

CREATION REDISCOVERED

*Ipse fecit nos et non ipsi nos: nos autem
populus ejus et oves pascuae ejus...*

Ps. 99

Gerard Keane, in his work *Creation Rediscovered*, and Hugh Owen of the American Kolbe Center for the Study of Creation have both done admirable work in drawing to the attention of the Catholic faithful throughout the world the errors in the evolutionary thesis, and the non-negotiable truths that earth and universe were created by God and that we are utterly dependent on him. While I respect them for the work they have done I differ from them on one essential point, their approach to the Church's teaching on creation. In this paper I set out the differences between us and the reasons why I differ from them.

It is essential that two distinctions be observed—

1. In rejecting evolutionary theory, one is not bound to accept a literalist interpretation of *Genesis* 1, nor an interpretation of the first eleven chapters of *Genesis* which would require that those chapters be read as rigorous history or science.
2. The observations of modern science are not to be rejected because some scientists (or even a majority of them) have interpreted many of those observations as confirming evolutionary theory.

Preliminary Matters

The Church does not close her mind to new knowledge since its subject, reality, is God's creature and knowledge is itself a great good. She is always open, then, to the lights that new knowledge about nature may shed upon her teachings. By the beginnings of the 20th century, human knowledge of the earth and universe was vastly more comprehensive than its state when the transcribers of the Biblical texts were at work, or when the Fathers of the Church issued their commentaries and teachings in the centuries after Christ's death and Resurrection.

Truth is one. The truth in one discipline cannot contradict the truth in another. Differences that may arise between them, then, are apparent only. We have to be humble before reality. We ought not to presume that in the 21st century AD we have all the solutions to the dilemmas that arise between revelation and natural knowledge. It does not follow from our inability to resolve them that they cannot, or never will, be resolved.

The proper object of philosophy is being. While it has something to say about evolutionary theory, it is not concerned about the age of earth or universe, save *per accidens*. It is of no concern to philosophy whether its subject (being) has existed for 1,000 years or a billion. Philosophy is entitled to speak about evolutionary theory because that theory involves a doctrine of causality. Philosophy condemns the

theory because it is nonsense. In this it is simply affirming what the man in the street would regard as common sense. Nor should we be surprised about this, for philosophy is nothing but the working out at a highly refined and abstruse level of what is ultimately common sense.

Theology is that discipline whose proper object is God as manifested in what He has revealed of Himself to men for their good and especially their ultimate salvation. It, too, has something to say about evolutionary theory because this theory impinges upon what God has revealed. But the salvation of man does not depend upon the age of earth or universe. It follows that, like philosophy, theology is not concerned with this issue, *save per accidens*.

Science, in all its branches, has as its proper object natural phenomena and, in the observations that it makes and in the reasonable conclusions drawn from such observations, it is entitled to offer an opinion about the age of the earth and universe. But science has limitations not shared by theology and philosophy, notably its inductive method which prevents it ever arriving at absolute certitude over any issue. Yet science is a great servant to man and its conclusions may not be disregarded if its observations are rigorous and the conclusions drawn from those observations are reasonable.

The overarching evil which afflicts our intellectual lives in the 21st century, as was also the case in the 20th century, is subjectivism. I have dealt with this evil elsewhere. For the present let it suffice to note that subjectivism is behind every pre-conception not rooted in reality. Evolutionary theory is such a pre-conception. So was the early assumption (driven by evolutionary theory) that the earth and universe were immensely old. So, in my view, is the assumption based upon a literal interpretation of *Genesis* chapter 1, that the earth and universe are only 6,000 years old. To investigate reality objectively one must rid oneself of all pre-conceptions and see what the facts reveal. These are God's signposts. These alone should be followed.

In seeking to solve dilemmas between revelation and science, we must start our investigation from a position of certitude, rather than of conjecture.

The Church, The One Interpreter

The one certitude available to us in this debate is the rulings of God's Holy Church for to the Church alone is given the faculty to interpret sacred scripture truly.

