

Rome's Theistic Evolutionary Philosophy

By Richard Bennett

In his October 23, 1996, address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Pope John Paul II showed himself to be the epitome of a theistic evolutionist. Concerning the origin of life and evolution, the Pope laid out the problem he would address, "How should the conclusions reached by the diverse scientific disciplines be brought together with those contained in the message of Revelation?"¹

When the Pope mentioned "the message of Revelation," it must be understood that he was referring to the tripartite authority base of the Roman Catholic Church. This tripartite authority base, which is to be believed unquestioningly by every Catholic, is composed of Scripture, tradition, and what the magisterium of the Roman Church proposes as divinely revealed.² The latest *Catechism*, produced under Pope John Paul II's endorsement, also defined his understanding of "Revelation." It states, "...the [RC] Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence."³

Tradeoff begins

Citing the encyclical of his predecessor, Pius XII, Pope John Paul II has stated, "The encyclical *Humani Generis* treated the doctrine of "evolutionism" as a serious hypothesis, worthy of investigation and serious study, alongside the opposite hypothesis. Pius XII added two methodological conditions for this study: (1) one could not adopt this opinion as if it were a certain and demonstrable doctrine, and (2) one could not totally set aside the teaching of Revelation as it applied to these questions."

The tradeoff is: that in exchange for recognizing that "evolutionism" is a "serious study," the evolutionists were to refrain from taking the dogmatic position that their stand was truth, that is, they could not totally obliterate the position of the Catholic Church as regards the issue. Today, however, in many circles the position taken is that evolution is a fact of science and, therefore, true.

According to Dr. Donald Chittick, evolution is defined as "the common term applied to the philosophical concept that nature is autonomous."⁴ Since the Roman Catholic authority base is mixed rather than absolute, the Roman Catholic Church cannot be expected to hold any firm biblical position against the virile encroachment that the proponents of evolution have made.

¹ "What the Pope Actually Said: Excerpts from the Message of Pope John Paul II to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences", *The Catholic World Report*, December, 1996, p. 54.

² *Code of Canon Law*, Latin-English. Ed., (Wash. DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1983). Canon 750 "All that is contained in the written word of God or in tradition, that is, in the one deposit of faith entrusted to the [RC] Church and also proposed as divinely revealed either by the solemn magisterium of the Church or by its ordinary and universal magisterium, must be believed with divine and catholic faith."

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994), Papa 82; hereafter cited as the *Catechism*.

⁴ Donald E. Chittick, *The Controversy: Roots of the Creation-Evolution Conflict* (Newberg, OR 97132-0993: Creation Compass, 1984) p. 86. Call (503)-625-7679 to order.

Pope's "if" clause doubts biblical truth

Methodology in place, Pope John Paul II went on to state, "Today, more than half a century after the appearance of that encyclical [*Humani Generis*]⁵, some new findings lead us toward the recognition of more than one hypothesis within the theory of evolution....And to tell the truth, rather than speaking of the theory of evolution, it is more accurate to speak of the *theories* of evolution...." Having held open the gate for evolutionary theories (the basis of such theories is in the presupposition that the created world is autonomous), the Pope then tried to neatly corral these theories by saying, "Here the final judgment is with the competence of philosophy and, beyond that, of theology." No mention is made of the absoluteness of biblical authority. Indeed, to take such a stand would contradict the very authority base on which the Pope himself stood.

Going quickly on, the Pope said, "The magisterium of the Church takes a direct interest in the question of evolution, because it touches on the conception of man, whom Revelation tells us is created in the image and likeness of God...Pius XII underlined the essential point: if the origin of the human body comes through living matter which existed previously, the spiritual soul is created directly by God." Here the present Pope has enunciated a classical definition of theistic evolution. His flawed base, here called Revelation, makes possible the compromise with the atheistic philosophical system on which the conception of evolution is formed. The Bible states very clearly in Genesis 2:7, *And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.* This is what every Christian should hold as truth. It leaves no room for evolution, no room for Pius XII's "if..." clause; no room for compromise.

What the Pope neglected to mention

It is signal that John Paul II did not mention the position of Pope Pius X (1903-1914). John Paul II's position was condemned by Pius X eighty-nine years prior in the decree, "*Lamentabili*" (1907) when Pius X declared that the following statements were to 'be held as condemned and proscribed';

"64. The progress of the sciences demands that the concepts of Christian doctrine about God, **creation**, revelation, the Person of the Incarnate Word, the redemption, **be recast.**

65. Present day Catholicism cannot be reconciled with true science, unless it be transformed into a kind of nondogmatic Christianity...*Censure of the Holy Pontiff*: His Holiness [Pius X]... has ordered that all and every proposition enumerated above be held as condemned and proscribed."⁶

In 1950, Pius XII moved away from Pius X's position in order to cut a deal—by trading off recognition of the theory of evolution as "worthy of investigation and serious study"—for recognition by the evolutionists that Roman Catholic Church Revelation must not be entirely set aside, nor can the evolutionists settle into the position that their theory is the whole truth.

