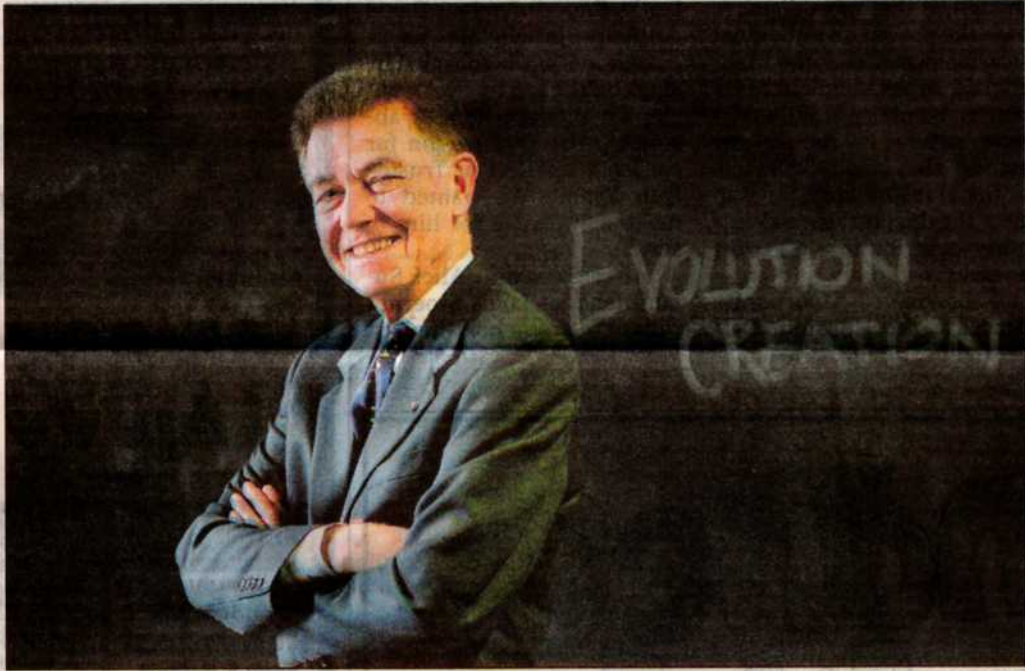


# Former priest is a Darwin disciple

**Biologist says theory of evolution is not anti-religious**

By **ERIC BERGER**  
HOUSTON CHRONICLE

As part of the festivities surrounding Charles Darwin's 200th birthday, evolutionary biologist Francisco Ayala spoke last week at Rice University, the Houston Museum of Natural Science and Baylor College of Medicine. Ayala is a passionate defender of evolution. But, as a former Dominican priest, he also has a unique viewpoint on how science and religion need not collide. Science writer Eric Berger caught up with Ayala at Rice to find out why.



MAYRA BELTRÁN : CHRONICLE

**DEFENDER:** Francisco Ayala is a former Dominican priest and a passionate defender of evolution.

**Q: What message are you bringing to Houston to mark Darwin's birthday?**

**A:** That Darwin is one of the most important scientists in the history of the world, and some of my colleagues would say the most important scientist. In any case, he is in the same league as Einstein and Newton.

**Q: That's pretty high praise, no?**

**A:** The reason why he is so important is that he completed the scientific revolution. Physical scientists like Copernicus, Galileo, Newton and others have studied science in the modern sense, that the natural world can be explained by natural laws, which have universal application. But they left organisms out, because organisms seemed so obviously to be designed. Darwin discovered natural selection, and as he was aware, he brought organisms into the realm of scientific explanation. So it was a major achievement in the history of ideas and science.

Science, at some level, became complete, because everything in the world was subject to scientific explanation.

**Q: As a former priest, are you trying to reach religious people who question evolution?**

**A:** I am trying to talk to people of faith and to try and persuade them that the theory of evolution is not anti-religious. In fact, it is more consistent with faith than these theories that have evolved under the name of creationism or intelligent design. These have implications with respect to the creator that are completely unacceptable.

**Q: Such as?**

**A:** With respect to intelligent design, if we have been designed by God, God has a lot to account for. There are many aspects of human beings that are very poorly designed, starting with our jaws. The human

jaw is not big enough for our teeth, so we have to have wisdom teeth removed, and other teeth grow crooked, because there is not enough room for them. An engineer who designed the human jaw would be fired the next day for incompetence. Are we going to blame God?

**Q: How have you found that fundamentalists respond to this sort of a message?**

**A:** They usually don't respond. They run away from the message. People of good faith, like the majority of the audience I had at the Houston Museum of Natural Science, are at first puzzled, and one hopes that as they hear more and more about it, they feel enlightened, and that they come to understand it is not evolution that is anti-religious. But it is intelligent design that is anti-religious.

**Q: So where is the place for God in your conception of the universe?**

**A:** Everywhere. It is about our relationship to God, the meaning of life, the purpose of life. Moral values. Science has nothing to say about these things. Science is not about excluding God. Those who try to use science to prove God does not exist are misusing science. ...

You can go to the very beginning of Christianity and find the message I have been telling you in St. Augustine, in his commentary on the genesis. Remember, this is 1,800 years ago, and he very explicitly says, 'As a Christian, why do we care if the Earth is a disc or a sphere? It doesn't help me to reach salvation. The Bible is there to teach me how to go to heaven, not how the heavens were made.' He's saying it's a categorical mistake to take the Bible for an elementary textbook on biology or chemistry or geology.

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