

**“CHILDREN OF EVE”**

An earlier version of this article appeared in the *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*  
in March of 1988

*And Adam called the name of his wife Eve: because she was the mother of all the living (Genesis 3:20).*

There appeared recently on Public Television in the science series called *Nova*, a remarkable program entitled "Children of Eve." In the opening segment Dr. Rebecca Cann of the University of California at Berkely says: "The group that gave rise to us whether you call them anatomically modern humans, *homo sapiens*, *sapiens*, or whatever, that population contained a woman, an Eve, if you want to call her that...and we are all descended from her." <sup>1</sup>

The program went on to give a popular presentation of the scientific research which resulted in this startling conclusion, a conclusion of great importance to theology. But let me give a little theological and "science" background, before discussing this fascinating discovery. Modern scientific opinion on the origin of man is based on population genetics. It requires large breeding populations for the occurrence of favorable mutations in sufficient frequency for natural selection to operate. The Nobel Laureate, Jacques Monod, writes: "In so large a population, consequently mutation is by no means an exceptional phenomenon: it is the rule. And it is within the broader framework of population, not on isolated individuals, that selective pressure is exerted." <sup>2</sup>

According to current scientific opinion, such as it is, the evolution of man required a large population of hominids (pre-men) for a successful humanizing mutation to have taken place. This precluded the possibility (at least until recently) of a single first couple (Adam and Eve), and is what is known as polygenism, many first parents, as opposed to monogenism, a single first pair. The notion of a simultaneous humanizing mutation in both male and female individuals is considered mathematically impossible, and is rejected out of hand by most scientists today on the grounds that it would require divine intervention, a possibility that they refuse to consider.

But it is clear from Scripture, and it has been the constant teaching of Tradition and the Magisterium of the Church, that we are all descended from Adam and Eve. But weighed down by a heavy feeling of inferiority towards the ephemeral opinions of contemporary science, many Catholic theologians have abandoned the Church's traditional teaching on monogenism and espoused polygenism. Fr. Teilhard de Chardin, for example, writes: "Thus in the eyes of science, which at long range can only see things in bulk, the 'first man' is and can only be a crowd, and his infancy is made up of thousands and thousands of years." <sup>3</sup>

Pope Pius XII became alarmed at this tendency among some Catholic intellectuals, and in 1950 in his encyclical *Humani Generis*, he condemned polygenism:

But as regards another conjecture, namely so-called polygenism, the children of the Church by no means enjoy the same liberty. No Catholic can hold that after Adam there existed on earth true men who did not take their origin from him as the first parent of all, or that Adam is merely a symbol for a number of first parents. For it is unintelligible how such an opinion can be reconciled with what the sources of revealed truth teach on original sin, which proceeds from sin actually committed by an individual Adam and which, passed on to all by way of generation, is in everyone as his own. <sup>4</sup>

The Book of Genesis (3:1-20), St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (5:12-19), and the Council of Trent (Session 5, canon 1) make the doctrine of original sin depend on monogenism, one Adam and Eve. Catholic theologians therefore who accept scientific opinion on polygenism have been forced to deny, or at least cast doubt on, the doctrine of original sin. Fr. Robert Faricy, S.J., in his *Teilhard de Chardin's Theology of the Christian in the World* summarizes Teilhard's teaching on polygenism and original sin:

In Teilhard's theory original sin cannot be localized in time or space; it is not an event in a historical chain of events. Rather, it is a global modality of evolution. From this point of view our conception of original sin "considered in its cosmic basis - as opposed to its historical actuation by the first beings - tends to be absorbed by our conception of the very mechanism of creation." For if creation is thought of as progressive unification, then "original sin represents the action of the negative forces of counter-evolution." <sup>46</sup>

...The acceptance of his hypothesis would "incidentally free us from the obligation, heavier every day, of paradoxically making the whole human race derive from one couple." <sup>48</sup> In Teilhard's theory, Adam is "universalized." "Strictly speaking there is no Adam. Under this name is hidden the universal law of reversion or perversion." Evil is the "ransom of progress." <sup>49</sup> In Teilhard's view Adam is a symbol that all men are born fallen, that all are marked by original sin the instant they become members of mankind. But men are not born in sin because of some aboriginal sin of a primitive Adam. Men are born in original sin because this is the law of the universe, the cosmic condition of a world in evolution. <sup>5</sup>

In 1966 Pope Paul VI convened a symposium of scientists and theologians in Rome, to discuss the challenge raised by polygenism, to the Church's teaching on original sin. The Holy Father said:

It is therefore, evident that the explanation of original sin given by some authors will seem to you irreconcilable with true Catholic doctrine. Starting from the undemonstrated premise of polygenism, they deny more or less clearly, that the sin from which so many cesspools of evil have come to mankind, was first of all the disobedience of Adam, "first man," figure of that future Man, committed at the beginning of history. Consequently these explanations do not even agree with the teaching of Scripture, of sacred tradition and the Church's Magisterium,

according to which the sin of the first man is transmitted to all his descendants not through imitation but through propagation, "is in each as his own," that is privation and not simple lack of holiness and justice even in newborn babies.<sup>6</sup>

Pope Paul VI made this condemnation of polygenism in 1966, yet despite this in 1967 Fr. Karl Rahner arrogantly wrote an article entitled "Evolution and Original Sin" published in *Concilium*, in which he proposed the following thesis:

I want to try to prove the following thesis: In the present state of theology and science it cannot be proved that polygenism conflicts with orthodox teaching on original sin. It would be better therefore if the magisterium refrained from censuring polygenism.

