EXPANDING HUMANITY'S Vision of God
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## PART II  NEW VISIONS OF THEOLOGY

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## Part III  HISTORICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE SCIENCE-RELIGION DIALOGUE

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This book is a collection of essays and sermons that were awarded prizes in a recent award program of the John Templeton Foundation. The program was announced in December 1998 and concluded on April 1, 2000. Over this period, three hundred entries were received and thirty-five were awarded prizes totaling $233,000.

Guidelines offered examples of the kinds of essays and sermons the program was seeking, emphasizing the importance of the science-religion dialogue. Program leaders pointed out that Sir John Templeton is deeply committed to fostering an expanded vision of God that is informed by recent discoveries of science about the nature of the universe and the place of humans in our world. He believes the stage is set for keen and creative minds to launch out on a new exploration of theology, respectful of our great religious heritage, but focusing on the new visions and new possibilities that have come to us through the momentous scientific discoveries of the twentieth century.

The target audience for this program included theologians, ministers, priests, rabbis, imams, leaders of other faith traditions, scientists, educators, policymakers, artists, writers, and others who are respected for their religious thinking and who represent a diversity of religious traditions. Because of this diversity, the essays and sermons chosen for this book display rich, varied, and often expansive visions, many of which resonate with one of our original contest questions, “Can we have a more comprehensive, more exploratory, more humble theology?” There is also considerable cultural diversity, with authors from Germany, Israel, India, Iran, and Australia.

The book is divided into three parts. In the first, “Contemporary Science Raising Theological Questions,” thirteen chapters address the many fascinating questions raised by physicists about quantum theory, by cosmologists about our enormous universe, and by biologists about our evolutionary past and future and the new theological challenge of artificial intelligence. For example, Günter Thomas draws many parallels between the “new creation” of the Bible and complexity theory in contemporary science, while Pirooz Fatourchi addresses the scientific understanding of the creation of the universe from an Islamic perspective. Richard Rice discusses the tensions many scientists with religious
beliefs face in the course of their work and the ways in which these ten-
sions may be ameliorated. Brian Edgar focuses on the theological impli-
cations of developing medical technologies that may extend human life
beyond its current life span, while Kuruvilla Pandikattu tackles the im-
plications for religion if humans were to become immortal. Peter
Heltzel concludes Part I by making connections between human at-
ttempts to create artificial intelligence and God’s creation of the universe
and everything in it.

In “New Visions of Theology,” six chapters stretch our thinking
about God into new frameworks by joining theology with quantum in-
determinacy, by perceiving nature as sacred, and by a synthesis of sci-
ence with Jewish and Eastern philosophies. Michael King, for example,
discusses the devotional and cerebral aspects of Western and Eastern re-
ligions and the ways in which these two qualities have affected, and
may continue to affect, scientific inquiry around the world. Rami
Shapiro presents a kabbalistic “map” that will allow us to unify our sci-
ences, both material and spiritual, while presenting an idea of God that
incorporates and transcends them both.

In “Historical and Philosophical Perspectives on the Science-
Religion Dialogue,” the tone is more searching. The five authors look
somewhat less optimistically at the future of science-theology interac-
tion, taking into account the unfulfilled promises of the past and the
limitations of our own humanity. Roger Shinn explores our historical
and theological understanding of nature and the ecological ramifica-
tions. David Mehl uses the context of Reformation Sunday to encour-
age a new reformation between science and religion, a reformation
marked by humility and common sense. And Theodore Roszak rounds
out the book by analyzing humanity’s place in the universe in keeping
with the evidence suggested by the “new cosmology.”

While the contributors to this volume approach the science-religion
dialogue from varying perspectives, each writes with the attitude
that theologians and scientists can, indeed must, communicate with
each other—questioning, researching, informing—in an effort to bring
greater understanding to all of us.

Eleven additional winning papers in the contest, which are not in-
cluded in this book, can be viewed on the Templeton Foundation’s Web

Robert L. Herrmann
PART I

CONTEMPORARY SCIENCE RAISING

Theological Questions