

Religion and science – actualities of a manifold relationship

In a first step, the study tries to clear some difficulties concerning the definition of the terms 'religion' and 'science'. On the one hand, it is problematic to suppose that there is a common essence of religion, consequently we cannot speak of the relation between religion and science in general. Instead, we should always indicate precisely which religion we are treating. On the other hand, one also has to define which science one is talking about. The relation to religion may be different in the case of natural, social or human sciences. Another difficulty is that the Hungarian term for 'science' refers to a much wider range of ordered knowledge than does the English expression. According to these considerations and for historical reasons it is advisable at least at the beginning to confine the examination to the relation between Christianity and the modern natural sciences.

After so determining the framework, the study presents the most important current topics in the field: general features of the relation between religion and science; origin of the material world; history and evolution of the Universe; the origin of life and the evolution of living beings; origin of the human species; the relation between body and soul; social and ethical questions.

The next section introduces the some significant contemporary participants of the international discourse about religion and science. It analyses Ian G. Barbour's classical scheme of the four ways of relating religion and science, that is conflict, independence, dialog and integration. It also emphasizes the contribution of process philosophy and theology. This is followed by a review of the Hungarian contributors and their most important writings related to the topic. Mention is made among others of the work of S. L. Jaki, E. Nemesszeghy, B. Weissmahr from the Catholic side, as well as of J. Bolyki, B. Gaál and L. Végh from the Protestant side, most of whom are theologians and have professional experiences in the natural sciences at the same time. At the end of the section, one can get acquainted with the most important international institutions committed to promoting the dialogue between religion and science, and with some current Hungarian initiatives in the field.

Finally, the study tries to give an initial answer to the question why these efforts to clarify the relation between religion and science are necessary. Our civilization is divided by many tensions that may jeopardize its future development, and the often hostile relationship between religion and modern science seems to be one of these. In order to overcome such deep and dangerous bifurcations it is inevitable to face the factors that contribute to creating them, and to search for new ways of mediating between the two spheres.