Technically, John Paul II could have taken the position of Pius X, since the positions of all the Popes are maintained by the dogma of papal infallibility and the irrefutable nature of the

⁵ *Humani Generis*, August 12, 1950. Pius XII's pontificate was from 1939-1958.

⁶ Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, Tr. by Roy J. Deferrari, Thirtieth Ed. of *Enchiridion Symbolicarum* (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1957) #2064, 2065, 2065a. Emphasis added.

Roman Catholic Church.⁷ But John Paul II decided to embrace the theistic evolutionist position taken by Pius XII, a position which Pius X condemned forty years prior to Pius XII. Vatican Council II Document No. 64, *Gaudium et Spes*, Chapter III provided the philosophical backbone for Pope John Paul II's position.

John Paul II conducted a litmus test

Thus, to speak of “theories of evolution” served the Pope's purposes well, because it appeared conciliatory, yet conservative. Ordinary Catholics have in the end held for whatever the Pope has said, as is shown officially by Canon 750, by the 1994 *Catechism*, and elsewhere. In the meantime, the Pope, *et al*, have quietly conducted their own polls to see how many calling themselves Christians (and Evangelicals) did not, in fact, hold tenaciously to the biblical authority base alone. The ensuing confusion over what the Pope actually said, including translations thereof, worked nicely for the Pope at that juncture, so close, as it was, to the advent of the Third Millennium.⁸

Pope questioning biblical truth not new

The Pope's statement to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences ought not to have shocked Evangelicals. For years, authentic Catholic sources have taken the theistic evolutionary position. For example, the entry entitled “Evolution” in the 1976 edition of *The Catholic Encyclopedia* states, “In the Catholic understanding, the theory of evolution, or transformism from lower forms of life through a sequence to human beings, remains a theory. However, should proof be eventually produced, the teaching of Genesis and its inspired narrative would remain, for it tells that the world was created for human beings and human beings themselves came from God, no matter what course was followed by divine wisdom in forming the human frame.”⁹

The Catholic Study Bible teaches that the section in the Bible, speaking of the creation of man formed of the dust of the earth, uses a number of mythic story themes from Mesopotamia. Of Genesis 2:4b—3:24, it states, “This is an independent account of the creation which is older than Genesis 1 and uses a number of mythic story themes known from Mesopotamia, although the biblical version is unique as a whole and far more sophisticated in its vision than anything else we have found in the ancient world....The major differences between the biblical accounts and the stories of other religions center on the clear connection in the Bible between a single God's loving care for humanity, the moral refusal of people to obey God, and the rightful sentence of mortality that now burdens us, together with a change in our relation to the land that now requires backbreaking labor to make it a blessing.”¹⁰

⁷ Vatican Council II Documents, No. 28, *Lumen Gentium*, Sect. 25 “This infallibility...in defining doctrine pertaining to faith and morals, is co-extensive with the deposit of revelation...The Roman Pontiff...enjoys this infallibility in virtue of his office, when, as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful...he proclaims in an absolute decision a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals. For that reason his definitions are rightly said to be irreformable by their very nature and not by reason of the assent of the Church.”

⁸ See our paper, “We Ought to Obey God Rather Than Men”: An Analysis of *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium*.”

⁹ *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Robert Broderick, Ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers, 1976), p. 202. This definition is in line with Pius XII's encyclical, *Humani Generis*, of 1950.

¹⁰ *The Catholic Study Bible*, New American Bible (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1990) Reading Guide, p. 62. This study Bible has six endorsements (imprimatur and Nihil Obstat) attesting to its importance as a R.C. source.

The writers of the commentary do not in any way intimate that the biblical account is truth. Yet, of God's Word, Jesus states, "Thy Word is truth." Of this absolutely essential fact, however, these myth chasing commentators, like men bewitched, have remained utterly silent. Under the presupposition that there are multiple sources for truth, as the Catholic definition gives, when disagreements arise, as in the debate over the creation of man, it becomes clear that it is the human authority which will be taken as absolute, rather than the Word of God.

Roman evolutionary position flashes effectively

Having laid the ground work for further tradeoffs in citing Pius XII, Pope John Paul II, with an eye to the impact it has made on the world press at that time, has safely said to the Pontifical Academy, "...Pius XII underlined the essential point: if the origin of the human body comes through living matter which existed previously, the spiritual soul is created directly by God." He gave nothing away, but again drew the world's attention to the Roman Catholic Church and her position.

