

In the Beginning...

The Church's Teaching on the Origin of Man

by

Fr. Peter D. Mary Fehlner, F.I.

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Part I or Preliminaries

The Content of This Teaching

Belief in the Creator

The starting point of theology is our knowledge of God. Theology begins, writes St. Bonaventure ¹, where philosophy, including all branches of 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 ². 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.

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 exist, are like Him. He is all powerful, all knowing, all good. Whatever can be done, He can do; and whatever He 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 He wills it to be, or simply is not. The "*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, an 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 timeless agents not divine, but all came to be out of nothing by an act of the divine will. Not every single individual existing now or in the past or in the future was made 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 first 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 essence of things, and the overall rhythms of 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* [to the outside] 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 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 Creator⁴, 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 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, and 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 or Revelation 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 interferences of the unformed.

Terminology

None of this is possible without universal recognition of the epistemological dimensions of questions concerning the origin of the world, and especially of mankind.

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 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* [terminus from which] 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* [terminus to which], 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 now 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.

2. 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 predetermined by the Creator is establishing "each according to its kind." ⁵

Principal and Instrumental Cause

The principal cause is the agent directly responsible for the specific effect produced and is contrasted with the 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 principal 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 the duration pleasing Him and appropriate to his ends (24 hours as Genesis tells us).

The divine creative act is distinguished from His conservative act, both of which, although 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 done, for He can always do something more. The second reflects His ordered power and is known from nature and the laws of nature and the laws of nature discerned in creation.

Part II or The Apostles Creed

Texts

*I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth
[Apostle's Creed].*

We believe in one God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and

of all things visible and invisible. - [Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed - 4th century].

Textual Observations

Creator-Maker

The terms are synonymous when predicated of 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 these dogmas, the 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 [see above], 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 Himself through Whom all things were made, and without Whom nothing that came to be was made. ⁶ Several examples will make this clear.

In the Beginning

"In the beginning [*en arche, in principio*] was the Word and the Word was with God..." ⁷. 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. The Word or Son of God, the only begotten God ⁸ comes from the Father not by a creative act but only 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 ⁹, 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 ¹⁰ for which resurrection the teaching of the Church has always required the exercise of a power capable of drawing out of nothing, the power of working a miracle, a power belonging to God alone ¹¹. 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 their possibility and inner intelligibility and 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 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, have 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 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 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 being]. In our century it was re-stressed by Pius XII ¹², but little noted by modern commentators on the theology of human origins.

Nature, Grace, and Glory

There are parallels between the intervention of Creator *qua* [as] Creator in the order of Nature, of grace, and of glory. St. Paul in the letter to the Ephesians¹³, formulates the principle explaining the nature of that link which correlates these three orders, a principle in fact 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 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 letter¹⁴ 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 extrapolation 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 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 His distinctive action principally that gives order to the world 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 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 E. Testa¹⁵

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 a 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 matter¹⁶ 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 of the character of the creative act; not a natural process with *a terminus a quo* [terminus from which], but a simple act of the will.

4. In the exact parallel drawn by many of the 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, the two phenomena are identified as being both effected directly by the omnipotence of God, starting not from nothing, but from something inert, 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, sympathy which Cardinal Newman in his classic study of Arianism¹⁷ 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 20th century writers¹⁸ 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*, [seminal plan] 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 here 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 ologenism 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 development occurred during the Hexameron are not natural, but special for this occasion. It is difficult to see how these so-called 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 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 the latter. In St. Augustine, certainly, the point is clear that he is not talking about evolution in the modern sense, for in opting for a 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 Word¹⁹. 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 the first woman is principally a divine work rather than natural and the source of the special likeness of God to Adam and to him in all his descendants.

3. The discussion of such Fathers is related not to the theory of evolution as expounded in modern science, but to certain questions of an epistemological character, viz:

* 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 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 condition that the discussion not call into question those points certain in the teaching 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 13th 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) ²⁰ 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 ²¹ and in John Duns Scotus ²² 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 ²³.

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 ²⁴ in opting for the literal interpretation of day in the first chapter of Genesis has been commonly overlooked in modern times. The *ratio seminalis* 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 background 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 between "fact" and truth on the one hand, and hypothesis on the other. Evolution is neither a truth immediately evident, not a fact directly observed or attested by witnesses who have observed it, but an hypothesis constructed so as to resolve questions whose resolution is not otherwise possible to the human mind. Hypothesizing, in whatever the distinction, 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 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 induplicable 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 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 later 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 this evaluation of such theories.

The Patristic Consensus

E. Testa ²⁵ 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 to 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;
- * 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, 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 is directly and solemnly affirmed the unity of the human family through the 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 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 no 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 of them, 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.

References

- 1 *Breviloquium*, Part I, Chapter 1,3.
- 2 Gen.1:1.
- 3 John, 1:1.
- 4 Rom. 1:18 - His supereminent divinity and power.
- 5 ratio seminalis [seminal plan] of St. Augustine.
- 6 John 1:3.
- 7 John 1:1.
- 8 John 1:14, 18.
- 9 John 17:5 - glorify Me with Thyself, with the glory that I had with Thee before the world existed.
- 10 John 10:18 - No one takes My life from Me, but I lay it down, and will take it again
(i.e. make my corpse live again).
- 11 Also Mt. 25:34.
- 12 *Infra*.
- 13 Ephesians 1:18ss.
- 14 Peter (3:3ss).
- 15 *La Creazione del Mondo nel Pensiero dei SS. Padri, Studi Biblici Franciscani Liber Annus 16*
(1965 -66) pp.5-68.
- 16 In the early Church known as Docetism, in modern times popularized by Bishop G. Berkely during
the 18th century.
- 17 *The Arians of the Fourth Century*, Chapter 1, Section 1.
- 18 Cf. E.C. Messenger, *Evolution and Theology* (New York 1939), and *Theology and Evolution*
(London, 1949).
- 19 *The excellent study of E. Des Places, Syngencia La Parente de l'Homme avec Dieu d'Homer a la*
Patristique, Paris, 1964.
- 20 *Breviloquium* part 2, Ch. 5.
- 21 E.C. Messenger, *Op. cit.*
- 22 N. Wildier, *An Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin* (New York 1968). For the anti-evolutionary
interpretation, W. Hoeres, *Kritik der Tranzendental philosophischen Enkenntnistheorie* (Stuttgart,
1969); C. Solazuren, *Christocentrismo cosmico de Teilhard de Chardin*; in *Verdad y Vida* 19
(1961) 131-143. Cf. also J.B. Carol *Why Jesus Christ* (Manasses, Va., 1986) p.437, n.26.
- 23 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, I (1940) 382-395.
- 24 *Brevioquium*, Part 2, Ch. 2,5.
- 25 *La Creazione Mono nel Pensiero del SS. Padri, Studi Biblici Franciscani Liber Annuus 16* (1955- . 66)
pp.5-68
