

THE JOY OF GIVING:  
SIR JOHN'S VISION FOR A BETTER WORLD

**“Scientific revelations may be the goldmine for revitalizing religion in the 21st century,” once predicted Sir John Templeton. Progressive ideas are Templeton’s specialty, having spent a lifetime encouraging open-mindedness in both financial and spiritual endeavors. Now a fulltime philanthropist, he gives away about \$40 million a year — especially to projects that benefit the cooperation between science and religion. On the path from a small town in Tennessee to his home today in Nassau, the Bahamas, he has advanced a disciplined work ethic, a “humble approach” to theology, and the belief that science and theology are compatible. He is committed to a quest to find a hundredfold more spiritual information.**

When John Templeton was born in rural Tennessee in 1912, automobiles were still very new; most people in the country still traveled by wagon or horse or bicycle. Telephones and radios were quite novel. Radios were so extraordinary, in fact, that when Templeton’s older brother put the first radio in their playhouse, people came from miles around by foot to see proof of how it was possible to get a message from somebody 500 miles away without a wire.

“All those things were so unknown at that time that it has given me this viewpoint about how little we know, how humble we ought to be. Even today, we know less than 1 percent of what can be known. If somebody would take the time to make a timetable, we could see that these discoveries are coming faster and faster, not slower,” he says. “We are in the period where we ought to be overwhelmingly grateful that God allowed us to be living; we are in the most productive, most progressive period ever seen.”

Templeton likes the saying, attributed to Thomas Edison, that, “If there is anything you are doing the way you were doing it 20 years ago, then there is now a better way.” Progress, he believes, “comes from a few people trying to do it better.”

He has seen enthusiasm about how new concepts contribute to greater discoveries and progress than he, or anyone, could have predicted. For several decades, Templeton has said that religion needs to be more forward-looking. “I’ve never found a religion that was enthusiastic about research and discoveries. For some odd reason, for thousands of years, every religion has wanted to discourage new concepts. That’s a pity, and that’s why religion has become less important over the years, until now it is irrelevant to many people. In medicine, suppose the doctors a century ago said that they didn’t want to make new discoveries. How little we would know about the body! Suppose in electronics two centuries ago people said that they didn’t believe that there are atoms. We would not have had television, radio, telephones or the Internet. Nobody could have foreseen what the great originators in electronics or medicine have discovered,” he says.

“Religion should be humble in the sense that no human being has yet understood even a fraction of 1 percent of what can be discovered. If we could get humanity to devote even 10 percent of their total research money to searching for the spiritual realities behind religion, the benefits to humanity would be even greater than it has been from electronics, medicine, economics, and all other fields combined.”

While many people who think of religion as unprogressive or backward-looking choose simply to abandon religion—became secular, perhaps even agnostic—Templeton’s approach has been radically different. He has tried to advance religion, feeling there is something there that is definitely worth pursuing.

So he looked, perhaps surprisingly, to science and its methods. If religious leaders have historically been uninterested in new concepts and “felt that they knew it all already and anyone who disagreed with them was wrong,” scientists agree that they know little about the universe. They know that reality is deeper than the visible and the tangible and they are eager to learn more through a process of discovery based on experimentation and research projects.

“We never started out to study science and religion. We started out to encourage progress in religion, all types of religion. We hoped that religion would become just as progressive as medicine or astronomy. For at least 40

years, I have thought that religion should be just as exciting as any other field,” he says. “Probably in the long run, the manpower and money we invest in discovering more about God should approach what goes into science. More than \$1 billion a day are spent on scientific research. If one-tenth of that were spent on research on spiritual subjects, that would be \$100 million a day. That would be visionary.”

So now, Templeton and his foundation are “trying one thing after another to do something that increases our knowledge of God, God’s purposes or God’s love.” Those that are useless, he knows, will die out and soon be forgotten; the useful ones will flower and be wonderful. The idea is to experiment, to find out what will prove beneficial.

Templeton has experimented with the wonderful intricacies of the universe since he was a small-town boy. When he was young, he studied horticulture and collected caterpillars, amazed by how they turned into something as beautiful as a butterfly. “My parents never gave me answers, but they gave me the literature and equipment so I could pursue the answers myself,” he says.

In 1932, as the Great Depression took hold, Templeton headed off to Yale University, but after one year there, his father could no longer afford the tuition. From that point on, the young Templeton was forced to live thriftily as he earned every dollar for his education himself. “That was the best education. I had to go back and take three jobs and learn to be useful in three different jobs,” says Templeton, who finished his bachelor’s degree in 1934. “Back in those old days, universities didn’t give scholarships because a child needed the money. They gave scholarships because they had high grades. So knowing that, I decided that I was going to get high grades. This competition meant that I had to work hard; I learned to be a hard worker, a very hard worker. I worked nights and days and weekends, which I still do.”

