

# *One World*



JOHN C. POLKINGHORNE

# *One World*

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THE INTERACTION OF SCIENCE  
AND THEOLOGY



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*To Reverend Mother and Sisters of the  
Society of the Sacred Cross Tymawr Convent,  
From a Priest-Associate*

*For by a single impulse of God the Word everything is put together,  
each acting in its appropriate way, and all produce a single  
common order.*

—St Athanasius, *Against the Gentiles*

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## *Preface to the 2007 Edition*

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Apart from a short book intended to be a personal apologia for my Christian faith (Polkinghorne 1983), which I wrote during my transition from being a professor of mathematical physics to becoming an Anglican priest, *One World* was my first book on issues in science and religion, soon to be followed by two more (Polkinghorne 1988, 1989), with which it forms a trilogy. Reading it again, I recognize that it introduces a number of themes that have remained important in my thinking in subsequent explorations of the interaction between science and theology, those two great human engagements with reality.

I described the context of *One World* as being the post-Enlightenment realization that the quest for clear and certain ideas, which could serve as foundations for reliable knowledge, had, in the end, proved to be a heroic failure. In today's postmodern culture, with its questioning of metanarratives and doubting of claims of truthful understanding, the issue of what we can know and how we can gain knowledge is one of even greater criticality than it was in 1986. I believe that the answers to questions of this sort have to arise from the investigation of specific truth-seeking projects, assessing their actual methods and achievements, rather than from general epistemological argumentation. The consideration in this book of the nature of science in chapter 2, and of the nature of theology in chapter 3, are exercises of this kind. In both cases, we encounter communities that are seeking truthful understanding, which they affirm can be gained through the