

## *Editorial*

In the last issue (June 2002), I commented on the constant movement in our religion-science discussions between the old and the new. We are continually revisiting older, familiar ideas and texts, just as we are dealing with new challenges, often in places that we have scarcely noticed before. This observation could be probed at some depth, both historically and philosophically. There is more than a little truth in Umberto Eco's suggestion that we interpret even the new from the resources we have inherited from the past—he said that all books are actually responses to previously written books. Religious traditions know this well: new experience is interpreted by writing glosses on interpretations of older experience, Midrash. Religions more often reinterpret the old in order to deal with the new; less often do they repudiate the old.

This issue of our journal is constituted in three parts—two parts reinterpreting the old, one attempting to take the measure of the new. Because two of these parts have been assembled by guest editors who have supplied their own prefacing comments, I shall sketch only the main outlines of these three parts.

In the “Articles” section, theologian John Haught focuses on two thinkers of the recent past—Paul Tillich and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin—in order to continue his reflections of many years on the task of understanding God in relationship to evolutionary understandings of the world. Two philosophers, Edward Schoen and Michael Ruse, turn to the more distant past, the seventeenth century and the scientist-philosopher Robert Boyle. Boyle is well known for his theory of gases as well as for contributions to understanding nature in analogy to the clock and God to the clock maker. Both Schoen and Ruse argue that there is more to be learned from Boyle, much of it quite relevant to our current thinking.

The second section, “Human Meaning in a Technological Culture,” has been put together by theologian-physicist Willem Drees from the 2001 Star Island conference of the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science. Thomas Rockwell (artist), William LaFleur (Japanese studies), Philip Hefner (theology), Rustum Roy (materials science), and John Teske (psychology) join Drees in sketching the new challenges posed by technology, how (to quote Drees) it “redefine[s], for better and for worse, human identity and meaning as well as ideas about reality and God.” Readers of these articles

must be prepared to think new ideas, some of which are exciting, others iconoclastic, even irritating.

Finally, we turn to a perennial topic for discussion in the religion-science dialogue, miracles. For our "Symposium on Miracles," Terence Nichols (theology) has gathered six articles that are guaranteed to set off flares of thinking and debate. Nichols's keynote article is followed by pieces authored by geneticist R. J. Berry, social scientist Ilkka Pyysiäinen, theologian-physicist John Polkinghorne, and theologians Keith Ward and Wolfhart Panenber. Illustrating in a quintessential manner how the old and the new may be interwoven, these authors refuse, on the one hand, to abandon the idea of miracles, while, on the other hand, they insist that new ways of thinking about miracles are essential.

Readers will, as a matter of course, bring their own distinctive blend of old and new eyes and minds to these articles. And like the authors here presented, the readers will also be looking to the future, writing their own glosses to the texts of their past.

—Philip Hefner