

Preface

by Terence Nichols

These papers were composed at the University of St. Thomas during a summer seminar (June 3-14, 1996) on the interaction of science and theology. Participants in this seminar came from various disciplines: biology, computer science, economics, engineering, English, mathematics, philosophy, theology, and sociology. The seminar itself was the seventh in a series of interdisciplinary dialogues that have been conducted at St. Thomas between theology, philosophy, and the various science departments. A short sketch of the history of those discussions and of future prospects follows.

In the spring of 1991, the theology department began a series of discussions among its own members concerning *Ex Corde Ecclesia*, the Apostolic Constitution on the Catholic University. That document considers the search for an integration of knowledge to be an essential feature of a Catholic university: "In a Catholic University, research necessarily includes (a) the search for an integration of knowledge, (b) a dialogue between faith and reason, (c) an ethical concern, (d) a theological perspective." As a result of the discussions of *Ex Corde Ecclesia*, the theology department initiated a series of lectures and seminar discussions on the interrelation between the natural sciences and theology. The first invited speaker was Dr. John Polkinghorne, an internationally known physicist, an Anglican priest, and the president of Queens' College, Cambridge. His address, given April 7, 1992, was entitled "One World: a Contemporary Reflection on the Relation of Theology and Science." To prepare for this talk, about forty St. Thomas faculty members read Polkinghorne's book *One World*, and discussed it in small groups at several meetings.

Over the next four years, other well known speakers have come to St. Thomas to deliver public lectures and lead seminar discussions with the faculty. These speakers and their lecture titles are: Ernan McMullin (March, 1993), "Galileo Reconsidered: Lessons of the Galileo Case"; Robert Russell, founder and president of the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences in Berkeley (April, 1994), "Science and Religion: Conflict and Convergence"; Fr. Michael Buckley (Oct. 94), "Science and Religion: 17th and 20th Century settlements"; Robert Russell (March 1995, for a second visit), "God's Action in Nature"; Nancey Murphy (February 1996); "Theology and Ethics in the Hierarchy of the Sciences"; and recently Ian Barbour (October 1996), "Nature, Science and God." As a result of these events, and other initiatives, significant progress has been made at St. Thomas in developing an ongoing interdisciplinary dialogue between the natural sciences, philosophy, and theology. The papers presented in this volume are some of the fruits of this dialogue.

Presently we are planning an interdisciplinary seminar on the historical relation between science and religion, to be held in the summer of 1998. Dr. John Polkinghorne is scheduled to speak at St. Thomas in October, 1997, as part of a series of events inaugurating the new science building (opening Fall, 1997). Beyond this, we are planning

to develop an Institute for Faith and Science, which would be a subdivision of the new Center for Catholic Studies. Some of the objectives for such an institute would be to further discussions on interdisciplinary dialogue between the sciences and theology, especially as such dialogue might affect teaching of the science courses and theology courses at the undergraduate level; to serve as a regional center for the science/theology dialogue; and to serve as a local resource on this topic in the metropolitan area.