

Editorial

The recent announcement by the University of Cambridge that it was establishing the Starbridge Lectureship in Theology and Natural Science in the Faculty of Divinity has led to some vigorous debate both in the national press and in scientific journals. Funded by the best selling author, Susan Howatch, whose gradual conversion to Christianity began in 1983, the lectureship aims to promote a continuing dialogue between natural science and theology, recognising that 'Developments in science and technology have made us aware of the complexity and importance of the ethical and ecological decisions facing society today. Religion and theology have theoretical and practical resources to contribute to the resolution of these issues'. One might have imagined that such observations would not prove particularly controversial. The publication of an emotional editorial in *Nature* (362, 380, 1993) attacking the whole concept of such a lectureship was therefore surprising. Apart from a vindictive attack on Susan Howatch herself, an attack later shown to be full of factual errors (*Nature* 362, 698, 1993), the editorial made the extraordinary claim that the sciences can be pursued with academic rigour, whereas the study of the relationship between science and theology necessarily lacks such rigour. As one who reads all papers submitted to *Science & Christian Belief* before sending them to relevant referees, and who also frequently referees papers submitted for publication to *Nature*, I can find no basis for the claim that the academic standards relating to the study of science-theology interactions need be any less rigorous than they are for the study of science itself. Indeed the field needs much more treatment at a high academic level if we are to be spared some of the emotive outbursts of both anti-religious scientists and anti-science New Agers. Furthermore, in the words of six university professors who wrote to *Nature* criticising its editorial (362, 690, 1993): 'Today modern science is placing enormous power in the hands of humanity which can be used for either creative or destructive purposes. There is an urgent moral responsibility to harness such power for the common good and the fulfilment of that responsibility is becoming increasingly complex. Rather than the outmoded attempt to draw sharp boundary lines around their fields of investigation, there is a need for a more humble approach whereby scientists welcome attempts to relate their knowledge to theology and moral philosophy. The decision to establish the lectureship in Theology and Natural Science is therefore not only a continuation of a tradition of partnership between science and theology which goes back many centuries, but also provides a further valuable opportunity to explore the ethical responsibilities of the scientific community with respect to the applications of their science'.