The
Humble
Approach
The Humble Approach

Scientists Discover God

JOHN MARKS TEMPLETON

TEMPLETON FOUNDATION PRESS
Philadelphia & London
CONTENTS

I  An Introduction 1
II  The Blossoming Time of Man 6
III The Vast Unseen 13
IV  The New World of Time 25
V  Humble About What? 34
VI  Benefits from Humility 44
VII  Creation Through Change 55
VIII Spiritual Progress 64
IX  The Benefits of Competition 80
X  Earth as a School 90
XI  Creative Thinking 101
XII  Love and Happiness: The True Test 109
XIII Laws of the Spirit 118
XIV A New Research Program 129
References (Footnotes) 140
Bibliography 143
Appendixes

1. Humility Theology Information Center 153
2. Excerpt from *Riches for the Mind and Spirit* 154
3. Board of Advisors of the John Templeton Foundation Humility Theology Information Center 156
4. Trustees and Members of the John Templeton Foundation 163
5. John Templeton Foundation—Theology of Humility 165
6. Recipients of The Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion 170
I An Introduction

We are perched on the frontiers of future knowledge. Even though we stand upon the enormous mountain of information collected over the last five centuries of scientific progress, we have only fleeting glimpses of the future. To a large extent, the future lies before us like a vast wilderness of unexplored reality. The God who created and sustained His evolving universe through eons of progress and development has not placed our generation at the tag end of the creative process. He has placed us at a new beginning. We are here for the future.

Our role is crucial. As human beings we are endowed with mind and spirit. We can think, imagine, and dream. We can search for future trends through the rich diversity of human thought. God permits us in some ways to be co-creators with Him in His continuing act of creation.

There is, however, a stumbling block: egotism. The closed-minded attitude of those who think they know it all inhibits future progress. Natural scientists, by and large, have overcome this hurdle. They are more open-minded. They research the natural wonders of the universe, devising new hypotheses, testing them, challenging old assumptions, competing with each other in professional rivalry. The physical future of human civilization is in their professional hands, guided by relatively tolerant and open minds.

This is not equally true concerning our spiritual future.
Some theologians, religious leaders, and lay people are frequently blind to the obstacles they themselves erect. Many are not even aware that the spiritual future could, or should, be different from anything that has ever been before. Many do not realize that spiritual reality can be researched in ways similar to those used by natural scientists. Some do not want even to consider the possibility of a future of progressively unfolding spiritual discoveries.

Why not? Many devoutly religious people are not devoutly humble. They do not admit their worldview is limited. They are not open to suggestions that their personal theology might be incomplete. They do not entertain the notion that other religious have valuable insights to contribute to an understanding of God and His creation. When people take a more humble attitude, they welcome new ideas about the spirit just as they welcome new scientific ideas about how to cure headaches, how to heat and cool their homes, or how to develop natural resources.

The humble approach to human knowledge is meant to help as a corrective to the parochialism that blocks further development in religious studies. Taking this humble approach reminds us that each person's concept of God, the universe, even his or her own self is too limited. To some extent, we are all too self-centered. We overestimate the small amount of knowledge we possess. To be humble means to admit the infinity of creation and to search one's place in God's infinite plan for creation. This approach asks each of us, whether we are students of the natural or the supernatural, to witness to the intimate relationship of physical and spiritual reality in our own lives. In a humble manner we can use our talents to explore the universe to discover future trends. There is abundant evidence that by grace God gives us talents and intelligence with which to participate in His vast creative process.

Until the emergence of human beings on the face of the earth, evolution proceeded routinely, unfolding the rich complexity of mineral, vegetable, and animal life. Now with human intelligence capable of studying the Creator and His creation, evolution no longer travels only on its own path. Possibly it was
God’s plan that one day His children could serve as useful tools for His creative purposes.

At this present moment, the human race, even after thousands of years of historical development, is still at the dawn of a new creation. This is a tremendous, awe-inspiring responsibility. It should humble us.

