

A Chronicle

2002 Templeton Prize Laureate
Rev. Dr. John C. Polkinghorne

TEMPLETON PRIZE

*For progress toward research or discoveries about spiritual realities
including research in love, creativity, purpose, infinity, intelligence,
thanksgiving and prayer.*

Press Conference | New York City | March 14, 2002

Buckingham Palace | London | April 29, 2002

Foreign Press Association Luncheon | London | April 30, 2002

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STATEMENT BY

Sir John Templeton

AT THE TEMPLETON PRIZE PRESS CONFERENCE, NEW YORK CITY, MARCH 14, 2002

Welcome friends. I feel that we are all working together for an ambition that I think is the most important I can imagine, and that is to have human beings increase their information about divinity more than one hundredfold.

To clarify that, one hundred odd years ago Alfred Nobel set up prizes that have had an enormous effect in stimulating people to make new discoveries in important fields such as physics and chemistry and medicine. There have been literally hundreds of thousands of the most brilliant people of all nations who have set as a part of their life goals to make a discovery deserving to win the Nobel Prize and that has had a marvelous beneficial effect on all humanity.

But ask yourself, what we are doing, you and me, may be even more beneficial for humanity. Suppose the day comes when we can say human beings know more than a hundred times as much about divinity as we knew a century ago, just a century ago. Now I know that sounds unreasonable. Religions are not a century old but ten or twenty or thirty centuries old, and religions have made some new discoveries, but we know very little more now about divinity than we knew 2,000 years ago.

Does it have to be that way? Probably not. It's probably only a peculiar mindset where, in the case of medicine, for example, we expect the medical doctors to make new discoveries every month, but we think that in terms of spirituality we should always look back to the ancients. Let me try to clarify that a bit.

Suppose one day you go for a spiritual problem to your priest. You would expect him to take out the Bible and from the 2,000-year-old book tell you what is good for you spiritually. The next day you had a

body problem and went to your medical doctor and he took out the equally famous book in medicine written 2000 years ago by Hippocrates and he opened that book and told you what to do to yourself bodily. You would go to another doctor. You would think he was old fashioned, that he hadn't kept up with the times.

Why should that be? It is probably just a human mindset that we have hypnotized ourselves to think that in hard sciences you should make rapid discoveries, more and more rapid, but in spiritual matters it is not necessary or even proper to look for new discoveries. That is a mindset that we started out 30 years ago to change. We wanted people to think that discoveries of a spiritual nature can be made and should be made and will be made even more rapidly than they are made in the natural sciences. So we borrowed from the wisdom of Alfred Nobel who had set up those very effective prizes to stimulate research and we made our prize deliberately slightly larger so it would say to people that progress in spiritual discoveries is even more important than progress in those other areas.

We are trying to say more and more, year by year, to all the people of the world, "Go out and devote your whole life to try and make new discoveries of a spiritual nature." The first reaction I get since we started this is, "Oh well, that's different. Religion is not that type of thing. You can't make new discoveries because there's nothing to research. How can you start doing research?" So on the face of this let me show you what we've done.

What do you mean when you talk about studying spiritual matters?

Love. There's nobody that would say that love is not real. Every human being would say love is a reality. So if love is a reality, there are all kinds of evidences of love. So why shouldn't we examine those evidences just as the scientists observe the elements of electromagnetism? In electromagnetism two centuries ago there was almost zero information, but Michael Faraday and others devoted their lives to making more research studies of aspects of electromagnetics so that now electromagnetism dominates our lives in terms of communication.

Creativity. No one will deny that creativity is real. Creativity is obvious, there's plenty of evidence to study it, to do research on creativity.

Purpose. Nobody will deny that you have a purpose. Most people have a purpose. Not just people have a purpose but there's an enormous amount of evidence that purpose has been in the universe since the Big Bang. Purpose is not only in human beings but purpose is in the microbes, and there are a hundred thousand times as many varieties of microbes as there are human beings, but they all show evidences of purpose. Why don't we study them scientifically?

Infinity. There is no question that infinity is genuine. The more we learn, infinity gets bigger and bigger. As recently as when I was a child it was not known that there were any galaxies at all. We knew there was a Milky Way, but we did not know that it was comprised of more than a hundred billion other stars

resembling our sun. That was discovered soon after I was born and then they discovered not only our Milky Way galaxy but at least a hundred billion other galaxies and that the majority of them also contain a hundred billion suns. So just in one person's lifetime think of how we have enlarged our concepts of infinity. I believe that everyone will agree that infinity is one way to study divinity. So if infinity is an aspect of divinity, study it.

