Introduction

Smith-Moran, S.O.Sc., Barbara
Boston Theological Institute

http://hdl.handle.net/2144/3945
Boston University
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Barbara Smith-Moran, S.O.Sc., Editor
New England Center for Faith and Science Exchange

The Boston Theological Institute (BTI) and the New England Center for Faith and Science Exchange (F&SE) publish The Journal of Faith and Science Exchange as one of the few journals for academics and professionals doing research, development, and application at the intersection of science and religion. The editors have selected the best work of promising graduate students in this field, and present it alongside the work of more established scholars. This policy is the essence of the mission statement of the Journal.

This 1999 volume of the Journal spotlights the work of thirteen students at graduate institutions worldwide. The programs represented by these students include theology, philosophy, the history of science, psychology, and several natural science disciplines. For the first time, we publish an essay in Spanish, as originally submitted by the author, together with an English translation. All essays have been recommended for publication by the faculty members who have personally mentored the students’ work. These faculty members comprise the 1999 Editorial Panel.

In addition, we include essays by four well-known and established thinkers in the field: Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad, Bruce Babbitt, John Maxwell Kerr, and Arthur Peacocke. Each has presented the paper published here as an invited speaker at conferences or lecture series sponsored by the BTI and F&SE.

Study of the interactions between religion and science was, not long ago, a rather narrow field. Reconciliation of Jewish and Christian scriptural accounts of creation and miracles with scientific laws and observations was of prime concern. Today, however, this study encompasses a dozen or more active areas, including the five topical categories treated by this year’s essays.

Linguistic studies

The first three essays deal with the use of language for conveying meaning and evoking both emotion and motivation. Marylu Bunting proposes a formulaic description of the cosmos, its history and nature, a description that is consonant with scientific findings and that orients human beings within the cosmos. She intends this, further, to be an description with the power to motivate humility, joy, and ethical behavior toward and within the cosmos. John Darling demonstrates the emotive and motivational power of metaphors used by contemporary scientists when they present the results of their research to a general audience. Maurice Lee examines selected biological and theological accounts of language, its development and function.

Cultural context of faith and science interaction

Five essays are historical studies of the cultural context of science-religion interactions. Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad advocates for attitudes of moderation toward market economy, the environment, and technology, in keeping with teachings in the Qur’an, the prophetic tradition and Islamic law. Bruce Babbitt describes how his personal search for a non-utilitarian religious stance toward the environment led him to a new paradigm for administering environmental policy. In light of the failure of contemporary physicists to teach the general public in the United States about the excitement and importance of their research, Margaret
Doris analyzes some recent developments in the struggle for adequate science education in public schools. Arthur Peacocke engages in some “plain speaking” about traditional religious claims that must be reworked to apply to a scientific worldview, lest they make the Christian message appear to be hopelessly wedded to some bygone era. And Matthew Stanley shows that the appropriation of the classical arguments of Paley and Whewell for contemporary natural theology is problematic, because of the change in historical context from Enlightenment and pre-Reform England.

Theological studies

Four authors analyze the work of some prominent theologians, sometimes offering alternative ways for considering various topics. Craig Brammer, a psychologist, looks at Barbour’s treatment of the mind-body problem and finds it incomplete and partially in error. Ann Bersky critiques aspects of the thought of Peacocke, Polkinghorne, and Murphy, regarding divine action in the world. Richard Honeycutt regrets the bias distorting many of the science-and-religion dialogues, a bias against those modes of knowing not valued by science but traditionally important to religion—namely, the intuitive and the emotional. Noemí Pérez, a biologist, examines some of the work of Teilhard, Rahner, Schmitz-Moormann, and Ellis that explores how the Creator interacts with the evolving Creation.

Philosophical studies

Four essays delve into metaphysical concepts, with a sweep across several centuries. Chris Doran compares the way in which knowledge is categorized by Thomas Aquinas and by Francis Bacon, and pays special attention to Bacon’s ideas concerning metaphysics. Elora Weringer and Joseph Cassidy also visit the metaphysics of Bacon, allowing him to engage in an imaginary Socratic dialogue with Whewell, Whitehead, Newton, Newman, and John Paul II. John Maxwell Kerr looks at concepts of time and at God’s relationship to time-bound creation, and considers time’s settling and unsettling effects upon those who experience it with awareness. Jean Kim looks at the first biblical creation story under the light of results from new branches of physics, as well as the light of non-Christian philosophical views of nature.

Ethics

And finally, Gregory Maslowe surveys the thought of Wilson, Mayr, and Margulis—three contemporary evolutionary biologists—concerning the evolution of ethics. In an effort to avoid the erroneous idea of a split between culture and biology, he begins to develop an evolutionary humanism.

We expect the trend toward the recognition of the subtleties of interaction between the sciences and the religions to increase, and we look forward to publishing next year’s Volume IV, with essays that reflect this trend. As we have done successfully for the past two years, the Editorial Board continues in its commitment to use this Journal as a catalyst for helping to move progressive thinkers into leadership in the religious life of this country and abroad.