

EDITORIAL

The dialogue between Theology and Science in the 21st century: towards a new synthesis

In March 2006 the *European Journal of Science and Theology* (EJST) will celebrate the first anniversary of its existence. By launching the first issue in March 2005 the EJST inaugurated a new situation in the field of Science & Theology, when the quarterly issued Journal emerged in Eastern Europe, in Romania – a country where the Eastern Orthodox Christianity outlines spiritual attitudes and culture its peoples. Romania is a special country: it is the only Eastern Orthodox country, which linguistically does not descend to the Greek (or Byzantine) culture. By being Orthodox, Romanian Christianity is deeply Greek Patristic, but the expression of the ethos of Christianised Hellenism in prayer and liturgy has always been taking place in a language, which belongs to the Latin descent. It is in this sense that one can feel that Romania is unique, for it represents a living Christian synthesis of the East and West. And it is this uniqueness which made it possible to launch a new international journal on Science & Theology namely in Romania.

In four issues published so far, the Journal confirmed its affinity not only to promote the science-religion dialogue in those ‘conventional’ areas which are well presented in editions such as *Studies in Science and Theology* published annually by the European Society for the Study of Science and Theology (ESSSAT), or *Theology and Science* published by the Center of Theology and Natural Sciences (CTNS) in America, but also to initiate awareness of scholars in the field about the specificity of the Eastern Orthodox approach to the dialogue between theology and science. This approach was reflected in papers dealing with ‘hot’ issues in Science & Theology such as cosmology and its relevance for religious experience, theology and ecology, bioethics, historical aspects of Science & Theology and others. One can assert that the Journal fulfilled its primary objective to promote the dialogue between theology and science in different areas and across different denominational and geographical contexts in Europe.

The year 2005 was also remarkable in the Romanian landscape because of the International Congress on ‘Science and Orthodoxy. A necessary Dialogue’ which took place in Bucharest and Constantza in October and which gathered scholars from all over the globe. In addition to these triumphant achievements, another Romanian city, Iasi, will host this April the XIth ESSSAT Conference ‘Sustaining Diversity. Science, Theology and the Futures of Creation’, jointly organised with the Technical University of Iasi and with a direct participation of members of the Editorial Board of EJST. One can hope that this tradition of mediation between East and West in the field of theology and science will

successfully continue in the coming years and unfold further horizons of this endeavour. One is tempted to ask: what are these horizons, which have not yet been enlightened in modern discussions on Science & Theology? Does one expect a new trend to emerge, which would avoid the arbitrariness of a post-modern voluntarism and would preserve and reveal with a new force the ultimate destiny of the united human spirit, which is encoded in the traditions accumulated during the last twenty centuries? We take a risk of conjecturing about one possible trend where the Eastern Orthodox contribution expressed in a language of phenomenological philosophy may enlighten the whole issue of theology and science and lead to a new synthesis.

In the background of all varieties of the dialogue between theology and science, which takes place in the West, one admits that what is missing, is the qualification and evaluation not of pre-existing forms of this dialogue, but its essence. It is one thing to discuss the existing historical forms of this dialogue, but it is a completely different thing to enquire into the very cause of this dialogue, the very existence of the problem of science and religion and the underlying tension between them. This does not mean that the problem of the dialogue must be approached from an a-priori chosen ad hoc philosophical position. On the contrary, the dialogue between science and theology has sense only as an existential issue, that is, as originating from within the immediate needs of humanity. This means that the initial stance of any dialogue must begin from the enquiry about that particular mode of the human condition which led to the existence of the contraposition of religion and science and, as a result, to the whole range of speculations on how to relate them. If this immediate existential concern of this 'dialogue' disappears either from theology or from science, then all sorts of ways of combining theology and science, in order to establish a reasonable model of their co-existence, has sense only as an abstract and empty game of the obscured reason with no existential and spiritual consequences. One can produce many sophisticated schemes of the dialogue still without understanding why the separation between religion and science takes place and why there is an incessant urge in the human psyche to reconcile them. In order to address this question the whole discourse on Science & Theology must transform to 'another' level where the problem of theology and science will be grasped in its historical entirety as well as in its soteriological necessity. Then, it will not be difficult to realise that theology and science must be presented at this 'another' level not locally, in terms of existing schools and paradigms, but in terms of the ongoing tradition of the human spirit, that very spirit from which all modes of the human endeavour emerge in their intrinsic unity, that unity which is seen at present as being split in itself. Seen along these lines, the problem of theology and science becomes a problem of disunity in the human spirit, that disunity which the human soul painfully attempts to overcome.

