

Editorial

Aggression, especially in its extreme form of violence, seems increasingly to threaten the safety of people. In the twentieth century, we have repeatedly been taken by surprise to find ourselves engaged in a succession of history's most violent wars of worldwide scope. We are jittery lest another outburst of aggression reach the level of intensity that will release an atomic violence to destroy life. In addition to this, we are appalled to find aggression reaching the level of destructive violence within national borders, even at the levels of population that have been presumed to be the most civilized and cultured—the university and the religious institutions.

What is the function of religion and moral behavior in this situation? What is the underlying teaching of theology and ethics? What can or will religious institutions do?

On August 10–16, 1969, the sixteenth conference of the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science devoted itself to the matter of “Aggression—Its Biological, Psychological, and Societal Roots and the Place of Religion in Its Control.” The first three papers in this issue of *Zygon* are from that conference. These papers should make good grist for the mill of theologians and leaders of religion who are seeking to understand better their role in this time of crisis for man and for religious institutions. Certainly full understanding of this complex situation is not reached in these three papers, nor in all the papers of the conference, nor in all the papers that have been written on this matter.

Perhaps the essence of this approach to the problems of aggression was expressed in the call to the conference by the program chairman, Dr. Warren F. Busse, a physicist.

How can we solve the problems of human aggression that are so prominent in the headlines today? These problems are not new, for men have lived with, or died from, aggression of their fellow men at least since Cain killed Abel, and probably for a million years before that. Religions have tried to cope with aggression in terms of original sin, or the possibility of an escape to a Nirvana, or Utopia, or Kingdom of Heaven, where all men would live in splendid harmony, or at least be free of all aggressive impulses and desires. However, all attempts to build utopias on earth have failed, suggesting that men are not built for this kind of life. Today, with modern weapons of atomic, biological and chemical warfare, man's uncontrolled aggression could easily wipe out our

civilization, if not the whole human race. How can these aggressive impulses be defused, to make man safe from himself?

. . . We know that man is not an agent looking at Nature from the outside, but he is a part of Nature, and acts from within it. So any change in one part of the system—man's biology or psychology, or sociology or religion—can have an effect on every other part. Can man ever solve the problems of such a complex system?

In the past, men, with their puny muscles, have learned how to move mountains, and soar around the moon. This required not only faith (that it could be done) but also a detailed study of the laws of Nature, to learn how to do it. Thus man learned how to multiply his tiny quantum of free will, and his weak muscle power, many millionfold. Hopefully, a study of the laws governing man's biological and psychological nature will also enable society to amplify his social values and guide his aggressive impulses into constructive channels.

Today, theologians and related interpreters of human duty, hope, and destiny are searching contemporary knowledge in order to relate it to the long cultural and religious heritage so as to make it effective and relevant in this radical new age of man. For such searchers, we trust these papers are full of facts and wisdom.

While the first of the papers questions the effectiveness of religious institutions for the problem of aggression, and the second does not deign to mention them, these papers constitute hard facts about a reality with which religious institutions must be concerned. While *Zygon* in any one issue cannot provide final religious insight for our time, it is our hope that its issues are relevant to some of the central problems. Readers from the more traditional religious community might find a new light if they read *Zygon* intent with the following probe: If, as a servant of evolving religion, I am concerned to interpret man's hopes, duties, and destiny in the context of the ultimate source or ground of his being, what happens if I can translate the term "Nature," as used in Dr. Busse's last two paragraphs quoted above, into the familiar term "God"? The wisdom and understandability embedded in traditional language and ways of conceiving make this kind of translation important, for man cannot easily live in two seemingly contradictory worlds, but must seek to integrate them as best he can. Hopefully, translations can be found to integrate the wisdom of a long tradition with new knowledge which may provide wiser and more effective religious institutions.

The second half of this issue is devoted to commentaries on the papers on human values and natural science which were published in the March 1969 issue of *Zygon*.

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