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Holmes Rolston III Wins 2003 Templeton Prize

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Holmes Rolston III, Professor of Philosophy at Colorado State University, whose 30 years of research, writing and lecturing on the religious imperative to respect nature have established the field of environmental ethics, has been named the 2003 Templeton Prize laureate. The prize, valued at more than one million dollars, was announced today at a news conference at the Church Center for the United Nations in New York.

Rolston, also University Distinguished Professor at Colorado State and a Presbyterian minister, is one of the world's leading advocates for protecting the Earth's biodiversity and ecology in recognition of the intrinsic value of creation, including the ongoing evolutionary genesis in the natural world. In philosophical circles, he is widely known as the "father of environmental ethics." In theological circles, he is known for his concept of a sacred, prolific, yet "cruciform" creation.

Parallel to the ways in which physicists and theologians in dialogue seek a broader understanding of the astronomical universe at cosmic scales, Rolston has been at the forefront of those who join biology and religion for the understanding of Earth's evolutionary ecosystems, an effort made all the more critical in the past three decades by escalating environmental concerns worldwide.

Yet, science and religion have usually joined to keep humans in central focus, an anthropocentric perspective when valuing the creation of the universe and evolution on Earth. Rolston, by contrast, has argued an almost opposite approach, one that looks beyond humans to include the fundamental value and goodness of plants, animals, species, and ecosystems as core issues of theological and scientific concern. His 1986 book, *Science and Religion -- A Critical Study* and his 1987 *Environmental Ethics* have been widely hailed for re-opening the question of a theology of nature by rejecting anthropocentrism in ethical and philosophical analysis valuing natural history.

The Templeton Prize for Progress Toward Research or Discoveries about Spiritual Realities, founded in 1972 by Sir John Templeton as the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, is valued at 725,000 pounds sterling and is the world's largest monetary annual award given to an individual. The world's best known religion prize, it is given each year to a living person to encourage and honor those who advance spiritual matters. When he created the prize, Templeton stipulated that its value always exceed the Nobel Prizes to underscore his belief that advances in spiritual discoveries can be quantifiably more significant than those honored by the Nobels.

The Duke of Edinburgh will award the prize to Rolston in a private ceremony at Buckingham Palace on May 7.

Rolston, 70, initially achieved wide recognition with a 1975 article, "Is There an Ecological Ethic" in *Ethics*, the first article in a major philosophical journal that challenged the then widespread idea that nature was value-free and that all values stem from a human perspective. Nature, Rolston contended, contains intrinsic values independently of humans and deserves to be treated as such out of respect for and love of creation. In 1979, he co-founded *Environmental Ethics*, which continues to be the leading journal in the field.

Rolston's work has been reviewed, cited in and translated into 18 languages. His several hundred university lectures include the prestigious Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh, as well as invitations to Harvard, Yale, Georgetown, Vanderbilt, Yale Law School, Rutgers, Notre Dame, Oxford, the University of Manchester, and many others. Rolston has lectured on seven continents including throughout

Europe, Australia, South America, China, India, and Japan.

Holmes Rolston III was born in Rockridge Baths, Virginia in 1932 to Mary Winifred Long and Holmes Rolston II, a Presbyterian pastor. His family moved to Charlotte, North Carolina, and then to Richmond, Virginia, where his father became editor-in-chief of the Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. In a home rich in Christian teaching and writing, and surrounded by the natural wonder of the Shenandoah Valley countryside, Rolston's childhood laid the foundation for a life that would challenge the longstanding orthodoxy on the relationship of religion and nature and open new frontiers for understanding values in creation.

Rolston was educated at Davidson College, near Charlotte, with a degree in physics and mathematics. His theological education was at Union Seminary in Virginia and he studied philosophy at the University of Pittsburgh. He earned a Ph.D. at the University of Edinburgh, where his advisor was Thomas F. Torrance, the 1978 Templeton Prize winner.