Intelligence. There probably always has been intelligence, but intelligence as known to humans is relatively new. As recently as the last one-thousandth of human history most of intelligence has been developed, in terms of education, in terms of brain-power, in terms of research, all within the last one-millionth of the history of the earth. This intelligence is an obvious fact. And intelligence is surely a part of divinity. So if we want to learn about divinity we should do more research on intelligence.

Thanksgiving. There's no question that thanksgiving is a powerful reality. It's not something manufactured by us. Thanksgiving has always existed.

Prayer. There's no question that prayer is absolutely real. Hundreds of millions of people pray and they get benefits from prayer.

So all those things lend themselves to research, serious research. But the amount of money that humans now spend on all of those spiritual studies is infinitesimal, less than one-ten-thousandth as much on studying those realities than is spent on studying chemistry, physics or medicine.

Now that's what we're trying to change, you and I working together to create a new mindset where what can we do with our lives would be the most beneficial to humanity. I haven't found anything more beneficial to the future of humanity than to persuade people to devote at least as much time and money to research on the spiritual realities as we have learned to develop in the physical and material realities. This is an enormous project and something that gives me great enthusiasm. At 89 years old I'm the most enthusiastic I've ever been. You are my partners in it and there's no reason why you shouldn't feel the same enthusiasm. And we are reaching out through the

In one century it's not unreasonable to say that humans will know more than a hundred times as much about divinity as anybody knew before and the benefits will be even greater than we've learned from the sciences combined. That's why I'm enthusiastic. That's why this prize has not been changed, the prize is exactly the same as it was 30 years ago. But we weren't using words that told you what I have just told you. We were using words such as religion. Religion is very important, I admire religion, but religion doesn't carry the concept of scientific research; it doesn't carry the concept of a hundred times more information.

We are trying to say more and more, year by year, to all the people of the world, 'Go out and devote your whole life to try and make new discoveries of a spiritual nature.'

media that appears today and Dr. Polkinghorne is going to speak with more than a dozen media organizations in the time that he's in America alone. So the word is getting out that if you really have the enthusiasm for discovery in spirituality it will happen and it will happen quickly.

We are trying to describe that, not only to the millions of the public but even to our nine judges who select the prize winners, what it is that we are talking about when they select the prize winners. So as you will hear later, Dr. Polkinghorne is a good example of what one person can do that will result eventually in humans knowing over a hundred times as much about divinity. Thank you.

STATEMENT BY

The Rev. Dr. John C. Polkinghorne

AT THE TEMPLETON PRIZE PRESS CONFERENCE, NEW YORK CITY, MARCH 14, 2002

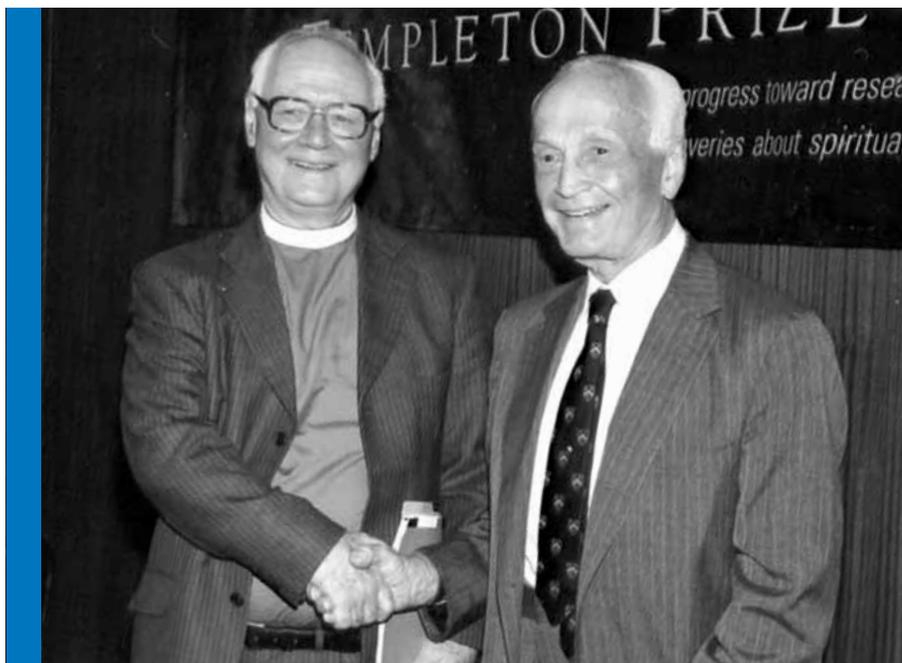
I was in Rome attending a conference on science and religion, when I got a message to call Dr. Templeton about “an important matter.” After a certain amount of wrestling with the telephone system, I managed to get through and I learnt the very exciting news that I was to be the recipient of this year’s Templeton Prize. Of course, I am greatly honoured by the award, for which I am deeply grateful and which represents a recognition of my work that gives me profound satisfaction.

