

# TEMPLETON REPORT

NEWS FROM THE JOHN TEMPLETON FOUNDATION

April 16, 2008

## Blogging the Templeton Prize

The announcement on March 12 that Michael Heller had won the 2008 Templeton Prize drew wide international news coverage. Media outlets from the U.S. to the UK, from India to Heller's native Poland, described his achievements and his unusual career as a theoretical physicist, philosopher, and Catholic priest. The story was interesting enough to readers of the *New York Times* that it climbed to #3 on the paper's list of the most e-mailed articles. Heller explained to BBC World TV that the link between his scientific philosophy and theology is the he put it, mathematics serves as work of God."



Such themes were eagerly and readers who commented online forums. A news article

posted on the website of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* generated more than forty responses. Though several were little more than the familiar name-calling of the culture wars, other comments were much more thoughtful. As one reader remarked, the "richness" of Heller's contribution lies in his understanding that "science and religion are not methods of either/or." Another expressed his hope that religious people would not "close their ears to science" and that scientists would "not fall into scientism."

research and his work in central role of rationality. As a way of "contemplating the

taken up by the many bloggers on Heller's ideas in various about the Templeton Prize

Chris Herlinger, a reporter and blogger for the Religion News Service, was struck by Heller's impatience with the advocates of "intelligent design." Calling their views "a grave theological error" (a phrase taken from his formal Prize statement), Heller told Herlinger that the "mind of God" allows the "collaboration of chance and laws." Taking out a pen during the interview, he held it up and let it drop to the table, saying that we know the pen will fall but cannot know precisely where. "Physics," he explained, "leaves room for random events." Heller's critique of what he called "the intelligent design ideology" was also noted with approval by the National Center for Science Education.

Larry Arnhart, a professor of political theory at Northern Illinois University, praised Heller for setting out a position too often missing in the heated debate over Darwin. As he wrote on his own blog, "Whether God works through the ordinary laws of nature or through extraordinary miracles, it's all an expression of His intelligent design. From the point of view of Christian theology, Darwinian evolution *is* intelligent design."

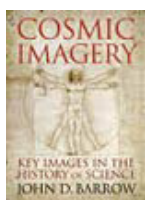
Blogging for the *New Scientist*, Amanda Geferter admitted to being won over by Heller despite her own commitment "to the idea that science and religion don't mix." In a phone interview, Heller came across to her "as a contemplative, kind, and brilliant man with an impressive intellectual range, flitting easily between talk of complex philosophical ideas and sophisticated mathematical physics." He is "the kind of physicist," she noted, "who is so awestruck by the mathematical order of the universe that he sees God lurking in equations."

## NOTEBOOK

### *Charles Taylor's "Indispensable" Book*

Writing recently in "Papercuts," the book blog of the *New York Times*, Barry Gewen praised Charles Taylor, the 2007 Templeton Prize laureate, for putting modern scientific rationalism into perspective in his latest book, *A Secular Age*. "One of [Taylor's] most striking stands," observed Gewen, an editor at the newspaper's book review, "is his opposition to what he calls a 'subtraction story,' the notion that religion was simply proved false by scientific truth. Taylor argues it was more like the other way around: only after people changed their view about man's place in the universe did they become receptive to the facts of science, not before. . . . A practicing Roman Catholic, Taylor isn't out to convert nonbelievers to his faith . . . but merely to open his readers up to a different way of thinking about what they think they think."

### *Visualizing Science*



The latest book of the prolific John D. Barrow, the 2006 Templeton Prize winner, has just been published in the UK. *Cosmic Imagery: Key Images in the History of Science* is a massive, gorgeously illustrated collection of the most powerful and influential images in the history of science. A professor of mathematical sciences at Cambridge University and a Fellow of the Royal Society, Barrow has written more than a dozen acclaimed books on the character and significance of modern developments in physics, astronomy, and mathematics. *Cosmic Imagery* will be published in the U.S. by W.W. Norton in September.

### *In Memoriam*

The Foundation was saddened to learn in recent months of the deaths of two Templeton Prize laureates—the Hindu leader, Murlidhar Devidas "Baba" Amte (1990; awarded jointly) and the Catholic founder of the Focolare Movement, Chiara Lubich (1977). Though emerging from very different religious traditions, both dedicated themselves to serving the poor and forgotten.

- Baba Amte left his comfortable life as a wealthy Hindu lawyer to follow a personal calling, developing modern communities to help those with Hansen's Disease (leprosy) and other so-called untouchables of his native India. By building and funding hospitals, schools, rehabilitation centers, a bank, library, post office, and cooperative shops, he brought employment, education, health, and other services to citizens long denied dignity and compassion.
- Unhappy with the limitations of the cloistered existence for women dedicated to becoming Catholic nuns, Chiara Lubich founded and developed Italy's Focolare Movement as an alternative. Her community in Trent, Italy, dedicated itself to serving the poor. Soon, it expanded to include men and married people. It then spread to other Italian cities, followed by Focolare settlements in Belgium, Germany, France, the United States, Japan, and Hong Kong. She underscored this legacy with longtime efforts to heal the theological breach between Catholics and Protestants.

Baba Amte and Chiara Lubich are mourned by friends around the world. Their examples will continue to serve as an inspiration.

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