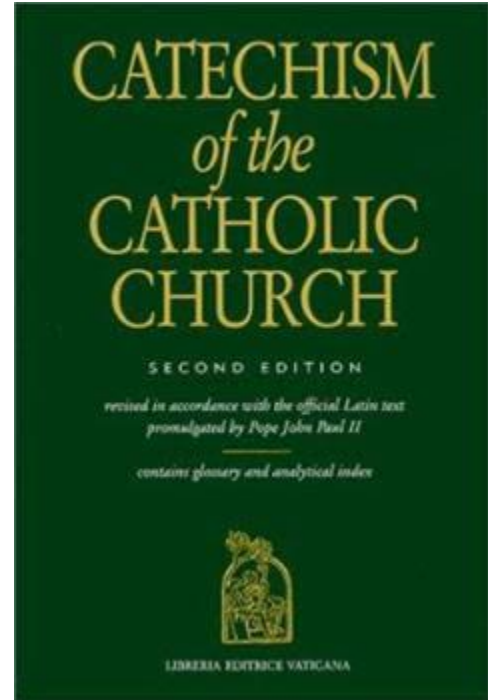


# Creation Catechesis: Dead on Arrival

Thomas L. McFadden, Sr

The 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* paragraph 282 teaches that

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.



At the parish level of catechesis that teaching was “dead on arrival,” not because of any negligence of the priests and their Directors of Religious Education, but rather because they did not know how to teach such fundamentals of the faith. According to the late Benedict XVI, the creation narratives had disappeared from the curriculum of the seminaries and other formation institutes.

## Ratzinger and Biblical Interpretation

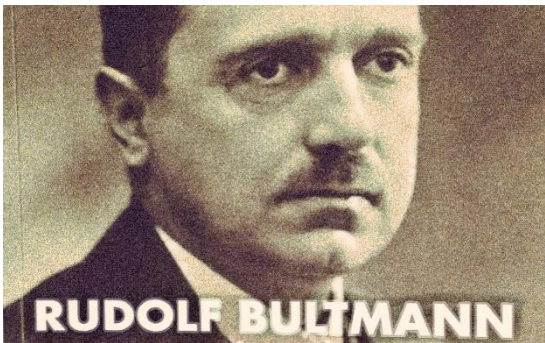
Cardinal Ratzinger, who became Benedict XVI, addressed that problem often when he was Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. For example, on January 27, 1988, he delivered a lecture about that theme at St. Peter’s Church in New York. The title was “Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: On the Question of the Foundations and Approaches of Exegesis Today.” It echoed the same type of criticisms of Catholic



scholars that Pope Pius XII had made 38 years earlier in his encyclical *The Human Race: Some False Opinions Which Threaten To Undermine Catholic Doctrine (Humani Generis)*. Cardinal Ratzinger made the same connection between belief in evolution and the demise of Catholic metaphysics in that 1988 address:



“In the first place, one can note that in the history-of-religions school, the model of evolution was applied to the analysis of biblical texts. This was an effort to bring the methods and models of the natural sciences to bear on the study of history. Bultmann laid hold of this notion in a more general way and thus attributed to the so-called scientific worldview a kind of dogmatic character. Thus, for example, for him the non-historicity of the miracle stories was no question whatever anymore. The only thing one needed to do yet was to explain how these miracle stories came about. On one hand the introduction of the scientific worldview was indeterminate and not well thought out. On the other hand, it offered an absolute rule for distinguishing between what could have been and what had to be explained only



by development. To this latter category belonged everything which is not met with in common daily experience. There could only have been what now is. For everything else, therefore, historical processes are invented, whose reconstruction became the particular challenge of exegesis...To that extent there lies in modern exegesis a reduction of history into philosophy, a revision of history by means of philosophy.”

