

John Templeton, backer of religion-and-science studies, dies at 95: Funded research on the "Big Questions"

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John Marks Templeton, who first made his mark as a pioneer international investor, is being remembered in religious circles for his commitment to the most prominent prize in religion: the annual Templeton Prize.

His passionate interest in the relation between religion and science and his hope that research could shed light on love, forgiveness and other religious tenets was reflected in the recognition of numerous scientists and philosophers who won the Templeton Prize in recent decades and the many universities awarded grants for examining the subject.

Templeton was born in Tennessee and eventually became a naturalized British citizen. He died of pneumonia at age 95 on July 8 at Doctors Hospital in Nassau, Bahamas, where he had lived for many years.

The longtime Presbyterian served as a Princeton Theological Seminary trustee for 42 years, including 12 as board chair. He also endowed Templeton College at Oxford.

Templeton's creation, in 1972, of the Templeton Prize grew from a belief that an award honoring "innovators in spiritual action and thought" is as important as a Nobel Prize. Early on, Templeton stipulated that the value of the prize bearing his name must always surpass that of the Nobel Prize.

Early winners of the prize were well-known religious figures and writers, including Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who was the first Templeton Prize Laureate in 1973, and evangelical leaders Billy Graham and Bill Bright, as well as Russian novelist Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Winners include Jews, Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus.

In recent times, however, the prize has been awarded to figures not as well known to the wider public but renowned in physics, philosophy and cosmology. They include Freeman Dyson, John Polkinghorne, Charles Townes, John Barrow, Charles Taylor—and this year’s winner, the Polish cosmologist and Catholic priest Michael Heller.

A large portion of Templeton’s fortune also went to establishing the Pennsylvania-based John Templeton Foundation, founded in 1987 with the motto: “How little we know, how eager to learn.” Templeton sold Templeton Funds, his investment firm, in 1992 for \$440 million to the Franklin Group.

With its \$1.5 billion endowment, the foundation’s mission is to “serve as a philanthropic catalyst for research on what scientists and philosophers call the ‘Big Questions,’” the foundation said. It is a mission based on Templeton’s “belief that rigorous research and cutting-edge science are at the heart of human progress.”

Templeton worked his way through Yale University and later studied at Oxford University as a Rhodes scholar. He began a Wall Street career during the 1930s depression, eventually creating international investment funds that earned him the title, bestowed by *Money* magazine, of “the greatest global stock picker of the century.”

Britain’s Queen Elizabeth II bestowed on Templeton the title of Knight Bachelor in 1987 for his philanthropy. *-Chris Herlinger, Ecumenical News International*