

Evolution: A Dying Mythology

by Hugh Owen

While reserving to themselves the right, given them by Christ, of authoritatively interpreting God's Word, the apostles and their successors early laid down guidelines for the interpretation of Scripture. Above all, they upheld the primacy of the literal and obvious sense of the text. In the words of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*, Catholics must "carefully observe the rule so wisely laid down by St. Augustine – not to depart from the literal and obvious sense, except only where reason makes it untenable or necessity permits."

Interpreting the words of Christ according to their literal and obvious meaning – except in those places where it would be absurd to do so (e.g., "I am the sheep gate" [John 10:7]) – the early Fathers of the Church found in the words of Christ a complete catechesis on creation and man's early history. From His words, they knew and taught that God made human beings male and female "from the beginning of creation" (Mark 10:6). They also knew and taught that the events in the book of Genesis actually took place. These events included the creation of Adam and Eve (Matthew 19:4), the righteous life and death of Abel (Matthew 23:35; Luke 11:51), and Noah's flood, which, according to Jesus, destroyed "all" but Noah's immediate family (Luke 17:27). Moreover, from the genealogies contained in the Gospels (Luke 3:34-36), the Fathers knew and taught that the Scriptures contained a factual record of Christ's ancestry.

On the strength of these divine words, the early Fathers – including even those of the Alexandrian School – knew and taught that God created all things out of nothing, that He formed Adam's body from inanimate matter and Eve's body from Adam's, and that the subsequent events recorded in Genesis actually took place. (I refer interested readers to www.robibrad.demon.co.uk) Moreover, even the allegorically minded Alexandrians agreed that the universe was no more than 10,000 years old. In doing so, Christian intellectuals like Origen defied the conventional wisdom of the Greek and Roman intelligentsia who believed in an ancient earth.

For well over 1500 years, no serious challenge was offered to this consensus. In the nineteenth century, however, for reasons that cannot be explained in so short an article, a number of natural scientists claimed to discover "irrefutable evidence" that contradicted the literal sense of Genesis on several points. The most important of these evidences included variations within populations of plants and animals and the discovery of layers of fossils in sedimentary rock formations in various places. The discovery of fossils in layers all over the earth inspired various interpretations. Charles Lyell speculated that the fossils had been laid down over millions of years and that they contained a record of the evolution of many different kinds of living things from common ancestors. This interpretation provided the framework for another creative interpretation of a different body of evidence.

For amateur naturalist Charles Darwin, the "fact" that various species of plants and animals changed over time seemed to support Lyell's theory of organic evolution. According to Darwin, given Lyell's long ages of geologic time, the small changes that he had observed on the Galapagos Islands might accumulate, resulting in the transformation of species. He theorized that natural selection – the survival of the fittest, or better adapted members of each species – could even account for the transformation of reptiles into birds, land mammals into whales, and apes into men.

What followed vividly recalls Iago's devilish discovery of "irrefutable evidence" of Desdemona's infidelity – only in this case the victim was the spotless Lamb "who cannot deceive or be deceived." From the end of the nineteenth century, an increasing number of Catholic intellectuals came to believe that the facts of biology and geology had "proven" the theory that all living things had evolved by small changes from a primordial blob. In reality, the proof of macroevolution – or "particles to people" evolution – was never provided. Instead, like Iago (but, in some cases, without a deliberate desire to deceive), the theory's promoters presented pieces of evidence that could be interpreted as favoring their theory, while promising to deliver the definitive "proof" – fossil evidence of transitional forms between diverse kinds of living things – in the near future.

Numerous Catholic intellectuals of good will accepted as proven the assumption that the fossil bearing rocks of the earth had been laid down vertically in chronological order over millions of years. Interpreted in this way, the apparent arrangement of the fossils from simpler to more complex, from the deepest to the surface fossil layers seemed to confirm the occurrence of macroevolution. A few lone voices, like those of Sir J. Ambrose Fleming, Paul Lemoine, and W. Bell Dawson protested the complete lack of evidence for these assumptions. However, the intellectual leadership of the Church came under increasing pressure to agree with the American Association for

the Advancement of Science resolution of 1922 that "the evidences in favor of the evolution of man are sufficient to convince every scientist of note in the world."

