Zygon *and the Future of Religion-and-Science*

with Philip Hefner, "Discerning the Voice of Zygon*"; Karl E. Peters, "Why* Zygon*? The Journal's Original Visions"; Solomon H. Katz, "Transcending Irony"; Lea F. Schweitz, "On the Road with Religion-and-Science"; Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, "History and the Future of Science and Religion"; Stephen M. Modell, "The Genetic Recombination of Science and Religion"; John A. Teske, "A Literary Trinity"; Carol Rausch Albright, "James B. Ashbrook and His Holistic World"; James W. Haag, "Blazing a New Trail"; Joan D. Koss-Chioino, "Concerning Diversity and Practicality"; Ann Pederson, "New Directions, New Collaborations"; Gregory R. Peterson, "Stage-Two Secularity"; Willem B. Drees, "Reflecting upon Religion"*

REFLECTING UPON RELIGION

by Willem B. Drees

Abstract. The new editor of *Zygon* considers the task of "yoking religion and science" not as the combination of two similar entities. Rather, their categorical difference makes reflection on their interplay worthwhile. One thereby confronts the understanding of religion, the multiple facets of religion, the diversity of religious traditions, and disagreements within religious communities. Although concern about secularization might stimulate an apologetic attitude, the author favors a critical and more skeptical attitude, countering superstition and the abuse of people. By being academic rather than apologetic we engage in the best apology for meaningful religion, if any.

Keywords: Clifford Geertz; religion; secularization; superstition; yoking; *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*

As the new editor of *Zygon*, I have the honor of making some concluding remarks in this exchange on "*Zygon* and the future of religion-and-science." It is a daunting task, as the preceding essays are insightful, and there is still so much more to consider. Alas, only in retrospect will we be able to discuss

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the future adequately. Nonetheless, it may be appropriate to express some programmatic ideas about the field and the journal.

Yoking What Is Different

The name *Zygon* relates to the word *zygote* and expresses the ambition to "yoke" two major human endeavors—science and the well-winnowed wisdom of religious traditions (Peters 2010). "Yoking" need not insist that the two human endeavors be similar in kind. Activities such as science and law, or science and politics, interact in various ways, but not because they are cognitively similar. Their interplay is important because they make different contributions to human lives and societies. Being different does not imply that they must be "non-overlapping magisteria," as Stephen J. Gould (1999) distinguished religion and science. Their interplay need not be smooth; we may have to live with dissonance, as James Haag (2010) indicated, or irony, as Philip Hefner (2010) discussed in his keynote.

Respecting categorical differences and domains of authority is to the benefit of each of them. Once, at a conference, someone asked me "Who is your philosopher?" For the interlocutor the answer was obvious: Alfred N. Whitehead. For me, the question was surprising. I am not in favor of philosophy as philosophology, the study (or, even worse, imitation of) philosophers. However, if I had to mention one philosopher, it would be Immanuel Kant with his insights on the distinction between theoretical and practical reason, or, in modern terms, science and ethics. A few years after Kant, the theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher distinguished religion from cosmology and from ethics. He saw religion as a domain of its own, characterized by awareness of our creaturely dependence. Nowadays, quite a few identify religion with values or morality. Although I think there is something to this identification, I find it inadequate. There is more to religion. Besides, in the modern period ethics has become more autonomous relative to religious beliefs and institutions. I consider this an important, and positive, insight. Anyhow, a key question in reflecting upon religion-and-science is the question What then is religion?

Religion and the Religions

The more I am professionally involved in religious studies, the less I know what religion is. Some scholars focus on social dimensions: institutions, communities, or structures of authority. Others stress experiential aspects. For others religions are about moral or aesthetic values, a vision of the highest good. Still others give primacy to metaphysical beliefs or present religion as a theory of ultimate origins. Religion has many facets.

Besides, there are many religions, and there are many voices within each religious tradition. The most risky word in any discussion is the definite article, as when one claims that "the Christian view is. . . ." Internal plu-

ralism is far more significant than the pluralism of traditions; an argument in religion-and-science often is an argument in favor of one school within a religious tradition versus other schools.

When reflecting upon religion, the anthropological approach of Clifford Geertz may be useful. From the same year as this journal was founded, 1966, comes his observation that "sacred symbols function to synthesize a people's ethos—the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood—and their world view—the picture they have of the way things in sheer actuality are, their most comprehensive ideas of order" (Geertz [1966] 1973, 89). This insight regarding the role of symbols (and rituals, in my opinion) in synthesizing ethos and worldview brought him to an oft-quoted definition: "a religion is (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of facticity that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" ([1966] 1973, 90).

Elsewhere Geertz spoke of distinguished models *of* the world and models *for* the world, thus combining a descriptive claim (worldview) and a normative claim (values). In that light, yoking science and values is what religion is about. A separate relationship between religion and science would thus seem unnecessary, except that historic religions often draw upon an earlier worldview inconsistent with current science.

The distinction between *is* and *ought*, the factual and the normative, seems to me a categorical distinction that should not be blurred intellectually. At the same time, yoking is and ought is what religious narratives do, as such narratives seek to inspire experience and provide orientation (moods and motivations, in Geertz's terms). By combining the factual and the normative, fundamental philosophical and theological problems arise, such as the naturalistic fallacy and the problem of evil. It is in the integration of that which is categorically different that irony seems to have its basis. My proposal, developed at greater length in Drees 2010 (see also Drees 2006), is a bit like the triangle that Sol Katz presented (2010), except that I do not treat religions as a separate category but as the way science and ethics are kept together, whether in harmony or tension. However, Katz's schema has the advantage of recognizing that the religions, as historical traditions, need not be in line with current science or with current moral intuitions or principles.