In contrast to other advocates of theology/science dialogue who often begin in religion and move to embrace science, or vice versa, Rolston has spared neither religion nor science. "The trouble is making peace between the two," Rolston noted in remarks prepared for the news conference, "but equally I have had to quarrel with both about values intrinsic to nature.

"Science thought nature to be value-free. Monotheism thought nature fallen owing to human sin. They agreed that humans were the center of value on Earth. I had to fight both theology and science to love nature." His outlook has often left him as an outsider among his peers. His first efforts to introduce an environmental ethics were rejected by mainstream philosophical journals, before his 1975 article was accepted by *Ethics*. He recalls how he reacted in shock when he received his invitation to deliver the world-famous Gifford Lectures in 1997-98, because, as a Rocky Mountain westerner, he could barely get attention from what he calls "the Eastern establishment," much less from the celebrated theologians of Britain and Europe. The manuscript at the heart of his lectures had been turned down by prominent publishers. It was then published as *Genes, Genesis and God* by Cambridge University Press in 1999, and has since received acclaim as a monumental work.

Rolston has won admirers in some unlikely places. While most philosophers would proudly include in their vita that they had been invited to deliver an address at the World Congress of Philosophy, as Rolston was in 1998, he is equally proud of his 1999 invitation to give a distinguished lecture to the Yellowstone National Park Scientific Conference on the conservation of wild nature. He has said he thinks it is as important to publish in the *Journal of Forestry* as in *Ethics*. "I am much encouraged to get a sympathetic hearing, often from those I might first have taken to be religion's cultured despisers."

Beginning with the groundbreaking 1975 article in *Ethics*, Rolston has carefully expanded his message to detail the importance of respect for nature, not at the expense of humans, but, indeed, for their benefit. Rolston even claims to be wiser than Socrates. Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living," but added that "trees and country places could not teach him anything." Rolston agrees on the examined life, but insists that Socrates was wrong ignoring nature. "Life in an unexamined world is not worthy living either."

In his 1988 book *Science and Religion*, Rolston argued that each discipline needed the other lest they both miss the opportunity to be fully insightful and relevant. "The religion that is married to science today will be a widow tomorrow (recalling a theological proverb). The sciences in their multiple theories and forms come and go. Yes, but science is here to stay," Rolston wrote, "and the religion that is divorced from science today will leave no offspring tomorrow. Religion cannot live without fitting into the intellectual world that is its environment. Here, too, the fittest survive."

The current concern for environmental degradation around the globe makes Rolston's prize particularly timely. "Within religious thought and practice in the second half of the twentieth century, no development is more striking than the re-consideration of the human relation to the natural world, launched by environmental concerns," wrote Dr. Perry H. Biddle, Jr., Minister-at-Large for the Middle Tennessee Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church (USA) in his nomination of Rolston for the Templeton Prize. "Rolston, more than any other living person, has been the seminal thinker who makes possible a new rapprochement between biology and religion, joining theologians and biologists in their common respect/reverence for nature. In the ancient

Hebrew Scriptures, the Hebrew people envisioned a promised land, flowing with milk and honey, but if and only if they resided in that land with justice and love, rolling down like waters. Rolston has enlarged that vision a hundredfold, from locally to globally, placing on the agenda for Earth in the new millennium the vision of Earth as the promised planet."

In his news conference remarks, Rolston also cast the Earth's environmental needs in terms of justice. "Our planetary crisis is one of spiritual information: not so much sustainable development, certainly not escalating consumption, but using the Earth with justice and charity. Science cannot take us there, religion perhaps can. After we learn altruism for each other, we need to become altruists toward our fellow creatures. We must encounter nature with grace, with an Earth ethics, because our ultimate Environment is God -- in whom we live, move, and have our being."

Rolston, who has been married since 1956 to the former Jane Wilson, a Christian educator, lives in Fort Collins, Colorado. They have two children.