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How Did We Get Here? A Catholic Read on Evolution (5377)

Book Pick: *Catholicism and Evolution: A History From Darwin to Pope Francis*

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by BY FATHER C. JOHN MCCLOSKEY 08/13/2016 Comments [\(12\)](#)



CATHOLICISM AND EVOLUTION

A History From Darwin to Pope Francis

By Father Michael Chaberek

Angelico Press, 2015

354 pages, \$21.95

To order: <https://angelicopress.com/>

The author of this book, Father Michael Chaberek, is a Polish Dominican priest who has studied the Church's thinking and doctrinal pronouncements on creation throughout her 2,000-year history, from the New Testament and the Church Fathers to the Middle Ages, the 19th century and down to our own times. This book is a must-read for Catholics to understand the controversial question of how we came to be.

There is often much confusion from scientists, who in many cases are nonbelievers, about what the Catholic Church actually teaches and has taught about evolution.

Father Chaberek helps the reader by clarifying Church teaching about the status of man in the universe. This book gathers all doctrinal statements on evolution and presents the history of the engagement of Catholicism with natural science, including quotations from St. John Paul II, Pope Benedict and Pope Francis. The reader will find it a great help in understanding the teachings of the Church on this crucial topic.

To begin with, many centuries before Charles Darwin set sail on *The Beagle* for the Galapagos Islands, great Catholic thinkers were already laying the intellectual groundwork for understanding just what theories about the origins of the Earth and all its creatures were consistent with the God of Scripture.

In the early centuries of the Church, Christian theologians confronted the Greek philosophers' arguments that God could not have made the world out of nothing. By grappling with ideas about the nature of God and about where the universe came from, the Church developed a doctrine of creation. The doctrine that all nature once did not exist and was created by God had immense implications for the Christian civilization that gradually developed in Europe following the collapse of the Roman Empire. It led to an understanding of nature as intelligible, created good and real (as opposed to some Eastern conceptions that nature is an illusion projected by mind).

There are many other questions about creation and cosmology that the Church Fathers like St. Augustine and later medieval thinkers like St. Thomas Aquinas grappled with; their insights armed the Church with a set of first principles for engaging with the theory of evolution when it arose and determining which versions were problematic from the point of view of Catholic theology. (Whether evolution is or is not a true explanation is a separate question that the Church does not pronounce upon, any more than it feels called upon to pronounce on the truth or falsity of particle physics.)

In this book, Father Chaberek deftly and lucidly summarizes 2,000 years of thinking on creation and almost 200 years of evolutionary theory. In the century and a half since publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, there have been a number of papal statements on the subject. Among the key points that Pope Pius XII, for example, made in his 1950 encyclical *Humani Generis* are 1) the soul does not evolve, but is immediately created by God, and 2) human beings all descend from one set of parents whose sin was "actually committed by an original Adam and which, through generation, is passed on to all and is in everyone as his own."

There is much, much more to learn from this readable and extremely useful summary of Catholicism and evolution. Father Chaberek's book is thoroughly accessible to the reader

without a strong science (or theological) background. Read it, and you will be better prepared to share your faith with others in this year dedicated to mercy.

After all, instructing the ignorant is one of the spiritual works of mercy, and certainly many Catholics and non-Catholics could benefit from learning what the Church teaches about creation and evolution — and why.

Opus Dei [Father C. John McCloskey](#) is a Church historian.

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