

Michał Heller

Professor Heller's address at the Polish club — Ognisko Polskie, 6th May, 2008

Zagadnienia Filozoficzne w Nauce nr 43 [Numer specjalny: Nagroda Templetona 2008], 30-32

2008

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Michał HELLER

***PROFESSOR HELLER'S ADRESS AT THE
POLISH CLUB — OGNISKO POLSKIE,
6th MAY, 2008***

In the very beginning I want to express my deep gratitude to the Holy Father, Benedict the Sixteenth, for the message he sent to me through Father José Funes, the Director of the Vatican Astronomical Observatory. I am especially grateful to him for his encouragement addressed to “all those who devote their lives to exploring the profound insights to be gained from scientific research in the context of religious belief.” With these words, he has once more proved that he wants to continue the dialogue between religion and science to which John Paul II so powerfully contributed.

The John Templeton Foundation supports financially a multi-year program for six Roman Church universities (among them, Gregorian, Lateranum and Angelicum) aimed at introducing elements of the sciences in these universities and at fostering the academic study of mutual relations between science and religion.

I hope that it is a good beginning to a further collaboration between Church authorities and the John Templeton Foundation for the benefit of both the world of Church and the world of science.

There are here so many distinguished guests, some of whom I have a pleasure to meet for the first time in my life. I excuse myself for not enumerating them by names and dignities. I am a little tired and afraid to omit some of them. But this is not the main reason. In these few days, I made the most important cosmological discovery in my life.

Physics teaches us that there are four fundamental forces that shape the structure of the Universe: gravity, electromagnetism, and two nuclear forces — weak nuclear force and strong nuclear force. My discovery is that there exists a fifth, the most powerful force. Although it is not a physical force, without it all physical forces and all processes in the universe would be meaningless. This force is called friendship. This is why I dare to address all present here as my friends.

Friendship belongs to the realm of values. There is a standard doctrine that values find themselves beyond the reach of the scientific method, or that they are transparent to the scientific method. It is true, but this does not mean that values are not a part or an aspect of the Universe. On the contrary, I believe that the Universe is permeated with values. Without them even science with all its successes would be valueless.

It is exactly one of the main goals of the John Templeton Foundation to stop people to be blind to the fact that it is only the scientific method that is blind to the values, and that values themselves are as real as, say, nuclear force in the Universe. I thank the John Templeton Foundation not only for the Prize I was given, but first of all for its persistent insistence that it is not only science, but rather science together with the world of values that makes the Universe and the human life rational.

We are hosted tonight in a Polish institution and the Templeton Prize of this year has certainly Polish overtones. I remember my first time abroad. It was to London, in the late 1970s. My first encounter with London was during a morning walk somewhere in Acton Town. The streets were empty, and as I wanted to cross the street, I looked first... to the left, and all of the sudden a black, elegant limousine stopped just in front of me. An elderly gentleman opened the window... I was prepared to be taught a severe lesson. Instead, the gentleman smiled and said, "Nasty weather have we today, haven't we?"

From that moment on, I started liking to come back to England. But there is another lesson to this story.

At that epoch we indeed had nasty weather, from the political point of view. Now, the weather has significantly improved, and we are on the right track to improve it even more. My country belongs to the Great Family of Free Countries.

I must say, I never expected that the echo to the Templeton Prize in my country would be so enormous. If I had a little bit smaller sense of reality, I would have started to believe that I am the third one after Copernicus and Mme. Curie. Nevertheless, I am very happy that I have added something, owing to the Templeton Prize, to this rich Polish culture.

My old and new friends! Thank you for this possibility to be here together. And let us remain like that. In a few days we shall return to our everyday work. Space and time intervals will separate us. Let us remember, however, that the Universe does not consist only of space, time and matter, but also of manifold values. And they are able to keep us together even if we are separated by space and time. Thank you once more.