The eighth of the rulings of 30th June 1909 of the Church's *Pontifical Biblical Commission* runs —

Whether in that designation and distinction of six days, in the first chapter of *Genesis*, the word *Yom* (day) can be taken either in its proper sense as a natural day, or in the improper sense of a certain space of time; and whether among exegetes it is permitted to discuss this question freely? Affirmative. (DS 3519)

To assert that a Catholic must subscribe to the view that the word 'day' in *Genesis* chapter 1 means a natural day of 24 hours is, accordingly, against the true sense of sacred scripture. To assert that anyone who denies that view has to prove his claim is, likewise, against the true sense of sacred scripture.

In his encyclical *Humani Generis* (12th August, 1950), Pope Pius XII said of the first eleven chapters of *Genesis*—

[A]lthough properly speaking, not in conformity with the historical methods used by the best Greek and Latin writers or by competent authors of our time, [they] do nevertheless pertain to the genus of history in a true sense... [T]he same chapters, in simple and figurative language adapted to the mentality of a people of little culture, both state the principal truths upon which the attainment of our eternal salvation depends, and also give a popular description of the origin of the human race and the Chosen People. (DS 3898)

It follows that these chapters, though truly historical, are not to be read as a rigorous history of what transpired, or as a rigorous expression of the scientific ideas of the time.

What Science Has To Say

The overwhelming weight of opinion of the many branches of science is that earth and universe are of great age. An instance of that opinion in the field of geology is given in the paper of American physicist, Dr Roger C. Wiens, *Radiometric Dating*¹. There are many scientists, described as 'creation scientists', who oppose that view and advocate a view which would restrict the age of earth and universe to 6,000 years or thereabouts.

Creation scientists and those that follow them assume that evidence asserted as revealing great age in earth and universe is questionable because gathered with an *a priori* mindset in favour of evolutionary theory. That is, they assume the results have been contrived to fit the theory. Enthusiasm for evolutionary theory among an increasingly secular and atheistic scientific community might well have been the spur for their research. But if the observations were carried out objectively, and they show earth and universe to be of great age, *the observations do not fall to the ground because evolutionary theory is shown to be fundamentally flawed.*

It has to be said that there are many who speak on this subject without qualification on both sides of the debate. In the end, the determination of the issue is for scientists—those who are qualified—not for enthusiastic amateurs. However, in insisting on this point I am not conceding that it must be left to scientists also to determine whether or not evolutionary theory is acceptable. Evolutionary theory is, at the last, not a scientific issue, but a philosophic issue as I have explained. Therefore, apart from using it as a sort of working hypothesis to explain measurable

¹ Available at <http://www.evcforum.net/RefLib/RadiometricDatingEvo3.html> Dr Wiens, a Mennonite Christian based in Los Alamos, contrasts the consensus view of science with instances of the 'creation science' view.

phenomena, there is no reason why science should remain committed to evolutionary theory. Of course, in any discipline once an hypothesis is shown to be defective it ought to be discarded.

In the days when the title *Doctor of Philosophy* awarded in a scientific discipline meant what it says, the candidate would show how the working out of his discipline's subsidiary investigations confirmed the philosophy of being: in other words, he would prove the resonance of his discipline with the queen of the sciences. Those days have long since passed with our descent into the gutter thinking of modern philosophies which have lost all nexus with objective truth.

What The Church's Two Greatest Thinkers Have To Say

The Fathers of the Church did not ignore the relationship between natural knowledge and the teachings of Christianity. St Augustine addressed a particular problem, Christian pomposity about the findings of rigorous² scientific observation—

It frequently happens that there is some question about the earth, or the sky, the movement, revolutions, or even the size and distance of the stars, the regular eclipses of the sun and the moon, the nature of animals, vegetables and minerals, and other things of the same kind, concerning which one who is not a Christian has knowledge derived from most certain reasoning or observation. It is highly deplorable and mischievous and a thing especially to be guarded against that he should hear a Christian speaking of such matters as if in accordance with Christian writings and uttering such nonsense that, knowing him to be as wide of the mark as, to use the common expression, east is from west, the unbeliever can scarcely restrain himself from laughing.³

