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By Diane Bondareff, AP

Truth seeker: George Ellis, long critical of apartheid, says the black majority's hope helped him find faith.

Spiritual honor for atheists' son

South African cosmologist
awarded 'religion's Nobel Prize'

By Greg Barrett
Gannett News Service

WASHINGTON — To hear George Ellis tell it, science and religion are ultimately united in the way they divide. Christian, Islamic and scientific fundamentalism all have the same effect: They polarize.

"You claim partial truth as the whole truth and you therefore dismiss the partial truths that other people might offer," said Ellis, a South African theoretical cosmologist and winner of this year's \$1.4 million Templeton Prize. "Religious fundamentalists are like scientific fundamentalists who think science is everything. What I am really about is trying to get people not to have fundamentalist positions."

The Templeton Prize for Progress Toward Research or Discoveries about Spiritual Realities, religion's version of the Nobel Prize, is the world's largest annual monetary award for individual achievement.

Ellis, a Quaker and a mathematician at the University of Cape Town, said at a news conference Wednesday in New York that he would use half his winnings for retirement and half for philanthropic causes such as aiding South African welfare and education programs.

Ellis, 64, is known for his activism and critical writings on apartheid. A scientist and the son of atheists, he credits the resilience and hope shown by the black majority in South Africa with giving him a sense of faith. Ellis was drawn to the Quakers' Religious Society of Friends because of its belief that partial truths are gleaned to make up the whole and that neither science nor any one religion has all the answers.

As a cosmologist, Ellis studies the origins and evolutions of the universe. He specializes in general relativity, a study made famous by Albert Einstein.

Ellis has written books about the homeless in South Africa, as well as dense texts about time, space and relativity, such as *The Large Scale Structure of Space-Time*, co-written with Stephen Hawking.

Past winners of the prize, which was established in 1972 by Sir John Templeton, include Mother Teresa (1973) and the Rev. Billy Graham (1982). Recently, the award has gone mostly to scientists and researchers.

