

Catholic Answers to Common Objections on Origins
by Edward A. Razz

Objection: *The bible isn't a science text book and should not be read as one.*

Response: This is true; the bible contains no equations or theories like a science textbook. However, this can be misleading if you then jump to the conclusion that the bible has no relevance to our origin. The bible does provide historic information on the history of the world and the origin of man. For example, Scripture states that we are all descendents of Adam and Eve. Is this true? If a scientist claimed that mankind originated from many hominids or Adams from different parts of the world – would we as Catholics then be obligated to critically question that assertion? Yes, absolutely. In this way, the bible is authoritative on things related to science and history and must be believed. By the way, the Magisterium of the church has authoritatively taught that polygenism (the belief in many Adams) is NOT permissible for Catholics. This teaching was promulgated by Pope Pius XII in the encyclical *Humani Generis*.

Objection: *The theory of evolution is completely compatible with the Catholic faith.*

Response: If what you mean by evolution is loosely defined as “change”, then there is little reason to object. However – a more precise definition from the National Association of Biology Teachers reads this way: "The diversity of life on Earth is the outcome of evolution: an unsupervised, impersonal, unpredictable and natural process of temporal descent with genetic modification that is affected by natural selection, chance, historical contingencies and changing environments." An all natural, unguided and impersonal process is not at all compatible with belief that a personal, supernatural creator God performed these acts *ex nihilo* (meaning out of nothing). The Magisterium of the church has permitted debate among Catholics on the subject of evolution within certain defined constraints of revealed truth. These constraints are not widely known because they are either suppressed or ignored by those who favor evolution. A complete listing of these teachings is summarized in the attached document entitled “*What does the Catholic Church teach about origins?*” If your belief in evolution causes you to deny any of those teachings from church councils and papal encyclicals – then an incompatibility with your faith and evolution exists.

Objection: *Hasn't the theory of evolution been scientifically proven as plainly as Newton's Laws of gravitation have been demonstrated?*

Response: Evolution is not a fact of science nor can it be claimed to be true with a high degree of certainty despite its wide acceptance by our culture. Objections to the theory are largely squelched as “religious” and are not taken seriously. Our public education system presents only evidence in favor of the theory while scientists are silenced and punished if they speak out against the theory (See the movie, *Expelled, No Intelligence Allowed* – available on DVD).

Another difficulty with this statement is that it confuses historical science with empirical science. Historical sciences deal with the events of the past that can not be repeated in a laboratory. It is much less certain than empirical science and not as easily influenced by the scientist's personal beliefs. In the historical sciences, men attempt to put together a story by observing natural laws today and extrapolating them into the past in order to make assertions about their story. Both creation and evolution deal with stories about the past that involve non-repeatable events without human observers. In this way, neither creation nor evolution can be asserted as a fact and therefore only statements of plausibility can be made.

Objection: Catholics don't believe you should take the bible literally.

Response: This is a false. See the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) paragraphs 116 and 117 below. CCC 116 The literal sense is the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture and discovered by exegesis, following the rules of sound interpretation: "All other senses of Sacred Scripture are based on the literal." – a quote from St. Augustine.

CCC 117 The spiritual sense. Thanks to the unity of God's plan, not only the text of Scripture but also the realities and events about which it speaks can be signs.

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Following the example of St. Augustine, Catholics first must properly understand the literal sense of Scripture. The fact that Scripture has other senses where further and deeper meaning can be derived does not discount or eliminate the literal sense.

Objection: The Church's teaching on creation is of secondary importance.

Response: This is not true according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

(CCC 282) Catechesis on creation is of major importance. It concerns the very foundations of human and Christian life: for it makes explicit the response of the Christian faith to the basic question that men of all times have asked themselves: "Where do we come from?" "Where are we going?" "What is our origin?" "What is our end?" "Where does everything that exists come from and where is it going?" The two questions, the first about the origin and the second about the end, are inseparable. They are decisive for the meaning and orientation of our life and actions.

Objection: I believe in both God and evolution so I really don't see the issue.

Response: It's good that you have retained your faith in God as Creator but please understand that our culture is going increasingly secular and many today are walking away from the faith because of evolution. Evolution undermines

1. belief in a role for the Creator. (Evolution asserts that design and order we see in nature is the result of random and natural processes.)
2. belief that Sacred Scripture is the revealed word of God. (If God got Genesis wrong – what else needs changing in the bible?)
3. belief in revealed doctrines that are based in the book of Genesis (Marriage, Original Sin).
4. belief that physical death is a consequence of Adam's sin. (God guided Evolution would mean that God used death, elimination of the weak as his creative process so death came before Adam's sin.)
5. belief that all mankind is in need of a savior. (If Genesis is myth then what historic event disrupted our relationship with God to cause our need for a Savior?)

Objection: It doesn't matter for Catholics "how" creation took place as long as you conclude that God is the ultimate source.

Response: It does matter "how" because the theological meaning is derived from those details. Consider the teaching example of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. In Matt 19:3-6 (RSV), we read:

³And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" ⁴ He answered, "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, ⁵ and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? ⁶ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder."

In Genesis we learn that God created Eve from Adam's side recalling the historic and literal origin of the "one flesh" union of Adam and Eve. Notice that Jesus refers to these events to derive the Catholic doctrine of marriage indissolvability from it. He uses the "how" of creation to provide deeper theological meaning.

Genesis also teaches us that God took the dust of the earth to form the first man. We are reminded of this historic reality on Ash Wednesday during the start of Lent when ashes are placed on our forehead and the words "From dust you were created – from dust you shall return" This only make sense from a literal understanding of these words. When we die – we return to the earth and decompose into the elements from which we were composed.

Also, in the New Testament, Saint Paul confirms the historicity of Genesis chapter 1 in 1-Timothy 2:13, "For Adam was first formed, then Eve." In 1-Corinthians 11:8, "For the man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man." The historic formation of Eve from Adam's side places her unique among women. From this point forward, all men are born of a woman.