Eight hundred years later St Thomas Aquinas sounded a similar note of caution in the field of philosophy—

When philosophers are agreed upon a point, and it is not contrary to our faith, it is safer, in my opinion, neither to lay down such a point as a dogma of faith, even though it is perhaps so presented by the philosophers, nor to reject it as against faith, lest we thus give to the wise of this world an occasion of despising our faith.⁴

The burden of the advice of these two great philosophers and theologians is that the Christian is bound by the demands of reality no less than by what God has revealed. The scientist may not conclude from the findings of his science that revelation is false. Nor may the philosopher. But neither may the Christian ignore the findings of rigorous scientific observation or sound philosophy because they appear to conflict with revelation. Were these two great doctors alive today, it is inevitable that the views that they expressed in their own time on any number of issues would be affected by the discoveries of modern science and would differ from the views they have expressed. Neither, for instance, would be in any doubt from the findings of

² *Derived*, as St Augustine says, *from most certain reasoning or observation*. I am not referring to erroneous conclusions derived through adherence to an *a priori* mindset like evolutionist theory.

³ *Literal Commentary on Genesis, (De Genesi ad litteram, i, 19, 39)*

⁴ *Contra Errores Graecorum, x.*

modern science that human life begins at conception rather than around the 40th day of gestation.

What Reason Has To Say

Man is entitled, indeed bound, to act in accordance with his nature as a reasonable being. How are we to judge on a matter about which there is controversy and about which we are largely reliant upon experts to advise us? Clearly, we must accept, until it is proven to be erroneous, the opinion given by the majority.

I say 'largely reliant' because there is scope for the individual to form a tentative view about the age of the earth (there would seem to be no scope for forming such a view about the age of the universe) from personal observation and conclusions from facts which seem to be beyond controversy. If I had no science to enlighten me on the subject I would incline to the view that the earth is a very great deal older than the 6,000 years a literal interpretation of Genesis and the allusions thereto by the Gospel writers would claim. I cite one instance only.

In the 1930s, two Australian gold prospectors, Michael Leahy and Michael Dwyer, discovered in the unexplored hinterland of New Guinea in a series of high and lush mountain valleys most difficult of access, a race of people numbering nearly one million who had had no previous contact with the outside world. One of their number, Kirupano Eza'e, fifty years or so later expressed that obliviousness, "We had not seen far places. We knew only this side of the mountains. And we thought we were the only living people."⁵ Gerigle Gande of Kerowagi: "We only knew the people who lived immediately around us. For example the Naugla, they were our enemies, and we couldn't go past them. So we knew nothing of what was beyond. We thought no one existed apart from ourselves and our enemies."⁶ Ndika Wingti of Moika near Mt Hagen: "We thought the world ended where the clouds in the sky met the earth, and that they [the white men and their servants] came from somewhere in that direction."⁷

It would appear also that among this people there was no communal memory of the sea, though that immensity was less than 120 miles away to the north and south⁸. In their classic text, *First Contact*, Bob Connolly and Robyn Anderson relate that in October 1933 Michael Leahy returned to the coast with a large party. They continue—

⁵ *First Contact, New Guinea's Highlanders Encounter The Outside World*, Bob Connolly & Robin Anderson, Viking Penguin, New York, 1987, p. 6. Also, *First Contact*, film produced by Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson, Arundel Films, 1983; available on DVD from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2005.

⁶ Connolly & Anderson, *First Contact*, op. cit., p. 14.

⁷ *First Contact*, p. 104.

⁸ 'Coastal items of value—particularly seashells but also the odd piece of steel—were traded through innumerable hands in innumerable transactions from the coasts into the interior. But by this time information about the origin of the goods was lost.' Connolly & Anderson, *First Contact*, p. 13 See also p. 146 for Patrol Officer James Taylor's assessment from his translating of a speech of big man, Ndika Powa, that the natives thought the pearlshells they prized so highly grew on trees.

