

COSMOLOGY AND THE MEANING OF HUMAN EXISTENCE:
OPTIONS FROM CONTEMPORARY PHYSICS AND EASTERN
RELIGIONS

INSTITUTE ON RELIGION IN AN AGE OF SCIENCE

THIRTY-FIFTH ANNUAL SUMMER CONFERENCE

JULY 30-AUGUST 6, 1988

STAR ISLAND in the ISLES OF SHOALS off PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Increasingly in the last two decades cosmologists and elementary particle physicists have been working in conjunction to provide a detailed description of the history of the universe, especially the very early history, and a comprehensive understanding of matter and space-time. Seeking a coherent explanation of experimental observations, elementary particle theorists are currently proposing theories that predict the existence of all particles and also provide a unified description of the fundamental physical forces of nature. Consideration of elemental particle properties contributed to the development of the Inflationary universe theory which extends the Big Bang theory to describe many previously unexplained features of the universe. Building on this progress, theorists continue to search more deeply for an underlying physical principle.

Questions regarding the origin, nature and fate of the universe have been pursued for millennia by religious thinkers worldwide. In Eastern religious traditions the search for underlying reality has involved extensive philosophic study of many facets of space, time and matter. Such work may be found in the Hindu and Buddhist literature. Rich "salvational" cosmologies also characterize the Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist traditions.

The theme of the conference is the relation of contemporary physical and Eastern religious cosmologies to ultimate human concerns regarding our role in the cosmos and the meaning of our existence. Among the issues to be addressed are: (1) Do questions of human meaning and purpose suggested by contemporary discoveries in cosmology and elementary particle physics have any relation to such questions addressed in Eastern religions? (2) Can a dialogue meaningful for our ultimate concerns be developed? (3) What issues in the theory of knowledge and reality are involved? (4) How might conceptions of cosmology, space, time, and matter, regardless of the source, affect our world view and what impact does this have, in turn, on our deepest comprehensions of who we are?

SPEAKERS INCLUDE: ANINDITA BALSLEY, Hindu philosophy, University of Aarhus, Denmark; JOHN BOWKER, religious studies, University of Cambridge; EDWARD HARRISON, astronomy, University of Massachusetts; LESLIE KAWAMURA, Buddhist philosophy, University of Calgary; RANDOLPH KLOETZLI, Indian cosmology, Washington, DC; STEN ODENWALD, astronomy, Naval Research Laboratory, Washington, DC; KEVIN SHARPE, natural and religious Philosophy, Union Graduate School, Cincinnati.

CHAPLAIN: RAIMUNDO PANIKKAR, comparative philosophy of religion, University of California, Santa Barbara.

PROGRAM CHAIRPERSONS: LAWRENCE FAGG, Department of Physics, Catholic University of America, Washington, DC 20017; and NANCY HOUK, Department of Astronomy, University of Michigan 1041 Dennison Building, Ann Arbor, MI 48109.

CONFERENCE COORDINATOR: EDWARD F. RUTLEDGE Box 543, Henniker, NH 03242

REGISTRATION: Please fill out the form on the next page and mail it with the appropriate registration fee -- payable to IRAS -- to:

Mrs. Bonnie Falla, Registrar
810 1/2 North 9th Street
Allentown, PA 18102
(215) 432-8711

Additional registration forms are available from the Registrar, or legible copies of this form are acceptable.

REGISTRATION FEES: Husband and wife \$165. Singles over 20, \$90. Children between 12 and 20, \$60. Children under 12, \$50. Fees (less 20 percent) are refundable if registration is cancelled before June 1.

Registering in January or February by all conferees is advisable because accommodations are limited to 200. Room and board, provided at about \$220 per adult for the week, will be payable on the island.