

## Editorial

A religion (. . . there is no such thing as religion in general) always signifies a special body of beliefs and practices having some kind of institutional organization, loose or tight. In contrast, the adjective *religious* denotes nothing in the way of a specifiable entity, either institutional or as a system of beliefs. It does not denote anything to which one can specifically point as one can point to this or that historic religion or existing church. . . . It denotes attitudes that may be taken toward every object and every proposed end or ideal.

John Dewey

In examining the nature of religion, we in the Western world often regard religion as a separate area of life. Not only are religious organizations such as church, synagogue, and temple viewed as distinct from political, economic, educational, and other societal institutions; but religious activity also is thought to deal with a special dimension of existence characterized by the sacred over against the profane or the supernatural over against the natural.

This separateness is often exemplified by the isolation of the activities of organized religion from those of everyday life, especially from those of economics but also from activities of the arts and the sciences. While some people live their total lives with the awareness that all they do is permeated by religion, many see no connection between their faith and the rest of their life.

Interestingly, while organized religion often is separated from other human activities, modern science, especially through scientifically based technology, is permeating more and more all aspects of our lives. In fact it is quite difficult to think what our daily life today would be like without scientific technology. Not only are research laboratories dependent on it, but we also find the fruits of science in the home, school, workplace, and recreational establishments.

The main articles in this issue of *Zygon* challenge the belief that religion is separate from other aspects of life. Instead, they suggest that religion, like science and its technology, can pervade all human endeavor. Rather than seeing religion as standing over against what is natural and everyday, they suggest that it is not completely distinguishable from other functionings of human culture in relation to the rest of the natural world. There is a religious dimension to nature and culture, not religion separate from the rest of culture and nature.

Murray L. Wax recognizes that everyone in Western societies has some understanding of what is meant when the word *religion* is used in a popular sense. However, he argues that the western idea of religion cannot be universalized to describe adequately what occurs in nonwestern cultures. The dichotomies of supernatural/natural, sacred/profane, ritual/nonritual, transcendental/mundane, and revealed/natural seem to be irrelevant when applied to anthropological field researches. Whatever it is, what we regard as religion does not adequately characterize what people of other societies regard as "religion."

The articles by Ward H. Goodenough and Robert G. Franke, as well as the excerpt from an essay by Loren Eiseley, together present a picture of the religious attitudes of a scientist. They show what is meant by Dewey in the above

quotation when he suggests that the word *religion* may be regarded as an adjective (*A Common Faith* [New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1934], pp. 9-10). What the adjective signifies is that religion pervades all of life, much the same way science is seen to pervade all types of human activity when they become scientific and technological.

Finally, one sees the pervasiveness of what we call religion in Richard H. Hiers's study of how the ancient Hebrews included all living beings as existing under God's care. Not only did natural phenomena remind the Israelites of the ultimate source and determiner of their destiny, but they affirmed that part of their destiny was to be responsible for the well-being of all nonhuman creatures. In this respect, the ancient Hebrews might be compared with the modern scientist Eiseley; both affirm that religion should not separate us from what we today call nature. This affirmation is reinforced by the original prayer of Kofi Appiah-Kubi, which grows out of the view of the Akan people of Ghana regarding our familial relation to the earth. The Akan perspective is expressed in a way that can be appreciated by people raised in a Judeo-Christian culture.

In seeking to establish constructive relationships between contemporary science and what we westerners call religion, we should keep in mind that both can and should pervade all of human life, including our relationships to the nonhuman world. Only when this happens can our knowledge of all things become more refined, precise, and trustworthy. Only when this happens can we come to understand how and be motivated to apply our scientific knowledge and the power it gives us for the maximum benefit of all living things.

Karl E. Peters