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Pastor's Column

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The 21st Century Challenge: The Creative Interaction of Science and Religion

In the last several years, I have become acquainted with the John Templeton Foundation. Established in 1987, the foundation supports hundreds of programs worldwide, which serve three chief purposes. The first is to stimulate serious, rigorous, progress-generating links between the sciences and all religions. The second purpose is to encourage character development in schools and colleges. And the third is to stimulate greater appreciation worldwide for the benefits of freedom and free competition.

“The mission of the John Templeton Foundation is to pursue new insights at the boundary between theology and science through a rigorous, open-minded and empirically focused methodology, drawing together talented representatives from a wide spectrum of fields of expertise. Using the ‘humble approach,’ the Foundation typically seeks to focus the methods and resources of scientific inquiry on topical areas which have spiritual and theological significance ranging across the disciplines from cosmology to healthcare.” (From the John Templeton Foundation brochure)

Templeton believes there is much to be learned in all fields, including religion, by the successful methods of scientists—which occasionally means holding in one’s mind seemingly antithetical ideas at one time. “No one knows the total truth,” he points out, “but a rigorous method can start movement in the right direction.”

The ancient fear of many scientists was the one predicted by J.B.S. Haldane in his 1923 book “Daedalus” that science, especially the technology of war, was destined to turn good into evil. John Templeton is intent on seeing that science turns good into more good.

The Foundation funds many projects that attempt to create an interaction between science and religion. The Foundation also offers “The Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion.” This prize is given each year for extraordinary originality in advancing the world’s understanding of God or spirituality. This award began in 1973. Among past recipients was Mother Theresa of Calcutta.

Science and religion, once seen as enemies, are now handmaids—together seeking truth and understanding of the Universal Mystery. Stem cell research is just one issue facing us that brings together the questions of “Can we do this?” and “Should we do this?”

If you are interested in the creative interaction between science and religion, I would encourage you to visit the website: www.templeton.org.

Charles Townes, Ph.D., Nobel Laureate in Physics, Professor of Physics at the University of California, Berkeley, has said: “Science wants to know the mechanism of the universe, religion the meaning. The two cannot be separated.”

Through all our efforts in our little corners of the global village, let us take on the 21st century challenge of a creative interaction between science and religion!

F. Mike