

Priest, Once Physicist, Wins \$1 Million Religion Prize

By DENNIS OVERBYE

A particle physicist who resigned his professorship at Cambridge University 23 years ago to become an Anglican priest was named the winner of the \$1 million Templeton Prize, the annual award given by the John Templeton Foundation to advance spiritual matters.

The award, to the Rev. Dr. John C. Polkinghorne, 71, was announced yesterday at a news conference at the United Nations Church Center. The foundation said Dr. Polkinghorne's writings and lectures "have consistently applied scientific habits to Christianity, resulting in a modern and compelling new exploration of the faith."

Dr. Polkinghorne has written more than a dozen books, including "The Faith of a Physicist" (Princeton University Press, 1994) and the

newly published "The God of Hope and the End of the World" (Yale University Press). He portrays science and religion as complementary, united by their belief that there is a truth to be sought and found.

"They are both concerned with exploring, and submitting to, the way things are," he wrote in "One World: The Interaction of Science and Theology" (Princeton, 1986).

The foundation and the prize were established in 1972 by Sir John Templeton, the mutual fund billionaire and philanthropist, to promote the notion that progress in spiritual matters could be as real as progress in physics or cosmology, if the incentives were there. In addition to the prize, the Templeton Prize for Progress Toward Research of Discoveries About Spiritual Realities, the foundation sponsors a range of activities, including conferences on

science and religion.

Sir John set the value of his prize above that of the Nobels, to symbolize his belief that the potential benefits of spiritual advances were greater than those of material research.

In an interview, Dr. Polkinghorne said he had had a "humdrum spiritual life" and, unlike St. Paul, "no dramatic Damascus Road experiences." Raised in a devout family in

Weston-super-Mare, Somerset, in southwest England, he said he had always been a believer, and emphasized that he did not grow disillusioned with physics. He loves it, he said, and he appreciated the chance to apply his "modest talents," but by 1979 he felt that it was time to try something else. His interest in religion, he said, had been reawakened by a Bible study group, in which, he said, "I began to feel the power of theological thinking."

After being ordained as a priest in 1982, and serving a total of four years in two parishes, he returned to Cambridge as a dean and became president of Queen's College. He retired in 1996 and was knighted in 1997.

His new book examines prospects for an afterlife, suggesting that God will preserve souls in the form of information-bearing patterns in his memory after death and eventually resurrect them. In a recent article in The New York Review of Books, Dr. Freeman Dyson of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, himself a former Templeton winner, criticized this theology as too narrow, saying its answers were based on "the beliefs of a single tribe."

Dr. Polkinghorne said he was "mildly miffed" at that. "Of course I take a Christian perspective," he said. "Everyone has to have a point of view."