I have spent half my life working in theoretical elementary particle physics, concerned with using mathematics to understand the behaviour of the smallest bits of matter. In 1979, I resigned my chair in Cambridge to take up a very different vocation, as I began to train for the priesthood in the Church of England. I always want to emphasize that I did not leave physics because of any disillusionment with the subject. I value its insights and I seek to maintain an intelligent interest in its advances. I simply felt that after 25 years I had done my little bit for science and it was time to try to do something different.

I have been a Christian believer as long as I can remember and religious faith is central to my life, so that the transition to becoming a clergyman seemed a natural one, both to me and to my wife Ruth — for the decision was, of course, a joint one. After a few years of service in parish life, I returned to the academic world of Cambridge because by then I had come to the conclusion that thinking and writing about how science and religion relate to each other was central to the fulfilment of my new vocation.

I want to take science and religion with great and equal seriousness. I see them as complementary to each other and not as rivals. The most important thing that they have in common is that both believe that there is a truth to be sought and found, a truth whose attainment comes through the pursuit of well-motivated belief. Of course, the two forms of enquiry view reality from different perspectives, science studying the processes of the world, while religion is concerned with the deeper issue of whether there is a divine meaning and purpose behind what is going on. I believe that I need the binocular approach of science and religion, if I am to do any sort of justice to the deep and rich reality of the world in which we live. I think of myself, and of some of my colleagues in this task, as being “two-eyed” scientist-theologians.

One important difference between science and theology is that the former subject is cumulative. I am just an ordinary physicist but, because I live at the beginning of the twenty-first century, I know much more about the universe than was ever possible for Isaac Newton, great genius though he was. I do not



Rev. Dr. John C. Polkinghorne with Sir John Templeton at the Templeton Prize Press Conference.

need to read the *Principia*, despite its being one of the great intellectual classics of all time. In the sphere of religion, it seems to me that matters are somewhat different. I certainly need to read the Bible. All faith traditions look back to their foundational events and the resulting conversation has to range across the centuries, for it cannot just be confined to the contemporary scene alone. All generations have brought their own insights to the theological task and these must not be lost to scholars in the present, though they may need re-evaluation in the light of

It has been a privilege for me to seek to contribute to that contemporary conversation. I have to say that I love writing. Bishop John Robinson, of *Honest to God* fame, was a great friend of mine. He once said to me that he could not think without a pen in his hand. I knew exactly what he meant. Ideas buzz around in one's mind but the act of writing is the act of crystallization. You have to decide precisely what it is that you want to say. I value that process of clarification very highly.

All generations have brought their own insights to the theological task and these must not be lost to scholars in the present, though they may need re-evaluation in the light of contemporary knowledge.

contemporary knowledge. Two of my great theological heroes are Augustine and Aquinas. Progress comes not from abandoning the past, but from its consonant incorporation into the present. Of course, we cannot just take the insights of past thinkers without subjecting them to our own analysis. Each generation has to take the understandings of faith and make them its own, in its own day and in its own way. For us in the twenty-first century this means that the dialogue between science and religion is of great significance.

One of the most pressing contemporary issues is to understand how the great world faith traditions should relate to each other. I think that a shared concern with science can provide a fruitful place of mutual meeting. One of the valuable projects currently supported by the John Templeton Foundation is "Science and the Spiritual Quest," an initiative formulated exactly along these lines. I was involved with a SSQ Conference when I was in Rome and learnt the wonderful news of my Templeton Prize. I am deeply grateful for the honour that has been done me and for the further opportunities that it will provide.

Press Conference

NEW YORK CITY, MARCH 14, 2002

Q: What are your plans for the prize money?

A: I was hoping somebody might ask that question. It seems to me that there is a really growing body of activity in the area of this interaction between scientific understanding and spiritual understanding. There are very intelligent and able young people entering the field, many are doing PhDs in the subject. I would like to use the Prize to assist post-doctoral work in this area. It is at the postdoctoral level usually in academic work that initial fruitfulness really comes into flower. I should like to do that and I should like to do it in the setting of the University of Cambridge not just because it is my own university, but also because I think it is a good place to do these things. We have many resources there, theological, religious studies, many scientific resources, history and philosophy of science also. In broad terms, that's what I hope to do with it. I don't have detailed plans at the moment because I couldn't exactly go to my friends in Cambridge and say what would you do if you had 700,000 pounds to spend and they'd say what makes you think you have.

Q: In the Islamic world in the 8th century we know they had a great flourish of scientific inquiry and a tremendous interest in cosmology. That seems to have totally disappeared from the Islamic faith in the last 1,000 years. Can you comment on that aspect of Islamic studies.

