

# Reclaiming Genesis: Part II

By Greg Witherow

In the opening chapters of Genesis the modern reader is at once confronted with the question of evolution<sup>1</sup>. Did God immediately create Adam, body and soul, or did “Adam” evolve over a millennia? Most Catholics claim the latter. But pockets of doubt (or even ghettos of resistance) persist with memories of old books depicting a six-day creation. For many of us a tension between Science and Faith exists. But this is a false tension as God is the author of both. While doctrine revealed by God holds precedence over theories derived from creation<sup>2</sup>, the two are never in conflict. Any perceived tension must be eradicated by a diligent and cautious search for the truth<sup>3</sup>. While Catholics must reject Darwinian evolution and it’s Natural Selection, Catholics can discuss (and hold) positions that embrace some facets of evolutionary theory - or none at all. This range of theories are embedded in either Theistic Evolution or Intelligent Design<sup>4</sup>. Yes, it is true that the evolution debate is an open question in the Catholic Church. But it is also true that evolutionists must make their case within the heart of the Church<sup>5</sup> and refrain from undermining Tradition, the Magisterium or Scripture. The following is a reminder to the evolutionist (theistic or otherwise) of historical Catholic teaching.

## **Adam Did Not Have Parents**

“The [Church] Fathers concur in teaching that God immediately created the first man, both as to body and to soul”<sup>6</sup>. If Tradition is the consensus of “what has been believed by everyone, always and everywhere”<sup>7</sup> evolution immediately has a problem. A letter written by Pope Pelagius I (556-561) demonstrates the common sentiment of the Fathers. Writing in April 557 the Pope states, “For I confess that ... Adam himself and his wife, who **were not born of other parents**<sup>8</sup>, but were created, the one from the earth, the other however, from the rib of a man...”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> By evolution I mean macroevolution (not microevolution), specifically the evolution of Man.

<sup>2</sup> Humani Generis paragraph 35.

<sup>3</sup> Humani Generis paragraph 36.

<sup>4</sup> Theistic Evolution (TE) and Intelligent Design (ID) are different theories. It's not accurate to portray TE adherents as supporters of the ID movement, nor is it accurate to portray ID advocates as those who completely accept evolution. Both believe that there is design in nature, that God created the universe. The ID position is that natural processes are not sufficient to produce what we see in nature, i.e. supernatural miracles are required. ID adherents hold up "irreducibly complex" systems as evidence that some sort of interference or help was needed along the way. TE adherents accept that natural processes are sufficient (though they may believe God could intervene in a more direct manner if he wanted to) and that irreducibly complex systems do have a natural explanation. While a Young Earth creationist falls under the umbrella of ID, not all ID adherents (and perhaps not most) are Young Earth creationists. An adherent of TE views the Genesis account more allegorically while an ID adherent could take the Genesis account more literally.

<sup>5</sup> See the Catechism of the Catholic Church 113.

<sup>6</sup> This quote is lifted from The Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma, page 95.

<sup>7</sup> This statement does not mean that every last person has believed the same about a given topic. There have been dissenting minority opinions. John Paul II made statements sympathetic to evolution, stating in 1996 that evolution was “more than a hypothesis”. While Church doctrine was not changed (it was not donned a Magisterial decree), the press mistakenly took it to mean the Church officially taught evolution.

<sup>8</sup> In “not being **born** of parents” he must be referring to their bodies and their souls.

## **Eve Not A Product Of Evolution**

Writing the encyclical Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae in 1880, Pope Leo XIII states, “We record what is to all known, and 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**<sup>10</sup> of Adam when he was locked in sleep.”

Eve did not evolve. The evolution debate revolves around one individual, namely Adam.

## **The “Days” In Creation Can Be Periods Of Time**

In 1909 Pope Pius IX answers the following question. “Whether in that designation and distinction of six days, with which the account of the first chapter of Genesis deals, the word (dies) can be assumed either in its proper sense as a natural day, or in the improper sense of a certain space of time; and whether with regard to such a question there can be free disagreement among exegetes?”

Reply: In the affirmative.<sup>11</sup>”

Catholics may hold that the days in the Creation were periods of time or 24-hour days.

## **God Created the Whole Substance of Adam From Nothing**

Pope Pius IX convened the first Vatican Council during 1869-1870. While it is most famously known for defining Papal Infallibility, the council did speak of the Creation.

The council states, “[God] **immediately** from the beginning of time **fashioned each creature out of nothing**, spiritual and corporeal, namely angelic and mundane; and then the human creation, common as it were, composed of both spirit and body<sup>12</sup>.”

The Council further stated:

“If anyone does not confess that the world **and all things which are contained in it**, both spiritual and material, were produced, according to **their whole substance, out of nothing by God**; or holds that God did not create by his will free from all necessity, but as necessarily as he necessarily loves himself; or denies that the world was created for the glory of God: **Let him be an anathema**<sup>13</sup>.”

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<sup>9</sup> Denzinger 228a. This quote is a voice from Tradition, not the Magisterium as it was lifted from a letter.

<sup>10</sup> This prefigures the bride of Christ coming from his crucified side via the Sacraments (blood and water).

<sup>11</sup> Denzinger 2128.

<sup>12</sup> Denzinger 1781. This quote is lifted from Vatican I, chapter 1 of its Dogmatic Constitution concerning the Catholic Faith.

<sup>13</sup> Denzinger 1805. Vatican I canons chapter 1 paragraph 5.

