to use the definition “creation without resistance” for what took place in creation,³⁸ since the Old Testament texts do not deal with the dogma of creation from nothing.³⁹

of mammals. If this happens, the truth of the statement does not change because it claims that the human is completely different from the animal; for one is precisely what the other is not.”
RAVASZ 1990, 48–49.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Op. cit. 48.

³⁷ Therefore, we cannot agree, “[...] the essence of the biblical creation accounts is the taming of chaos, not the production of matter. And the survival of ordered reality depends on God’s vigilance, with which he watches over the bars and gates that hold chaos in place”. CZÖVEK 2007, 101.

³⁸ Op. cit. 136.

³⁹ Op. cit. 103.

Gaál Botond's study provides guidance on this issue. Considering the research results of Thomas Torrance, he clarifies that the term does not originate from Greek philosophical thought. The philosophers did not question the validity of this teaching for a long time.⁴⁰ *Creatio ex nihilo* appears for the first time in the intertestamental age (2 Macca 7:28).

The expression, which appears again in the works of Augustine and other early church fathers, was rethought by the reformers and made part of scientific thinking to this day.⁴¹ The holistic view based on the natural sciences, the philosophy of science and Christian theology, which is manifested in the clarification of this dogma, further strengthens the extremely useful statement that scientists are not distinguished from each other by the standpoint of their own field of science but by their different worldviews.⁴²

This brings us to the trivial question that we tried to answer earlier, and which reads as follows: are the natural sciences and theology enemies of each other? Alister E. McGrath states, "Science, when at its best and most authentic, has no creed, whether religious or anti-religious."⁴³

In other words, no single field of science can establish about the other that it is completely unnecessary and unappreciable from a scientific point of view. Nevertheless, the so-called "new atheism" movement and its emblematic representative, Richard Dawkins, do exactly that.⁴⁴ Based on a more in-depth study of his views, we can once again conclude that philosophy is highly necessary, but it does matter how it is cultivated. Theology did not always find the necessary proportions in its own formula for coherent cooperation with philosophy. Gaál Botond highlights the fact that dysfunctionality and inefficiency occurred in such cases.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ GAÁL, Botond (1989): *Creatio ex nihilo*. In: Gaál, Botond (ed.): *A választott nép szolgálatában. Ünnepi kötet Czeglédi Sándor 80. születésnapja alkalmából*. Debrecen, *Debreceni Református Kollégium Sokszorosító Iroda*. 62–79.

⁴¹ Op. cit. 78–79.

⁴² LENNOX 2011, 8.

⁴³ MCGRATH 2011, 38.

⁴⁴ Even the titles of his books speak for themselves: *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe without Design*. Norton & Company. 1986; *River Out of Eden. A Darwinian View of Life*. Basic Books. 1995; *A Devil's Chaplain*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson. 2003; *The God Delusion*. Transworld Publishers. 2006.

⁴⁵ GAÁL, Botond (2012a): *Rejtett paraméterek a teremtésben? [Hidden Parameters in Creation]*. In: *Vigília*. LXXVII, 3. 177–178.

There is no doubt that Dawkins's statements are philosophical in science – at least science does not suffer from this –, and it can also be clearly demonstrated what “faithful” position he rests on. However, natural science cannot have the task of subjugating, destroying, or deliberately making other disciplines obsolete, because this would violate the basic criterion of the cultivation of science. This is how László Ravasz thought about this in his address to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1928:

“A new great spiritual power has appeared, which wants to replace all statements and oracles, and this is science. The basic condition of science is that it is free from bias and that it processes all human knowledge in a unified system.”⁴⁶

Dawkins crosses the boundaries of the philosophy of science without further ado, and he does not care that science should always know its limits, even if it strives to constantly push them. A critique of Dawkins's awareness of religion can be found in Alistair E. McGrath's *Surprised by Meaning*. McGrath shows that Dawkins bases his claims primarily on Sir James Frazer's work *The Golden Branch*, which was first published in 1890. According to Frazer's theory, religion can be reduced to a few simple universal aspects, that is, religion can be described with certain general characteristics. This voluminous work, which is primarily based on anthropological research, appeared with a powerful influence at the turn of the 19th century; it was seen as a reference, but by today, the results of Frazer's research have been surpassed in every respect.⁴⁷