...We can...rightly ask how one can explain in a convincing manner that the mutually independent origin of two human beings from the animal world must be limited to these two only. One may take refuge in every kind of ad hoc argument, such as the arbitrary will of the creator or the fact that the hominization is in any case a rare occurrence on biological grounds, but do not such explanations sound rather forced? And then we have to ask ourselves further how can one understand that this one "Adam" found this one "Eve," both having evolved independently of each other, without appealing to miraculous intervention by God for which there is no justification. In other words, is it seriously probable that, within the wider population unit of the immediately preceding pre-hominids who create the living conditions and opportunity, only these two break through to become human beings and begin to procreate human beings?

...It is doubtful, to say the least, whether a bodily, historical unity of the first human beings can be understood in terms of monogenism. It is a general principle of biology that true, concrete genetic unity is not found in the individual but in the population...and in the same biotype (organisms of the same genetic constitution). Only within such a situation can evolution come about since selection can exercise its pressure only within such a population and not in isolated individuals.<sup>7</sup>

With that little theological and "science" background, let me return now to the *Nova* program, "Children of Eve." Up till the 1970s most genetic research into human evolution had concentrated on nuclear DNA, the DNA found in the nucleus of the cell. This DNA is inherited half from the mother and half from the father. But at Emory University in Georgia a team of scientists led by Dr. Douglas Wallace began studying the DNA in mitochondria, the little organelles in the cytoplasm of the cell. Dr. Wallace says: "In the early 1970s my collaborators and I started looking at MtDNA [mitochondrial DNA] in humans to try to understand the rules of inheritance. During the same period, other workers, working in other animal systems, made an important observation. And that is that the MtDNA of toads and other kinds of animals, was inherited exclusively from the mother."<sup>8</sup>

An experiment called an autoradiograph was performed on camera and Dr. Wallace concluded: "Therefore this kind of analysis shows us unequivocally that the MtDNA was inherited exclusively from the mother and not from the father." <sup>9</sup> The scientists speculate on what is happening:

Some experts believe that this is because only the nucleus of the sperm makes its way into the egg during fertilization. As the egg contributes all the cytoplasm to a fertilized zygote, only the mother contributes mitochondrial DNA to the next generation. Thus, only the egg's mitochondrial DNA is reproduced in the offspring, and mitochondrial DNA is immune to change by sexual recombination of genes from each parent. <sup>10</sup>

These studies were independently confirmed by Dr. Rebecca Cann of the University of California at Berkeley. She says: "Our major conclusion was that the human species, the group that gave rise to us whether we call them anatomically modern humans *Homo sapiens sapiens*, or whatever, that population contained a woman, an...Eve if you want to call her that, and she was in Africa. She belonged to a group which spread throughout all areas of the world, and we've all descended from her." <sup>11</sup> [I will come back to that Africa conclusion in a moment] the narrator of the program comments "This is a powerful notion. Every single human being who is alive today carries within, a vestige of this great great grandmother of modern people. For thousands of generations her genetic legacy has traveled from woman to woman." <sup>12</sup>

These recent scientific discoveries do not of course confirm the Church's teaching on monogenism; they are far from conclusive. But they should give pause to those Catholic theologians who so rashly abandoned the perennial teachings of the Church in favor of the ephemeral notions of contemporary science. Nor do these researchers themselves see the real significance of their own discoveries. They are so brain-washed by their evolution myth, that they think there were real men before "mitochondrial Eve," Pre-Adamites, and real men who were contemporary with her, but not descended from her, Co-Adamites. Both of these ideas, necessary corollaries of polygenism, were condemned, we have seen, by Pope Pius XII in *Humani Generis*. And of course since Darwin said we were descended from the apes, and since our most likely ape ancestors are found mainly in Africa, "mitochondrial Eve" must have originated in Africa.

If polygenism is true, and we have indeed descended from many pairs of first parents, it would necessarily follow that there is no real unity to the human race. In 1909 under Pope Saint Pius X, the much maligned Pontifical Biblical Commission upheld the traditional teaching of the Church on the unity of the human race:

### **On the Historical Character of the First Three Chapters of Genesis.**

...3) *Historical Character of Certain Parts* -

Whether in particular, we may call in question the literal and historical meaning where there is question of facts narrated in these chapters which touch the fundamental teachings of the Christian religion, as for example...the special creation of man, the formation of the first woman from man, the unity of the human race...

