



# Life

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## HEALTH AND BEHAVIOR

# Templeton winner has faith: To err is human and divine

By Greg Barrett  
Gannett News Service

PRINCETON, N.J. — The winner of religion's most lucrative prize (nearly \$1 million) is a churchgoing agnostic who does not pray and does not consider God omnipotent or omniscient. Rather, the Creator must be a bit like us, and vice versa — we're bumbler.

How else to explain famine, suffering and disease? "I think there is nothing irreverent in that. It is part of the human condition; it is part of his condition, too," says Princeton University's Freeman Dyson, a British-born mathematician, physicist and futurist.

Dyson, 76, is the first to acknowledge he's not your typical winner of the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, an annual award founded in 1972. Before Wednesday's award announcement in New York, Dyson, who is so diminutive his suits appear to swallow him, called the

honor "undeserved and unexpected."

In nominating him for the Templeton, Dwight Neuenschwander, a physics professor at Southern Nazarene University in Bethany, Okla., credited Dyson for work that attempts to meld science and religion to a common goal of helping all humanity.

The author of eight books, Dyson works in a nondescript office at Princeton's Institute for Advanced Study, an Ivy League fortress of genius whose address — Einstein Drive — memorializes its most famous former resident. In a two-hour interview here, Dyson, an affable scientist quick to laugh, seemed genuinely surprised that his name would be linked to religious icons such as Mother Teresa (Templeton winner, 1973) and the Rev. Billy Graham (1982).

"Truly, this is absurd," he says. "I've done nothing, really, to deserve it. I'm not so seriously into religion, in a way. For me, religion is a way to live. It is not a set of beliefs."

Dyson is a humanitarian who wants science to focus its efforts on the poor and to work with religion as a social equalizer.

"To lift up poor countries, and poor people in rich countries . . . technology is not enough," he says. "Technology must be guided and driven by ethics if it is to do more than provide new toys for the rich."

He gives examples in *The Sun, the Genome, and the Internet: Tools of Scientific Revolutions* (Oxford University, \$22): Use the sun as cheap energy, use genetically engineered plants to convert sunlight into chemical fuel, and provide universal access to the Internet as a way for people to generate income wherever they live.

His attraction to religion and the church is not so much a matter of spirituality as it is one of community. He attends Nassau Presbyterian Church in Princeton for fraternity, not worship. Early in life, he decided most Bible stories were fables.

"There comes a time when you say this is all bull. Who really believes in Adam and Eve?" he says. "I don't know if that means rejecting a creator . . . but, very clearly, images of God are anthropomorphic."

Dyson is agnostic in the sense that, like many scientists, he believes that proof exists only in mathematical equations. He dares not prophesize or hypothesize on heaven and hell.

"An agnostic is really someone who does not know, and I don't know what of the New Testament is true," he says. "The point is, Jesus did live, and he did have amazingly good ideas."

Hearing that quote, Dyson's eldest daughter, Esther Dyson, an Internet entrepreneur and author of *Release 2.1: A Design for Living in the Digital Age* (Broadway Books, \$14), laughs. "Sounds like Dad. He has great moral courage and goodness. It is all internal and not because he thinks God told him" to behave a certain way.

Much of Dyson's theories today are of tomorrow, and his vision has such clarity that some people might think him mad. Early in the 22nd century, he says, mankind will be able to adapt life to another planet and live, say, on Mars.

Society is already seeing the beginnings of space colonization in biotechnology and the mapping of the human genome, he says. Trees and crops and all things that sustain life will be engineered to grow on Mars, where explorers will one day go "like on the Mayflower."

"And when we live on Mars, we won't want to walk around in spacesuits; we will want to be out in the open," he says. "That will require a bit of genetic engineering so our bodies will be adjusted to Mars, and that means we will be a different species." That, he says, will pose a far greater dilemma than cloning.

The Templeton is given for outstanding originality in advancing the world's understanding of God or spirituality. The prize was created by British investor and philanthropist John Marks Templeton, who believed that the Nobel Foundation overlooked spirituality.

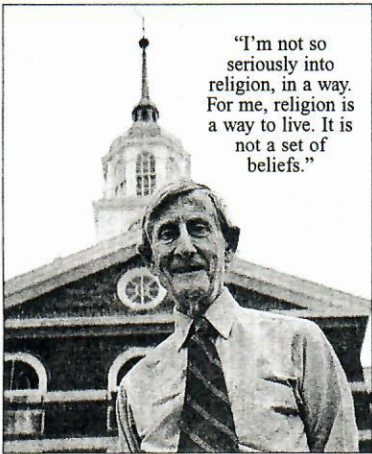
He founded the Templeton for perpetuity at a monetary level to always exceed the Nobel Prizes. This year, it is worth 600,000 pounds sterling, or about \$948,000, depending on the exchange rate May 9, when Britain's

Prince Philip hands Dyson his check during a ceremony at Buckingham Palace.

"Luckily it's not quite a million," Dyson says. "I'm very uncomfortable with that word — million."

Dyson is not saying what his plans are for the sudden

wealth, other than to help some of his six children (in addition to Esther, he has George, a boat designer and author; Rebecka, an emergency room radiologist; Emily, a cardiologist; Dorothy, a veterinarian; and Mia, a Presbyterian minister) and nine grandchildren.



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## A scientific revelation

Freeman Dyson was born in 1923 in Crowthorne, Berkshire, England, the second child of a composer/conductor father and a lawyer mother who doted on him and his older sister, Alice, a British social worker.

Dyson served as a civilian strategist for the Royal Air Force Bomber Command during World War II, and he later was a consultant for the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. His only college degree is a bachelor of arts in mathematics from Cambridge.

Dyson became widely known to science at age 24 when he tied together contrasting theories of quantum electrodynamics, or QED, which paved the way for rich toys — everything from lasers to laptop computers. Today, Dyson shuns cellular phones. "Oh," he says, "I still haven't gotten used to that."

The revelation about QED came to Dyson in the summer of 1948 as he traveled on a Greyhound bus from the University of California, Berkeley, to Princeton. The ride was comfortable, he says, but too bumpy to read or write. Somewhere between Nebraska and Illinois — and between fatigue and exhilaration — he synthesized the theories.

"In a flash, it all came to me," he says. "When we stopped in Chicago, I wrote it all down."

In 1965, physicists Richard Feynman, Julian Schwinger and Sin-Itiro Tomonaga shared a Nobel Prize for their work on QED, but if Dyson felt slighted, it doesn't show. "I didn't discover it," he says. "I just tidied it up."