

RELIGION

Physicist Paul Davies garners award for initiating
new dialogue between science and theology

Winner of Religion Prize Breaks the Mold

By Ron Scherer

Staff Writer of The Christian Science Monitor

NEW YORK
WHEN physicists get stuck, they have nowhere to go but theology," says Paul Davies.

Last Wednesday, being stuck netted Mr. Davies, a theoretical physicist, the major award in religion — the \$1 million Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion.

Davies is different from most of the past winners, such as Billy Graham and Mother Teresa. He is not religious in the traditional sense.

Davies doesn't go to church. He considers the Bible an interesting collection of stories and ideas, but deems the Bible "not God's manifesto." He finds Jesus' message of love "very instructive," but adds that he has real difficulty with the concepts of the Trinity and Jesus as God incarnate.

Instead, Davies is considered one of the world's brilliant scientists. He has done original research on such phenomena as black holes in space and the Big Bang — widely viewed as the start of the physical universe. He has written 22 books, including his most recent, "About Time: Einstein's Unfinished Revolution" (Simon & Schuster). He is currently a professor of natural philosophy at the University of Adelaide in South Australia.

Davies' scientific work has led him to ask deeper cosmological questions. It is those questions that have linked him with the religious world.

"He has initiated a new dialogue between science and religion that is having worldwide repercussions," said the Rev. Wilbert Forker, a Methodist minister and executive vice president of the Templeton Prize, at a press conference on March 8.

Some of Davies' books, such as "The Mind of God" (Simon & Schuster), are written for the general public. "In the books he has raised interesting questions, in an open way, that fall within religion in general and humanity's quest for meaning in God," says Robert John Russell, one of the Templeton judges and a professor of theology and science at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, Calif.

Mr. Russell, the founder of the Center for Theology and the Nat-

ural Sciences in Berkeley, sees Davies as being at the center position between atheists and opposing creationists, who believe in the literal word of the Bible.

Davies' interest in theology started when he was a teenager growing up in East London. He would lie awake at night pondering the basic questions of life: "Who am I? What am I doing here? Is there life after death?"

He was dissatisfied with the answers he heard from the local



PAUL DAVIES: The Templeton winner, a theoretical physicist, is not religious in the traditional sense.

vicar and his parents. He remembers being deeply influenced by Anglican Bishop John Robinson's book, "Honest to God." Robinson began the "God is dead" debate of the 1960s.

The young Davies was also a keen reader of astronomer Fred Hoyle, an atheist who still expressed a sense of awe about the universe.

By his mid to late teens, Davies says he remembers thinking, "If I really wanted to get to the heart of the matter, I would have to make a career as a professional scientist." In 1970, he received his doctorate in theoretical physics from University College in London.

Once he became enmeshed in science and physics, he found that, over the past 300 years, science has often had a message of despair: "It has created a paradigm that we are lumbering on ... in a universe that is dying," Davies explains.

But Davies says he has tried to show that there is a different way of looking at the world. Instead of despair, he states, "there is a more hopeful picture of progres-

sive events, where humans are not the center of the universe, not the pinnacle of creation, and can regain control of their destiny."

Davies believes a lot of people like science because they feel it "demystifies" the universe. "They think God hides in mysterious corners," he explains. Davies, however, views science from another angle: The more humanity learns about the universe, the more mystery science dispels, "the more wonderfully organized everything seems to be, the greater evidence we have of some underlying meaning or purpose," he says.

Rather than looking at the creation of the universe as evidence of God, he believes man needs only to look at the laws themselves as proof. To Davies, the laws governing the universe show a "self-creating" and "self-organizing" universe.

Take the chaos theory, for example. On the surface the notion of an "unpredictable" universe could be disturbing. But to Davies, chaos theory shows "the creative element of nature." He sees chaos as a sign that within a deterministic system, "there is still some openness."

Central to Davies' message is the idea that life is not an accident, a chemical reaction on the right planet at the right time. Instead, he maintains "the emergence of life and consciousness are very significant manifestations of the rather special nature of the laws of physics."

Thus, there should be life on other planets. In fact, it is essential to Davies to find extraterrestrial life to show that life is not an accident, but is built into the laws of the universe.

Nevertheless, he considers finding life in other solar systems a long shot (and he doubts there is any other life in our solar system). But, he adds, searching for such life would be worthwhile, "since it would be the scientific discovery of all time." In fact, in the coming years, Davies says he plans to devote more time to such a search.

He asks, "Are we the only creatures to gaze at the stars and ponder the meaning of existence, or do we share the cosmos with a myriad of reflective beings?"

Davies is confident of the answer.

WORTH NOTING ON TV

By Alan Bunce

■ SUNDAY

5 American Handguns — 5 American Kids (HBO, 10-11 p.m.): Partly, perhaps, to counter its own image as a purveyor of shows even more violent than the ones on broadcast TV, the cable industry is launching a commendable and remarkably broad initiative the week of March 19.

Called "Voices Against Violence," it's a collaboration among some 50 cable networks to offer shows (please check local listings) in many formats that address violence in society and in the media, as well as special items like a couple of anti-violence announcements that President Clinton has recorded for the occasion.

One example of the programming is "5 American Handguns — 5 American Kids," a documentary offering five case studies grimly illustrating the impact of one form of violence — handguns — on families. Narrated by Beau Bridges, the program unhesitatingly relates these personal tragedies to the national problem of handgun availability, pointing out, among other statistics, that it is five times more likely a child will take his or her own life when there's a gun in the house.

■ TUESDAY

Schoolbreak Special (CBS, 4-5 p.m.): One of the brighter spots in network TV's programming for young people is "Schoolbreak's" honest efforts over the years to probe and help solve their personal and social problems. This edition, "What About Your Friends" is the first program whose executive producer, writer, director, and cast are all African-American.

The story is about three high school girls from varied backgrounds who are close friends and dream of going to Spellman College together. As they deal with the reality of enrolling, hard and sometimes ironic facts interfere: One girl from a middle-class family can't afford the tuition, for instance, while a poor girl gets an enticing full scholarship to UCLA.

How they deal with this new world of experience and struggle to retain their friendship through it all is the heart of the story.

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