

# *Questions that Shape Our Future*

## INTRODUCTION TO THE SYMPOSIUM

*by Philip Hefner*

At a symposium 1–2 May 2003 the Zygon Center for Religion and Science celebrated the inauguration of Antje Jackelén as its director. The symposium marked a transition, the sort of event that is critical in the life of any community. In this case the transition is from the founding generation to the successor generation that will actually establish the character and worthfulness of the Center. Although it is a matter of opinion whether a successful transition indicates that the community has become an institution, there is no question that this event defines an important accomplishment. Transitions are not to be taken for granted; they indicate that the Center's enterprise is more than a program or the expression of one group's personal interests and abilities. Through the transition the Center becomes an ongoing spirit, a persisting influence in its world.

Appropriately, the theme of the symposium offered an occasion for reflection on what it is that this Center or any such venture should be about. In the moment that such basic issues are considered, the entire enterprise that is known as the religion-and-science dialogue comes into purview. The questions that shape the future of the Zygon Center are those that shape as well the entire broad interface of religion and science. There are other questions that the symposium did not address, but the questions that were examined belong to all who work in the religion-and-science field or who have a stake in it.

The symposium unfolded in four acts, so to speak. The first of these comprised four keynote addresses, two of which are published here. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (psychology) reminds us that the major challenge we face is that "of contributing to the well-being, or indeed the survival, of our

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species." This challenge requires that we attend to the welfare of the planet, to social justice, and finally to discovering "joyful ways to direct the evolution of consciousness in the future." Willem Drees (theology, physics), under the rubric of looking for "guidance," suggests that moral and motivational interests lie at the heart of the religion-science engagement. Guiding this engagement, therefore, becomes a way of addressing the larger human concern for moral guidance. In relating religion and science, we do not resolve issues so much as we exemplify that broader human quest.

Mary Evelyn Tucker (religious studies) and Ursula Goodenough (biology) also presented keynote addresses that are not published in this collection. Tucker identified a broad-gauged need to deal with the future of the planetary ecosystems, while Goodenough focused on emergence as a fundamental constituent shaping the religion-and-science discussion. The substance of her address appeared in the December 2003 issue of *Zygon* in her article (authored with Terrence Deacon) "From Biology to Consciousness to Morality."

The second "act" was a panel of five persons who addressed the sub-theme "Writing the Agenda." Ann Pederson (religious studies) chaired the discussion by Vitor Westhelle (theology), Ian Barbour (physics, theology), Grace Wolf-Chase (astronomy), and V. V. Raman (physics, Hindu philosophy). Pederson's brief essay here reflects on the panel's contribution and introduces the individual articles by the panelists.

In a third segment, Antje Jackelén and Philip Hefner (outgoing director) offer a dialogue presentation in which they articulate their own personal visions for the Center and the mission of religion-and-science.

In his valedictory, "The End of All Our Exploring," Arthur Peacocke (biology, theology) sets forth a program for how theology can be carried out in light of scientific knowledge. His final note expresses the hope "that the shared global experience and perspective generated by the sciences might form a more common and acceptable starting point than hitherto for the exploration toward God of the seekers of many religious traditions and of none."

These reflections on the questions that shape our future grow out of a specific, local community of exploration as that community, the Zygon Center, ponders its future. A larger significance emerges from this local occasion, however. These essays demonstrate that the future under consideration is the future of us all.