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Transcription of History - Genes, genesis and God Radio interview with Charles Heyman (Radio National - Australia), 2003-03-26

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BEGIN TRANSCRIPTION

[00:00 - 00:30] Interviewer: Global warming is a bigger threat to the world than Saddam Hussein or so says a very distinguished voice, that of Professor Holmes Ralston, the third winner of the latest Templeton Prize, worth nearly 2 million AUD. The awards made for raising awareness of how scientific research can lead to discoveries about spirituality. Previous winners include Mother Teresa and the Australian scientist Paul Davies. Holmes Ralston is a professor of philosophy at Colorado State University. A belated congratulations, Professor Ralston.

[00:31 - 00:36] Prof. Ralston: Thank you, sir. And don't forget the Australian ecologist Charles Birch, who's also a winner.

[00:36 - 00:46] Interviewer: Is he? And a renowned Australian to Charles Birch. Can I just pick up on that point that I began with why is global warming, in your mind, a bigger threat than Saddam Hussein?

[00:47 - 01:01] Prof. Ralston: Well, global warming is here for the century. Saddam Hussein well, long since been in the history books 50 years from now or 100 years from now. You need to think long term.

[01:03 - 01:12] Interviewer: Of course, a figure like Saddam Hussein may well be the catalyst for a change in international relations, though that could have profound long term implications.

[01:14 - 01:53] Prof. Ralston: Well, that's possible. A figure like Hitler, let's say, did have profound world implications, but it's difficult to think of implications more important than the quality of our environment. I mean, I spoke of global warming that's most obvious. But the threat to our environment on all scales from escalating population consumption resource use, I think is far more of a threat to our children, our grandchildren, than Saddam Hussein or any world changes he's likely to introduce.

[01:53 - 02:06] Interviewer: I think, have said the four main challenges we face in this millennium are war and peace, that's one of them. As you say, escalating population development, the environment, I mean, do you rank those or do you think those are equally threatening?

[02:06 - 02:35] Prof. Ralston: Well, they're all intertwined. I do put them in that order and certainly the newsworthy stories are war and peace, and we worry about development, that's the global economy. But underneath in the support system we have, we certainly need environment or escalating numbers, the world population escalating dramatically. They're all quite intertwined. They come as a package.

[02:35 - 02:41] Interviewer: Now, I think you've also said that your life's work really has been about trying to make peace between science and religion.

[02:44 - 03:14] Prof. Ralston: That's right. Although I'm usually quick to add that I have to quarrel with some science, especially if it's sort of arguing that nature is value free and to be exploited by humans. I'd quarrel with some theology, the theologians may also think that humans are here to have dominion over the planet. So I need to make peace between science and religion, but I also need to challenge some scientists and some theologians.

[03:14 - 03:18] Interviewer: What about the notion that as science has advanced, religion as retreated?

[03:20 - 03:59] Prof. Ralston: Well, that's not a very helpful notion. But the value questions that we face are sharp and painful as they've ever been. And so, yes, we've had science for 400 years, but the value questions are as acute and painful as ever and we see that, of course, on front page news now, the war and peace aspect. But you know, what we ought to do in caring for the planet is not

something that science has helped us solve that much. It points up the problem, but it doesn't tell us what we ought to do.

[03:59 - 04:05] Interviewer: Of course, through science, humankind has had more and more dominion over the planet.

[04:07 - 04:43] Prof. Ralston: Through science, humans has had more and more dominion over more capacity for dominion over the planet. You're , trighthat's quite true. Through science, humans have more and more capacity to make war on each other and to devastating capacity. Through science, we have lots of capacities but just what and how we ought to employ those capacities, whether we ought to think of ourselves as masters of the planet, for example, or as trustees might be better way or caretakers. All those problems are still with us, even though we've got lots of science.

[04:43 - 04:56] Interviewer: Professor Holmes, I'm interested in your own background. I believe that you were brought up in a house without running water and electricity. The son of a rural Presbyterian pastor in quite poor south West Virginia. What impact is all of that had on your life?

[04:58 - 05:52] Prof. Ralston: Well, quite poor. Those people were poor in some ways. Now we are talking you know, I was born in the American Depression we're talking a while back in that sense, many people did not have electricity in those first days. They were poor in some sense, but they weren't poor in other senses. You know, they had integrity they in Virginia, they loved the gospel. They loved their landscape. They were farmers who knew how to live there. They lived there 700 years on the whole. They were probably happier than people live in the same country are right now. So they were materially poor, but they knew how to handle themselves on that landscape and in that sense, their love of sort of gospel and landscape was quite formative. Even though I had no electricity in those days.

[05:53 - 05:57] Interviewer: We must leave it there, congratulations again and thank you very much for taking time to talk to us.

[05:57 - 05:58] Prof. Ralston: Thank you, sir.

[05:58 - 06:10] Interviewer: Holmes Ralston, who is a professor of philosophy at Colorado State University, and he's won the famous Templeton Prize worth over 2 million AUD. He's going to donate the money in the US

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