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Scientific Extremism on Display — And the Prize Goes To . . .

The edifice of modern science is built upon a worldview of naturalistic materialism as a methodological assumption. This controversy shows that the commitment of many scientists goes far beyond methodological naturalism — their commitment is to naturalistic materialism as a fundamental and non-negotiable worldview.

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Last week, Britain's Astronomer Royal, Lord Martin Rees, was announced as the recipient of the 2011 Templeton Prize. The prize, awarded annually, provides a cash award greater than the Nobel Prize and is presented, according to the Templeton Foundation, to someone who has made "exceptional contributions to affirming life's spiritual dimension."

Apparently, affirming life's spiritual dimension is a rather meaningless category, since Martin Rees is widely known to have no religious beliefs at all. As *The Guardian* [London] reported, Lord Rees "neither believes in God nor subscribes to any religious dogma."

Rees, who was reared in an Anglican home and sometimes attends chapel services at his Cambridge college, said: "I participate in occasional religious services which are the customs of the society I grew up in. I'm not allergic to religion."

In an extensive interview with *The Guardian*, Lord Rees told the paper, "Well, I've got no religious beliefs at all. Of course some of the winners have, but I think not all of them."

He accepted the paper's designation of himself as "a churchgoer who doesn't believe in God," and said: "What I've said is I'm happy to attend my college chapel and things like that, because I see this as part of my culture, just like many Jews light candles on Friday night even though they don't believe anything, and my culture is the Church of England, as it were."

Ruth Gledhill of *The Times* [London] reported that Lord Rees had stated:

This is certainly why I myself have no religions belief. Despite my unbelief, I continue to be nourished by the music and liturgy of the Church in which I was brought up. . . . I am a 'tribal Christian', happy to attend evensong each week (especially as I am privileged to attend Trinity College, Cambridge, with a superb musical tradition).

In announcing the award, Templeton Foundation president John Templeton, Jr. said that Martin Rees was chosen because, "The questions Lord Rees raises have an impact far beyond the simple assertion of facts, opening wider vistas than any telescope ever could." He continued: "By peering into the farthest reaches of the galaxies, Martin Rees has opened a window on our very humanity, inviting everyone to wrestle with the most fundamental questions of our nature and existence."

If all this sounds a bit incongruous, just wait. Early Templeton Prize winners included Billy Graham and Mother Theresa. Back then, of course, the award was known as the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. The award was established by the late John Templeton, Sr., a famous investor who described himself as "an enthusiastic Christian."



The late Mr. Templeton was also an enthusiastic believer in the harmonization of science and Christianity, in general, and of evolutionary theory and Christian theology, in particular. Over the years, the award selection took a more scientific bent, even as it became a focus of intense controversy within the scientific community.

In a major article published earlier this year in the prestigious scientific journal *Nature*, M. Mitchell Waldrop reported that the Templeton Foundation now “doles out some \$70 million in grants” each year, with \$40 million going to “research in fields such as cosmology, evolutionary biology and psychology.”

Getting right to the point, Waldrop traced the recent history of the foundation, explaining that “it is reducing its emphasis on religion to make its programs more palatable to the broader scientific community.”

The award is now simply known as the “Templeton Prize,” not the “Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion.” The choice of Martin Rees this year marks something of a full transition for the prize, given his absolute lack of any religious belief at all. All he sees, he says, is “a sense of wonder at the universe.”

In one sense, all this could be explained by the process of secularization — just one more theistic institution transformed into something almost purely secular. There is a far larger and more pointed lesson here, and it shows the futility of John Templeton, Sr.’s attempt to reconcile the elite scientific community with the Christian church.

The best evidence for this futility comes directly from the scientific community itself. Nobel laureate Harold Kroto of Florida State University asserted, “There’s a distinct feeling in the research community that Templeton just gives the award to the most senior scientist they can find who’s willing to say something nice about religion.”

Evidently, a recipient does not have to say much even “nice” about religion at all. Martin Rees has no religious beliefs at all and has merely said that he is not allergic to religion. That amounts to nice?

Beyond this, Lord Rees has explained that he differs in approach from ardent atheist (and fellow scientist) Richard Dawkins because “if you are teaching Muslim sixth formers in a school and you tell them they can’t have their God and Darwin, there is a risk they will choose their God and be lost to science.”

In other words, he sees no need to start a war with religious believers because science might well be the loser in such a conflict. That cannot be classified as a statement of respect for theistic believers, much less for theism.

Professor Kroto accuses scientists like Martin Rees of “intellectual schizophrenia.” Richard Dawkins called Rees a “compliant quisling.” Prominent evolutionary scientist Jerry Coyne described the Templeton Prize as “money wasted on nonsensical ideas.” Professor A. C. Grayling, one of the most influential figures among British academics, accused the Templeton Foundation of “mixing astrology with astronomy or voodoo with medical research.”

And all this comes even as the Templeton Foundation dropped programs under the banner of “Science and Religion” and, as Mitchell Waldrop reported, “almost any mention of religion at all.”

The furor over the Templeton Prize to Lord Rees comes entirely from the scientific community, which seems absolutely determined to insist that even “a sense of wonder at the universe” and a refusal to pick public fights with religious believers is enough to prove that a serious scientist has sold his scientific soul to Christian fanatics.

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And even when, in light of this scientific fanaticism, an organization like the Templeton Foundation seems perfectly willing to drop any honest reference to something as generalized as “religion” or some belief in virtually any spiritual reality — no matter how vague and vaporized — it is still dismissed as “mixing astrology with astronomy or voodoo with medical research.”

Keep this in mind when you hear someone argue that the conflict between naturalistic science and Christianity would

be resolved if Christian believers would only “give a little” in terms of belief. As abhorrent as such a theological compromise would be in principle, this controversy shows that it fails practically as well.

Christians, let not this lesson be wasted.

I am always glad to hear from readers. Write me at mail@albertmohler.com. Follow regular updates on Twitter at www.twitter.com/AlbertMohler.

Ian Sample, “[Martin Rees Wins Controversial Templeton Prize](#),” *The Guardian* [London], Wednesday, April 6, 2011.

Ian Sample, “[Martin Rees: I’ve Got No Religious Beliefs at All — Interview](#),” *The Guardian* [London], Wednesday, April 6, 2011.

Ruth Gledhill, “[In Conversation with Martin Rees](#),” Articles of Faith, *The Times* [London], Friday, April 8, 2011. [Full article available only by subscription.]

M. Mitchell Waldrop, “[Faith in Science](#),” *Nature*, vol. 270, pp. 323-325. February 17, 2011.

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