

'Philosopher gone wild' wins the

\$1.1 million award honors innovators in the study of religion and spirituality

By JOHN RIVERA
SUN STAFF

NEW YORK — The Rev. Holmes Rolston III, a naturalist, Presbyterian minister and self-described "philosopher gone wild," won the 2003 Templeton Prize yesterday, an award of more than \$1 million given annually to an innovator in the study of religion and spirituality.

Rolston, 70, a native of Virginia's Shenandoah Valley who teaches at Colorado State University, pioneered the study of environmental ethics.

But he considers himself a philosopher who prefers the beauty of the wilderness to the towers of academia.

Pursuing his love of nature, he has been chased by an elephant in South Africa and once stared down a leopard in Botswana. His epitaph, which he recently had carved on a tombstone that will sit on a family plot in Virginia, reads: "A philosopher gone wild."

Rolston said he would donate the prize money to endow a chair in science and religion at his alma mater, Davidson College in Davidson, N.C.

Rolston's work challenged the prevailing belief in science and philosophy that values were a strictly human phenomenon. In contrast, Rolston argued that values were intrinsic to nature and that plants, animals and ecosystems have a fundamental

goodness apart from utility to humans.

Therefore, Rolston argues, there is a religious and moral imperative to respect nature.

"I have spent my life in a lover's quarrel, not with my wife of four decades, but with the two disciplines I love: science and religion," Rolston said yesterday during a news conference at the Church Center for the United Nations.

"The trouble is in making peace between the two, science and religion. But equally I have had to quarrel with both about values intrinsic to nature. Science thought nature to be value-free. Monotheism thought nature to be fallen, owing to human sin. They agreed that humans were the center of value on Earth. In that sense, I had to fight, or maybe better challenge, theology and science to love nature."

Donald W. Shriver, retired president of Union Theological Seminary, credits Rolston with opening a dialogue between scientists and theologians and philosophers.

"He stands squarely in the middle of the academic community, which means he is a bridge between long-separated disciplines," Shriver said. "As a result, his standing in each one of those disciplines is likely to be controversial and questioned by people who are used to studying only a slice of reality."

Rolston is the author of several seminal works on environmental ethics, including *Philosophy Gone Wild*, published in 1986, *Science and Religion: A Critical Survey* in 1987 and *Environmental Ethics* in 1988.

The Templeton Prize was established in 1972 by Sir John Templeton, who made his fortune as a Wall Street investor, then devoted himself to funding research in science and religion.

Templeton stipulated that the prize bearing his name always exceed the value of the Nobel Prize to emphasize his belief in the greater significance of spiritual pursuits. This year it's valued at 725,000 pounds sterling — a bit more than \$1.1 million.

Past winners of the Templeton Prize include Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who won the first award in 1973, the Rev. Billy Graham in 1982, Russian author Aleksander Solzhenitsyn in 1983, and physicist and mathematician Freeman Dyson in 2000.

Templeton says he hopes the annual prize will spur further research into spiritual realities.

"If we can get the world to spend even 10 percent as much on spiritual research [as on scientific research], probably more will be discovered, so that by the end of this century, humans will know a hundredfold more about the nature of divinity, the nature of creativity, than anybody ever knew before," he said.

"And the benefits are likely to be even greater than the marvelous benefits that come from chemistry or medicine or physics or even cosmology."

This year's winner was born in Rockbridge Baths, a small town near Lexington, Va.

Although he received a bachelor's degree in physics and mathematics from Davidson, Rolston felt called to spiritual pursuits and earned a divinity degree from Union Theological

ology prize

Seminary in Richmond, Va. He went on to earn a doctorate in theology and religious studies from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland.

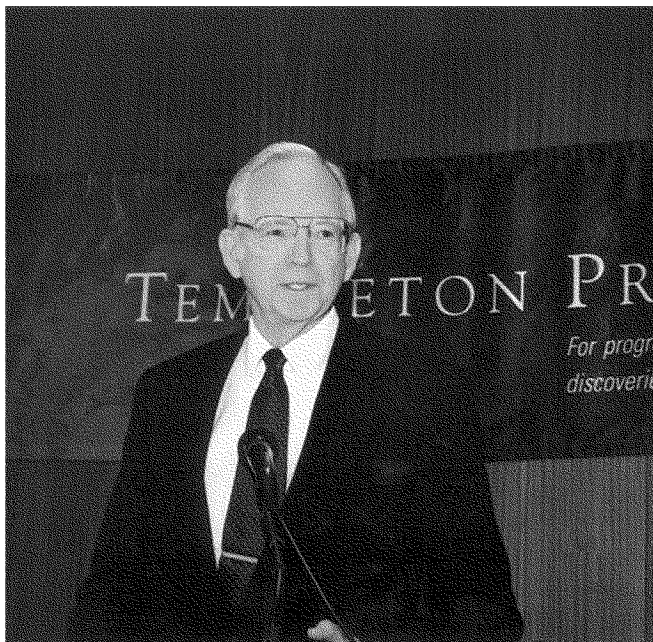
Rolston said he intended to become a theology professor, but his mentors persuaded him to spend time in the ministry first. Ordained a Presbyterian minister, he led a church as pastor for a decade in Bristol, Va. Returning to academia, he earned a master's degree in the philosophy of science from the University of Pittsburgh and joined the philosophy department at Colorado State University in Fort Collins in 1968.

In 1975, Rolston published a seminal essay, "Is there an Ecological Ethic?" in the journal *Ethics*, which is considered the first article in a major philosophical journal on whether ethics should be extended to plants and animals.

Four years later, he published "The Pasqueflower" in *Natural History* magazine, explaining how blooms of the anemone in around Easter express his vision of evolution in nature.

"The winter's long, it's cold. And you've climbed up in the mountain zone and what do you encounter? A flower breaking through the snow. And it's a kind of majestic flower," Rolston said in an interview. "And I had a religious experience encountering the pasqueflower as a symbol of life persisting in the midst of its perpetual perishing."

"That's a theme of what's going on in natural history. Life, death, life, death, constantly reborn, regenerated over 3 billion years. There's a struggle. But there is the gift of life renewed."



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The Rev. Holmes Rolston III speaks to reporters after receiving the Templeton Prize for his work on environmental ethics.



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