## **Doctrine of Creation Disappeared**

Cardinal Ratzinger returned to the theme of his 1988 identification of evolution as a primary cause of the disappearance of the creation doctrines from theological instruction. That was in an address to the Presidents of the European Doctrinal Commissions in May 1989. His address was titled "Difficulties Confronting the Faith in Europe Today." He traced through the litany of issues pertaining to sexual morality and the Church's sacramental order and said they are linked together by the same false vision of humanity. He went on to say that:

We can give a proper answer to the conflict in detail only if we keep all of the relationships in view. It is their disappearance which has robbed the Faith of its reasonableness. In this context, I would like to list three areas within the worldview of the Faith which have witnessed a certain kind of reduction in the last centuries, a reduction which has been gradually preparing the way for another "paradigm."

In the first place, we have to point out the almost complete disappearance of the doctrine on creation from theology. As typical instances, we may cite two compendia of modern theology in which the doctrine on creation is eliminated as part of the content of the faith and is replaced by vague considerations from existential philosophy, [he then named two published in Europe]. In a time when we are experiencing the agonizing of creation against man's work and when the question of the limits and standards of creation upon our activity has become the central problem of our ethical responsibility, this fact must appear quite strange. Notwithstanding all this, it remains always a disagreeable fact that "nature" should be viewed as a moral issue...That nature has a mathematical intelligibility is to state the obvious, the assertion that it also contains in itself a moral intelligibility, however is rejected as a metaphysical fantasy. The demise of metaphysics goes hand in hand with the displacement of the teaching on creation.

## **Creation Narratives Unmentioned**

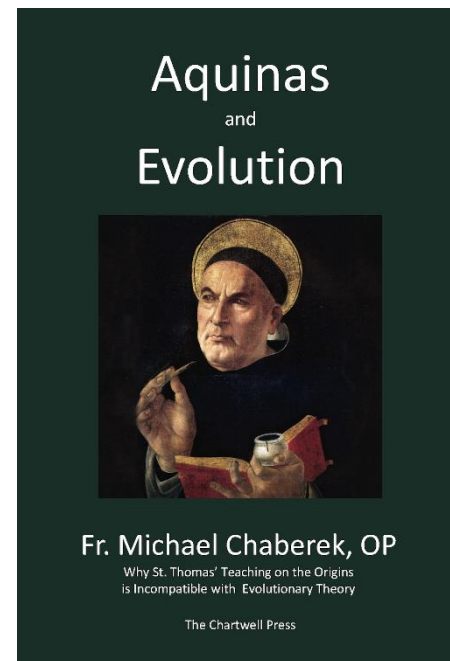
In 1995 Ratzinger again publicly lamented the disappearance of creation doctrine from the Catholic education universe. He published a book, *In the Beginning...* and in its preface he wrote:

...the creation account is noticeably and completely absent from catechesis, preaching, and even theology. The creation narratives go unmentioned; it is asking too much to expect anyone to speak of them.

### **The New Paradigm**

In his 1989 lecture cited above, Ratzinger mentioned “a certain kind of reduction in the last centuries, a reduction which has been gradually preparing the way for another ‘paradigm’ which was the assumption that evolution was a proven fact and then applying that to the interpretation of Scripture.

A further explanation of what the future Pope meant by “another ‘paradigm’” was provided by Fr. Michael Chaberek, O.P., in *Aquinas and Evolution* which he wrote in rebuttal to other Dominicans promoting “Thomistic Evolution.” Chaberek wrote that theologians and philosophers don’t know natural science well enough to be able to distinguish scientific facts from the materialistic interpretations and they dread being called “anti-scientific.” He asserted that because their exaggerated esteem or even fear of the “scientific community” makes them unable to question the so-called “scientific consensus” they have adopted the naturalistic paradigm.