The term “immediately” seems problematic for evolutionists. If the creation process of the body and the creation of the soul **are separated by millions of years**, how is that immediate? Pope Pius IX was well aware of evolution by 1870 when this was written.

### **Discussion of Evolution Is Not Forbidden**

Pope Pius XII published a Papal Encyclical Humani Generis (Concerning Some False Opinions Threatening to Undermine the Foundations of Catholic Doctrine) in August of 1950. This encyclical is the most recent proclamation on evolution promulgated by the Magisterium. The following is a number of extracts from this encyclical.

“For these reasons the Teaching Authority of the Church **does not forbid** that, in conformity with the present state of human sciences and sacred theology, **research and discussions**, on the part of men experienced in both fields, **take place with regard to the doctrine of evolution**, in as far as it inquires into the origin of the human body as coming from pre-existent and living matter—for the Catholic faith obliges us to hold that souls are immediately created by God. However this must be done in such a way that the reasons for both opinions, that is, those favorable and those unfavorable to evolution, be weighed and judged with the necessary seriousness, moderation and measure, and provided that all are prepared to submit to the judgment of the Church, to whom Christ has given the mission of interpreting authentically the Sacred Scriptures and of defending the dogmas of faithful. **Some however rashly transgress this liberty of discussion**, when they act as if the origin of the human body from pre-existing and living matter were already completely certain and proved by the facts which have been discovered up to now and by reasoning on those facts, and as if there were nothing in the sources of divine revelation which demands the greatest moderation and caution in this question.<sup>14</sup>”

The Church does not forbid discussion and research on how the human body developed. Unfortunately for many, all caution has been cast aside and Discussion has become Dogma. When Pope John XXIII opened a papal commission to investigate contraception, there was the same reaction. The Discussion of Contraception was assumed to be the Dogma of Contraception and nearly the entire Church raced headlong into embracing contraception. But they were wrong. Discussion, yes. Dogma, no.

### **Polygenism Is Rejected**

“[In regards to the theory of] **polygenism, the children of the Church by no means enjoy such liberty**. For the faithful cannot embrace that opinion which maintains either that after Adam there existed on this earth true men who did not take their origin through natural generation from him as from the first parent of all **or that Adam represents a certain number of first parents**. Now it is in no way apparent how such an opinion can be reconciled with that which the sources of revealed truth and the documents of the Teaching Authority of the Church propose with regard to original sin, which proceeds from **a sin actually committed by an individual Adam** and which through generation is passed on to all and is in everyone as his own.<sup>15</sup>”

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<sup>14</sup> Humani Generis paragraph 36.

<sup>15</sup> Humani Generis paragraph 37.

Adam existed. He is not an allegorical figure representing the original men.

### **Catholic Schools Cannot Teach Adam As Myth**

“For this reason, after mature reflection and consideration before God, that We may not be wanting in Our sacred duty, We charge the Bishops and the Superiors General of Religious Orders, binding them most seriously in conscience, **to take most diligent care that such opinions be not advanced in schools, in conferences or in writings of any kind, and that they be not taught in any manner whatsoever to the clergy or the faithful.**<sup>16,</sup>”

Pope Pius XII concludes by warning Catholic theologians not to teach Genesis as allegorical tales in our Catholic schools and seminaries. **This directive has been virtually ignored.** While our bishops watch, Modernist notions of “creation mythology” have a free rein in our Catholic universities, seminaries, parochial schools and parishes.

### **The Fall Brings Death**

Before we conclude, we must touch on the problem of death. The Scripture states that by sin death came into the world<sup>17</sup>. Additionally, God says in Genesis that the creation was good, even very good. With that, it’s hard to make a case that death and disease (cancers, viruses, etc.) entered the world before the Fall<sup>18</sup>. The evolutionist must explain how death and disease entered paradise before we can be asked to embrace his theories.

### **Summary of Catholic Teaching (Tradition, Magisterium, Scripture)**

- God immediately created the first man, both as to body and to soul (Tradition)
- Eve was specially created out of Adam, not by evolution (Magisterium)
- The “days” in creation are either natural days or periods of time (Magisterium)
- God created the whole substance of man immediately from nothing (Magisterium)
- Catholics are free to research and discuss evolution (Magisterium)
- Polygenism is rejected as all descended from a historical Adam (Magisterium)
- The creation account in Genesis is not to be taught as myth (Magisterium)
- Death was introduced into the world after the Fall of Adam (Scripture)

While it is a fact that Modernists heretics drive much of the evolution debate in the Church, it is also true the Church is discerning evolution’s merits. To hold evolutionary views (**within the limits stated above**) is not heretical. Catholics are free to hold such views. But let’s be clear. The Modernist is out to reshape the Church into a Humanistic Institution. Gutting Genesis of its historical merits and advancing Darwinian evolution

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<sup>16</sup> Humani Generis paragraph 41.

<sup>17</sup> Wisdom of Solomon 2:24 states, “but through the devil’s envy death entered the world”. Romans 8:18-22 includes, “for the creation was subjected to futility...[and] itself will be set free from its bondage to decay”. Romans 5:12, “sin came into the world by one man and death through sin”. See 1 Corinth. 15:26

<sup>18</sup> Even Creation was cursed by the Fall with thorns and pain. But plants were eaten (dying) before the Fall.

are necessary tools to this end. The guidance of Tradition, the Magisterium and Scripture means nothing to them. But the Catholic looks to the Church to discern our origins, knowing that ultimately **Science and the Church are allies**, not adversaries in Truth.