

# Catholic Faith and Evolution

Earl Muller, S.J.

Scholar in Residence

Notre Dame Seminary, New Orleans

# Catholic Teaching on Creation and Evolution

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

## *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

### Part One, Chapter One, Paragraphs 1-2

I believe in God the Father

- God is one
- God is a living God
- God is a Trinity
- The God of the Judeo-Christian tradition is one who is “in conversation” with humanity; He reveals himself

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*

Part One, Chapter One, Paragraph 3

I believe in God the Father almighty

- God is omnipotent
- His omnipotence is universal
- His omnipotence is loving, merciful
- It is in accord with his justice and wisdom
- It is mysterious, especially when “made perfect in weakness”
- It is discerned in faith

# *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

## Part One, Chapter One, Paragraph 4 (part 1)

I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth

- Creation is Christocentric—“from the beginning, God envisaged the glory of the new creation in Christ” (CCC 280)
- Our origins are inseparable from our end (CCC 282)
- Science, which has enhanced our knowledge of the origin of the universe and of man, cannot answer the question of what it means (CCC 283-84)
- The alternative is between a universe governed by chance, blind fate, anonymous necessity and a universe that originates from a transcendent, intelligent and good God

# *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

## Part One, Chapter One, Paragraph 4 (part 2)

I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth

- The revelation of creation is inseparable from the revelation and forging of the covenant of the one God with his People (CCC 288)
- The first three chapters of Genesis, read in the light of Christ, remain the principal source for the catechesis on the mysteries of the “beginning”: creation, fall, and promise of salvation (CCC 289)
- The opening line of Genesis affirms three things:
  - God gave a beginning to all that exists outside of himself
  - God alone is the creator
  - The totality of what exists depends on Him (CCC 290)

# *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

## Part One, Chapter One, Paragraph 4 (part 3)

I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth

- God created freely and according to his wisdom (CCC 295)
- He created “out of nothing” —there was no pre-existent thing (CCC 296)
  - This implies the possibility of grace for the spiritually dead
  - and resurrection for those who are bodily dead (CCC 298)
- Creation is good and ordered; it is oriented to humans “created in the ‘image of God’” (CCC 299)
- God transcends all his works, but “as the first cause” is present to the inmost being of all creatures (CCC 300); he upholds and sustains them (CCC 301)

# *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

## Part One, Chapter One, Paragraph 4 (part 4)

I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth

- God, in his providence, is the sovereign master of his plan (CCC 303)
- He grants creatures “the dignity of acting on their own, of being causes and principles for each other, and thus of cooperating in the accomplishment of his plan (CCC 306)
- God enables men to be intelligent and free causes in order to complete the work of creation. . .they can also enter deliberately into the divine plan by their actions, their prayers, and their sufferings (CCC 307)
- God is the first cause operating in and through secondary causes (CCC 301)



# *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

## Part One, Chapter One, Paragraph 4 (part 5)

I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth

- God, in his providence, is the sovereign master of his plan (CCC 303)
- He grants creatures “the dignity of acting on their own, of being causes and principles for each other, and thus of cooperating in the accomplishment of his plan (CCC 306)
- God enables men to be intelligent and free causes in order to complete the work of creation. . .they can also enter deliberately into the divine plan by their actions, their prayers, and their sufferings (CCC 307)
- God is the first cause operating in and through secondary causes (CCC 308)

## *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

### Part One, Chapter One, Paragraph 4 (part 6)

I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth

- God, freely willed to create a world ‘in a state of journeying’ toward its ultimate perfection (CCC 310)
- Physically this entails the presence of destructive forces of nature as well as constructive ones
- Angels and men journey by their free choice; they can go astray, they can sin; thus *moral evil* entered the world (CCC 311)
- God is not the cause of moral evil but permits it
- He can bring good from even moral evil; Christ’s death is the preeminent example (CCC 312)

## *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

### Part One, Chapter One, Paragraph 5 (part 1)

I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth

- The existence of the spiritual, non-corporeal beings that Sacred Scripture usually calls “angels” is a truth of faith; it testifies to the conviction that there is a spiritual reality that cannot be reduced to material reality (CCC 328-30)
- Christ is the center of the angelic world (CCC 331)
- With regard to the visible world the *Catechism* teaches:
  - Nothing exists that does not owe its existence to God the Creator
  - Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection
  - Each is beautiful
  - The order of the six days reflect the hierarchy of creatures “from less

