

# In the Beginning

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## Preface

For a number of years questions have been arising concerning the teaching of the Catholic Church on the origin of the world, of the species, and especially of the bodies of the first man and of the first woman. Unfortunately, that teaching has, more often than not, been seriously misrepresented, sometimes to the point of being unrecognizable, and this by persons claiming to represent the authentic teaching of the Church.

Two frequently met distortions are:

1. The teaching of the Church on creation and the origin of the world (teaching in the first article of the Creed) has no bearing whatsoever on the matter of teaching about origins in either parochial or public schools.
2. The issue is a purely secular one, because the issue of origins is a purely scientific one and hence should be resolved on purely secular grounds without reference to Catholic belief and religious practice. The teaching of the Church has nothing directly to contribute for the presentation of origins in parochial and public education. "How" the world came to be is a secular-scientific question, to be settled independently of religious considerations. But the Church is interested in the outcome because her teaching concerns the Person "Who" caused the world to come to be or evolve as it has. As this argument goes, the Church is quite prepared to accept the "fact" of evolution as the means by which God made the world. This point of view is often known under the heading "theistic evolution," and when its promoters seek to reconcile the notion of a "Creator God" with the "fact" of evolution they have recourse to a form of reflection known as "process philosophy."

Superficially examined, the two distortions are quite contrary. The first makes religion and the teaching of the Church a merely private, personal affair vis-a-vis the public, visible world. The second ends by making the Deity immanent in the process of evolution. Both positions, however, even at a superficial level of examination, are directly opposed to the first article of the Creed as it has always been understood by the Church: that in virtue of creation there is nothing in the world independent of God and thus in some way without religious dimension; and that, in virtue of his title Creator, God is not immanent in the processes of the natural order.

This common opposition to the first and most basic article of Catholic belief rests on two assumptions shared by the proponents of these distortions. The first is a notion of science as completely autonomous. The intelligibility of the object of scientific study is totally comprehensible to science or not intelligible. Any scientific theory, set forth under the name "creation science," thus indicating a dimension of the

object of science not entirely comprehensible by scientific means, becomes by definition “unscientific.”

Secondly, the teaching of the Church and the teachings of Revelation have nothing to contribute to the understanding, *a parte rei* or objectively, of what science and philosophy study or of how this object came to be. Both assumptions are the direct opposite of the actual teaching of the Church since the beginning of her existence.

The objective of this essay is a correct statement of the teaching of the Church on the origin of the world and of the species, especially of the human species, and of the consistent policy based on this teaching and followed by the Church in assessing the results of philosophic and scientific study of these questions.

The exposition comprises five divisions. The first deals with a number of preliminary considerations indispensable to a correct interpretation of the creedal formulae of the Church. The next three are commentaries respectively on the three solemn definitions of the Church’s belief in creation (the ancient creeds, the oldest and most frequently used being that known as *The Apostles’ Creed*); the second being the definition of the Fourth Lateran Council, and the third being the definition of the First Vatican Council. A final section will treat the development of that teaching since Vatican I to the present. The conclusion will indicate application to the matter of teaching about origins in parochial and public schools.

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## Preliminaries

### Belief in the Creator

The starting point of theology is our knowledge of God. Theology begins, writes St. Bonaventure<sup>1</sup>, where philosophy, including all branches of natural intellectual endeavor, metaphysics, science or natural philosophy (as it was called by St. Bonaventure) leaves off (i.e., with God). Natural knowledge begins with the visible, the objects of the senses, and through their investigation and study, arrives at a knowledge and understanding of God, their Maker. Such knowledge of God cannot but be indirect, mediate, and very limited, especially when contrasted with that knowledge of God which begins with God, the invisible, the changeless, and from the knowledge of Him Who is Creator proceeds to a study of His creation, which is all else that is. For this kind of study St. Bonaventure reserves the name theology.

This reflection of St. Bonaventure makes clear why belief in the Creator is the first and basic article of the Creed, the first truth revealed in Scripture.<sup>2</sup> At once it assures both an unambiguous, distinct, clear, accurate notion of God Who can and will save His people, and a sound criterion for the correct interpretation of all those signs pointing to the Creator and to the possibility of some greater work on His part. So long as a person is in fact mistaken on either or both of these points, so long will his salvation be endangered, so long will his true temporal welfare be impeded. Thus, from the beginning of her existence the Catholic Church has insisted on an accurate exposition of the first article of the Creed as absolutely fundamental to her teaching mission and to the cultivation of theology.

## The Content of This Teaching

### God

There is but one, true God, not merely the first, but the only God, unlike any other being, although all others, to the extent that they are, are like Him. He is all powerful, all knowing, all good. whatever can be done, He can do; and whatever lie cannot do, cannot be. \What is possible, is what He knows to be possible, and what is not known to him is neither intelligible nor possible. And what actually comes to be outside Him comes to be because He wills it freely, as lie wills it to be, or simply is not. This “Fiat” -- let it be, and it comes to be -- is called a creative act, as distinct from the natural processes and actions of creatures, as is the Creator from creatures. Only God creates by a simple act of His will, without assistance (instruments), and without acting on any antecedent matter. God makes out of nothing. This notion of Creator reveals God to be utterly independent and sovereign, the beginning or source of all else, without beginning,<sup>3</sup> eternal, necessary, infinite ocean of perfection; all else that is has a beginning in dependence on another, a beginning in time, and thus is shown to be finite and not divine.

### Creation

All that exists other than God, the invisible world of angels as well as the visible world of matter, came to be originally, neither by an emanation from the divine substance, nor by development or evolution entailing natural processes of pre-existing agents not divine, but came to be out of nothing by an act of

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<sup>1</sup> *Breviloquium*, Part 1, Chapter 1,3. references to the works of St. Bonaventure are based on the Suaracci critical edition; mode of citation is the standard one used in all editions published in this century.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. 1,13

<sup>3</sup> John 1,1

the divine will. Not every single individual existing now or in the past or in the future was made directly out of nothing in this way, nor is every change in the world to be explained directly in terms of creation. Nonetheless, before anything at all could exist or change, something was made by God out of nothing.

Not only did this creative act give existence to the world; it provided the world order and intelligibility, and this in two ways:

- by constituting the essences or species of the natural agents acting within the world, and
- by establishing certain patterns, rhythms, and laws according to which these natures act on or are acted on by each other.

This order and intelligibility define the limits of the created order, and of each created agent, limits which can be modified temporarily or permanently only by the Creator's direct intervention, otherwise known as a miracle. Within those limits created agents can be the source of change and development, for better or for worse.

At each of these points, the world as a whole, the essences of things, and the overall rhythms or laws of nature, the impress of the Creator and His creative act can be discerned and at the same time distinguished from the creature and his natural actions. For neither the Creator nor His distinctive mode of acting *ad extra* is continuous with, uniform, and comparable with the natural order and the processes which presuppose the creative action of God.

## Summary

From the foregoing, it is quite evident that the Catholic understanding of the first article of the Creed includes a revelation of truths pertinent to all creation, and not only to the Creator. How many and to what extent these truths provide knowledge not otherwise accessible to the human mind, or merely confirm what could be known naturally, are separate questions. So too it is clear that a careful study of God's creation (the world) should lead to a knowledge not only of God as Creator,<sup>4</sup> but to a realization of the world as created. Whether in fact without the help of Revelation the unaided human intellect ever could come to such a clear realization of the true character of the objects of our senses, or even to a faint realization of the notion of "being created", has often been answered negatively; but whatever the difficulties, or whatever final form the demonstration takes, the Creator can and should be known from the fact that this world, and what is in it, is created, finite.

## Source of This Teaching

In exercising her teaching office the Catholic Church does not claim the power to effect new revelations of divine mysteries, but only to set forth clearly, accurately, and consistently the "deposit of faith" entrusted to her by her Founder. The source, then, of this teaching concerning creation and the Creator is Revelation as this is contained in the divinely inspired books of Scripture and Tradition of the Church. Further the Church claims a divine guidance and protection in expounding the truths of salvation without error.

This does not preclude on the part of philosophers and scientists study of those points of Revelation

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<sup>4</sup> Rom. 1, 18 His supereminent divinity and power.

falling in one way or another within the scope of their disciplines. And just as faith can be of great help in the advancement of knowledge in all areas, so natural study can also serve to confirm and deepen the understanding of Revelation and to help in distinguishing what is revealed from mere hasty inferences of the uninformed.

None of this is possible without universal recognition of the epistemological dimensions of questions concerning the origin of the world, and especially of mankind. What these dimensions are and what principles govern their adjustment and coordination will become apparent at several points in this exposition.

## **Terminology**

Every intellectual discipline develops a vocabulary and usage distinctive of its subject matter and method of study. Correct definition of terms at the outset, especially in a matter such as the question of origins, is indispensable to the fair appreciation of the teaching of the Church and of the theology resting on her authority.

## **Creative Act**

The creative act is an action of God alone by which something which did not exist at all is made to exist. Strictly speaking, no process or passage from one state to another is involved, because no *terminus a quo* existed. Such a creative act may be contrasted with the divine processions in which one divine Person proceeds from Another, but which is not a process of movement or change, because in this “procession” the divine nature of the Person proceeding neither comes to be, nor in any way is changed or divided, but is simply communicated from one Person to Another. Productive acts of creatures entail the management of instruments and the pre-existence of matter on which to act. This implies a real process and passage of time in the production of the *terminus ad quem*, not existing prior to the process and change, both in the agent and in its effect.

## **Primary and Secondary Agents**

God alone is said to be the primary Cause, because all other causes presuppose His creative action in some way in order to exist and continue to exist so as to act. All other agents are known as secondary causes (i.e., creatures).

## **Equivocal and Univocal Causes**

The Creator in the traditional terminology is said to be an “equivocal Cause,” not because He acts deceptively, but because none of the effects He produces is fully like Him, or need be exactly like each other. Thus the Creator is capable of making a variety of species, each different from its Maker and from each other in degree of perfection. A “univocal” cause is said to be one which produces effects always identical in nature with their cause. Rational creatures to a certain extent are “equivocal” causes to the extent they are capable of artistic work. Only the Creator is an “equivocal” Cause without limitation. This point is an important one in assessing the relative stability of the order of nature and of the possibility of a miracle. The Creator, in the teaching of the Church, most certainly established a relatively stable system of nature. Within those limits rational creatures are capable of directing a certain development of the World; but only the Creator is capable of modifying those limits temporarily or permanently, or of totally annihilating His work.

Two points pertinent to modern theories of upward evolution of the species may be noted:

1. Such a production entailing the modification not of accidental qualities, but of the substance and

essential properties of the lower species requires as principal agent of change, a rational agent, an equivocal cause. An example of this is man, made out of the slime of the earth. A univocal cause by definition is incapable of producing such results, nor has any such agent, as is normally postulated in modern evolutionary theory, ever been observed to have done such. No “kind” or species not endowed with intelligence and freedom (i.e., a rational agent) is capable of modifying a species.

2. Apart from the “inorganic” world, no rational agent except the Creator is capable of changing a species essentially, but only accidentally, as for instance in stock breeding, and this only within limits pre-determined by the Creator in establishing “each according to its kind.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Principal and Instrumental Cause**

The principal cause is the agent directly responsible for the specific effect produced, and is contrasted with instrumental cause, the agent responsible only in a subordinate way. Principal cause is not to be confused with primary cause, as is so often the case in explanations of origins known as theistic evolution. When a creature acts as principle cause of some effect, God is also involved as the primary Cause conserving and concurring with that action. When, however, God is said to be Creator, He and He alone is the principal Cause. When He is said to work a miracle, He may or may not utilize an instrumental cause, He may or may not act on pre-existing creatures. Although in some cases a miracle may appear to be like a natural process, it is in fact not a natural process at all, because the principal Agent is not a natural agent, and therefore, the process is not uniform or measurable in those terms. For this reason the term evolution, to avoid ambiguities and equivocations, should be restricted to natural processes wherein the principal agent is a creature. In the work of creation, the six days of Genesis, the Church has always understood God to be the principal Agent, although each of His actions during that period may not have been creative in the strictest sense, but only in the broader sense of miraculous. He may have used instruments already created, or acted Himself on pre-existent matter as in the case of Adam’s body “from the slime of the earth.” In any case, although individual creatures once created may have acted before the end of the sixth day when God “rested,” they did so directly under the creative power of God, and only after completion of the entire work did the world begin to function with a relative autonomy in the sense of secondary, principal causality.

The importance of this distinction can be illustrated with the popular objection to the creation of the heavenly bodies in a single day of 24 hours. It is claimed in the objection that the formation of these bodies would have postulated a duration of enormous length, since such is the time required for light from these bodies to reach the earth at present, and that light was observed by the first man on his appearance (according to *Genesis*). The objection, however, begs the question. It assumes as certain what in fact the proponents of evolutionary theory should prove, that the processes now observed in the transmission of light from the heavenly bodies to earth - and the duration needed to traverse the distance between them - are the same by which they were made to shine initially. Where the Creator is the principal Cause, there is no reason why He cannot do all this without the aid of natural processes and with or without any duration pleasing Him and appropriate to His ends (24 hours as Genesis tells us). Nor should it be said that the appearance of long “light-years” is a deception. Appearances are deceptive only where no key to their interpretation is provided. Thus what looks like bread and smells like wine is bread and ~ except where those elements have been “transubstantiated” into the Body and Blood of Christ by the consecratory action of a priest. There the appearances of bread and wine, real enough, indicate not bread and wine, but the Body and Blood of the Savior. This is known because God

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<sup>5</sup> *ratio seminalis* of St. Augustine



has told us so, that such power has been given to an ordained priest. So too in this case, the Creator, being the only witness to what happened in the beginning, has told us He made the stars and made them shine within a period of 24 hours, thus providing a key to the interpretation of the appearances “in the beginning.”

Thus, the divine creative act is distinguished from His conservative act, both of which though identical in God with His power, have different terms outside God. The second conserving act presupposes the completion of the “founding” of the world, and is directed to its relatively autonomous operation. The first is a reflection of what Catholic theologians subsequently called God’s absolute powers, by which He not only made the world, but can destroy it, modify it, or temporarily interrupt its ordinary rhythms, as in the case of a miracle. The full extent of this power we cannot know simply from what He has already done, for He can always do something more. The second reflects His ordered power and is known from nature and the laws of nature discerned in creation.

## The Apostles’ Creed

### Texts

*Credo in Deum, Patrem omnipotentem, Creatorem caeli et terrae* (Apostles’ Creed).

*Credo in unum Deum Patrem omnipotentem, factorem caeli et terrae, visibilium omnium et invisibilium* ... (Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed - 4th century).

## Textual Observations

### Creator-Maker

The terms are synonyms when predicated on God. When He creates, He indeed produces an effect outside Himself utterly dependent for its existence and nature on that productive act. The divine making is different from the productive act of the creature precisely because it is creative.

### Uniqueness

Only God can make in a creative way, because He alone is omnipotent. Therefore all things, invisible as well as visible, owe their existence and nature to this unique kind of productivity. The natures and actions of the created order will reflect partly the nature and action of the Creator; but the unique character of the Creator and His creative act cannot be defined in terms of that natural order and the processes stemming from created agents. Creation as an act of God is incomparable, discontinuous with, and different from natural activities in which it is reflected.

