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Religion, science mesh

■ Inventor Charles Townes wins annual Templeton Prize

By RICHARD N. OSTLING
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NEW YORK — Charles Townes, co-inventor of the laser and a Nobel Prize-winner in physics, was named this week as recipient of a religion award billed as the world's richest annual prize.

Townes, 89, a professor at the University of California, Berkeley, won the Templeton Prize for Progress Toward Research or Discoveries about Spiritual Realities. The award is worth 795,000 British pounds — more than \$1.5 million — and Townes was honored for talks and writings about the importance of relating science and religion.

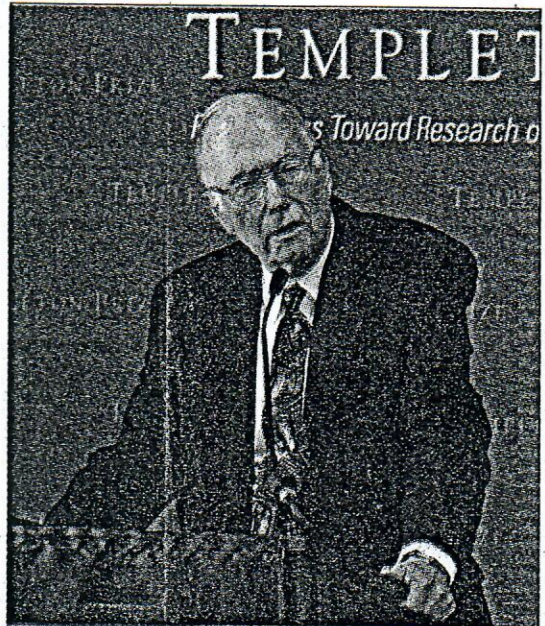
He first addressed that topic in 1964, the same year he shared the Nobel with two Russians for research on principles underlying the laser (light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation) and maser (microwave amplification by stimulated emission of radiation).

Townes said in remarks prepared for the announcement that his first talk about religion, to the men's Bible class of New York City's Riverside Church, was later published in IBM's Think magazine and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology alumni magazine.

After the second article, a prominent alumnus threatened to cease all involvement with MIT if anything like it were ever published again, Townes said. Years before, he said, his doctoral adviser at California Institute of Technology "jumped on me for being religiously oriented."

"Many people don't realize that science basically involves assumptions and faith. But nothing is absolutely proved," Townes said. "Wonderful things in both science and religion come from our efforts based on observations, thoughtful assumptions, faith and logic."

He has compared his flash 1951 discovery of



GREGORY BULL: ASSOCIATED PRESS

MAKING A CONNECTION: Charles Townes, a Nobel Prize-winning physics professor and co-inventor of the laser, was awarded the Templeton for his efforts to connect science and religion.

maser principles, while sitting on a park bench in Washington, D.C., with the revelations depicted in the Bible.

Townes said that, with findings of modern physics, it "seems extremely unlikely" that the existence of life and humanity are "just accidental." He plans to donate a major portion of the money to Furman University, the Pacific School of Religion, the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, the Berkeley Ecumenical Chaplaincy to the Homeless and Berkeley's First Congregational Church.