# *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

## Part One, Chapter One, Paragraph 5 (part 2)

I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth

- With regard to the visible world the (CCC 337-49) teaches:
  - Nothing exists that does not owe its existence to God the Creator
  - Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection
  - Each is beautiful
  - The order of the six days reflect the hierarchy of creatures “from less perfect to more perfect”
  - Humankind is the summit of creation
  - All creatures are in solidarity with each other in their origin and their end in God’s glory
  - Creation was fashioned with a view to the Sabbath, the worship of God
  - Creation finds its meaning and its summit in the new creation in Christ

# *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

## Part One, Chapter One, Paragraph 6 (part 1)

I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth

- Created in the image humans alone among visible creatures are able to know and love God and share in his own life (CCC 356)
- They are persons--capable of self-knowledge, self-possession, of freely giving themselves--called by grace into a covenant with God (CCC 357)
- All else was for humans, who were created to serve and love God (CCC 358)
- Only in Christ does the mystery of man truly become clear (CCC 359)  
Cf. the Adam-Christ imagery of I Cor. 15:20-22, 45-49
- Because of its common origin the human race forms a unity called to be brothers and sisters in Christ, the second Adam (CCC 360)

# *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

## Part One, Chapter One, Paragraph 6 (part 2)

I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth

- Created in the image humans alone among visible creatures are able to know and love God and share in his own life (CCC 356)
- They are persons--capable of self-knowledge, self-possession, of freely giving themselves--called by grace into a covenant with God (CCC 357)
- All else was for humans, who were created to serve and love God (CCC 358)
- Only in Christ does the mystery of man truly become clear (CCC 359)  
Cf. the Adam-Christ imagery of I Cor. 15:20-22, 45-49
- Because of its common origin the human race forms a unity called to be brothers and sisters in Christ, the second Adam (CCC 360)

## *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

### Part One, Chapter One, Paragraph 6 (part 3)

I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth

- The human person is a being at once corporeal and spiritual (*CCC 362*)
- Man, whole and entire, is willed by God
- “Soul” can signify human life or the entire person but also the spiritual principle in man (*CCC 363*)
- The body is human because it is animated by a spiritual soul (*CCC 364*)
- The whole person is intended to become a temple of the Holy Spirit
- The union of body and soul forms a single nature (*CCC 365*)
- Every spiritual soul is created immediately by God--it is not “produced” by the parents—it is immortal (*CCC 366*)

# *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

## Part One, Chapter One, Paragraph 6 (part 4)

I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth

- ‘Being man’ or ‘being woman’ is good and willed by God (CCC 369)
- They have the same dignity and equality as created “in the image of God”
- They were created *together* and willed each *for* the other. . .to be a communion of persons, equal and complementary (CCC 371-72)
- By forming “one flesh” they can transmit human life (CCC 372)
  
- The first humans were created good and in friendship with God and in harmony with creation (CCC 374)
- This is called “original justice”; an implication was that man would not have to suffer or to die (CCC 376)



## *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

### Part One, Chapter One, Paragraph 7 (part 1)

I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth

- Sin makes sense only in the context of our relationship to God: it is a rejection of God and opposition to him (CCC 386)
- It is an abuse of the freedom given to us (CCC 387)
- Original sin can only be understood in terms of the universal salvation offered through Christ—sin in the first Adam, life in the second (CCC 388)
- One cannot tamper with the doctrine of original sin without undermining the mystery of Christ (CCC 389)
- The account of the fall in Genesis 3 uses figurative language (CCC 390)
- That account affirms a primeval event, a sin, at the beginning which marked the whole of human history

# *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

## Part One, Chapter One, Paragraph 7 (part 2)

I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth

- The consequences of sin:
  - The loss of original justice (*CCC* 399)
  - The loss of harmony with self, the other, with creation (*CCC* 400)
  - The entrance of death into human history
- All men are implicated in Adam's sin, as all are implicated in Christ's justice (*CCC* 401, 404)—cf. the Adam-Christ imagery
- The transmission of this effect is a mystery not fully understood but it is by propagation
- Original sin was personal for Adam, for his descendants it is a state of a nature that has been wounded but not totally corrupted (*CCC* 405)

