

God's creation of man eludes natural explanation: Aquinas

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By Father Michael Chaberek, OP

It is unfortunate Dr. C.S. Morrissey continues to use a polemical approach in his op-ed article on Aquinas and Evolution of May 25. This only serves to obscure the facts about evolution and cover up the whole truth about St. Thomas Aquinas rather than promote real dialogue on these matters.

Let's make it clear again there is no room for an evolutionary origin of either the body or the soul of Adam and Eve in Aquinas's teachings. He is so explicit and clear about it that claiming otherwise is nothing but a complete misrepresentation of his theology of creation.

In his *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas devotes three chapters (Lat. *Questio*, 90-92) to explain how the human soul and body were created. He claims that slime of the earth was the most fitting material, and the formation of the human body could have happened only by an immediate action of God.

He excludes cooperation of any created so-called secondary causes. He provides a number of theological and philosophical arguments to defend Christian doctrine on the special origin of the human body (not just the soul!)

To quote just one passage: "God, though He is absolutely immaterial, can alone ... produce a form in matter, without the aid of any preceding material form.... Therefore, as no pre-existing body has been formed whereby another body of the same species could be generated, the first human body was of necessity made immediately by God" (S.Th. I,91,2).

This teaching is so well-defined that any attempt to reconcile it with the evolution story simply distorts Aquinas's thought.

Today's Christian evolutionists sometimes claim that if Aquinas had known modern science he would have adopted the evolution story. But this claim is as unfounded as it is improbable. Aquinas considered the emergence of the first humans a supernatural event that goes beyond the abilities of nature.

If so, it is a matter of faith and not of natural knowledge. Therefore, no matter what kind of arguments scientists present, they would be rejected by Aquinas altogether, because the origin of man simply eludes natural explanations.

Other events simply elude natural explanation: a virgin giving birth, a dead man rising from the tomb, and thousands of people being satisfied with a few loaves of bread. Science excludes these events altogether. Nevertheless, Christians believe these events happened at particular moments in history because these are matters of divine revelation that exceed the order of nature.

Prof. Morrissey tries to justify his defence of the evolution story by quoting the Catechism of the Catholic Church (#365). But none of his quotations support his interpretation. The new Catechism never claims the soul was created whereas the body evolved. This is Morrissey's interpretation of the Catechism. Is this interpretation tenable?

First, the Catechism makes it clear the soul is the "form" of the body. In philosophical terms, one individual form can be the form of only one particular body. Therefore claiming the soul is immediately created and then it is "attached" to some other body, that came about through natural evolution, is philosophically untenable.

The so-called "ontological leap" out of necessity entails the so-called "physical leap," but if the physical continuity of the evolutionary process is ruined by the special creation and infusion of the soul, then what is the sense of defending theistic evolution in the first place?

Creation of the soul determines our understanding of the origin of the body, and if the first belongs to the supernatural order, the latter cannot be purely natural.

Second, Prof. Morrissey reads the Catechism and papal utterances as if nothing had ever been said on the matter in Church history. In this way he presents the Catechism as alienated and disconnected from the 20 centuries of tradition that preceded it.

However, Pope Benedict XVI (as well as Pope Francis) rejected this approach, calling it the "hermeneutics of rupture." Instead the Pope Emeritus proposed the "hermeneutics of continuity," which means that post-conciliar Church pronouncements should be read in the light of earlier magisterial teachings.

This "methodological" requirement stems from the conviction that the faith is the same throughout all times, regardless of cultural and intellectual trends, even such influential ones as, for example, the evolutionary reinterpretation of all science in our times.

The first catechism of the Church [Tridentine Catechism] published in 1566, proclaimed quite openly the special creation of both human body and soul: "[God] formed man from the slime of the earth, so created and constituted in body as to be immortal and impassible, not, however, by the strength of nature, but by the bounty of God. Man's soul He created to His own image and likeness...."

The same truth was constantly repeated in all local catechisms published with Church permission and under theological scrutiny of Rome up until 1950s. For instance Baltimore Catechism No. 4, from 1885, states: "God could have made Eve as He made Adam, by forming her body out of the clay of the earth and breathing into it a soul, but He made Eve out of Adam's rib to show that they were to be husband and wife."

Therefore, as I said in my first response to Prof. Morrissey, we may have confusion, or perhaps even contradictions, in recent Church teachings regarding human origins. This, however, means the issue is not settled. On the contrary, this state of affairs calls for deeper discussion that would include experts from different disciplines.

The Church must hear the arguments of both sides and ultimately rediscover the authentically Christian understanding of human origins. Ignoring or disregarding any of those arguments

goes clearly against Pius XII's advice from *Humani Generis* and also against the demands of rational and honest debate.

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