

Michael Welker

The Science and
Religion Dialogue

Past and Future

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such as cosmology, anthropology, eschatology and ethical responsibility. Leading academic institutions, particularly in the USA and Great Britain, created university chairs for Theology and Science, or Science and Religious Studies.

Sir John had not only a genius perception of the powers of the economic markets. He also had a deep sense for the creative potentials of the dialogue between scientific and religious thought despite its uncertainties and risks. Accordingly, for the past 25 years, the *John Templeton Foundation* has supported many research projects in this field. The University of Heidelberg and its Research Center for International and Interdisciplinary Theology were among the institutions that received major grants from the *John Templeton Foundation*. Above all, in one of his last founding decisions, Sir John established the *John Templeton Award for Theological Promise* at this university. Young scholars from across the globe were invited to apply for it with their doctoral dissertation or their first post-doctoral work in the area of "God and Spirituality" (broadly understood). Each year, 12 of them received a substantial prize after a strict evaluation process by 25 scholars from different fields and from 19 countries. In the days following the award ceremony (held in this room) they presented their next academic projects at the *Internationales Wissenschaftsforum*, where an academic conference will start tomorrow. The award very quickly made a name for itself on a global scale. When the *John Templeton Foundation* had to terminate it after five years because of its legal rules, the Heidelberg *Manfred Lautenschlaeger Foundation* decided to continue the prize as the *Manfred Lautenschlaeger Award for Theological Promise*.

This opening ceremony, apart from commemorating Sir John and celebrating the 25th anniversary of his foundation, intends to mirror the broad spectrum of its support in the science and religion discourse. We are very glad to welcome the three speakers from different fields, namely Professor Hans Joas from the Universities of Freiburg and Chicago, who will give a short presentation on "The Natural History of Religion." We are grateful that Professor Martin Nowak from Harvard University will deal with the topic "God and Evolution." Finally, it is a particular joy to welcome Professor John Polkinghorne from the University of Cambridge, UK; he has repeatedly been a guest professor in Heidelberg and is also a Von Humboldt prize winner. His lecture is entitled "The Search for Truth."

We are looking forward to a stimulating event tonight and a fruitful conference.

Michael Welker

The Science and Religion Dialogue: Past and Future

The Science and Theology Dialogue has been well established in Heidelberg since 1958. Located above Heidelberg's famous castle, the Research Center of Protestant Churches in Germany, the FEST, has cultivated this dialogue in consultations, workshops and publications. Its current topics are interdisciplinary anthropology, concepts of nature and questions of bioethics. In 1987, the year the John Templeton Foundation was established, one of the FEST's members, Professor Jürgen Hübner, biologist and theologian, published a book of more than 500 pages titled *The Dialogue between Theology and the Natural Sciences: A Bibliographical Report*.¹ Today, it would probably need ten volumes of similar size to provide an update of the bibliography.

My own serious interest in this dialogue dates back to a multi-year project at the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton, the CTI, in the early 1990s, designed by its former director, Daniel Hardy. I had the privilege to meet international colleagues who had been engaged in the Science and Religion Dialogue for quite some time. From this group of longtime dialogue partners, I am most happy to welcome today the distinguished colleagues John Polkinghorne and Janet Soskice from Cambridge, UK, John Headley Brooke from Oxford and Durham, William Schweiker and Kathryn Tanner from, respectively, the University of Chicago and the Yale Divinity School, Wentzel van Huyssteen from Princeton, Ted Peters and Robert Russell from Berkeley, Owen Gingrich from Harvard, Willem Drees from Leiden and Niels Gregersen from Copenhagen.