'The Hagen... people who are with us,' wrote Michael Leahy later in his diary, 'are thrilled to bits over the sea but I am afraid it will be beyond them to adequately describe it to their people in the bush.' Nonetheless it seems Dau [a highland woman who had married one of Patrol Officer James Taylor's native policemen] made a fair fist of it. 'We tried to explain that the saltwater was really huge. It filled up all the space there was. We told them all the rivers from here went into this big area, and it all stayed in the one place. Sometimes the water overflowed onto the land, and then went back, and overflowed again.'

When questioned today, old Hageners who made these pioneering journeys invariably agree that what impressed them above all else was the sea...⁹

Yet, according to literalist biblical theory, only 4,300 years before their discovery—some 1,700 years from the creation of Adam and Eve—Noah and his family, from whom the Church holds all the races of men on earth are descended, had emerged from the Ark in Armenia some 7,000 miles and half a globe away, across innumerable lands and seas. How is it that this race of men could have had no communal memory whatsoever of any other race of men? Or would appear to have had no memory of the sea when travel across the sea was essential to them reaching their remote mountain habitat?

There are some 800 different languages—not dialects, be it noted, but languages—in Papua New Guinea. Connolly and Anderson illustrate the difficulties these presented to communication when they recorded an interview in preparation for their documentary film *First Contact* first shown in 1983.

Kirupano begins his story. He speaks in Melanesian Pidgin, lingua franca of the colonial times, an amalgam of German, English and New Guinean languages that has defied its detractors and been evolved by the Papua New Guineans into a language of subtlety, beauty and expressiveness. The two old men standing next to Kirupano, since they were not singled out for any form of colonial service in their youth, were not taught pidgin, so the conversation with Kirupano is unintelligible to them. Neither could they converse with Kafe-speaking people twenty miles to the east, or with the Kuman people twenty miles to the west. The two old men speak Gahuku, the language of their region, and that is all they know.¹⁰

One could imagine as possible the dispersion of the forbears of this race of people from so great a distance; their establishment in the mountain highlands with that sedentariness which is the common feature of all mankind; the loss of these memories among them; and the development of such extraordinary linguistic diversity throughout the island—if the time which had elapsed since their forbears had abandoned the Ark had been perhaps 43,000 years. But how, in all reason, could these events have occurred in only 4,300 years?

⁹ *First Contact*, pp. 178-9

¹⁰ *First Contact*, p. 6. For a more recent instance of 'first contact' in New Guinea and of the difficulties in communication with natives, see David Attenborough's film 'A Blank On The Map' first broadcast by the BBC in December 1971 and available on DVD as part of the series 'Attenborough in Paradise'. Attenborough puts the number of different languages in Papua New Guinea at one thousand.

I don't put these observations forward as proofs, only as a suasive argument against the 'creation scientist' interpretation of sacred scripture. I am well aware that those who are convinced of that thesis will find reasons they will regard as sufficient to dismiss it, including, if all else should fail, some sort of Divine intervention.

Man is bound to act in accordance with his reason. Reason requires that effects should be ascribed to an appropriate cause. Furthermore, the principle of economy in reasoning requires that entities not be multiplied unnecessarily. If in earth and universe there are signs of great age *it is entirely reasonable that man should regard them as being so*. It is inappropriate to admit, gratuitously, hidden causes to contradict natural appearances.

Conclusion

The 'creation scientist' thesis cuts its followers off from the one certitude in the debate, the Church's rulings on revelation. In doing so, it loses the balance between what has been revealed and the testimony of the senses. It depreciates the worth of modern science by assuming that its findings are erroneous on no other ground than that those findings fail to accord with its own unsupported preconceptions about revelation. Furthermore, the thesis is self contradictory. While insisting that we should take Genesis 1 at face value, it denies that we should do the same with the appearances of the great age of the earth.

Perhaps the strongest argument against the thesis, however, is the implication contained in the rejection of natural appearances that the Author of creation, Almighty God, is a deceiver. This is inadmissible.

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25th March 2006—*The Annunciation of the Lord*