

A Catholic Statement On Human Origins

From *A Catholic Assessment of Evolution Theory*

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1. All Catholics loyal to Church teachings accept that Scripture is the inspired word of God and is without error. Therefore, the legitimate debate over human origins concerns the interpretation of Sacred Scripture and a proper understanding of Church teachings in light of the claims regarding human evolution.
2. When studying Scripture, the Catholic interpreter aims to discover the intended meaning of the inspired human author. When Scripture appears to address issues that touch on (natural) science or other domains, caution should be used so that needless conflict does not arise. However, a Scripture that has scientific implications does not preclude it from being a matter of faith and morals, as is clear from Church teachings on abortion, the Transubstantiation, the beginning of the universe, and all miraculous claims in Scripture.
3. Leveraging the Thomistic concept that all truth is in harmony and that the authentic findings from natural science will not, in the end, conflict with the truths of the faith, Catholics are free to consider *legitimate* scientific evidence when attempting to arrive at the intended meaning of a text. However, legitimate scientific conclusions are only one of many considerations and, given the abysmal track record of evolutionary claims, they must be objectively evaluated rather than blindly accepted.
4. *Genesis 2:7* and *2:21, 22* describe the Special Creation of mankind. The straightforward reading of this text implies the immediate Creation of Adam's soul out of nothing and the simultaneous Creation of Adam's body, by God, from the dust of the earth. The obvious sense of the text also implies the miraculous Creation of Eve's body, by God, using part of Adam's side. The term "immediate" means directly and all at once, so if the inspired author meant to communicate the immediate formation of Adam, by God, from the dust of the earth, human evolution did not occur.

For more than nineteen centuries, the Creation of Adam was viewed by the Catholic Church in the straightforward sense conveyed in *Genesis*. With the advent of evolution theory, scholars began to speculate that perhaps the first two chapters of *Genesis* were not intended to convey the notion of Special Creation. The Church has established guidelines and specific doctrine that all should follow.

5. Pope Leo XIII established in the great encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* that Catholics are to hold fast to the straightforward and obvious sense of Scripture, unless reason would make it necessary to depart from this sense. In the case of Special Creation, what would justify a departure from the obvious sense involving the immediate Creation of Adam's body by God?

Many Catholics have deemed evolution theory as a sufficient reason to depart from the obvious sense of *Genesis*. However, while evolutionists tell us that evolution is a fact of science, there are sound reasons from science and the philosophical writings of evolutionists to conclude that this so-called “scientific consensus” is the forced conclusion, not of sound science, but of an underlying commitment to materialism or other evolution-based philosophies. In other words, when scientists bring to their studies an underlying commitment to materialistic or pantheistic philosophies, evolution theory is the only acceptable answer and Special Creation will not even be entertained, no matter how poorly the evidence supports evolution theory. Indeed, a review of the scientific literature and the writings of leading evolutionists from Charles Darwin to Richard Dawkins reveal that evolutionary claims are presented as highly reliable for philosophical reasons, even though there is little supporting scientific evidence. The distinguished scientist Sir Solly Zuckerman concluded about the study of human evolution that “...students of fossil primates have not been distinguished for caution when working within the logical constraints of their subject. The record is so astonishing that it is legitimate to ask whether much science is yet to be found in this field at all.”¹

6. The 1950 encyclical *Humani Generis* by Pope Pius XII allowed the study of human evolution with regards to man’s body, but it does not necessarily follow that human evolution is compatible with the Catholic faith, any more than allowing the study of the universe means that belief in an eternal universe is compatible with the faith. The most important aspects of the liberties granted in *Humani Generis* include the **mandate** that the evidence both for and **against** evolution be studied, and that Catholics are **not to treat evolution as a certain proven doctrine**, as if there is nothing in Scripture or Tradition that would require the greatest caution. The encyclical instructed all Catholic teachers that they cannot teach in good conscience unless they *religiously accepted and exactly observed* the instructions in *Humani Generis*. Tragically, these mandates are seldom followed today.
7. Additional considerations also mandate caution. The Church Fathers were *unanimous* in their belief that Adam was immediately created by God, from the dust of the earth, and that Eve’s body was formed, by God, from Adam’s side. Departing from this Tradition is problematic given multiple Magisterial statements that, in matters of faith and morals, no one is permitted to interpret Sacred Scripture contrary to the unanimous agreement of the Fathers, “for their unanimity clearly evinces that such interpretation has come down from the Apostles as a matter of Catholic faith.”² The Council of Trent, Vatican I, and *Providentissimus Deus* all preclude the departure from the unanimous teachings of the Fathers and their interpretation of Scripture in matters of faith and morals.

While it is tempting to reject the teachings of the Fathers on Special Creation by claiming that this is a purely scientific question having no impact on faith and morals, the frequent writings of the Church on origins underscores the extreme importance of this doctrine from the perspective of theology and moral philosophy. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (par. 282-289) explicitly teaches the interconnection between man’s understanding of origins, the purpose of our lives, and our final end. Pope John Paul II taught likewise in his encyclical *Faith and Reason*, and *Humani Generis* explicitly links evolution with faith and morals.