### **What Changed?**

Chaberek found that the current paradigm in Catholic education was a historical development. He noted that since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, when evolution was soundly refuted by Popes and theologians of Vatican Congregations, neither evolution theory nor Catholic doctrine has changed. So how and why did belief in evolution, that was soundly refuted at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, become mainstream in Catholic academia by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century? His answer was like the one that Ratzinger had asserted in his May 1989 lecture when he said, “The demise of metaphysics goes hand in hand

with the displacement of the teaching on creation.” Chaberek linked it to the demise of metaphysics in this way:

As we noted, it is not the understanding of Aquinas or evolution that has changed over the last century or so. It is rather the change in paradigms—from roughly speaking “Biblical” or “creationist” to “naturalistic” or “evolutionary.” This change of paradigms explains why a great number of today’s Thomists greatly differ from those of a century ago. In our opinion, the “evolutionary” as opposed to the “Biblical” is not the proper context in which the problem of origins should be addressed. For this reason, we believe that not today, but the previous Thomists were closer to the truth regarding both—the interpretation of Aquinas’s metaphysics and the assessment of the evolutionary theory of origins...

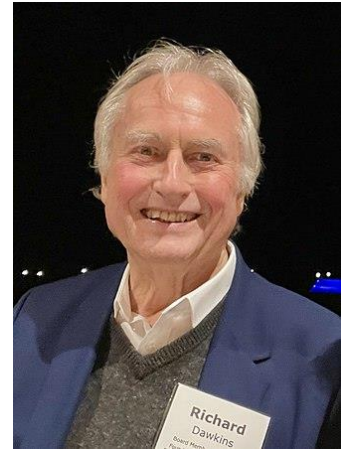
### **Ratzinger was Echoing Pius XII**

#### **On the Loss of Confidence in the Creation Narrative**

When, as Ratzinger said, “the model of evolution was applied to the analysis of biblical texts” and the “non-historicity of the miracle stories was no question whatever anymore” one practical result was loss of confidence in the fiat creation narratives of *Genesis* and acceptance of the evolutionary story of the naturalists. The only caveat attached by Catholic biblical teachers to acceptance of the Humanists’ evolution narrative was that whatever happened, “God did it.” The fiat creation of *Genesis* was replaced in the mainstream of Catholic education by “theistic evolution” which its proponents believe provides the required reconciliation between Scripture and the claims of science represented by the theories of cosmic and biological evolution. The problem with theistic evolution is lack of coherency. If the good intention of its proponents is to promote theism to harmonize with science, it does not work. It is not scientific specifically because it depends on supernatural involvement.

## The Theory of Secondary Causes

Fundamental to theistic evolution is that it is the playing out of secondary causes flowing according to Divine Providence from the original “whatever it was” created from nothing “whenever.” It could never harmonize with the scientific consensus and results in ridicule by the scientific consensus. The assertion that God guided evolution, a process that is defined as random or unguided, is a contradiction. Even God cannot guide an unguided process.



The opinion of the scientific consensus about theistic evolution was illustrated by world-famous evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins. He has Doctorates in Philosophy and Science from Oxford, and has been a professor at both the University of California Berkley and Oxford. In addition to his academic career, Dawkins has published 14 books (*The God Delusion*, *The Blind Watchmaker*) promoting atheism based on evolution that collectively have sold over 10 million copies. My little town’s public library has 8 of his books. He travels the world lecturing and debating on behalf of evolution and atheism. On a TV show, Dawkins was interviewed and asked when he became an atheist.

And was there a particular point or something that you read or an experience you had that sort of said ‘Yep, this is it. God doesn’t exist’?

Dawkins replied:

Oh well, by far the most important I suppose was understanding evolution. I think the Evangelical Christians have really got it right, it in a way, in seeing evolution as the enemy, whereas the more, what shall we say, sophisticated theologians who are quite happy to live with evolution, I think they are deluded. I think the Evangelicals have got it right in that there really is a deep incompatibility between evolution and Christianity and I think I realized that at about the age of 16.

