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Rethinking the Integrative Dimension of Theology with Science: Syntheses and Congruences

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Abstract. If we want to define today's society in one word, trying to capture its meaning, it would be polarization. The interdependence between all social segments, articulated by globalization, has a double function: unpacking the identitary elements that enter in the structure of society (religion, politics, culture, science, etc.) and framing them in a relational dynamic. In this situation are Theology and Science, which, of course, maintain a number of components under their general names. Can we talk about a congruence between these two dimensions of human knowledge? Or they are developing completely separately and antagonistic in social progress? According to Ian G. Barbour there are four types of relation between Science and Religion: conflict, independence, dialogue, integration. This article intends to highlight the congruence between Theology and Science in the paradigm of *neo-patristic synthesis*, which explores in a phenomenological, theological and philosophical way the relationship between these two. *Neo-patristic synthesis* is a theological movement from the 20th century, generated by the initiative of the orthodox theologian G. Florovsky.

Keywords: theology, science, neo-patristic synthesis, G. Florovsky

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1. Why we need an integrative relation between Theology and Spirituality in 21st century? Challenges and perspectives

In Orthodox space, the climate of change, of redefining under new paradigms, brings a series of challenges to theology, religious discourse of the Church, and to academic theological education:

1. Instrumentalisation of the human person by reducing it to the status of an object, a statistical figure in a consumer society; human dependence on the digitized and technologicalized register of his life minimizes awareness of existential values in a world invaded by inflation of words and images without a spiritual content.

2. Globalization seen just as *standardization* and *uniformization*, that brings into dialogue different religious identities; this encounter of religions, of one's identity with alterity can lead to the emergence of at least four different attitudes: *indifference*, *fundamentalism* (seen as fanaticism or intolerance towards cultural diversity), *opening* towards others without restructuring one's own identity, and, *acculturation*.

3. The phenomenon of migration which changes the economic, social, cultural, religious morphology of society; this phenomenon challenges us to be responsible and co-responsible to each other.

4. The postmodernist secularism that is advancing a new 21st century Christianity; this trend is carried out on three main directives: (a) devaluation of dogmas, (b) deinstitutionalization of the Church, (c) privatization of religion: from public religion is pushed to the private one [1].

5. The deconstruction and relativization of theological language. The experience of liberal or radical theologies, etc. (like postmodern theology of the "death of God") not produce any beneficial effect in developing a spiritual integrative stability for man. Postmodern theology assumed the risk of deconstruction in the derridean manner, creating the premises of the discarding the religious discourse from the Church. The development of the postmodernist deconstruction of language, also extended to religious language, specifies its conceptual boundaries with reference to Transcendence; religious language is a symbolic, conventional language, and dogmatic teachings do not reflect the possibility of expressing the Transcendent God [2]. In the postmodern condition, theology reinvents itself, but propose a God beyond any metaphysical assertion and construction, a God presented and sustained imprecisely and confusedly; a God alien to the act of self-discovery, to His own revelation [3].

6. The new-religious phenomenon as so-called secular religions, reinterpreting in a syncretistic paradigm traditional religions, the latter being considered inadequate in contemporary society.

7. The tension between tradition and modernity.

8. The isolation and non-adjustment of religious discourse to the realities of contemporary society.

In response to all these theological challenges, Christian theology cannot appear closed in itself, in its own sufficiency. The religious university education in Romania proposes an integrative academic theology and in full congruence with spirituality. Theology separated from spirituality remains a discourse that is closed and cannot be transposed into life, because is assimilable only on an intellectual level, an ideal knowledge, without a shared, genuine communion [4]. Spirituality is the exercise of conformity with Jesus Christ — the Path, Truth and Life. Theology without spirituality is an ideology.

Contrary to the postmodernist paradigm, authentic theology is preoccupied with maintaining a healthy balance between dogmatic teaching and spirituality, between theological reflection and social commitment. It is a social apostolate and patristic refreshment, religious deepening and philocalic enrichment, a theology of ministry with wide ecumenical openness, fidelity to Tradition and receptivity to the new. Theology cannot stand in isolation: it is called to dialogue with philosophy, with science, and to provide integrative and filled with meaning insights to the depersonalized, robotic, and singularized man.

