

Dogma and Method

Edited by
ROBERT J. WOŹNIAK

Dogmatik in der Moderne



Mohr Siebeck

Dogmatik in der Moderne

Edited by

Christian Danz, Jörg Dierken, Hans-Peter Großhans,
and Friederike Nüssel

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Dogma and Method

Toward Interdisciplinarity
in Dogmatic Theology

Edited by
Robert J. Woźniak

Translated by
Laura Bigaj

Mohr Siebeck

Robert J. Woźniak, born 1974; 2005 PhD in dogmatic theology; professor at UPJP II; vice president of the Polish Society of Dogmatic Theologians.
Orcid.org/0000-0003-3419-1514

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www.mohrsiebeck.com, info@mohrsiebeck.com

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Assumption of Our Lady 15.08.2023

Robert Józef Woźniak

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List of Abbreviations

BibAn	The Biblical Annals.
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Université Catholique de Louvain.
DH	H. Denzinger/P. Hünermann, <i>Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum</i> .
GNO	Gregorii Nysseni Opera.
JROO	Joseph Ratzinger Opera Omnia.
JSNT	Journal for the Study of the New Testament.
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement.
KRSW	Karl Rahner <i>Sämtliche Werke</i> .
LThK	Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche.
NDPAC	Nuovo dizionario patristico e di antichità cristiane, Marietti, Bologna.
NHThG	Neues Handbuch Theologischer Grundbegriffe.
PG	Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca.
ROR	Ricerche di Ontologia Relazionale.
SCh	Sources chrétienne.
SJT	Scottish Journal of Theology.
WKGS	Walter Kasper <i>Gesammelte Schriften</i> .
ŽMT	Źródła Myśli Teologicznej.
ŽrMon	Źródła Monastyczne.

Introduction: Dogmatics without Dogmatism

At least since the time of Descartes, man's drive towards unquestionable knowledge has become a determinant of rationality and one of the bridgeheads of a new concept and awareness of freedom. The pursuit of certain knowledge of reality is associated with an assumed openness to crossing the established boundaries, with a radical rejection of all forms of dogmatism.¹ Such a modern epistemological project quickly led to a scientific revolution initiated in the 17th century. This, in turn, resulted in an innovative, original concept of evolving knowledge, constantly exceeding the existing thought patterns, methods and paradigms. It took on a mature form in modern strategies from methodological doubt (the already mentioned Descartes) through Kantian criticism² to verificationism (the Vienna Circle) and falsificationism (Karl Popper and his critical realism).

As one can easily guess, Catholic dogmatics in such a perspective has become synonymous with unenlightened cognitive opportunism. In addition to this external crisis, there is the internal one caused by the atrophy of faith immersed in the world of accelerating secularization, the disintegration of community ties

¹ "The term 'dogmatism' does not have a single meaning in philosophical language. [...] In the first sense, dogmatism is contrasted with skepticism. This is how it was used in antiquity, when skeptics referred to those philosophers (such as academics and stoics) who asserted something firmly as dogmatists. [...] In the second sense, dogmatism is sometimes contrasted with criticism. This distinction is found in Immanuel Kant's doctrine, referred to as criticism. [...] In the third sense, dogmatism would be a position on the basis of which one accepts a certain assertion(s) as unassailable on the basis of insufficient rationale for it, that is, in the absence of sufficient examination of its (their) validity and/or truthfulness". R. Kleszcz, "Dogmatyzm jako wada poznawcza", *Filozofuj!* 44/2 (2022) pp. 11–12.

² "This critique is not opposed to the dogmatic procedure of reason in its pure knowledge, as science, for that must always be dogmatic, that is, yield strict proof from sure principles a priori. It is opposed only to dogmatism, that is, to the presumption that it is possible to make progress with pure knowledge, according to principles, from concepts alone (those that are philosophical), as reason has long been in the habit of doing; and that it is possible to do this without having first investigated in what way and by what right reason has come into possession of these concepts. Dogmatism is thus the dogmatic procedure of reason, without previous criticism of its own powers. In withstanding dogmatism we must not allow ourselves to give free rein to that loquacious shallowness, which assumes for itself the name of popularity, nor yet to skepticism, which makes short work with all metaphysics. On the contrary, such criticism is the necessary preparation for a thoroughly grounded metaphysics, which, as science, must necessarily be developed dogmatically, according to the strictest demands of system, in such a manner as to satisfy not the general public but the requirements of the Schools". I Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B XXV–XXVI, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 1929, pp. 32–33.

