

In the Beginning

Author: Josef Cardinal Ratzinger. (*Our Sunday Visitor* or Ignatius Press, 1990)

Critique by Paul Ellwanger [Catholic layman]

Introduction

In the theological turmoil since *Vatican Council II*, the orthodox Catholic has been caught between a large, powerful, and vocal group of dissenters and a smaller but determined group of traditionalists. At this point consolation for the orthodox believer is that documents from Rome, some of which have expressed personal convictions of John-Paul II in favor of macro-evolution, have not contained any official pronouncement changing Church teaching on creation and on Original Sin.

A book is now in circulation, however, which suggests that the groundwork is being laid for a major upheaval in Church teaching. *In the Beginning* is an annotated version of a 4-homily series delivered by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger in Munich (1981). Subtitled *A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, the book was published in Germany in 1985 and is now available in this English translation.

A careful reading of the book suggests the Cardinal is proposing a complete abandonment of the 1900-year-old Catholic tradition and teaching on several crucial issues, including creation, Original Sin, and Scripture interpretation.

Because the Cardinal's ideas are often couched in nuanced terms and obscure language, some of those ideas will come under observation in this critique. Even more serious than the Cardinal's radical proposals, however, are his omissions. He ignores the constant teaching of the Church on the formation of Eve from the body of Adam and the rulings of the *Pontifical Biblical Commission* on the interpretation of Genesis. He omits any reference to the teachings of the Church Fathers that the human body was created directly by God, never mentions the papal encyclicals on Scripture interpretation, and totally ignores the restrictions contained in *Humani Generis* (Pius XII, 1950).

Critique format to follow will consist of specific book excerpts, followed by comments on those excerpts.

Excerpts [from Cardinal Ratzinger's 1990 book]

p12 ...for science has long since disposed of the concepts (**Gen 1-49**) that we have just now heard. ...we hear of the Big Bang, which happened billions of years ago. ...it was rather in complex ways and over vast periods of time that earth and the universe were constructed.

p65 We cannot say: creation **or** evolution. The proper way of putting it is: creation **and** evolution

p37 Physics and Biology, and the natural sciences in general, have given us a new and unheard of creation account

p66 ...the progress of thought in the last two decades helps us to grasp anew the inner unity of creation and evolution and of faith and reason.

p71 It is the affair of the natural sciences to explain how the tree of life in particular continues to grow and how new branches shoot out from it. This is not a matter for faith.

Critique [of preceding excerpts]

1 The Cardinal bases his entire thesis on the unfounded assumption that the Genesis account of creation

has been disproved by science. He then proceeds to develop the contention that Catholic teaching on creation should come, not from Sacred Scripture, but from modern scientists and scholars, an inordinate number of whom are atheists.

- 2 It has been demonstrated that the evolutionary premise of modern scientists and scholars cannot meet even threshold requirements of empirical science. It is a premise that, being untestable and unrepeatable of events which occurred in the distant past where true science cannot operate, is a matter of history and philosophy ...but most certainly not of empirical science.
- 3 Attempting to hold both creation and evolution to be true leads to logical contradictions: The Church has a direct dogmatic interest in the origin of the human race, as made clear in *Humani Generis* (Pius XII: 1950). Our first parent, Adam, could not have both evolved and been created. Only one or the other is possible. Nineteen centuries of Church tradition tells us Adam was created directly by God. The Cardinal tells us Adam evolved from animal. (p.65)
- 4 An evolutionist explains the contradiction: The creation formulation envisions a higher state of perfection at the very beginning. Adam is, in effect, a perfect man, certainly more perfect than any of his posterity. On the other hand, an evolutionary view of human origins envisions rather **primitive beginnings** followed by a growth toward **better conditions**. ...the theological doctrine on Original Sin (based on creation) has become almost incomprehensible for a Christian who views the origin of the human race in terms of some form of evolution. *What Are They Saying About Creation?*, Rev. Zachary Hayes
- 5 A Catholic theologian explains the contradiction:

The Catholic believer cannot, however, drop from his belief facts bearing on the origin of the physical world as expounded in the revealed account of these origins. ...Hence "theistic evolution" ...is a priori inconsistent... In the Beginning, Rev. Peter D. Fehlner.

- 6 The first three chapters of **Genesis** must be considered to be true history. On **30 Jun 1909** the *Pontifical Biblical Commission* ruled *On the Historical Character of the First Three Chapters of Genesis*:

QUESTION: Whether we may, in spite of ...the almost unanimous opinion of the Fathers and of the traditional view which ...has always been held by the Church, teach that the three aforesaid chapters do not contain the narrative of things which actually happened, a narrative

which corresponds to objective reality and historic truth...?