Theology is a science because operates with proper scientific methods and analysis in knowledge of God and in explanation of cosmos, man etc. From the point of view of its method and its objects, theology is at the origin of what we call interdisciplinarity today, understood as an intersection of different disciplinary areas.

Authentic theology is, as Father Dumitru Stăniloae pointed out, traditional, contemporary and prophetic one [5]. Traditional in sense that theology is rooted in experience of Church and promote the permanent or traditional values of the gospel of Christ, the One who "yesterday and today and forever is the Same" (*Hebrews* 13:8), is contemporary as a critical attitude towards the missionary self-sufficiency and inefficiency of ecclesial institutions, but also self-critic of herself. At the same time, theology is contemporary if it becomes creative in developing a proper language to convey, now and here, "the faith given to the saints once and for all" (*Judas* 1, 3). Authentic theology is prophetic or future-oriented, having as its ultimate goal not the transitory terrestrial life, but the universal resurrection and eternal life, deification.

Under these circumstances, theology is relevant not only in human and cultural aspects, but also in social ones. An authentic theology, centered on the experience of the liturgical and spiritual life of the Church, can offer social-human integrity, a valorization of the human condition and progress in knowledge. In this regard, theology is the basis of the dialogue between cultures and religions. Europe encourages the principle of "unity in diversity", preserving national identity, local traditions and values built over the centuries and not pursuing artificial and sterile leveling, a destruction of the distinctive cultural aspects. On the other hand, cultural diversity can become a source of tension and disunity. The prolific finality of

interreligious dialogue is, in fact, aimed at developing a culture of coexistence that will avoid the transformation of diversity into adversity and the confusion of identity with isolation. An authentic interreligious dialogue seeks peaceful cohabitation, not violent conflicts, mutual respect, not mutual contempt, the cultivation of our own ethnic and religious identity, together with others, not against them. This healthy attitude in interethnic and interreligious relations is not a simple option, but it becomes a vital imperative or attitude of a multi-religious society.

2. The cultural fracture between Theology and Science: historical context

At the beginning of the XXI century, the Romanian Orthodox Theologian Fr. Dumitru Popescu publishes an excellent critical analysis on the relationship between theology, culture and science in the contemporary society: *Man without Roots* (2001). His theological analysis warns of how it will unfold the religious and moral life of contemporary man in a secular and over-technologized society, as a consequence of three major challenges that were historically and culturally imposed by modernity:

(1) transferring the centre of gravity of the world from God to man, so man feel himself as being in such a manner autonomous related to Divinity that he may consider the will of God as a kind of violation against his own freedom;

(2) the artificial separation between the public and the private sphere, that manifests itself through the tendency of eliminating religion from the social life and transforming the society into a domain that is reserved to the economical preoccupations to the detriment of spiritual values;

(3) the separation between man and cosmos/nature, man becoming absolute owner of nature, in the sense, that he may shape and exploit nature according to his own desire of profit [6].

The Enlightenment programme was centred on the technological development through the gradually elimination of God and religious Christian values from the sphere of science. The purpose was achieving an autonomy of man and society regardless of any evidence to Transcendence, considering that theology limits human knowledge and it represents an obstacle on the way of progress of natural sciences.

This disintegration of the relationship between God, man and cosmos through the continuous fragmentation of the "self", which becomes autonomous and individualistic, of the "truth" that becomes measured with technical devices and of "God", deistic isolated in an inaccessible transcendence, lead to a crisis of human sense of the scientific development in a horizon in which the authentic sense of life has been deluted, in which everything is seen from a consumerist point of view, autonomous, ideological and without reference to moral and ethical values. The new technical civilisation risks to lose his vocation when it discards the ethical and morals norms, and the scientific progress risks to become an instrument of dehumanization by abstractization of man to the level of simple factors of production and consumption. This regrettable fact is not due to science and scientific

progress in itself, but to those who use science without consciousness, without an ethical and moral ideal.

3. A new paradigm of rethinking relation between Theology and Science: "neo-patristic synthesis"

In his book *When Science Meets Religion. Enemies, strangers, or partners?*, Ian G. Barbour defines four ways in which science and religion are linked to each other today:

1. Conflict, that assume the fact that religious beliefs and scientific theories are in conflict. "Biblical literalists believe that the theory of evolution conflicts with religious faith. Atheistic scientists claim that scientific evidence for evolution is incompatible with any form of theism. The two groups agree in asserting that a person cannot believe in both God and evolution, though they disagree as to which they will accept. For both of them, science and religion are enemies. These two opposing groups get most attention from the media, since a conflict makes a more exciting news story than the distinctions made by persons between these two extremes who accept both evolution and some form of theism" [7. P. 2].

