

The Vatican claims Darwin's theory of evolution is compatible with Christianity

The Vatican has admitted that Charles Darwin's theory of evolution should not have been dismissed and claimed it is compatible with the Christian view of Creation.

by Chris Irvine

Last Updated: 8:24AM GMT 11 Feb 2009



Gianfranco Ravasi: Monsignor Ravasi said Darwin's theories had never been formally condemned by the Roman Catholic Church Photo: EPA

Archbishop Gianfranco Ravasi, head of the Pontifical Council for Culture, said while the Church had been hostile to Darwin's theory in the past, the idea of evolution could be traced to St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas.

Father Giuseppe Tanzella-Nitti, Professor of Theology at the Pontifical Santa Croce University in Rome, added that 4th century theologian St Augustine had "never heard the term evolution, but knew that big fish eat smaller fish" and forms of life had been transformed "slowly over time". Aquinas made similar observations in the Middle Ages.

Ahead of a papal-backed conference next month marking the 150th anniversary of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, the Vatican is also set to play down the idea of Intelligent Design, which argues a "higher power" must be responsible for the complexities of life.

The conference at the Pontifical Gregorian University will discuss Intelligent Design to an extent, but only as a "cultural phenomenon" rather than a scientific or theological issue.

Monsignor Ravasi said Darwin's theories had never been formally condemned by the Roman Catholic Church, pointing to comments more than 50 years ago, when Pope Pius XII described evolution as a valid scientific approach to the development of humans.

Marc Leclerc, who teaches natural philosophy at the Gregorian University, said the "time has come for a rigorous and objective valuation" of Darwin by the Church as the 200th anniversary of Darwin's birth approaches.

Professor Leclerc argues that too many of Darwin's opponents, primarily Creationists, mistakenly claim his theories are "totally incompatible with a religious vision of reality".

Earlier this week, prominent scientists and leading religious figures wrote to The Daily Telegraph to call for an end to the fighting over Darwin's legacy.

They argued that militant atheists are turning people away from evolution by using it to attack religion while they also urge believers in creationism to acknowledge the overwhelming body of evidence that now exists to support Darwin's theory.

The Church of England is seeking to bring Darwin back into the fold with a page on its website paying tribute to his "forgotten" work in his local parish, showing science and religion need not be at odds.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/religion/4588289/The-Vatican-claims-Darwins-theory-of-evolution-is-compatible-with-Christianity.html>