

Vatican hosts Darwin conference

By David Willey
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The Vatican is sponsoring a five day conference to mark the 150th anniversary of the publication of Charles Darwin's Origin of Species.

The subject is the compatibility of evolution and creation.

It is one of two separate international academic conferences being sponsored by the Vatican this year.

They aim to re-examine the work of scientific thinkers whose revolutionary ideas challenged religious belief: Galileo and Charles Darwin.

Scientists, philosophers and theologians from around the world are gathering at the prestigious Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome to discuss the compatibility of Darwin's theory of evolution and Catholic teaching.

Christian churches were long hostile to Darwin because his theory conflicted with the literal biblical account of creation.

But the Catholic Church never condemned Darwin, as it condemned and silenced Galileo.

Pope John Paul II said that evolution was "more than a hypothesis".

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Prof Francisco Ayala

Yet as recently as 2006 a leading Catholic Cardinal, Christoff Schoenborn, of Vienna, a former student and friend of Pope Benedict XVI caused controversy by saying that Darwin's theory of natural selection was incompatible with Christian belief.

A leading American scholar of biology, Prof Francisco Ayala, plans to tell the conference that the so-called theory of intelligent design, proposed by Creationists, is flawed.

"The design of organisms is not what would be expected from an intelligent engineer, but imperfect and worse," he said.

"Defects, dysfunctions, oddities, waste and cruelty pervade the living world."

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