At one time, Templeton—who continued his studies in Balliol College at Oxford University on a Rhodes Scholarship and graduated with a law degree—thought about being a Christian minister, then a missionary. In the end, he decided “the best I could hope for in a spiritual way was to be a missionary’s helper. When I was 18, I came to believe that the talents that God had given me—not many, and not so different from other people’s—were elements of judgment and foresight. Where would they be useful?” he remembers wondering. “So I undertook at age 18 to educate myself on judging the value of corporations. I thought that would help religion in the sense that, if I were good at it, I would be able to do things like what I’m doing now.” Templeton was better than good at the mutual fund business, becoming one of the most successful entrepreneurs of the 20th century. On Wall Street, he founded his own investment management company and created some of the world’s largest international investment funds. After several years of increasing success as an investment advisor, he then launched the Templeton Growth Fund, which allowed investors to take advantage of foreign growth opportunities by maximizing a disciplined, long-term approach to identifying bargain stocks worldwide.

“I was so busy trying to accumulate some money, since I started with none, that I was over 50 years old when I began to wish that I could devote my time to helping people. Gradually, by the time I was 80, I looked around for my strongest competitor in the management of other people’s money. It was a group named Franklin Resources in California, and I sold all my mutual funds to them.”

Armed with the millions of dollars he made on the sale, he was ready to “take up the more important career of trying to spread progress in spiritual information.”

More and more, Templeton felt that the search for spiritual truth was “one area in life where I could spend my time and money in ways that would benefit humanity, and maybe make a small contribution to the future of civilization. There is a big blank to be filled in by somebody with money to donate in the encouragement of research and discoveries about aspects of reality related to the invisible and intangible.”

Templeton—who believes “Joy comes from giving, not getting”—says he is having more fun giving his money away than he ever had making it. Today, the John Templeton Foundation helps to finance more than 300 projects, studies and award programs, based on the principle of inviting proposals from bright people who say, “I can do this if I had a little bit of money.”

Near to Templeton's heart is the program that started as a gift to the young people in his hometown of Winchester, Tennessee. The Laws of Life Essay Contest encourages kids to write essays on the noble purpose they are planning for their future and the values and principles that will guide their life, offering prizes for the best ones. "Based on that, they had to do some thinking. They wrote stories that their classmates would read and the local papers would print," Templeton says.

One of the biggest and most expensive of Templeton's projects is The Institute for Research on Unlimited Love, whose mission is to increase knowledge of unlimited love through scientific research and education. "Love over the centuries has meant many things, but what we mean is called by the Greeks agape," he says, explaining that unlimited love is "love that gives you joy and helps you grow by giving love. You don't grow much by getting love; most growth in life is by giving love."

Now in his tenth decade, Templeton has had the time to test his belief that those who do good in the world are rewarded. He also has the luxury of being able to look both far back and far ahead.

He still maintains that "the time my father told me that he couldn't give me another dollar, it was the greatest benefit." He also credits Norman Vincent Peale's book, *The Power of Positive Thinking*, read 70 years ago, with making him realize that "what I had become in my short lifetime was mainly dependent on my mental attitudes — a mental attitude of looking for the good will bring good to you; a mental attitude of giving love will bring love to you. I like everyone else should give a lot more thought to how to be more loving, more love-giving. The example of Mother Teresa is excellent. She was the first winner of the Templeton Prize in 1973 because she provided the greatest example of lifetime love."

Templeton was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II in 1987 and decorated a Knight of St. John in 1995. He continues to work hard, devoting his time and giving not only money, but also concepts and ideas. All the while, he is driven by an enthusiasm for his projects and the belief that "there is an exciting opportunity throughout the world to encourage enthusiasm for applying scientific methods to the discovery of over a hundredfold more about spiritual realities." In the coming years, Templeton says rapid progress "is going to be in the realities that are not tangible or physical."

He knows that no one can know the total truth, everything about God, or the intricacies of our beautiful universe, "but a rigorous method can start movement in the right direction." Scientific research, he says, is part of God revealing himself, and God reveals himself to those who seek and Sir John seeks, believing that is the way to learn more about the purposes, the reality, or the infinity of God than we ever could have imagined. "I believe there is much more that we can learn about God," he says. "No human being yet has known 1 percent of what can be known about God. If there is still 100 times more to learn, let's try to learn it and not give up!"