A: It's certainly true that Islamic scholars both preserved a great deal of pre-scientific thinking, particularly Aristotle, and also of course developed ideas further in their own way. In the later Middle Ages, particularly in Spain, there was a very interesting period in which representatives of all three Abrahamic faiths — Judaism, Christianity and Islam — all interacted with each other in ways that were fruitful and important. In fact I'm involved in helping to found an

international society of science and religion which we hope to be truly international and truly interfaith and we plan to hold our first meeting in southern Spain precisely for that reason, because it is such a significant part of the world. These things fluctuate — Islam has not been absent from the scientific field. In fact, I did my PhD at Cambridge under Abdus Salam, a Pakistani physicist who later on won the Nobel Prize for Physics. I hope that we shall see more interfaith developments, and of course, the Jewish and Christian world have had a long, if troubled, history of mutual engagement. So I hope that the Abrahamic faiths will get together again, but not just the Abrahamic faiths for we need also to talk to our friends from the Asian religions as well. It's a very developing thing. But you're right, and people sometimes speak of the Middle Ages as being the Dark Ages, but from that point of view they were the light ages, when there were these powerful and fruitful interactions between different faith traditions.

Q: In the field of disarmament security, the question for me is that science, while in many ways enhancing world welfare, in many areas is threatening our very existence, especially in the last few days the talk about new nuclear weapons. How in your view can these multifaith communities moderate their drive or turn it around? It seems that unless this is done, all the progress we are making in other fields of science becomes negative and an accidental nuclear blast would take care of all of that. How can your kind of ideas best bring to bear on these issues?

A: This is an extremely important question. Science itself produces knowledge and knowledge I think is always a good thing better than ignorance. But technology, the lusty offspring of science, takes science and turns it into power. And power is much more ambiguous, because there are some things you

should do and some things that you shouldn't do. And if we are to make the right choice we have to add wisdom to knowledge and power, so that we have the ability to choose to refuse the bad. Not everything that can be done should be done. Science itself does not trade in wisdom but the world faith traditions, with their long histories of ethical reflection, certainly do. I do not claim a monopoly for religion in this area, for our humanist friends also are concerned with issues of moral responsibility, but I do think the world faiths have much to offer in facing these complex and important issues.

Q: What do you think about the matter of creationism, particularly in North America?

A: I have to say that this is a matter that gives me, as someone who wishes to take both religion and science with great seriousness, a great deal of sadness and perplexity. My Christian brothers and sisters who maintain this point of view are teaching things that seem to me ill-motivated from the point of view about what we know about the history and process of the world. There are serious issues to think about. I have absolutely every reason to believe that life started about three and a half billion years ago. It started very simple and it's become very rich and complex. It's become so at least partly through a process of natural selection. I don't think we know for sure scientifically or otherwise that the conventional Darwinian story is the whole story. To enquire whether there are other processes at work in the developing history of life is an extremely interesting scientific question to ask quite apart from any theological questions about the meaning of evolutionary history.

I want people to be fair-minded and truth-seeking in the way they approach these issues. I have to say that creationism particularly if you understand that in a very narrowly defined way associated say with things like a 6,000-year-old earth and so on, in my view is attempting to bind on people burdens that they should not be asked to bear. And I am spiritually upset

by such a procedure. Not only because it involves a certain denial of truth, but also it introduces a very brittle state of mind. Where if somebody suddenly comes to the conclusion that the earth is older than 6,000 years then there is always a danger that all their religious and spiritual beliefs will go with it and the whole thing will shatter and that certainly is not necessary. And so I have to say I'm saddened. If I have a hope for the 21st century, I hope that creationism in that narrow sectarian sense will actually fade away.

Q: So much of your writing seems to be a joyous celebration of the concept of continuous creation and I wonder if you could say a word about how that is a fruitful and freeing idea for people who would make progress both in science and religion.

A: Yes, I do find that a helpful idea and I derive quite a lot of my thinking in that area actually from two previous Templeton Prize winners whose photographs are over there, Ian Barbour and Arthur Peacocke, both of course senior friends of mine. Creation is what God is doing in the world. And what God does in the world is not just the Big Bang and retire and let things get on with it, but God is continually at work in the unfolding process of creation. And I see that process of creation as being a sort of grand improvisation in which the creator and creatures all play their part. You know, in 1859 Darwin published *The Origin of Species* and there is a sort of folk myth assiduously propagated in some circles that that was a moment of head-on collision between scientific light and religious darkness. And that is absolutely historically ignorant and untrue. There was considerable division in the scientific community about Darwin's ideas in the beginning and there was a variety of views in the religious community.

An Anglican clergyman, Charles Kingsley, coined the phrase within a year or two of publication of the *Origin* that exactly encapsulates the theological way of thinking about an evolving world. He said no doubt God could have snapped his divine fingers and brought into being a ready-made world. But God had done

something cleverer than that in making a world that could continuously make itself. That's the continuous unfolding. God endows the world with great potentiality, with great fruitfulness, but at least partly leaves it to these creatures to realize and bring about that world.

