



CONTACT: Donald Lehr – The Nolan/Lehr Group
(212) 967-8200 / mob (917) 304-4058
dlehr@templetonprize.org
www.templetonprize.org

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STATEMENT BY PROFESSOR FRANCISCO J. AYALA

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Science and religion are two pillars on which American social life rests. (The third is the U.S. Constitution and the political institutions based on it.) American science is, by many standards, the most successful in the world and the envy of nations. The American people are more religious than people in most other technological countries. Yet, many Americans, people of faith as well as some scientists, reckon that science and religious beliefs are in contradiction.

I contend that science and religious beliefs need not be in contradiction. If they are properly understood, they *cannot* be in contradiction because science and religion concern different matters. Science concerns the processes that account for the natural world: how the planets move, the composition of matter and space, the origin and function of organisms. Religion concerns the meaning and purpose of the world and of human life, the proper relation of people to their Creator and to each other, the moral values that inspire and govern people's life.

It is only when assertions are made beyond their legitimate boundaries that religion and science, and evolutionary theory in particular, appear to be antithetical. Science and religion are like two different windows through which we look at the world. We see different aspects of reality through them, but the world at which we look is only one and the same. Consider a painting, such as Picasso's *Guernica*. Suppose that I list the coordinates of all images represented in the painting, their shape and size, the pigments used, and the quality and dimensions of this immense canvas, measuring 25 feet, 8 inches by 11 feet, 6 inches. This information would be interesting but it would be hardly satisfying if I completely omitted aesthetic considerations and failed to reflect on the painting's meaning and purpose, the dramatic message of man's inhumanity to man conveyed by the outstretched figure of the mother pulling her dead baby, the bellowing human faces, the wounded horse, and the Satanic image of the bull.

The point is that the physical description of the painting does not tell us anything (by itself cannot tell us anything) about the aesthetic value or historical significance of *Guernica*; nor, on the other hand, do aesthetics or intended meaning determine the physical features of the painting. Let *Guernica* be a metaphor for the point I wish to make. Scientific knowledge, like the description of

the size, materials, and geometry of *Guernica*, is satisfying and useful, but once science has its say, there remains much about reality that is of interest: questions of value, meaning, and purpose that are beyond science's scope.

The proper relationship between science and religion can be, for people of faith, mutually motivating and inspiring. Science may inspire religious beliefs and religious behavior, as we respond with awe to the immensity of the universe, the wondrous diversity and adaptations of organisms, and the marvels of the human brain and the human mind. Religion promotes reverence for creation, for humankind as well as the environment. Religion may be a motivating force and source of inspiration for scientific research and may move scientists to investigate the marvelous world of the creation and to solve the puzzles with which it confronts us.

I will now go beyond those claims and advance an assertion that may come as a surprise to most people. Scientific knowledge, the theory of evolution in particular, is consistent with a religious belief in God, whereas the tenets of Creationism and the so-called Intelligent Design are not.

The point should be valid for those people of faith who believe in a personal God who is omniscient, omnipotent, and benevolent, as Christians, Muslims, and Jews do believe. The natural world abounds in catastrophes, disasters, imperfections, dysfunctions, suffering, and cruelty. Tsunamis and earthquakes bring destruction and death to hundreds of thousands of citizens; floods and droughts bring ruin to farmers. The human jaw is poorly designed; lions devour their prey; malaria parasites kill millions of humans every year and make 500 million people very sick; about 20 percent of all human pregnancies end in spontaneous abortion because of the flawed design of the human reproductive system.

People of faith should not attribute all this misery, cruelty, and destruction to the specific design of the Creator. I rather see it as a consequence of the clumsy ways of nature and the evolutionary process. The God of revelation and faith is a God of love and mercy, and of wisdom. Scientific knowledge, and in particular the theory of evolution, provide fulfilling understanding of the world of nature and of life. They may also sustain a religious view of creation.

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