

CSU prof wins top-notch prize

Rolston, 'father of environmental ethics,' plans trip to Buckingham Palace

By Rebecca Jones
ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS

A philosophy professor at Colorado State University, considered the "father of environmental ethics," has won the Templeton Prize, worth more than \$1 million.

The Rev. Holmes Rolston III, who has been at CSU since 1968, will receive the award from England's Prince Philip in a private ceremony at Buckingham Palace on May 7.

The award, given annually for research or discoveries that advance the understanding of God and spiritual realities, is the richest prize in the world given to an individual. Previous winners have included Mother Teresa, Billy Graham and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

"I've been lucky that my own personal agenda, figuring nature out, has during my lifetime turned out to be the world agenda, figuring out the human place on the planet," Rolston said Wednesday at a news conference in New York City, at which the award was announced. "Living locally led me to think globally."

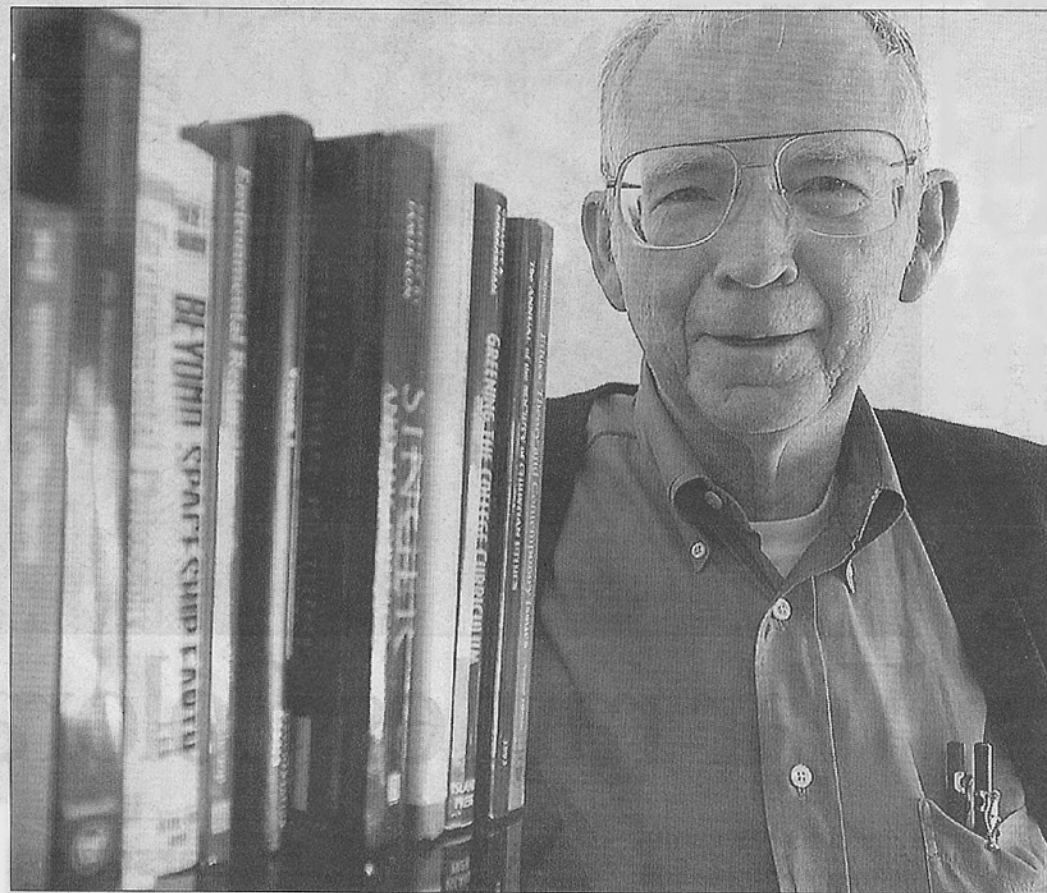
Rolston says he intends to use the prize money to establish an endowed chair in science and religion at his alma mater, Davidson College in North Carolina.

Rolston is the author of six books, including *Science and Religion — a Critical Study* (1986) and *Environmental Ethics* (1987), considered seminal works in the field.

Rolston, 70, has blended a lifelong love of nature, environmentalism and theology. He wrote about the philosophy of nature at a time when most scientists believed there was no such thing.

"I have defended integrity in creation, beauty in creation, the richness of biodiversity, you might say the 'sacredness' of nature," Rolston said. "I was swimming against the stream over the years. In a certain sense, I've come to people's attention by defending respect for nature from a religious viewpoint."

Things in nature, he says, possess intrinsic value — beyond and apart



The Rev. Holmes Rolston III, at his home in Fort Collins, stands by a group of books he authored. Rolston, a professor of philosophy at Colorado State University, won the 2003 Templeton Prize, valued at more than \$1 million. The annual award is given for research or discoveries that advance the understanding of God and spiritual realities.

HERRI BARBER
THE COLORADOAN

from any monetary value humans may assign them — because they "are part of God's good creation."

But Rolston, an ordained Presbyterian minister, is equally comfortable making the same point in non-theological terms.

"I talk about values in nature," he said. "My claim is that nature, contrary to a lot of philosophical tradition, is not value-free, not simply a resource for human ingenuity, but that there are values present in nature in the wild, and these command our ethical attention."

Like struggle, for instance. He terms nature a "cruciform creation" because, like the cross that is at the center of Christian theology, it de-

mands suffering to attain redemption.

"That's what natural history is all about — death and regeneration," Rolston said. "It's life persisting in the midst of its perpetual perishing. Things are born and die, things struggle to live on."

Rolston has had a glittering academic career. He has given lectures on all seven continents — "although technically, I was on a boat in Antarctica," he said. His books are used as texts at more than 150 universities. He co-founded *Environmental Ethics* in 1979, and today it is still the leading journal in the field.

But he grew up in rural southwest Virginia in a home without electrici-

ty or running water, the son of a rural Presbyterian pastor.

He studied physics at Davidson College, a small liberal arts college in North Carolina. After graduating he went to seminary, then completed a doctorate in theology and religious studies at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland.

He returned to mountainous southwest Virginia to spend 10 years as a pastor there. On his days off, he'd sit in on science classes at nearby East Tennessee State University.

"That's where I learned the key to plants," Rolston said. "I probably took 20 classes in biology, botany, zoology, geology, meteorology. I worked hard at it. That's where I got

to be a pretty good naturalist."

It's where he was also introduced to the ecological devastation of strip-mining coal. He saw soils eroded and wildlife decimated.

He later returned to school to get a master's degree in philosophy from the University of Pittsburgh.

Now he describes himself as "a canoe freak" and "a tree-hugger type." Later this year he plans a horseback excursion through Montana and a trip to Uganda to observe gorillas.

And he's still sitting in on science classes — 50 or 60 of them since he's been at CSU.

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