

## THEOLOGY AND THE NATURAL SCIENCES

About ten people participated in this workshop. The following questions were proposed and explained as a starting point for developing discussion:

1. What do you see as the importance of considering the relationship between Theology and the Natural Sciences?
2. Ernan McMullen has said that the question of this relationship is neither scientific nor theological, but epistemological. Do you agree?
3. Holmes Rolston says that science and religion differ principally in that the former is concerned with causal explanations and the latter with meaning. Do you agree? (The suggested reading for the workshop was Rolston's book: *Science and Religion: a Critical Survey*, Temple University Press, 1987.)
4. Science as it began its modern development chose methodologically to ignore formal and final causes, and to deal only with material and moving (or efficient causes). How would you evaluate this choice?
5. Some would wish to collapse science into theology, at least partially, as in the case of so-called Creation-Science. Others have collapsed theology into the natural sciences, as in the case of certain forms of deism and natural religion. How should we state the distinction between science and theology? (E.g., differences in the kinds of questions asked, in evidence considered, in ways of drawing conclusions from evidence, of formulating answers, of organizing answers into a coherent unity, of relating theory to practice and to values.)
6. Four possible relationships between science and theology as distinct disciplines can be conceived:
  - (1) hostility
  - (2) indifference
  - (3) mutual encouragement
  - (4) mutual cooperation.To what degree are these relationships currently present? What can be done to minimize (1) and (2) and to promote (3) and (4)?
7. How significant do you think the "fine tuned universe" is for pointing to an intelligent Cause?
8. Do modern quantum mechanics and relativity theory do anything more than leave room for the acknowledgement of God?
9. Does Rolston's view of evolution differ significantly from Teilhard's?
10. Does Rolston's understanding of Religion point implicitly or explicitly to a particular understanding of revelation?

The discussion revolved mostly around the first question: the importance of the issue as perceived by different persons in the workshop. In the first place it was observed that an essential task of theology (as Bernard Lonergan pointed out) is to mediate the faith to contemporary culture. Our culture today is permeated by

scientific modes of thought. Many people tend to regard the scientific method as the unique avenue to truth, and scientific conclusions as virtually unchallengeable. Without a proper appreciation of the nature and value of science today it is impossible to make the faith even remotely intelligible and acceptable to those who are imbued with this culture.

Furthermore, theology itself, while it is derived from faith, is structured by some kind of philosophy. But every philosophy supposes a cosmology of some sort, some way of understanding the material universe. This, today, comes by way of the natural sciences. A philosophy for structuring a contemporary theology must itself draw upon the world of contemporary science.

Christian theology in recent years has been so taken up with redemption and allied topics that it has neglected creation. Sometimes concern for the transcendent Creator-God has led us to be unconcerned about the world and the creatures that make it up. An awareness of science and the wonder it grows out of and elicits could help alleviate this imbalance. In this connection wonder was spoken of as astonishment at the "Big Bang"—how did it come to be? Science and Religion are two windows on this astonishing universe.

The "turn to the subject" in recent Catholic theology has meant a turn away from the cosmos. But theology needs to be more than anthropocentric, it needs to be cosmocentric. Someone spoke of existentialism as "philosophical hypochondria."

So much of Lonergan's work, especially in *Insight*, depends on science and the scientific method. One person was interested in Theology and the Natural Sciences just to understand Lonergan better.

It was pointed out that the "warfare between science and religion," except for a few notorious incidents, is largely a myth. No doubt, however, much could be done to help the present situation, as mirrored, for example, in the work of Carl Sagan, who displays extraordinary ability in science and extraordinary ignorance of theology.

Much of the discussion revolved around the ethical issues raised by science. So much scientific development today is directed toward the advance of military technology. Science itself provides no ethical guidelines in this connection. There is the further question of our stewardship of the planet.

Finally, some attention was given to the ever present "Problem of Evil." The planet works violently in many ways, e.g., the movement of tectonic plates which causes earthquakes. We can speak of evil as such only as we reach the human level, both in the way that humans are affected by these violent movements, and in the evil choices that human beings make. No solution to this problem can be had apart from a consideration of world processes, and the myths of evil that reflect them.

The group thought that it was not wise to seek to institute an ongoing seminar on theology and the natural sciences just yet, but to wait until such time as there was a more general awareness among the members of the society of the crucial and comprehensive importance of the issue. To promote this general awareness they strongly urged that a major talk be devoted to this topic at an annual convention, perhaps in 1990. If we wish to do more than talk to ourselves, but wish to

reach the contemporary world around us, we must be alert and knowledgeable in this area.

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