

Pastor's earthly passion honored

\$1.2 million prize goes to CSU prof

By Coleman Cornelius

Denver Post Northern Colorado Bureau

Holmes Rolston III, an ordained Presbyterian minister widely known as the father of environmental ethics, was once hiking in a Colorado wilderness area when he spotted a rock-clinging tundra moss he couldn't identify.

A longtime Fort Collins resident, Rolston became a moss expert because most people consider the velvety clusters "worthless," he said. But his appreciation paid off: The rare moss *Bryum knowltonii* that Rolston discovered above treeline in the Mount Zirkel Wilderness Area in 1981 had never before been found in the United States.

His sighting helped broaden understanding of alpine ecology.

Rolston urges other people to more fully value the natural world, a world he views as a divinely inspired creation that reflects the workings of God and science.

On Wednesday, Rolston, a philosophy professor at Colorado State University for 34 years, was named recipient of the world's top religion prize at the Church Center for the United Nations in New York.

The Templeton Prize for Progress Toward Research or Discoveries About Spiritual Realities comes with nearly \$1.2 million, a sum meant to signal that spiritual advances can be as significant as the scientific advances honored by the Nobel Prize, according to the John Templeton Foundation of Radnor, Pa., which awards the prize.

John Templeton, a Wall Street investor who became a British citizen and philanthropist, established the award in 1972.

Other recipients have included religious celebrities such as Mother Teresa, the Rev. Billy Graham and Dame Cicely Saunders, as well as noted intellectuals and social reformers representing many faiths. Rolston is the 10th Templeton laureate from the United States.

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Minister's passion takes prize

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"I'm surprised because I'm just not sure I'm in this class," Rolston, 70, said last week in his study, surrounded by wildlife sketches and theological tomes. "Here I am at a cow college in Colorado, and here I get the award."

The Templeton Foundation said Rolston won because his research, writing and lecturing on the religious imperative to respect nature have helped create environmental ethics. Some of his best-known lectures were collected in a 1999 book called "Genes, Genesis and God."

He is "one of the world's leading advocates for protecting the Earth's biodiversity and ecology in recognition of the intrinsic value of creation," the Templeton Foundation said in announcing the winner.

The Duke of Edinburgh will present the prize in a private ceremony at Buckingham Palace in London on May 7.

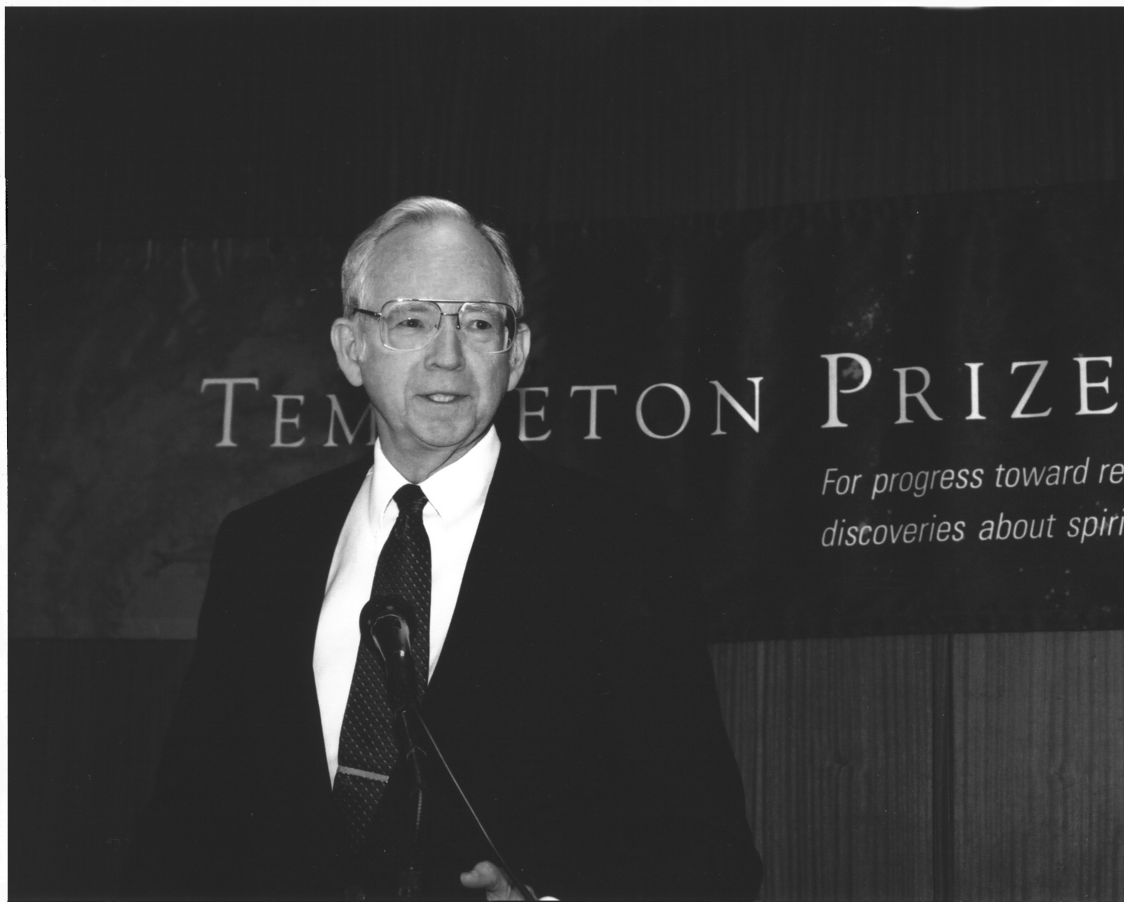
"Why do I get the award? I get the award because I've made a lot of noise about respect for nature, reverence for nature, the intrinsic value of nature," said Rolston, who was born the son of a country preacher in Virginia.

