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Opportunities and Challenges

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Introduction

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One does not have to look far into the contemporary news cycle to see the often-fractious conversation between religion and science in our contemporary context. Whether covering debates on “intelligent design vs. evolution” in our school curriculum or Pope Francis announcing there is no conflict between evolutionary biology and creation as depicted in the Bible, the boundaries between religion and science seem to be contested on a regular basis in public discourse. But is all dialogue between religion and science one of challenge? Is there not opportunity as well? This supplement of the *Journal of Religion and Society* asks just that question.

On February 20-21, 2014 a diverse group of scholars representing many disciplines were invited by the Kripke Center at Creighton University to discuss, delineate, and debate the challenges and possibilities relating the fields of “religion” broadly considered and “science” broadly considered. The dialogue partners included fourteen scholars from physics, theology, religious studies, biblical studies, history, philosophy, history of science, and environmental

ethics. Four general conversations emerged from this gathering which included: 1) the relationship between religion and the sciences broadly conceived; 2) religion and social sciences; and 3) religion and the natural sciences; and 4) religion and environmental science.

Under the first category, the difficulty, challenges, and dimensions of interdisciplinary engagement is discussed by Jill O'Brien as she captures the overall challenge of interdisciplinary work. These challenges are spelled out in detail in the works on the relationship of pragmatism to science and religion by Elizabeth Cooke as well as the relationship between academic and theological readings of the Bible by Ron Simkins. Both Cooke and Simkins argue that how we conceive the nature of the means, motives, and results of science, philosophy, or the hermeneutical status of a particular "text" will determine the way the claims of religion and science intersect. This general recognition of the pre-cognitive suppositions we all bring to our fields gives way to the utilization of certain sciences for theological purposes. Finally, Todd Salzman and Michael Lawler illustrate the relationship between religion and science by demonstrating an expansion of Catholic sexual ethics when the sciences of biology and psychology are taken seriously. Their article demonstrates that when a religious tradition such as Roman Catholicism says it is open to the work of the sciences (as it did at Vatican II), significant reformulations of sexual ethics consistent with the tradition but starting from different presuppositions are the result.

The second category explores the appropriation of the social sciences in religious and theological inquiry. Donna Bowman explores the consequences of gathering data from the theology of ordinary experience to determine whether people are understanding and appropriating academic or pastoral theology in their own lives. Using empirical data as both barometer and data input could have significant impact on how theology is taught and formulated. The use of social sciences was further explored by Thomas Kelly through the life and ministry of Rutilio Grande, S.J. This Salvadoran Jesuit used social analysis to determine the direction of his ministry to those overwhelmed by the social, economic, and political inequalities plaguing his country in the early 1970s. Finally, Joseph Selling articulates the psychological aspects of a new version of "virtue ethics" in his exploration of motivation, ends, and intentions relating to ethical actions. What emerges is a complex human actor who embodies a number of "virtues" when making ethical decisions, as opposed to emphasis on an act embodying one virtue or another.

Following an exploration of the social sciences is a conversation related more directly to the natural sciences. In each scholarly effort, boundaries are questioned, methods are appraised and outcomes are evaluated in terms of both religion and the natural sciences. Gintaras Duda examines the intersection of cosmology and religion with regard to questions of origin, causes, and possible ends to the universe. How science informs questions of ultimacy must impact theological thinking as scientific truth is part of the humanity's overarching drive to know truth in its many forms. Closely related to this is a glimpse of the history of how science has been employed by those arguing for a creator from the perspective of intelligent design. John Haught discusses the methodological differences between science and theology and the questions both attempt to answer or explain. Steven Pope explores Christian ethics from the perspective of evolutionary examinations of altruism. What can we learn of human motivations and potential from evolutionary biology and how can this inform Christian ethics? Finally, the question of how to manage

relationships between claims of spirituality and the interests of science closes out this section. Leandra Swanner offers a comparison of successful and failed efforts at reconciling sacred land with the desires of astronomers to use those same spaces for observatories. How can language re-frame the relationship between competing interests in spirituality and science, and what can we learn from this to more effectively manage future conflicts?

Finally, a concern for the environment has marshaled a new field of religious and theological environmental ethics that takes seriously the contemporary claims of science. Kiara Jorgenson argues that the irreversible damage humanity has brought upon the earth must re-shape and inform Christian conceptions of Creation. John O’Keefe looks to the patristic period for how to think eco-theologically and respond to contemporary criticisms of Christianity as both cause and culprit of our current predicament. Finally, Lisa Sideris queries the nature of biological reductionism in efforts to educate children on the importance of nature. Will “wonder” be sacrificed in favor of scientific “control” over the natural world?