



*In Memoriam of Antonino Zichichi: A Scientist Who Searched the Cosmos for Traces of the Creator*

Antonino Zichichi, an internationally renowned particle physicist, gifted communicator, and a leading figure in European scientific research in the second half of the twentieth century, died on 9 February 2026 at the age of 96. A member of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences since 2000, he stood out as one of the most distinctive voices in Italian science. He consistently affirmed that scientific inquiry does not distance humanity from God but awakens wonder before the profound logic written into the fabric of the cosmos – a conviction he repeated throughout his many books and public interventions. For Zichichi, intellectual humility meant acknowledging that the Author of nature's logic is wiser than any philosopher, mathematician, or scientist, and that human reason itself is a gift from God.

Born in Trapani in 1929, Zichichi quickly made his mark in the world's leading research institutions. At CERN in Geneva, he led the team that, in 1965, observed the antideuteron for the first time – an important milestone in the study of antimatter. He also worked at Fermilab in Chicago, contributing significantly to the development of high-energy physics. Over the course of his career, he held major leadership roles, including the presidency of Italy's National Institute for Nuclear Physics and the European Physical Society, helping strengthen Europe's position in subnuclear research.

In 1963, he founded the Ettore Majorana Centre for Scientific Culture in Erice, Sicily, which soon became an international meeting point for scientists, Nobel laureates, and young researchers. It embodied his vision of a scientific culture that remained open to the deeper ethical and cultural questions raised by human knowledge.

Zichichi was a complex and often debated figure within the scientific community. He consistently defended the rational credibility of faith and criticised ideas he believed weakened the scientific method. He was also known for his outspoken stance against astrology and superstition, arguing for a rigorous and intellectually honest scientific mindset.

Beyond his research, he was a popular public educator. With clarity and enthusiasm, he brought scientific ideas into the homes of ordinary Italians, suggesting that behind the laws of nature lies a deeper order and presenting science not merely as an intellectual discipline, but as a human and spiritual journey. In recent years, he had embraced social media as another way to share reflections on the wonder of the universe and the responsibility humanity bears in safeguarding it.

His faith, never hidden, nourished his scientific curiosity. “Science gives everyone great intellectual dignity,” he liked to say, “and it is the instrument that helps us understand that we are made in the image and likeness of the Creator”. These words resonated deeply with many believers seeking a meaningful, non-ideological bridge between reason and transcendence.

After the death of his wife, Maria Ludovica, in 2024, he entrusted to his writings the memory of a love illuminated by both science and hope – pages that revealed his profound conviction that nothing in creation is ever truly lost.

With the passing of Antonino Zichichi, we lose not only a scientist who helped shape contemporary physics, but also a man who sought to show that the search for truth – whether in science or in faith – is the highest calling of the human intellect. His legacy endures in the research centers he founded, in the students he formed, and in his unwavering belief that “science gives everyone intellectual dignity”.