## Theistic Evolutionists Were Taught, Not Born

It may be the opinion of the scientific consensus that theistic evolutionists are deluded but if they are it may be because they have been taught that the Catholic Church has authorized them to “hold” theistic evolution with only

one restriction: that God infused a soul into something that was living. That understanding is transmitted in Catholic institutions of formation and traces back to an incomplete and out-of-context reading of paragraph 36 of the aforementioned encyclical *The Human Race: Some False Opinions Which Threaten To Undermine Catholic Doctrine (Humani Generis)*. That paragraph merely permitted research and discussion by persons experienced in both human sciences and theology. The same paragraph laid down strict parameters for any such discussions. I engaged with a priest while he was reading paragraph 36 from his iPhone. He insisted to me that paragraph 36 permitted Catholics to “hold” belief in evolution. It was an example of rushing to a conclusion without the evidence that Pius XII had noted when he said in paragraph 35:

In fact, not a few insistently demand that the Catholic religion take these sciences into account as much as possible. This certainly would be praiseworthy in the case of clearly proved facts; but caution must be used when there is rather question of hypotheses, having some sort of scientific foundation, in which the doctrine contained in Sacred Scripture or in Tradition is involved. If such conjectural opinions are directly or indirectly opposed to the doctrine revealed by God, then the demand that they be recognized can in no way be admitted.

### **Poor Reading Comprehension or Wishful Thinking?**

Attributing “permission to hold evolution” from the permission given to persons experienced in life sciences and theology to discuss it seems contrary to the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> paragraphs of that encyclical. Pius XII identified belief in evolution as the underlying cause of the “false opinions” that had penetrated Catholic philosophy and threatened to undermine Catholic doctrine.

5. If anyone examines the state of affairs outside the Christian fold, he will easily discover the principle trends that not a few learned men are following. Some imprudently and indiscreetly hold that evolution, which has not been fully proved even in the domain of natural sciences, explains the origin of all things, and audaciously support the monistic and pantheistic opinion that the world is in continual evolution. Communists gladly subscribe to this opinion so that, when the souls of

men have been deprived of every idea of a personal God, they may the more efficaciously defend and propagate their dialectical materialism.

6. Such fictitious tenets of evolution which repudiate all that is absolute, firm and immutable, have paved the way for the new erroneous philosophy which, rivaling idealism, immanentism and pragmatism, has assumed the name of existentialism, since it concerns itself only with existence of individual things and neglects all consideration of their immutable essences.

### **Science of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Does Not Support Evolution**

What the Pope called “fictitious tenets of evolution” have not become less fictitious in the 70+ years since. In fact, the evidence offered to support it has largely been debunked by 21<sup>st</sup> century research and that is clear from reading what secular scientists admit when “talking to each other” in the scientific research journals. It is getting to the point that evolutionary theories maintain their popularity in scientific circles for reasons that have little to do with science. They are necessary to underpin the culturally-dominant non-theistic religion of Humanism (religious atheism). In what must be the most unread paragraphs of the encyclical, namely 40-42, Pius XII prohibited the teaching of evolution.

41. ... We charge the Bishops and the Superiors General of Religious Orders, binding them most seriously in conscience, to take most diligent care that such opinions be not advanced in schools, in conferences or in writings of any kind, and that they be not taught in any manner whatsoever to the clergy or the faithful.

We all know how that moral command was obeyed!

### **Catholic Youth Leaving in Droves**

According to Bishop Robert Barron, speaking in his capacity as Chairman of the Commission for Catechetics and Evangelization to the Bishops’ semi-annual conference in June 2019, half of those Americans baptized and confirmed in the last 30 years have left the Catholic Church. He called that “the



bitter fruit of the dumbing down of our faith” as it has been presented in catechesis and apologetics.” The reality is that many of those once-Catholic children of whom Bishop Barron spoke never had the faith or lost it *before confirmation*

And the trend is accelerating. To explain that phenomenon, I offer at least a “working hypothesis.” Social researchers Pew Research and the Center for Applied Research Apostolate (CARA), have sought the cause by interviewing Catholics to find their reason for leaving. They found that a significant percentage who said that they had lost belief in God cited “science” as their reason. In an article reported in *Our Sunday Visitor*, August 27, 2016, CARA found from two nationwide studies of Catholics that “Young people are leaving the faith. Here's why: Many youths and young adults who have left the Church point to their belief that there is a disconnect between science and religion.” Pew Research interviewers in other contemporary studies also found “science” to be frequently mentioned.

