

# Templeton religion prize to philosopher Charles Taylor

The Canadian thinker has written about the search for meaning in increasing secular times.

By David O'Reilly  
 INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

The John Templeton Foundation yesterday awarded its annual Templeton Prize for progress in religion and spirituality to Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor.

Taylor, 75, has written extensively on how the notion of self evolved in Western culture, with particular attention to the modern search for meaning in an increasingly secular culture.

In awarding the \$1.5 million prize, foundation president John M. Templeton Jr. noted that Taylor throughout his career had "staked an often lonely position that insists on the inclusion of spiritual dimensions in discussions of public policy, history, linguistics, literature and every other facet of humanities and social sciences."

The foundation, based in West Conshohocken, has awarded the prize since 1973. Previous recipients have included Mother Teresa, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the Rev. Billy Graham, and numerous scientists with an interest in spirituality, including physicist Freeman Dyson.

Templeton announced the

prize at the Church Center for the United Nations in New York. It is the largest cash prize awarded to an individual each year. Taylor is the first Canadian to win it.

In an interview Tuesday, Taylor called his choice a "great surprise," because he associated the prize more with cosmologists like Dyson.

But he said he "supposed" that the foundation had chosen him because he had for so many decades been "running against the tide or consensus in sociology and political science and philosophy that you could just ignore spirituality as a part of the human dimension."

He echoed that view at yesterday's news conference.

"The divorce of natural science and religion has been damaging to both," he said. "We urgently need new insight into the human propensity for violence," including "a full account of the human striving for meaning and spiritual direction."

A practicing Roman Catholic, Taylor was for many years a professor of moral philosophy at Oxford University. In recent years he has been professor of political science philosophy at McGill University.

Known as a "communitarian" political theorist, he is perhaps best known for his 1989 work, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*.

Part history, part philosophy, it presents a broad look at western civilization's evolving notion of the good.

In it, Taylor observes how pa-

triotism, religion, class and ethnic identity traditionally served as broad "horizons of meaning" by which individuals defined themselves and found meaning and purpose.

But, he says, the search for meaning and personal "authenticity" has become a lonelier, more subjective enterprise in the modern era, with a concomitant loss of community.

The prevailing western ethic of individualism has resulted in a "centering on the self" he writes in *Sources of the Self*, and that can lead to a "shutting out, or even unawareness, of the greater issues or concerns that transcend the self, be they religious, political historical.

"As a consequence," he writes, "life is narrowed or flattened."

Amy Gutman, president of the University of Pennsylvania, yesterday called Taylor's selection for the prize a "spectacular choice," and praised him in a phone interview as a "brilliant political philosopher" who has been "a significant influence on my thinking."

Gutman, herself a prominent political philosopher, edited and wrote the introduction to Taylor's 1994 book, *The Politics of Recognition*, about multiculturalism.

Taylor was nominated to the Templeton Foundation by the Rev. David A. Martin, emeritus professor of sociology at the London School of Economics.

The Templeton Foundation was created by the American-born mutual fund developer Sir John M. Templeton. It spends about \$45 million annually for research into science, religion, and what his son, John Templeton Jr., described Tuesday as "progress in the really big questions of life."

Sir John M. Templeton, 94, who makes his home in the Bahamas, retired as chairman of the foundation several years ago.

This year's prize will be officially awarded to Taylor by Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, in a private ceremony May 2 at Buckingham Palace.

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Charles Taylor will receive the \$1.5 million prize in May.

