

## Editorial

Three months ago, contextualizing the articles that appeared in the third number of this twenty-seventh volume of our journal, we focused upon theology's efforts to take scientific understandings of the world into account and to interpret them in useful and fruitful ways. *Zygon* has made this effort a central element of its agenda. The articles in this volume's fourth number approach the same underlying task from a different perspective.

For more than three decades, Gordon D. Kaufman has been recognized as one of this country's most distinguished theologians. In a volume honoring him, James Gustafson selects a phrase from Kaufman's own work to characterize his understanding of theology's function: to "create a framework of interpretation which can provide overall orientation for human life" (in *Theology at the End of Modernity*, ed. Sheila Greeve Davaney, p. 62). The articles that follow in these pages, by theologians Kaufman, Karl Peters, and Don Browning, all take scientific perspectives into serious account and wrestle with creation of such frameworks of interpretation. In Kaufman's piece, we catch a glimpse of his most mature efforts to date, facets of his large work, *In Face of Mystery*, which will be published next year. Reinforcing Gustafson's comments, he states his hope that a reconceiving of the symbol "God" can "perform once again its important function of helping to focus human consciousness, devotion, and work in a way appropriate to the actual world and the enormous problems with which men and women today must come to terms."

Karl Peters continues his work of developing a framework of interpretation that might give orientation to human life in the context of probing what *viability* might mean for us as we face the future on planet earth. He was assigned this task at the November 1991 symposium "Human Viability and a World Theology" (organized by *Zygon* and the Chicago Center for Religion and Science). In the process, he also continues his work on fashioning a concept of the human being as the "web of culture, life, and cosmos." His piece, along with Kaufman's, picks up on another matter that our editorial in the preceding issue discussed—"naturalistic" and "traditional" as two varieties of theological approach to the task of interpreting scientific understandings in useful ways. Peters and Kaufman are two of the most creative thinkers in the trajectory of naturalistic theology. In that editorial, we characterized this approach as the attempt to discern the dimensions of ultimacy within the processes and structures of nature. Consequently, it places a high premium on probing those processes and structures and permitting their deepest dimensions of meaning to surface.

In the essay we cited above, James Gustafson notes that the effort to "create a framework of interpretation which can provide overall orientation for human life" is also the intention of several of the sciences, three in particular: rational choice economics, sociobiology, and behavioristic psychology. In his essay "Altruism and Christian Love," Don Browning begins with sociobiological efforts, under the rubric of altruism, and

suggests, on the one hand, that theological attempts to conceptualize love must take the sociobiological insights to heart, while on the other hand, that the theological elaborations of love can broaden the significance and reach of the scientific concept of altruism. He carries the discussion of meaning systems into the realm of concrete matters of moral psychology and behavior, with particular attention to the family as a mediating agency of love.

Two scientists also provide contributions to the work that Gustafson has highlighted, both in modes quite different from the theologians. Francis Schmitt, neuroscientist, presents an organizational proposal for advancing the enterprise of religion-and-science interaction. It puts the task of creating frameworks of meaning from the mix of science and religion at the core of serious organizational development. Schmitt's ideas represent a creative adaptation of a vehicle that he designed in the 1950s, the Neurosciences Research Program, for the decades-long project that may be said to have created the field we now call the neurosciences. This proposal was also presented at the symposium on human viability. We note here that both the symposium itself and the publication of its papers was made possible by a grant made by the Templeton Religion Trust.

The "Endmatter" section of this issue brings to the reader still another facet of how there emerge the frameworks of meaning that give orientation to our lives. Thomas Shotwell has been a researcher in the biological and medical sciences. In recounting his own personal experience, he follows in the tradition of scientists like Teilhard de Chardin for whom the scientific worldview has given rise to gripping affective images that help to put our lives in order.

The reader who finishes this issue of *Zygon* will have walked an interesting pathway in the company of those who are seriously involved in fashioning, from the interaction of science and religion, meanings that can provide orientation for our lives. These artisans of meaning pursue varying crafts—theologian, philosopher, psychologist, moral philosopher, scientist, organizer, mystic. We take satisfaction in the fact that our twenty-seventh year comes to a close with this kind of yoking taking place in these pages.

—Philip Hefner