

RELIGION



Paul Davies speaks at a news conference in New York after he was named winner of the \$1 million Templeton Prize.

When Theology Meets Cosmology

Physicist Wins Prize for Work on Science and Spirituality

By Bill Broadway
Washington Post Staff Writer

Australian physicist Paul Davies has a lot on his mind—things like God, the universe and the \$1 million he will pick up in May as winner of the 1995 Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. He also wonders whether the discovery of extraterrestrial life, when it occurs, will blow a hole in the Christian belief system.

"It's always been my position that the emergence of life and consciousness were not miracles, nor were they stupendously improbable accidents," said Davies, who explored the nature of the universe in his popular book *"The Mind of God: The Scientific Basis for a Rational World"* (1992).

"They are part of the natural outworkings of the laws of physics," he said. "Of course, one of the tests of that hypothesis is that these same laws, which are universal, should work out the same basic processes throughout the universe." That means earth has no exclusive claim on life forms that have minds and, perhaps, souls.

Contact with alien communities may be a long time coming, Davies said in a telephone interview before a news conference Wednesday in New York announcing his selection for the prize. But powerful radio telescopes such as those being used in the new Phoenix Project in Australia can pick up signals from anywhere in the galaxy and may be closing the gap, he said.

Davies rejects reports of UFO sightings because he finds it "extremely unlikely that interplanetary travel takes place. It's dangerous and expensive. Why bother to do it if you can exchange information using radio?"

Belief in UFOs, like belief in angels, satisfies a need "deeply rooted in the human psyche" that "superior beings exist in the sky or beyond the sky that act as intermediaries to God," he said. But personal accounts of alien sightings and abductions, however sincerely given, are not evidence of extraterrestrial life, he said.

In anticipation of scientific proof, which he thinks is probable, "some deep theological thinking needs to be done," said Davies, who frequently discusses religion and science with ministers but has found few who have formed an opinion on alien life. "It's amazing how little they've thought about it."

The discovery of thinking beings in other worlds would have all faiths reassessing their theological positions, he said. But it is particularly problematic for Christianity because of its position that Jesus is God incarnate. That belief, he said, "seems to tie the incarnation specifically to our species."

Could there be a savior for each species? Davies thinks not. "You have to wonder, if there are little green men, would God take on little green flesh? It gives a ludicrous view of the incarnation if it's repeated as a circus act all around the universe." Christians will have to decide whether evidence of alien life can be incorporated into their belief system or will "devastate" it, he said.

Davies, 48, is professor of natural philosophy at the University of Adelaide and the author of 20 books. He is the eighth scientist to win the Templeton Prize, which was created in 1972 by global investor John Marks Templeton because the Nobel prizes lacked a religion category.

An avowed theist, Davies places himself among an increasing number of scientists "who never go into a church or synagogue or a mosque but nevertheless are religious in the broadest sense." In *"The Mind of God,"* he wrote that "even hard-nosed atheists frequently have a sense of reverence for nature . . . that is akin to religious awe."

In a citation to be presented May 5 in a private ceremony at Buckingham Palace, along with the check, Templeton judges call Davies "one of the world's most brilliant scientists. He works at the forefront of research in fundamental physics and cosmology. . . . He has initiated a new dialogue between science and religion that is having worldwide repercussions."

That dialogue has helped reestablish a lost "link" between

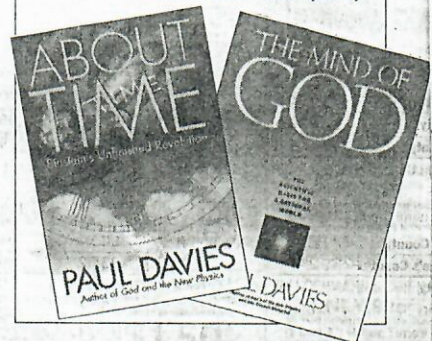
Davies Speaks . . .

