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## SCIENCE AND RELIGION IN ROMANIA

**Magda Stavinschi**\*

*Astronomical Institute of the Romanian Academy, Bucharest, Romania*

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### Abstract

For a year and a half scientists and theologians from Romania are benefiting by a very important grant offered by John Templeton Foundation: 'Science and Religion in Romania'. It is the first large grant for an orthodox and post communist country. We try to introduce the activity of the participants implemented until now and their perspective for the next future.

*Keywords:* science, religion, orthodoxy, lectures, research, mass media

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### 1. The Past

I am an astronomer and I try to know and understand the universe. I want to find how it is built and also why it is so, to discover where it comes from and where it goes to, the reason and meaning of its existence. I try to understand why our planet is the only, as far as we know, to offer proper conditions for life, why it has appeared and what is its future.

During most of my life I have received a double standard education. The official one, on one hand, which taught that everything is material, that we know everything and thus we are capable of mastering the universe, and that the Bible is at the most a funny book. And on the other hand the family education, through which I have survived, about Christmas meaning the Birth of Jesus and Easter the Resurrection, and about the outstanding traditions of our Romanian nation. At home the Bible was indeed the holy book, cautiously kept away from uninvited eyes.

My generation received an 'atheistic-scientific' education, which I had to practice also during the public meetings we often held for the general public. However, during those meetings my colleagues and I did our best not to emphasize the ideological component, and made use of any opportunity to bring some light into the lives of the people deprived of any intellectual joy. It is true that given the circumstances it was pretty difficult to publicly answer questions like "If life were to be discovered on another planet, will those beings be also creations of God?" or "Where is the contradiction between the Book of Genesis and the official theory concerning the birth of the Universe?"

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\* e-mail: [magda@aira.astro.ro](mailto:magda@aira.astro.ro)

This duplicity has left deep marks on the individual life and on our society, which in the last 15 years tries to gain its bearings, as well. The most severe marks came from the scientific concepts, that were much falsified, from the ignorance of theology, and also from the history of religion, all that in the country that gave the world the great personality of Mircea Eliade. An equally serious consequence still echoes on the almost general incapacity of establishing a normal social dialogue, and particularly a dialogue between scientists and theologians.

## **2. The Present**

However, something happened. In April 2000 I was in Paris with the occasion of the colloquium 'Science et Religion: une discipline émergente', organized by 'Université Interdisciplinaire de Paris' [1]. For the first time I had the opportunity to hear an exchange opinions concerning Science and Theology, either convergent or divergent, and to witness a true dialogue between scientists and theologians. It was altogether surprising and fascinating.

Even now, I remember myself saying, in the few words I uttered those days, that "If something like that is very important in any place in the world, I believe that in an Orthodox and post communist country, where democracy is just being re-established, where the art of the dialogue had been lost for a long time, such a colloquium is not only welcomed but extremely useful."

I knew that Orthodoxy could add a new impetus to this dialogue, and also bring its original viewpoints about which the Western world and other cultures have not much knowledge. Consequently, the international colloquium 'Science and Religion' was hosted in November 2001 by Bucharest, the first reunion of its kind in an Orthodox and post communist country [2].

It was for the first time when such a topic was openly approached in Romania. It was also an extraordinary incentive for many of us to study more profoundly this subject, considered prohibited for so many decades. A certain opening of Romania towards other religions, however, created the conditions for such a dialogue. Firstly, I refer to the first visit of a Pope in an Orthodox country (the visit of His Holiness Pope John Paul II in May 1999), as well as to the first document signed by a Pontiff Sovereign and an Orthodox Patriarch, the first common document of the new Millennium, during the visit of His Beatitude Teoctist, the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church to the Vatican.

The result of the remarkable interest manifested by many universities and scientific and theological centres toward the new opening was the initiation of an ample program called 'Science and Religion in Romania', financed by 'The John Templeton Foundation'. This program is carried out with the support of many prestigious Romanian and foreign institutions, as: 'The Romanian Academy', 'The National Foundation for Science and Art', the Patriarchy of the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Archdiocese of Tomis, UIP (Université Interdisciplinaire de Paris) and CIRET (Centre International de Recherches et Études Transdisciplinaires, Paris).

