



1991 TEMPLETON PRIZE FOR PROGRESS IN RELIGION

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Of God and Mammon

Big money awaits a religious prizewinner

This afternoon in New York, a prominent British Jew will be given the world's largest monetary award in recognition of his achievements in advancing the world's understanding or love of God.

He will be the first Jew to win the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, worth £410,000.

The award was created in 1972 by Sir John Templeton, the Wall Street financier and religious philanthropist, to fill what he felt was a void in existing awards. The first winner, in 1973, was Mother Teresa. Last year the prize was shared by Baba Amte, a Hindu lawyer who has devoted his life to advancing the cause of India's lepers, and Charles Birch, an Australian biologist researching issues of science and faith.

Sir John, aged 78, was knighted by the Queen in 1987 for charitable services. He funded Templeton College at Oxford.

He was born in 1912 in Winchester, Tennessee, the son of a lawyer and cotton grower. He won a place at Yale in 1930 to read economics. After a Rhodes scholarship took him to Oxford, he started on Wall Street in 1937.

He heads a worldwide financial empire of more than 64 mutual funds managing more than \$16 billion. He left Britain and became naturalised some years ago.

To underscore the importance of the Templeton Prize, he stipulated it must always be larger than the Nobel. Most of the winners, who include Alexander Solzhenitsyn, have used the money to further the causes which brought them to the attention of the Templeton Foundation. Mother Teresa invested her prize money in the Missionaries of Charity, founded by her to help homeless children in Calcutta. Billy Graham devoted his prize in 1982 to helping itinerant third world evangelists.

One of the stated goals of the award is to increase sensitivity to the diversity of religious thought. The nine judges are instructed to consider all faiths. Sir John, a Presbyterian elder, does not take part in choosing the winner.

Sir John believes the prize is not for saintliness or good works, but for progress. One of his goals has been to "influence educated people to wake up to religion". This year's winner can be guaranteed to attempt to do that.

RUTH GLEDHILL