

Evolution, Science, Religion: Part 3

The last several weeks the bulletin articles have taken up, to some extent, the not infrequent claim that “science has disproven the bible.” In particular, many evolutionists claim that evolution disproves the creation accounts in Sacred Scripture. This can have an effect on the faith of people of all ages, but especially young people. How can “science” be wrong, after all? Seeing the results of science firsthand (as, for example, in plant and animal agriculture) might reinforce this doubt of faith. So the questions of science and evolution were taken up, noting first that the physical sciences are limited to questions of material reality and thus incapable of making any inferences about pure spirit (God, angels, the human soul). Science is also restricted to testable hypotheses, which raises the question of whether evolution can even be considered a *scientific* theory since it cannot be tested. Evolutionary theory also has *no* explanation for how life began. A further question is: what caused everything to happen, to fall into place as it is? Chance is used as the answer but chance is not a cause or explanation, it’s the lack of an explanation; chance means: I don’t know. Questions about evolutionary theory from a genetic (mutation-selection) standpoint were also brought out.

What to make of all this? The first point is very simply that we should not be easily swayed by so-called scientific claims. First, is the claim really scientific, within the realm of the physical sciences? Secondly, before believing something because it’s “scientific,” demand from it the rigor it should have. Part of the point of talking about questions and problems, holes if you will, in evolutionary theory was just to bring out that there *are* questions and problems. In fact, it is *often* true that scientific beliefs are not nearly as certain as they might seem to be. Finally, do not let go of the question of causation. It is one thing to say: I don’t know what caused “it,” that’s fine; it’s another to gloss over the question of cause or say “it was chance.”

Those are some initial points on this topic of Evolution, “Science,” and Religion. But since a fair amount of time was spent on this topic, what about evolution (meaning here: development of one species from another)? And for that matter – what about God and Creation? The logical proofs for the existence of God have not been presented in these bulletin articles but given them and if, *if*, I knew nothing else about religion and I had to choose between the “God-hypothesis” and evolution, based purely on which is more explanative, which “fits the data” better, which is more comprehensive, which is more logically rigorous, which follows better from reason alone, the “God-hypothesis” appears far more likely. If I had to choose based just on reasoning (God or some blind, ephemeral “evolutionary process”), belief in the Creator is simply much more plausible. From just a purely genetic point of view, evolutionary theory (as it stands today) is insufficient.

As far as man is concerned, I personally don’t believe he descended from apes or any other man-like beast. The great irony here, though, is that such a theory is not even inconsistent with Scripture (or Revelation); the creation accounts do not rule it out – they don’t necessarily support it, they just don’t rule it out. You in fact don’t have to choose between one or the other, it is evolutionists who try to make that claim. Let us step back for a moment, now, and consider what God has revealed regarding creation. Bearing in mind that the word “evolution” simply means change, the creation accounts themselves imply a certain “evolution” in the creation of the material world: “day” 1 God created the heavens, the earth, and light; day 2: let there be a firmament (dry land) in the midst of the waters...and so on – a step-by-step process of change, with man being created last. I have seen “scientific” presentations that go on and on about how long the earth existed before man. I’m not sure what the point was (although it seemed to be anti-Creator) but Scripture actually says exactly that – man came last! Now Scripture does use some figurative language. In the creation accounts, then, “day” *could* be a figurative term; one “day” might mean a 1000 (or even 1000’s) of years; in fact, Scripture even says that a thousand years are like one day to God. It’s not *certain*; one “day” could mean literally one day, but it could be a figurative term as well. In any event, Scripture itself implies a certain kind of “evolutionary process” in the development of the world. In regard to man, Genesis itself says that God created man from material that He had already created (from pre-existing material) – the dust (or slime) of the earth. *Could* that “dust” be some other animal that God put a human soul into? I don’t personally believe that’s the case, but it can’t be ruled out definitively. Scripture, then, does not disallow some sort of “evolution,” even in the case of man (of course it certainly does not prove Darwinian evolution either). What about Sacred Tradition? Some of the Church

Fathers (e.g., St. Augustine), as well as some theologians from the Middle Ages (centuries before Darwin), held that God created some creatures in a finished state (as they are today) while others He created in seed form that developed over time into what they are now. While this is by no means certain, and while this has significant differences from modern Darwinian evolutionary theory, it does show that development of living creatures over time is not inconsistent with either Scripture or Tradition.

Let us finish this topic with what the Church teaches definitively on creation. One of the best sources for this is the book by Dr. Ludwig Ott called: *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, first published in 1952. This book, which is basically a manual, has long been considered a reliable, even authoritative, source for what the Church teaches definitively (the Church's doctrines and dogmas).

Ott states the following: "The first three chapters of the book of Genesis contain narratives of real events, no myths, no mere allegories or symbols of religious truth, no legends." Part of the reason for this statement is because there have been Scripture "scholars" and "theologians," including "Catholic" ones, who have tried to say that Scripture is something like Aesop's fables – just a myth or story or legend that is meant to teach some nice lesson on how we should be. *No*, the first 3 chapters of Genesis contain descriptions of concrete events that actually occurred, although some figurative language might be used. Thus, Ott states further: "[Since] the Sacred Writer had not the intention of representing with scientific accuracy... but [rather] of communicating knowledge in a popular way suitable to...his time, the account is not to be regarded as if it were couched in language which is strictly scientific." As mentioned before, although Scripture makes statements about the natural world, it's not intended to be a science book and cannot be judged on that basis.

