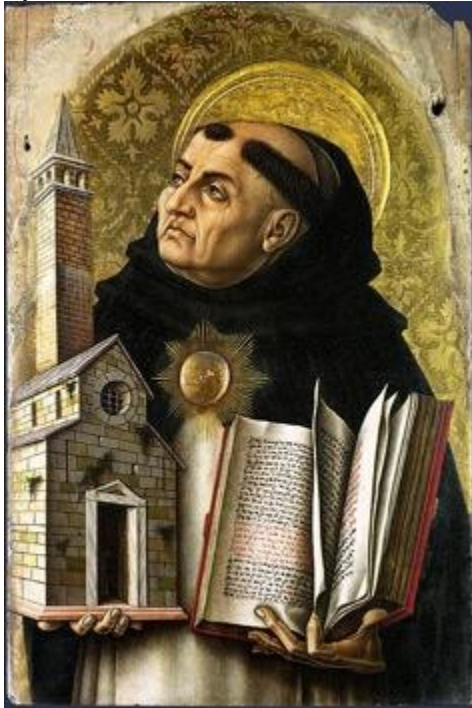


Distinguishing belongs to the wise: creation vs. evolution

Monday, 18 May 2015 09:00

Scripture explains how the universe was created, not how it works

By Father Michael Chaberek, OP



When discussing evolution we need to carefully understand terms that we use and "realities" or ideas that we talk about.

In the recent polemical text (of April 13), Prof. C.S. Morrissey fails to account for some necessary distinctions. He confuses two completely different ideas, namely, geocentrism and creationism.

It is true that even among Catholics one can find proponents of all kinds of weird ideas. This does not mean, however, that we can put those ideas into one pocket with legitimate and reasonable explanations and condemn both as equally irrational.

As St. Thomas Aquinas used to say: *Distinguere sapienti est*, which means: Distinguishing belongs to the wise. Let us introduce, therefore, some distinctions and clarifications to [what Prof. Morrissey said](#).

First, geocentrism and heliocentrism are theories that try to explain how the solar system works. This is quite different from explaining where the solar system comes from.

Evolution and creation are two different answers to the question, "Where do living species come from?" As such, they address the problem of the *origin* of things and not the *operation* of things.

Questions regarding origins often elude scientific explanation. To address them fully, we need the help of revelation. This is why the Bible does not give us knowledge about how the

universe works, but it does provide us knowledge about how the universe was created and formed.

And because creation, according to St. Thomas, is always a supernatural act of God, no naturalistic theory of the origins, including the Darwinian one, can be true.

Second, Prof. Morrissey refers to evolution as both a fact and a theory. By theory he means biological macroevolution, i.e., the idea that all species descended from one single-cell organism.

As much as the theory may look coherent and neat, and even have some scientific evidence in its favour, it is still not a fact. For example, nobody has ever seen a reptile changing into a bird or an ape transforming into a human. Therefore, contrary to what Prof. Morrissey claims, macroevolution is just a theory, not a fact, and this is a plain fact.

Third - and this is the point of our special interest - Prof. Morrissey presents Catholic teaching in such a way that it appears as if there is no room in the current Church for non-evolutionary interpretations of the origin of species and the human being. Prof. Morrissey's main argument is the "consistent approach" of the recent Popes.

But what kind of "consistent" message do we find in recent papal teachings? Is there any to be found in [recent papal teaching on evolution](#)? The last doctrinal statement addressed to the whole Church was Pius XII's encyclical *Humani Generis*.

This document, however, contains nothing more but quite a reserved permission to study the hypothesis of the animal origin of human body. Studying does not mean supporting.

Actually, the Pope makes it clear that Catholic scholars should beware of such more or less erroneous opinions because "diseases are not properly treated unless they are rightly diagnosed" (HG, 9).

In the same encyclical, Pius XII excludes the very possibility of discussing polygenism. According to Prof. Morrissey, this papal warning is not relevant anymore, because since the 1950s the dominant evolutionary theories have abandoned the idea of many different origins of humanity across the globe. Now they point to Africa as the sole place of human origin.

Contrary to what Prof. Morrissey claims, this shift does not invalidate the Pope's concern. The crucial problem of polygenism is not whether humanity originated on different continents many times in history or just one time in Africa. Instead, it concerns the question whether there was one human couple in the beginning or not.

In fact, contemporary evolution stories speak about a population of so-called hominids that evolved into humanity. The estimates of the population's size and the time of its existence vary dramatically, depending on many different assumptions. But the idea of a population generating the first humans often denies the very existence of historical Adam and Eve.

This means that the evolutionary challenge to Christianity in our times is not diminished. In fact, it goes far beyond the ideas countered by Pius XII. In the new book *More Than Myth* Catholic theologian Robert Stackpole directly addresses the failed attempts of recent Catholic thinkers to harmonize the new population theories with Pope Pius XII's concerns.

The only theologically significant novelty introduced by recent Popes (John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis) is their saying that there is no essential incompatibility between the "theory of evolution of nature" and the Bible. But in this context the Popes never clearly define what they mean by the term "evolution of nature."

Even assuming that the Popes meant a lack of contradiction between biological macroevolution and Genesis, what does this really tell us about the theory itself? It does not mean the theory is true, or that a Catholic cannot discuss it or reject it.

In fact, many scientific theories (including flat earth and geocentrism) may be compatible with the Bible and still remain a complete scientific error.

Prof. Morrissey rightly recognizes the rank of the recent papal statements on evolution is low because they refer to science, which is not the proper object of papal teaching authority. But if this is the case, can those less significant statements overturn the robust and well-confirmed magisterial teachings about the special creation of the human body?

The Solemn Profession of Faith by Pope Pelagius I (558), the Synod of Cologne (1860), Leo XIII's encyclical *Arcanum* (1880), the Responses of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, and several other documents testify to a robust Catholic teaching on human origins through special creation immediately by God.

We may have confusion or perhaps even contradictions between the former "high-ranking" doctrinal statements and current "low-ranking" and fragmentary papal utterances. This, however, only strengthens the need to discuss both views, without prejudices or disregard.

Finally, Prof. Morrissey resorts to the authority of the "great Dominican Thomist" in order to back up his evolutionary reinterpretation of human origins. But there is no need to invoke [contemporary Thomists](#) for help. Let's read Aquinas himself.

[In one place](#) he explicitly claims, "The first formation of the human body could not be by the instrumentality of any created power, but was immediately from God."

*Father Michael Chaberek, OP, a doctor of theology, specializes in Catholic teaching on evolution. His book *Catholicism and Evolution*, published in Europe, is being prepared for publication in North America.*

Last Updated on Friday, 22 May 2015 14:06