### **3. Science and Religion in Romania - A program under the aegis of JTF**

For a year and a half, scientists and theologians from Bucharest, Cluj, Constanta, Craiova and Ploiesti studied the ways in which such a dialogue can be implemented in a country without traditions in this respect and how the new generation can be attracted to it. The main topics were either printed or published through the mass media.

Consequently, an international congress dealing with the issue of the dialogue Science-Religion is scheduled for this October, with the participation of various personalities from all over the world, renowned for their accomplishments in the field of Science and Religion.

#### ***2.1. The research***

Naturally, the most important and difficult to accomplish was the research program itself. Almost 20 participants from several cities met on a monthly basis in order to subject a series of topics to the public debate (taking into account the participation of an extremely various public in these reunions). A short review of each topic included in the Program will give an idea about its amplitude and goals:

- Problems of Cultural Anthropology from an Orthodox Christian perspective
- Dialogue between Science and Spirituality in the Romanian Education from the point of view of the National Curriculum – Proposal for a transdisciplinary structure
- Sources of scientific thought in the Medieval Theology
- Modern Theology in dialogue with modern sciences
- The Hermeneutical re-evaluation of Dualism – The Gnostic system
- The included middle in the Orthodox Church tradition – Documents, analysis and synthesis
- Some view points of contemporary scientists on the relations between scientific knowledge and religious belief. A critical examination
- Levels of reality and Paradise on Earth
- Classical issues in Bioethics
- The ideologization of Sciences and its impact on the relationship between Science and Religion
- The scientific reform: Natural Philosophy between Science and Religion
- The references of the Patristic Gnoseology assumed in the contemporary dialogue between Science and Theology
- Natural Philosophy and Theology in Newton's principia
- The problems of understanding and the use of models as mediators for understanding in the Physical Sciences and in the Orthodox Theology – A comparative evaluation
- Theological perspectives on the relation between Religion and Science

- Max Planck about causality and finality
- On a possible epistemological model of the ‘Vivid Contradiction’: From the antinomy in the theological language to fuzzy logic
- Science, Theology and language games.

The topics were individually presented by a speaker, and debated in meetings open to anyone interested. At the end, the presentations will be published as chapters of a research volume.

The meetings hosted the remarkable presence of Prof. Ronald Cole-Turner, H. Parker Sharp (Professor of Theology and Ethics at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary) and Prof. Alexei Bodrov (Rector of St. Andrew's Biblical Theological College and Institute in Moscow).

In order to attract the general interest on the approached topics, other meetings were organized as well in different locations. We are especially proud of the National Symposium ‘Science and Theology – Complementary Components of Education’, organized by the ‘Centre for Dialogue between Science and Theology’ in Craiova, with the support of the ‘University of Craiova’, the ‘Dolj County School Authority’, the ‘Dolj Teacher's House’ and the 34<sup>th</sup> ‘Eugeniu Carada’ Primary School from Craiova. The participants were secondary and high school teachers in History, Biology, Sciences and Religion/History of Culture. Other meetings were held in schools or in interested circles.

The Faculty of Theology of the ‘Ovidius’ University from Constanta has organized on 10-13<sup>th</sup> of May 2005 another National Symposium called ‘Modernity, Post Modernity, Religion’, which had a beneficial impact on the theological environment. The topics were a real challenge for the theologians, with indisputable success.

## **2.2. The publications**

A large number of studies presented on these occasions, as well as those of the research groups, have already been published or are waiting to be.

In this respect should be mentioned the publication ‘The New World Paradigm - Studies of Inter and Transdisciplinarity’, its fourth volume (June 2005) being already part of the Templeton Program [3]. In order to offer a better idea about the profile of this publication and a publishing opportunity for other authors, we present the summary of its last edition, with the mention that it is published in Romanian in order to enlarge the circle of interest toward the main subject we are dealing with:

- Magda Stavinschi - *The Dialog is Something We Have to Learn*
- Archbishop Lazar Puhalo (Canada) - *Approaching the Educated Person in the Post Christian Era*
- Doru Costache & Basarab Nicolescu - *Traditional Landmarks for a Comprehensive Framework Necessary in the Dialog between Science and Theology: The Dogma of Chalcedon*