The trend referred to as “new atheism” is a kind of religion, and it belongs to those natural scientists who wage a desperate and implacable struggle against all forms of religiosity while being religious themselves. However, the real trouble begins when they present their own metaphysical dogmas to the world as science. László Ravasz thinks as follows: “Science with a serious and honest epistemology that shows where the limits of knowledge are, how far we can go, and where we must stop. It teaches us to defend ourselves mainly against pagan dogmatism sold under the label of science, and not to accept nonsense that does not arise from the blessed soil of a universal religious statement because of natural science nomenclature.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ RAVASZ 1941, 452.

⁴⁷ “Most anthropologists now cite Frazer as an example of how not to study religion.” MCGRATH 2011, 35.

⁴⁸ RAVASZ 1941, 468.

In connection with his thoughts, the recognition that they have relevance and place in today's modern, 21st-century theological thinking arises increasingly often. Here is another thought from Lennox to support this statement, which repeats almost verbatim what we quoted a few lines earlier from László Ravasz: "In particular, we have a duty to point out that not all statements by scientists are statements of science and so do not carry the authority of authentic science even though such authority is often erroneously ascribed to them."⁴⁹

3. Philosophical (and Theological) Question – Philosophical (and Theological) Answer

In the previous chapters, I tried to point out that without philosophy and theology certain questions belonging to the scope of morality remain unanswered, since ethical values are outside the boundaries of natural science. We either avoid answering these questions completely, or we must inevitably must take a metaphysical position. Perhaps it is no coincidence that some excellent minds have tried to ensure the unquestionability of their scientific position precisely by completely ignoring philosophy and theology. The simple attitude of utilitarianism is reflected in the fact that science does not need philosophy, nor theology.⁵⁰

Based on all this, we could conclude that there will remain an irreconcilable conflict between natural science, philosophy, and theology. But this assumption is refuted by the highly recognized and excellent experts in natural science who see no source of danger or shame in the fact that their scientific work is in full symbiosis with their faith in the God the Bible speaks of.

⁴⁹ LENNOX 2011, 7.

⁵⁰ In contrast, László Ravasz talks about mutual interdependence: "First, we must see that one cannot replace the other. No matter how accurate and complete the worldview based purely on experience, accompanied by strict criticism, and systematic knowledge, by its very nature, it cannot provide answers to the innermost, eternal questions of the soul. [...] The soul becomes sick without religion, and the more it stuffs itself with knowledge, the emptier, bleaker, sadder, and darker it becomes. [...] On the other hand, the religious worldview that does not want to hear about science, shuts itself off from it, and despises knowledge as Satan's tricks, becomes miserable and a distorted image of the glory to which God called it". RAVASZ 1941, 467–468.

Alistair E. McGrath points out that “We need transcendent narratives to provide us with moral guidance, social purpose, and a sense of personal identity. Though science may provide us with knowledge and information, it is powerless to confer wisdom and meaning.”⁵¹

He points out that many scientists dealing with natural science are divided into two distinct groups. One includes those who are not disturbed in their scientific work by the belief in the transcendent, and do not fight against this belief, because they do not fear the respectability of their science. The other, presumably larger group includes those scientists who reject it in a moderate or radical way or who openly fight against having their scientific findings and the conclusions drawn from them be evaluated by any moral norm. Once again, we are faced with the fact that McGrath is somehow familiar with the thoughts of László Ravasz.

Science cannot answer the questions that interest us the most. It cannot strengthen itself against an unpredictable fact of the world, fate. Can you not give a satisfactory answer to where we come from and where we are going? And without this, it is impossible to find out about the most practical questions: what is the value, meaning, and purpose of life? Science cannot give an answer to the biggest and most exciting question, to the unbroken fact of the world that we encounter everywhere: the fact of creation. Will his explanations of existence remain half-baked until he can say what life is and what being is? Man will never get answers to all these questions anywhere else than from religion. Faith, therefore, has the importance of explaining the world, which does not change the objective picture of the world much in terms of content, but it brings them into a new context and thereby, on the one hand, calms and reconciles the soul and, on the other hand, gives a motive that cannot be obtained from anywhere, except from religion. There is no doubt that if there are people on earth, there will always be religion.⁵²

The indispensability of philosophy is confirmed by Paul Davies when he writes, “All cosmological models are constructed by augmenting the results of observations by some sort of philosophical principle.”⁵³ It is no coincidence that he feels that way since

⁵¹ MCGRATH 2011, 6.