and a progressive social atomization, and, last but not least, the lack of creative relations with the universe of knowledge in its present shape and condition. It is only worth recalling that dogmatics is still largely based – and not only in its conceptual layer – on an outdated Aristotelian paradigm, whose historical value cannot be denied³, as well as the fact that in many of its points it does not stand the test of time. The presented collection of texts claims an ambition to go beyond this state of affairs, which is harmful not only to theology but also to global culture. The point is, first of all, to show the paradoxically undogmatic⁴ structure and nature of Christian dogmatic theology.⁵ Dogmatics in the modern world is associated with dogmatism, which means that dogma itself is seen as a bond imposed on the freedom of human thought.⁶ Meanwhile, dogma in theology is also understood as a set of hermeneutical rules and principles of thought that do not hinder but direct thinking. Moreover, dogma, as the history of theology shows, should be seen not only as a specific formula referring to the abstract notion of God, but as a hermeneutical key to the reading of human reality. The hermeneutics of dogma and the contemporary understanding of the world are interconnected. At this point, we touch on the second main objective of this project, which is to present the possibilities of using new methods of thinking and a modern ‘image of the world’ in dogmatics. In fact, the project of methodological renewal of dogmatics seems to be an opportunity to overcome both the internal and external obstacles that block the development of dogmatics and its fruitful interaction with other areas of thinking; thus, blocking a broader dialogue of dogmatics with modernity and the possibility of its critical inscription in the current millennium. A great need of the moment is to demonstrate the openness of dogmatic thinking to the whole spectrum of contemporary knowledge about man and the world inhabited by him. Of course, this in no way can be done at the cost of subjecting the truth of faith to any particular view of reality linked to one or another scientific discipline or worldview. It is more about finding their common points, while respecting their fundamental

³ Cf. M. Edwards, *Aristotle and Early Christian Thought*, Routledge, London-New York 2019.

⁴ It is interesting that a similar term is used by Lothar Lies in his monograph on Origen, proving that his work is in fact a form of “non-dogmatic dogmatics” (*eine undogmatische Dogmatik*). It seems that dogmatics itself can take many different forms, and that its original forms were in no way connected with what was later called dogmatism. Cf. L. Lies, *Origenes’ „Peri archon“: eine undogmatische Dogmatik. Einführung und Erläuterung*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1992, pp. 91nn.

⁵ One can find a general introduction to the state of dogmatic theology today in: *Dogmatik heute. Bestandsaufnahme und Perspektiven*, T. Marschler, T. Schärfl (eds.), Pustet, Regensburg 2014. See also, T.G. Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, T&T Clark, London-New York 2005.

⁶ A.E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine. A Study in the Foundation of Doctrinal Theology*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1990, pp. 8–10.

distinctiveness, and maintaining the distinction between a research field and a methodical competence.

The renewal of dogmatics, understood in this way, opening it to other disciplines and modifying its internal dynamics, is not, therefore, an attempt to break with its traditional heritage, which could turn out to be an attack on its internal identity, but to make it more dynamic and open up its traditional content to new contexts, which in turn will allow dogmatics to be re-integrated into the scientific-cultural-social debate, restoring its proper place in the universe of human thought. Such incorporation seems to be a necessary condition for all evangelizing activity in its broadest sense, including that which includes a concern for culture. In other words, it is an attempt to set traditional dogmatic truths in completely new perspectives, so that the light of other fields can fully bring out the new shades of meaning from its traditional assertions, corresponding to these new contexts (scientific, cultural, etc.).

In an era of “atomized reality” and “criticism of great narratives”, such a task is particularly important. This moment in history is marked, on the one hand, by a great respect for pluralism, also in its intellectual dimension, and, on the other hand, by the increasingly fragmented nature of the particular narratives that cannot find and meet each other. The renewal of dogmatics, as proposed in this volume, makes it possible to incorporate theology into the scientific discussion on a worldview, with full respect for the autonomy of the different disciplines and, moreover, with a desire to draw from these disciplines what is valuable, while enriching the other discussion partners with its own original way of interpreting the world.

