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Early spring, out in the Bahama Islands each year since 1972 a committee carefully selects the winner of the Templeton Prize which recognizes exceptional contributions to the furtherance of religion in the world. In effect, it is the religion counterpart to the Nobel prizes for peace, science and literature. Established by Sir John Templeton - a US-born financier living in the Bahamas - the prize includes a US $400,000 gift.

While last year's prize was swirled into a storm of controversy over the selection of Dr. Khan, head of the World Muslim Congress (Jewish leaders accused him of anti-semitism) the 1989 co-winners, German physicist Carl von Weizacker and Church of Scotland minister Lord MacLeod, enjoyed wide-ranging approval. They received the award recently in London. According to a New York Times report, Templeton stated the 1989 awards "demonstrate the rich variety of religion" and provide a "good illustration of why there is such an award program."

Prof. von Weizacker, 76, former director of the prestigious Max Planck Institute, contributed to several key nuclear physics discoveries and is internationally recognized as a philosopher of science representing theistic views. He was cited for "initiating the dialogue between the once hostile disciplines of natural science and religion."

Weizacker was the colleague of fellow German physicist, W. Heisenberg, one of the giants of the revolutionary physics of quantum mechanics and among a handful of European physicists to cognize the mystical implications of their theories - implications that overlap Oriental metaphysics. Weizacker shared Heisenberg's haunting intrigue and it eventually brought him to meet Gopi Krishna, the Hindu savant of kundalini from Kashmir, India. A warm and mutually beneficial friendship developed between them. Weizacker spent 3 weeks with Krishna at his home in Kashmir.

Gopi Krishna had written a brief manuscript entitled "The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius," and Weizacker agreed to write an introduction for it, anticipating that his thoughts would help give the book credibility in the West and perhaps spur interest in an institute he was attempting to establish to relate science and theology. The book was published by Harper & Row in 1972, a success for Gopi Krishna and a fine firstborn expression of cross-fertilization between physics and prana/kundalini for Weizacker: but his participation also met with some peer criticism.

Reading from Weizacker's introduction is to glimpse a crossover into Upanishadic ontology: "In scientific discovery I encounter something in my achievement which I must acknowledge as non-ego and yet as myself. But the self [atman-Self] is still hidden here from my consciousness and manifests itself only through the gift it has given me through its achievement. In mysticism I must open myself to the self, I must overcome the ego, or what comes to the same thing, I must get to know my ego as a manifestation of the self. In the last analysis, I have to be the self which I have always been."

According to Gene Kieffer, friend and publicist for Gopi Krishna (died 1984), he had sent a copy of Biological Basis to the Templeton Prize committee in 1987 with a nomination for Weizacker. HINDUISM TODAY contacted Sir Templeton to determine if the book played a decisive role in the award. Templeton responded that the award was not for the book's introduction but for Weizacker's "lifework in the Theology of Science."

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