It is unlikely that Catholics lost belief in God over the modern technology that results from operational science and engineering. More likely, it was the oxymoron known as “historical science” that provides a naturalist explanation for the universe and life, namely, cosmic and biological evolution, as the alternative to the supernatural fiat creation of traditional Catholicism.

### **From the University to the Schools for Youth**

As just one concrete example of how materialist explanations are taught as science at top universities and trickle down to the school children, consider the career and influence of Dr. Francis Ayala. He was on the faculty of the University of California for 47 years. His academic appointments included



University Professor and Donald Bren Professor of Biological Sciences, Ecology & Evolutionary Biology (School of Biological Sciences), Professor of Philosophy (School of Humanities), and Professor of Logic and the Philosophy of Science (School of Social Sciences). Over his career he has won many of the top honors

and prizes in science including the coveted Templeton Prize. He has been president and chairman of the Board of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He had 950 publications and wrote 30 books. His influence on American scientific teaching, textbooks, teachers, and the students he taught during those 47 years was enormous. In the technical journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 104 (2007): 567 he published an article titled “Darwin’s Greatest Discovery: Design without Designer.”

It was Darwin’s greatest accomplishment to show that the complex organization and functionality of living beings can be explained as the result of natural processes – natural selection– without any need to resort to a Creator or other external agent. The origin and adaptation of organisms in their profusion and wondrous variations were thus brought into the realm of science

When teaching such as that filters down to the level of school children, it may not be that blunt but the essence of it is taught and believed. When these ideas hit school children in contrast to the religious stories taught by mom and dad, CCD teachers, or Catholic school catechism, it causes cognitive dissonance that requires a choice between those stories and science. Too many choose science.

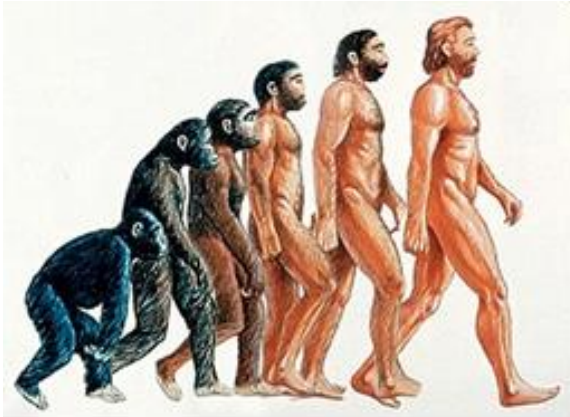
### **Evolution Story Answers the Questions the *Catechism* Says Teachers Need to Answer**

In the two national studies by CARA mentioned above, “the interviews with youth and young adults who had left the Catholic Faith revealed that the typical age for this decision to leave was made at 13. Nearly two-thirds of those surveyed, 63 percent, said they stopped being Catholic between the ages of 10 and 17. Another 23 percent say they left the Faith before the age of 10.”

Of course, it would be wrong to blame even most of those losses to the “disconnect” between religion and science that they perceive. But, in the absence of a 21<sup>st</sup> century science-based creation catechesis, the evolution story provides answers to the questions that paragraph 282 of *The Catechism* says must be answered. The loss of confidence in the fiat creation of *Genesis* has caused many Catholic educators to teach an “origins catechesis” adopted from and harmonized with the doctrines of the Humanists. Cosmic and biological

evolution tends to eliminate the need for the Creator described in bible. Richard Dawkins explained that Darwinism makes theistic belief both implausible and unnecessary: “Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist.”

