

\$1.4m religion prize to science writer

By PHILLIP McCARTHY
Herald Correspondent

NEW YORK, Wednesday:
In the past it's been awarded to
Mother Teresa and to Water-
gate burglar Charles Colson.

But this year an Australian-
based academic is the winner
of a religious prize that is billed
as the world's most generous
annual award for professional
achievement.

Professor Paul Davies, a
mathematical physicist at the
University of Adelaide, has
won the 1995 Templeton Prize
for Progress in Religion, which
is worth more than \$1 million.

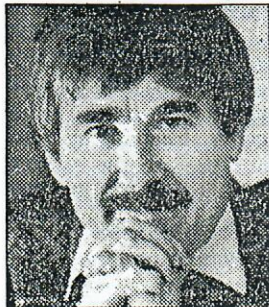
The prize was established in
1972 by the Anglo-American
financier and philanthropist
Sir John Templeton. The
endowment is set just above the
level of the Nobel Prizes,
which do not cover religion or
spirituality, and is topped up to
keep its rich status intact.

Professor Davies's win is to
be announced at a press confer-
ence in New York today. He will
be on hand to acknowledge his
jackpot award.

The prize's nine judges —
who included former US Presi-
dent George Bush and former
British Prime Minister Lady
Thatcher — cited his research
work in mathematics and phys-
ics that many theologians
believe has breached the barrier
between science and religion.

"In the process he has forged
scientific concepts that extend
well into the theological realm,"
the judges said in their citation.

Specifically, they said Pro-
fessor Davies had "developed
several important contribu-
tions to theories concerning
black holes, the nature of time,



the beginning of the universe
and other monumental ques-
tions of modern physics" that
made religion and science
more reconcilable.

In a statement prepared for
today's press conference, Pro-
fessor Davies, 48, said his
scientific career has spanned a
period when science had made
some amazing advances in areas
that had been previously consid-
ered the province of religion.

"The most obvious example
concerns the origins of the
universe in a so-called big
bang," he said.

"As late as the 1960s the big
bang was a mysterious and
largely untested concept.
Today we have strong evidence
from observational astronomy
that the entire universe came
into existence all at once about
15 billion years ago."

While the prize will be
announced today, the actual
presentation will be on May 5
at Buckingham Palace. The
prize's value is £650,000 (\$1.4
million).

London-born Professor
Davies, who has lived in
Australia since 1990, is the
second Australian resident to
win the Templeton Prize. In
1990 Professor Charles Birch,
of the biology faculty of the
University of Sydney shared
the prize. He was cited for his
work on science and faith.

Sir John Templeton made
his fortune with some of the
world's largest and most suc-
cessful investment funds. A
feature of his management
style was prayer. He sold the
funds and now lives in the
Bahamas.

He set up his fund and
endowed it so it could always
offer a prize worth more than
the Nobel Prizes, which he
believed unfairly excluded reli-
gion and spirituality from its
chosen disciplines such as
peace, literature and econom-
ics.

Previous winners of the
Templeton Prize include
Mother Teresa, the Rev Billy
Graham, Alexander Solzheni-
tsyn and former Watergate
burglar Charles Colson, who
was awarded the prize in 1993
for his work in setting up
prison ministries.