I find that a very satisfying insight and it's satisfying because it coheres with a notion of God as being the God of love. The God of love does not create a divine puppet theater in which God pulls every string and all the creatures just jump to the divine tune, but God creates a world in which creatures can be themselves and even make themselves.

Q: Your answers sound like this new variation called intelligent design which is trying to work its way into the classroom. Can you comment about that?

A: Intelligent design is different from the sort of narrow creationism that I've been describing. It raises actually very interesting scientific questions. Somebody like Michael Bebe thinking about various molecular biological processes thinks that he can detect in some of them what he calls irreducible complexity. That is to say that they involve a number of components but he can't see how the process would have any value unless all the concurrents are in place at one go. The model of the mousetrap is one that he likes to use in explaining that. If that were really the case then it would be a very important scientific discovery and it would certainly require a re-evaluation of Darwinian thinking. Because evolutionary Darwinian thinking is a gradual step by step, small step by small step, process but if this picture of irreducible complexity is right, there are no small steps, you have to get there in one go.

So it's a very interesting scientific question. It seems to me, however, that the jury is out about whether it has been established or not. It requires a pretty deep understanding of molecular processes that I don't think we have.

And we've been there before. After the publication of the *Origin*, people were worried about what seemed to them to be the irreducible complexity, although they didn't use that phrase at that time, of the human eye, the wonderful delicate optical system, and Darwin himself was very much anxious about that. Now over the century that's followed since then, I think evolutionary biologists have produced pretty plausible scenarios by which they can see how, in this step by step way, a slightly light sensitive cell could eventually evolve into a fully formed eye. And moreover that has happened several times independently in the history of life — the insect eye is different from the mammalian eye.

So I think that putative example of irreducible complexity did turn out to be right. I don't think we know enough about molecular processes to know whether that's going to happen again or whether there is something really there. If there is something there it is a scientific discovery of Nobel quality. We'll have to wait and see, but intelligent design is not an irrational assertion. It raises an issue that in my view is not yet resolved but it's a much more intellectually serious set of considerations than so-called creation science.

Q: One of the discoveries of the 20th century is, of course, the computer — the creation of the computer — and I was amazed to read a book by Ray Kurzweil in which he projects the future of computers in the not too distant future as having a spiritual element connected to them and I would be fascinated to hear your comments on whether you think that will ever come to pass.

A: Well I'm pretty wary about those sort of projections. The claims of artificial intelligence — the more extreme claims, I should say — about artificial intelligence have on the whole proved to be somewhat hyperbolic over the years. It seems to me we have very good reasons to think that we are not ourselves computers made of meat. I think there are arguments that human thinking is more than computation. That's a point of view that's associated with Roger Penrose,

some of you I'm sure will know, in *The Emperor's New Mind*. It's also a point of view philosophically maintained by someone like John Searle. So I'm pretty wary of those claims. I think that human thinking itself is more than a computer could do. We know for example that emotional responses are a very important part of human personality — the work of Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, shows that. We'll wait and see what happens. If it did work out that way, it would be very interesting and I don't think it would be fatal to our spiritual or religious view of the world though it would certainly be surprising. I think it's very very primitive.

One of the people I knew a little bit was a very important physicist, Wolfgang Pauli, and he was a very sharp-tongued person and he used to wag his finger at people and he would say, "No credits for the future." In other words, he said, "Don't tell me what you're going to do tomorrow, tell me what you've done today." And I think we might say, "No credits for the future" to some of our friends in the AI area too.

Q: I value what is the effect of, shall I say, the right kind of religion — that's a terrible thing to say because everybody's religion is right — but what bothers me sometimes is the satisfaction with a scientific discovery which makes it possible for the scientist to leave his laboratory, go home and beat his wife. And on the other hand the discoveries surely in religion must have an effect on our daily life and our relationships with each other. In that regard I'm afraid I see more distance between the two than you do.

A: Actually I agree with you. I know I'm very keen on science. Of course science asks limited questions and makes limited demands upon it. And I believe very passionately in the existence of quarks and gluons as constituents of matter, but that doesn't affect my life in every respect.

Religious or spiritual understanding is a total understanding of the whole human person. I can't be a Christian believer without that affecting my life in all sorts of ways. You're right about that, that's an important difference, that's one of the reasons why spiritual discoveries are of much more significance even than scientific discoveries because they have these much more widespread implications for who we are and how we behave. So thank you for saying that, I agree with you.

