

Editorial

It was due to the initiative of Arthur Peacocke, now an associate editor of *Zygon*, that the Science and Religion Forum came into being in Great Britain. Its activity is focused on its annual conference, to which scholars from various disciplines are invited to contribute to the chosen theme. In March 1985 the meeting at Westminster College, Oxford, considered the subject of "The Science and Pseudo-science of Creation." Apart from the intrinsic interest of the subject, it provides a suitable case study for exploring the methodological problems associated with the science-faith interface. Although there are many fundamentalists in Britain, the creationist movement is not nearly as strong as in the United States. Creationists often claim to be doing science and putting forward alternative scientific hypotheses, yet biblical scholars regard a fundamentalist approach to the Scriptures as unscientific. At the same time some philosophers of science have stressed the cultural dependence of all scientific knowledge. Therefore, central to our endeavor is the problem of knowledge. Is truth revealed or discovered? Are there reliable criteria for separating science from pseudo-science?

While the creationist movement and the current controversy has taken place mostly in the United States, most of the authors in this issue of *Zygon* are British. This in itself may shed a somewhat different and hopefully helpful light on the issues. However, at the Science and Religion Forum conference we were fortunate to have among our speakers Langdon Gilkey, who, based on his first-hand experience, described something of the situation in the United States. We also would have benefitted greatly at the conference from the contribution of Ronald Numbers; we are grateful for permission to reprint his essay here to complement the five major papers from the Science and Religion Forum.

In "The Creationists" Numbers gives a fascinating historical survey of the creationist movement from its first reactions to Charles Darwin to the present day. As well as being concerned to preserve the inerrancy of the Bible, creationists blamed evolutionists for the falling away from faith of the young and for moral decline: the survival of the fittest had supplanted Christian ethics. The movement's progress depended on trying to find or develop reputable scientists to demonstrate that evolution was bad science. Since the 1960s creationists have argued in the courts sometimes successfully that evolution and creationism both deserve the same status as scientific theories.

Langdon Gilkey's paper "Religion and Science in an Advanced Scientific Culture" refutes any suggestion that the recent court cases in the United States represent another round in the science versus religion controversy; there were clergy opposing the creationists and scientists supporting them. Instead, the clash was between different world views each with a religious and scientific content. Gilkey draws interesting parallels between the age when religion was the "established" world view and today when the scientific world view has displaced it. He goes on to discuss the necessity for science to be embedded in a culture. This marriage takes place in a variety of ways and raises questions concerning truth and goodness.

Taking up the point made by Gilkey that science is the new orthodoxy, the philosopher Mary Midgley explores in depth the phenomenon of "Evolution as

Religion." Using prophecy as an example, she demonstrates from the writings of biologists how easily they slide from science into metaphysics and myth. She is strongly critical of this move for two reasons: first, because many scientists dismiss religion precisely for the reason that it is metaphysics and myth; and, second, because the move from science is often inadequately argued, simplistic, and even perhaps sinister.

The contribution by R. G. A. Dolby examines critically the various prescriptive and descriptive demarcation criteria which have been proposed to separate science from pseudo-science. He questions whether the prescriptive criteria are value free and suggests that there is evidence to show that each was developed in part to serve an ideological function. Then he examines sociological insights into the growth of science. Finally he assesses to what extent creationism satisfies these various criteria in its claim to be a science.

For the creationist it clearly is very important how the world came to be the way it is. This is the starting point of Eileen Barker's contribution entitled "Does It Matter How We Got Here?" Various reasons why the creationist cause is so controversial are discussed, for example, to preserve differing views of scripture, to maintain compatibility with science, and to combat atheism. In addition, the moral consequences of the evolutionist and creationist positions are significantly different. Barker then goes on to examine the interesting similarities and differences between the situations in Great Britain and the United States.

The final paper, by a biblical scholar, discusses the critical skills (e.g., archaeological, historical, linguistic, sociological, etc.) needed to recover the meaning of "Creation in the Biblical Tradition." With painstaking care George Brooke asks four questions of Genesis 1:1-2:4a. He shows that later biblical writers used the Genesis material in different ways, which reflected their differing situations. Yet certain motifs underlie all these. Recovering what the biblical writers themselves meant by creation is a *sine qua non* for our task of understanding the rich significance of "creation" today.

Taken together, the authors demonstrate that there are a variety of ways in which science and religion are brought together, often if not invariably from a predetermined ideological base. Furthermore, some tools exist to sift bad science and bad religion. The authors on the whole take the view that creationism is too determined by a particular doctrine of biblical revelation which is difficult to defend and that much contemporary scientific atheism is poorly substantiated. However, there is an important ongoing critical task of clarifying a world view which does justice to both the best science and the best religion. These papers are a generous contribution to that task.

Brian Chalmers

Editor's note. I wish to thank Brian Chalmers for his work in bringing this fine set of papers from the Science and Religion Forum to publication in *Zygon*. Dr. Chalmers, a former research chemist, is senior anglican chaplain to the University of Kent at Canterbury. He was chair of the Science and Religion Forum from 1984-86. His present address is Keynes College, University of Kent, Canterbury CT2 7NP, England.

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