8. Also regarding the claim that origins is a matter of science, not theology, the Church Fathers and Doctors made a clear distinction between the six days of Creation—when God created the different

kinds of creatures using His divine power—and the period of Providence, which began when God rested from His creative activity (*Genesis* 2:1-4). This Creation/Providence framework implies that the Creation of Adam and Eve involved supernatural, divine acts (not natural processes) that are properly matters of theology and history, not natural science.

In the period of Providence, which began after the sixth day and continues to the present, created beings act according to their God-given natures and within the framework of natural laws established by God, but which became fully operational only after the sixth day. Theistic evolution incorrectly assumes that the natural order existing today has existed from the start, and that natural processes can explain the origin of mankind and animal kinds. But, in addition to a lack of scientific evidence for this position, it violates the framework of the Fathers. In 2 Peter 3:3-6, St. Peter prophesied that the concept of “uniformitarianism” would arise in the final days. This concept, which was formally established in the 1800s, was prophesied to be used by scoffers of the faith who seek to live according to their own desires and deny God’s interaction in the world and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

9. Previous ecumenical councils have also made statements on human origins that must be considered. For example, Vatican I, which was convened ten years after *The Origins of Species* was published, echoed the teachings of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 in declaring that God, “immediately from the beginning of time, fashioned each creature out of nothing...and then the human creation, common as it were, composed of both spirit and body.” The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* references this statement in paragraphs 293 and 327.

The Vatican I bishops and theologians had also drafted a statement that would have confirmed, as an infallible statement, the teaching of the Fathers that Adam was created immediately by God from the dust of the earth, and Eve was created by God from the side of Adam. Although political turmoil interrupted the council and prevented the promulgation of this statement, it is clear that the Council Fathers viewed human evolution as incompatible with revealed truth.

10. More recently, in 1909, the Pontifical Biblical Commission, which was then a part of the teaching Magisterium, declared that the literal and historical sense of *Genesis* cannot be called into question concerning the Special Creation of man and the formation of the first woman from the first man. These decrees have never been formally abrogated and in 1907, Pope Pius X clearly articulated that those who disregard the Commission’s statements are guilty of grave sin.³
11. Another voice that Catholics respect enormously is that of St. Thomas Aquinas, a Church Doctor who is widely considered as the greatest Catholic philosopher and theologian. St. Thomas insisted, as have previous Church Councils and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, that the human body and soul are so intricately linked that they necessarily came into being at the same time.

In the *Summa*, St. Thomas Aquinas also wrote that the first human body was of necessity made immediately by God, and Eve was formed, by God, from the side of Adam. In other words, St. Thomas Aquinas was completely in line with the Fathers regarding the Special Creation of mankind. Reflecting on the work of St. Thomas Aquinas and the writings of Church Fathers, the great Catholic theologian of the late 16th and early 17th century, Francis Suarez, concluded: “...we must hold that the body of Adam was immediately produced or formed by God alone...the thesis we affirm is *Catholic doctrine*; it is taught by St. Thomas [and] in this concur the other theologians and Fathers.”⁴

12. In 1880, Pope Leo XIII issued the encyclical *Arcanum Divinae Sapientie*, which stated that, as a matter of “permanent doctrine,” the following “cannot be doubted by any, that God, on the sixth day of creation, having made man from the slime of the earth, and having breathed into his face the breath of life, gave him a companion, whom He miraculously took from the side of Adam when he was locked in sleep.”⁵ While not an *ex cathedra* pronouncement, this statement on human origins is from an encyclical letter that is part of the ordinary teaching Magisterium and is to be believed with religious assent. Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical is consistent with the 6th century profession of faith by Pope Pelagius I that stated, in concurrence with the Fathers, that Adam and Eve “were not born of other parents, but were created: one from the earth and the other from the side of the man...” These teachings are inconsistent with the naturalistic evolution of the human body.

One could also make a very strong case that when Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical is considered in the light of Tradition and previous Church statements, even the possibility of “special transformism” is inconsistent with the Catholic faith. (Special transformism holds that God’s direct “Creation” of Adam could have involved the divine modification of genetic material as Adam was conceived in the womb of a hominid mother, who was herself part of a long evolutionary process. Catholic doctrine clearly teaches that evolution played no role in the Creation of Eve).

13. Catholics are to read Scripture as a whole and to consider the original language when interpreting a text. Every time the formation of man is discussed in Scripture, it assumes the direct Creation of Adam from the dust of the earth, as this is clearly conveyed in the original Hebrew text of *Genesis* 2:7. The Creation of Eve (*Genesis* 2:21, 22) directly from Adam’s body is also affirmed throughout Scripture.

