

## **Editorial**

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The recent death of Professor Reijer Hooykaas is marked in this Issue by an obituary and by a reprint of one of his articles. His passing provides an opportunity to focus on one particular quality which he constantly promoted during his long and productive life both as a goal for scientists individually and for the scientific community collectively, namely, the need for humility whilst carrying out the research enterprise. Established theories could always be wrong. As Hooykaas points out in 'The Christian Approach in Teaching Science', science 'shows us that though we may know much and perform great things, we cannot be omniscient and omnipotent. It confirms the biblical teaching that we cannot be our own god, but that we are in an intermediate position between the Creator and the rest of creation . . .'.

There are constant reminders of the extent to which much contemporary secular thinking on the subject runs counter to such a theme. John Postgate, emeritus professor of microbiology at the University of Sussex in England, recently popularised a very different view in the *Financial Times* (June 18, 1994) under the banner headline 'Religion: are we better off without it?' In his article Professor Postgate made a number of sweeping and poorly substantiated claims, among them the statements that 'few scientists . . . hold religious beliefs. Those scientists who are religious have to think in compartments, closing down for religious thought the critical faculties that they would use for scientific work', and that 'science has come to occupy the high ground of morality, which has prompted bizarre attacks against it'. Postgate proceeds to lambaste religion for causing so many wars, whereas it is proposed that the scientific community is generally above such activities.

It is a curious fact that scientists who spend a life-time in the collection and assessment of data often display a scant disregard for facts and apparently forsake their critical faculties when commenting on fields outside their particular areas of specialisation. But the most worrying aspect of Postgate's article is its proposal that the scientific community is on some 'moral high ground', as if scientists comprised a new religious sect hankering after omniscience, rather than being very much part and parcel of the very imperfect societies in which they work. Prof. Hooykaas' article reprinted on p. 113 was first published 34 years ago, but its message is as relevant now as it was then and should be read and pondered in every generation.

A 'theology of humility' has been promoted by the John Templeton Foundation in recent years. It is therefore appropriate in this context to congratulate John Brooke, Professor of History of Science at the University of Lancaster, for his recent prize from this Foundation for his essay 'Natural law in the natural sciences: the origins of modern atheism' which was recently published in *Science & Christian Belief* (4, 83-103, 1992).