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**STRICT EMBARGO**  
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### **MARTIN REES WINS 2011 TEMPLETON PRIZE**

LONDON, APRIL 6 – Martin J. Rees, a theoretical astrophysicist whose profound insights on the cosmos have provoked vital questions that speak to humanity’s highest hopes and worst fears, has won the 2011 Templeton Prize.

Rees, Master of Trinity College, one of Cambridge University’s top academic posts, and former president of the Royal Society, the highest leadership position within British science, has spent decades investigating the implications of the big bang, the nature of black holes, events during the so-called ‘dark age’ of the early universe, and the mysterious explosions from galaxy centers known as gamma ray bursters.

In turn, the “big questions” he raises – such as “How large is physical reality?” – are reshaping crucial philosophical and theological considerations that strike at the core of life, fostering the spiritual progress that the Templeton Prize has long sought to recognize.

In his work with many colleagues over the years, Rees has enlarged the boundaries of understanding about the physical processes that define the cosmos, including speculations on the concept of “multiverses,” or infinite universes.

These investigations are balanced with his prominence in urging the international scientific community to raise public awareness of the impact of human activity on planet Earth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the first, Rees says, when one species – humans – can determine the future of the entire biosphere.

“Some people might surmise that intellectual immersion in vast expanses of space and time would render cosmologists serene and uncaring about what happens next year, next week, or tomorrow,” said Rees, 68, in a prepared statement at today’s news conference. “But, for me, the opposite is the

case. My concerns are deepened by the realization that, even in a perspective extending billions of years into the future, as well as into the past, this century may be a defining moment.”

The Templeton Prize was announced today at The Royal Institution of Great Britain in London by the John Templeton Foundation, which has awarded it since 1973. Valued at £1,000,000 (about \$1.62 million or €1.14 million), the Prize is the world's largest annual award given to an individual and honors a living person who has made exceptional contributions to affirming life's spiritual dimension. HRH Prince Philip will award the Prize on June 1 at Buckingham Palace.

John M. Templeton, Jr., M.D., president and chairman of the John Templeton Foundation, notes that for all the discoveries attached to Rees's career, it is the questions he inspires that qualify him for the 2011 Templeton Prize.

“The questions Rees raises have an impact far beyond the simple assertion of facts, opening wider vistas than any telescope ever could,” Templeton said. “By peering into the farthest reaches of the galaxies, Martin Rees has opened a window on our very humanity, inviting everyone to wrestle with the most fundamental questions of our nature and existence.”

Martin Rees was born in 1942 in York, England. After a peripatetic life during the war his parents, both teachers, settled with Rees, an only child, in a rural part of Shropshire near the border with Wales. There, his parents founded Bedstone College, a boarding school based on progressive educational concepts that continues to thrive to this day.

At 13, he moved to the nearby Shrewsbury School and earned a solid educational background to gain entry to Trinity College, Cambridge. In 1963, he received his bachelor's degree in mathematics from Cambridge University, but felt little enthusiasm for the discipline. His interests found a new outlet, however, after he secured a research studentship at the university's department of applied mathematics and theoretical physics, thanks in large part to the charisma and inspiration of his advisor, Dennis Sciama, a brilliant scientist whose other students included Templeton Prize laureates George Ellis and John Barrow, as well as Stephen Hawking, James Binney and Brandon Carter.

Rees's post-graduate work in astrophysics in the mid-1960s coincided with an explosion of new discoveries, with breakthroughs ranging from confirmation of the big bang, the discovery of neutron stars and black holes, and a host of other revelations. Within this auspicious setting, Rees quickly established himself as one of the bright young luminaries in a bright, young field.

Rees obtained his Ph.D. in theoretical astronomy in 1967. After short-term posts in the U.S. and a period at Sussex University, he returned to Cambridge in 1973 on appointment as Plumian Professor of Astronomy and Experimental Philosophy and Fellow of King's College, Cambridge. In the decades since, Rees has become one of the world's most renowned astrophysicists, authoring and co-authoring more than 500 research papers and several books, with lectures and broadcast appearances worldwide.

Despite his continuing focus on astrophysics, he developed an involvement with issues bearing on international science and public policy. In one particularly influential book, *Our Final Century?* (published in the United States as *Our Final Hour*), Rees argues that civilization has no more than a fifty-fifty chance of surviving until 2100 without suffering a severe setback. Although he is optimistic about the prospects opened up by science and technology, he emphasizes the challenges to governance that are posed by the collective pressures humans are imposing on the environment, and by the vulnerability of our interconnected world to disruption.

Most recently he delivered the Reith Lectures for the BBC Radio 4, exploring the challenges facing science in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. An expanded version of the lectures will be published in June as [\*From Here to Infinity: Scientific Horizons\*](#).

In her nomination of Rees for the Templeton Prize, Virginia Trimble, professor of physics at the University of California, Irvine wrote, "Looking back over his career, one is impressed by how early he seized on the importance of fields that are now central to the astronomical enterprise, and by the durability and prescience of his insights."

In his recommendation of Rees for the Templeton Prize, Robert Williams, president of the International Astronomical Union noted, "I have found Martin's books and lectures, of which I have read and heard numerous, extremely thought provoking." Williams added, "He is very unusual in that he constantly touches on spiritual themes without dealing explicitly with religion. I do not know whether he is a theist, for example."

In fact, Rees has no religious beliefs, but considers himself a product of Christian culture and ethics, explaining, "I grew up in the traditions of the Anglican Church and those are 'the customs of my tribe.' I'm privileged to be embedded in its wonderful aesthetic and musical traditions and I want to do all I can to preserve and strengthen them."

Rees was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1979, and as the society's president from 2005 to 2010 provided wide advice on policy questions to the UK government and interaction with scientific academies worldwide. In 1995 he was named Astronomer Royal, established by Charles II in 1675 but now a largely honorary post. He is a foreign member of the National Academy of Sciences (USA) and the American Philosophical Society. He has received numerous academic awards, and served as a visiting professor or adviser at many institutions around the world.

In 2005, Rees was appointed to the House of Lords as a non-party-political peer, sitting on the Cross Benches as Lord Rees of Ludlow, after his hometown in Shropshire. He was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II in 1992 and in 2007 was appointed to the Order of Merit, an honor in the gift of the Queen and limited to 24 members. He lives in Cambridge with his wife, Caroline Humphrey, a professor of social anthropology and founder of the Mongolia and Inner Asian Studies Unit at Cambridge.

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Notes:

- The Templeton Prize each year honors a living person who has made an exceptional contribution to affirming life's spiritual dimension, whether through insight, discovery, or practical works.
- Established in 1972 by the late global investor and philanthropist Sir John Templeton, the Prize is a cornerstone of the John Templeton Foundation's international efforts to serve as a philanthropic catalyst for discoveries relating to the Big Questions of human purpose and ultimate reality.
- The monetary value of the prize is set always to exceed the Nobel Prizes to underscore Templeton's belief that benefits from discoveries that illuminate spiritual questions can be quantifiably more vast than those from other worthy human endeavors.
- Photos of the Laureate will be available at: [www.flickr.com/photos/templetonprize](http://www.flickr.com/photos/templetonprize)
- Videos of the Laureate will be available at: [www.youtube.com/templetonprize](http://www.youtube.com/templetonprize)