- Gabriel Memelis - *Elements for a Mystical Physiology*
- Razvan Ionescu - *Autonomous Reason and Spiritualised Reason: Meeting the Reality*
- Dana Jalobeanu - *Closed World, Infinite Universe and Divine Attributes: The Role of Natural Theology in Structuring Modern Cosmology*
- Alexandru Mihaila - *Elements of a Biblical Cosmology: An Interpretative Paradigm*
- Virgiliu Pop - *Space Exploration and Sacred Art*
- George Istodor - *Euthanasia*
- Victor Godeanu - *For a Possible Methodology in Bioethics: The Patristic Model and the Assumed Responsibility*
- Catalin Mosoia - *Templeton Prizes.*

The publishing house 'XXI: Eonul dogmatic' ([http://www.geocities.com/xxi\\_eonuldogmatic](http://www.geocities.com/xxi_eonuldogmatic); E-mail: [xxi\\_eonuldogmatic@yahoo.com](mailto:xxi_eonuldogmatic@yahoo.com)), interested in works on the dialogue between Science and Religion, already released a number of books in the collection 'New World Paradigm': '*Science and Religion. Antagonism or complementarity?*' [2], '*Science and Religion - From conflict to dialogue*' [4], '*Science et croyance*' [5], '*L'Affaire Galileo*' [6] and in print '*Science, Theology, Spirituality: Elements for a Perspective of Coexistence*' and '*La mélodie secrète*'.

### 2.3. The course

An important issue in promoting our topics is to attract the young people's interest, with the declared intention to prepare a trained generation in this new field of knowledge. The idea is to set up a number of courses for the Theology students in order to offer them the scientific necessary opening, to draw attention upon some topical problems in an ever more secularised world. Equally, for the dialogue to exist, the future scientists have to be prepared as well.

At first, things were not simple at all, but finally, we had our proposed courses for the theological faculties accepted by three main state universities (Bucharest, Craiova and Constanta), and also a special course on 'Science and Religion' (the first of its kind in Romania and probably a world premiere) for the first year students in Journalism accepted by the private university 'Hyperion' in Bucharest. Attended by over 150 students, this special course offers not only the general culture needed in the field, but also a new perspective on the relation between Science and Theology, training them to cope with their own questions or with those they will come across during their career. Furthermore, the Chair of 'History of Science' at the Babes-Bolyai State University in Cluj-Napoca acknowledged that History of Science cannot be separate from that of Religion, and promised his full support in honour of the great historian of Religion Mircea Eliade.

#### 2.4. The congress

We want to conclude this short review by mentioning a real important event for our JTF financed Program, for the general Romanian public and for the international community as well.

The International Congress Science and Orthodoxy - a Necessary Dialogue, is to be opened in October. It is a great congress, not only in number of participants, but also taking into account of the personalities it gathers from Romania and abroad. Its main goal is to develop new insights on the ultimate reality by including specific and methodological approaches in the debate on Science and Religion, linked to the Orthodox tradition.

Although its main topics are: 'Methodological Guidelines in Science and Theology' and 'The Apophatism as Dialogue Interface between Science and Orthodox Theology', the subjects proposed by the participants cover a much larger area. The participants are from: Bulgaria, Canada, Greece, France, Italy, Japan, Poland, Romania, Serbia & Montenegro, United Kingdom, U.S.A. and the Vatican. Due to the extreme importance of the meeting, we are looking forward to hear the presentations of the speakers and to see the debates that will follow.

This congress will be an opportunity to test once again the level of interest about such an international reunion in the Orthodox world, given the general prejudice that fundamentalism is too deeply rooted and the scientific level so little developed, that dialogue is meaningless.

#### 4. The future

The achievements so far stands in favour not only for the disposition of the Orthodox world to the new, but also for its opening towards the new spirit of closeness among scientists and theologians, between different religions and Christian confessions, leaving the door to the dialogue open for anyone, believer or atheist. The dialogue can be learned. And it is better to make it with great acceptance of the other, in order to be able to gain the peace towards which the Church always calls, and to make science meet this peace.

#### References

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