

## *Editorial*

Eighty years ago, T. S. Eliot commented that poets work with the whole of the past literary tradition in their bones (Eliot 1932, 14). It seems appropriate to reflect on his words as we send out what will be the final issue of our journal in this twentieth century (as marked by some Western calendars). This issue is also the confluence of two other anniversaries: thirty-four years of *Zygon's* publication and one decade in the tenure of the present editor. To work with the past tradition in our bones includes an awareness of what has happened on the very broad interface of religion and science in this century, as well as the very particular traditions set in motion by our founding editor, Ralph Burhoe (editor, 1966–79), and his successor, Karl Peters (editor-in-chief, 1979–1989; co-editor, 1989 to the present). The traditions of Burhoe and Peters are constituted not only by the several hundred authors whose work has appeared in the journal, but also by the several dozen editorial and production staff persons and consultants who have made the print (and now electronic) pages an actuality for the readers.

Eliot knew, however, that the bone-filling tradition exists only in the context of innovation; the new modifies the old. The major question for Eliot was how the life-sustaining order that exists prior to each instance of novelty can maintain itself while being subject to change. His answer: “the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new” (1932, 15). So, too, even though this journal exists for the sake of the new, it aims not at destroying what has come before us, but at altering it.

Eliot's basic idea holds for the religion-and-science discussion, even though there may be vigorous discussion as to just how it does so. Is science more concerned with the new, whereas religion exists as a pillar of the old? Does innovation come more easily to the one and with more difficulty to the latter? Or is the struggle to find adequate “conformity between the old and new” equally a challenge to both religion and science?

The articles in this issue all demonstrate this struggle. The opening “profile” section featuring the work of Nancey Murphy is an important case in point. In general, Murphy has worked hard in her relatively brief career to elaborate theories that will explain how traditional Christianity can be “readjusted” in the light of contemporary science, while she has

proposed the specific idea of “physicalism without reductionism” as a way of acknowledging the primacy of the natural world and naturalistic explanations of it without devaluing the importance of religious concepts. Commentators George Ellis, Philip Clayton, and Dennis Bielfeldt respond to Murphy’s efforts and their adequacy for the challenge she has taken on.

David Jones and John Culliney, as well as Wesley Robbins, tackle the issue of how the old and new “conform” in domains of thought that are familiar to readers of their previous articles in *Zygon*: how nature as interpreted by Daoism can interact with current physical theories, and how the very American philosophical perspectives of neo-pragmatism challenge both scientific and religious knowledge. Jones and Culliney offered a complementary interpretation of Confucianism in our September 1998 issue. That issue also presented an exchange between Robbins and Murphy (see also Robbins’ article in December 1997). Robbins, in particular, is presenting his own version of the physicalism without reductionism that Murphy has proposed.

One could say that this present issue continues *Zygon*’s ongoing examination of naturalist philosophies and their usefulness for understanding the interaction between science and religion. Howard Van Till and Paul Nelson carry on this examination under the rubric of “intelligent design” theory, which in some quarters is considered to be a very hot topic. Future issues will have more to say about both naturalism and design theories.

Our twentieth century presentation closes with two personal perspectives: Gregory Peterson’s understanding of how the past lives on in our bones and Arthur Peacocke’s synthesizing a lifetime’s reflection on biology, evolution, and theology.

Our traditions will persist when we take up the tasks of the twenty-first century, and so will the innovations. We invite our readers to continue, with us, to take up the challenge of working out the conformity of the old and the new.

—Philip Hefner

#### REFERENCE

- Eliot, T. S. 1932 [1919]. “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” In *Selected Essays*. London: Faber and Faber Limited.