### **Both are Matters of Faith**



Our “origins” are matters of faith to both fiat creationists and cosmic and biological evolutionists. Neither alternative can be proved by the methods of science. Fiat creation rests on the authority of Scripture and Tradition. Cosmic and biological evolution rests on the claims of science that are often just conclusions that are made based on inferences about the observed data based on axioms. An axiom is a statement that is

asserted to be so well-established that it is accepted without controversy to serve as the starting point for further explanations. For example, a cosmic evolutionary axiom underlying the “big bang” is that all of the matter and energy in the universe existed in a hot, dense item known to theoretical physicists as the “singularity” that existed in no space before time. There is no proof for that; it is just repeated as if it is self-evident. For atheist theorists the “singularity” helps to fast forward past the problem of the origin of matter and energy which Catholic philosophy attributes to the Uncaused Cause. The Bible reveals the Uncaused Cause: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.”

An example of a biological evolutionary axiom is one coined by America’s most famous evolutionist of the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The late Stephen J. Gould reigned at Harvard from 1967 until 2002, published 300 essays in *Natural History* magazine, and wrote 22 books, 9 of which are in my local public library: “And human beings evolved from apelike ancestors whether they did so by Darwin's proposed mechanism or by some other, yet to be discovered.”

## **Can There Be Faith Without Belief in the Bible?**

For Catholics whose Church authoritatively teaches that the bible is inerrant, choosing that the Genesis alternative is true ought to be easy. But through the corruption of Scripture studies shaped by the evolutionary paradigm, a priest of my acquaintance asked “Was a day really only 24 hours?” Then to support that question he quoted completely out of context from *2 Peter:3* that “With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.”

Other students were taught to believe that the creation account cannot be taken literally because in it the earth is said to have come before the sun. The underlying assumption that the creation narrative conflicts with science is the axiom of evolutionary cosmology: the solar system formed itself from gas and dust 4.5 billion years ago. In that story the sun existed before the earth.

Such students might agree that God is both the Author of the bible and is responsible in some way for both the sun and the earth. But He allowed His Church to teach a creation narrative literally until 18<sup>th</sup> Century German philosopher Immanuel Kant in his *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heaven* proposed that the sun, the earth, and the rest of the solar system formed itself from a *nebula*, or cloud of dust and gas. French deist mathematician Pierre-Simon Laplace (1749–1827) restated and developed the nebular hypothesis. Three centuries later that is taught in schools and on NASA’s website as a fact simply because nothing better has come along and that hypothesis does not involve God.

### **The Necessary Catechetical Resources Are Available**

Plenty of scientific resources are readily available that show how implausible 19<sup>th</sup> Century Darwinism and 20<sup>th</sup> Century theoretical physics explanations such as the “big bang” really are. In my experience it has been very hard to break through the evolutionary beliefs of Catholic clergy. I wonder if it is a matter of “what could I ever learn from a layman.” I ‘ve talked to priests and other credentialed religious educators about these matters and seen their eyes glaze over; they are sticking with what they have learned. It “works” for them but the statistics prove it doesn’t “work” for half of the Catholics baptized and confirmed who leave.

Until that barrier is overcome, the situation will remain as described by Cardinal Ratzinger: “The demise of metaphysics goes hand in hand with the displacement of the teaching on creation.”

Paragraph 282 of *The Catechism* will not be implemented, and Catholic youth will continue to be peeled away by the “disconnect” between religion and science that they perceive. Anyone who would like to change that situation could start by exploring the material offered on the websites of the Institute for Science and Catholicism ([scienceandcatholicism.org](http://scienceandcatholicism.org)) and the Kolbe Center for the Study of Creation([kolbecenter.org](http://kolbecenter.org)). Both promote resources for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century approach to restoring creation apologetics and catechesis.