Pope glossed over real answer

He moved on, "An appreciation for the different methods used in different fields of scholarship allows us to bring together two points of view which at first might seem irreconcilable. The sciences of observation describe and measure...the many manifestation[s] of life, and locate them along the time-line." Turning deftly from viewing this position, the Pope moved to his conclusion, "The moment of passage into the spiritual realm is not something that can be observed in this way...but the experience of metaphysical knowledge, of self consciousness and self-awareness, of moral conscience, of liberty, or of aesthetic and religious experience--these must be analyzed through philosophical reflection, while theology seeks to clarify the ultimate meaning of the Creator's designs."

Flawed base brings on a pharisaic attitude

Such generalizing suited the Pope's purposes well--for it was hardly an oversight on his part that he had neglected to mention that modern science arose out of the Reformation understanding that the Bible speaks truthfully and propositionally concerning all creation. Rather, absolute silence on this signal issue is a fruit of the Roman Catholic Church flawed authority base. What John Paul II was teaching Catholics and others who took him as an authority is similar to what the Pharisees did in the Lord's own time. While saying they held to the truths of Scripture, they interpreted it according to their own tradition, thus "*making the word of God of none effect.*"¹¹

Theistic evolution undermines Gospel

When the Apostle Paul presents the Gospel in Chapter 1 of Romans, it is within the context of creation, *the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.* In Chapter 5, the first Adam is vividly contrasted to the "last Adam," i.e., Christ. Clearly **both** Adam and Christ are understood to be "historical figures". To make room for evolutionary myth as any part of Gospel truth is to cast doubt on Adam as an historical figure. To uphold the doctrine of Adam and Eve and original sin, as the Roman Church does, while em-

¹¹ Mark 7:13

bracing the nonsense of evolutionary theories as “worthy of investigation and serious study” is proverbial double talk.

God being in partnership, as it were, with evolution, i.e., His created universe somehow become autonomous, is a clear parallel to what the Roman Catholic magisterium attempted to teach in her *Catechism* concerning grace. She officially teaches that man can have merit and be an associate with God in His grace, paragraph 2025, “We can have merit in God’s sight only because of God’s free plan to associate man with the work of his grace...”; and grace, paragraph 1477, “all those who...by his grace have made their lives holy...” The co-operation formula is that grace, plus works, equals salvation. Such a concept is a flat lie, as it denies the repeated statements of God’s truth in Scripture that the work of redemption is “*by Himself*,”¹² “*without the deeds of the law*,”¹³ “not of yourselves, it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast,”¹⁴ “*not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us...*”¹⁵

God allowing for autonomous man to respond to Him by saving himself is what is seen in the summary definition of grace in the *Catechism*, grace, paragraph, 2021, “Grace is the **help** God gives us to respond to our vocation of becoming his adopted sons. It introduces us into the intimacy of the Trinitarian life.”¹⁶ This definition of grace reduces the sovereign grace of God to a tool, presumably by the aid of which a man can attain his own salvation. In a quite similar fashion, in John Paul II reiterating Pius XII’s position regarding evolution, now God’s work in creation is no longer held to be sovereign and finished, as the passages of Scripture clearly state, but rather doubt is applied to the Scriptural Word in order to allow for autonomous evolution in the process of creation.

Heresies running parallel in the dark

The Roman Catholic “Revelation” is a clear parallel to the theistic evolutionary position. When the Bible alone is not held to be the absolute basis of truth, but rather “Revelation” (as defined in grace, paragraph 82 of the *Catechism*, “**not**...from the holy Scriptures alone...”) is held to be the absolute basis of truth, the door is opened to many grave errors. The anti-biblical position provided for by the Catholic Church--that in spite of whatever God has said in Scripture, He somehow allowed evolution to be the way He formed man--is an heretical position. Equally heretical is the Roman Catholic anti-biblical position that God now allows the “co-operation” and “merit” of human beings in His work of grace and salvation. To that is Isaiah’s unchangeable measure: “*To the law and to the testimony! If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.*”¹⁷ ♦

Richard Bennett of “Berean Beacon” WebPage: <http://www.bereanbeacon.org>

Permission is given by the author to copy this article if it is done in its entirety without any changes.

Permission is also given post this article in its entirety on Internet WebPages.

¹² Hebrews 1:3.

¹³ Romans 3:28

¹⁴ Ephesians 2:9.

¹⁵ Titus 3:5.

¹⁶ Bolding not in original.

¹⁷ Isaiah 8:20

