

**NEWS RELEASE**

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**RELIGIOUS LEADERS, ROYALTY AND SCIENTISTS  
CONGRATULATE NEW TEMPLETON LAUREATE**

POLISH PRIEST AND COSMOLOGIST Professor Michael (Michał) Heller, credited with initiating a 'theology of science', was given official congratulations from Pope Benedict XVI today at an event celebrating the award of the 2008 Templeton Prize, the world's largest academic award.

Earlier, Heller received the £820,000 Templeton Prize from HRH The Duke of Edinburgh at the private award ceremony at Buckingham Palace.

Following the prize award, a special reception for Heller was also held at the Royal Society, hosted by Lord Rees, its President. The events come during a week of celebrations at churches, universities and venerable institutions across the Capital and beyond.

The letter of congratulations from Archbishop Fernando Filoni, sent on behalf of the Pope, was delivered at the official Prize reception in St James's, London. It said: "His Holiness has repeatedly underlined the importance of a fruitful encounter between faith and reason, the two wings on which the human spirit rises to contemplation of the truth (cf. *Fides et Ratio*, 1), and he wishes to encourage all those who devote their lives to exploring the profound insights to be gained from scientific research in the context of religious belief.

"Invoking upon you and all those whose work serves to promote a deeper understanding of the relationship between religion and science, His Holiness cordially imparts his Apostolic Blessing."

At the Buckingham Palace ceremony, Dr John M. Templeton, Jr., Chairman and President of the John Templeton Foundation said: “The Templeton Prize judges recognised the extraordinary and unique contributions of Professor Heller as an eminent scientist, philosopher and theologian. The judges agreed that Professor Heller has persuasively shown that scientific investigation and theological inquiry can harmoniously interact without compromising each other.”

Following receipt of the award, Professor Heller gave an insight into his outlook in response to the Templeton Foundation’s latest Big Question: ‘Does science make belief in God obsolete?’ He said:

“Does science make belief in God obsolete? It depends on the idea of God you have. If your God is a being who manipulates the world and thinks more or less like yourself then science simply ignores it. However, if your God truly transcends the world and all your ideas, but at the same time is immanent in the world and in all your ideas, inadequate as they are, then God is also in the laws of physics and in all human activities aimed at understanding the Universe.”

Dr. Templeton continued: “He has brought to science a sense of transcendent mystery and to religion, a view of the universe through the broadly open eyes of science. His most creative writings can be concisely characterised as a meditation upon the miracle of the ‘mathematical essence of nature’”.

Yesterday a special service was held at the London Oratory in honour of Heller followed by a dinner reception attended by the head of the Catholic Church in England and Wales, the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O’Connor.

Since arriving in the UK, Heller has also held Mass at London's main Polish church, Our Lady of Czestochowa in Islington, and contributed to a research symposium at the Royal Society, 'Modeling the origin of time and of the universe'. Later in the week he will be attending events at Imperial College, London and St. Anne's College in Oxford.

Heller is the 38<sup>th</sup> winner of the Templeton Prize, which was first awarded in 1973. He is donating his prize money to the development of a 'Copernicus Centre' in conjunction with the Jagiellonian University and the Pontifical Academy of Theology in Krakow. The Centre's aim will be to provide dedicated research and education in science and theology.

Further information on the Prize can be found at [www.templetonprize.org](http://www.templetonprize.org).

Information on the John Templeton Foundation's Big Question: 'Does science make belief in God obsolete?', can be found at [www.templeton.org/belief](http://www.templeton.org/belief).

## **ENDS**

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### Background on the Laureate:

- Heller was born in Tarnow, Poland in 1936
- During the political unrest under the Nazis, Heller's family were uprooted from Poland to the present day Ukraine, Siberia, and southern Russia before returning to Poland
- Thanks to vigorous debate among his parents and their friends, Heller gained powerful insights into the importance of mathematics, physics and religion
- Despite the active anti-intellectualism of the communist regime in Poland, Heller established himself as an international figure among cosmologists and physicists through his prolific writings

- He has written more than 30 books and nearly 400 papers on issues such as the unification of general relativity and quantum mechanics, multiverse theories and their limitations, geometric methods in relativistic physics such as noncommutative geometry, and the philosophy and history of science
- Heller's current work focuses on noncommutative geometry and groupoid theory in mathematics, which attempts to remove the problem of an initial cosmological singularity at the origin of the universe. "If on the fundamental level of physics there is no space and no time," says Heller, "noncommutative geometry could be a suitable tool to deal with such a situation"
- Reverend Professor Heller is currently professor in the faculty of Philosophy at the Pontifical Academy of Theology in Krakow where his scholarship in physics, logic, philosophy and theology has influenced two generations of students

Background on the Prize:

- The Templeton Prize is awarded annually on the decision of a panel of independent judges
- The Templeton Prize is a cornerstone of the John Templeton Foundation's international efforts to serve as a philanthropic catalyst for discovery in areas engaging life's biggest questions, which it describes as ranging from explorations into the laws of nature and the Universe to questions on the nature of love, gratitude, forgiveness, and creativity
- The Duke of Edinburgh will present the Prize at a private ceremony at Buckingham Palace on Wednesday, May 7th
- The 2008 Templeton Prize Laureate will join a distinguished list of 37 former recipients. Last year's award went to Professor Charles Taylor as recognition of his long-standing efforts to examine what role "spiritual thinking" should have in modern society, and particularly how it can help solve problems of violence and bigotry
- Other recent Laureates include Charles H. Townes, Professor in the Graduate School at the University of California, Berkeley, who shared the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1964 for his investigations into the properties of microwaves and his co-invention of the laser, and theoretical cosmologist George F.R. Ellis of the University of Cape Town, who advocates balancing the rationality of evidence-based science with the causal effect of forces beyond the explanation of hard science, including issues such as aesthetics, ethics, metaphysics, and meaning

- Past judges have included the Dalai Lama, HRH the Prince of Wales and HRH Prince Albert of Belgium
- The judges for the 2008 award were:
  - **Dewi Fortuna Anwar, Ph.D.**  
Director for Program and Research of The Habibie Center and Deputy Chairman for Social Science and Humanities at The Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) in Jakarta, Indonesia
  - **His Eminence Daniel Ciobotea, Ph.D.**  
Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church
  - **Prof. Sarah Coakley**  
Mallinckrodt Professor of Divinity at Harvard University
  - **Francis S. Collins, M.D., Ph.D.**  
Director of the National Human Genome Research Institute, which is part of the U.S. National Institutes of Health
  - **Prof. Kaikhosrov D. Irani**  
Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the City College of New York
  - **Prof. Kenneth S. Kendler**  
Professor of Psychiatry and Professor of Human Genetics at the Medical College of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth University
  - **Michael Novak**  
Theologian, author, former U.S diplomat, and current holder of the George Frederick Jewett Chair in Religion, Philosophy, and Public Policy at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, D.C
  - **Prof. M. S. Swaminathan**  
Chairman of the National Commission on Farmers, Government of India, Chairman of the M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai (Madras), India, UNESCO Chair in Ecotechnology, and President of the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs
  - **Walter E. Thirring, Ph.D.**  
Professor Emeritus in the Department for Theoretical Physics at the University of Vienna

For full details, please visit: <http://www.templetonprize.org/judges.html>

Background on the Foundation:

- The mission of the John Templeton Foundation is to serve as a philanthropic catalyst for discovery in areas engaging life's biggest questions. These questions range from explorations into the laws of nature and the Universe to questions on the nature of love, gratitude, forgiveness, and creativity. For more information on the John Templeton Foundation visit: [www.templeton.org](http://www.templeton.org)