2. Independence, science and religion can coexist, foreign to each other, and they always must keep a distance between them. "An alternative view holds that science and religion are strangers who can coexist as long as they keep a safe distance from each other. According to this view, there should be no conflict because science and religion refer to differing domains of life or aspects of reality. Moreover, scientific and religious assertions are two kinds of language that do not compete because they serve completely different functions in human life. They answer contrasting questions. Science asks how things work and deals with objective facts; religion deals with values and ultimate meaning. Another version of the Independence thesis claims that the two kinds of inquiry offer complementary perspectives on the world that are not mutually exclusive. Conflict arises only when people ignore these distinctions — that is, when religious people make scientific claims, or when scientists go beyond their area of expertise to promote naturalistic philosophies. We can accept both science and religion if we keep them in separate watertight compartments of our lives. Compartmentalization avoids conflict, but at the price of preventing any constructive interaction" [7. P. 2].

3. Dialogue. This would consist of a comparison of the two domain methods, which would prove that there are similarities, while recognizing the inherent differences between them. "Dialogue. One form of dialogue is a comparison of the methods of the two fields, which may show similarities even when the differences are acknowledged. For example, conceptual models and analogies are used to imagine what cannot be directly observed (God or a subatomic particle, let us say). Alternatively, dialogue may arise when science raises at its boundaries limit-questions that it cannot itself answer (for example, why is the universe orderly and intelligible?). A third form of dialogue occurs when concepts from science are used as analogies for talking about God's relation to the world. The communication of

information is an important concept in many sciences; the pattern of unrepeatable events in cosmic history might be interpreted as including a communication of information from God. Or God can be conceived to be the determiner of the indeterminacies left open by quantum physics, without any violation of the laws of physics. Both scientists and theologians are engaged as dialogue partners in critical reflection on such topics, while respecting the integrity of each other's fields" [7. P. 3].

4. Integration. Science and theology can form a constructive partnership based on the long tradition of natural theology that reveals the existence of God in the reality of nature. Integration seeks a closer integration of the two disciplines. "The long tradition of natural theology has sought in nature a proof (or at least suggestive evidence) of the existence of God. Recent astronomers have argued that the physical constants in the early universe appear to be fine-tuned as if by design. If the expansion rate one second after the Big Bang had been ever so slightly smaller, the universe would have collapsed before the chemical elements needed for life could have formed; if the expansion rate had been even slightly higher, the evolution of life could not have occurred. Other authors Stan from a particular religious tradition and argue that some of its beliefs (ideas of divine omnipotence or original sin, for instance) should be reformulated in the light of science. Such an approach I call a *theology of nature* (within a religious tradition) rather than a *natural theology* (arguing from science alone). Alternatively, a philosophical system such as process philosophy can be used to interpret scientific and religious thought within a common conceptual framework" [7. P. 3].

An answer to this actual challenge of the XXI century may be found in the "neo-patristic synthesis" from the XX century generated by the initiative of the orthodox theologian, G. Florovsky, as a rethinking theology as experience of communion with God according to the criteria of the Holy Fathers. In the history of theology, the patristic theology is delimited between the 2nd and 14th centuries and defines the way of thinking of Holy Fathers. The neopatristic synthesis means to think like them, to have this open theology for the contemporary challenges [8. P. 30].

The "neo-patristic synthesis" proposes an understanding of the place of science in the context of the general spiritual progress of humanity and does not refer only to a simple comparison between theories and scientific practices and the secular implications of religion, but, firstly, also a clear understanding of the fact that science itself is possible only as a way of experiencing the world offered to humanity through vivid communion with God. Actually, this synthesis between theology and science tries to reintegrate the breach between *faith* and *knowledge* by highlighting the anthropological dimension of science and technology [8. P. 33].

