



Spiritual recognition

Retired physicist who became Anglican priest wins \$1 million religious prize

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Gannett News Service

NEW YORK — The retired physicist, Anglican priest and newly minted Templeton Prize millionaire was holding court in a New York hotel room, six months and five miles removed from a notorious mass murder, when he hinted at a religious failing.

Had the World Trade Center towers been standing, the Rev. Dr. John C. Polkinghorne, 71, chosen Thursday as the 2002 winner of religion's annual \$1 million Templeton Prize, might have been able to see them from his 28th-floor room.

"It would be unwise to discount the possibility that there are evil spiritual forces in the world ... and why they are allowed to operate is a very difficult problem for which I don't have any answers," he said, reflecting on common perceptions of heaven and hell, God and Satan.

However, he added, "I don't think (evil forces) are going to win in the end, but I do think they are quite alive in astonishing degrees at the present."

For the fourth consecutive year, the award formerly known as The Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, which fancies itself the Nobel Prize for religion, went to a scholar with roots in Britain and in science. And in a wordy effort to better define itself, the 30-year-old award was renamed The Templeton Prize for Progress Toward Research or Discoveries about Spiritual Realities.

That is to say, cerebral tinkering that somehow bridges reality and spirituality. Or in Polkinghorne's case, science and theology, much like successive Templeton winners Ian Barbour (1999), Freeman Dyson (2000) and Arthur Peacocke (2001).

Other notable Templeton winners have included Mother Teresa (1973) and the Rev. Billy Graham (1982).

In Polkinghorne's many books, papers and lectures about science and theology, he describes the two as compatible, even complementary. For example, where religion may struggle to understand how something like cancer can thrive in a world created by a benevolent force, science defines genetic mutation.

"The very processes ... that have produced the rich flowering development of life on Earth will also make our cells become malignant," he said, espousing the belief that there is a yin for every yang.

Likewise, where science struggles to explain the rationale for a functioning world, religion offers answers through some texts that stand up to historical review.

"I want to take science and religion with great and equal seriousness," Polkinghorne said Thursday in a prepared statement at a news conference in New York. "I see them as comple-



Ed Bailey/Associated Press

British physicist Rev. Dr. John C. Polkinghorne, left, is congratulated by Sir John Templeton on Thursday in New York. Polkinghorne of Cambridge, England, has won the 2002 Templeton Prize for Progress Toward Research or Discoveries about Spiritual Realities.

mentary to each other and not as rivals.

"The most important thing 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."

Polkinghorne was an expert of quantum physics and a noted professor of mathematical physics at England's University of Cambridge when he made a career change at age 49. When he told physicist friend and philosophical adversary Steven Weinberg that he planned to train for the priesthood, Weinberg recalls being stunned.

"I was with my wife sitting in his kitchen in Cambridge when he said he was going to take holy orders ... and I had a vision of John and (wife) Ruth preaching to the natives in some uncomfortable part of the world," said Weinberg, winner of the 1979 Nobel Prize in Physics and a professor of physics at the University of Texas at Austin.

Instead, Polkinghorne became a parish priest and later the president of Queens College at the University of Cambridge. He retired in 1996, but continues to write and lecture today.

"I have argued about religion with him in a friendly sort of way," Weinberg said, "but I am really happy he got the (Templeton) prize. He is sincere and intelligent and eloquent."

And wrong, say scientists who believe there is no divine design to the world.

"It seems to me that one of the great services that science has done for mankind is to weaken the hold that religions have on people," Weinberg said. "I would like to see that continue rather than to see the differences ... papered over, so I am quite hostile toward the aims of the Templeton Foundation."

Religious certainty in the wrong hands and in the extreme can be harmful, he said. "Whether it is from people flying airplanes into office buildings or people tearing down the temples ... or even worse, theocracies like Iran or Sudan or Afghanistan under the Taliban."

Polkinghorne said he will use his 700,000 pounds sterling (roughly \$1 million), to be awarded in a private ceremony April 29 at London's Buckingham Palace, to establish a post-doctoral fellowship for science and theology at the University of Cambridge.

The Rev. Dr. John C. Polkinghorne

■ **BORN:** Oct 16, 1930, in Weston-super Mare, Somerset, England.

■ **CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:** 1968 — Appointed professor of mathematical physics at University of Cambridge

1978 — Served one year as chairman of the Nuclear Physics Board

1981 — Ordained as priest in Church of England

1989 — Appointed President of Queen's College at Cambridge, retired seven years later

■ **ON LIFE AFTER DEATH:**

"I think we all go through a sort of intermediate realm (before heaven). If you learn anything from the way in which God acts in this world, you know that God is patient and subtle. He doesn't act by snapping the divine fingers."