Issues related to the interdisciplinary hermeneutics of dogma have so far not received any significant or direct interest from researchers. In dogmatics, the methodology of historical and substantive description of basic truths of faith prevails. Such an approach is common to all recent studies in this field, both in the multi-authorial worked (J. Auer and J. Ratzinger; W. Beinert, Th. Schneider, F. Schussler-Fiorenza and J.P. Galvin; W. Beinert and U. Kühn) and monographic (G.L. Müller, H.-M. Barth, O.-H. Pesch, J. Rahner, W. Kasper, Th. Rausch, R. Doran). A good foresight is J. Werbick’s recent work on general theological methodology.⁷ Previous works that have been promising in this respect turned out to be insufficient and marked by the reduction of truths of faith to psychological and therapeutic categories (as for example E. Drewermann), philosophical (H. Küng) or cultural-political (contextual theology: S.B. Bevans, theology of liberation: L. Boff, G. Gutierrez, J. Sobrino, I. Ellacuría). Perhaps K. Rahner’s theology should be considered the most successful project in this regard. He was a tireless advocate of practicing dogmatics in the context

⁷ J. Werbick, *Theologische Methodenlehre*, Herder, Freiburg-Basel-Wien 2015. Theoretical bases of the ideas presented there can be found in an earlier book: Idem, *Einführung in die theologische Wissenschaftslehre*, Herder, Freiburg-Basel-Wien 2010.

of the modern world view, drawing on both modern philosophy (reference to Kant's transcendentalism) and empirical sciences. Unfortunately, due to quite many controversial places in Rahner's system, today, as a whole, it arouses distrust among many theologians. From the multi-author projects, one should mention the collection of monographs on dogmatics in the context of modern post-Kantian philosophy (*Dogmatik in der Moderne*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2011-), in which present book has an honor to be included. In Polish, significant interdisciplinary research was conducted in the field of relations between dogmatics and literature (J. Szymik). The subject of numerous studies is also the relationship between dogmatics and empirical sciences (J. Życiński, M. Heller, A. Anderwald, T. Pabjan). In the latter case, there are also quite a number of partial studies carried out in the context of the dialogue of theology/faith and sciences, which serve as a contribution to research on the consistency and methodological compatibility of theology and sciences. It should be noted, however, that these studies, apart from being fragmentary and selective in treating the issues we are interested in here, are characterized by a very low degree of reference to dogmatics understood in the strict sense, which means that they are conducted more on the level of a broader dialogue of theism (understood philosophically) with other disciplines.

Of course, the situation differs from one science to another. In the complex context of neurosciences, for example, it can be seen that they actually begin to influence the reinterpretation of individual issues of theological anthropology and are reflected in the field of redefinition of primitive anthropological categories (especially in philosophy). However, there is a lack of general principles allowing for systematic work on the whole of anthropological-theological issues, which are in relation to neuroscience. In the context of cosmology and physics, the dialogue is conducted in the field of broadly understood relation to the basic principles of theism and its coherence. Such research boils down to searching for the rational validity of theism, most often without engaging internal dogmatic truths, which, if they were considered, would strongly influence the context, shape and dynamics of dialogue. In the field of interaction with philosophy, the situation is clearer. The synthesis of philosophy and theology seems to be the most natural. Nevertheless, it is a fact that while theology in history has spontaneously taken up contemporary philosophical motifs, embodying them within its own structures of explaining Revelation, in the modern era there are great omissions in this field. Unfortunately, contemporary philosophical trends are often taken up by theologians with mistrust or even hostility. This state of affairs often results from the search for philosophical systems that would be entirely suitable for transplantation into theology. However, such systems do not exist. Didn't Aquinas have to make a far-reaching modification of Aristotle's basic metaphysical principles in order to be able to incorporate them into his own interpretation of faith? Of course, there is a fundamental difference be-

tween the philosophical systems, dictated by their greater or lesser openness to modification and the different adherence of their assumptions to the spirit of the Gospel. But waiting to find a system that fully meets the requirements of the latter seems oversimplified and a kind of naivety.

