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Heather Templeton Dill Announces the 2017 Templeton Prize

It is a great joy to announce the winner of the 2017 Templeton Prize: the American philosopher Alvin Plantinga, the O'Brien Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at the University of Notre Dame.

Dr. Plantinga taught at Notre Dame for 28 years until retiring in 2010 and, before that, at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1963 to 1982.

I would like to say a few words about the Templeton Prize, and about why the nine Prize judges independently, and separately of each other, chose Dr. Plantinga as the forty-seventh Prize Laureate.

The Templeton Prize is given annually to a living person who has made an exceptional contribution to affirming life's spiritual dimension – through insight, through discovery, or through practical works.

The Prize has been given to religious leaders such as Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks and the Dalai Lama.

But it has also been awarded to scientists like the physicist Paul Davies. In his own Templeton Prize address, Dr. Davies said: "The contrived nature of physical existence is just too fantastic for me to take on board as simply given. It points forcefully to a deeper underlying meaning to existence."

The Prize also recognizes humanitarians such as Jean Vanier, who founded communities around the world where people with and without disabilities live and work together as peers.

All of these laureates – the humanitarians, the scientists, and the religious leaders – all affirm that our interactions with each other, our scientific investigations, and our religious traditions are essential ways of exploring the nature of our world.

Sir John Templeton founded the Templeton Prize in 1972, long before he created the John Templeton Foundation. He realized that many of his friends and colleagues thought religion was

uninteresting and old-fashioned, even obsolete. He wanted to honor people who were responsible for, in his words, the ‘marvelous new things going on in religion.’ The Prize was designed to help them become more well known, not so much for their own benefit, but for the benefit of people who might be inspired by them.

Alvin Plantinga has been awarded the Templeton Prize because his scholarship made theism – the belief in a divine reality or god – a serious option within academic philosophy.

When Dr. Plantinga began his career in the late 1950s, most academic philosophers deliberately rejected religiously informed philosophy.

But early on, Dr. Plantinga defended a variety of arguments for the existence of God, marking the beginning of his efforts to put theistic belief back on the philosophical agenda.

His 1984 paper “Advice to Christian Philosophers” challenged them to pursue work on a theistic vision while continuing to engage with the broader philosophical community. It has influenced a generation of religious philosophers, their students – and now, those students’ students.

Indeed, more than 50 years later, university philosophy departments around the world employ thousands of professors who bring religious commitments to bear on their philosophical work: not just Christians philosophers but Buddhist philosophers, Jewish philosophers, and Muslim philosophers as well.

Sometimes ideas come along that revolutionize the way we think, and those who create such breakthrough discoveries are the people we honor with the Templeton Prize.

We at the Foundation are delighted that the Prize judges have acknowledged the work of Dr. Plantinga. He embodies the values that inspired my grandfather to establish the Templeton Prize and the John Templeton Foundation – to promote open-minded inquiry about the spiritual underpinnings of human existence.

On behalf of the Trustees of the John Templeton Foundation, I congratulate the 2017 Templeton Prize Laureate, Dr. Alvin Plantinga.

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