

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Renowned Physicist and Theologian John Polkinghorne Calls for “Friendship of Science and Religion”**

Chicago, Illinois: January 29, 2009--As America’s leading scientists gather in Chicago for the nation’s largest annual scientific conference, **distinguished British physicist and Anglican priest John Polkinghorne will speak at the University of Chicago, calling for “The Friendship of Science and Religion.”** The Revd Dr Polkinghorne—a Fellow of the Royal Society, winner of the prestigious Templeton Prize, and author of 26 influential books on science and religion—will speak on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of Charles Darwin’s birth.

Polkinghorne’s lecture (**Thursday, February 12, 2009, 7:00 PM at the Biological Sciences Learning Center, Room 115, University of Chicago, 945 E. 57th Street, Chicago IL 60637**) may surprise listeners steeped in old stereotypes of enmity between science and religion. But his address comes at a pivotal moment in broader debates over science policy and religious polity in American public life. At his inauguration, President Barack Obama declared that “We will restore science to its rightful place”—a promise many heard as a reversal of the previous administration’s handling of scientific research that challenged its political agenda. According to an analysis by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the science and technology sector in the United States would receive over \$13 billion for research and development under the economic stimulus bill recently introduced in Congress. Meanwhile, there are signs of shifting religious attitudes and alliances that no longer align with the “culture wars” of recent decades: faith communities across a wide denominational spectrum are uniting as “green congregations” in response to global climate change, and in February, hundreds of congregations will hear sermons commemorating Darwin’s bicentennial.

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (<http://www.aaas.org>), the world’s largest general scientific society and publisher of the respected journal *Science*, has been active in promoting constructive conversations through its Dialogue on Science, Ethics, and Religion (<http://www.aaas.org/spp/dser/>). “At this year’s AAAS meeting, we look forward to exploring the many benefits of forming a coalition of scientific societies working together to understand religious perspectives and contribute to the dialogue,” noted Dr. Lea Schweitz of the Zygon Center for Religion and Science and the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.

Few are as qualified as Polkinghorne to speak to the emerging comity of science and religion. As professor of mathematical physics at Cambridge University, Polkinghorne worked on elementary particle theory and played a significant role in the discovery of the quark. Ordained as a priest in the Church of England, he served as dean of the chapel at Trinity Hall, Cambridge, and as president of Queens’ College, Cambridge. Polkinghorne was a founding member of the Society of Ordained Scientists and founding president of the International Society for Science and Religion. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society (1974), made a Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire (1997), and was awarded the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion (2002). His many publications include *Belief in God in an Age of Science* (1998), *The Faith of a Physicist* (1994, based on his Gifford Lectures), and the forthcoming *Questions of Truth* (2009, with Nicholas Beale; see <http://www.questionsoftruth.org>).

Hopes are high for renewed conversations around the University of Chicago, where Polkinghorne will speak on the eve of the AAAS annual meeting. The lecture is co-sponsored by a diverse mix of campus ministries, student organizations, and academic centers—Brent House, the Episcopal Center at the University of Chicago (<http://www.brenthouse.org>), the Canterbury Club, the Lutheran Campus Ministry (<http://lutheran.uchicago.edu>), the Lutheran Student Fellowship, Rockefeller Memorial Chapel (<http://rockefeller.uchicago.edu>), and the Zygon Center for Religion and Science (<http://www.zygoncenter.org>)—and funded in part by the university's Student Government Finance Council. Some seek to deepen and enrich their own faith with scientific insights, while others hope for scientific questions to help open dialogue across religious lines. Said the Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Davenport, dean of the university's landmark Rockefeller Memorial Chapel and its new Interreligious Center: "This year's anniversary offers a natural opportunity for all of us in the academy to revisit Darwin's extraordinary legacy and, given the level of hostility to his work which still exists in certain religious contexts in the United States, to engage afresh the broader issues related to scientific knowing and religious knowing. If we are to be religiously literate global citizens, as the 21st century demands of us, we must recognize the differences between these kinds of knowing, and also be able to speak to the many areas of common interest."

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