## Catholic Reaction to Evolution from the mid-1800s (Part 1)

1859 The appearance of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*

1860 Provincial council of German bishops in Cologne

- The first parents were created directly by God

- The claim that the body of man came to be by a spontaneous change from imperfect nature to the most perfect and, in a continuous process finally became human is contrary to Scripture and to the faith

Theological manuals of the time (excepting that of Matthias Scheeben) were reserved toward evolution if generally negative.

Rome “recognized” the Council of Cologne but was otherwise silent.

## Catholic Reaction to Evolution from the mid-1800s (Part 2)

### 1869-70 First Vatican Council

- Evolution was on the agenda but not acted on because of Franco-Prussian War
- The gist of the proposed document was an affirmation of the truth of the Genesis narrative
- The council did affirm the harmony between faith and reason (*De fide* 4)

1878 A book by Fr. Raffaello Caverni who argued that evolution was consistent with Catholic doctrine was placed on the *Index of Prohibited Books*—the point was to condemn Darwinism indirectly. This was utterly ineffective.

1893 Pope Leo XIII's *Providentissimus Deus* on the interpretation of Scripture

The layman and scientist, St. George J. Mivart, had his works on hell placed on the *Index*; his 1871 work accepting evolution, *On the Genesis of Species*, was not.

## Catholic Reaction to Evolution from the mid-1800s (Part 3)

1894 Fr. Marie-Dalmace Leroy, O.P.'s book, *The Evolution of Organic Species*, was denounced to the Congregation of the Index. He was asked to retract his suggestion on the evolution of the human body. He did so.

1897 Fr. John Zahm, C.S.C.'s book, *Evolution and Dogma* was denounced to the Congregation of the Index; he was asked to retract his view; this did not actually happen but what Zahm did satisfied the Congregation

1898 Bishop Geremia Bonomelli apparently denounced to the Congregation of the Index for praising Zahm's and other works on evolution. He issued a retraction before the Congregation had a chance to act

1899 Bishop John Hedley had also praised Zahm's work; he "retracted" this; the Congregation took no action

## Catholic Reaction to Evolution from the mid-1800s (Part 4)

1898-99 The “retractions” published by *La Civiltà Cattolica* which had been quite critical of the theory of evolution. The journal misattributed the action of the Congregation of the Index to the Holy Office (now the CDC) which seemed to give its judgments much greater dogmatic weight than they in fact had. Throughout this time the Holy Office and the Papacy were silent. Still, on the basis of the reports of *La Civiltà Cattolica*, theology textbooks in the following years treated the theory of evolution with great suspicion and upheld a literal, historical reading of Genesis.

1909 The report of the Pontifical Biblical Commission on the historical character of the first three chapters of Genesis which generally supported a literal historical reading of those chapters in Genesis.

## Catholic Reaction to Evolution from the mid-1800s (Part 5)

1943 Pius XII published the encyclical *Divino afflante spiritu* which opened the door to modern Catholic biblical exegesis

1950 Pius XII published the encyclical *Humani generis* which is the first official and public document (of either the papacy or the Holy Office) which mentions the theory of evolution. Pius XII still argued that the theory of evolution was unproven but allowed that it could be understood in a way compatible with Catholic faith. There were only two caveats—the immediate creation of the human soul by God and the question of polygenism which is with difficulty reconcilable with Catholic faith.

By this point the science of genetics was transforming the discussion of the theory of evolution.

## Catholic Reaction to Evolution from the mid-1800s (Part 6)

1986 Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (Benedict XVI) writes that “We cannot say: creation *or* evolution, inasmuch as these two things respond to two different realities. . .we are faced here with two complementary—rather than mutually exclusive—realities.”

1996 John Paul II declares that evolution was “more than a hypothesis”; he also reiterated previous Church teaching on the spiritual nature of man—those philosophies which “regard the spirit either as emerging from the forces of living matter, or as a simple epiphenomenon of that matter, are incompatible with the truth about man.”