Q: One thing I find fascinating and frustrating at the same time is every time one talks about some new scientific discovery, they were quoting something from the *Upanishads* or something from the *Gita* and saying well that was already known, especially in terms of the structure of the cosmos and also at the subatomic level. And I wonder what your thoughts on that. I mean conceptually, these thinkers have already mapped a map.

A: I'm a little bit cautious on hindsight discovery. Of course there are consonances and I think we would expect that if we think there is an ultimate reality to the ground of the existence of the world that we expect that there are certain measures of consonance between reality as we study it at one level and another. But I'm a little bit wary about these retrospective claims. I mean I'd be more impressed if someone had come along on the basis of the *Upanishads* or whatever and predicted the quark structure of matter beforehand. That would be very striking and would have saved us a lot of trouble, I might say.

Q: John, you've sparred a little bit with Steven Weinberg and the general feeling that the scientific community has about religion and science. Your position is that there is a kind of wistful longing and Weinberg says no he just doesn't care about it. Can you comment on that?

A: Yes, I don't think that everybody in the scientific world has a wistful longing for religion, and certainly Steven and I take a very different view of things. I want to say two things. One is I am by no means

dismissive of atheists like Steve, I think they are very clever people and they have very interesting and important things to say. But I do believe that theism explains more by believing that there is a divine mind and purpose in the world. For example, physical scientists are very struck with the beautiful, rationally beautiful, rationally transparent basic structure of the world. The sense of wonder at the sort of things that are revealed in our investigations is a very important payoff for doing science, and it seems to me that somebody from an atheist position has to just say, "well, that's just our luck, that's the way the world happens to be." But if you believe there is a mind behind it all, then that rationally beautiful order becomes intelligible as a reflection of the divine mind of the Creator.

The other thing I like to say is this. Steve is an old friend of mine and we meet each other from time to time and he does like talking about God which I think is interesting and which is encouraging. I don't believe in astrology and actually I don't have any friends who are astrologers, but if I did I really would not want to spend much of my time talking about astrology with them, I would just leave it. Some of my atheist friends, and Steven is by no means the only one, love talking about God. And so do I.

CLOSING STATEMENT BY

John M. Templeton, Jr., M.D.

AT THE TEMPLETON PRIZE PRESS CONFERENCE, NEW YORK CITY, MARCH 14, 2002

I want to say this has been one of the most dynamic and engaged exchange between your questions and your perspectives and our Prize winner that we have ever had. So we appreciate very much your coming.

I hope you'll take away a message that we think is very important which is that as we learn about the lives, and particularly the work of our various winners, we hope that will inspire millions of others as you reach your large audiences to also look at the questions of spiritual discoveries to not look at things as static and already known from the past, but to see that what we can learn from science can greatly contribute to our perspective about spiritual realities and the creator behind those spiritual realities.

In fact, we hope that some of you will be inspired to become nominees of Prize winners. The Prize winner needs to be a living person, the Prize does not encourage syncretism but rather an understanding of the benefits of diversity, it does not seek therefore a

unity of denominations or a unity of world religions, but rather seeks to encourage the benefits of understanding what we can learn from each other by questioning and by learning. And as you can also tell through the rich history of the Templeton Prize that there is no limitation of race or creed or gender or geographical background.

In your packets there is a brochure that tells more about the Prize and one of the important parts for those of you who may get excited about someone you want to nominate is our web site which is www.templetonprize.org. All of the information is available there should you or someone you know wish to make a nomination. We are very enthusiastic about bringing to light new people that we don't know about and perhaps the world needs to know about.

So once again thank you all for coming, this has been a very exciting exchange, and thanks again to our winner, Sir John Polkinghorne.

PRESENTATION OF THE

2002 Templeton Prize

AT BUCKINGHAM PALACE, LONDON, APRIL 29, 2002



The Duke of Edinburgh with the Rev. Dr. John C. Polkinghorne and his family and friends, at the Buckingham Palace ceremony.



The Duke of Edinburgh presents the 2002 Templeton Prize to the Rev. Dr. John C. Polkinghorne as John M. Templeton Jr., M.D. looks on.

Foreign Press Association Luncheon

LONDON, APRIL 30, 2002

In April 2002, Rev. Dr. John C. Polkinghorne was honored at a press luncheon at the Foreign Press Association in London, England. Attending members of the press were invited to ask Dr. Polkinghorne questions.

Dr. John M. Templeton, Jr., President of the John Templeton Foundation, opened the session with information about how the judges consider a Templeton Prize nominee's contribution to progress made during the prior year or during his entire career. Dr. Templeton reported, "The qualities sought in awarding the prize are freshness, creativity, innovation and effectiveness. Such contributions may involve new concepts of divinity, new organizations, new and effective ways of communicating God's wisdom and infinite love, creation of new schools of thought, or creation of new structures of understanding about the relationship of the creator to His ongoing creation of the universe to the physical sciences, the life sciences, the human sciences and the releasing of new and vital impulses into old religious structures and forums. The judges were very wise and perceptive in recognizing the extraordinary contributions that Dr. Polkinghorne has made."