If the evidences in favor of macroevolution were so strong, some argued was not the Church justified in revising her traditional interpretation of Genesis? The literal sense of Genesis as understood by the Fathers of the Church taught that God created the different kinds of living things ex nihilo less than 10,000 years before Christ. If the facts of science flatly contradicted the literal sense, the literal sense would have to be abandoned in favor of a figurative sense. But if this were so, then would she not also have to revise her literal interpretation of other passages of Sacred Scripture, such as the miracles of Moses, the parting of the Red Sea, and even perhaps the miracles of Christ Himself?

As on the pretext of a false "proof" noble Othello lost faith in his bride, so many Catholic professors, priests, and even bishops lost their faith in the literal sense of Scripture wherever it seemed to contradict the tenets of "evolutionary science." The likely consequences of this catastrophe were not lost on Pope Leo XIII. He feared in a special way for the young and warned that "if they lose their reverence for the Holy Scripture on one or more points, [they] are easily led to give up believing in it altogether."

Providentially, to this day no official magisterial pronouncement has ever endorsed macroevolution and its attendant ideas. Indeed the official catechism does not even mention the word "evolution." But unofficial statements in favor of the theory have proliferated. Today, it almost seems as if macroevolution has become the conventional wisdom of the Church. But the tide is about to turn.

In spite of confident references to "evidences in favor of evolution," the greatest non-event of the twentieth century has been the evolutionists' failure to provide the promised "proof" for macroevolution. No transitional fossils have been found. No examples of upward evolution through the formation of new organs or bodily systems have been observed. Until recently, the failure to find these "proofs" has been glossed over with assurances that they will be found eventually. But in light of scientific advances in many disciplines during the last quarter century, evolution no longer suffers from a mere absence of proof. It has been definitively and fatally contradicted.

Although many recent advances in genetics, biochemistry, molecular biology, and geology, among other fields, have challenged the macroevolutionary theory, a few have destroyed the very assumptions upon which it is based. Here it will be possible to sketch only a few of them.

In geology, the work of sedimentologist Guy Berthault has demonstrated that the sedimentary layers of the earth are far more likely to have been formed by flowing water in sideways sloping strata than by having been deposited one on top of the other. Thus, the strata cannot be used to date rocks or the fossils contained in them. Moreover, studies of the aftermath of the Mt. St. Helens volcanic eruption have confirmed Berthault's findings and demonstrated that rock formations thought to have been formed over millions of years can be formed by rapidly moving water in a matter of days.

Meanwhile, recent discoveries in molecular biology have revealed the staggering complexity of even the simplest cell. According to molecular biologist Michael Denton, "A functional protein or gene is complex beyond our own creative capacities.... Alongside the level of ingenuity and complexity exhibited by the molecular machinery of life, even our most advanced artifacts appear clumsy."

Information theory has now shown that this staggering complexity cannot have arisen from within material things. It had to have been programmed into them by an intelligent designer. In the words of Dr. Walt Brown: "Based on modern advances in the field of information theory, the only known way to decrease the entropy [tendency to disorder] of an isolated system is by having intelligence in that system" (emphasis in original).

Genetics research has also demonstrated that this staggering complexity of information in the simplest living things cannot have arisen through beneficial mutations or through any natural, undirected process. Thus, all the so-called examples of upward (information-adding) evolution have turned out to be examples of loss of genetic information. Information specialist Dr. Lee Spetner observes: "All point mutations that have been studied on the molecular level turn out to reduce the genetic information and not to increase it."

Contemplating these facts in the light of Pope Leo's Providentissimus Deus, is there any reason for Catholics to reject the literal and obvious sense of the first eleven chapters of Genesis? On the contrary, since there is no scientific evidence in favor of macroevolution or of long ages of geologic time, Tradition urges us to return to the

literal sense of Genesis. Indeed, Tradition tells us that we must cling to the literal sense unless proof is provided that the literal sense is not true.

It would be difficult to overestimate the significance of this return to a traditional understanding of Genesis. While recognizing that some passages of Scripture, like the visions of Daniel, for example, must be interpreted figuratively, the Apostles and the Fathers of the Church believed in the absolute trustworthiness of God's Word, in its literal sense, wherever the authors intended to be taken literally. By allowing a materialistic theory to compromise their faith in the trustworthiness of the literal sense of God's Word in Genesis, Catholic converts to evolutionism could not help losing faith in the trustworthiness of the literal sense of other Scriptures, including even the Gospel. In short, they could no longer take their Father at His Word.

As natural science administers the coup de grace to macroevolution, some fallen away Catholics are sure to arise from the empty cornhusks of materialism and return to the Father. But it is to be hoped that many will return with a renewed commitment to the Faith of their Fathers.

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