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Colorado Naturalist Wins Religion Prize

Wednesday March 19, 2003 8:00 PM

NEW YORK (AP) - A pioneer in environmental ethics who says humanity has treated nature "disgracefully" was named Wednesday as this year's recipient of a religion prize that is billed as the world's richest annual award.

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The Rev. Holmes Rolston III was awarded the Templeton Prize for Progress Toward Research or Discoveries about Spiritual Realities, a redefined version of the more general Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion that was presented through 2001. The prize is 725,000 British pounds, roughly \$1.2 million.

Rolston said at a news conference that he would use all the prize money to endow a chair in religion and science at his alma mater, Davidson College in North Carolina.

"I've spent my life in a lover's quarrel, not with my wife of four decades but with the two disciplines I love: science and religion," Rolston said. "I had to fight - or maybe better, challenge - both theology and science to love nature."

The son and grandson of clergymen, Rolston, now 70, is a native of Rockbridge Baths, Va. He has taught philosophy since 1968 at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, where he holds the title of university distinguished professor.

A former pastor at Walnut Grove Presbyterian Church in Bristol, Va., Rolston became an avid outdoorsman and naturalist while serving there.

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From the Associated Press



He has since rafted 400 miles through the Grand Canyon, studied nature in Siberia and the Himalayas and once eluded a charging elephant in South Africa. Last summer, he backpacked in Wyoming's Beartooths Mountains, and this summer he plans to search for gorillas in Uganda.

That interest in nature led to a career seeking to put respect for earth's natural environment and all its species at the center of human moral reflection.

Rolston said his wonder at nature "turned to horror when I encountered the oncoming environmental crisis. No sooner did I discover that nature is grace than I found we were treating it disgracefully."

He said what a society does to its "fauna, flora, species, ecosystems and landscapes" reveals its character as much as how it treats minorities, women or children.

Rolston co-founded the academic journal *Environmental Ethics* and wrote such books as "Environmental Ethics" (1988) and "Genes, Genesis and God" (1999).

Although nature is immensely valuable, he believes, it is also value-free - the study of nature does not teach things like justice and compassion on its own, for instance. Those values come from outside, he says.

"One does not learn the Ten Commandments in the wilderness," Rolston says.

Rolston will receive the award at a private ceremony May 7 in London's Buckingham Palace.

This year's judges included Cardinal Francis Arinze, president of the Vatican's council for interreligious dialogue, Metropolitan John of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul, Japanese Buddhist leader Monshu Koshin Ohtani and several scientists.

The prize honors work on such matters as "love, creativity, purpose, infinity, intelligence, thanksgiving and prayer."

The previous version of the religion prize was awarded from 1972 until 2001 to a wide-ranging interreligious lineup of academics, philanthropists and activists, including Charles Colson, Billy Graham, Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Mother Teresa.

Rolston earned a Ph.D. in theology at the University of Edinburgh,

Scotland, where his adviser was Thomas Torrance, winner of the 1978 Templeton prize.

The contest is administered by the John Templeton Foundation of Radnor, Pa., founded by mutual funds entrepreneur Sir John M. Templeton and now led by son John Jr. The foundation sponsors various science-and-religion projects.

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On the Net:

John Templeton Foundation: <http://www.templeton.org>

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