14. So when it comes to departing from the obvious meaning of *Genesis* with regard to Special Creation of mankind, there are compelling reasons why we should reject the concept of theistic evolution, especially when the scientific evidence is so weak. In obedience to *Humani Generis*, *Providentissimus Deus*, and sound Thomist principles, we should critically study the evidence set forth and be aware that materialistic philosophy, masquerading as science in classroom textbooks, could lead (and has led) even Catholic scholars away from the truth about origins.

15. It is also important to study the scientific evidence for evolution because, following the publication of *The Origin of Species* in 1859, much of the western world came to embrace materialistic or pantheistic evolution. Modernism also became, and remains, a serious error and source of dissension within the Church. Such combinations of false philosophy and unproven claims turned out to be anything but harmless and provided the presumed intellectual foundation for non-Christian belief systems, or worldviews. These alternative worldviews now dominate Europe, America, and their educational systems. These worldviews also gave rise to the pro-death and anti-family agendas against which the Church has so strongly fought but, frankly, is now losing. Moreover, those holding relativistic worldviews have clearly voiced their intent to silence the Church on all moral issues in the days ahead. Thus, while some in the Church consider evolution to be a non-issue, any informed student of history will admit the link between evolution theory, the rise of anti-Christian worldviews, and the moral relativism now engulfing America and the western world that threatens, as Pope Benedict XVI stated, to put all under a “dictatorship of relativism.”

16. Those who do not understand the link between evolutionary thought and the battles over moral issues should remember the words of St. Thomas Aquinas: “A small error in the beginning grows enormous in the end.”⁶ In other words, if we have the wrong answer to what Pope John Paul II called one of the fundamental questions of life: “Where did I come from?” then there is almost no limit to how far man can be led astray, as evinced by the direction of the western world the past 150 years.
17. If the traditional doctrine of Creation is abandoned to evolution theories, the war of worldviews will be lost.⁷ Given the steady decline in the number of the faithful, strategies to win the moral issues, to reach truth-seekers, to stop the exodus from the Church, and even to maintain our religious freedoms will likely require a challenge to the intellectual basis of evolution-based worldviews. *This does not mean that we should remove evolution theory from the classroom, but that we should teach it objectively and critically*, meaning that we should teach the scientific difficulties with evolution theory and counter the false claims made in biology textbooks. This is a common sense approach that is perfectly consistent with the scientific method, with Thomistic philosophy, with the mandates of *Humani Generis*, and even with the widely used “separation of church and state” argument. *Only those who want to treat Darwinism as an infallible dogma would oppose such a balanced approach.*
18. If Catholics honestly assess why a stronger stand against evolution has not been taken, the inaction has been caused by a debilitating combination of the failure to study the scientific evidence, a fear of being ridiculed, and intimidation by evolutionists who are quick to condemn any challenge to their classroom monopoly. Unless Catholics find the courage and resolve to restore truth, the sorrowful trends of the past 150 years will likely continue. Thus, it is very important that Catholics, especially Catholic educators at all levels, study the claims for evolution theory and teach the truth. This is our moral duty, and all will be accountable before God.

You can gain more information in *A Catholic Assessment of Evolution Theory* and in *Repairing the Breach*. These books are available at www.RestoringTruthMinistries.org See also the recommended Catholic ministries: the Kolbe Center for the Study of Creation www.kolbecenter.org and Daylight Origins Society www.daylightorigins.com

¹ From Sir Solly Zuckerman, *Beyond the Ivory Tower: The Frontiers of Public and Private Science* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Co., Inc., 1970), p. 64, see also *Repairing the Breach: Explaining the Systematic Deception Behind the War of Worldviews, and How Christendom Can Turn the Tide* (Dallas: Brown Books, 2008), p. 33.

² From Pope Leo XIII, Encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* (18 November 1893), par. 14. Taken from <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Leo13/113provi.htm> on 7/13/2010.

³ For more information concerning the on-going authority of the decrees of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, see “Rediscovering the Decrees of the Pontifical Biblical Commission” by Fr. Sean Kopczynski, Article No. 94 of the Roman Theological Forum Study Program, July 2001.

⁴ From Cardinal Ernesto Ruffini, *The Theory of Evolution Judged by Reason and Faith* (Boonville, NY: Preserving Christian Publications, 2008), p. 134.

⁵ From Pope Leo XIII, Encyclical *Arcanum Divinae Sapientie*, par. 5. Taken from *Pro-Life Library*, (Front Royal, VA: Human Life International, 2000). CD-ROM.

⁶ From St. Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, par. 1, available online at <http://faculty.fordham.edu/Klima/Blackwell-proofs/MP.pdf>

⁷ Cardinal Ratzinger (later elected as Pope Benedict XVI) said in his short book *'In The Beginning...' A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995, pp. 99-100) that "We can win the future only if we do not lose creation." While Cardinal Ratzinger largely took a non-literal view of Genesis in his book, his statement is nevertheless accurate and largely explains why Christendom is losing the war of worldviews.