## Sources of the Creedal Formulae

Some dogmas of Catholic faith are only made explicit, or given a definitive formulation after the passage of some time. An example of this is the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God. Unlike some of these other dogmas, this article of faith, which is in the Creed, appeared, as it were, fully elaborated with the Church herself. The key elements, always regarded as synthesized in the classic form of the ancient symbols of faith V. *supra*, can easily be located in the recorded teaching of Christ and his Apostles. Thus the importance always assigned this article by the Church for the foundation not only of Catholic theology, but of Christian philosophy and science, is rooted in the stress laid on this point by the Son of God through Whom all things were made, and without Whom nothing that came to be was made.<sup>6</sup> Several examples will make this clear.

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<sup>6</sup> John 1,3

## In the Beginning

“In the beginning (*en arche, in principio*) was the Word and the Word was with God...”<sup>7</sup> The “beginning” of the prologue of the Gospel according to St. John, the beginning which is without beginning (eternal) is contrasted with the “beginning” of Genesis 1,1, which refers to the world which is not eternal (infinite). The Word or Son of God, only begotten God,<sup>8</sup> comes from the Father not by a creative act, but by an act of generation as eternal as the Father. Thus, the Word conceived in the womb of the Virgin virginally is not to be confused with a creature dependent on and subordinate to the Creator, but identified as the One Who before His beginning in time at the moment of His conception, pre-existed as the equal of the Father from eternity, and as the One through Whom what He later became was made.

Elsewhere in the Gospel according to St. John, our Lord, the Founder of the Church, and her Teacher, is clearly recorded as defining the difference between Creator-creature, eternity-time, creative act - natural act,<sup>9</sup> and asserting the possession of creative power or omnipotence, alone capable of effecting the resurrection of a human corpse by Himself as the Word made flesh<sup>10</sup> for which resurrection the teaching of the Church has always required the exercise of a power capable of drafting out of nothing, the power of working a miracle, a power belonging to God alone.<sup>11</sup> The constant belief of the Church in the reality of Christ’s physical miracles (e.g., walking on water, multiplication of loaves, transfiguration) entails a belief in the source of their possibility and inner intelligibility, in the power of the Creator to modify and correct for higher ends the created order and its laws originally established by Him. And this power, in virtue of His divinity, was possessed by the Son of Mary.

## Adam and Eve

Not only does the cosmos as a whole, before it begins to develop with a certain apparent autonomy, have a beginning in time which is the immediate effect of a creative act of God, but the principal work of the sixth day, Adam and Eve, has a specific beginning on the sixth day and not before. It is not ascribed to the antecedent action of principal causes merely creatures, but to the direct, principal action and intervention of the Creator, touching not only both the material as well as spiritual components of that nature defined as human, but also the differentiation of male and female. In the Gospel according to St. Matthew (19,4), Christ refers to this specific beginning of man and woman as the basis of the distinctive, unchangeable (i.e., non-evolving) nature of marriage. This fundamental difference between the human and non-human among living creatures is present not only in the soul as in its root, but also in the human body, differentiating it from that of any other animal, however perfect. This difference

- is the basis of the human person’s special likeness to God among all creatures and the root of his personal dignity;
- accounts for the distinctive, unchangeable character of marriage, giving to the marriage contract its

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<sup>7</sup> John 1,1

<sup>8</sup> John 1,14,18

<sup>9</sup> John 17,5 - glorify Me with Thyself, with the glory that I had with Thee before the world existed.

<sup>10</sup> John 10,18 - No one takes My life from Me, but I lay It down Myself, and will take It up again (i.e., make my corpse live again).

<sup>11</sup> Also Matt. 25,34

sacred character, even among non-Christians; and

- is established directly by the Creator through the use of His distinctive power to create.

However the particulars of this action are described, it is not the equivalent of a natural process, as this is observable in the interaction of created agents already constituted *in esse*. In this century it is a point made by Pius XII,<sup>12</sup> but little noted by recent commentators on the theology of human origins.

### **Nature, Grace, and Glory**

There are parallels between the intervention of Creator *qua* Creator in the order of nature, of grace, and of glory. St. Paul, in the letter to the Ephesians,<sup>13</sup> formulates the principle explaining the nature of that link which correlates these three orders, a principle for the rest illustrated graphically in the many miracles of our Lord. The power at work now in the Christian (the grace received in baptismal regeneration), he writes, is the same that was at work in Christ Jesus raising Him from the dead (order of glory). This power (*dynamis, virtus*) is nothing other than the divine omnipotence by which all things were created (order of nature). The difference between the creative act, prerequisite for the foundation of the world and subsequent activity within it, is the exact measure of the difference between the action of God prerequisite for the establishment of the orders of grace and glory and their coordination, and the activities within them subsequent to their foundation.

Pelagianism, the radical denial of the difference between grace and nature, results from a failure to acknowledge this precise difference.

The denial of the need for grace in order to act in a salutary manner, for a supernatural end, leads logically to a denial of any need for an omnipotent “Fiat” to originate the world and each of the species within it. However different from Pantheism (Polytheism, Syncretism) that Pelagianism may seem, it rests on the same intellectual and psychological assumptions as does Pantheism, the equation of the creature and the “created will” with the Creator and the divine will.

### **Relative Uniformity of Nature**

St. Peter in his second letter<sup>14</sup> solves the objection of those who deny the possibility of the life to come, of the resurrection, of the coming of Christ in glory, and of a new heavens and a new earth, on the grounds that the world has always functioned in the same way in the past, and therefore will always function in the same manner in the future. St. Peter simply denies the truth of the assumption made by the skeptic doubting the realism of Christian hope as do those who call it an opiate today. The uniformity we presently observe in the world is not absolute and provides no basis for extrapolating into the past or into the future without limit and without taking account of God’s power to modify the form of the world and the order prevailing among the actions of creatures. In fact, the Creator has modified that order at least once since completing His original creative work. He did this at the time of the universal flood, and will do so again by fire at the time of Christ’s coming in glory. The basis for this relative uniformity of the laws of nature is to be located in the difference between a creative-miraculous act and one merely natural. Neither the original existence of the world, nor the constitution of its original order can be explained in terms of merely natural activity by extrapolating from the nature of that activity presently observed. Quite clearly, one of the key methods employed by evolutionists to

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<sup>12</sup> *Infra* pp. 27ss

<sup>13</sup> Ephesians I, 18ss

<sup>14</sup> Peter (3, 3ss)

prove an event no longer observable to scientists, viz. the uniformity of nature and the assumed continuity between the mode of origin of the species and of the world and the present, apparently uniform mode of acting within that world, conflicts with a constant Church teaching and the possibility of miracles (physical in particular).

## Summary

The creedal formula for creation, seen against its scriptural backdrop, quite explicitly contains the following points:

1. The One and only God, utterly incomparable, is the Creator of all else; the entire cosmos for this reason has a beginning in time. It is not eternal-infinite.
2. Not only is the Creator solely responsible for the existence of the world, but it is His distinctive action principally that gives order to the world in establishing the distinct natures or species in their essence and in establishing the laws or structures governing the subsequent activities of created agents.
3. Underlying these propositions (i.e., the relative and conditional uniformity of the laws of nature) are suppositions, a denial of which is itself a religious assertion, untrue factually as well as theologically, and because untrue, idolatrous.

## Exposition and Use in the Catholic Tradition

The Church's early tradition consistently demonstrates these same conclusions: that God created and principally caused the world and its order. These constitute His work (six days of Genesis), as contrasted with the work of creatures acting as principal causes, only after the prerequisite work of establishing and ordering had been completed by the Creator. These points have been amply demonstrated in a very careful study of F. Testa.<sup>15</sup>

## Polemical Uses

The polemical uses to which the Fathers of the Church put this article of the Creed likewise confirm these points. Thus,

1. The first article of the Creed clearly excludes any form of Polytheism whose central tenet is not the denial of God's existence, but the denial of His uniqueness, both in nature and in operation. The doctrine of creation quite unequivocally secures not only the correct notion of divinity, but likewise the correct use of those evidences in this world pointing to the existence of the only God.
2. The first article excludes any form of Manicheism in bringing all things, even the lowest material being, under the Lordship of God, thus securing the basis for the reality of matter and its goodness, because it is made by God. Not only metaphysical Dualism, but skepticism concerning the reality of matter<sup>16</sup> and the objectivity of the objects of the senses, is thereby excluded.
3. So too metaphysical Dualism's exact contrary, Pantheism, the ancient theory explaining the origin of the world by way of an emanation or evolving from the substance of God, is excluded by reason

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<sup>15</sup> *La Creazione del Mondo del Pensiero del SS Padri*, Studii Biblici Franciscani Liber Annus 16 (1965-66) pp. 5-68.

<sup>16</sup> In the early Church known as Docetism, in modern times popularized by Bishop G. Berkeley during the 18th century.

of the character of the creative act: not a natural process with a *terminus a quo*, but a simple act of the will, discontinuous with its effect.

4. In the exact parallel drawn by many Fathers between the formation of the body of the first man from the slime of the earth and the raising of the dead body of each person from the tomb, two phenomena are identified as being both effected directly by the omnipotence of God, starting not from nothing, but from something inert, and incapable, except by the direct exertion of the divine power in a uniquely divine action (miracle) of developing into a body capable of vivification by a spirit (soul).
5. Throughout the history of the Church a close connection between the first article of the Creed and the dogma of the Incarnation is noticeable. For instance, at the time of the Arian controversy, St. Athanasius held that Arius' view of the Word as an exalted creature, but merely a creature, could not be correct. For the Word is the One through Whom all else was made, and only a divine Person is capable of a creative act in the proper sense.

So too the ancient Modalism (and its modern counterpart, Unitarianism) which denied the real distinction between Father and Son has always tended to deny, and almost always in practice has denied, that the "one God is the Creator of all," and has espoused a religious system that can only be described as syncretistic. That is undoubtedly the root reason for the consistent sympathy to be found between various forms of Modalism and Pelagianism across the centuries, a sympathy which Cardinal Newman in his classic study of Arianism<sup>17</sup> notes to have first appeared in the views and practices of the Judaizers of St. Paul's time.

Once this is realized, it comes as no surprise to discover modern evolutionary theory denying the first article of the Creed to be closely allied with modern versions of ancient christological heresies in the promotion of syncretistic Mysticism.

### Speculative Discussion

Some 20<sup>th</sup> century writers<sup>18</sup> claim that the thought of at least some of the Fathers on the origin of the species (work of ordination) is not incompatible with, indeed would seem to suggest in other words a kind of "mitigated evolution." By this is meant an explanation of the *ratio seminalis*, or the essence of any species, as endowed with special powers such as to enable it to become in an individual instance something different (more perfect - a new, higher species) from what it was. The most famous Fathers cited are St. Gregory of Nyssa in the East and St. Augustine in the West. And because their authority is frequently adduced to justify a merely figurative interpretation of Genesis on the origin of the bodies of the first man and woman in such ways as to permit a believer to hold a completely natural explanation of the origin of the human body and one or another form of Polygenism as the origin of the human race, it is appropriate to indicate here why in general this interpretation is incorrect.

1. The term "mitigated evolution" is ambiguous. In modern usage evolution indicates a process of development arising out of the inherent natural powers of the subject developing. The evolution "discovered" in some Church Fathers is said to be mitigated, because the powers by which such

<sup>17</sup> The Arians of the Fourth Century, Chapter 1, Section 1

<sup>18</sup> E.C. Messenger, *Evolution and Theology* (New York 1939), and *Theology and Evolution* (London 1949). For the general background of *rationes seminalis* in St. Augustine, cf. E. Portalic, *A Guide to The Thought of St. Augustine* (Chicago 1960), and E. Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine* (New York 1960).

development occurred during the Hexaemeron are not natural, but special, for this occasion. It is difficult to see how these special powers differ from the miraculous. In fact, a natural sequence is being explained not in terms of natural powers, but supernatural endowments of the subject developing, so that what makes the critical difference between lower species and emergence of the higher is not the natural power of the lower species, but the power of God using this. In St. Augustine, certainly, the point is clear that he is not talking about evolution in the modern sense, for in opting for figurative interpretation of “day” in Genesis, he does not intend to promote the idea of long eras of development, but that of instantaneous creation and ordering where day indicates merely logical sequence. Far from assigning a certain fluidity to the notion of species Augustine intended, as St. Bonaventure saw so clearly, to defend the fixity indispensable to the intelligibility of any essence by making these all the direct work of God.

2. The ancients, not only Christians and Jews but non-believers as well, were generally not familiar with the modern idea of the more perfect evolving from the less perfect. The ancient Pantheism, with which the Fathers were familiar, asserted the evolution of the less perfect from the more perfect, ultimately from the divine. This approach is particularly obvious in the ancient discussion of the descent of man from the gods. The closer a man approached the condition of the beast, the farther he had fallen from his original condition. The denial of Pantheism, in the form of reincarnation, by the Church, is not the equivalent of an opening to evolution, but an assertion of a special “creative” act rather than generative action at the origin of human existence on God’s part. Only in baptism could a man call God his Father, as does the Word, and then only by adoption, not by nature as does the Word.<sup>19</sup> In discussing this “creative” act of God in respect to human nature and by extension to other species, neither St. Gregory nor St. Augustine deny the common teaching that the formation of the first man and first woman is principally a divine work rather than natural and the source of the special likeness of God to Adam and to Adam in all his descendants.
3. The discussion of such Fathers is related not to the theory of evolution as expounded in modern science, viz.,:

How much concerning the origin of the world and of the species within it can be learned from its present operation?

But to certain questions of an epistemological character:

- How exactly and fully does Revelation describe the formative work of God where that involved a sequence?
- How precisely is the essence of each species formed by God defined in Revelation?
- How much knowledge of the present operation of creatures and form of the world can be derived from Revelation directly?

### **St. Bonaventure**

On these points raised by the Fathers, the Church has permitted and still permits a certain amount of discussion, on the condition that the discussion not call into question those points certain in the teaching

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<sup>19</sup> The excellent study of E. Des Places, *Syngeneia. La Parente de l'Homme avec Dieu d'Homme avec Dieu d'Homer a la Patristique*. Paris 1964

of the Church and which the unanimous witness of the Fathers attests as the correct meaning of Revelation. The assessment of St. Bonaventure in the 13<sup>th</sup> century is certainly a balanced one. We cannot say that Revelation given us by God is a complete description of His work, but one that is sufficient to identify the character of his action so that we might understand how to use this world and our time in it to save our souls. Further, Revelation does not give an equally clear definition of each species, such that we can in every instance of present observation, merely on the basis of theology, discern the limits of each species philosophically considered. In some instances, in particular that of human nature, a great deal more bearing on the essence of man is given than for other species, precisely because this knowledge is so intimately bound up with questions of salvation. Finally Revelation contributes only by indirection to the resolution of a great many questions of natural philosophy (science today)<sup>20</sup> In a word, it is not a substitute for the development of scientific knowledge, anymore than the revelation of certain truths concerning the natural knowledge of God is a substitute for, or a resolution of, all questions bearing on the construction of this or that proof for God's existence.