It is known that Orthodox Theology was never heavily engaged in discussions with science, because science, seen as a human enterprise, that is, as the specific and concrete realisation of existential events, could not contradict the facticity and contingency of every personal existence, even less could it control it. Science could not, and still cannot, justify its own facticity as a particular realisation of the human subjectivity, that very subjectivity in whose horizon science is acting. Orthodox Theology was not afraid of any scientific developments and their application, simply because all scientific achievements could not explain away the mystery of the incarnate subjectivity (it has only been concerned with those technological applications of science which can threaten humanity physically). Even in the case when the lured human reason attempted to proclaim its alleged self-emergence from some pre-existent and impersonal stuff of the universe, theology kept 'smiling' in its silent wisdom about the genuine ontological origin of all things in the universe as articulated through the events of personhood, whose irreducible and transcendent origin, inexplicable by any science, is sustained by the power of the Other, God-creator, the Father of all humanity, its ultimate archetype, its Alpha and Omega. It is then not accidental that Orthodox Theology is called existential theology: it gives priority to concrete personal (hypostatic) existence (expressed through the intensity and immediacy of a particular moment), as the ultimate ontological ground for all other aspects of reality. This existential dimension in theology can be traced back to early Greek Patristics, which was largely forgotten in the 20th century and interest in which slowly rises nowadays. A Neo-Patristic Synthesis of theology and science (as the expansion of the Neo-Patristic appeal in Orthodox Theology of the 20th century made by G. Florovsky [1] and developed by the great theologians such as V. Lossky, D. Staniloae, C. Yannaras, J. Zizioulas and others), incorporating theological experience of recent centuries as well as achievements of philosophy and science in the fabric of ecclesial fullness, thus becomes the task for Orthodox theologians, philosophers and scientists, their spiritual orientation.

The quest for the essence of the 'dialogue' between theology and science demands to revert the whole discussion to the essence of theology and the essence of science and hence to the roots of both of them in tradition which encodes the *telos* of humanity's infinite tasks, as its *entelechy*. One sees that the debate on humanity enters this dialogue not through discussion on its physical and biological origin (the evolution debate), not through its position in the universe (the anthropic principle in cosmology), not through bioethics and ecological concern, but as that medium of all facticity through which the content of sensible and intelligible universe, its relationship to man and God, is formed. Humanity and its transcendental subjectivity sanctified by the grace of the Spirit of God, becomes the central issue in any discussions on theology and science [2, 3].

The centrality of the human subject for the dialogue between theology and science manifests itself through the simple, almost naïve observation that scientific realities, as mental creations, represent themselves as varieties of the human experience in the world, an experience whose intentionality is directed towards outward nature and whose limits are set by what is usually called ‘natural attitude’ of the human mind. But this experience is still a human experience in the same way that theology is the experience of God addressed to man, since in its origin and essence theology is the experience of God as man’s self-awareness of the limits of a humanity that is rooted in a contingent creaturehood. Thus there are two types of experience that meet each other in the same humanity. What then is the goal of the dialogue between theology and science? One could argue that the essence and objective of establishing a relationship between theology and science is to relate two different types of experience in the same human subjectivity, and that the division (*diairesis*) and internal split that we observe in the tension between science and theology today is not something that was implanted in the nature of man as originally created, but rather represents a continuation of the event in biblical history that we call the Fall. The human divine image has been distorted and its integrity lost, but intrinsically human beings are still unified creatures, having a kind of archetypal memory of their likeness to God. Therefore the process of restoration of unity in what is meant to be related in man, i.e. unity between the scientific vision and the experience of God, has as its ultimate goal the return of humanity to God and its entry into union with God through the removal of all divisions in creation (St. Maximus the Confessor). This restoration is not a cultural or academic necessity, but rather an ascetic and spiritual imperative that follows from the present human condition and that which is implanted in the teleology of the human spirit. Finally, one can assert that the problem of engagement of theology and science cannot be addressed without an enquiry in theological anthropology, that is, understanding man as both *microcosm* and *mediator*, as a created being (enslaved by its physico-biological constitution) that is free and able to transcend its own nature (through faith as “the substance of things hoped for, the manifestation of realities unseen” (Hebrews 11.1), as well as knowledge founded in faith), and which longs for the restoration of its lost likeness to God, when man was ‘all in all’.

