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Philanthropist wins £750,000 for forging links between faiths

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SIR Sigmund Sternberg, a Jewish businessman and philanthropist, has won a £750,000 prize for his work in promoting dialogue between Christians, Jews and Muslims.

Sir Sigmund, donor to the Labour Party and executive chairman of the International Council for Christians and Jews, is to be awarded the Templeton prize for progress in religion, it was announced in New York yesterday.

Former winners of the Templeton, endowed by American businessman Sir John Templeton, include Mother Teresa and the British former Chief Rabbi, Lord Jakobovits.

Sir Sigmund is credited with improving Catholic-Jewish relations. He arranged for the Pope to visit a Rome synagogue and had a hand in the Vatican's recognition of Israel.

The judges praised his work

at the International Council of Christians and Jews and at the Sternberg Centre, Europe's largest Jewish cultural centre. "He has tirelessly promoted co-operation, harmony and understanding among religions."

He has gone on to found the Three Faiths Forum, comprising Christians, Jews and Muslims. It will be among those to benefit from the award, he said yesterday.

He made his fortune in metal, property development and computer software. He was born in Hungary in 1921 and attributes his interest in good works to his experience of anti-semitism.

"I grew up with the taunt of 'Jews killed Jesus', and that is not a good experience for a child to start their education with. I had nothing to do with the murder of Jesus. Why should I be blamed?" he said. "We've made tremendous progress in relations between Christians and Jews in the last 50 years."