Q: Dr. Polkinghorne, do you think that scientists and your colleagues are more or less amenable to ideas of religion than the non-scientific community?

A: That's a very interesting question. I think the reactions of scientists vary. My professional view is the majority of people I know in the scientific world have a wistful condition. They're wistful because many of them see that science certainly doesn't give you the whole story; it's part of the truth but not the whole truth. They are wary because they have a picture that religious belief is based on faith and faith is shutting your eyes and gritting your teeth, believing in such impossible things before breakfast, because



some unquestionable authority says that's what you've got to do. And they don't want to see that, I don't want to see that and you don't want to do that. So, fortunately I can explain to my scientific friends that I have motivations for my religious beliefs just like motivations for my scientific beliefs. When I left physics and moved closer to the ministry, I turned my core around as people say, a very distinct change, but not the search for the truth. The search for the truth is wherever they can believe.

Q: Following from that idea, you said the quest was staying the same, the search for truth (in both religion and science), but what about acceptable evidence? Will you ever get a way of having the subjunctive, the personal evidence, the belief if you like, in a way that the skeptical biologists can cope with? Is there a fundamental block there in the way you do science?"

A: I think there is an element of precariousness and a need for commitment in the search for scientific discovery. Twentieth century philosophy of science shows that science is discovering the truth about the world, but it's a more precarious search for truth than you might think in a 'plan' versus 'what's going on.' Obviously when you move into areas more deeply personal, you move into an area first of all where the unique becomes significant. In personal experience, we never have the same experience twice. We never hear Beethoven's fourth symphony played the same way twice, even if I play the same CD it won't sound the same. There is an inescapable uniqueness and particularity in personal life that makes those experiences, in some sense, more complicated. You lose that secret weapon of science, which is the old experiment, but equally of course we gain a depth in the sense that the personal experience is more profound in my view. I think we can search for truth. There is another difference between science and religion that comes in. I believe very comfortably in the existence of quarks and gluons, that's part of being a physicist, and I could, if there were time, try and share those beliefs with you. But they don't affect my systems; they don't make the laws that run my life. But religious belief, and again there are many other forms of personal belief, does make the laws beyond the merely intellectual, the merely competent.

Q: **Do you not think that knowledge has advanced by leaps and bounds since the late 1800s? If we're all here in a hundred year's time, do you not think that we wouldn't be asking these questions and you wouldn't be giving these answers because the amounts of knowledge that would have been accrued in the next hundred years would have rendered the questions and the answers almost irrelevant?**

A: I don't know if you shall know a good deal more in a hundred years time about a great number of issues. For example, that neuroscience will advance a good deal, and people will understand the workings of the brain, affecting what we do today. I'm not at all

sure that we should understand our experience of consciousness better, which seems to be quite a different question. Rather the information processing pathways, in our brain. So we will make some progress, but on deep human questions, whether there is a meaning or significance to life, what's happening, what's going on with your life, and that sort of thing, I don't think we have that sort of cumulative process. I mean in theology for example, there is no necessary implication that in the twenty-first century, theologians of whatever faith tradition would have a better understanding of things than basic figures in the past. There is a sort of dialogue across the century. We are enthralled with the past, indeed we were not at all in the present. In science we are. I know much, much, more about the universe than Issac Newton ever did. That's why I'm just an ordinary physicist and he, of course, was a great genius. But that key moment, the very special one, is a very limited form of human inquiry. I hope we can make progress in the area of deep and interesting questions; for example, is there a meaning and purpose in the world? is there a destiny beyond death? However, I'm not persuaded that it will be totally different in a hundred years time, from the sort of conversation we're having today.

Q: **The twentieth century saw lots of amazing scientific discoveries. Does science have a Holy Grail for the 21st Century?**

A: Interesting that you call it a Holy Grail, it's a signal of how indispensable religious terminology is when talking about things that are really important to people. Many people say that the next frontier is consciousness. They would say that science has conquered life; I don't think it's true. We don't really understand how life came about. Again, there is a choice, and I hope one day we will begin at least to have an understanding of why and by which life has developed. We never know what the next discovery is going to be.

Q: I've just come back from Brazil, and as you know there is a plague of AIDS in Brazil and in Africa. The people have been working with volunteers like my twenty-year-old daughter who is involved in trying to eradicate the disease and help people deal with it. Has God forgotten Africa, what is going on?