Attempts within the past 50 years have been made to show in St. Thomas<sup>21</sup> and in John Duns Scotus<sup>22</sup> a certain opening to evolution, but without success, since in the judgment of most scholars the position of these two theologians does not differ from that of St. Bonaventure. Indeed, according to some (W. Hoeres) the metaphysical theology of Scotus in those questions of christology (primacy of Christ) most often alleged today to provide a basis for theistic evolution represents an approach diametrically opposed to any form of evolutionary theory, particularly the theistic.<sup>23</sup>

On the particular point of the literal or merely figurative interpretation of the six days, St. Bonaventure acknowledges that the Church has never condemned St. Augustine's view, creation of all as it were in a day. But what St. Bonaventure notes<sup>24</sup> in opting for the literal interpretation of day in the first chapter of Genesis has been commonly overlooked in modern times. The *ratio seminalis* of St. Augustine is the equivalent of essence, not embryo. It is the same when the world began to operate on its own as it is now. Only God can make it, change it, annihilate it. And thus how long it actually took God to make these species, only God can answer, because no one else was there to observe. It might have taken a day, or 200 days, etc., says Bonaventure, but the only evidence we have is what God has told us. For Bonaventure, the philosophical and epistemological points Augustine wishes to defend can be made just as well or better by holding for six days of twenty-four hours; and for Bonaventure there is no other convincing evidence pointing to a merely figurative meaning. Finally the choice of six days by God to complete His work of creation provides a solid objective basis for the subsequent rhythms of history. The structure of the seven day week, of the lunar and solar year, all provide a very exact, regular, intelligible backdrop for the unfolding of the divine plan of salvation.

These reflections of St. Bonaventure also illustrate the very ancient basis for a distinction crucial to the evaluation of evolutionary theory, particularly in respect to Christian belief. The distinction is between "fact" and truth on the one hand, and hypothesis on the other. Evolution is neither a truth immediately

<sup>20</sup> *Breviloquium*, Part 2, Ch. 5

<sup>21</sup> E. C. Messenger, *op cit.*

<sup>22</sup> N. Wildier, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin* (New York 1968). For the anti-evolutionary interpretation cf. W. Hoeres, *Kritik der Transzendental philosophischen Erkenntnistheorie* (Stuttgart 1969); C. Solaguren, *El Cristocentrismo cosmico de Teilhard de Chardin: in Verdad y Vida* 19 (1961)131-143. Cf. also J.B. Carol, *Why Jesus Christ* (Manassas, Va. 1986) p.437, n. 26.

<sup>23</sup> G.R. Doran, *De corporis Adami origine doctrina Alexandri Halensis, Sancti Alberti Magni, Sancti Bonaventurae, Sancti Thomae*. Mundelein 1936; idem, *St. Thomas and the Evolution of Man in Theological Studies* 1(1940) 382-395.

<sup>24</sup> *Breviloquium*, Part 2, Ch. 2,5

evident, nor a fact directly observed or attested by witnesses who have observed it, but an hypothesis constructed so as to resolve questions whose resolution is otherwise not possible to the human mind. Hypothesizing, in whatever the discipline, in every instance begins with observed or attested facts, and concludes with some kind of verification. Speculation of this kind may serve to deepen the understanding of the facts at its starting point or may serve to identify errors in observation. But what it cannot do is provide the grounds for simply rejecting as false or mythical the observed or attested facts providing its starting point.

Theories of origin of the world or of the species within it, no different from any other form of hypothesizing, are subject to the same rules. In case of direct conflict between hypothesis and fact, observed or attested, it is the hypothesis, not the fact, which must be abandoned. In the case of unduplicatable origins no longer subject to observation, Revelation attests to certain facts and truths which constitute a prime test of the validity of any hypothesis on origins. Such an hypothesis will not be rejected:

- either because Revelation provides a direct answer to every possible question that might be raised concerning the origin of the world or of the species,
- or because *a priori* science and philosophy can contribute nothing to elucidate such questions.

Any hypothesis on origins will be rejected because in each instance it directly contradicts certain facts attested by Revelation and the teaching of the Church.

In the subsequent sections of this essay, evolutionary' theory will be shown repeatedly in direct conflict with certain facts, attested by Revelation and by the Church, as basic to salvation. This evolutionary' theory has emerged slowly and in various ways since the late middle ages. In each instance where the Church perceives that conflict, the theory (not the truths of Revelation) is rejected so consistently that one might justly surmise from this alone that theories of evolution, whatever scientific or philosophic claims might be made for them, are radically flawed as an attempt to answer questions primarily theological. In those cases where evolutionary theory claims scientific or philosophic support it is possible to demonstrate the falsity of such claims. That is certainly of great importance to the theologian, though not the primary' basis for his evaluation of such theories.

### **Patristic Consensus**

E. Testa,<sup>25</sup> after a detailed study of the teaching of the Fathers on the origin of the world as set forth in Genesis, concludes that the negative response of the Pontifical Biblical Commission to the question: whether the literal historical sense of the first chapters of Genesis can be called in question when the facts narrated touch the foundations of Christian religion, is an accurate resume of the unanimous witness to the mind of the Church from the beginning. These facts are:

- the creation of the entire universe in the beginning of time by God;
- the special creation of the first man;
- the formation of the first woman from the first man by God;

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<sup>25</sup> *op. cit.* p.68



- the unity of the human race; and
- the initial happiness of our first parents in the state of original justice.

All of these facts figure in the teaching of the Fathers and in the liturgy. Some of them, directly or indirectly, figure in the official condemnations of the heresies, particularly christological, heresies such as Apollinarianism, Nestorianism and Monophysitism, and in the condemnation of Pelagianism. In all of these, certain facts concerning the origin and nature of man figure prominently. Although only in the condemnation of Pelagianism directly and solemnly affirms the unity of the human family through descent from a single pair formed directly by the Creator. In the condemnation of christological errors, such definitions and attributes of human nature as simplicity and integrity of

the soul, the substantial unity of soul and body, are derived not primarily from philosophical reflection, but from the deposit of faith. In all this, the key point is not what man has in common with other creatures, but how he differs from others. This provides the correct basis for understanding what occurred when the Word hypostatically assumed a human nature. In every instance, God's direct formative action accounts for that difference; each christological error ultimately rests on a denial of that difference and its source. The Church claims a sound anthropology because she claims to know how God made man.

## Summary

It is against these specifics that any philosophical or scientific theory of origins must be measured. The Church in ancient times never denied that natural knowledge could contribute to the understanding of this world and of its origins. But in the case of conflict, the truths of Revelation could not be "reinterpreted" to fit the new theory; rather the theory, including theological speculation, had to be adjusted to the facts of Revelation certified by the Church. Although the Church has not formally pronounced on all exegetical questions surrounding the interpretation of Genesis, she reserves to herself the right to make final decisions. Whether, however, any modern theories of evolution can ever be reconciled with those points clearly and irreversibly defined by the Church in this matter is another question. Some, the Church has already indicated, cannot. But the basis on which this evaluation is made had already been clearly affirmed long before theories of evolution posed problems.

## Lateran IV Text

*Firmiter credimus et simpliciter confitemur, quod unus solus est verus Deus unum... universorum principium: creator omnium visibilium et invisibilium, spiritualium et corporalium: qui sua omnipotenti virtute simul ab initio temporis utramque de nihilo condidit creaturam, spiritualem et corporalem, angelicam videlicet et mundanam: ac deinde humanam, quasi communem ex spiritu et corpore constitutam. Diabolus enim et alii daemones a Deo quidem natura creati sunt boni, sed ipsi per se facti sunt mali. Homo vero diaboli suggestionem peccavit.* (Chapter 1, De Fide Catholica).

## Textual Observations

In comparison with the ancient creedal formularies this solemn definition identifies the invisible and visible respectively with spiritual-angelic and corporal-earthly, both established originally out of nothing at the beginning of time; then at the end of God's creative work He established the human, both body and soul united in a single nature. It is not said expressly that man was established out of nothing,

but the word used, *condidit*, clearly indicates that God alone formed man. Moral evil only entered each created order, invisible first and then visible, after God had completed its establishment. This occurred after angels and men had begun to exercise responsibility within their respective created order.

## Context

The definition of creation in the Fourth Lateran Council is in fact a repetition of the first article of the ancient creeds with additions constituting not a development of doctrine (for these points were already explicitly understood as forming the content of the creedal formularies), but a more precise formulation in view of certain errors of the time bearing directly on the origin of the world and in a particular way on the origin and nature of man.

According to St. Bonaventure,<sup>26</sup> the ancient dogma was so stated in order to make clear that three approaches to the question of origins, thought by many at the time to be compatible with Christian faith, were in fact utterly contrary to it. These were:

- I. The eternity of the world, as proposed by many Aristotelians - thus the definition states the world was created in the beginning of time to make clear the exact meaning of finitude.
2. The subtraction of the visible-corporal world from the power of God, and the identification of moral evil with material existence, the position of the Manichees of the middle ages - thus the insistence on creation of matter by God *ex nihilo*, and the location of the source of sin in a free choice not in conformity with the divine law.
3. The limitation of God's omnipotence by making the exercise of his power dependent on the cooperation of instruments, the position of the medieval Neo-Platonists, a position akin to that of the emanationists of old and the theistic evolutionists today -hence the phrase "God alone" to describe Who establishes and how He establishes His creation.

## New Perspectives

The second and third errors, widespread at the beginning of the 13th century, did not however represent positions not dealt with by the Church in centuries past. Often enough evolution is considered a "modern" theory, in all its forms linked popularly to the name of Darwin, and a theory with which, as with science in general, the Church must come to terms. From the foregoing section of this essay it should be clear that the remote basis of evolutionary theory had been familiar to the Church from her beginning. Indeed, that beginning is inseparably tied to the first article of the Creed, so that an attack on one is inevitably an attack on the other. For the Founder of the Church, the Organizer of her clergy, the great High Priest of her confession, is the Word through Whom all things are created. That basis, the old Manicheism and the old Pantheism, was once again anathematized in the second and third errors proscribed by Lateran IV.

The roots of the "modern" theory of evolution, in so far as "modern" indicates a relatively novel form for a very hoary theory, are to be discovered, not in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, but in the 13<sup>th</sup> century with the appearance of "Latin Aristotelianism", a mode of interpreting Aristotle so as to make of Aristotelian thought an apt instrument for a radical repudiation of the entire Catholic faith and tradition. As St. Bonaventure saw so clearly, the cornerstone of this position was the denial of the dogma of creation as incompatible with an intellectual affirmation of the eternity of the world, in effect a

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<sup>26</sup> *Breviloquium*, Part II, Ch. 1,2

thoroughgoing secularism.

There is no doubt but that the re-discovery of Aristotle in the West triggered an intellectual ferment constituting a challenge to Catholic theology, not hitherto dealt with directly, and centering on the first article of the Creed, on origins, so that the conflict between Secularism and Catholicism as contrary ways of life centered intellectually on the problem of the eternity of the world versus creation in time.

According to many modern interpreters of Aristotle, but also according to many in the 13th century, including St. Bonaventure,<sup>27</sup> Aristotle neither had any idea of the Christian notion of creation *ex nihilo*, nor did he ever raise the question of the origin of the world. He simply took the world for granted, as always existing, eternally imperfect, eternally perfectible. The unmoved mover by its immobility made motion possible, but was not understood by Aristotle to be the maker of the world. For in such a perspective the origin of the world is simply not a question, because a non-existent origin needs no explanation. Only when this perspective is confronted by the dogma of creation does the question arise for such a philosophy. So long as the eternity of the world is maintained, so long will this question be resolved in a non-creationistic form.

As brilliant as Aristotle's thought was and is, it had major defects whose consequences, when uncorrected, are seldom appreciated by those who reject the Christian doctrine of creation and its relevance to the conduct of science. Fr. Stanley Jaki in *The Road of Science and the Ways of God* has noted that Greek science was a monumental achievement of the human intellect, but was stillborn because it lacked the knowledge of creation. Modern science, he claims, really began in the 13th century with the development of a Christian philosophy based on the notion of the world as created-finite and God as the infinite Creator; and to the extent that a scientist engages fruitfully in the cultivation of his discipline he acts on, even when he consciously rejects creation, a philosophy of science and methodology only possible on the assumption creation is true. But to the extent a scientist works on the assumption of an eternal, radically infinite world, to that extent his work becomes progressively more fruitless because unrelated to the real world) which is the object of scientific study, a world in fact finite and temporal, not infinite and eternal.

Corrected, Aristotelian thought could and would prove useful to the further development of Christian thought, as the works of St. Thomas Aquinas and the Venerable John Duns Scotus demonstrate. But the needed correction, as St. Bonaventure saw so clearly, was a major one touching a point crucial to the determination of the final character of Aristotelian thought: closed or open to Christian faith; and therefore of its utility for believers and as many historians of science hold, its utility for science as well.

Uncorrected, in the hands of those bent on the destruction of the Christian faith and the Catholic way of life, it became a potent instrument for undermining intellectual confidence in the first article of the Creed, because it provided in intellectual rather than religious form an alternative to the dogma of creation (with its philosophical and scientific correlatives) as a solution to the problem of origins. This is the first, proximate root of modern evolutionary theory, a root despite its intellectual format, neither purely nor primarily intellectual and scientific, but religious, because the question of origins both thematically and historically is a religious question.

A second root of "modern" evolutionary theory in the 13th century, and of the Secularism based on it, is to be found in Joachintism and the peculiar mystique of "progress" which it popularized during the 13th century and which has not disappeared from western culture since. Originally a theology of history

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<sup>27</sup> II Sent. d.1, a, 1, q, 2

proposed by the unworldly Abbot Joachim to explain and justify a program of reform and renewal of the Church, it was condemned at the Fourth Lateran Council as involving notions inimical to a sound understanding of the Trinity and of the nature of the Church. Its subsequent development showed it to be a potent catalyst of ardent revolutionary fervor.

The progression, by which in this theory history was to be explained, provided a basis for an expectation of the imminent advent of the kingdom of the Holy Spirit and the inauguration of a time of peace and prosperity wondrously contrasting with the misery and corruption of the present age of the clerical kingdom known as the “canonical” or institutional Church. But like so many projects of the unworldly, this one lost sight of the difference between the temporal and the eternal, the secular and the spiritual, and thus in its own way of explaining the end of the world eliminated the difference between created and uncreated which Latin Aristotelianism did by means of its theory of an eternal world as an explanation of the world’s origin. The results are not surprising. Religious and secular progress came to be identified; the reality of the object of Christian hope (a life after death) eventually became confused with earthly progress. Unlimited human progress and perfectibility on earth promised by human science and achieved by human technology could be rationalized as the ultimate hope and inspiration of human activity. And from the marriage of progress with the theory of an eternal world came the modern notion of unending evolution toward a better and better future in this world.

Since that time a certain number of characteristics have attached themselves to this kind of thought and are of considerable interest because they tend to be present wherever evolutionary thought predominates at present.