Does such a vision of the problem of the dialogue between science and theology diminish the role of scientific picture of the world and man? Not at all. On the contrary, scientific theories become an extremely important and useful instrument in demonstrating just how human subjectivity, incarnate in the world, affirms itself through the exteriorising tendencies of its ‘natural’ attitude. The universe that science represents to us as something different from us and devoid of our influence and presence, represents in fact the articulated words and thoughts of humanity. By studying what science is saying about nature, we study ourselves, namely how our own consciousness attempts to overcome the mystery of its own existence by projecting this mystery on to the outer world. If science is to be involved in dialogue with theology, it is important to look carefully at

how this science is defined and limited by the structures of human thought and by the human condition in the universe. This is definitely not a task for the scientist himself. It is a task for those intellectuals who can exercise their consciousness in a 'natural' as well as in a philosophical mode. It is at this stage that phenomenological philosophy can offer help as a methodological tool enabling us to elucidate those contexts in which the sciences function and which are nevertheless not reflected at all by the sciences themselves.

Phenomenology helps to identify the meaning of the sciences as a pre-philosophical form of thought, and hence their inherent partiality in judgements about reality as a whole. Each partial science stretches towards its philosophical limit in attempting to express some particular opinion about the whole of reality. Phenomenology articulates this partiality of opinion about the whole and its relationship to those views that are appropriate to the whole. Phenomenology, by being indifferent to the truth or falsity of science's claims about reality, clarifies its partiality and its underlying 'natural' attitude, and thereby discovers in the sciences various contexts that the sciences are unable to identify themselves. While phenomenology clarifies the meaning of science by referring it to the context of historical consciousness as it functions in the world, that is, to the living, embodied subjectivity with its pre-scientific experience of immediate indwelling in the world (the intensity of the immediate instance of hypostatic existence), theology can proceed even further by articulating the structures of the life-world in the context of existential faith in God. The very essence of theology is to articulate the human condition in the universe by focusing on the destiny of man in his relationship with God, seen as that discloser of the transcendence that *is being given* in the very phenomenon of humanity in a characteristic way of *presence in absence*. But this implies the presence of that *non-natural* attitude to the contemplation of being which is called *faith*.

Let us point to an analogy with patristic thought as regards the relationship between faith and knowledge, theology and the sciences. Clement of Alexandria, when he undertook a synthesis of the Christian Faith within the context of Hellenistic culture, taught that the truth arrived at in Greek philosophy is a partial truth. Truth in an absolute sense (as the Divine truth) is not attainable from within philosophy as such, for this requires *faith*, though philosophy can contribute to the elucidation and comprehension of truth, "not as being the cause of comprehension, but a cause along with other things, and co-operator; perhaps also a joint cause" [4]. In a similar way Clement argues that there is only partial truth in the sciences: "In geometry there is the truth of geometry; in music, that of music; and in right philosophy, there will be Hellenic truth." [4] Thus the function of philosophy (and all so called 'sciences', which in Clement's time formed part of 'philosophy') is to be understood as that of a co-operating knowledge leading towards the truth. If one translates the thought of Clement into the contemporary philosophical context employing, for example, some phenomenological terminology, one could say that patristic theology, without denying or condemning the 'natural' attitude that is intrinsically present in the natural sciences, just points out that which is absent in them, namely the context

of *existential faith*. What does this mean? Without judging the content of the sciences theology provides insight into the meaning and foundation of the sciences in the perspective of faith, understood ontologically as a mode of being. As, for example, St Maximus the Confessor expressed this thought: "Faith is a relational power or a *relationship* which brings about the immediate, perfect and supernatural union of the believer with the God in whom he believes." [5] In a contemporary context the same thought can sound like this: "if Christian faith has a meaning for us, it is because our existence is permeated through and through by faith in the broad existential sense of the word. Faith in this sense is a general and fundamental constituent of human existence, like participation, or giving in exchange, or the communion..." [6]. The faith thus represents our existential conviction that reality as such is bound up with the existence of humanity, whose presence in the universe makes this reality a very special one. Here faith manifests itself not just as religious belief or highest capacity of contemplation, but as the reflection and manifestation of our existence in the world as such. For when the sciences articulate the outer 'material' world, they in fact *believe* in its existence, and this belief is a different way of expressing that human beings are not disembodied souls, but integrities permeated by the material (which human subjectivity constitutes in turn as its own corporeality).