"Rolston's oddball interest in the natural world turned out to be the environmental agenda," he said.

In acceptance remarks Wednesday, Rolston referred to the global environmental crisis that has coincided with his own evolution as a religious philosopher.

"No sooner did I discover that nature is grace, than I found we were treating it disgracefully," he said, later adding, "We must encounter nature with grace, with an Earth ethics, because our ultimate environment is God."

The CSU philosopher said he would donate his entire monetary



Associated Press / Ed Bailey

Holmes Rolston III, a Colorado State University philosophy professor, talks to the media Wednesday after receiving the world's top religion prize from the John Templeton Foundation in New York.

KEY WRITINGS BY HOLMES ROLSTON III

- "Is There an Ecological Ethic?" (Ethics, 1975)
- "The Pasqueflower" (Natural History, 1979)
- "Philosophy Gone Wild" (Prometheus Books, 1986)
- "Science and Religion: A Critical Survey" (Random House; Temple University Press, 1987)
- "Environmental Ethics" (Temple University Press, 1988)
- "A Forest Ethic and Multivalued Forest Management" (Journal of Forestry, 1991)
- "Disvalues in Nature" (The Monist, 1992)
- "Does Nature Need to be Redeemed?" (from Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science, 1994)
- "Genes, Genesis and God" (Cambridge University Press, 1999)
- "Nature and Culture in Environmental Ethics" (Ethics: The Proceedings of the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy, 1999)
- "Kenosis and Nature" (from "The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis," SPCK and Eerdmans, 2001)
- "Natural and Unnatural, Wild and Cultural" (Western North American Naturalist, 2001)
- "Naturalizing and Systematizing Evil" (from "Is Nature Ever Evil? Religion, Science and Value," Routledge, 2003)

Source: Templeton Foundation website, www.templeton.org

award to his alma mater, Davidson College, a liberal-arts school with ties to the Presbyterian

Church near Charlotte, N.C. The college will use the money to establish an endowed chair in sci-

ence and religion, Rolston said.

Perry H. Biddle Jr., a Presbyterian Church official in Tennessee, nominated Rolston for the Templeton Prize, calling him a "seminal thinker" who has joined theologians and biologists in respect for nature.

Rolston has offered a "vision of Earth as the promised planet" and called on people to live here "with justice and love," Biddle wrote.

Rolston, a self-described "canoe freak and tree hugger," said he spends much of his time outdoors — whether it's hiking Greyrock Mountain outside Fort Collins, rafting the Colorado River, taking a 10-day horseback trip in Montana or searching for the wild asses of Ethiopia.

"It's just nice to be in the woods," he said. "You're in the presence of something primordial, an elemental creativity. You're sort of down to roots and sources. For me, it's like being in church."