The neopatristic synthesis put in our attention the crisis of science and theology in our days. In a certain way the scientific approach is oriented towards the aspects that are defined by the secular society or towards how it tends to satisfy the existential needs, the demands of the secular man. We may say that the

contemporary man has a tendency towards what is artificial. A man that is limited to the immanent horizon of material references. In these conditions, it is necessary to speak about a re-evaluation or re-consideration of the values that are inherent to the human person open to the infinite horizon of communion with God, and not to its mere reduction to a simple subject of consumption. After all, any edifying analysis and re-construction grounded on criteria of normality starts from man. The Neo-patristic synthesis of the relationship between science and religion, theology may re-position science in the exercise of knowledge that regards normality: in that what is constructive and beneficial for the human person without trying to subdue it to multiples challenges. Our nowadays situation is the consequence of the past-thinking of the relationship between theology and science, and the situation of tomorrow is the consequence of thinking or rethinking this relationship today.

On the ground of all the varied forms of dialogue between theology and science that take place today, we admit that the aspects that are lacking refer to the qualification and the evaluation of the essence of this type of dialogue and not to one that refers to the pre-existing forms of the dialogue in question. One thing is to discuss the present historical forms of dialogue, and another one to observe its cause, the existence of the science-religion issues and the tension between them. The dialogue between theology and science has a sense just as an existential issue, that is something generated by the immediate needs of mankind. In this sense, science and theology have a certain commitment towards the truth [8. P. 74—88].

We may also speak about an existential crisis regarding the 20th century theology, because it has developed itself in an artificial environment and in isolation, it has become and remained a scholastic subject, even more, something that is being taught, but even less a search, an inquiry of the truth or a confession of one's faith. The theological thought has lost its gradual faculty of applying the technological development in aspects that refer to the life present in the Church, to mankind itself.

And science secluded itself from the theological horizon, without any legitimacy regarding practical confirmations of the truth behind the normal functioning of the universe, it has isolated itself from theology and has developed, in a singular manner, an existence without any approach of religious and moral values.

In this order it is necessary to solving the conflict between faith and knowledge: that will strictly define the spiritual dimension of the world and its vocation towards transcendence by accepting the scientifically developments as a discovery of the immanent, material senses of the complexity of this world.

Conclusions

Science represents the experience of man with the world; religion is the experience of man with God in which this relationship of man with the world is valued. This is why science and theology have to acquire anthropological dimensions.

If theology is applied from the grounds of the Neo-patristic synthesis, one may assert that it is capable of surpassing the negative formula of the stereotype negative perception regarding scientific progress and technology. The objective of such a theology is not to evaluate and judge, but to transform the vision of science into prophetic activity with the purpose of revealing the gift of God present in science. A gift that God makes to mankind in order for mankind to explore the world and glorify God by the means of creation.

The separation present between theology and science may be surpassed by re-finding their common *telos* present in a natural way among the human condition, a *telos* that leads towards a fulfilled destiny of mankind.

Authors' contributions:

Dura Ioan — analysis, writing the full text and developing the main concepts of the research;

Mihălescu Ionel — work with the primary sources and materials in Romanian language;

Frăţilă Mihai — formulation of theoretical hypothesis;

Cîrceie Victor — translation into English;

Borcan Rubian — editing and final review of the text.

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Переосмысляя интеграционные аспекты теологии и науки: синтезы и конгруэнтности

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Аннотация. Если мы желаем определить сегодняшнее общество одним словом, попытаюсь уловить оттенки значения, то это будет слово «поляризация». Взаимозависимость между всеми социальными сегментами, выражаемая глобализационными процессами, выполняет двойную функцию: раскрывает элементы идентичности, входящие в структуру общества (религия, политика, культура, наука и т.д.), и обрамляет их в реляционную динамику. В данных условиях находятся теология и наука, которые, разумеется, сохраняют ряд свойственных им компонентов под общими наименованиями. Можно ли говорить о конгруэнтности этих двух измерений человеческого знания? Или они развиваются совершенно отдельно и антагонистичны в социальном прогрессе? По мнению Яна Барбура, между Наукой и Религией существует четыре типа отношений: конфликт, независимость, диалог и интеграция. Настоящая статья призвана подчеркнуть согласованность теологии и науки в парадигме неопатристического синтеза, в которой феноменологически, теологически и философски исследуются связи между этими двумя типами. Неопатристический синтез — это богословское движение XX в., созданное по инициативе православного богослова Георгия Флоровского.

Ключевые слова: теология, наука, неопатристический синтез, Г. Флоровский

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