As a result, the revealing of the context of faith within which the sciences work means that traces of existential faith must be found everywhere, i.e. in all scientific articulations of the universe. This leads to the conclusion that every possible approach to the material world (as related to God the Creator and articulated by human beings) is intrinsically imbued with living faith, with the result that without this faith (i.e. without taking into account the specificity and concreteness of the human condition in the universe), any alternative abstract intellectualist approach to the worldly realities is devoid of existential meaning and can properly be qualified as non-human.

One now anticipates that there must be a certain shift in the dialogue between theology and science. If scientists who are working within the 'natural' attitude of mind attempt to engage with theology, they automatically transform the whole of theology into a set of views and formal teachings which are also perceived from within the 'natural' attitude. But for a theologian or religious thinker this approach is unacceptable, because theology interpreted from within the 'natural' attitude loses its existential meaning and its transcendent and mystical origin in communion with God. Such a 'theology' (if it can be called such) inevitably becomes immanentist and worldly. If the movement towards an engagement between theology and science takes place from within the natural attitude, the whole enterprise becomes just a strange mental exercise involving the comparison of things that are both posited by the transcendental consciousness as existing outside and independently of itself, devoid of any inward existential meaning and being only abstractions of the mind, either scientific or pseudo-theological. It is not hard to see that any attempt of the straightforward mediation between theology and science leads ultimately to the identification of the two different attitudes of human consciousness that are at

work in theology and science, namely the ‘natural’ attitude of the one and what one might call the philosophico-theological attitude of existential faith that characterises the other. However, there is no simple non-philosophical form of reconciliation between these attitudes in the human subjectivity, and thus no naïve and simple dialogue between theology and science is possible, unless the issue of the human transcendental subjectivity becomes a central theme of this dialogue [2, 3].

We can therefore see that the foundation for a relationship between theology and science can only be found in the depths of the human subject, which is itself a manifestation of the unity of our actual experience of incarnate existence in the world. The meeting of theology and science takes place within rubrics of human experience, and therefore the fundamental ground for mediation between them is the internal life of human subjectivity as it faces the world through its own personal incarnation in it. Since the particular forms of the functioning of human consciousness and the higher faculties of contemplation must leave traces everywhere, i.e. in scientific theories as well as in theological teachings, the goal of mediation between theology and science can be understood as the re-discovery of human subjectivity in scientific discourse through articulating its presence to the same consciousness that is at work in scientific theories. The objective of this stage of mediation is to look at these theories as they develop in order to learn more about how the human consciousness constitutes itself *for itself* when it faces the world. It is here, that one can envisage a change in the ‘natural’ intentionality directed towards the objects of the ‘outer’ world such that it transforms towards the intentionality of the self, where consciousness directs its activity towards itself. As a result, the whole scientific enterprise could come to be seen as contributing towards the constitution of this self. In the spirit of the phenomenological approach, that consciousness which works in the intentionality directed to the self, ‘deconstructs’ scientific theories in order to find the human subjectivity present behind all of them, adopting a neutral and dispassionate stance with respect to what these theories assert. In this case the mediation between theology and science acquires a more deep sense as a disclosure of the dialectical split of intentionalities in the human spirit, (apparent as historically divided attitudes the world), in their intrinsic teleological unity pointing towards the same Holy Spirit who acts upon the fullness of humanity.

Thus, the ‘phenomenological turn’ in the problem of theology and science, as we briefly outlined it above, leads one to understanding that the major and most difficult point in this dialogue is the dual position of humanity in the universe being at once the ‘lord and a slave of the universe’, being ‘a container for the universe and being contained by it’. This is the problem of the finite and local embodiment of humanity in cosmic stuff on the one hand, and its unlimited ability to transcend the locality of its body through knowledge across the universe, on the other. This is the problem of origin of humanity, not in a trivial biological sense, but as the ultimate metaphysical origin, as incarnate hypostatic consciousness. Cosmology and Anthropology of all kinds will be of

equal importance in tackling this mystery, because, as it was expressed by Gabriel Marcel, “the problem of the genesis of the I and of the genesis of the universe are just one and the same problem, or, more exactly, one and the same insoluble, the insolubility being bound up with my very position, my existence, and the radical metaphysical fact of that existence” [7].

Let us hope that the dialogue between theology and science in the 21st century will be able to shed more light on this basic mystery of the human existence, and that the *European Journal of Science and Theology* will be pioneering new trends in this momentous research.

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