1. The religious practice inspired by this kind of thought is strongly indifferent to dogma and highly syncretistic, seeking to reduce particular religions to a higher synthesis and very often giving to this synthesis a certain number of christic trappings.<sup>28</sup>
2. Movements impregnated with this kind of thought are radically anti-clerical in a violent manner, because firstly the existence of Catholic clergy, in particular the Pope, is seen as an obstacle to religious progress and renewal, and secondly as an obstacle to intellectual freedom and moral spontaneity. In this framework the destruction of the clerical Church is the necessary condition for progress or evolution. Indeed, this kind of principled and militant anti-clericalism throughout the history of the Church has invariably been the *sine qua non* for any plausible identification of the spiritual with the temporal (idolization of the present world and denial of the world to come).
3. Such movements are endowed with a very potent totalitarian instinct, sometimes described as communistic, in the medieval period very evident among some groups of Franciscan spirituals, and after their condemnation, among the so-called *fraticelli* of the middle ages and various communistic groups at the time of the Protestant reformation.

The distinctive “anti-Creationism” of the 13<sup>th</sup> century involved in particular false concepts of human nature, justified by an intellectual system entailing complete independence from Revelation and Church authority, and inspired by an ideology or spirituality, totalitarian at root. Hence, from this time forward, official pronouncements of the Church dealing with the question of origins place a particular stress on two points:

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<sup>28</sup> infra under *Council of Vienne*

- a correct notion not only of what man should do, but what man is by nature in virtue of what his Creator has made him directly; and
- a correct assessment of the natural abilities of the human intellect vis-a-vis the exercise of faith in assenting to the truths revealed by God and proclaimed authentically by the Church.

### **Magisterial Statements on Human Nature**

Because of these factors the question of the origin of the world quickly came to center on the question of the origin and nature of man. While this may initially have been on the minds of all those departing from the tradition of the Church, in fact there are but two starting points for any such discussion of human origins: creationistic or pantheistic, today often designated as evolutionary. Further, as in earlier times, any departure from a creationistic standpoint invariably entailed serious christological deviations. It is interesting to note in the texts that follow, that with the exception of the origin of the body of the first male human, every characteristic feature of modern evolutionary hypotheses concerning human origins was explicitly condemned between the Fourth Lateran Council and the Council of Trent.

### **Innocent III**

Innocent III wrote *Gaudeamus in Domino* to the Bishop of Tiberias in Palestine, 1201; Polygamy is forbidden by the natural law, and monogamy is of the very nature of marriage, he affirmed, because of the manner in which the Creator formed the first woman, Eve, from the side of the first man. The narrative is taken in the literal sense, and as pertinent to the truths of salvation, just as the Biblical Commission in 1909 remarked concerning the same verse. The letter of Pope Innocent III is not a solemn definition; it does reflect quite clearly the consistent mind of the Church on this verse from her foundation to the present. It also says that this understanding is not contingent on philosophical or scientific analysis, but on a theological tradition stemming from Christ.<sup>29</sup>

### **Council of Vienne (1311)**

The ancient damnations of Apollinarianism (in the incarnation the divinity of the Word replaces the rational part of the soul, and thus forms a substantial unity with the body), are repeated and so formulated as to exclude the erroneous views of a Franciscan, Peter of John Olivi. The Council declared that the one intellectual soul, *qua* intellectual, is the form of the Body of Christ conceived in the womb of the Virgin, just as it is in every other human nature. To hold, as Olivi seems to have taught, that the soul only informs the body by way of some power less than intellectual would be to open the way to a denial of the essential difference between the human body and that of the brute. The Council further insisted that the soul of Christ is individual, not the common mind dear to the medieval pantheist throughout the 13th century and which in fact the divinity becomes in all forms of Apollinarianism.

The source of the teaching of the Council of Vienne on the human soul and its relation to the body ultimately rests on the Church's traditional understanding of the origin of the first man's body and soul. Each was made specially by the Creator and then united by Him to form a single man, who is not God, but a creature, a creature different however from any other in his special likeness to God.

### **Fifth Lateran Council (1513)**

Against the views of the Neo-Aristotelians of the Renaissance this Council defined the immortality of

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<sup>29</sup> T.J.Motherway, *The Creation of Eve in the Catholic Tradition in Theological Studies* 1(1940)97-116

each human soul, the possibility of natural demonstration thereof (details unspecified) and the direct creation of the souls of not only the first man and first woman but of each and every descendant of Adam and Eve.

This creative act is to be understood in the sense of creation *ex nihilo*. The direct formation of the first human bodies by God has never been understood by the Church as a creation *ex nihilo*, because the Scriptures describe that uniquely divine action in respect to the first human bodies as on something pre-existent; for Adam the slime of the earth, for Eve a rib from Adam's side.

### **The Council of Trent**

The Council of Trent, in the decree on original sin,<sup>30</sup> defined the unity of the entire human family as one of descent from one man and one woman made directly by God, and that in virtue of that descent and only in virtue of descent by procreation, is one a human being. Further, in virtue of that descent, original sin is a matter of inheritance, not of imitation of the sin of Adam.

No theory of Polygenism is reconcilable with this belief, as both Popes Pius XII and Paul VI clearly noted. The theory in principle is a denial of facts (that there was but a single couple and not multiple couples, owing its existence principally and directly to the Creator, from which couple all other human beings descend); and these facts, known as true on the authority of God, cannot be disproven.

Implicitly, this decree of the Council of Trent constitutes an affirmation of the literal sense of Genesis in those passages dealing with the individuality of Adam and Eve and of the unity of the human family.

### **Epistemological Considerations**

The very obvious challenge to the first article of the Creed represented in the position of medieval Latin Aristotelianism regarding the origins of the world (at once a continuation of the ancient Pantheism and an anticipation of key features of modern Evolutionism), in conjunction with the ideals of reform, progress and perfectibility of the human condition by human effort, exerted a strong magnetism over the human mind and spirit. Equally potent were the epistemological factors associated with this challenge, recognized as such both by the Church and by her opponents as basic to the resolution of the questions raised.

### **Warnings and Prohibitions Against the Use of Aristotle**

Throughout the first half of the 13th century the popes issued a series of warnings, and in some instances prohibitions against the use of the works of Aristotle as a basic textbook of philosophy in the school of arts of the University of Paris, and against the danger of using new terminology and concepts drawn from philosophy as a means of determining and interpreting the sense of Revelation in preference to those criteria based on sacred tradition and Scripture.<sup>31 32</sup> St. Bonaventure<sup>33</sup> discusses theological method and the dangers attendant on the use of merely natural knowledge apart from a divinely appointed authority as a primary criterion for the resolution of theological questions, of which the interpretation of the divinely inspired books of the Bible is one.

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<sup>30</sup> Session V, 1546

<sup>31</sup> M. Grabmann, *I divieti ecclesiastici di Aristotele sotto Innocente III e Gregorio IX*. Roma 1941

<sup>32</sup> Pope Gregory IX, *Ab Aegyptiis Argentea*, 1228

<sup>33</sup> *Collationes in Hexaemeron*, 19

These warnings are not a condemnation of Aristotle, nor a denial of the possible utility of philosophical, and by extension scientific knowledge within theology, much less an attempt to control and manipulate philosophical and scientific research and reflection. Rather they indicate that until the valid insights of Aristotle, or any other scholar, are detached from a secular bias placing no limits on the freedom and prowess of man to know all naturally, a bias ultimately resting on the denial of creation and of the very possibility of faith, that mode of speculation, particularly when applied to questions touching the origin of the world, of man, and of the nature of the incarnation, employed as the initial model for forming the intellectual habits of youth, is dangerous to faith.

There appear here the rudiments of a policy subsequently developed and applied with great consistency by the Church in questions involving not only theology, but other intellectual disciplines. Statements directly contrary to revealed truth are condemned as such. Hypotheses of a philosophical and scientific character are not judged directly in terms of the methodology employed, but in view of the assumptions governing any equitable and balanced use of the human intellect these are rated, as it were, as safe and sound, or unsafe, in terms of what is known by faith to be beyond question.

Like his modern counterpart, the secular intellectual of the middle ages regarded such a policy as obscurantist in principle. But however inept the administration of such a policy by ecclesiastics might become in certain cases, the policy can only be regarded as obscurantist in principle on the assumption that Revelation and theology have nothing to contribute to the understanding of that which in other ways is the subject matter of philosophy and science. This is especially the case with speculation concerning the existence and nature of God, the origin of the world and of the species, in particular human, within it.

This policy, entailing in principle a radical compatibility and mutual support between the truths of faith and the results of genuine science (in the medieval sense, including what since has come to be designated under the headings philosophy, science and art) made two assumptions, whose affirmation or denial has inextricably been linked to the affirmation or denial of creation.

1. Truth is objectively one. Contradictories cannot simultaneously be true. Hence Revelation and reason, to the extent they give distinct but authentic access to the truth, cannot be at odds. Apparent contradictions arise either from the thinker's abuse of faith or from the abuse of reason. Truth is eternal and immutable; otherwise it would not be one.
2. Methods or procedures for the use of human intelligence in grasping the truth are multiple. One method, theological or scientific, is not capable of comprehending all there is to know, or even all there is to know about one object (e.g., the material world, or human nature). Because the Truth is one, these methods are coordinated one to the other and subordinated to (centered on) that one science providing the most direct access to the Truth itself, the study of Revelation.

Effective avoidance of the practical import of this policy, whatever the reason, postulated the denial of these two assumptions. This is exactly what occurred during the 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### **The Two-Truth Theory**

During the middle ages, those who adopted the secular stance in intellectual and religious matters, but who also wished in some way to retain their link with Catholicism without acknowledging such a choice, precluded any such link, devised as a rationalization of their position, later termed the "two-truth" theory. To avoid choosing between flatly contradictory statements, only one of which could be

true, it was stated that what might be true theologically, could simultaneously be false philosophically (or historically, or scientifically), or vice-versa. Such a position could not be acknowledged as legitimate for anyone calling himself a Catholic, for it quite obviously entails a skepticism or intellectual relativism incompatible with the Catholic view of truth, and dogma in particular, as unchanging.

Between this theory and the mode of reasoning of Christian proponents of evolution attempting to reconcile the “fact” of evolution with the data recorded in Genesis there is a curious similarity. It is claimed that the facts of Genesis are true as theological symbols, a kind of code for transcendent religious truths, but false historically and scientifically.

But it is just this claim concerning key data of Genesis that the Church has consistently denied throughout her history. They are not symbolically but literally true. To be included among the data so interpreted are both facts and essences (e.g., human nature).

On this point, many thorough evolutionists have always concurred. Consistency does not permit the synthesis represented by what is today termed “theistic evolution.” One must choose between the dogma of creation or all-embracing evolutionary perspective as the starting point for any discussion and resolution of the questions of cosmic and human origins.

### **Nominalism**

One of the characteristic features of this 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century movement among Catholic philosophers and theologians was the refusal to concede to universal concepts a status greater than that of a generalization (a purely mental construct). Concepts never rise above the level of mental tags and symbols, and hence of themselves can provide no sure avenue to the understanding of the extra-mental real. For example, the concept of a species (e.g., human nature as a rational animal) tells the thinker nothing absolutely certain and unchanging about human nature outside the mind.

The implications of such a position for certainty and objectivity of human understanding are reducible to two:

- either such certainty concerning the reality and stability of the outer world is imposed by authority (Fideism); or
- the only certainty is that nothing is certain -reality is an unending flux.

Any attempt to reason on such an assumption tends to identify the real with the objects of the senses, always in flux, since the essence of things, even material things, not distinctly and directly perceived by the senses, are but mental constructs. Access to the truth, then, in so far as truth designates the real outside the mind, is the exclusive prerogative of the “scientific method,” by definition the method appropriate to the study of the sensible. Thus, any theory of science radically nominalistic will also be evolutionary, because the objects of the senses are constantly changing. Change or evolution rather than form or substance as the fundamental characteristic of the real will conversely be described in such a context as scientific and reasonable, whereas Creationism, however presented, cannot appear, *a priori*, as anything but fideistic, authoritarian, and unscientific.

It is just this theory of science which Fr. Stanley Jaki claims is as unscientific as it is anti-Christian and anti-creationistic. Further consideration of the support which nominalism has always provided for theories of legal Positivism and arbitrary Voluntarism confirms the radically arbitrary character of any



theory of science based on nominalistic assumptions, and the importance of distinguishing science as a genuine intellectual endeavor of the human mind from explanations of the nature of that endeavor. So too, it is important from a Catholic point of view to question whether evolutionary thought has ever been scientific in any but the sense of being part of a theory of science whose root assumptions are incompatible with what Pope Paul VI in his Creed<sup>34</sup> considers an integral part of Catholic belief, the human mind's ability to form universal concepts by which objective knowledge about the essences of things is derived.<sup>35</sup>

### The Galileo Case

Once the rejection in the 16<sup>th</sup> century of the authority and traditional policies of the Magisterium of the Church had become sufficiently widespread, it was possible to use technical advances made possible by the cultivation of science as a kind of marvelous or miraculous confirmation of the theory of science set forth by scientists and philosophers at odds with the Magisterium and the traditional teaching of the Church and as a proof of the Obscurantism and childishness of faith. The case of Galileo has become a landmark in the illustration of such a point of view.

There are many questionable aspects of the Galileo case, touching both parties in the dispute: the conduct of certain ecclesiastics, the narrowness of certain theologians and scholars (but by no means all supported the final decision), the unscrupulous use made of human failings by the propagandists of Secularism, buoyed by the alleged triumph of modern science liberated from the dogmatic Obscurantism of the Church. Whatever the truth about the alleged failings of some ecclesiastics involved in the trial, the final decision, in so far as it involves questions of doctrine and of the relations between Revelation and reason as sources of knowledge, was consistent with tradition. Hence, it is not correct to make of the decision a kind of dilemma; either support the decision and maintain intellectual narrowness, or repudiate it and in effect capitulate to Modernism's major assumption that truth is a coefficient of the current culture and subject to evolution proportionate to the progress of science.

In so far as the two decisions in the Galileo case touched matters of belief, two points were involved:

1. The astronomical theories of Galileo touched points also mentioned in Scripture. His views, propounded as proven fact, would seem to render Scriptural reference to the immobility of the earth either false or meaningless. Thus the decision to place the works of Galileo on the Index of Forbidden Books, and to forbid him to publish anything more, was not a condemnation of scientific theorizing as such, or this theory of Galileo in particular, but only an insistence that it be held merely as a theory, until such time as the Church should have resolved the exegetical questions; and not to publicize the same in circumstances where it might easily be taken as proven fact by the uninformed to the detriment of their faith. One may discuss whether this was the best manner to handle the pastoral problem; but it hardly constitutes intellectual tyranny. And just as Galileo's celestial mechanics were not condemned, neither were Aristotle's canonized.
2. The immediate concern of the Church was not the justification of astronomical theory, but the guardianship of the deposit of faith and of its correct interpretation.<sup>36</sup> Revelation does contain references to what seems to be a fact: the immobility of the earth. The Fathers of the Church, as St.

