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Doctorate thesis summary, Ewa Banasińska

**"Relationships between natural sciences and Christian theology in light of the work by  
John Polkinghorne as a physicist and theologian"**

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The subject of the dissertation is the issue of the relationship between the natural sciences and theology. It is important not only for naturalists and theologians, but also for everyone who strives to deepen their knowledge about the universe.

The hypothesis stated in the work concerns the close relationship between the natural sciences and theology. The main goal of the work is to activate the hypothesis. The specific goal is to present the subject, goal and method applied in the natural sciences and theology. The secondary goal of the overall work concerns the contemporary understanding of natural theology and the three stages of God's activity: the work of creation, God's activity in the world and eschatology. The path to achieving the research goals was a critical analysis of the source and secondary literature.

Chapter 1 concerns the subject of the natural sciences, including the goal of these sciences and the methods they use.

The subject of the natural sciences is the physical world. Scientists try to define both the features of the world (ontology) and the planes of its cognition (epistemology). A rational approach to the world requires reference to experimental research, which is closely related to interpretation and always assumes a certain initial point of view - a certain theory. Although there are autonomous levels of understanding the world, corresponding to individual natural sciences, unfortunately, we know very little about their mutual relations.

It would be a mistake to define the goal of the natural sciences as striving to achieve complete and indisputable truth about the world around us. The aim of these sciences is to get to know the reality around us better and more precisely. This goal is by its nature limited, because it comes down to answering questions belonging to the "how" category, excluding questions of interest to us from the "why" category, namely, questions about objective values and questions about meaning.

So far, scientific methods have generally been presented as procedures that inspire complete trust and will certainly reach the truth. Recently, however, critical voices have also begun to appear. We noticed that the scientific view of the world is always seen through the prism of a previously accepted theory. Every researcher wears certain "glasses on the back of his head." Therefore, it cannot be ruled out that there are different points of view, different perspectives, and that our current scientific view may be only one of the possible options. Therefore, scientific methods should be given their proper place; they should not be considered infallible, but should be subjected to verification procedures.

Chapter 2 is devoted to theological sciences, their subject, purpose and methods.

The subject of theology is God, whom we know thanks to reason that refers to religious experience. This experience requires openness to mystery. Learning about the subject of theology is based not only on a rational, natural pursuit of the truth, but also on enlightenment, which is an act of God's grace. God cannot be known through intellectual curiosity alone. The path of knowledge requires opening one's heart to the experience of admiration, and it also requires an attitude of worship due to God. The subject of theology should be subjected to increasingly deeper intellectual and spiritual discernment. Apophatic theology claims that we do not know more about God than we do know now. Nevertheless, on God's initiative and supported by His grace, we are still looking for the truth about God - our Lord and Savior.

The purpose of theology is indicated by the very definition of this discipline of knowledge coming from Anselm of Canterbury: *Fides quaerens intellectum*. The aim of theology is to ensure that faith is not based only on tradition, but that it is consciously accepted, constantly deepened, strengthened and persistently proclaimed. The aim of theology is to help people understand their life calling as fully as possible. The goal is also to help the Church implement God's eternal plan, which wants all people to come to know the truth. In difficult times of weakening faith and leaving the Church, the priority goal of theology has become ensuring that every person has access to God's truth. The goal of the theological sciences is to seek the most coherent explanation of the nature of God and His actions, while maintaining full respect for Holy Scripture, Tradition, and scientific research on the universe.

In theological methods, apart from religious experience, tradition plays an important role as the invaluable legacy of our predecessors in faith. Theological methods, just like natural methods, should be accompanied by critical realism. The feature of realism is related to the fact that research is an empirically exploratory process, while the feature of criticism comes down to the fact that procedures combine experience with interpretation. Polkinghorne's original style, called bottom-up, means that the first stage of constructing a new theory is always experience, and only the next stage is the interpretation of this experience. The Bible, Tradition and Theology are three pillars that free theologians from the subjectivity of personal experiences and individual preferences. Theological thought often uses metaphorical language, as well as particularly valuable symbolic language.

Chapter 3 contains material on the relationship between the natural sciences and theology. This chapter also presents a contemporary understanding of natural theology.

Analyzing the natural sciences and theology in terms of their search for truth, one can notice a clear affinity between these sciences. This is why they are sometimes called sister sciences. The relations between different sciences may have the character of conflict, independence, dialogue, integration, consonance or assimilation. The attitude of dialogue deserves special attention. Scientists hope that the fruit of the dialogue between the natural sciences and learning about God will be the discovery of new traces of the divine mind and divine will behind the order and history of the universe. The differences between the natural sciences and theology should neither be omitted nor overemphasized. What these disciplines have in common is a common passion for searching for the truth about the world we live in and the truth about ourselves.

Natural theology is a field of deepening knowledge about God, based on the experience of exploring the world. If God is the Creator of all reality, intuition suggests that He has left undoubted traces of His presence and action in the world. For a careful observer, these signs may be: the orderliness of the world, the harmony of the laws of nature, the beauty of nature and the fertility of the world constantly bringing new beings into being. Observations and their interpretations having the characteristics of natural theology date back to biblical times - the Old and New Testaments. Currently, natural theology is experiencing a revival. The novelty of natural theology comes down to the fact that: 1) its discourse has the character of insight rather than proof, 2) it turns not to specific entities, but to the laws of nature, 3) it wants to seek answers to meta-questions that result from scientific observations, but they definitely go beyond the limits of scientific interpretation.

Chapter 4 presents an interdisciplinary look at God's action, relating to the time of creation, the present and the future.

The chapter presents a short history of the Universe, starting from the point of the original singularity, through the Big Bang, to the appearance of life on Earth and the evolution of this life. There is no contradiction between the fact that the world was created by God and the fact of the Big Bang, because these propositions refer to two different issues: the cause of the world (why the world was created) and the manner of the world (how the world was created). Science does not have the competence to confirm or deny the truth regarding the creation of the world by God. However, it may refer to the physical processes that accompanied the first moments after the Big Bang. Science also legitimately refers to the processes that are related to maintaining the world in existence, meaning to the evolutionary processes of both the cosmos and the world of living beings.

Some physicists see God's special action in the world in the areas of quantum events. Others reach for a certain class of macroscopic dynamic systems, called "untamed," which are extremely sensitive to even the smallest interactions. An approximate description of such systems has become possible thanks to a new theory called the *chaos theory*. One of the most interesting concepts regarding God's action in the world involves the use of an analogy between God and the universe (on the one hand), and human beings and their bodies (on the other hand). It is worth emphasizing, however, that God's action will always be hidden, surrounded by a "fog" of natural and supernatural processes that are unpredictable for humans. Therefore, this action cannot be detected through scientific research, but it is noticeable thanks to the intuition of faith.

Polkinghorne's views on the end times are consistent with Catholic teaching, although they use slightly different concepts. However, the essence is preserved and comes down to four truths: 1) the human soul is immaterial; 2) the human soul comes from God; 3) the human soul is immortal - after the death of the body it does not die, it remains hidden in God; and 4) at the moment of our resurrection from the dead, the soul will reunite with the body. The soul is the guarantor of the organization of a person as an entity with a physical and at the same time spiritual structure.

The aim of my work is of an apologetic nature and is related to providing arguments in favor of the thesis that the natural sciences not only do not contradict faith in God, but complement theological knowledge. The work, referring to both the research of temporal

realities and the research of divine realities, falls within the scope of issues typical of fundamental theology, a borderline discipline.

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