Ott goes on to say that a purely materialistic theory of evolution which claims that matter (material stuff) is eternal and uncreated and that the emergence of all living creatures can be explained by purely mechanical, material causes is contrary to Revelation; i.e., it is definitely false, we know with certainty it is false because it is contrary to what God has revealed. Although it is not necessarily contrary to Revelation that some living things developed from other living things, matter is not eternal, it did have a beginning, it was created and the Creator is God. In regard to man, here also a purely materialistic theory of evolution cannot be held – it is not true that man (body and soul) arose *entirely* from the animal kingdom in a purely mechanical way; that is definitely false. To once again quote Ott: "The soul of the first man was created immediately by God out of nothing. As regards the body, its *immediate* formation from inorganic stuff [i.e., "dust"] by God cannot be maintained with certainty...the possibility exists [i.e., cannot be ruled out] that God breathed the spiritual soul into an organic stuff, that is, into an originally human body" [i.e., man being made from some other creature cannot be ruled out by Revelation, although Revelation certainly doesn't say that this *is* the case either].

Ott brings out the central problem plaguing many modern-day evolutionists – that of materialism. Materialism doesn't just mean that I value material things too much. Materialism is the false contention that the only things that exist are material things – the only reality is physical or material reality. Materialism holds that there is no such thing as spiritual reality; there's no God or angels or human soul. Materialism is inherently atheistic. There is a strong undercurrent, if not overt claim, of materialism amongst modern day evolutionists. When this materialistic view is held and advocated, it is this, not the possibility of man or other creatures being created from pre-existing creatures, that makes it diametrically opposed to the definite truths of Revelation and thus definitely false. The great irony, once again, is that it is entirely unnecessary to hold to materialism in order to believe that one species arose from another. When adhering to materialism, evolutionists dig themselves a completely unnecessary hole.

Let us step back now and consider or reiterate some general and important points. God created the natural world and He also gave us Revelation. It is impossible, therefore, for actual truths of the natural world to contradict the truths of Revelation. There is no real conflict between the two: "either science or religion" is not a choice one has to make; it is a false dichotomy, sadly one that is, today, all too often perpetrated by enemies of faith. A person *will*, at times, have to choose between false claims of "science" and the truths of the faith; in some cases, one may even have to choose against false claims of some religions as well. But again, truth cannot contradict truth; the realities of the material world are entirely consistent with the truths of Revelation; it cannot

be otherwise. If at some point there seems to be a contradiction, it just means that one or the other is not yet understood in the right way. True science, a pure search for the truths of the natural (physical) world without bias or agendas, is something good. It *could* even help, at times and to some extent, in knowing God in a fuller way since all of creation bears His mark. This should also be remembered when considering the likeness of various species; a common ancestor is not by any means the only conceivable way to explain similarity; so is a common Creator who creates nothing that is completely unlike Himself – just like an artist’s paintings, although different, will bear certain resemblances to each other.

Why would anyone want to insist that things like evolution “prove” their atheism? It is undoubtedly, at least in part, because of the core corruption of original sin, a turning in on one’s self; I will be king, the master of my own self, I will have no God over me; I will worship myself. It is pride; simple, foolish human arrogance.

We should at the same time, however, also briefly address a flip-side to this “controversy” of evolution. There are those who, while believing in some way in Christ, also cause harm to the faith by breaking from the teaching authority of the Church and insisting on their own personal interpretation of Scripture, namely an *absolutely* literal interpretation of *all* of Sacred Scripture; for example, one day definitely means one 24-hour period, nothing else is possible, no matter what else I see or hear. I wonder how such people deal with our Lord’s statement that if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out; if your hand, cut it off? If I interpreted that literally, I wouldn’t have any body parts left. Thank God for the teaching authority of the Church; it is invaluable for both this life and the next.

How helpful for man it would be if people, including “scientists,” simply accepted Revelation and that there can be no real disagreement between Revelation and the truths of the natural world, and that if there seemed to be some disagreement, it simply means that one or the other is not yet understood in the right way – rather than trying to oppose one against the other. How much further man could go in gaining knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. Perhaps our young people can begin to build such a culture.

Let us conclude with this: being bound to testable hypotheses about material things, the physical sciences cannot prove the existence of God or the articles of faith. Is love the highest good for man and his ultimate destiny? The physical sciences might be able to find indications of that but it can never prove it. The flip-side, however, is also true – they cannot disprove the existence of God or the articles of faith either; that is clear and certain -- don’t expect it to and don’t be fooled by false claims that it can. Faith is both an act of the intellect (it is reasonable to believe) and an act of the will (I choose to believe). If this or that from the physical sciences sheds light on some aspect of the faith or some event recorded in Scripture, great; but it will never prove the inviolability of Revelation nor can it provide the certitude of the virtue of faith.

God bless you, Fr Kuhn.