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<sup>34</sup> Introduction, n.5

<sup>35</sup> Also G. Sermoni - R. Fondi, *Dopo Darwin, Critica all'evoluzionismo*. Milan 1982, pp.104-120

<sup>36</sup> Council of Trent, Session 4

Robert Bellarmine noted, also seem to attest this as a fact pertaining to the mystery of salvation. If the heliocentric theory is true, then, as St. Robert observed, our understanding of these passages must be reexamined to discover the faulty interpretation, but it is not permissible to say God has stated something factually false by way of the literal sense of Scripture or engaged in pious deception. But if this theory is merely a possible hypothesis which could be true, but also false, it is not a sufficient basis, according to St. Robert, for doubting the literal sense of Scripture attested by the Fathers, but only of saying we do not know how to reconcile the two points. In passing, it may be remarked that there are still serious scholars willing to make a case for the geocentric theory.

Despite the polemics surrounding this affair, the decision in essence illustrates a policy, and the basis for that policy, on the part of the Church in dealing with subjects, at once a matter of Revelation and of reason, already in evidence in the 13th century, and which will appear again in subsequent centuries.

All the factors subsequently involved in the Evolutionism condemned by the First Vatican Council and by Pope Pius XII in the encyclical *Humani Generis*, as is apparent from the foregoing, were already familiar to the Church long before the time of Hegel and Darwin, and were rejected as incompatible with the Truths of Revelation which the Church professed the Apostles to have received from her Founder, Savior, and Teacher, Jesus Christ. All that is missing is the name “evolution” and the designation of such thinking as “scientific.”

## Vatican I

As the Fourth Lateran Council anticipated key elements in the medieval challenge to the first article of the Creed, so too the First Vatican Council performed the same service for the Church in modern times.

### Texts (Dogmatic Constitution, *Dei Filius*)

1. Hic solus verus Deus bonitate sua et omnipotenti virtute non ad augendam suam beatitudinem nec ad acquirendam, sed ad manifestandam perfectionem suam per bona, quae creaturis impertitur, liberrimo consilio “simul ab initio temporis utramque de nihilo condidit creaturam, spiritualem et corporalem, angelicam videlicet et mundanam ac deinde humanam quasi coinmunem ex spiritu et corpore constitutam. (Chapter 1)
2. *Eadem sancta mater Ecclesia tenet et docet, Deum, rerum omnium principium et finem, naturali humanae rationis lumine e rebus creatis certo cognosci posse... attamen placuisse eius sapientiae et bonitati, alia eaque supernaturail via se ipsum ac aeterna voluntatis suae decreta humano generi revelare....* (Chapter 2)
3. *Hoc quoque perpetuus Ecclesiae catholicae consensus tenuit et tenet, duplicem esse ordinem cognitionis non solum principio, sed objecto etiam distinctum: principio quidem, quia in altero naturali ratione et altero fide divina cognoscimus; objecto autem, quia praeter ea, ad quae naturalis ratio pertingere potest, credenda nobis proponuntur mysteria in Deo abscondita, quae, nisi revelata divinitus, innotescere non possunt....* (Chapter 3)
4. *Porro, Ecclesia, quae una cum apostolico munere docendi mandatum accepit fidei depositum custodiendi, jus etiam et officium divinitus habet falsi nominis scientiam proscribendi, ne quis decipiatur per philosophiam et inanem fallaciam....* (Chapter 4)

5. *Neque solum fides et ratio inter se dissidere numquam possunt, sed opem quoque sibi mutuam ferunt, cum recta ratio fidei fundamenta demonstret eiusque lumine illustrata rerum divinarum scientiam excolat, fides vero rationem ab erroribus liberet ac tucatur eamque multiplici cognitione instruat. Quapropter tantum abest, ut Ecclesia humanarum artium et disciplinarum culturae obsistat, ut hanc multis modis iuvet atque promoveat. Non enim commoda ab iis ad hominum vitam dimanantia aut ignorat aut despicit; ....Nec sane ipsa vetat, huiusmodi disciplinae in suo quaeque ambitu propriis utantur principiis et propria methodo; sed justam hanc libertatem agnoscens, id sedulo cavet, ne divinae doctrinae repugnando errores in se suscipiant, aut fines proprios transgressae ea, quae sunt fidei, occupent et perturbent. Neque enim fidei doctrina, quam Deus revelavit, velut philosophicum inventum proposita est humanis ingeniis perticienda, sed tanquam divinum depositum Christi Sponsae tradita, fideliter custodienda et infallibiliter declaranda. Hinc sacrorum quoque dogmatum is sensus perpetuo est retinendus, quem semel declaravit sancta mater Ecclesia, nec unquam ab eo sensu altioris intelligentiae specie et nomine recedendum. “Crescat igitur.... et multum vehementerque proficiat, tam singulorum quam omnium, tam unius hominis quam totius Ecclesiae, aetatum ac saeculorum gradibus, intelligentia, scientia, sapientia: sed in suo dumtaxat genere, in eodem scilicet dogmate, eodem sensu eademque sententia. (Chapter 5)*

## Commentary

### First Text

The first text is a repetition of the solemn definition of the Fourth Lateran Council, with an additional reference to the nature of that creative act, a free act of God's will, rooted in His goodness and omnipotence, and motivated not by a desire for gain, but one of generosity. Both as to its motive as well as to its character the creative act is distinctive of God and is the basis for condemning in the canons of the Dogmatic Constitution, *Dei Filius*, the following errors:

- that the one God is not the Creator of all else (Chapter 1, Canon I);
- that the substance of God is identical with the world (Chapter 1, Canon 3);
- that finite beings evolved from the substance of God (Chapter 1, Canon 4);
- that through its evolution or manifestation the divine substance becomes all things, or a part of some things (Chapter 1, Canon 4); and
- that the world and everything in it, spiritual as well as material, was not produced by God *ex nihilo secundum totam suam substantiam* (i.e., in its every part). (Chapter 1, Canon 4).

The first anathema excluded from Catholic belief the view (Deism) that one can subtract the world from dependence on God, either in existence or perdurance or both, and still claim belief in God, and by implication claim that belief in God tells one nothing about the existence and nature of those subjects forming the direct object of philosophic and/or scientific study.

The second, third, and fourth anathemata exclude various forms of Pantheism, both the ancient form (psychological Monism) claiming the world emanated from God or that God became a part of certain things and the more modern form (Hegelianism) claiming the world becomes God because it is the manifestation or evolution of the divine substance, as compatible with Catholic belief.

The fifth anathema cited here clearly indicates that the world also studied by natural reason in various

ways, and the natural development characteristic of the world as a whole and each of its parts, presupposes a creative action of God touching not simply the first moment of the world's existence, but the entire work of six days by which the species in the philosophical sense were established and the universe given an orderly, intelligible form. Any theory that claims to explain the origin of the world, or of the species, exclusively in terms of natural processes (evolution) is by that very fact opposed to Catholic belief. The essences of finite species, and the essential structure of world order are not the fruit of the activity of those species, but their necessary prerequisite, only possible in virtue of a distinctive, divine productive action.

## Second Text

The second text is a corollary of the first. Precisely because the things of this world can be recognized in their existence and essence as created through the use of the human power to know naturally, therefore God can naturally be known as the One, true God Who is Creator. But precisely because His creation is finite, there is much more about Him, and about the designs of His will, that cannot be known naturally, but only from Revelation.

The teaching of the Church, and the Revelation which it claims to declare, contains in addition to truths knowable only by Revelation and faith, truths accessible to reason as well, and asserts that it is a part of Catholic faith to profess this. The first of these truths is that the world created by God reflects in its nature and activities the perfections of its Creator, and that these most basic aspects even of the humblest material object can be recognized as such. To deny on principle that either philosophy or science cannot eventually point to such is incompatible with Catholic faith.

## Third Text

This text indicates the basis for distinguishing between the orders of natural and revealed knowledge, in terms of which these two cognitive orders are correlated, avoiding at once Fideism (the denial of the possibility of achieving any certitude in the use of the intellect naturally, whether philosophically or scientifically) and Rationalism (the denial of the very possibility of faith).

## Fourth Text

This text makes clear the right of the Church to proscribe not merely errors concerning the content of Revelation, whether this pertains to mysteries of faith or to truths of the natural order, but to unmask those epistemological errors *falsi nominis scientia* parading in the guise of legitimate philosophy or science. These the faithful must not only avoid, but recognize for what they are: denials of the faith of the Church, and therefore false religion.

## Fifth Text

The final texts set forth the belief of the Church concerning the relations between faith and the cultivation of the intellect:

- in principle, the cultivation of faith and reason will be mutually beneficial, because the same Creator is the source of both;
- the ecclesiastical Magisterium does not interfere with or attempt to supervise the internal development of any discipline in accord with its proper method and nature;
- that Magisterium is concerned that in the name of a specious academic freedom (*falsi nominis scientia*) these disciplines should incorporate views which are false, because directly contrary to Revelation, or that in the cultivation of these disciplines reason should come to occupy the place of

faith; and

- that although reason can contribute to the progressive elucidation of the deposit of faith entrusted to the Church, the primary criterion must remain the Church's past unchanging and inerrant declarations whose sense may not be altered in view of the "progress of science."

Thus are anathematized (Chapter 4, Canons 2-3) two positions very much bound up in the controversy over evolution, scientific as well as philosophical: that it is possible to enjoy such liberty in the use of the human intellect that one can hold as true what is directly opposed to the belief of the Church (e.g., that the world is eternally evolving) and that the Church may not proscribe such a position; and that the progress of science constitutes grounds for interpreting the articles of faith in a way different from the traditional meaning assigned them (e.g., Polygenism in place of Monogenism), in respect to the texts of Genesis on Adam and Eve.

## **EVOLUTION IN THE LIGHT OF CONTEMPORARY CHURCH TEACHING**

The statements of the ecclesiastical magisterium over the last hundred years dealing with the questions of the origin of the world, and of the human species in particular, occasioned by theories of evolution, do not contain any elements not previously set forth in earlier times as the teaching of the Church, but are, rather, representations of those aspects in view of theories apparently independent of or directly contradictory of those resting on the origin of the world and of all in it in terms of creation. It is often objected that the earlier teaching has no normative value in the current discussion, because it reflects merely a primitive and immature level of scientific culture, and that the Church can only form an assessment of these points after and in the light of a resolution of the scientific questions. That, however is precisely the point which the teaching of Vatican I denies. The Church claims to know something about God as Creator and about the world as creation, quite independently both of philosophy and of science. Even if the cultivation of philosophy and science can contribute in some way to the clarification of our understanding of the Creator and His work, the faith of the Church does not depend or wait upon this development, or upon the authority which philosophy and science can give to the results of their respective research.

### **Vatican I**

In this regard the First Vatican Council teachings on creation, on the nature of Revelation and faith, and their relations to philosophy and science provide an excellent recapitulation of the mind of the Church over the centuries in respect to two key issues (Pantheism and Rationalism) at the center of the controversy over evolution and Catholic faith. Any scientific explanation of origins that entails either the one or the other or both is directly opposed to Catholic belief, indeed is not only false but false religion, and according to the teachings of Vatican I is not only opposed to faith, but in the opposition undermines the health of the intellect. Key signs of such positions are the affirmation of the eternity of the world, the infinity of the universe, the exclusive right of science to evaluate theories of evolution and explanations of the origin of the species, and the inability of the Church and believers to know anything about the origin of the world apart from scientific speculation.

Subsequent declarations of the Church are but elaborations of particular points within this frame of reference, occasioned by claims made for evolutionary Pantheism (of Hegel for instance) as:

- scientific; and

- because scientific, rendering impossible any longer a literal interpretation of Genesis and many other parts of Scripture, particularly those dealing with contingent facts of an historical kind and the unchanging character of the human species as constituted by the Creator directly.

Inextricably linked to these claims, as Pope Pius XII would point out in his encyclical *Humani Generis*, are theories of doctrinal development utterly relativistic (historicist) and utterly subversive of the genuine teaching of Christ and of the Church as coming from Christ and the Apostles.

### **Theistic Evolution Disfavored**

It is little wonder, then, that attempts by Catholics (St. G. Mivart, M.D. Leroy, J.A. Zahn) in the closing years of the 19th century to reconcile acceptance of evolution, especially of the human body from the beast, with Catholic faith, met with disfavor, and that some of those authors' works were proscribed by high Church authorities. No reasons were given for the judgment, but from the circumstances it is clear enough that the kind of evolutionary theory envisioned was Darwinian, and that such theory was not only linked to pantheistic and rationalistic modes of thought, but quite inseparable from such.

Such decisions were merely disciplinary, and by themselves provide no answer to the query: whether it is possible to construct and convincingly defend merely within the limits of science and on scientific grounds alone an evolutionary theory of origins. The response of the Biblical Commission in 1909 is quite important to the question, whether a Catholic is permitted to call into doubt the literal-historical sense of the facts narrated in the first three chapters of Genesis. Without such freedom the ability of a Catholic believer to construct and defend a plausible theory of evolution is greatly constricted, indeed many would say in effect non-existent. The decree of the Commission, summarizing the tradition attested by the Fathers, states that in matters which directly touch the bases of the Christian religion a believer must interpret these facts in the literal-historical sense. Then examples are listed:

- the creation of the entire world at the beginning of time;
- the special creation of man and the formation of the first woman from the first man;
- the unity of the human race;
- the initial happiness of our first parents in the state of justice, integrity and immortality;
- the testing of Adam and Eve through a positive precept;
- the temptation and transgression under the influence of the devil;
- expulsion from the initial paradise; and promise of a Redeemer.<sup>37</sup>

Such an answer is perfectly coherent with the tradition of the Church and the solemn definitions of the first article of the Creed. If one believes in a Creator God, on Whose creative act rests the existence and intelligible order of the world, then this list is a mere specification of those "facts" made by creation and not evolution, and prerequisite to any subsequent development and the limits thereof. Nor is it any less coherent that such a listing should be made, not on scientific evidence in the first instance, but on authority, for the only basic and adequate proof of these facts is the historical witness of a competent observer - in this case only the Creator. Hence the sense of the narrative must be taken historically at

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<sup>37</sup> Response no.6, question 3

these points; not to do so would be the equivalent of denying the traditional notion of creation as expounded by the Church from her beginning.<sup>38</sup>

## Literal Defined

What is meant by literal sense in this decree is relatively simple to grasp, but is much misunderstood. “Literal” can be defined in three ways when predicated of the sense of Sacred Scripture, as contrasted with the accommodated, the spiritual, the figurative or metaphorical senses.

In the first case, the literal sense is the one intended by the sacred Author, whereas the accommodated sense is the further meaning the text has when applied (e.g., by a preacher in his sermon).

In the second case, literal indicates the direct, primary meaning of a passage intended by the inspired author, whereas spiritual, allegorical, symbolic sense is a secondary one intended by the Author of Scripture, but only by way of the literal sense.

