

# South African theorist wins Templeton Prize: George F. R. Ellis

News in the [April 6, 2004](#) issue

George F. R. Ellis—a prominent theoretical cosmologist, a Quaker and an active opponent of apartheid during its rule in South Africa—has won the 2004 Templeton Prize. Ellis becomes the latest scientist to win the \$1.4 million prize that its founder, U.S.-born investor Sir John Templeton, has stipulated be the largest annual monetary prize given to an individual outside the sports world.

The John Templeton Foundation says its mission “is to pursue new insights at the boundary between theology and science . . . drawing together talented representatives from a wide spectrum of fields of expertise.” Ellis, 64, a professor of applied mathematics at the University of Cape Town, was honored for his “bold and innovative” contributions to ongoing scientific and religious contacts.

He said such dialogue “is one of the most important issues we can engage in at the present time.” A cornerstone of Ellis’s work is his advocacy of balancing the faith and hope of religion with the rationality of science. This emphasis, he said, stems in large part from his own involvement in South Africa’s peaceful transformation from a racially segregated state to a multiracial democracy. That change, Ellis said, confounded “the calculus of rationality.”

A 2002 book Ellis edited, *Far-Future Universe*, was based on a symposium at the Pontifical Academy of Sciences at the Vatican and included participation by cosmologists, biologists and theologians.

This year’s winner, announced March 17 in New York City, will receive the prize May 5 from the duke of Edinburgh in London’s Buckingham Palace. *-Ecumenical News International*