ANSWER: ...**in the negative**...

- 7 The theory of evolution has not been proven In *Humani Generis*, Pius XII (1950) referred to "...evolution -- which has not yet been fully proved even in the domain of natural sciences." On **7 Sept 53** Pius XII stated: "...one is forced to say that the study of human origins is only at its beginnings; there is nothing definitive about present-day theory."

Ernesto Cardinal Ruffini wrote that "...no branch of human knowledge, be it geology, paleontology, biology, embryology, genetics, or any other, has been able to present a truly and seriously scientific basis for the evolutionary theory..." (p.59)

It is "a matter for faith" how the human race began. *Humani Generis* states: "...the Church does not forbid ...discussions on ...the origin of the human body ...provided that all are prepared to submit to the judgment of the Church."

More excerpts [from Cardinal Ratzinger's 1990 book]

p20-21 In Israel itself the creation theme went through several different stages. ...The moment when creation became a dominant theme occurred during the Babylonian exile. It was then that the account which we have just heard -- based, to be sure, on very ancient tradition -- assumed its present form ...At this moment the prophets opened a new page. ...It was in exile and in the seeming defeat of Israel that there occurred an opening to the awareness of the God (Who is) ...Creator of everything.

p24 The classic creation account is not the only creation text of Sacred Scripture. Immediately after it there follows another one, composed earlier.

p21 This faith (in creation) now had to find its own contours and it had to do so precisely vis-a-vis the seemingly victorious religion of Babylon.

p22 It has to find its contours vis-a-vis the great Babylonian creation account of Enuma Elish.

p23 Only with this in mind (the Babylonian account) can we appreciate the dramatic confrontation implicit in this biblical text, in which all these confused myths were rejected and the world was given its origin in God's Reason and in His Word...

p24 ...in confronting its pagan environment and its own heart, the people of Israel experienced what "creation" was...

Critique [of preceding excerpts]

1 What the Catholic Church actually teaches: The book of *Genesis* was written by Moses and not by unknown authors many centuries later "during tile Babylonian exile." To the question whether the arguments amassed by critics ...justify the statement that these books have not Moses for their author but have been compiled from sources for the most part posterior to the time of Moses," the *Pontifical Biblical Commission* ruled **in the negative**, due to "the very many evidences to the contrary in both Testaments ...the persistant ageement of the Jewish people, the constant tradition of the Church..." ...Also that "the work thus produced, approved by Moses as the principle and inspired author, was made public under his name."

2 In his *A Companion to Scripture Studies*, Msgr. Steinmueller explains: The Mosaic authenticity of the Pentateuch is not merely a literary and purely historical or archaeological problem; it is also to a certain extent a theological question. Those passages which are directly ascribed to Moses as their author, and the substance of the other part of the Pentateuch is theologically certain to be of Mosaic origin.

3 In his exhaustive study of creation, *In the Beginning*, Fr. Fehlner writes:

It is claimed that the facts of Genesis are true as theological symbols ...but false historically and scientifically. But it is just this key claim concerning key data of Genesis that the Church has consistently denied throughout her history. They are, to her, not symbolically but literally true. (refer to **pp13,38,62** in Ratzinger book)

4 The explanation given by the Cardinal was specifically rejected by the *Pontifical Biblical Commission* (PBC) on **30 Jun 1909**. This *PBC* rejected the claim:

...these chapters contain fables derived from mythologies and cosmologies belonging to older nations but purified of all polytheistic error and accommodated to monotheistic teaching by the sacred author or that they contain allegories and symbols destitute of any foundation in objective

reality but presented under the garb of history for the purpose of inculcating religious or philosophical truth or, finally that they contain legends partly historical and partly fictitious, freely handled for the instruction and edification of souls.

- 5 In **1905** the *PBC* rejected the idea that "those books of Holy Scripture which are regarded as historical ...only have the appearance of history and are intended to convey a meaning different from the strictly literal or historical sense." And in *Humani Generis* (Pius XII: **1950**):

*...deplored a certain too free interpretation of the historical books of the Old Testament ...the first eleven chapters of **Genesis** ...do nevertheless pertain to history in a true sense...*

More Excerpts [from Cardinal Ratzinger's 1990 book]

p13 ...the scientific view of the world ...says that the Bible ...is a religious book ...one can only glean religious experience from it. Anything else is an image...

p38 Thus far it has become clear that the biblical narratives represent another way of speaking about reality than that with which we are familiar ...they say in different ways that there is only one God...

p39 ...the individual passages ...represent truth in the way that symbols do -- just as, for example, a Gothic window gives us a deep insight into

p62 The essence of an image consists in the fact that it represents something.

p81 The garden (of Eden) is an image of the world...

pp82-83 The image of the serpent ...is taken from the Eastern fertility cults ...it was a symbol of that wisdom which rules the world ...