In the third case, literal has reference to the mode of expression and indicates that the sense, expressed univocally, without metaphor or comparison, whether simply or complexly, popularly or technically. Thus, what is literal in the second sense, that about which the decree of the Biblical Commission is concerned, may in some instances be expressed in a form that is either literal or figurative. That a “literal” truth revealed by Genesis (e.g., the direct formation of the body of Eve from a part of the first man by God) might in part be expressed figuratively (i.e., rib as a metaphor for “part of man”) or in a popular rather than technical style, does not make the primary and literal meaning of the text any less so. To deny this, and insist that an historical fact, or a primary datum of the real world can only be expressed in a certain style, or known by a trained scholar or scientist is not only to adopt a position radically skeptical of the objective truth and accuracy of Scripture, but of the direct knowledge of reality obtained by our senses. Thus, my knowledge that I am alive, that such and such moves, that so and so is human and not animal, that what I see is colored and not merely an illusion or subjective impression, is knowledge both true and accurate, though not fully accurate perhaps or fully understood, antecedent to further scientific or philosophic analysis in the proper sense. So, too, in the same way God can and does reveal something true and accurate about the origin of the world and of its structuring, especially of the origin of human nature, although this knowledge may not constitute full knowledge or be expressed always in a manner corresponding to the style and apparatus of a developed philosophy and science. Indeed, there are certain “facts” (e.g., the beginning of the world) that permit only a literal form of expression or are not true. Finally, it is also a possibility that certain primary truths concerning origins, like those truths directly accessible to anyone exercising his cognitive powers irrespective of his degree of education, are best expressed in a simple rather than complex manner.

These distinctions were commonplace in Catholic theology long before the controversies over evolution arose. Hence it cannot be said that they were devised only to escape the implications of modern science. Some Fathers of the Church (e.g., St. Gregory of Nyssa) observed that, although Moses was learned in the science of the Egyptians, he chose under the influence of the Spirit to write about the creative work of God in another style, accessible to all, not merely the learned, and by implication more appropriate initially to a discussion of a divine rather than natural activity.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Council of Trent, Session 4; Vatican I, *Dei Filius*, chapter 2

<sup>39</sup> Also St. Paul, in First Corinthians, chapters 1 and 2, where he contrasts the style of speech appropriate to philosophy and that appropriate to revealed theology: the first is relatively developed and polished, the second by contrast appears simple, unpolished, rough.

Once noted, these distinctions enable one to perceive that the alleged reversal of stance toward evolution effected by Pius XII in his 1943 encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (from antipathy to sympathy for it) does not in fact exist. The study of the literary forms of any part of Scripture of itself does not threaten the dogmas of the Church. Such a threat is only verified when the student does not understand the difference in meaning attached to literal or thinks that in establishing the literal sense in the third case above, that this automatically and always resolves the question of literal sense in the second case. Thus Pius XII in this encyclical, and Fr. Voste in his letter to Cardinal Suhard of Paris in 1948, do encourage the study of the literary forms found in the ancient writings of the Old Testament, a study not only not forbidden to Catholics, but one that can contribute to the further illustration of the revealed meaning, and to the correction of faulty interpretations of the literal sense. But this hardly constitutes a revocation, express or tacit, of the decree of 1909, that a Catholic in virtue of conclusions pertaining to literary questions may not doubt that Genesis does literally convey facts of an historical character directly bearing on the resolution of the problem of origins. Nor does the fact that some Fathers and theologians of the past combined belief in the literal sense with expositions of a faulty kind, either in terms of literary form or philosophic-scientific study soundly based, does not invalidate their accurate witness to the revealed, literal sense. Thus, this encyclical hardly implies that the earlier teaching of the Church on origins was “fundamentalistic” and in need of correction, where Fundamentalism denotes not merely adherence to fundamentals but the imposition of explanations of these resting on insufficient knowledge. In the case of Church teachings it is the faulty interpretation of this by individuals, not the teaching itself, that sometimes requires correction. The difference has been recognized by the Church from ancient times.

### **Pope Pius XII**

That this is a fair reading of the mind of Pope Pius XII in regard to the question of origins as set forth in the teaching of the Church is quite evident in the address given by this Pope to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences two years before the encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*<sup>40</sup> In this address the Pope makes the following points:

1. The starting point for any discussion of the question of origins is not the similarity, but the difference between the Creator and the creature, between human nature (including the human body) and the rest of creation.
2. What principally and primarily accounts for the difference is the distinctive productive action of the Creator (creative and/or miraculous) and not a natural process.
3. In the case of the initial existence of the world (at the beginning of time) only that creative action of God accounts for the difference and therefore the partial resemblance of creation to the Creator, and the possibility of knowing God from a study of the visible world.
4. In the case of the bodies of the first man and woman, as well as of their souls, it is the direct divine intervention which accounts for the specific difference between human beings and the rest of creation.

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<sup>40</sup> Nov.1941 - AAS (Acta Apostolicae Sedis) 33 (1941) pp.504-512



5. Antecedently to the formation of Adam and Eve the heavens and the earth were ordered by the direct intervention of God culminating in the appearance of the first man and woman.
6. Science as well as philosophy may be able to contribute to the further understanding of what is principally the work of God as a whole (the Hexaemeron) but only by respecting these truths. To date, he concludes, none of the sciences has contributed anything certain and definitive to the knowledge of origins already possessed from Revelation and set forth by the Church.

### ***Humani Generis (1950)***

The Pope returned to the subject of origins in his encyclical *Humani Generis* in 1950. The encyclical as a whole deals with questions touching the nature of theology and theological method. Because theories of evolution touch not only the particular question of origins but raise issues of theological method, the encyclical devotes considerable attention to this theme.

- Evolution as a basic mode of thought is condemned as directly opposed to those modes of reflection implied by Catholic faith. In this sense it is a form of Rationalism underlying three contemporary errors, pantheistic Totalitarianism, existential Skepticism concerning the objectivity of philosophic knowledge of essences, and Historicism or Skepticism concerning the unchanging character of eternal truths and dogmas of the Church. Any specific scientific hypothesis constructed on the basis of evolutionary thought is by that fact opposed to the truth, and therefore false. Not only is it false, but it is not scientific; rather it is a form of false religion parading as science because it is a direct denial of the truth of creation, at once the key to our understanding not only of God, but of the most basic truths about the world and ourselves.
- Evolution merely as a scientific hypothesis, on the assumption that one can be constructed apart from evolution as a theory of knowledge (the Pope does not say whether this is impossible in every instance, only that so far it has not successfully been done) may be investigated by properly trained Catholic scholars, provided certain conditions are verified:

that such hypotheses are not used or proposed to explain the origin of the world in the beginning of time, a question already definitively settled on the basis of a strictly creative act of God;

that such hypotheses are not used or proposed to explain the origin of the human soul, a question already decided on the basis of a strict creative act of God;

that such hypotheses are not used or proposed to suggest that any member of the human family has any other origin except by way of carnal generation from a single couple formed immediately by God (condemnation of Polygenism);

that such hypotheses, when the subject of discussion, are not disseminated indiscriminately among those unprepared to grasp the complexities involved and the precautions that must be taken in order not to deny certain points of truth; and

that in studying these hypotheses scientifically the reasons against, as well as for, a possible theory of evolution be presented with complete objectivity, in such a way as not to imply that scientific analysis by itself provides an adequate basis for resolving a point of Revelation, or

that any other authority but the Church has the right to decide such questions definitively.<sup>41</sup>

- The encyclical permits Catholic scholars to propose, hypothetically, evolutionary explanations for the origin of the first human body (Adam's)<sup>42</sup> from pre-existent living matter, so long as these take account of the direct divine intervention principally involved in this process.

The encyclical does not indicate what might be the eventual contribution of science to the understanding of the origin of the first human body, or the origin of any other material being mentioned in the revealed account of origins, nor does this encyclical deal with the question whether evolution, used to describe tenable and untenable hypotheses, is a term used in the same sense (univocally) in each case. The requirement that such theories account not only for the Creator as primary, but as principal Cause in such a process, would indicate that such hypotheses differ significantly from those normally designated as such, because the latter do not make allowance for a miraculous element in the formation of the first man's body. From the point of view of this encyclical the permission to study human origins scientifically might just as well, or even more so, point to those hypotheses often known as "creation science" in the event evolutionary hypotheses fail to justify their scientific character. The encyclical does not take note of any doubt concerning the scientific character of evolution, even within the limits enjoined for its tentative investigation. Rather the encyclical assumes any such investigation and the formulation of its results will be strictly scientific. Should this not be the case, or further should it prove impossible, Catholic proponents of evolution as a "scientific" hypothesis could not appeal to *Humani Generis* for support. Indeed, a fair reading of the encyclical would entail abandonment of such hypotheses, as a kind of *falsi nominis scientia* proscribed by Vatican I. Hence, *Humani Generis* is not, as so often claimed, a charter for Evolutionism among Catholics. Rather the passage often cited to support this claim is essentially approval to examine the question of origins from a scientific standpoint, in so far as this is feasible. The limits traced in the encyclical serve to define "feasibility" in practice.

In any case those theories known as "theistic evolution", which attempt to explain the origin of the human body of Adam and Eve in terms of a purely natural process, and which more often than not, when extended in fully logical fashion, have defended the possibility of Polygenism and of a notion of God involving Him in the process of creation as a subject of change Himself, have met with the consistent disfavor of the Church, and in the best known case, that of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, public reprimand<sup>43</sup> preceded by numerous prohibitions to pursue such lines of thought Or publish these.

### **Summation of the Teaching of Pius XII**

The teaching of Pius XII should be regarded, not as a definition of points hitherto undeclared by the Church, but as a clarification of issues in view of a double objective:

- establishing the limits of academic freedom, particularly scientific, to speculate vis-a-vis the exercise of faith; and
- rebutting the charge that the practice of faith, particularly the unconditional obedience entailed

<sup>41</sup> Council of Trent, Session 4, on authority and criteria for determining the inspired sense of Scripture.

<sup>42</sup> Eve is not mentioned, but in view of the antecedent tradition should be regarded as excluded, if not mentioned explicitly.

<sup>43</sup> the *Monitum* of 1962, declaring his works to contain heresy and errors dangerous to faith, reaffirmed in July, 1981

therein, is obscurantist in principle.

The guidelines provided both in regard to Historicism (evolutionary epistemology) and in regard to allegedly “scientific” theories of evolution for the origin of the first human body, if one is to judge from the comments of this Pope’s successors, are still valid, but have not been followed too faithfully by all Catholic scholars.

Two questions rarely raised in connection with *Humani Generis* are:

1. Are the “evolutionary” theories of human origin permitted as hypotheses of a strictly scientific kind under the conditions established by Pius XII truly evolutionary?
2. Does any theory of evolution merit the appellation “scientific”?

One of the merits of “creation science” is to provide an excellent basis for a negative response to both, especially to the second. A negative response, while hardly an exhaustive and definitive resolution to all problems of Biblical exegesis associated with the question of origins, will indeed tend to undermine and destroy the grounds for doubting the traditional teaching of the Church on creation, and at the same time provide a positive impetus to science.

#### **Pope Paul VI (1966)**

Pope Paul VI, in an address<sup>44</sup> to theologians gathered in Rome to study the theme of original sin, made the following points:

1. The traditional dogma of original sin, unchanged, figures in the teaching of Vatican II at many points, and is to be taken seriously as a basic criterion for assessing the meaning of the documents of Vatican II.
2. Polygenism, as repeatedly stated in the past, is incompatible with the teaching of the Church on the state of original justice of our first parents and the origin of original sin.
3. If hypotheses of evolution touching the origin of the first human body, never the soul, proposed in accord with the still binding directive of Pius XII in *Humani Generis*, cannot be constructed plausibly without holding Polygenism, then the hypothesis of evolution must be modified or abandoned as false, not the dogma changed to accommodate the hypothesis.

In the introduction to his *Credo of the People of God*<sup>45</sup> this same Pope makes a very interesting observation germane to the discussion of origins. In addition to that knowledge of the real world available to men through observation and the cultivation of science, it is also possible for the human intellect to attain to an understanding of the essences, the *quid est* of those agents whose activities are observed. The Pope states that the Catholic believer will always affirm the possibility of objective understanding on both counts. The reason is clearly stated in Vatican I: belief in God the Creator is the most realistic basis for strengthening the native powers of reason to know with certitude those aspects of reality within its grasp. Denial of the first article of the Creed is the best way to undermine that intellectual confidence native to the human mind as a participation in the perfection of the divine intellect and its natural orientation to the truth.

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<sup>44</sup> AAS 58 (1966) pp.649-655

<sup>45</sup> AAS 60 (1968) pp.433-435, n.5

The notion of species, of nature, employed at the level of observation is that of a generalization, subject to exceptions, to change and modification. There is nothing objectionable *per se* to the use of generalizations. But when such a notion of species is used exclusively in the construction of any theory of origins, as is the case with evolutionary theory, the modifications to which that “species” can be subjected appear unlimited. Indeed, evolutionary theory would seem impossible without the use of such a device to render ceaseless progression plausible. Catholic belief on the contrary implies that such modifications are not infinite, actually or possibly, but rather circumscribed within the limits of the species understood essentially, as a universal concept not admitting of exceptions, the same whatever the conditions of the subject in which it is found; and that any development of a species in the scientific sense, without the intervention of a rational agent, always presupposes, does not produce the species in the philosophic sense. These developments within the limits of each species, will not be continuous, but discontinuous with each other. The only question to be raised concerns the possibility of a rational agent, other than the Creator, modifying these living species first established by the Creator. Catholic tradition replies in the negative; and scientific experiment tends to confirm this.

This observation of Paul VI, which he claims to be an integral part of the teaching of the Church, is a rejection of one of the positions commonly associated with the nominalist philosophy of the 14<sup>th</sup> century (William of Ockham and disciples) and especially that characteristic of Lockean Empiricism and Kantian Skepticism in the modern world. In the context of the *Credo of Paul VI* this observation provides the immediate background for understanding his teaching on contraception as intrinsically evil, and the invariability of human nature, as well as for the possibility of transubstantiation (in what sense the first is against nature, and therefore not within our power to change; in what sense with the second the species or accidents can remain unchanged, the substance of bread being totally changed into the Body of Christ).

Contrary to theory fashionable since the days of Ockham, F. Bacon and J. Locke, science tends to confirm the importance of the universal. Change is not unlimited, but finite, and when observable within the world of living beings occurs within the well defined limits of the species in the traditional Catholic sense of this term. Apparent exceptions at the level of observation are rather the result of imperfect understanding on the part of the observer, rather than the absence of anything objectively denoted by the term species or essence in the sense of “universal.” Proponents of evolution have yet to demonstrate:

1. that their theories correspond to anything that is happening or in fact has happened, and
2. that the traditional notion of species so integral to the dogma of creation and “literal” interpretation of *Genesis*, as in the thought of St. Bonaventure, is irrelevant to sound science.

Whatever the personal belief and philosophy of scientists, scientific practice tends to confirm the wisdom of the *Credo of Paul VI*.

## Appraisal

It is not too difficult to appreciate the pertinence of this observation to the question of the origin of the species and of human nature in particular. Evolutionary theories stress the continuity of development between the species from the lower to the higher, as well as a sufficient duration to permit the operation of natural or artificial causes according to the laws governing these. Catholic belief stresses an essential discontinuity, which in the case of those essences, whose limits were fixed by the Creator and which

cannot be modified by the intervention of natural or artificial agents of a finite power, only the divine omnipotence can transcend, and that without any prerequisite duration, long or short. In the case of the human body there is nothing implausible in the fact that God should have formed the first human body, beginning with inorganic matter rather than organic, and bringing it to such a degree of perfection that the soul especially created for it might be infused into it. The divine omnipotence (the principal Agent) is not bound to act within the limits of a merely natural process. Nor is there anything mysterious about the fact that this action cannot be duplicated naturally, because it is not within the power of finite agents to deploy the power of the Creator.

