

“Science 400 years after Galileo Galilei”
Inaugural speech of the conference

P. F. Guarguaglini

Chairman and CEO of Finmeccanica

S. Spirito in Sassia, Rome – 26 November 2008

This conference, which I have the honour to open, falls between two important anniversaries. The first, which relates to us directly, is the 60th anniversary of the founding of Finmeccanica, which took place on 18 March 1948. The second is the decision by the United Nations to announce 2009 as the International Year of Astronomy, commemorating the 400th anniversary of the first use by Galileo Galilei of the astronomical telescope, the emblem of the birth of modern science.

As we all know, anniversaries are a good time to reflect on the past and take stock of the present, in order to get a clearer picture of the steps to be taken in future.

“All men desire to know”, wrote Aristotle in *Metaphysics*, “and what they desire to know is the truth”. Man is the only being in all visible creation who is not only capable of knowing, but is also aware that he knows and is therefore interested in the truth of what he sees. The need to know, to understand, to inquire, is part of the very nature of mankind. This fundamental need is the reason for so much research, and so many struggles, especially in the field of science, which have brought to light unexpected and significant results in the past few centuries and led to the real and objective progress of humanity as a whole.

As we move along this road, continually evolving and improving, and confirming or refuting every theory by subsequent discoveries, the task of science is to understand and interpret through experiment the complexity of the physical reality in which we live. The

fundamental guide for scientists – as regards not only empirical reality but also theory – is the search for the truth.

And moreover, in developing and applying new technology, scientists of every discipline also set themselves the task of progressively improving the condition of mankind.

However, science should not and cannot provide responses to more fundamental questions such as the meaning of life and death, or the ultimate value of our existence. We must look elsewhere for the answers to these questions – seek this knowledge outside the boundaries of science, through our own spirituality, which gives us hope and enables us to live in harmony with the universe that surrounds us. This spiritual dimension is where ethics find their home. Scientists, with all their rationality, intuition and technical knowledge, can verify what is possible or impossible in nature, but as humans capable of seeking and striving for what is good, they can also question whether what they are doing is right or wrong.

In his *Letter to Madame Christine of Lorraine, Grand Duchess of Tuscany* on the distinction that must be maintained between theology, philosophy and science, Galileo, in agreement with Cardinal Baronio, writes that “the intention of the Holy Spirit is to teach us how one goes to heaven, not how heaven goes”. This was to emphasise that there was no conflict between Scripture and his astronomic concepts, since the former refers to matters of faith and clearly not to issues of a scientific nature.

Today, the dispute between science and religion looks ever more fanciful and anachronistic. On the one hand, we need to clearly define the boundaries of each, while on the other, we must recognise, without any prejudice and with an open mind, the undeniable relationship between the spiritual world, the quest for freedom, and the scientific knowledge of

the truth.

In my opinion, it is necessary to identify common ground and build on areas of overlap, where frank and sincere debate between science and religion is welcome, in an attempt to give a response to the issues and problems thrown up by the ethical complexities of contemporary technological and scientific research.

At today's meeting, we would like to offer our contribution to the debate, in a spirit of dialogue and mutual enrichment, and in the certainty that science and technology can and must always work for the good of mankind. It's no coincidence that the phrase chosen by Finmeccanica to celebrate its anniversary is: ***"At 60 years old, we still have a great future ahead of us. At Finmeccanica we have always held a shared vision: to build our future on our skills, research and technology, and to ensure a safer tomorrow for us all"***. And I believe this is the greatest good that we should preserve and strive for every day: to guarantee the future.