Critique [of preceding excerpts]

1 The Cardinal's interpretation of the Bible is **completely contrary** to the interpretation and the rules for interpretation handed down by the Church through the centuries. A letter of the *Pontifical Biblical Commission* (**21 Aug 41**) refers to the golden rule of the doctors of the Church, dearly expressed by Aquinas: All the senses are founded on one -- **the literal** -- from which alone can any argument be drawn; that rule which the Supreme Pontiffs have sanctioned and consecrated by prescribing that, before everything else, one must seek out the literal sense.

2 The claim that one can "only glean religious experience" from the Bible was contradicted and condemned by Benedict XV:

...what is a peculiar sorrow to us, even clerics ...either openly repudiate or at least attack in secret the Church's teaching ...by endeavoring to distinguish between what they style the primary religious and secondary profane element of the Bible their notion is that only what concerns religion is intended and taught by God in Scripture, and that all the rest -- things concerning "profane knowledge" ...God merely permits, and even leaves to the individual author's greater or lesser knowledge. Small wonder then that in their view a considerable number of things occur in the Bible touching physical science, history, and the like, which cannot be reconciled with modern progress in science. ...In the first place, then, we must study the literal or historical meaning. ...Jerome then goes on to say that all interpretation rests on the literal sense. ...Those, too, who hold that the historical portions of Scripture do not rest on the absolute truth of the facts ...are ...out of harmony with the Church 'teaching. ...the immunity of Scripture from error or deception is

necessarily bound up with its Divine inspiration and supreme authority.

3 "The first men were Adam and Eve, who were created immediately by God" (*Catechism of Christian Doctrine*, published at the order of St Pius X)

4 The Cardinal tells us that some of the ideas in **Genesis** come from "the Eastern fertility cults". But pope after pope have insisted that God, and God alone, is the Author of Scripture. Leo XIII wrote:

For all the books (of Scripture) ...are written wholly and entirely, with all their parts, at the dictation of the Holy Spirit ...it is impossible that God Himself, the Supreme Truth, can utter that which is not true. ...the Old and New Testaments, whole and entire ...have God for their Author. ...He was the Author of the entire Scripture ...

5 *Vatican Council (1870)*: Hence also that sense of the sacred dogmas is to be perpetually retained which our Holy Mother the Church has once declared, nor is this sense ever to be abandoned on plea or pretext of a more profound comprehension of the truth.

6 The Cardinal refers to readapting the images in the Bible which correct themselves. Pius X condemned this error in *Pascendi*:

Modernists believe they are the images of truth, and so must be adapted. ...Consequently the formulae which we call dogmas must be subject to ...change. Thus the way is open to the intrinsic evolution of dogma. Here we have an immense structure of sophisms which ruin and wreck all religion.

7 Pope Leo XIII declared:

God, the Creator and Ruler of all things, is also the Author of the Scriptures -- and that, therefore, nothing can be proved either by physical science ...which can really contradict the Scripture. ...The Catholic interpreter ...must nevertheless always keep in mind that much which has been held and proved as certain (in natural science) has afterwards been called into question and rejected ...

8 The Cardinal interprets the Bible according to "the scientific view of the world." Pope Leo XIII declared that a Catholic must do the exact opposite. St. Gregory stated:

...for theology does not receive her first principles from any other science, but immediately from God by Revelation. And, therefore, she does not receive of other sciences as from a superior, but uses them as her inferiors... The claim one can "only glean religious experience" from the Bible was also rejected by Leo XIII: ...the system of those who ...do not hesitate to concede that divine inspiration regards the things of faith and morals, and nothing beyond ...this system cannot be tolerated.

More excerpts [from Cardinal Ratzinger's 1990 book]

p12 Today we hear of the Big Bang ...with which the universe began its expansion.

p65 Hence we only interpret an individual text correctly (theologically) ...when we see it as a way that is leading us ever forward, when we see in the text where this way is tending...

p25 ...the Bible itself constantly readapts its images to a continually developing way of thinking, how it changes time and again. .. In the Bible itself the images are free and they correct themselves ongoingly. In this way they show, by means of a gradual and interreactive process, that they are only images...

