

Francis Collins, champion of faith and science, awarded Templeton Prize

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(AP photo/Andrew Harnik)

Francis Collins, world-renowned geneticist and director of the National Institutes of Health, is the 2020 recipient of the Templeton Prize. The award, valued at \$1.3 million, honors individuals who use scientific advancements to answer the deepest questions related to humanity's existence and purpose.

Collins is perhaps best known for leading the Human Genome Project, which successfully mapped and sequenced the 3 billion DNA letters that compose the human genetic instruction book, and for advocating for the holistic integration of Christian faith and science. Today he is the longest-serving director in the history of the NIH, the largest supporter of biomedical research in the world.

The prize has been awarded to Collins as he and his agency are at the forefront of work to develop treatments for the novel coronavirus. The award also comes as religious leaders in the United States have quarreled with politicians and public health experts over the proper balance between faith and science, with some Christian pastors advocating for opening their churches against the recommendations of health officials.

When asked about churches reopening, Collins responded that he deeply values in-person worship. "At the same time," he said, "I think as Christians we have to have as our no. 1 priority that we are going to care for the sick and the vulnerable. I cannot see, therefore, that it's justifiable to bring large numbers of people together even in the name of worship, because of the risk it carries."

His 2006 best-selling book *The Language of God* made a case for harmony between science and Christianity; the book's enthusiastic reception led Collins and his wife, genetic counselor Diane Baker, to establish the BioLogos Foundation in 2007 to further support conversations about Christianity and science.

Collins hopes that the Templeton Prize will draw renewed attention to the question of science and faith and that it might teach young people that "it's entirely appropriate and wonderful to embrace [both scientific and Christian] worldviews."
—Religion News Service