

# Philosopher wins £800,000 award for spiritual focus

By Arifa Akbar

A Canadian philosopher has won the world's richest individual award by promoting the message that the threat of terrorism could be solved by greater spiritual examination in Western and Islamic countries.

Charles Taylor, 75, who won the Templeton Prize, and £800,000, yesterday, says lessons could be learned from terrorist acts, including the July 7 London bombings, if society focused more on understanding the role of spirituality – and how it can be misappropriated by extremists.

Professor Taylor, from Montreal, investigates people's desire to seek meaning and spiritual direction, and how this quest can sometimes end in violence. He says relying on a secular analysis of human behaviour has led Western nations to faulty conclusions and that spiritual examination is needed to combat the likes of al-Qa'ida.

"I think the reason why young children turn to vio-

lence in Gaza City is not just through socio-economic factors but also through the meaninglessness of their lives," he said yesterday. "They feel no purpose and people come along and offer them a 'cause'."

"Or take the people who were involved in the July bombings in London. What we know is that some were highly successful and integrated in British society and yet they did what they did, because they were excited by some greater cause of Islam on a global level. They were giving some sense to their lives by becoming fighters. We need to understand this 'dark spirituality' as the West is very unschooled in this."

Mr Taylor, professor emeritus of political science at McGill University, said America had refused to talk with moderate Muslims after September 11 and Washington only "strengthened recruitment for al-Qa'ida with its invasion of Iraq."

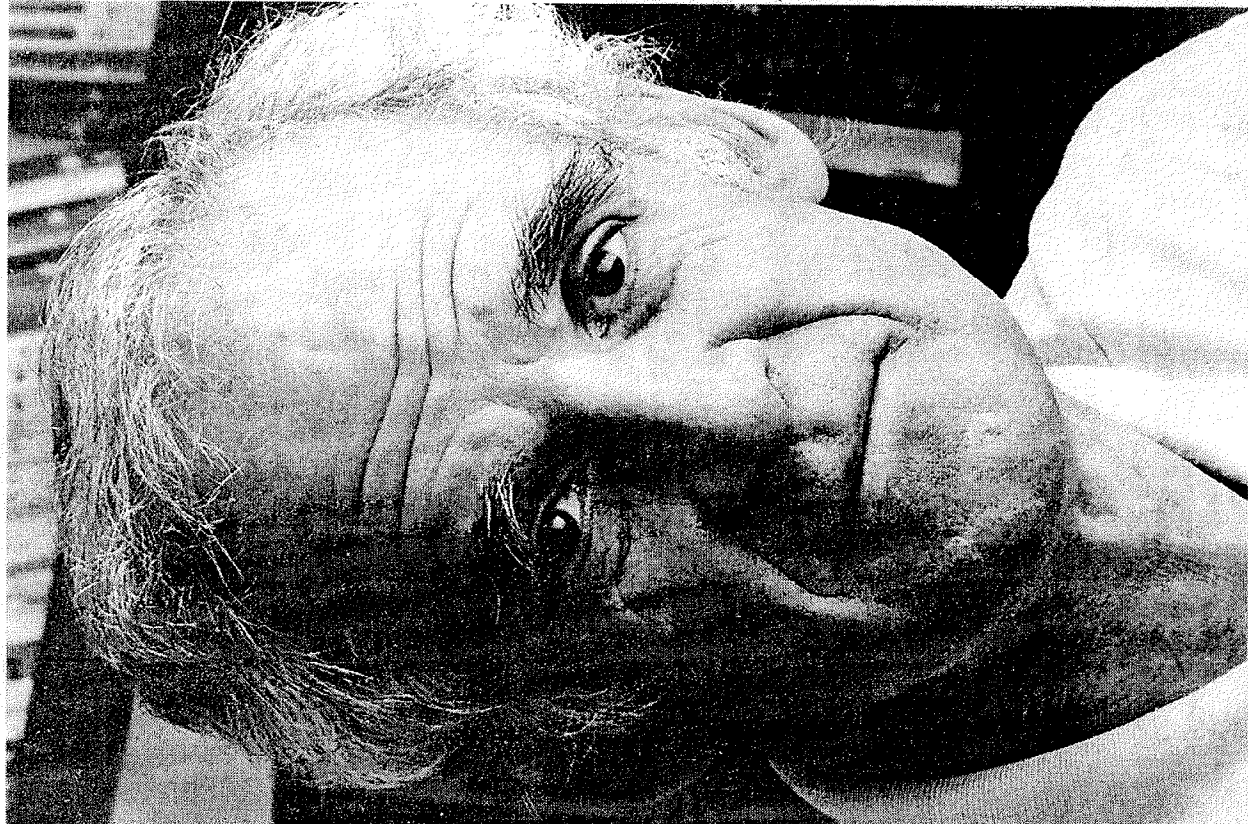
"We need to understand what moved people in the direction of violence and terrorism rather than quash

the voices of modern Muslims who criticised America after 9/11.

"There are certain kinds of hungers that people have, including a sense of meaning in life, that comprises the spiritual dimension. These terrorists were motivated by this need to be connected to a big cause. It is a hunger for meaning which is found in this cause that pushes them to acts of terrorism. The only way they can be prevented from heading for terrorism is to have a better answer to the meaningfulness of life," he said.

He will receive his prize in May at a ceremony in Buckingham Palace. The Templeton Foundation was founded by a US-born British financier, Sir John Templeton. Sir John congratulated Professor Taylor yesterday, and said the academic had "staked an often lonely position that insists on the inclusion of spiritual dimensions".

The first prizes were won in 1973-74 by Mother Teresa of Calcutta, and Frère Roger Schütz of the Taizé community in Burgundy.



Charles Taylor: 'We need to understand the dark spirituality of violent extremists'

## Templeton winners

**John C Polkinghorne, 2002**

Former professor of mathematical physics at Cambridge, who resigned in 1979 to become a priest. Author of a number of books on science versus theology.

**Sigmund Sternberg, 1998**

Hungarian-born British philanthropist has consistently encouraged dialogue between faiths. Helped organise first papal visit to a synagogue and was influential in opening Vatican files relating to Holocaust.

**Michael Novak, 1994**

Pioneer in the theology of economics, whose books are said to have influenced Pope John Paul II, Margaret Thatcher, Lech Walesa and Vaclav Havel.

**Charles W Colson, 1993**

Former special counsel to Richard Nixon who set up the organisation Prison Fellowship after serving a sentence for crimes related to the Watergate scandal.

**Michael Bourdeaux, 1984**

Defender of religious freedom in Eastern Bloc countries and expert on destruction of religion during the Cold War.

**Sarvepalli**

**Rachakrishnan, 1975**

President of India 1962-67. Oxford professor of Eastern religions and ethics, and advocate of non-aggression.