In fact, humility is the key to progress. Without it we will be too self-satisfied with past glories to launch boldly into the challenges ahead. Without humility we will not be wide-eyed and open-minded enough to discover new areas for research. If we are not as humble as children, we may be unable to admit mistakes, seek advice, and try again. The humble approach is for all of us who are concerned about the future of our civilization and the role we are to play in it. It is an approach for all of us who are not satisfied to let things drift and who want to channel our creative restlessness toward helping to build the kingdom of God.

Every person’s concept of God is too small. Through humility we can begin to get into true perspective the infinity of God. This is the humble approach.

It is also in humility that we learn from each other, for it makes us open to each other and ready to see things from the other’s point of view and share ours with him freely. It is by humility that we avoid the sins of pride and intolerance and avoid all religious strife. Humility opens the door to the realms of the spirit, and to research and progress in religion.

Twenty-five centuries ago Xenophanes and twelve centuries ago Shankara taught that nothing exists independently of God and that God is immeasurably greater than all time and space, let alone the visible earth. But only in the last century have modern sciences come to realize how very tiny the earth is compared to the billions of galaxies and how very brief human history is in the ongoing creation of the universe. Only now is man beginning to find evidence of hitherto undreamed-of forces and even dimensions of reality which transcend the invisible space-time field which holds together within its astonishing configuration all that man can observe in space and time. There are vast realms reaching out beyond the known,
inspiring wonder and inviting inquiry, but it is humility that opens the way forward.

It is to be hoped that this book will reach many people who are ready to benefit from this kind of experience at the frontiers of knowledge where their minds may be stretched far beyond the range of their grasp hitherto. Perhaps people will be uplifted and inspired by catching glimpses of unexpected aspects of reality that beckon their inquiry with exciting promises of still further manifestations of truth beyond anything they could anticipate. Perhaps the advance into the realms of spiritual reality and progress in religion will be as outstanding and rapid as the astonishing advances in physics, astronomy, and genetics. Church denominations may then be inspired to devote the manpower and find the funds needed for the promotion of research. Young people may be attracted to a religion that is genuinely dynamic and rapidly progressing. The visions and the teachings of the great prophets of the past need not be discarded or disputed. Rather they should be studied again and used as springboards to new and greater understanding and love of God. This book explores the possibility that humility in man's understanding of God may be more fruitful than the formal systems of thought which we have inherited, whether they be theistic, pantheistic, or panentheistic. Gradually we may learn to love every one of God's children and be grateful for an increasingly rich diversity of thought emanating from research and worship in every land. One of the purposes of this book is to examine and foster the idea that through a humble approach in knowledge in which we are open-minded and willing to experiment, theology may produce positive results even more amazing than the discoveries of scientists which have electrified the world in this last century.

Why do millions of people think theology has become obsolete, when no one thinks physics or astronomy can become obsolete? That is the subject of this book, The Humble Approach. Theology was called the queen of the sciences in ages gone by and can deserve that title again when it adopts the humble approach.

A bibliography on the subject of science and religion
is included to encourage others to read and write more extensively in this important and developing field. The bibliographies include articles and books for beginners as well as for advanced thinkers, whether they are scientists or theologians. By reading and writing in this theological field, scientists and other laymen may not only enhance their own spiritual growth but also stimulate progress and expand the whole field of theology in ways that may benefit all. Let us hope that already a spiritual and religious renaissance may have started, and that a great new day may be dawning.
II The Blossoming Time of Man

We should be overwhelmingly grateful to have been born in this century. The slow progress of prehistoric ages is over, and centuries of human enterprise are now miraculously bursting into flower. The evolution of human knowledge is accelerating, and we are reaping the fruits of generations of scientific thought: More than half of the scientists who ever lived are alive today. More than half of the discoveries in the natural sciences have been made in this century. More than half of the goods produced since the earth was born have been produced in the twentieth century. Over half the books ever written were written in the last half-century. More new books are published each month than were written in the entire historical period before the birth of Columbus.

Many astronomers believe the universe began with a “Big Bang” about eighteen billion years ago. This vast figure is about the same as the number of minutes which have elapsed since Moses was born. But not until five billion years ago did our galaxy, the Milky Way, containing over one hundred billion stars, look as it does now. At about that time, our star, the sun, was formed. About five billion minutes ago, William the Conqueror was born in Normandy. Thus seventy-two percent of the history of the universe occurred while, to quote from