⁵² RAVASZ 1941, 460.

⁵³ DAVIES, Paul (2007): *Universes Galore: Where Will It All End?* In: Carr, Bernard (ed.): *Universe or Multiverse?* Cambridge, University Press. 487.

“However, one of the main tasks of philosophy is to train people in the art of definition, logical analysis, and argument.”⁵⁴

In the subtitle above, it is not a mistake that the term philosophy appears before theology. Just as natural sciences, theology also needs philosophy to present its ideas about God in a logically coherent, structurally clear, generally systematic way. Without this consistency, chaos can indeed develop in any field of science.

It is also a question for Stephen Hawking: how do we know what we know, and what proves the correctness of our knowledge? In doing so, he actually poses an epistemological question, that is: (as he practices philosophy again, whereas, according to his claim), philosophy is dead.⁵⁵ John C. Lennox correctly summarizes the fundamental difference between the theological position and Hawking’s approach: “The crucial difference between the Christian view and Hawking’s view is that Christians do not believe that this universe is a closed system of cause and effect. They believe that it is open to the casual activity of its Creator God.”⁵⁶

The useful insight echoed in several of Gaál Botond’s studies rhymes with this: theology is an “upwardly open” science, just like the world.⁵⁷ A question related to this is: are other sciences also able to remain open?

⁵⁴ LENNOX 2011, 16.

⁵⁵ Op. cit. 29.

⁵⁶ Op cit. 42.

⁵⁷ GAÁL, Botond (2002): The World open Upwards. Truth Approaching Reality in the Scientific Thinking of the 20th Century. In: Gaál, Botond: *The Truth of Reason and the Reality of the World. Historic Development of Exact Sciences from a Christian Viewpoint*. Debrecen, DRHE. 121–148; GAÁL, Botond (2006a): Mennyire nyitott a teológia? [How Open Is Theology?]. In: Kustár, Zoltán (ed.): *Orando et Laborando. A Debreceni Református Hittudományi Egyetem 2005/2006. évi értesítője a 468. tanévről*. Debrecen, Debreceni Református Hittudományi Egyetem. 131–141; GAÁL, Botond (2006b): Az ember “fölfelé nyitott” világa [Man’s “Upwardly Open” World]. In: *Theológiai Szemle*. XLIX, 2. 70–74; GAÁL, Botond (2007a): A zárt világ fölnyitása [Opening the Closed World]. In: L. Erdélyi, Margit – Peres, Imre (eds.): *Gaudium et corona. Tanulmánykötet Takács Zoltán tiszteletére 80. születésnapja alkalmából*. Komarno, Selye János Egyetem. 287–292; GAÁL, Botond (2007b): The World is Open. In: Gaál, Botond – Végh, László (eds.): *A tudományos gondolkodás nyitottsága* [Openness of the Scientific Thinking]. Debrecen, Hatvani István Teológiai Kutatóközpont – DRHE. 46–60;

John Gray points out what is, for some practitioners of natural science, the “unforgivable sin” that philosophy must be rejected and ignored. According to Gray, in the past two centuries, philosophy has not rejected the main error of Christianity, the idea that humans are radically different from animals.⁵⁸ From this approach, it is understandable why philosophy is lumped in with theology – because he did not confront theology and thus betrayed natural science. However, this confrontation still faces serious obstacles, as philosophy would probably have to reckon with itself as well – concludes László Ravasz. “Science without religion and religion without science is the eternal negation of life, the path to distortion and death.”⁵⁹