When we first met, several of these colleagues had already established a cooperation with the John Templeton Foundation. In the late 1990s, the Foundation offered me a grant to explore and document the Science and Theology Dialogue in German-speaking countries. First, in a rather complicated search, we identified more than 20 doctoral students and postdocs who worked on the topic. We brought them together for a workshop in the International Scientific Forum, the IWH Heidelberg. For several of them, it was a turning point in their view of themselves, because they realized that they were not academic loners,

1 Jürgen Hübner (ed.), *Der Dialog zwischen Theologie und Naturwissenschaft. Ein bibliographischer Bericht*, München: Kaiser, 1987.

strange people with a strange academic hobby, but rather part of a community of researchers. It was a moving event. In another project we explored various models of discourse and their potentials, models that had been established and cultivated in Princeton and Cambridge, UK, in Zurich and Berkeley, in Marburg and Heidelberg, and in the Papal summer residence Castel Gandolfo. It was very interesting to see and discuss the question: Where do the strengths and potentials for further development in the individual projects lie?

My next contacts with the Foundation occurred through several excellent consultations orchestrated by Dr. Mary Ann Meyers and individual scholars under the heading *The Humble Approach Initiative*. I had the privilege to co-organize with Dr. Meyers one consultation with the first generation of academic Pentecostal theologians in New York and one consultation with Russian Orthodox scientists and theologians here in Heidelberg.²

At the CTI in Princeton, we had had very good experiences with international and interdisciplinary multi-year consultations in Science and Theology and achieved fine results.³ We convinced the Foundation to support three such multi-year consultations in Heidelberg. One of them was *Body, Soul, Spirit: The Complexity of the Human Person*.⁴ The second series of consultations explored *Concepts of Law in the Sciences, Legal Studies and Theology*.⁵ The third project dealt with *Law and Love: Science and Religion in China and the West*.⁶ All these initiatives, together with the very successful *John Templeton Award for Theological Promise*⁷ mentioned earlier by the Vice-President, have greatly contributed

2 Cf. Michael Welker (ed.), *The Work of the Spirit: Pneumatology and Pentecostalism*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006; idem, *The Spirit in Creation and New Creation: Science and Theology in Western and Orthodox Realms*, Grand Rapids u. Cambridge / UK: Eerdmans, 2012; Russian translation by Sergii Bortnyk, Moscow: St. Tikhon Orthodox University Press, 2013.

3 One particularly successful example: John Polkinghorne and Michael Welker (eds.), *The End of the World and the Ends of God: Science and Theology on Eschatology*, Harrisburg: Trinity, 2000; second printing 2000; Korean translation by Joon Ho Shin, Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of Korea, 2002; Chinese translation by Wang Tao, Logos and Pneuma Translation Series 16, Hong Kong: Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, 2010.

4 Michael Welker (ed.), *The Depth of the Human Person: A Multi-Disciplinary Approach*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014.

5 Michael Welker and Gregor Etzelmüller (eds.), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013.

6 Forthcoming in English and in Chinese, 2014.

7 Since the John Templeton Foundation could not support this award beyond five years (2007–2011), a German foundation continued this fine project. It is now *The Manfred Lautenschlaeger Award for Theological Promise*.

to developing the *Research Center for International and Interdisciplinary Theology* (Forschungszentrum Internationale und Interdisziplinäre Theologie, FIIT) here in Heidelberg and to establish the *Global Network of Research Centers for Theology, Religious and Christian Studies*, in which about 45 universities from all continents are involved. Here we exchange doctoral students and postdocs for one term and create new forms of academic cooperation.

These good experiences encouraged the Heidelberg physicist Jörg Hüfner and me, together with the biologist Hermann Bujard and the assyriologist Stefan Maul, to create a discussion group among professors from the humanities and the sciences. This was not easy, but has turned out to be very rewarding. Today, the dialogue across disciplines that seem to operate very far from each other is a matter of course in this university, a university that proudly understands itself as a “comprehensive university.” The John Templeton Foundation has greatly contributed to the fact that theology and religious studies are constructive and vital conversation partners in this multidisciplinary cooperation. Therefore, we are very grateful that, together with you, we can celebrate the harvest of 25 years of your radiation, a radiation that among many places in the world has also extended to the University of Heidelberg.