



New York Cultural Center

Introduction and Synthesis of

Evolution: Science, Ideology, Reason and Faith

Speakers: **Dr. Michael Behe**—Professor of Biological Sciences at Lehigh University

Dr. Michael Hanby—Associate Director of the Institute of Faith and Learning
at Baylor University

Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete—Theologian, author, columnist

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3041 Broadway at 121st Street, New York*

Introduction

Simmonds: Good evening, and, on behalf of Crossroads New York Cultural Center, we welcome you to tonight's panel discussion "Evolution: Science, Ideology, Reason and Faith." Before we begin, I would like to point out that this title has been carefully chosen in order to open the current discussion on evolution and faith to a broader dimension than the worn-out controversy over evolution vs. creation, science vs. religion. What has become clear to any intelligent observer is that many of these words have now become so loaded with ideological undertones that they are almost completely irrelevant. On one hand we have the creationist ideology that turns its back on twenty centuries of Christian reflections on the book of Genesis in order to advance a crude literal interpretation of Genesis that only gives more credibility to those who claim that human reason and Christian faith have nothing to do with one another. On the other hand, less obvious and thus even more insidious, we have what has been dubbed the ideology of "scientism," which reduces human reason to the methods of the empirical sciences, while at the same time promoting its own set of philosophical and theological prejudices under the cover of "science."

What motivated us to propose tonight's discussion is the desire to go to the bottom of these topics without being closed in by the ideological positions found on either side of the current debate. To facilitate this goal we would like to ask the following questions: What is science and what are its limits? What is it at the origin of scientific knowledge? What sparks scientific research? What is reason? What is the relationship between reason and faith? What are the agendas that move the two sides in the evolution vs. creation debate? How much of this debate involves science and how much involves politics? What is at stake?

To help us to explore and hopefully answer some of these questions, we have three experts with us tonight. I would like to introduce first Dr. Michael Behe, Professor of

Biological Sciences at Lehigh University who is well-known nationally as a proponent of the theory of Intelligent Design. His current research involves delineation of design and natural selection in protein structures. Next we have Dr. Michael Hanby, Associate director of the Institute of Faith and Learning at Baylor University. Dr. Hanby has done in depth philosophical and theological work on the doctrine of creation, on the notions of evolution and design in biology, and on the nature of scientific knowledge. Our third panelist is Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete, a former rocket scientist (he was actually a physicist before discovering a different vocation) and now a well-known theologian, columnist and author of *God at the Ritz*, - a book where the relationship between science and faith is lucidly discussed. Msgr. Albacete has kindly agreed to act as moderator of the discussion.

For those who are with us for the first time, I remind you that our cultural center finds its inspiration in the life of Communion and Liberation, the Roman Catholic international movement founded by Monsignor Luigi Giussani. Father Giussani always emphasized that a lived faith must, by its inner logic, generate a new culture. "Test everything, retain what is good." This suggestion of Saint Paul defines our concept of what culture is, and summarizes our mission statement better than any pre-packaged ideology, whether from the left or from the right. It is now my pleasure to hand the microphone over to Monsignor so that he can begin the discussion.

(see presentations by Hanby and Behe)

Synthesis

Msgr. Albacete: After listening to both presentations, and so aware of the cultural context that has brought us here to listen to these two, can we find a way, a path that will help us to critically assess in an intelligent way everything that has been said to us? It has to be, I speak for myself, something that is very powerful. Again, these questions are not just interesting academic questions. Increasingly we realize, sooner than one thinks, these questions become the central question of one's life. Is there a way in which we can verify, perhaps initially in a tentative way, but with ever-growing certitude, what is being proposed to us—to find our way as non-experts through this maze?

I love the remarks of Dr. Behe when told that he can only pursue the evidence up to a point and should give up. I liked what you said, that you were determined to pursue the evidence, wherever it takes you, without any kind of prior principle. What is at stake here is freedom—freedom from cultural dominance. How do we follow the free path of evidence in an intelligent way?

What is happening, listening to both presentations, confirms that today's debate has as its origin a debate between ideology and freedom--an ideology that sustains power by explaining everything versus freedom as an opening to newness, to novelty, to the unconditional. The biggest challenge to ideology is the human person because the human person, in a healthy state, will not accept to be bound only by the conditional. The human person will insist on reaching out to the unconditional. This is the nature of the debate, I believe, listening to both, and I would love to continue the question that you ask each other, that you continue to explore it.

What is at stake is ideology. And that can only be fought against by reason. The debate today does not either affirm scientific reason or belief in God, but the alternatives are:

reject reason or belief in God. The reality of a transcendent God makes reason possible, and this principle of rejection proposes to reason is what the expression of Niche's will to atheism. But in the end, even Niche is afraid of drama.

