

SA academic wins \$1.4m religious prize

By PHILLIP MCCARTHY,
New York, Wednesday

In the past it has been awarded to Mother Teresa and Watergate burglar Charles Colson. But this year an Australian-based academic is the winner of a religious prize billed as the world's most generous annual award for professional achievement.

Professor Paul Davies, a mathematical physicist at the University of Adelaide, yesterday was awarded the 1995 Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, worth about \$1.45 million.

The prize will be presented to Professor Davies by the Duke of Edinburgh at a ceremony at Buckingham Palace on 5 May.

It 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.

The prize's nine judges — including former United States President George Bush and former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher — cited his research work in mathematics and physics 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. They said Professor Davies had "developed several important contributions to theories concerning black holes, the nature of time, the beginning of the universe and other monumental questions of modern physics" that made religion and science more reconcilable.

In a statement prepared for yesterday's news conference, Professor Davies, 48, said his career had spanned a period when science had made some amazing advances in areas that previously had been considered 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."

London-born Professor Davies, who has lived in Australia since 1990, is the second Australian resident to win the Tem-

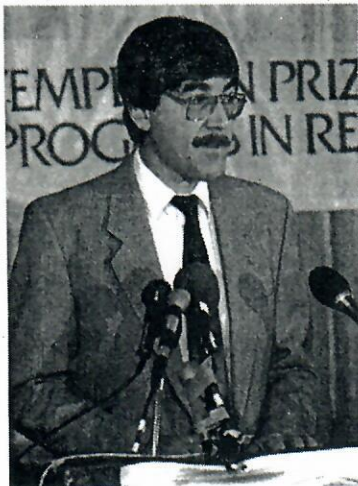
pleton Prize. In 1990, Professor Charles Birch, of the University of Sydney's biology faculty, shared the prize.

In his years as an academic in Britain and Australia, Professor Davies has published more than 20 books, including *The Runaway Universe*, *Space and Time in the Modern Universe* and *The Mind of God*.

His latest book, *About Time: Einstein's Unfinished Revolution*, is due out this month. It investigates unresolved aspects of the physics of time.

Sir John Templeton made his fortune with some of the world's largest and most successful investment funds such as the Templeton Growth Fund and the Templeton World Fund. 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 would always offer a prize richer than the Nobel Prizes because he believed the Nobel unfairly excluded religion and spirituality from its chosen disciplines such as peace, literature and economics.



Paul Davies: "monumental questions".

The prize's charter says it is awarded annually to a "living individual who has shown extraordinary originality in helping to advance the world's understanding of God and/or spirituality".

Previous winners of the Templeton Prize include Mother Teresa, the Rev Billy Graham and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

The most controversial winner was in 1993 when Charles Colson, the White House counsel convicted of Watergate felonies, won it for his work in setting up prison ministries.

In his statement, Professor Davies said he was honored to be a winner who was not a minister of religion.