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February 9, 2008: Darwin Day in Retrospect

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Title: Darwin Day in Retrospect

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2/9/2008--Last night, Judge John Jones III and Law Professor Edward Larson of Pepperdine spoke at Duquesne University's Darwin Day program. They were both excellent. But, it still seems to me that some proponents of teaching evolutionary theory in high school—and, of course, I am a proponent of that as well—lack respect and empathy for the concerns that drive opponents of Darwin. Especially the concern that parents have about the religious lives of their children. Evolution suggests that life began and unfolded naturally. And unpredictably, although there is some doubt in the literature about the ultimately random quality of natural selection. In any event, there is no obvious role for God in the growth and development of life. Since many 18-year-olds are entertaining doubts about what their parents and church taught them about God anyway, this aspect of high school biology class might well add to their doubts. And that is of grave concern to many parents. In this context, why do proponents of evolution oppose any gesture to reassure concerned parents? Why not give students a disclaimer to the effect that God and Darwin are not necessarily inconsistent? In not even considering such an action, proponents, like many present last night, are acting like partisans, afraid to give an inch for fear of appearing weak. American constitutional law is also to blame, because there is language in the caselaw suggesting that public schools should not be concerned about the religious lives of students. So, even though biology class may be creating a theological problem, the school board is not supposed to think about that. This incoherent demand may explain, at least in part, why public officials sometimes seem less than candid about these issues. We need a fundamental change in how we approach all this. But, last night, I heard mostly self-satisfaction.