Thus, as we can see, the fragmentary nature of the research conducted is, on the one hand, a contribution to the implementation of the submitted project, and, on the other hand, it proves the necessity of its implementation. The project therefore proposes to develop a new vision of dogmatics and as such has a causal character. It witnesses a certain process of redefining dogmatics in *statu nascenti*. Its concrete effect in the form of a monograph only wants to go beyond the space of wishful thinking and theorization in order to outline the possibility of understanding the corpus of truths of faith in dialogue, in conversation. Such dialogue must be based, no doubt, on a good knowledge of this corpus, its nature, structure, purpose and historical forms.

Also in this field, interdisciplinarity can offer valuable tools. Dogmatics is the science of dogma. By dogma we mean here a linguistic formula, of a binding nature, which gives a certain truth to be believed as revealed by God (dogma as a statement of the fact that a given truth belongs to Revelation). Dogmatic theology is a reflection of faith on the truths of the Revelation, which in various ways are given as such by the Church's Magisterium at its various levels. It is also concerned with truths that belong to Revelation even though they have not been explicitly/formally proclaimed as such (therefore dogmatics is not limited to formal dogmas). Dogmatics examines both the content of verbal expressions themselves and their historical origin, development and reception.⁸ The first task of dogmatics, therefore, is above all to present the truths of the faith in a reliable way, both conceptually, concretely and historically. But this is not the end of its task. For dogmatics makes an in-depth reflection on individual truths of faith, as well as their entire corpus. Hence it organically belongs to its essential tasks to explain and attempt to understand these truths in depth and to demonstrate their inner, mutual connection (*nexus mysteriorum*) in a concrete context. Dogmatics thus contains strong hermeneutical accents. As a hermeneutics of texts, it can and should enter into a methodological dialogue with other sciences, and especially with literary studies and philosophy, and such a dialogue can prove – without falling into contextualism – very significant for its own understanding of the truths of faith. Of course, the first environment for

⁸ The category of reception is becoming more and more important in theological reflection. It is worth noting the powerful study on Thomas Aquinas (*The Oxford Handbook of the Reception of Aquinas*, M. Levering, M. Plestead eds., OUP, Oxford 2021) or the more general research conducted by S. Coakley and R. Cross still not yet completed (*The Oxford Handbook of the Reception of Christian Theology*). Important information can be found in O. Rush, *The reception of Doctrine. An Appropriation of Hans Robert Jauss. Reception Aesthetics and Literary Hermeneutics*, Gregorian University Press, Roma 1997.

explaining and understanding the truths of the faith is the dynamic Tradition of the Church, which can and should benefit from a wealth of new proposals for understanding texts and reality itself.

Since contemporary culture is impregnated with the achievements of various sciences and their visions of the whole existence, the set of contributions presented herein can contribute not only to the development of dogmatics itself, but also to a broader vision of culture and social life. It is above all about opening dogmatics itself to unknown horizons and showing it as, on the one hand, a faith built on authority and, on the other, on all the requirements of reason and human activity. Moreover, it is also about the culturally fertile integration of dogmatics in relation to the whole of contemporary culture, without simultaneous subordination to it in terms of content and methodology. In this respect, it is a fundamental conviction of the authors of the project that there is no real incompatibility between dogmatic theology and the requirements of contemporary knowledge theory, which requires the development of solid methodological foundations. Thus, the greatest ambition of the project is to activate dogmatic reason by confronting it with the range of issues that constitute the content of the discourse of contemporary science and culture in order to overcome mutual animosities and re-introduce theological motifs into wider circles of social life. Such an aspiration does not differ, in fact, from the most noble thought-projects that have been creating and dynamizing thinking about the truths of the faith since the very beginning of Christianity. In fact, the theology of the Fathers of the Church was already characterized by its eminently dialogical character, which constantly called for a dynamic confrontation of faith and its contents with the deposit of human knowledge and culture.