Along with the development of the natural sciences and all their positive results, we can observe the development of a dualistic view. This approach resulted in “nature” and “culture” becoming completely different fields. Michael Welker points out that this approach is incorrect: “The so-called natural and the so-called cultural factors are connected to each other by very finely interwoven, indissoluble mutual relations.”⁶⁰

This is also important from the point of view of our topic, as Ravasz formulated it in one of his sermons as follows: “[...] culture is a divine command from creation, its essence is the rule of spirit over matter, the victory of quality over quantity, its purpose is to realize and ensure God’s rule. Culture: the way to God’s kingdom”. At the end of the sermon, he asks, “What is the image of God? The face of Christ in me. What is culture? Christ’s victory over the world. What is reign? Obedience to Christ. What is the creation of the world for? To reach his goal in Christ and be glorified. What will be the end of all things? Christ is all in all.”⁶¹

Ravasz does not defend cultural Protestantism here but practically formulates the same thing a few decades earlier that Welker also refers to. Much closer to him in time, the title of the book published in 1951 by H. Richard Niebuhr speaks for itself:

GAÁL, Botond (2012b): A keresztyén gondolkodás mint „fölfelé nyitott” rendszer [Christian Thinking as an “Upwardly Open” System]. In: *Gazdaság és Társadalom* (Special Issue. Conference Proceedings). IV. 5–15. Nyugat-Magyarországi Egyetem Kiadó.

⁵⁸ LENNOX 2021, 77–78.

⁵⁹ RAVASZ 1941, 460.

⁶⁰ WELKER, Michael (1995): *Schöpfung und Wirklichkeit*. Neukirchen-Vluyn, Neukirchener. 88.

⁶¹ RAVASZ 1941b, 149.

Christ and Culture.⁶² In this work, everything that Ravasz conveys in his sermon with his usual aphorism-like conciseness is discussed in detail.

4. Summary

In the recent decades, primarily constructive advances have been made in the field of theological sciences regarding the creation stories in Genesis. However, these have received different interpretations due to various metaphysical positions. The internal debates within the theological sciences and between various scientific fields did not bring the result that could have led to the formation of a unified vision. Some practitioners of the natural sciences took advantage of this when they made a renewed attack on theology with their movement called “new atheism” and questioned the scientific nature of theology, the correctness of its position, and even its existence. So far, the intention has not borne any fruit, but it has caused partial damage and – primarily in the secularized society – has made the good intention of getting closer to the church even more impossible. This imposes serious missionary tasks on the Church for the fulfilment of which a unified theological vision is now more urgent than ever.

Some practitioners of the natural sciences launched an assault siege not only against theology but also against philosophy. The withdrawal from philosophy led to the relativization of system theories, and this facilitated the treatment of various hypotheses as facts, the omission of proofs, and the failure of various experiments to be ignored. For some, this has come with the comfort of gaining great recognition in their science and widespread social influence, which they understandably hold dear. Most scientists dealing with the natural sciences do their research according to the principle of completely ignoring the viewpoints of philosophy and theology in the spirit of a dualistic approach, thus making their social responsibility irrelevant in terms of the use of the results discovered during their research.

The exclusion of philosophy and theology from the scientific cycle also leads to the halving of moral issues. Human culture cannot stand on the foundations of the natural sciences alone, as it also needs a solid metaphysical position, for which the Christian religion can provide a clue. This requires some kind of scientific openness in which philosophy

⁶² NIEBUHR, H. Richard (1951): *Christ and Culture*. San Francisco, Harper and Row.

plays an intermediary role between theology and the natural sciences. Mutual dialogue and rapprochement are needed. This is facilitated by natural scientists who are not afraid of theology in their scientific results. Quite a few positive examples prove that it is no problem for some people to express themselves at the highest level of science and be at the same time religious, Christian, and have a thorough knowledge of theology.

László Ravasz's views on creation are very relevant. Although he did not aspire towards a holistic vision due to the philosophical background of his thinking, he used the terms of Christian theology to prophetically deal with the issue of creation in his sermons, various shorter writings, and lectures. Despite its shortcomings, the timeliness of his position is indisputable, which was manifested in the coordination of natural sciences and faith and his striving for synthesis.

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