

# *Editorial*

## WHAT IS RELIGION TO DO?

What is religion's role in the engagement between science and religion? "Religion and science" has become a cliché—at times scarcely more than an empty cipher—loosely referring to a wide range of activities, including any organizational activity, research, and writing, that in some way qualify as attempts to relate religion and science. There is by no means a consensus, however, on just what "religion" means and how it should function in this pairing with "science."

On occasion, religion seems to mean "thinking about issues that arise in the engagement with science," and for Christians this is nearly synonymous with theology or philosophy. Thinking about issues is exemplified in the effort to understand how the biblical idea of God's creation can be compatible with the scientific theory of evolution or how human freedom can be understood in the face of the deterministic concepts of physics or genetics. These issues pose intrinsically interesting intellectual and conceptual challenges, and, because reflection on them expands our horizons of knowledge, they are well suited for academic reflection and teaching. For this very reason, in recent years hundreds of college, university, and seminary courses have come into existence.

Responding to scientific criticisms and misunderstandings of religion is a major agenda item in some segments of the discussion. This is particularly pressing for some because of attempts to describe religion in terms of sociobiology, evolutionary psychology, and the cognitive and neurosciences. Because these descriptions sometimes go hand in hand with dismissals of religion, much public controversy is produced, and one easily gets the impression that religion and science are adversaries. This adversarial perspective seems to consume most of the public awareness of religion and science today in the United States, where creationism and intelligent-design theories are pitted in opposition to scientific theories of evolution.

There is more to religion than the intellectual and doctrinal dimensions that these two understandings—the reflective and the defensive—convey. Two additional facets of religion may also come into play in the engagement with science. I call them the practical-moral and the spiritual.

In its practical-moral life, religion attends to the needs of the world in which it lives. One could argue persuasively that religion and science need to turn their agendas to responding to the kind of world in which they presently find themselves. Enhancing human life, for example, is often affirmed by both religion and science and is critical to the world that is developing around us. Our relation to the natural environment, overcoming violence, flourishing in communities of diversity, and alleviating hunger, poverty, and disease—these are essential to human well-being today. How is the religion-science engagement to take account of this world and its needs? Do the reflective and defensive responses seem less significant when set against the background of the contemporary world situation? Academics often claim that they must distance themselves from involvement in the world's events in order to discern the very truth that the world needs most urgently. Does such a claim hold for the religion-and-science endeavor? Or will the quality and rigor of the reflective intellectual function of religion be enriched by directing attention to the world situation? In any case, the focus and the content of that reflection will be different.

Religion's spiritual function is one of discernment—discerning what is most important in life: the operational absolutes and the fundamental values that direct our lives and the personal discipline that is obedient to those absolutes and values. It is not always recognized that this spiritual discernment takes place on both sides of the religion-science equation. When it occurs in recognized religious communities—church, synagogue, mosque, for example—it is explicit, or manifest, as sociologists might say. Science and technology also rest on operational absolutes and values that are pursued with the discipline and fervor that suggest a “latent” religiosity at work. Whether manifest or latent, religious commitment is often ambiguous: Not all absolutes are wholesome on either side of the equation that constitutes religion and science. Similarly, not all values work for the good. The resulting spiritual mandate involves discernment of both: the wholesome absolutes and values, whether latent or manifest, and an unmasking of the unwholesome.

It appears that there are at least four roles that religion might play in its engagement with science: reflective, defensive, practical-moral, and spiritual. These roles suggest a very large agenda for religion and science. It is clear why we sometimes limit our discussions to one or two of these roles—it makes the task much easier! Such limitation is intolerable for religion, however, because it will lose its soul if it does not attend to the practical and spiritual dimensions.

What difference would the fuller expression of religion make for science-religion interactions? Clearly, if we insist that the four roles be held together rather than isolated each by itself, they will impact each other. This mutuality will lead to significant differences of approach and content as well.

What difference does a full portrayal of religion make for this journal? That is a question we will be asking frequently in the year ahead.

The articles in this issue fall almost entirely in the category of reflecting on significant issues that arise on the science-religion interface. They also demonstrate how exciting and cutting-edge such reflection can be. These articles are grouped mainly in two symposia: “Quantum Reality and Consciousness,” which is accompanied by two articles by physicist Henry Stapp, and “Emergence Theory—What Is Its Promise?” The final section of “Articles” carries on the reflection at a high level, on other issues.

The question whether quantum physics encounters transcendence is hotly debated. The stakes in this debate are high, concerning the fundamental character of reality and whether it manifests traces of transcendence. Molecular chemist Lothar Schäfer opens the symposium with a probing presentation of the case for transcendence. His argument is extensive and meticulous and opens up a vast horizon for those of us who are not specialists in this field. Three symposiasts respond to his paper—a philosopher of science, Ervin Laszlo, and two physicists, Carl Helrich and Stanley Klein. Laszlo and Klein express both agreements and disagreements with Schäfer, while Helrich offers extensive critique of his paper. Is transcendence rooted in fundamental reality as revealed by quantum mechanics? or has Schäfer gone too far, reading his own philosophy and theology into the physical record? Schäfer responds at length to each of his critics, and, as readers follow the careful argumentation of the seven pieces of this symposium, their understanding of quantum physics and its importance for understanding the world will increase significantly. Stapp, also a physicist, has worked on the questions of physics and mind and consciousness for many years. His two essays add breadth to the considerations of the symposium.

Theories of emergence have been in the air for more than a century, particularly in philosophy and theology—think of Henri Bergson, S. C. Alexander, and even longer ago G. W. F. Hegel. Alfred North Whitehead gave considerable attention to these theories as did such theologians as Bernard Meland. Recently emergence has been much to the fore in certain scientific circles as well as in theological work. For many thinkers, emergence is a conceptual framework for understanding how novelty appears in ways that do not fracture the laws and processes of the natural world—how novelty is inherent in the nature of things. Others think that emergence renders ideas of God and transcendence unnecessary; their maxim is “something more from nothing but.” In our symposium, six philosophers and theologians reflect on emergence theories. Antje Jackelén, James Haag, Wentzel van Huyssteen, Stephen Crain, and Philip Clayton join in a discussion of Clayton’s 2004 book *Mind and Emergence: From Quantum to Consciousness*. “Outside” this discussion, so to speak, since he was not a participant in the original symposium, Gregory Peterson provides a general discussion of the theme.

In our final section, Sjoerd Bonting (biochemistry, theology) reflects on how the theological concepts of spirit and creation throw light on the relationship between religion and science. Douglas McGaughey (religious studies) analyzes the thought of Immanuel Kant for its insights into religion and science. Philosopher John Teehan brings this issue to a close with his probing examination how evolutionary theories of morality illuminate traditional religious ethical teachings.

Thinking through issues—our offerings in this September number of *Zygon* demonstrate just how profound and challenging those issues are and how our minds are expanded and our knowledge increased by exploring them.

—Philip Hefner

• Visit *Zygon's* Web site •

*[www.zygonjournal.org](http://www.zygonjournal.org)*

for information and notes on recent and older articles.  
Suggestions from users are appreciated.