Critique [of preceding excerpts]

- 1 The Cardinal's claim that the meaning of the Bible is evolving " ...a way that is leading us ever forward ...constantly readapts its images to a continually developing way of thinking, how it changes time and again" ...was condemned as Modernism by St Pius X:

The Modernists (affirm) ...that in the Sacred books we must admit a vital evolution, springing from and corresponding with the evolution of the faith ...It was also condemned by Leo XIII: ...it is permitted to no one to interpret Holy Scripture against such sense (which has been held and is held by our Holy Mother the Church) or also against the unanimous agreement of the Fathers.

- 2 The *Syllabus of Errors* of Pius IX condemned the error that "Divine Revelation is ...subject to a continual and indefinite progress, corresponding with the advancement of human wisdom."
- 3 Nowhere in his book does the Cardinal refer to the ancient interpretations of the Church, of the Fathers, the Doctors, the Councils, etc. Instead, he tells us in his footnotes his Biblical exegesis is based upon the writings of several recent Protestant writers, including Westermann and von Rad. This is a direct violation of Church teaching. Leo XIII pointed out the importance of relying on the Church:

...from the writings and authority of the ancients, who, in their turn, as we know, received The Rule of Interpretation in direct line from the Apostles. The holy Fathers, we say, are of supreme authority. ...But it is most unbecoming to pass by, in ignorance or in contempt, the excellent work which Catholics have done in abundance, and to have recourse to the work of non-Catholics -- and to seek in them, to the detriment of sound doctrine and often to the peril of faith ...the sense of the Holy Scripture can nowhere be found incorrupt outside the Church, and cannot be expected to be found in writers... without the true faith...

More excerpts [from Cardinal Ratzinger's 1990 book]

p26 ...the law of Moses, the rituals of purification ...are not to be carried out by us; otherwise the biblical Word would be senseless and meaningless. ...Therefore we read the law, like the creation account, with him ...we know what God wished over the course of the centuries to have gradually penetrate the human heart and soul. Christ frees us from the slavery of the letter...

pp58-59 Thus the unity of the human race becomes immediately apparent. We are all from only one earth ...there is only one humanity.

p83 It is with Israel's temptation in mind that Holy Scripture portrays Adam's temptation...

pp89-91 The account tells us that sin begets sin, and that therefore all the sins of history are interlinked. Theology refers to this state of affairs by the certainly misleading and imprecise term "original sin". What does this mean? Nothing seems to us today to be stranger or, indeed, more absurd than to insist upon original sin, since, according to our way of thinking, guilt can only be something very personal, and since God does not run a concentration camp in which one's relatives are imprisoned. What does original sin mean? ...this requires nothing less than trying to understand the human person better. Each of us enters into a situation in which relationality has been hurt. Consequently each person is, from the start, damaged in his relationships...

Critique [of preceding excerpts]

- 1 Leo XIII refers to "...the rule so wisely laid down by St. Augustine -- not to depart from the literal

and obvious sense only where reason makes it untenable or necessity requires."

Pius XII:

...in a particular way must be deplored a certain too free interpretation of the historical books of the Old Testament ...the first eleven chapters of Genesis ...do nevertheless pertain to history in a true ...

2 Under Benedict XV the *Pontifical Biblical Commission* ruled that:

...whatever the sacred writer asserts, declares, or implies, must be held to be asserted, declared or implied by the Holy Ghost.

3 The Cardinal's comments on original sin contradict 1900 years of Catholic teaching and Tradition, the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, the councils and popes. The true position of the Church as opposed to the Cardinal's views was summed up by Paul VI:

*...the doctrine of original sin ...is a truth revealed by God in various passages of the Old and of the New Testaments. But especially in the texts you well know of as **Genesis 3:1-20**. ...It is therefore evident that the explanations of original sin by some modern authors will seem to you irreconcilable with true Catholic doctrine. ...these explanations do not even agree with the teaching of Scripture, of sacred Tradition and the Church Magisterium, according to which the sin of the first man is transmitted to all his descendants not through imitation but through propagation...*

Conclusion

We have thus seen that Cardinal Ratzinger's ideas not only contradict those proclaimed by the Church over the centuries, but many have been specifically condemned as erroneous. Many additional sources could be cited but even a thousand citations will be rejected by those who have been blinded by the error of evolution.

In the *Syllabus of Errors*, St Pius X...

...condemned the idea that scientific progress demands the concepts of Christian doctrine be readjusted concerning God, the creation, and Revelation.

...rebuked "the theologian who professes that the conclusions of science must always be accepted."

His warnings have been tragically disregarded by laymen and cardinals alike. For them, "faith is made subject to science." And no teaching of the Church has any relevance to them. They have chosen to believe in evolution as espoused by Cardinal Ratzinger rather than Creation as taught by the Church over the centuries.