This set of contributions consists of four parts. The first one presents the problem of the theological foundation of interdisciplinarity from the perspective of the principles proper to theology itself. In the second one, three essays are presented, devoted to an attempt to outline the complex issue of working on dogma from a historical perspective. Their aim is to present an approach to dogmatic formulas in ancient, medieval, and modern times. The third, essential part of the collection focuses on the relations between theology and other sciences (perspective of extra-interdisciplinarity of dogma). Finally, the last, fourth part sketches out the relation of dogmatics with other fields of theology and its important methodological currents created in recent decades (intra-disciplinarity of dogmatics). We believe that reading the whole book will provide a basic orientation on the problems related to the application of interdisciplinarity in dogmatics and will contribute to deepening research in this direction. In dogmatic theology there is a great vital energy, a creative force whose discovery and implementation is an indispensable component of the Church's missionary work and an inexhaustible source of her spiritual renewal in the spirit of the great Tradition.

Theoretical Preliminaries of Interdisciplinarity
in Dogmatic Theology

Dogmatic Theology in an Interdisciplinary Perspective

Theoretical-Methodological Prolegomena

ROBERT J. WOŹNIAK

In his theology of preaching, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger years ago drew attention to the significant separation between dogma and pastoral care.¹ This situation today is deepening and becoming more and more pronounced within the broader discipline of theology itself, which, too often, puts dogma at the margin of its interests. Dogma and dogmatics have become uncomfortable and unwanted vocabulary in much of theology and in the life of the Church, not to mention the associations it evokes in non-ecclesial and non-theological circles. The relegation of dogma to the margins of the Church's life, at least in practice, causes an increasing breakdown of the Christian experience and identity. In this context, one of the most important tasks of the Church is to restore dogma to the center of the Christian experience and practice. The task is not easy. The marginalization of dogma is, in fact, the result of more than one cause. Among these, it is necessary to mention first the intra-theological factors: the misunderstanding of dogmas²; their reduction to insignificance; the prevalence of lifeless, purely formal legal statements; and the focus on the linguistic and conceptual side of the truths of faith without distinction of content, designation, or form. In addition, misinterpreted dogmas have met with powerful criticism from enlightened thought, focused on freedom. For this construct of thought, dogmatic formulas meant closed syllogisms, and the demand of blind, unreasonable, and undisputed obedience.³ The purpose of this article is to promptly regain the understanding of dogma and dogmatics as dialogically open realities. Its theme

¹ J. Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching: Applying Christian Doctrine to Daily Life*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2011, p. 7.

² Cf. G.O'Collins, *The Case against Dogma*, Paulist Press, New York-Paramus-Toronto 1975, pp. 9–22.

³ Cf. S. Turner, *Knowledge Formations. An Analytic Framework*, in *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity*, R. Frodeman, J. Thompson Klein (eds.), Oxford University Press, Oxford 2017, p. 14: "The teaching of theology and law, as well as medicine, was not explicitly concerned with the production of knowledge: The sources of knowledge were given, external to the university, and took the form of dogma. 'Discipline' meant the protection of the dogma. As late as the middle of the seventeenth century, 'a Doctor of Medicine was compelled by the English College of Physicians to retest a proposition he had advanced in opposition to the authority of Aristotle under threat of imprisonment'. Training was training in dogmas. There was a need to formulate these dogmas, and apply the dogmas in new circumstances, through

is the interdisciplinarity of dogmatics, as seen from the perspective of its own principles. Our main task is to point out the interdisciplinarity that is currently fashionable in general scientific theory, and stems in theology from the very nature of dogma.

1. Ontology of the Polyhedron: Interdisciplinarity as a Postulate from Recent Statements of the Magisterium

The issues of knowledge, cognition, and understanding are characterized by great complexity. Just a simple trace of the latest epistemology textbooks leaves the researcher convinced that there are more questions than answers in this field. However, the emerging perspectives are dominated by the idea of interdisciplinarity. We have been increasingly aware that the search for knowledge must be based on combining many perspectives. If our knowledge today is characterized by a higher dose of fragmentation, then this fragmentation of the understanding of reality raises the demand for a greater unification of cognition, and fusion of the multiple horizons of understanding.

