
Introduction

The theme for this issue, "Ecology, Cosmology, and Religion," emerged organically, as it were. Submissions received gradually coalesced not only around the religious and ethical implications of a technologically enhanced "environmental crisis," but also around the foundational question of a religious cosmology in light of our present ecological state.

One of the most significant advocates for a "new cosmology" is cultural historian Thomas Berry. In his article, he reflects not only on the Gaia Theory of James Lovelock, which purports that the Earth is a self-regulating, vital entity, but also on the need for a larger cosmological narrative in which to place the emergence of life itself. An advisor to U.S. Vice President Al Gore and plenary speaker at the 1993 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Washington, D.C., Thomas Berry's call for "a new story" in light of our present environmental degradation has been receiving a wide hearing in recent years.

Anne Marie Dalton situates Thomas Berry's work both culturally and intellectually, and directs the reader toward the importance of his contribution. Stephen G. Dunn surveys recent Christian theological approaches to nature, and proposes a cosmological approach building on the insights of Thomas Berry and others. John Mihevc delineates recent trends in biotechnology, indicating the social, economic, and political wellsprings of its emergence, and reflects on its ethical implications for both humans—especially small-scale farmers—and the environment. The thematic section is concluded by Sharon V. Betcher's imaginative ecofeminist account of the "redemptive value" of wetlands, in which she makes creative use of the work of Julia Kristeva and Mary Douglas.

In light of the diverse interests of our readers and contributors, the general article section features an essay by Gustavo Gutiérrez, one of the principal progenitors of Latin American liberation theology, in which he specifies the meaning of the "preferential option for the poor." Michael W. Higgins uncovers the sundry Jesuit influences upon the celebrated monk, poet, and cultural critic Thomas Merton, and Arvind Sharma and Samuel Laeuchli present some enlightening reflections on the Book of Job

from an Eastern religious perspective. Cindy Wesley concludes the non-thematic section with an intriguing treatment of paternalism in physician-patient relationships, and the ethical implications that medical progress has engendered.

A distinctive feature of *ARC* is "Computer Views," edited by Todd Blayone, who is also editor of the *Computer-Assisted Research Forum*. "Computer Views" is designed to provide relatively non-technical computer information to professors and students working in the area of religious studies and other areas in the humanities. Reviews by Robert Freud and Tony Dugdale will be of particular interest to those toiling in multi-lingual environments. Harry Hahne's close analysis of Bible-search programs is aimed at those performing detailed analysis of biblical texts. Finally, Richard Hayes's review of two Internet guides, and commentary on the importance of the Internet for scholarly discourse, should catch the attention of those who have begun communicating in cyberspace.

Chris Barrigar, editor of the "Book Review" section, has brought together a diverse array of reviews. With this issue, Barrigar has also initiated a new section entitled "Dissertation Abstracts," which portrays the range of Ph.D. dissertations completed in Montreal universities during 1993.

The other editors join me in expressing deep appreciation to the many minds, hands and eyes that have helped produce this volume. We wish to express special gratitude for the production assistance of Samieun Khan, Professor Richard Hayes and Marina Costain, as well as the editorial skill and leadership of *ARC* Committee Chair Gary A. Gaudin, who so generously shared his time and talents in the creation of this issue.

Stephen B. Scharper

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