Religion-and-Science, Secularization, and Superstition

What then would be the place for religion-and-science? I do not see this as a discipline of its own, because I have too much respect for distinct disciplinary competencies to claim such status easily. Religion-and-science is

not a special discipline; the scholar in religion-and-science is more like the public intellectual, or someone who serves a religious community (Hefner 2010). As Lea Schweitz (2010) commented, religion-and-science often is "on the road" rather than "at home," home being the academic setting. However, any authority that its contributions may have "on the road," and the freedom it claims to challenge religious authority or groupthink, has to be earned by doing well "at home," in the academy. Thus, for religion-and-science the academic sphere is extremely important—and not just for religion-and-science; it is a major issue for human civilization. Value-free research is of great value; encouraging disinterested research is a major human interest.

Religion-and-science clearly is a social reality, with its conferences, books, and journals. However, in academic circles this hybrid is not doing too well, as Hava Tirosh-Samuelson (2010) indicated. The main exception, as I see it, are the historians of science-and-religion, who are respected peers on their home turf, the history of science. In studying the contextual nature of religion-and-science they have offered valuable insights. But then, historians can stay away from normative discourse for today.

What then is our situation today in which religion-and-science must operate? Greg Peterson (2010) places secularization in the center and considers that after a first stage in which religion became a private affair, a live option for many, we now enter a second-stage secularism where for many a religious life or outlook is not a genuine option. Thus, religion-and-science would have to make clear how religion can be a reasonable and relevant option for well-informed modern persons. The four categories that Ian Barbour used to classify the field—conflict, independence, dialogue, and integration (1997, 77–105)—can be read thus as describing secularism as the problem (conflict, whether as outspoken atheism or as unacceptable biblical literalism), with three different strategies for addressing this problem. Independence may be more appropriate for earlier forms of secularization, whereas stronger relations to science may be responses to later forms of secularism.

Such an approach treats secularization as an intellectual problem. In my understanding, social changes, such as the welfare state, may have been far more important in the decline of religious institutions. Rather than concern about secularization, religion-and-science could also have been driven by concern about superstition. The abuse of people when they pay real money for false hope, or the persistence of nonsense—these are moral issues that drive organizations of skeptics. If this were to be the main focus of religion-and-science, coalitions would be different. The discussions would be more appreciative of skeptics, atheists, and agnostics and discern more critically among the religious voices. Self-invented science and pseudo-medicine hurt real people; it makes a difference what is promoted. In human communication there is a role for poetry and narrative, but we should

aim for clarity and reasonable plausibility. When pretending something, we ought to stand up to the standards of the relevant peer group, such as scientists and scholars in religious studies, history, and other relevant disciplines.

We are not just in the business of apologetics for religion or for science. We are in the midst of intrareligious struggles. Controversies over evolution are by and large conflicts as to who speaks for Christianity. The proper future of Islam is disputed among Muslims. When the Dalai Lama reaches out to Western science, he also opposes fellow Buddhists who seek a different future. And when the first editorial of *Zygon* announced that "We are committed to the task of reformulating religion for an age of science" (quoted in Hefner 2010, 420), the reform envisaged implies a struggle for the soul of religion.

There are other roles for religion-and-science as well. An important one is the acceptance of the scientific image, especially when it seems to threaten human self-understanding. As an aside, I have no quarrel with reductionism, because it reveals how levels of descriptions are related and thus is a form of holism. Others, however, seem to need "emergence"—apparently to protect something valuable (see Haag 2010; Albright 2010). Of more immediate relevance in our societies are moral and social issues surrounding science, medicine, and technology, as addressed by Stephen Modell (2010) and Ann Pederson (2010). Intellectually challenging, however, seems to me the multiple facets of religion, the multiplicity of religions (Koss-Chioino 2010; Pederson 2010), the diversity within religions, and the coexistence of insider perspectives and outsider perspectives in a historical or social-scientific perspective.

Zygon's Role and the Future of Religion-and-Science

As editor, I have a particular responsibility for this journal, but the journal is not about my own view; an editorial role is a matter of service. This includes service to a particular community, represented by the two owners of the journal, the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science (IRAS) and the Center for Advanced Study in Religion and Science (CASIRAS). The interest of these communities is to reach out well beyond the in-crowd, to invite input from scientists and scholars from all walks of life, and to bring good-quality articles to readers and libraries worldwide. Nobody is isolated; relationality is a very important feature of human existence (Teske 2010). I too belong to communities—partly the same ones that shape *Zygon* and the wider religion-and-science community, including IRAS and ESSSAT, the European Society for the Study of Science and Theology. I also am committed to my own professional environment, a secular research-oriented university where I serve as professor of philosophy of religion and ethics and vice-dean of its faculty of humanities. Given my own particular

professional setting, but also my own vision of the field, academic quality should be our main priority for *Zygon* in seeking to understand and reshape the complex human reality that is referred to as religious traditions and beliefs. By being academic rather than apologetic, we can offer the best possible apology for meaningful religion in our time.

NOTE

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