A: I don't think that God has forgotten the world, but I don't think that God's in total control of the world either. I think that God gives us the gift of love, and it's a dangerous and precarious gift. The problem with the gift of love is that it requires a certain degree of independence. One of the ways God wishes to work with the world is actually through the free, good choices of human beings. We make decisions on how we use human resources: for the relief of hunger, for the relief of disease, things of that nature. But overall, we don't do a very good job. I don't suggest for a minute that the problem of human suffering in the world is not a very serious and perplexing problem. It is the most difficult problem, holding people back in my view from forms of religious belief. It is also the most perplexing problem to those who are religious believers. I don't want to discount the problem, but I don't think it's all God's fault. To some extent it's the dark side of a life gift.

I'll give you an example. The fruitfulness of the tree of life has been driven by genetic inflection producing new forms of life. But exactly the same processes have enabled cells to mutate into these new forms of life, also allowing these cells to self-mutate and become malignant. The fact that this happens in the world isn't the creator acting callous or incompetent; it's the necessary by-product. You can argue whether it's worth the cost. But it's the necessary cost of the creativity of the three and a half billion year history of life. The world is complicated. We tend to think that there is good and evil in the world and that it would be easy to pull them apart; to throw away the evil and keep the good. The more scientifically we understand the questions of the world, the more we feel the presence of the dark side.



Q: What you are saying makes a lot of sense, but AIDS is of epidemic proportion in Brazil, I don't know how many people realize that. Yet it's being sort of hidden and the transmission is transgenerational. It's going across the placenta so babies are being born with AIDS.

A: I don't deny for a minute the anguishing character of what you're reminding us of, but I'm suggesting, that you have to ask the question "how is that to be dealt with?" Is it to be dealt with through loving response to ethical responsibility or is it to be dealt with through magic? Those seem to be the issues. Searching for the right thing, to change it all by eliminating the HIV virus. Of course science hasn't done enough and there's been a lot of resentment, especially because people haven't found the answer to these problems. I run out of insightful things to say when talking about the problem of human suffering, I think that the strangeness of the world is a reflection also of the curious way. The true way, a reflection of the gift of love from its creator, who is not a cosmic tyrant, or a capricious, costly magician.

Q: I'm just wondering where that answer leads us when we think of the personal God who one prays to. Should one be perhaps not praying for him to wave his magic wand as it were, but for us to be more compassionate or something?

A: I don't want to give a picture of God as simply a spectator of the world. I want to avoid the two extremes; both of which I think are bad theological mistakes. God the cosmic tyrant, the pocket master of the universe, who does everything. I believe that God interacts with the world, but does not overrule the world. I believe that one has to take this into account. I believe that what is involved in prayer is the offering of human will to act in alignment with the divine will. I believe that God acts providentially interested. I think that because of the way the human world and the divine worlds are aligned with each other, all things are possible. It's also true that things are not possible when these worlds are at cross purposes with each other. If I may use a scientific method for a moment, which I like to use in this area, it is laser light. What makes laser light so special and so powerful? It is because of coherence. All the waves of the light are in step; all the crests come together and add up or all the troughs come together and add down. If you have infrared light, the crests cancel troughs and they're out of step. I think in prayer we're seeking a laser light alignment of the human world with the divine world, to try and bring about change in the world.

possibility. No one can say which it is going to be. Only the person who has had the experience can say that was an experience of God's healing. It's a true mystery. It's part of the depth of the individual human particularity, which we have to recognize. I'm thinking about the nature of prayer and the consequences of prayer.

Now let's offer a tiny word about hope for the future, in particular a hope for dialogue between science and theology. The hope I have is that science and theology will provide a useful meeting ground for us to converse with each other. It's going to be long and painful, but I'm confident in the end, it will be a fruitful conversation. We must be on a serious path to initiate constructive dialogue. How we think about the physical world and its history is a serious and interesting ground on which both sides can relate to each other. Bringing people from different faith traditions in the same area of science to speak to one another is a goal of the John Templeton Foundation. We are organizing an international society of science and religion that will have its inaugural meeting in Granada, Spain this August. We really want this organization to be international and effective, truly ecumenical.

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The other thing I wanted to say quite briefly is this. Prayer is deeply personal. And everything that's personal involves the mystery of individual human destiny. When someone is very ill, people pray for that person's healing. How will it come? Well it may come in a variety of ways. Healing is really in all of us. That healing might come through some form of physical remission; that's usually what people think of. But it may come, as many pastors have experienced, through a person being helped to accept the imminent destiny of death. That is also a healing, a

Another thing is, it seems to me the dialogue, intact and original, has not only been increasing in intensity over the last thirty years or so, but also it has been increasing in seriousness and integrity. The obvious frontier relationships, creation and natural selection will always be important. But, within the last ten years, the most discussed subject in our community has actually been this question of divine action. Can we take the Divine seriously, believe that God does things to the world? We haven't reached agreed conclusions, but the discussions have been fruitful.

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