Catholic teaching has never pretended in every instance of observable species, on the basis of Revelation, to know what those outer limits are fixed by the Creator. But that there are such limits, even at the level of inanimate existence, sound science as well as philosophy has tended to confirm in stressing the finite character of the world and all that is in it. There is, for example, a point beyond which particles of matter cannot further be split without, as it were, reaching “nothing”, if this could be done. Catholic doctrine holds only the Creator can annihilate what He has created. The created agent can only modify, for better or worse. Yet the origin and nature of these particles is neither self-explanatory, nor intelligible in terms of yet simpler elements. As the scale of being is ascended, the relative stability of essences is reflected in the inability of finite agents to effect their variation, except within recognizable limits, pre-existing and pre-requisite for the variations. The non-living agent does not naturally become a living being by itself; nor the plant an animal, nor even the humble fruit fly a horse fly. Plant and animal breeding may be useful to humans, but such breeding does not change the essential species with which the breeding begins.

In the case of human nature, and in particular the human body, the limits are even more precise and fixed, and have always been so regarded by the Church. Any attempt to suggest, much less hold as certain, that the unborn child is less human essentially than the one born, that the uneducated, the senile, the retarded, etc. are less human essentially than the sophisticated, the alert, the socially productive specimen, has always been termed by the Church as a pernicious error. Thus, she regards eugenics, genetic experimentation aimed at modifying human nature, divisions of human nature into subspecies based on physiological, cultural, linguistic, or similar grounds, as an immoral assumption of divine prerogative, and as an affront to the dignity of the human person. This belief in the unique stability of human nature from the first moment of conception is clearly linked to the belief of the Church concerning the direct formation of the first man and first woman by the Creator, and that the only natural process capable of producing and accounting for the production of another human body is the human procreative process directly established by the Creator in forming the first two human beings as male and female. And just as clearly and inseparably this notion of the unchanging essence of the human species lies at the heart of the moral and sacramental orders as these appear characteristically in Catholic belief and practice.

Nor is it very difficult, with all due allowance for the stylistic characteristics of the Genesis narrative, to discover there unmistakable indications not only of the initial creative act of God at the beginning of time, but of that relative fixity and discontinuity of the species, most of all in the case of mankind, whose origin is the distinctive intervention of the Creator as principal Cause, and Whose truth forms the context and limits within which subsequent natural and artificial development can and should occur, until such time as the Creator should see fit to modify this order.

This is another way of saying the specifically more perfect cannot come from the less perfect naturally, but only through the intervention of a wise and free agent, and in certain cases that wise and free agent

can only be the Creator-God. What might have seemed to be only a point of scholastic philosophy overly influenced by certain aspects of Aristotelian thought, is primarily a part of Catholic doctrine, rooted in Revelation, just as “pre-scientific” in relation to the highly sophisticated reflection of Aristotle as it is in relation to modern science, arid as such, providing a key to the mysteries met by science at its frontiers.

### **Pope John Paul II (1981)**

The present Pope, John Paul II, in an address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences,<sup>46</sup> briefly touched on the question of the origin of the cosmos in its epistemological and hermeneutical aspects. The address is not a doctrinal constitution in the strict sense; but simply a series of reflections on themes bearing on belief and science reiterating without further defining the tradition of the Church on the points touched. Since it is widely being quoted as supportive of “theistic evolution” (a position as espoused by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, only a few months earlier once again reproved as incompatible with Catholic tradition) and indicative of a modification of the earlier tradition, an examination of the Pope’s remarks follows.

1. The Pope noted that Revelation, especially the Genesis narrative, is not to be conceived as a kind of scientific encyclopedia providing direct and immediate answers to questions of a formally scientific nature. Revelation is no substitute for the work of scientific research in the unraveling of the secrets of nature. Revelation rather is a body of religious doctrine which, when it touches points concerning the cosmos, does so with the intention of teaching the correct relations between man and God, and between man and the universe. Other types of teaching about the universe are extraneous to the intentions of the Bible. Which and how many points of this religious doctrine are facts bearing on the subject of scientific teaching it is not the Pope’s purpose to discuss here; rather that purpose is to state the professed limits of Revelation in these matters, arid why its presentation as a whole does not coincide with that of modern science. But that at certain points Revelation and science do meet and in part overlap he does not deny; indeed one of these points of encounter is at the heart of these observations by the Pope.

Further, remarked the Pope, this knowledge of the cosmos conveyed by Revelation is not couched in the language of modern science, but rather in the terms commonly employed by contemporaries of the sacred authors when discussing religious questions involving the cosmos, still employed today, and often described as “popular” or “pre-scientific.” It is clear from the tenor of the Pope’s remarks that such “popular” language is so employed in the Scriptures as to correct the errors of all times concerning the relations of God and the cosmos, arid of man and the cosmos.

It would, however, be a gratuitous inference contrary to Catholic tradition that “popular” here means merely symbolic, arid does not literally (in the sense of primary, direct content) convey any factual knowledge about the world and how it was made, because Revelation is not a scientific textbook or does not speak in a scientific style. Quite the contrary, on at least one point discussed explicitly, the first origin of the cosmos, only a source other than science, in a language other than science, can communicate a true arid factual answer. The aphorism used by the Pope to summarize his first point: Revelation teaches not how the world was made, but how to go to heaven, refers to the intentions of the sacred Author, not the content of His message, which quite surely does teach us how the world was made “in the beginning” by creation. This discussion of the “limits of revealed

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<sup>46</sup> October 3, 1981 (AAS 73 (1981) pp.668-672

knowledge” vis-a-vis the subject matter of science was not undertaken by the Pope for its own sake, but in view of a second point, the limits of science and its proper correlation with revealed theology on the question of cosmic origins.

But before examining the second point, it is worth noting to what degree the knowledge of “how” the world was made entailed by the revelation of “how” to get to heaven (i.e., salvation, or the purpose of Revelation) coincides with the knowledge of “how” the world was made presupposed for the progress of science. Because the knowledge of how to get to heaven does not require the kind of understanding of the world offered by science, that does not mean knowledge of salvation does not convey, indeed require, some knowledge of the origins of the world and of the human family, in some respects the only certain source of knowledge. The quarrel between Evolutionism and Creationism in part concerns whether or not that salvific knowledge coincides with the root suppositions of genuine science. The creationist affirms the coincidence; the evolutionist denies this. From a Catholic point of view, the evolutionary denial is “Scientism,” not science. Since theistic evolution shares this denial, its claims to support from Catholic faith and to be a support of Catholic faith are suspect.

In connection with these claims of theistic evolutionists for their particular version of Evolutionism as radically religious, there is this curious point to be pondered. In times past, almost until the time of *Humani Generis*, the plausibility of evolution for the general public inclined to accept it, lay in its denial of final causality to the world and to the natural forces operative within it. The “why” of the world had no relevance to its “how”. The approach was quite congenial to an Atheism rooted in a thorough-going Materialism and in the epistemological assumptions of the positivist school used to justify this approach.

But with the shaking of popular faith in the “necessary” laws of nature and with a realization of how little trust, much less absolute trust, could be placed in the *arbitrium* of scientists, exactly the contrary bias has come to support the plausibility of Evolutionism over the past half-century. Evolution now appeals because it explains the finality of the world, because it provides a basis for apprehending the unity and continuity of existence and for forming an all-embracing synthesis of the real, ultimately appearing to satisfy the desire of the human mind for ultimates and to give concrete shape to the wildest mystical flights of human fantasy. Evolution, far from being atheistic, has become religious; far from being materialistic, it has become idealistic and spiritual. Unfortunately, either way, evolution is not true because the truth of God’s existence excludes the possibility of Materialism as an explanation of the universe; and the truth that God is a Creator-God excludes the possibility of a “mystical” Pantheism as an explanation.

2. If theology is limited in what it can say about the world by the extent of Revelation God has chosen to give us, science is also limited in its efforts to explore the intelligibility of its subject matter. These limits are nowhere more evident than in the inability of science, universally acknowledged, to provide any ultimate explanation of the origin of its subject matter, and therefore of its own rationale. For this answer the help of “pre-scientific” knowledge, metaphysics and Revelation, is necessary. In support and illustration of his point the Pope cites a passage from an address of Pope Pius XI<sup>47</sup> on the proofs for the existence of God in the light of modern science. In this address

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<sup>47</sup> Pontifical Academy of Sciences, November 1951, AAS 44 (1952) pp. 231-43

Pius XII, after noting the insolvable enigma constituted for the scientific mind by the question of ultimate origins, insolvable either in terms of an uncreated (infinite) world, or self-creating (evolutionary) world, stated that the scientific mind versed in the wisdom of metaphysics and Revelation will indeed discover evidences in the world studied scientifically pointing to the true answer given by Revelation: the *Fiat* of an omnipotent Creator. Pius XII discusses two of these pointers: the mutability and variability of the world and its finite character, reflected clearly in the law of entropy.

On at least two points these remarks of Pius XII, cited so recently by the present Pope, constitute as it were a basic charter for creation science:

1. Science is not absolutely autonomous in the pursuit of its goals. It cannot be absolutely independent and self-sufficient in unraveling the intelligibility of its subject matter.
2. On at least one point, the origin of the cosmos, fundamental to all the rest, the doctrine of creation as traditionally expounded by the Church (and not Evolutionism) provides the clue, the key, the *paradigm* or context for discerning the sense of all the rest.

NOTE: In this address Pius XII mentions the age of the world in terms of millions of years. The question of the age of the world was merely incidental to the theme he was discussing, and in no way constitutes magisterial resolution of the question bearing on the age of the world or of the measuring of “day” in the Genesis account of the work of God, anymore than St. Augustine’s views on this point have represented more than a merely personal opinion. The Church has always permitted discussion of this point for Catholics, provided the final judgment was left to the Church, a judgment to date not rendered. Nor does the Church forbid holding a literal interpretation of “day”.

Clearly, two questions must be distinguished:

1. How much does Revelation tell us about the subjects investigated by science?
2. How much can scientific investigation tell us about the subjects and facts contained in Revelation, in particular about the origin of the cosmos and of the species?

To each question the Pope’s reply is quite traditional. To the first question he states relatively little, but that seeming little is more important than all the rest. To the second he replies perhaps something on some points, but on certain matters like the origin of the cosmos, he replies nothing at all, except in dependence on Revelation.

Despite multiple claims to the contrary, the Church in the last half century no more approves or permits “Evolutionism” as the epistemological matrix for the thought of Catholics than in times past. ~vhie many specific theories pr6posed in “creation science” on purely scientific grounds hardly can be described as “canonized” by the Church, or “certain” on scientific grounds, several of the epistemological and hermeneutical assumptions made by Creationism coincide with the teaching of the Church.

## Objections Addressed

Objection is often made to the foregoing presentation of the teaching of the Church on origins as false. The teaching of the Church, it is alleged, not only has no interest in creation science but is quite opposed to it as a form of “literalism” or biblical “fundamentalism”.



Some of the evidences adduced to support such objection may be dismissed as selective reading, out of context, of the teaching of Pope Pius XII. That in permitting Catholics, for example, to study the problem of literary forms and hold conclusions not identical with those of the Fathers, this Pope also permitted Catholics to depart from the literal sense of Scripture as attested by the Fathers, to be the primary content of Revelation, as in the case of Genesis or in the case of the infancy narratives on the virgin birth, simply is not true. In discussing the possibility of Catholics holding, merely as a scientific opinion, limited forms of evolution in reference to the first human body, this Pope made it very clear that any presentation of such theory effectively giving *carte blanche* to science to decide the meaning of Scripture was not ever permitted to Catholics, and that in the event of conflict the theory, not the truth, is to be modified or abandoned. Further, this Pope in *Humani Generis* did not permit Catholics to opt for an evolutionary “paradigm” accounting for the “fact” of evolution as distinct from the uncertainty of specific theories, in science or in any other area of intellectual endeavor; quite the contrary, he forbade this as irreconcilable with faith. And in every instance where such was done in contradiction to the directives of the Pope, the finished result (e.g., the works of Teilhard) met with consistent reproof and prohibition as containing grievous errors contrary to revealed truth.

Four arguments are often adduced in support of the objection that the foregoing presentation is not a correct interpretation of the teaching of the Church in respect to the matter of teaching about origins in either parochial or public schools.

## **Literalism**

*Argument:* Catholics are not required to subscribe to Biblical literalism but are required to ascribe only symbolic value to such descriptions *re* the transcendence of God, the dignity of man, and the on-going sustenance of the world.

*Reply:* A Catholic is not required to subscribe to Biblical Literalism, where “Biblical Literalism” assumes a naive and uncritical correlation between the “facts” of Revelation and particular exemplifications of these as they might be currently imagined on the one hand, or on the other highly sophisticated and abstract scientific speculation about the world of the senses. An equally naive and uncritical counterpart of Biblical Literalism in this first sense is a kind of arrogant “scientific Literalism” which assumes that scientific speculation alone provides an exact and realistic understanding of the objective world of the senses, and that if Revelation provides any factual knowledge of the cosmos and of the species within it, it must be strictly in accord with the methods and terminology of “modern science.” The repudiation of both forms of “Literalism” described above is not the equivalent of a denial that any facts about the world are to be found in Revelation.

Where “Literalism” has reference to that factual content touching the work of the Creator, especially Adam and Eve, and its bearing on salvation, however simple, “pre-scientific,” or metaphysical the style, there a Catholic is required on the basis of his faith to subscribe to a literal, or historical interpretation of the passages in question. Indeed, the entire tenor of Catholic tradition is that these facts in particular can only be expressed first in this manner, if they are subsequently to be discussed in any other fashion.

The oft alleged opposition between the assertion of “Biblical Literalism” in the early decrees of the Pontifical Biblical Commission and its repudiation by Pius XII in his encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* does not exist. For the encyclical of Pius XII has reference to Literalism in the first sense above, where the decrees refer to Literalism in the second sense.

Hence there is no need on the part of a Catholic to choose between an allegedly naive Fideism

(represented by the early decrees of the Biblical Commission) incapable of discerning the real from the imaginary and of appreciating the marvelous advances of “modern science”, and a skeptical Relativism (permitted by the encyclical of Pius XII) in respect to the interpretation of the facts traditionally believed revealed in Genesis. Why such a choice should seem to anyone inevitable, when in fact it is hardly such, is another question whose resolution is undoubtedly linked with metaphysical and epistemological assumptions incompatible with Catholic tradition and elsewhere mentioned in this essay.

## **Revelation and Science**

*Argument:* Revelation contains a body of religious doctrine; therefore it tells us nothing about the world as studied by science and neither does the Magisterium of the Church.

