

## Editorial

In recent times science-religion dialogue has made remarkable progress, quantitatively and qualitatively, extensively and intensively. Thanks to these developments, today it has moved away from a fringe discipline to a well-established, mainstream area of interest, engaging many internationally reputed scientists - including Nobel laureates-philosophers, theologians and other thinkers in highly respected institutions. National and international conferences on themes in this area are organized frequently in various parts of the world. Every other month a new book on this theme appears, and numerous scholarly and popular papers regularly appear in different journals. An interesting case in this connection is the book *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life*<sup>1</sup> by the late Stephen Jay Gould, who was the Alexander Agassiz Professor of Zoology and professor of geology at Harvard University. This is remarkable since Gould was never noted for his religious affiliation. In our own India also several such organizations are making valuable contributions towards fostering a constructive and creative interaction between modern science and religion.<sup>2</sup> In bringing about this turnaround the contribution of the John Templeton Foundation has been unique.

Despite all these developments, there are people, scholars and non-scholars alike, who still question the legitimacy and feasibility of such a constructive and creative dialogue between contemporary science and religion. In a manner reminiscent of Kipling's famous lines they would say: "Science is science, religion is religion. How can the twain ever meet? If they ever do, where will it be?" Perhaps the predominant theme running through all the six original papers of this second issue of *Omega* precisely is that not only can the twain meet but also it should. It has been pointed out by many scholars that, given the level and gravity

of the developments in science today, science-religion dialogue has become not a mere option, but a clear obligation.<sup>3</sup> In fact this is no new news; Alfred North Whitehead has spoken along the same line long ago: “When we consider what religion is for mankind, what science is, it is no exaggeration to say that the future course of history depends upon this generation as to the relations between them.”<sup>4</sup>

In the first paper, “The God Who Reveals: The Book of Nature and the Book of Scripture,” Kozhamthadam points out that science and religion are but two intimately interlinked aspects of the same phenomenon: the epiphany and self-disclosure of the God of love. Although the theme of the Book of Scripture and the Book of Nature is an old one, it is valid even today, especially the latter, as is evident from the works and lives of many eminent scientists.

Sweet in his contribution, “Science, Religion and Pluralism,” points out that since the self-disclosure of the Divine is conditioned by cultural factors, religious pluralism ensues, as is clear in many nations in the East, particularly in India. This religious pluralism poses a serious challenge to science-religion dialogue, especially for those brought up in a mono-religious and mono-cultural milieu. But he argues that, despite this challenge of religious pluralism, one can talk of a meaningful and fruitful interaction between science and religion.

From antiquity many thinkers were struck by their experience of the Book of Nature, and used this experience to reason back to the author of this book, giving rise to what is usually known as “the argument from design” for the existence of God. Thus one can see a long line of luminaries who developed and embraced it, like Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Copernicus, Kepler, Newton, Paley, etc. During the 17-18<sup>th</sup> centuries this was considered the master-argument for theism. According to Samuel Clarke, not even the most unintelligent person could be ignorant of this point.<sup>5</sup> For many this argument became a source of assurance for their faith, as was evident from the words of Cardinal Manning: “I took in the whole argument, and I thanked God that nothing has ever shaken it.” However, David Hume in his well-known *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* claimed to have demolished this argument. Henry in her paper, “The Resurgence of the Design Argument in the Twentieth

Century,” argues that the intellectual and scientific fascination for this argument simply does not go away; the argument keeps coming back in more and more sophisticated forms. Three such cases are discussed by her, all claiming good scientific support.

It is usually believed that death is an inevitable end and science is totally in the dark about the life after death. This would mean that death and life after death are the territory reserved exclusively for religion, and so the question about any dialogue between science and religion on these topics need not arise. Xavier in his paper, “Life Beyond Death: Scientific Perspectives,” argues that there are scientific considerations shedding valuable light on these topics. They can give us new insights into the nature of death and life after death. Death, far from being the end of life, is the beginning of a new form of life. In fact, he believes that we should talk of life-beyond-death rather than life-after-death.

The necessity for a dialogue between science and religious principles, particularly ethical principles, is brought out by Rai in his paper, “Science, Technology and Society.” Though science has inherent limitations and constraints, it has immense power at its disposal to make or break humankind and its achievements. A healthy interaction between science and ethical principles is necessary to keep science from veering away from its original goal of seeking the welfare of humans and the cosmos.

Finally, Ferrao in his paper, “Hermeneutical Proximity Between Science and Religion,” talks of the primary requirement for a healthy and creative interaction between science and religion. The primary requirement is that we remove all narrow, self-serving and self-centered understanding of science and religion. Once this is done, true science and true religion can emerge to bring about a constructive collaboration.

Since science and religion impact not just our ideas only, but our very life, dialogue between the two cannot remain purely at the intellectual or academic level. We invite you not only to read these pages, but also to reflect over them to find out how they can be a transforming influence.

To end on a personal note, we want to thank our readers for the

enthusiastic support and encouragement we have received for our first issue. We count on your continued support. We apologize for the delay in bringing out the second issue. It was unavoidable because of the unexpected sickness and hospitalization of the editor in chief.

**- Job Kozhamthadam**

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, *Rocks of Ages* (New York: The Library of Contemporary Thought, 1999).
- <sup>2</sup> For instance, in Pune IISR (Indian Institute of Science and Religion) has started many innovative programmes. ASSR (Association of Science, Society and Religion) of Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, has been in successful operation for over four years. ISR (Institute of Science and Religion) of Aluva is another important institution. There are several others in Bangalore, Palai (Kerala), Banaras, etc.
- <sup>3</sup> See for instance, Job Kozhamthadam, "Science and Religion: Past Estrangement and Present Possible Engagement," in his *Contemporary Science and Religion in Dialogue: Challenges and Opportunities* (Pune: ASSR Publications, 2002), pp. 2-45.
- <sup>4</sup> A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Free Press, 1967), p. 181.
- <sup>5</sup> See Norman Kemp Smith's introductory essays, in David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1947), p. 43.