"The physical species *Homo sapiens* may count for nothing, but the existence of mind in some organism on some planet in the universe is surely a fact of fundamental significance. Through conscious beings, the universe has generated self-awareness. This can be no trivial detail, no minor byproduct of mindless, purposeless forces. We are truly meant to be here."

—From *"The Mind of God"* (1992)

"Many people have an image of the epoch before the universe as a dark, inert, empty space. But for the modern cosmologist, neither time nor space existed before the big bang. The origin of the universe means the origin of space and time as well as matter and energy."

—From *"About Time"* (1995)



science and religion, said Wilbert Forker, vice president of the Templeton Foundation and coordinator of the prize.

The disciplines have been at odds for generations as fact-based science has challenged the "irrational" faith of Christianity and other religions. Davies argues that Western religions and science complement one another, having originated in the same tradition of Greek, Jewish, Islamic and Christian thought.

"I don't think science threatens or should threaten theology, because through science we learn more and more about how wonderful this universe is and that human beings have a place—not a central place, but we do have a place," Davies said.

In his latest book, *"About Time: Einstein's Unfinished Revolution,"* Davies pays tribute to the paradigmatic "religious" scientist. Albert Einstein often used the word God "in his deliberations on deeper issues," Davies said. Sometimes it was metaphoric, he said, but sometimes it was "beyond a way of speaking to a belief in some underlying order, some underlying purpose. Most scientists have this sort of feeling."

According to Davies, Einstein's greatest contribution to science and religion may have been his challenge of the long-held Newtonian theory of absolute time that is the same everywhere in a "clockwork" universe. In his theory of relativity, Einstein holds that the traditional concepts of past, present and future have flexible meanings depending on circumstances.

In answer to Einstein's question of whether God had any choice in creating the world the way it is, Davies answers yes: The world could have been different if God had chosen to make it so. Davies argues that the universe implicitly follows definite natural laws but is not a closed, mechanistic system with finite possibilities.

In the world according to Davies, where people go to See DAVIES, B8, Col. 5

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work every day, experience grief and joy and struggle with the meaning of life, that means free will exists. It means that we do have some choice, some measure of control over our lives even as the world evolves.

It also means that religion must be open to new discoveries and ideas.

"Religious fundamentalism is a terrible corruption of faith" because it allows for no change, he said. "We have to find a way, you might call it a kind of post-Christianity, of providing people—ordinary people, not scientists or theologians—a way in which they can live their lives with dignity without being tied to ancient texts and specific doctrines and different boring religious factions."

As science reveals more about such mysteries as black holes, supernovas, quarks and the big bang, the alleged moment of creation, it offers even more evidence of a "grand design" of endless complexity, Davies said. It disproves 300 years of belief that the universe is "nothing but a gigantic collection of stupid particles colliding like cogs in a machine and that human beings are locked in this cosmic juggernaut" stymied by fate and unable to alter their lives.

"Science can't do everything, and I'm not saying science can be on its own a latter-day religion," he said. "But it can provide a more reassuring framework than they've had so far, with a deeper underlying meaning and purpose."

Davies said he has "tried to be a champion" of a movement that forces people "to face up honestly and squarely to the results of modern science where they sometimes collide with or overlap with the concerns of theology." He plans to devote his time to research, writing and attending conferences, using the prize "to pay myself a salary the rest of my life."

When not traveling on a book or lecture tour, Davies lives in Adelaide with his wife and four children.

Past Templeton prize winners include evangelist Billy Graham; Watergate figure Charles W. Colson, who started the Prison Fellowship, a Christian ministry; Lord Jakobovitz, former chief rabbi of Great Britain and the Commonwealth; and the Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, founder of Rissho Kosei-Kai, a lay religious group in Japan. Last year's winner was Michael Novak, and a Roman Catholic scholar best known for his defense of American-style capitalism.

Among the nine judges for this year's 400 nominees were former president George Bush, an Episcopalian, and former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher, a Methodist.