*Reply:* This observation begs the question. That Revelation should be a “religious doctrine” does not mean it contains no information touching the subject matter of science, unless it is assumed science alone can comprehend and convey understanding of the visible world. That, however, is precisely the point at issue, which cannot be decided primarily on scientific grounds, but on other: the Catholic on one set of beliefs, the secular humanist on another. The Church does not maintain Revelation is a scientific textbook such as to provide exact parallels for every scientific question. At certain points, however, science and Revelation meet, and at those points (e.g., the question of origins) Revelation undoubtedly has something to say basic to scientific understanding and science.

## **Evolution as Paradigm**

*Argument:* Evolution is not merely a scientific hypothesis touching one or another issue of scientific research, but a “paradigm” providing the context, assumptions and methods best calculated to justify the nature of science and of its characteristic procedures in studying the uniformity, continuity and similarity among all elements of its subject matter.

*Reply:* Good arguments can be adduced to show that evolution is simply not a scientific hypothesis. Hence the paradigm providing the context for scientific endeavors is something other than science. And it is just this assumption of “Evolutionism” as the universal “paradigm” that directly conflicts with the teaching of the Church and constitutes an abuse of the limited permission of Pius XII to propose tentatively hypotheses of evolution within the limits of certain scientific questions and without questioning the decisions of the Church in matters also touching Revelation. Nor does the Church concede this kind of autonomy to politics, economics, etc. Within the well-defined limits of each science, art or profession, the trained practitioner is free from the authority of the Church. But that freedom does not mean license to define the limits of one’s science independently of the Truth that is God, and the Revelation He has entrusted to His Church. Such a position is the equivalent of Relativism in the intellectual order, and Secularism in the practical.

## **Latitudinarianism**

*Argument:* The Catholic is free to accept or reject evolution merely on scientific grounds, since matters of Revelation are beyond proof or disproof scientifically and cannot be affected by scientific theory.

*Reply:* Such an affirmation is too broad and is equivalent to the Fideism condemned by the First Vatican Council.<sup>48</sup> It renders *a priori* impossible that faith should seek understanding in human terms

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<sup>48</sup> *Dei Filius*, Chapter 4

(theology) or that the intellect should seek faith (apologetics). Faith, in a word, becomes purely an arbitrary affair. While it is true reason cannot prove the mysteries of faith, it can certainly apprehend these. It is not an exercise in mystagogery.

The opposite of the axiom cited in the objection is equally broad and the equivalent of Rationalism. Scripture and Revelation can neither affirm nor deny anything about the subject matter of philosophy and science. Revelation can only interpret the religious meaning of whatever it is reason investigates. But this is what is precisely not the case with the dogma of creation in the teaching of the Church. So, too, with many other truths of Revelation which are mysteries of faith, and which are therefore not directly accessible to reason, but which like the Virgin Birth, the Incarnation, the mystery of the Real Presence of the Body and Blood of the Savior in the Eucharist and the mysterious miracle, transubstantiation, by which this is effected, and other natural truths such as the immutability of human nature, the uniqueness of the human body, and the nature of human conception. All tell us something factual about the material, whose understanding is not irrelevant to the sound conduct of philosophy and science.

In summary, the objection is a thinly veiled presentation of science as self sufficient, a notion not at all evident scientifically no matter how many “authorities” are cited in its favor, but resting on assumptions of a “pre-scientific” and “religious” character, directly conflicting with the teaching of the Catholic Church.<sup>49</sup>

### **Theistic Evolution**

*Argument:* It is claimed that the believer, by adopting a position generally called “theistic evolution,” can drop those aspects of traditional “Creationism” as set forth in this essay, particularly the facts narrated in Genesis, which the evolutionist regards as unscientific and the critical historian as naive, and hence not literally true. At the same time such a position permits the believer to retain a belief in God, which the agnostic or atheist rejects on the basis of evolution, *inter alia*. In such a synthesis religion is said to explain “Who” made the world and “why”, while science explains “how” He made it (by evolution). Religion deals with final causes, while science deals with efficient causes, processes and facts.

*Reply:* The Catholic believer cannot drop from his belief facts bearing on the origin of the physical world and its contents as well as on the origin of the human world as expounded in the revealed account of these origins without in fact also changing the nature of that belief, something not in his power. Hence, “theistic evolution” as a viable Catholic position is *a priori* inconsistent with its alleged relegation of the “how” of creation to study by science alone.

Further, the Catholic in subscribing to the first article of the Creed affirms not only that God is and that He made the world, but how He made the world, and especially how He made the angelic and human species. It is precisely in affirming the difference between the uniquely divine activity (either creation *ex nihilo* or miracles), and those natural processes proper to different created species that the difference between infinite and finite natures is demonstrated. The operation of a created agent presupposes the prior existence of the world and of the species and cannot extend beyond these limits. The operation of the Creator does not. Any refusal to recognize the radical inadequacy of natural processes as an explanation for the origin of the world and the distinction of species must logically lead to a failure

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<sup>49</sup> *Dei Filius*, Chapter 4, and Canons 1-3 of this chapter.

(Panthéism) to perceive the distinction between God and His creation. Pantheism clothed in the terminology of Christian theology becomes a particularly insidious form of Syncretism.

Finally<sub>1</sub> from a scientific point of view “theistic evolution” appears an illogical compromise. Either natural processes provide an answer to the question of the origin of the world and of the distinction of the species in terms of efficient causality (“how”) or they do not. In the first case theology has nothing at all to contribute to the resolution of the precise question raised, and the atheistic evolutionist is vindicated. Religion in any form is simply an aspect of subjective experience. In the second case, the tradition of Catholic belief, theology will have a great deal to contribute bearing not only on religion, but on the assumptions of philosophy and science, but this theology will not be “theistic evolution,” for in the event that “evolution” cannot be verified, no amount of religious finality, however noble the ideals, will render it adequate or true.

## CONCLUSIONS

### Creation

The teaching of the Church on origins from her beginning embraces a body of doctrine consistent and unvarying, not only as regards its general content and tenor, but the explicit formulation of its details as well.

The one God is the only God, infinite and omnipotent, Who by His creative power not only made all else in the beginning of time, but ordered that creation, an ordering initially culminating in the formation of Adam and Eve. By the same power and with the same kind of action He is capable of modifying and perfecting the original creation, which in fact He has done in the work of salvation. The doctrine of creation, in general and in all its detail, is intimately bound up with the mystery of salvation. That is why no Catholic may call into question any aspect of the doctrine of creation which in fact the Church believes related to the mystery of salvation without also doubting that latter mystery.

While the Church does not hold that God has revealed all that can be known about His creation, or of that which has been revealed, that the precise sense has in every instance been definitively explained by the Church in the most explicit manner possible, certain points concerning the origin of the world and of the species within it have been so revealed and definitively explained by the Church, either solemnly or in her ordinary Magisterium, in such ways that they may not be questioned or subjected to modification to accommodate human theorizing.

1. The whole world was created by God *ex nihilo* in the beginning of time.
2. The essential structure or order of the world presupposed for any subsequent activity or development was established by God and admits of no exceptions, except those directly produced by divine intervention, such as that which the Church claims will bring to pass the resurrection of the human body from an inorganic to an organic state, and the new heavens and earth at the end of time.
3. The nature of the first man and first woman was made directly by God, by forming the male body out of pre-existing matter, the female body out of the body of the first man, by creating out of nothing a soul for each and then uniting soul to body as its form. At each of these three steps, formation of a body, creation of a soul, and infusion of soul into body, the principal Agent is the Creator, not a creature; hence the process is not a natural development from one species to another, but a divine or miraculous action discontinuous with any possible, merely natural process. This

discontinuity accounts for the distinctness and greatness of the human, and of each single human person in the whole of creation, and the special value of man before God.

4. God made only one man and one woman in this fashion. All others find their origin in descent from these two, human procreation through conception accounting for the origin of the body, divine creation of each soul *ex nihilo* for the origin of the soul and its infusion into the body conceived. Thus there is but one historical human family, with but a single couple at its beginning, this couple owing existence directly and principally to God as Creator. Only in the second birth of baptism can a human person speak of being born of God.

## Epistemology

The Church holds that some truths about the creative work of God can be known only from Revelation; others might also be known naturally (philosophically or scientifically). But in both cases what is known from Revelation is known as true, even if in fact nothing more is learned about these points naturally. Further the Church holds that she alone has been authorized to decide definitively, on the basis of criteria essentially theological, one of which is the unanimous witness of tradition that a given point of doctrine pertains to matters of faith and morals, what is the sense of Revelation. On those points not yet so decided she permits the presentation of various opinions (e.g., the exact meaning of day in the work of six days) provided that none is presented as anything other than opinion subject to correction or rejection by the Magisterium of the Church.

Further, the Church clearly distinguishes between the study of literary form and style and the determination of the meaning of Scripture in the theological sense. Precisely because the theological principles underlying the mystery of salvation rest on historical facts brought to pass by the free acts of the Creator *qua* Creator, that sense also includes historical facts certified by the Magisterium of the Church. One is free to discuss problems of styles and form, so long as certain truths declared as such by the Church are not called in doubt, and the results of these studies as they bear on the meaning of Revelation are subject to final evaluation by the Church.

## Culture and Revelation

While the principal concern of the teaching of the Church is salvation, that teaching at many points is also concerned with the truths of the natural order. Revelation and the teaching of the Church contain truths whose revelation is useful, indeed in some ways necessary for the balanced development of human culture, philosophic, scientific, artistic, and whose ignorance or facile denial is deleterious and destructive of the same. The Church holds that this culture is best developed not apart from, much less in opposition to faith, but in harmony with it. This does not mean that the Church believes either Revelation or her own teaching provides ready made answers to queries formulated within the limits of philosophy or science properly defined, or that she possesses the authority directly to intervene and supervise legitimate research within those limits. Rather she believes that in virtue of the deposit of faith entrusted to her she possesses an epistemology enabling her to formulate a sound policy for the discernment of those limits and the harmonization of intellectual effort in relation to Him Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. In a word, if the Church does not hold that a formally developed philosophy or science is to be found as such in Revelation or in her teaching, she does hold that she is in a position to support in a very basic way the cultivation of one. Thus, she believes philosophy and science to be only relatively autonomous in respect to the attainment of their specific objects.

## Evolution

In the matter of origins the Church permits the proposal of theories of evolution as scientific explanations of the origin of the species (never of the world) in only a very restricted way, and on conditions reflecting what she otherwise knows to be the truth, in such wise that any such hypothesis only doubtfully merits the designation evolutionary. Further, because any theory of evolution, provided it can be detached from the Pantheism and Rationalism condemned by the Church, touches points also contained in Revelation and bearing on salvation, the Church regards any proclamation of evolution as a fact on merely scientific grounds as scientific statement which presumes to determine on merely human authority what can only be determined on divine, and thus is tantamount to a counter-religious statement not free of the Rationalism condemned as false by the Church. Nor can the difficulty be avoided by a facile distinction claiming for science the task of solving the “how” of origins and for religion the “Who.” It is precisely because the Catholic faith claims to explain not only Who did it but how He did it (by creation) that we are able to distinguish the world as created from God as uncreated and infinite, and from our knowledge of the finite recognize not only the existence of God, but of the only God with Whom all may be compared, but Who is incomparable to anything else.

## Evolution Exclusively Presented

Not all accept the teaching of the Church. Dissenters consider dissent freedom to conduct their intellectual lives as they see fit. So long as such persons do not attempt to impose their views on believers, there exists no immediate conflict with the teaching of the Church. But in the context of what is defined and proclaimed as a “neutral” school, the exclusive presentation of evolution as the only plausible explanation of cosmic and of human origins, or worse as a “fact” beyond doubt, belies the religious neutrality of the school. Such a presentation does conflict directly with the teaching of the Church at many points, and is tantamount to indoctrination of a religious kind, one judged by the Church to be false. Presentation of arguments for an evolutionary theory and against it and set forth in a truly scientific manner (and that is a very big question, for it is yet to be demonstrated conclusively that any theory of evolution can meet threshold requirements of *science*), for a creationistic theory and against it, is in principle fair, provided both can be presented merely as scientific hypotheses and appreciated as such by public and parochial students.

That, however, is a major proviso. There are those who maintain that however plausible an evolutionary hypothesis might seem, it does not stem from any scientific character of the theory, but rather from the religious-philosophical assumptions employed in such a theory as the matrix for the organization of a great deal of disparate phenomena. Similarly there are those who maintain the difficulty, indeed the impossibility of separating “creation science” as a scientific hypothesis from the dogma of creation, a truth whose certainty is on revealed grounds beyond doubt and not to be confused with the merely hypothetical. The Church cannot agree that a revealed truth may be taught on the same footing as a hypothesis which in fact is false, for such in fact would amount to a tacit acceptance of religious indifferentism. It may well be that the only workable solution is to eliminate the treatment of origins from a “neutral” school, since once the subject is introduced, it may become difficult or impossible for a public school to remain neutral.

Such a solution naturally underscores one of the essential and irremedial failures of the “neutral” public school: to assume that a balanced and basic education is possible without assent to religious-salvific truth. The only alternative in such a setting is to say nothing at all about the subject of origins, for the subject of origins cannot be treated definitively in a merely secular fashion. Yet no man can form a

genuine philosophy of life without resolving such questions which are raised by the subject of origins.

### **Creation Science**

Finally, if the teaching of the Church, taken as a whole and examined throughout its history, indicates a native sympathy for the creation science approach, this sympathy is not the equivalent of a doctrinal canonization of creation science in its particulars. Creation science is not so much a “scientific” theory or demonstration as a set of assumptions forming a matrix and model for approaching certain primary questions of science, particularly where these tend to touch questions of origins. Once the matrix or model is accepted, then a great many other pieces of information can be organized coherently. But this coherence is hardly to be taken as a demonstration of creation, a truth by definition neither observable nor verifiable as scientific method postulates.

But even if the creation science matrix or model is not scientifically demonstrable, neither can creation science be disproven scientifically, any more than evolutionary “science” can be verified scientifically. When science reaches the question of origins, then it must look elsewhere for the key to solutions, for the same reason that it must look outside itself for the theoretical justification of its first principles. Therein is recognized one of the recurring themes of Catholic tradition. Any human intellectual endeavor arrogating to itself absolute autonomy merits the Pauline epitaph: *falsi nominis scientia*, and in fact is not science, but false religion decked out in the garb of intellectual respectability. Creation science surely looks to God and His Revelation for the key. No form of “evolution science” has been shown to do the same; in the history of the Church most theories of evolution have quite openly declared the contrary.

In dealing with the problems occasioned by the rise of Evolutionism one need is to unmask false religions - usually pantheistic - disguised as “scientific” theory or “fact” beyond question. Another need is to indicate how sound science points to the truth about origins revealed by God in order to further our salvation, viz., the dogma of creation and the work of the six days, particularly the formation of Adam and Eve. On both counts creation science can be a very beneficial instrument, to be employed in all schools, both parochial and public (neutral), that have the true welfare of the child at heart.



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Taught dogmatic theology and history of Franciscan theology for several years at the Seraphicum in Rome and at St. Anthony-on-Hudson, Rensselaer, NY, USA. In latter institution also served several years as librarian, Superior, and Rector of Seminary.

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