

Major grant to help fund Vanderbilt research on science and religion, Center for the Study of Religion and Culture gets Templeton Research Lecture Grant

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Vanderbilt University will become the center of an ongoing conversation about the friction and connections between science and religion with the help of a grant from the Metanexus Institute on Religion and Science in Philadelphia. The Templeton Research Lecture Grant will bring at least \$270,000 to the university to fund a research group, speakers, publications and a major conference over three years. A Templeton Research Fellow will be named each year to deliver a lecture series and write a book on religion and science. The grant was awarded this month to the Center for the Study of Religion and Culture, a transinstitutional center at Vanderbilt drawing on the expertise of a diverse array of faculty. “The challenges of the 21st century ... require new interdisciplinary collaborations, which place questions of meanings and values on the agenda,” said William Grassie, executive director of the Metanexus Institute. “We need to put questions about the universe and the universal back at the heart of the university.” The Metanexus Institute advances research, education and outreach on the constructive engagement of science and religion. It runs some 300 projects in 30 nations, including the Templeton Research Lectures funded by a grant from the John Templeton Foundation. Born in Winchester, Tenn., Sir John Templeton, 92, is best known as a pioneer in the development of value-based, globally diversified mutual funds, founding the highly successful Templeton Growth Fund and Templeton World Fund. Selling both funds in 1992, he established the John Templeton Foundation in West Conshohocken, Pa., near Philadelphia. The foundation’s mission is to pursue new insights at the boundary between theology and science through rigorous, open-minded and empirically focused methodologies, drawing together talented representatives from a wide spectrum of fields of expertise to encourage worldwide exploration of the moral and spiritual dimensions of the universe and of the human potential within its ultimate purpose. A graduate of Yale University and a Rhodes Scholar, Sir John Templeton was knighted in 1987 by Queen Elizabeth II.

The research at Vanderbilt will focus on scale, linking disciplines according to their scope. Subjects like microbiology and nanophysics will fall on the micro side of the

scale, with theology, astronomy and the like at the macro end of the spectrum. “Our intuition is that intellectual inquiry and the examined life, including its spiritual dimensions, are not subject to a single set of propositions no matter what their source,” wrote Vanderbilt professors Volney Gay and Richard Haglund, co-chairs of the project. “We view the dialogue between science and religion as continuous and ongoing. And we believe a focus on the hierarchy of nature is both large enough to attract key intellectual partners and focused enough to permit genuine advance.” Public participation in discussions about science and religion is critical to both Vanderbilt and the Metanexus Institute. “Stem cell research, evolution, genetic research and engineering are all subjects of vital interest to scientists and followers and scholars of religion,” said Mark Justad, project director and executive director of the Center for the Study of Religion and Culture. “Vanderbilt is uniquely qualified to lead this debate, as a leading scientific research university with a top-flight divinity school. We hope to use this as a constructive platform for productive dialogue on issues involving science and religion. “We hope this grant will mark the start of a permanent conversation on these issues.”

Media contact: Jim Patterson, (615) 322-NEWS Jim.patterson@vanderbilt.edu