

*The Origin of Science
and the Science of its Origin*

STANLEY L. JAKI

Modern man owes an immense debt to science. He has received on the one hand the practical benefit of powerful tools and on the other the stimulus to his imagination through the unveiling of the remote past. Yet science is a recent phenomenon. Its three-hundred-year-old history has occupied but a few moments of recorded time. No wonder that its novelty has provoked not a few reflections.

These reflections on the recent origin of science are the materials and rudiments of the science of its origin. For the first time they are surveyed and analysed in this book, the text of five lectures delivered at Balliol College, Oxford in 1977.

The historical survey is given in the first four lectures which deal in succession with the material accrued during the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. The lesson provided by this historical material and the analysis of that lesson, given in the fifth lecture, are the support of this book's major claim: only a Christian outlook can provide that view in depth of the origin of science which is needed for a proper appraisal of the past of science, and of its future impact.

Stanley L. Jaki, a Hungarian-born Benedictine priest, is Distinguished Professor at Seton Hall University, South Orange, N.J., who has been internationally acclaimed for his books on the history of physics and cosmology. In 1975 and 1976 he was Gifford Lecturer at the University of Edinburgh and has lectured widely in the United States and Europe. He was the recipient of the Lecomte du Nouy Prize for 1970.

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Studies in the Patriarchal Narratives reflects a general conviction that a historical perspective is needed for Old Testament criticism as well as a particular interest in the history of the criticism of the patriarchal narratives. The author has reacted against the imbalance which results from an undue concentration on what is supposed to be the 'new evidence' which is available for the interpretation of the patriarchal narratives. There is a view that archaeological discoveries have revolutionized the study of the narratives and that, as a consequence, there is nothing to learn from their earlier criticism. The orientation of the study of the narratives towards archaeology has resulted in an almost exclusive preoccupation with questions about their historicity. In an earlier phase of this movement the answers which were given to questions about historicity of the narratives had a positive character, but in a more recent phase there has been a marked negative reaction.

There is a tendency for a modern fashion of scholarship to possess a narrowness and obsessiveness which requires correction. Undue concentration on one line of approach constitutes an impoverishment of the study of the patriarchal narratives, and a vision is needed of a many-sided and ample subject to which there are several avenues of approach and in which there are many areas of interest. The purpose of this book is to deal with aspects of the study of the patriarchal narratives which have fallen into the background at a time when interest has been focused on questions of historicity. When it has been asked in what sense, if any, the stories can be used as historical sources, the province of their literary appreciation has hardly been entered. To enter this province, attention must be focused on the narratives themselves, for the most interesting and crucial literary questions cannot be properly raised so long as the study of the patriarchal narratives is dominated by references to external archaeological attestation.

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CONTENTS

Relativism and Absolutism in Bultmann's Demythologising Hermeneutic, by JOSEPH RUNZO	401
Remarks on <i>The Imitation of Christ</i> , by ALFRED DEWEY JENSEN	421
The Shaking of the Seven Hills, by P. D. L. AVIS	439
Max Weber and Ancient Judaism, by CYRIL S. RODD	457

REVIEWS

LEWIS: Persons and Life after Death	471	BRUCE: Paul: Apostle of the Free Spirit	482
BUTTERWORTH: Hippolytus of Rome, <i>Contra Noetum</i>	473	HÜBNER: Das Gesetz bei Paulus. Ein Beitrag zum Werden der paulinischen Theologie	484
KEE: The Scope of Political Theology	475	WEBER: The Cross: Tradition and Interpretation	485
CAMPBELL: Medicine, Justice and Health: the problem of priorities	476	DRUMMOND and BULLOCH: The Church in Late Victorian Scotland 1874-1900	487
VAWTER: On Genesis: a New Reading	478	DESSAIN and CORNALL: The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman	491
SAWYER: From Moses to Patmos: New Perspectives in Old Testament Study	479	KONSTANT: Religious Education for Secondary Schools: The First Three Years	493
SIEGEL: Conservative Judaism and Jewish Law	481		

BOOKNOTES

<i>The Oxford Dictionary of Saints.</i> By DAVID HUGH FARMER. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978. Pp. 435, £7.50	495	HUGHES and ANN HAMLIN. London: S.P.C.K., 1977. Pp. 131, £2.95	496
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