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Journal of Faith and Science Exchange

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2012-08-21

# Foreward

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## FOREWORD

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Men and women in faith communities realize that science and technology are part of our everyday lives. For twelve years the New England Center for Faith and Science Exchange (F&SE) and the Boston Theological Institute (BTI) have fostered the conversation between faith and religion and science and technology. Science-and-religion courses are included in the curricula of several of the BTI member institutions, and a Certificate Program in Science and Religion, a concentration that promotes dialogue between the two languages of human understanding, is also offered. F&SE administers the science-and-religion program and the Certificate Program in Science and Religion for the BTI.

F&SE, in conjunction with the BTI, also publishes an award-winning annual, *The Journal of Faith and Science Exchange*, one of two scholarly journals in the science-and-religion field. In 2001, its fourth year of publication, the *Journal* received the prestigious "Polly Bond Award for Excellence" from Episcopal Communicators. The *Journal* was established to spotlight the work of student authors of science-and-religion papers and to give them an opportunity to publish their work in a scholarly journal while still in graduate training. F&SE also issues *F&SE Notices*, a monthly newsletter of events and articles focused on faith-and-science interactions; and it sponsors conferences, seminars, colloquia, spiritual retreats and publishing contests for students in science-and-theology programs. The science-and-religion conversation is not limited to New England as evidenced by several other centers and organizations with similar focus around the country, such as the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences,

Zygon Center for Religion and Science, Philadelphia Center for Religion and Science, Institute for Religion in an Age of Science, and American Association for the Advancement of Science's Dialogue on Science, Ethics and Religion. F&SE is certainly in good company.

As science and technology have changed or expanded, so too has our concept of the world and the universe. Shepherds and travelers in biblical times used the stars in the heavens to guide them and could only wonder what lay beyond what they could see. Now astronauts and scientists send their instruments far beyond this planet and can view the world from a different perspective. Those with a web browser can view the earth or their neighborhood live from a satellite feed. Radio and x-ray telescopes send us images from deep space, even suggesting that there are other solar systems beyond our own. Whether one supports the Big Bang Theory or the Intelligent Design Theory, it is difficult to comprehend the vastness of all that is beyond this planet without a glimpse of the divine.

When we consider the advancements in other fields, in contrast to the vastness of the cosmos, it is often hard to imagine seeing or detecting things at the molecular, atomic, and subatomic level. We are way beyond Leuwenhoek's protozoan observations under a simple microscope. Medical technology has advanced so that detecting abnormalities and disease has become commonplace. New drug and treatment modalities save lives and allow people who once were considered hopeless cases to live productive lives. Mapping the human genome is only beginning to help scientists learn more about human life. As more

and more healthcare professionals adopt spirituality into their holistic treatment, it is increasingly easy to believe that divine intervention enters into and fosters the healing process.

Somatic cell therapy, germ line therapy, cloning, xenotransplantation, and genetically engineered plants are just some of the scientific advancements and breakthrough technologies that raise, within religious circles, such ethical, moral and religious questions as, "Can we play God?", "Who benefits from these new advancements?" and "Are these new technologies safe for us and our children?" While these new technologies may be helpful in improving the quality of life, they do raise important questions and concerns, such as these, that reach to the heart of what it means to live faithful lives. Clergy need some level of understanding regarding these new technologies in order to counsel parishioners and to help them make informed decisions.

In faith communities, somatic cell therapy seems to cause less concern than germline therapy because the DNA changes are not inherited and are "corrections" specific to the patient being treated. However, germline therapy involves DNA changes that will be inherited and causes great concern for many religious traditions. Some will support inherited genetic modification *only*

if it is therapeutic and *not* if it involves embryonic research. Cloning animals, and especially human beings, does not seem to be supported by most—and perhaps any—religious tradition. Xenotransplantation has also received attention in recent years. Some religious traditions have no problem with using animal parts from another species to improve the quality of life of human beings, whereas

others prohibit killing one animal to prolong the life of another.

Genetically engineered plants have been suggested as a way to feed the hungry of the world because specially engineered plants could be more resistant to disease and pest infestation. Thus, higher crop yields will make more food available. Some would say that global food production without genetically altered crops is sufficient, but that economics, politics and distribution are the real issues. Multinational producers of genetically altered seed control the types and prices of seed, often giving farmers little choice in what and how much they plant. Some yields may be higher, but the long-term food safety issues remain unresolved. Meanwhile, the producers of the seeds are convinced that these modified foods are safe.

Caring for and protecting the ecosystems and the environment are also important for us all to consider. Global warming, biodiversity loss, overpopulation, pollution, topsoil loss and overconsumption are several issues that have political, social, religious and eco-

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nomonic impact. Most people would not intentionally destroy the earth, but some lack knowledge regarding the impact of their habits, and others do not want any change in the status quo that might cause them social or economic hardship. Instead of blaming others for the condition of the world, perhaps more of us will be stimulated to take action if we learn more about the critical condition that

affects our planet and our lives. To raise awareness regarding the need to be stewards of the creation, some churches are now including discussions, liturgies, prayers and hymns related to the environment.

Almost everywhere, we are touched by science and technology. We need leaders in the church to be able to be part of the science-and-religion conversation. As new technology and scientific advancements emerge, the church may have to adjust the ways in which it fulfills its mission and change some of the traditional ways of teaching its beliefs. Religious leaders will need to have some scientific understanding to be able to communicate with parishioners and members of society in general.

The BTI endorses adding a scientific component to theological education. For many years, several of its member institutions have included science-and-religion courses in their curricula. In 1999, the BTI Board of Trustees approved the BTI Certificate Program in Science and Religion in three tracks of study: Religion and the Natural Sciences, Religion and Bioethics, and Religion and Ecology. Likewise, the Certificate Program also provides an opportunity for those already scientifically or medically trained to develop greater sensitivity to theological issues and ethical concerns. In its first two years the Program has been highly successful and has awarded a total of six certificates. The Certificate Program does not presume to make seminarians into scientists. Rather, the Program exposes seminarians to scientific concepts and helps to give them a level of competency that will allow them to preach and teach in a scientific and technological society. Equipped with scientific understanding, these clergy should also ensure that scientific education is included at every level of parish education.

Volume IV of *The Journal of Faith and Science Exchange* may be considered a potpourri of science-and-religion essays and papers. The topics cover a broad range in the science and religion dialogue. For the first

time, integration papers from the BTI Certificate Program in Science and Religion and papers from the Annual Science and Religion Colloquium are included. This volume also includes student essays from the Publishing Prize Contest in Science and Religion and papers from established scholars. Several student authors write about nature; others write about ethics, healing, theology, philosophy and artificial intelligence. **Wesley Wildman**, keynote speaker at the First Annual Colloquium in Science and Religion, suggests a roadmap for science-and-religion development at the beginning of the century; **Imdad-Dean Ahmad**, F&SE Tenth Anniversary Speaker, discusses Islamic contribution to modern scientific methods; and **Sjoerd Bonting**, F&SE 2000 Spring Lecturer, suggests connections between chaos theory and the creation of the world. We feel that the range of topics considered in Volume IV exemplifies the diversity in the science-and-religion field.

The science-and-religion field is multidisciplinary; it includes scientifically, theologically—and some scientifically *and* theologically—trained laity, clergy and theologians; they study and work in venues such as industry, academia, parishes, health care, law, centers for science and religion, and other national organizations. We at F&SE and the BTI are proud of our part in the continuing conversation between science and religion.