



Darwin's Gift: To Science and Religion

Francisco Ayala

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With the publication in 1859 of *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, Charles Darwin established evolution by common descent as the dominant scientific explanation for nature's diversity. This was to be his gift to science and society—at last, we had an explanation for how life came to be on Earth.

Scientists agree that the evolutionary origin of animals and plants is a scientific conclusion beyond reasonable doubt. They place it beside such established concepts as the roundness of the earth, its revolution around the sun, and the molecular composition of matter. That evolution has occurred, in other words, is a fact.

Yet as we approach the bicentennial celebration of Darwin's birth, the world finds itself divided over the truth of evolutionary theory. Consistently endorsed as "good science" by experts and overwhelmingly accepted as fact by the scientific community, it is not always accepted by the public—and our schools continue to be battlegrounds for this conflict. From the Tennessee trial of a biology teacher who dared to teach Darwin's theory to his students in 1925 to Tammy Kitzmiller's 2005 battle to keep intelligent design out of the Dover district schools in Pennsylvania, it's clear that we need to cut through the propaganda to quell the cacophony of raging debate.

With the publication of *Darwin's Gift*, a voice at once fresh and familiar brings a rational, measured perspective to the science of evolution. An acclaimed evolutionary biologist with a background in theology, Francisco Ayala offers clear explanations of the science, reviews the history that led us to ratify Darwin's theories, and ultimately provides a clear path for a confused and conflicted public.

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