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'Tree hugger' wins \$1M spiritual prize

Presbyterian minister
at one with nature,
religion, humans

BY BOB HARVEY

A self-described "canoe freak and tree hugger" won the world's richest cash award yesterday for his work in establishing the field of environmental ethics.

Holmes Rolston III was awarded the \$1-million Templeton Prize for Religion at the United Nations in New York for his 30-year campaign on behalf of what he calls "Wonderland Earth."

"Human life is richest if it includes an encounter with the goodness of the natural world," he says.

Like his father before him, Mr. Rolston, 70, is a Presbyterian minister. But he has multiple degrees in philosophy, religion, mathematics and science, and teaches philosophy at Colorado State University in Boulder.

Mr. Rolston grew up wandering the North Carolina countryside near his home in the rich Shenandoah Valley and told a news conference yesterday, "I had to fight both theology and science to love nature

"Science thought nature to be value-free. Monotheism thought nature fallen owing to human sin. They agreed that humans were the centre of value on Earth."

He said the planetary ecological crisis is one of "spiritual information."

"Science cannot take us there, religion perhaps can. After we learn altruism for each other, we need to become altruists toward our fellow creatures."

In a phone interview, Mr. Rolston said Canada may be able to do an even better job than the United States in blending nature and culture.



Holmes Rolston III said he will donate the prize to the school where he got his first degree, in physics and mathematics.

consider these intrinsic values," he said.

He says the language he uses to convince others about the value of nature depends on his audience. "If it is a religious audience, I may use the vocabulary of a good creation that is sacred, and should be revered.

"If it is a philosophical crowd, I am going to try to persuade them of the intrinsic value of nature. If it is a more secular crowd, I will talk of respect for nature."

Mr. Rolston said that in the 400 years since the Enlightenment, mankind forgot its earlier religious concerns for the larger non-human community of life, but was forced to re-think its place on the planet by the 20th century's environmental crisis.

"Other species, the various plants and animals, have developed various skills that allowed them to survive, and there is a goodness of life that is manifest in all the five million, 10 million species on Earth.

"Humans are in some sense unique. They have a remarkable cultural capacity that is not present in nature. Humans are the

"The maple leaf is a pretty marvellous symbol for a nation. I think Canadians may be more open to considering the presence of the natural world in the life of the country."

He said one temptation Canadians should avoid is "cutting down those forests, and shipping them off to make a quick buck."

Mr. Rolston said the one concept in his work he would most like others to remember is "the intrinsic value of nature."

"Plants and animals have a good of their own, and that good is present independently of human interests, concerns and affairs. Humans can use nature as a resource, but we have a duty and an obligation to respect and

stewards, the managers, the trustees," he said.

Mr. Rolston said he will donate all of his cash award to Davidson College, in North Carolina, where he earned his first degree, in physics and mathematics.

The Templeton Prize is awarded annually for progress toward discoveries about spiritual realities. Past winners include Mother Teresa, and Billy Graham. It was created in 1972 by Sir John Templeton, one of the world's most successful investment managers. He gives away \$40 million a year to various causes. The Duke of Edinburgh will award the prize to Mr. Rolston in a private ceremony at Buckingham Palace on May 7.