

Templeton Foundation fights ID tag: "Supporting Science" is new motto

by [John Dart](#)

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The Templeton Foundation has often described its principal grant-making interests using the expression "science and religion." "No more," says Pamela Thompson, Templeton's vice president for communications. In mid-November, a redesigned Web site appeared at www.templeton.org displaying the motto: "Supporting Science: Investing in the Big Questions."

"The phrase 'science and religion' has been hijacked," Thompson said, "by the Intelligent Design people,"—those theorists who assert that life is too complex to have been created without an "intelligent designer." Thompson did not accuse the ID folks of deliberately kidnapping the religion/science expression. But she made it clear that the foundation does not want to be seen as anti-Darwinian and anti-evolution—or as sympathetic to Intelligent Design or its cousin "creation science."

The decision to reshape the foundation's image was sparked one year ago by a *Wall Street Journal* article November 14, 2005, that portrayed the foundation as favorable to ID. Templeton's refashioned Web site details its rebuttal.

In a letter *WSJ* editors printed last year, Templeton senior vice president Charles Harper wrote that two professors who won competitive grants that involved non-ID topics, as well as another two recipients, appeared to become public with their ID approach after they got the grants. The foundation, Harper said, "vigorously disagrees with the intelligent design position."

Does this squabble and image remake matter? It should. Imaginative scholars and universities have designed hundreds of courses, conferences and research projects on the border of theology and science—and Templeton may be the country's biggest benefactor.

The foundation, which expects to have given \$60 million in grants by the end of 2006, was started by philanthropist Sir John Templeton, a Tennessee-born naturalized British citizen living in the Bahamas. He turned 94 on November 29. Once active in Presbyterian circles, Templeton became rich and famous as a stock-picking whiz, and is best known today for his 34-year-old Templeton Prize (longer name: Templeton Prize for Progress Toward Research or Discoveries About Spiritual Realities). A number of recipients have been scientists with feet in both science and religion.

Many scientists chafe at Templeton-funded conferences that “smooth over the differences between science and religion” and end “in a metaphysical draw,” as the *New York Times* put it recently (November 21, 2006).

One pivotal moment may have come at a non-Templeton-sponsored conference in California, wrote *Times* reporter George Johnson, when a Nobel laureate in chemistry, Sir Harold Kroto, suggested that the Templeton Foundation give its next \$1.5 million prize to an atheist—Richard Dawkins, the Oxford evolutionary biologist whose book *The God Delusion* is a national best seller.