

Physicist to Get Templeton Prize For Progress in Spiritual Matters

By DENNIS OVERBYE

Dr. Charles Townes, a physicist who shared the Nobel Prize for helping to invent the laser, added another and most unusual prize to a lifelong storehouse of honors yesterday. In a news conference at the United Nations, he was announced as the winner of the \$1.5 million Templeton Prize, awarded annually for progress or research in spiritual matters.

Dr. Townes, 89, a longtime professor at the University of California, Berkeley, has long argued that those old antagonists science and religion are more alike than different and are destined to merge.

"Understanding the order in the universe and understanding the purpose in the universe are not identical, but they are also not very far apart," he wrote in a seminal paper titled "The Convergence of Science and Religion," published in 1966 in the IBM journal "Think."

In a statement the Templeton Foundation described Dr. Townes as

"a unique voice — especially among scientists — that sought commonality between the two disciplines."

The prize was established in 1972 by the investor and philanthropist Sir John Templeton, with a monetary value always to exceed that of the Nobel. Dr. Townes is to receive his prize at Buckingham Palace in May.

Dr. Townes often recalls that he came up with the idea that would become the laser while sitting on a Washington park bench in 1951. In his 1966 article, he said there was little difference between such epiphanies, when the subconscious hits on the solution to a problem, and the religious experience of revelation.

Dr. Townes, who described himself as a Protestant Christian, said there was no reason to expect that the Bible would be all correct. Asked about his beliefs, he said, "I have enormous respect and adoration for Christ and what he did," but he added that he did not know whether Christ actually was the son of God.

"He's closer to it than anybody else I know of," Dr. Townes said.