*Answer:* In the negative. <sup>13</sup>

Fr. Teilhard de Chardin, since he believed that men had evolved from hominids many times over a long period of time, logically concluded that there was no real unity to the human race. Fr. Paul Wickens in his *Christ Denied* has made a little collection of Teilhard's comments on this subject which are scattered throughout his writings:

"The more I get around the world, the more I feel that [people] are making a grave mistake recognizing the equality of races in the face of all biological evidence." "I see an increasing possibility...the Chinese are arrested primitives, victims of retarded development whose anthropological substance is inferior to ours. Everything Chinese reduces to zero." "...no humane hopes for an organized society must cause us to forget that the human stratum may not be homogeneous. If it were not, it would be necessary to find for the Chinese, as for the Negroes, their special function, which may not (by biological impossibility) be that of whites" (April 6, 1927). "They [the Ethiopians] will merge or disappear...Some will say that I am cruel and insufficiently Catholic. The truth is...that progress is a force that insists on the destruction of everything which has outlived its time." <sup>14</sup>

Teilhard's Catholic admirers usually hide this aspect of his evolutionary thought. Of course it was ideas such as these that spawned Hitler's movement against "inferior" races. But it should be noted that these ideas did not arise in Germany, but in the United States, in academia. <sup>15</sup> Elitist ideas such as these were very common among secular intellectuals and their Catholic disciples, but they went out of fashion after World War II. However, the same elitist mind-set has remained with the same kind of people, both seculars and Catholics. The emphasis has merely shifted from inferior races to inferior groups such as the unborn, the defective, the elderly, and to the supposed menace of the "population explosion."

I think it is wonderful of God to allow these men and women to discover that we are all descended from one woman. At least they are now forced to believe in the unity of the human race. Dr. Wallace says: I think one of the things that I found most personally exciting about our discovery of a single female lineage of MtDNA is it showed how closely related all the different people on our globe are to each other. And that in fact, we really are part of one human family. <sup>16</sup>

Indeed, we are all brothers and sisters because of our common descent from our first parents Adam and Eve. But we become even more so by our unity in Jesus and Mary.

\*\*\*\*\*

### *References*

- 1 *Nova*, "Children of Eve," WGBH Educational Foundation, Boston, 1986, transcript, p.1.
- 2 Jacques Monod, *Chance and Necessity*, Random House, New York, 1972, p.120.
- 3 Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., *The Phenomenon of Man*, Harper and Row, New York, 1959, p.185.
- 4 Pope Pius XII, *Humani Generis* (36), Weston College Press, Weston, MA, 1951, p.41.
- 5 Robert Faricy, S.J., *Teilhard de Chardin's Theology of the Christian in the World*, Sheed and Ward, New York, 1967, pp.158,159; n.46 *Le Christ Evoluteur*, 1942, appendix, n.48....As Teilhard points out, although the problem of the monogenetic or polygenetic origin of man is a theological problem - since science deals not with individuals but with populations - there should be no contradiction between theological explanations and scientific findings. ("*Monogenisme et monophyletisme*," 1950, 1-2.)...*Chute, redemption, et geocentricit.*, 1920, 3. see *Lettres ... Leontine Zanta*, ,, 128: Evil can now be seen to be "not punishment for a sin, but 'sign and effect' of progress."
- 6 Pope Paul VI, *L'Osservatore Romano*, July 15, 1966; cited in Fr. Patrick O'Connell, *Original Sin in the Light of Modern Science*, Lumen Christi Press, Houston, 1973, pp.90.91.
- 7 Karl Rahner, S.J., "Evolution and Original Sin," included in *The Evolving World and Theology, Concilium*, Volume 26, Paulist Press, Glen Rock, 1967, p.64.
- 8 *Nova*, "Children of Eve," transcript, p.20.
- 9 "Children of Eve," p.24.
- 10 Brian M. Fagan, *The Journey from Eden*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1990, p.26.
- 11 "Children of Eve," p.24.
- 12 "Children of Eve," p.24.
- 13 *Denzinger*, 2123.
- 14 Fr. Paul Wickens, *Christ Denied*, New Jersey Catholic News, Kearney, NJ, 1981, p.46.
- 15 For a fuller treatment of eugenics, see my *The Six Days of Creation*, Ravengate Press, Cambridge, 1984, pp.299-329. During World War II the media were constantly telling us that the Japanese were sub-human, and had only recently come down from the trees. They were excellent climbers, and their snipers preferred tree positions. They even had shoes that had a slot for the big toe to help them in climbing. Of course I never believed a word of this, but when I was in New Guinea and saw my first dead Japanese soldiers, they did indeed have a slot in their shoes for their big toes. It wasn't till I got to Japan that this puzzle was solved. The Japanese do not wear rubbers or over-shoes in the rain as we do, but wooden sandals called *geta* which are raised about six inches off of the ground. The thong for the sandal fits in the slot cut out in the shoes for the big toe, and they go clacking along the sidewalks in rainy weather.

16 "Children of Eve," p.25.

\*\*\*\*\*