

Editorial

Our human responsibility for the system of nature surrounding us (the enviroing ecosystem) as well as for the system of nature within us (our human nature, both personal and social) has been the theme of the June and September *Zygon* issues of 1977. The June issue, on "The Ecosystem, Energy, and Human Values," was from a conference organized by Karl E. Peters for the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science, held at Rollins College, Winter Park, Florida, on March 19–20, 1976. This September issue, on "Man's Responsibility for Nature," is based upon a symposium organized by A. R. Peacocke for the British Science and Religion Forum, held at Windsor, England, on April 7–9, 1976, with the addition of a quite independent paper by Edward Goldsmith.

The theme of these issues is close to *Zygon's* basic concerns: not only man's proper relation to other men in his society but also his proper relation to the total system by which he was created, by which he is sustained, and in accord with which he is constrained to live (the total ecosystem, including all human social systems and himself within the system). The first relation is often referred to as religion's function to engender proper moral or ethical behavior. The second relation includes the religious functions of providing man with meaning, hope, and salvation for himself within the scheme of things entire. This scheme or total system far transcends man individually and men socially. It is a scheme whose hidden springs (mechanisms or dynamisms) have been symbolized commonly as the gods or the ultimate Deity.

We earlier planned, and actually announced, that both sets of papers would be published in a single issue. But financial limitations have separated them. Peters's introduction to the June issue suggested that a "systems approach"—including not only information from the natural sciences but also from the social sciences and humanities—might help resolve the crises arising in man's relation to his environment. The four papers provided several important perspectives on the relationship between traditional religions, contemporary ethics, and the sciences, both for explaining past and for guiding the future evolution of human values as man adapts to the requirements of his environment.

The three papers from the Windsor meeting of the Science and Religion Forum and the Goldsmith paper carry on a somewhat related analysis of human values and religion in the context of the same crises arising in man's relation to his environment but from quite different perspectives.

Paul Abrecht provides a review of the impact of science and technology on society as seen from his perspective as director of the subunit on church and society of the World Council of Churches. His paper reveals the ethical concern of the churches with the inequities that are produced and the difficulties of the church in effectively dealing with the future of the human community in a world of science-based technology.

Bishop Hugh Montefiore provides a traditional theological answer to the problem raised by Abrecht, an answer that may be as valid for human salvation today as ever it was. While he is not yet able to see how the scientific world view might be used to make his theology credible and hence more effective, he has taken the sciences seriously into his thinking; and he provides a clear view of what is necessary for the solution of the problems which Abrecht raised.

D. Bryce-Smith of the Department of Chemistry at the University of Reading seems to reinforce with some contemporary scientific views the general position presented by Montefiore. He seems to have a firm grasp of the basic scientific pictures of the way the world works, and he also seems to be one who is advanced enough in his views of religion so that he does not have to throw out the baby with the dirty bath water. His scientific understanding of the chemistry dependence and religious-attitude dependence of human brains for proper motivation leads him to some accounts of moral law and God's sovereignty seemingly as natural and as objectively real as other laws and facts of our scientific analyses of ecosystems.

An even more extensive call to religion from an ecological perspective was given to me for publication in *Zygon* a few years ago by Goldsmith, the editor of Britain's crusading and sometimes startling journal, *Ecologist*, devoted to such topics as man and the environment, the quality of life, pollution, and conservation. A time to publish it seems to have come with this issue. One might say that for Goldsmith religion is a socially transmitted control mechanism for a stable society in its particular ecological niche, a mechanism shaped by the total circumstances of the ecological niche rather than by any particular conscious formulations or intentions of men. With the rise of modern science and the demise of traditional religions, unfortunately a false faith in human technological capacities, unrestrained by knowledge of

ZYGON

the superior power of the ecosystem upon which the society is dependent, has produced a crisis as man disrupts his ecological niche to the point of disaster. Salvation depends on the redevelopment of a saving religion.

Thus the two-issue account of human values and religion in the context of ecology begin and end with ecologists who are clear about the divinity operating in nature and the urgent need of men for a proper faith in and obedience to the requirements of divine ordinance if men are to continue to have life. The philosophers, social scientists, and churchmen and theologians have expressed similar conclusions from different perspectives. We may have to excuse as almost unavoidable the scientists for being a bit naive about religion and the religionists for being a bit naive about the sciences. But we may conclude that ecology is playing a significant role in developing a new commonality of thought and concern between religion and science.

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