The postulate of interdisciplinarity also applies to our theological research. It was strongly expressed by Pope Francis in his Apostolic Constitution dedicated to the reform of the ecclesiastical system of education. Among other things, we read there that:

Today, as Benedict XVI noted in *Caritas in Veritate*, taking up the cultural insights expressed by Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio*, ‘there is a lack of wisdom and reflection, a lack of thinking capable of formulating a guiding synthesis’. This is where the specific mission entrusted to the program of ecclesiastical studies comes into play. The need for such a guiding synthesis not only makes clear the intrinsic purpose of the program of ecclesiastical studies, but also demonstrates, especially today, its real cultural and humanizing importance. Today’s recovery of an interdisciplinary approach is certainly positive and promising, even in its ‘weak’ form as a simple multidisciplinary approach that favors a better understanding from several points of view of an object of study. It is all the more so, in its ‘strong’ form, as cross-disciplinary, situating and stimulating all disciplines against the backdrop of the Light and Life offered by the Wisdom streaming from God’s Revelation.⁴

The proposed perspective fits neatly into the broader landscape of the papal understanding of evangelization, whose privileged environment is that of universities with their interdisciplinary character.⁵ It is worth noting that Pope

legal and theological casuistry, and this led to a certain amount of innovation. But innovation was not prized.”

⁴ Francis, *Veritatis Gaudium*, 4c.

⁵ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 134: “Universities are outstanding environments for articulating and developing this evangelizing commitment in an interdisciplinary and integrated way. Catholic schools, which always strive to join their work of education with the explicit

List of Contributors

Tadeusz Dola, born 1951, professor emeritus of theology at the University of Opole.

Andrzej Draguła, born 1966, professor at the University of Szczecin.

Dariusz Gardocki SJ, born 1963, professor at the Pontifical Faculty of Theology Collegium Bobolanum in Warsaw.

Wojciech Giertych OP, born 1951, theologian of the Papal Household, lecturer at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas (Angelicum) in Rome.

Milosz Hołda, born 1979, Assistant professor at the Department of Philosophical Anthropology of the Pontifical University of Pontifical University of John Paul II in Cracow.

Jarosław Jagiełło, born 1958, professor at the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Cracow.

Michał Janocha, born 1959, professor at the University of Warsaw.

Kamil M. Kaczmarek, born 1973, professor at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań.

Tadeusz Kałużny SCJ, born 1959, professor at the Institute of Fundamental Theology, Ecumenism and Dialogue at the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Cracow.

Dariusz Kasprzak OFMCap, born 1966, professor at Pontifical University of John Paul II in Cracow.

Dariusz Kowalczyk SJ, born 1963, professor at the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.

Marcin Kowalski, born 1977, Department of Biblical Theology and Prophecies at the Institute of Biblical Sciences of the Catholic University of Lublin.

Janusz Królikowski, born 1963, professor at the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Cracow.

Zbigniew Kubacki SJ, born 1962, professor of dogmatic theology and theology of religion at the Pontifical Faculty of Theology, Collegium Bobolanum in Warsaw.

Marek Lis, born 1967, professor at the University of Opole.

Francis Longchamps de Bérrier, born 1969, head of the department of Roman law at the Faculty of Law and Administration of the Jagiellonian University in Cracow.

Giulio Maspero, born 1970, professor at the Department of Theology at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross (Rome).

Tadeusz Pabjan, born 1972, Head of the Department of Philosophy at the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Cracow (section in Tarnów).

Krzysztof Porosło, born 1988, lecturer in dogmatic theology at the University of John Paul II in Cracow, Poland.

Jacek Prusak SJ, born 1971, Head of the Department of Psychopathology and Psychoprophylaxis at the Institute of Psychology at the Ignatianum Academy in Cracow (AIK).

Paweł Rojek, born 1981, adjunct at the Faculty of Philosophy of Jagiellonian University, Cracow.

Piotr Roszak, born 1978, professor at University of Nicolaus Copernicus (Toruń) and the University of Navarra in Pamplona.

Jan P. Strumiłowski OCist, born 1983, lecturer at the Higher Theological Seminary in Katowice-Panewniki.

Jerzy Szymik, born 1953, professor of Dogmatic Theology University of Silesia in Katowice.

Andrzej Wierciński, born 1961, professor at the University of Warsaw.

Lech Wołowski, born 1975, research and teaching fellow at the Institute of Dogmatic Theology of the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Cracow.

Robert J. Woźniak, born 1974, professor at the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Cracow.

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