In the scriptures, at one point, talking about Moses and the prophets and the richness of interpretations found in the Hebrew scriptures, Jesus says, translated literally, "I am the drama of Moses." Is there a point from which we can interpret all of this? Is there a method and what is its point of departure? The method I believe is the human person because, again, it is the reality of the human person that breaks through ideology because of its openness to the absolutely unconditional. The method is fidelity to how the human person reacts to the impact with reality. This would bring together all the dimensions of this dispute. And indeed there is only one word that explains fully, adequately, what happens when this impact takes place, and that is *wonder, amazement*. Is Christ a consequence or part of that wonder? Is the perception of reality as a cosmos precisely an intelligent design? The primacy of the Logos, the primacy of reason, to use a word Pope Benedict the XVI keeps insisting as a key to understanding how to respond to the present challenges. The primacy of being. Wonder grasps Logos. But this begins an adventure, an adventure in which reality becomes an event, not just nature to be studied according to scientific disciplines, though that is an expression of wonder, and at the service of wonder. But the human reality is the wonder that discovers reality as an event and faithfully pursues that fact, that evidence as far as it goes making sure of one thing, the mystery remains always a mystery. A reduction of the mystery to something found along the way or to an explanatory idea is ideology. Only the fidelity to the mystery as mystery keeps us from falling into the ideology error. After that, something happens, another event takes place at the end of the road, but that is different. Through it, reality reveals itself as love.

I would like to ask our speakers a question each. First, Professor Behe, you say your proposal, Intelligent Design, is the only one faithful to this human act of following the evidence no matter where it leads you, you want to follow the evidence. You are the free person and you're following the evidence. Can scientific evidence really ever reach the notion of a creator? That is, as Prof. Hanby indicates, beyond the creation itself, that is to say that it's not the first point of a cause and effect?

Behe: I could take science and come to a conclusion of a creator ex-nihilo, but nonetheless, I think science can make some conclusions about the creation. For example, (this is getting away from Intelligent Design) scientists used to think that the universe was eternal, and then, in the 1920s and 30s, evidence came about galaxies rushing away from each other, and this led to the notion of the Big Bang Theory, the notion of the beginning of the universe. And so a question that St. Thomas Aquinas thought was open, whether the universe had a beginning or not, science came up with an answer for him. And science can also say whether they think the advent of nature are chance arrangements or not. As methods for calculating, methods for fascination, and it's perfectly legitimate to decide to do so. And so I certainly think science has limits, and it doesn't reach the ultimate question, but it can say something about the creation. As a matter of fact, science had to say something about the creation, and it's not going to say much at all.

Hanby: While I do agree that science can say something about the creation, I also agree that it's beyond the capacity of science to demonstrate creation. I do think, though, that it's important to distinguish the creationist question which ultimately is a question of being from the question of being this or that--being a single primordial stub which somehow exploded into the myriad forms which we now call the universe versus non-existence at all. And part of what I would be concerned about with statements like: *Science can explain that the universe had a beginning* is that one has to be very careful about the ways in which statements like that can in some ways predetermine the way possibly metaphysical concept which I would argue are prior to the question of the efficient causes that made the universe into the form it is, that it doesn't predetermine those questions or exclude them. I think in a certain sense, to a certain extent to which scientists' self-understanding precludes the possibility of these questions, it prevents those kinds of questions from being entertained as real. But the science doesn't recognize its own enterprise as dependent upon being fundamental bad science.

Albacete: Prof. Behe is on to something, as measured by the reaction against him. He's touched a raw nerve. How raw is that nerve?

Hanby: Too raw, I think. That question could be interpreted in any number of senses, whether it's a political question or a scientific question, but at the end of the day....

Albacete: Not as politics. The political expression of it would be an expressionism. Indeed, there is something very fundamental at the very beginning of everything else that is at stake here and the political concerns are expressions of that. I think it goes beyond politics.

Hanby: I agree with you that Intelligent Design is on to something, but I think it is unclear what it is on to. That is part of what I tried to suggest, that precisely because it shares the presuppositions with Darwinism, at the end of the day, let's say by some miracle, that Professor Behe and his friends were to win, we wouldn't have gained that much and we wouldn't have proceeded to the fundamental questions, we wouldn't have gotten past the idea or called into question the idea that the human person is a machine reducible to his component parts. And if he is not simply a machine reducible to his component parts, what else is he? How do you account for that within the current paradigm of scientific theory? So we wouldn't have gotten beyond that point. To my mind that's a dangerous point at which to be. I don't also understand how we could sustain an account of the wonder that you mentioned. Part of my supposition here, and it's something that I didn't say in my paper, but I think is right, is that it is not simply that both ID and Darwinism predetermine the way we then can think about God or contain implicit suppositions about God. It's that they have constant recourse to what they deny in principle. I don't know how, for instance, on an a mechanistic understanding of reality that our experience of the world as intelligible in a way that doesn't seem to be immediately reducible to mechanism to ever finally at the end to be regarded as more than artifer.

Behe: I have absolutely no difficulty in thinking that organisms are not only machines, but certainly parts of them can be studied in mechanistic terms.

