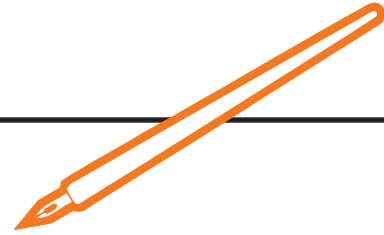


By G.Ph. van Popta



## Vatican makes peace with Darwin

Pope John Paul II has lent his support to the theory of evolution. He has proclaimed it compatible with Christian faith. On October 22, 1996, in a letter to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, a body of experts that advises the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) on scientific issues, the pope said that evolution is "more than just a theory." The Academy was in session to discuss the theme: *The Origins and the Evolution of Life: Reflections on Science at the Dawn of the Third Millennium*. The Roman pontiff advised that the theory of the physical evolution of man and other species through natural selection and hereditary adaptation appear to be valid.

He made clear that he considers the human soul as of immediate divine creation, not subject to any process; and yet, the pope has sold out to Darwinism.

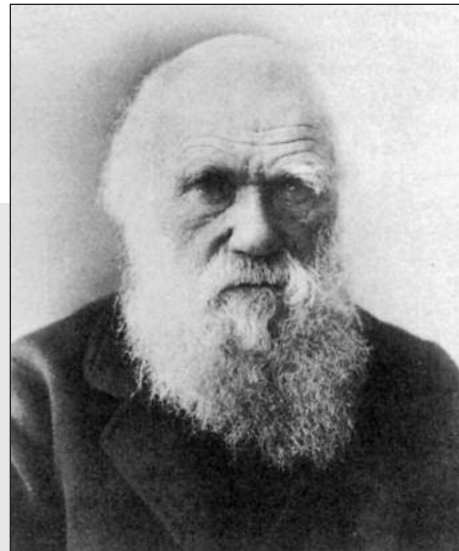
The theory of evolution has probably been best expounded by 19th century English naturalist Charles Darwin. The theory itself is old. Throughout history, the idea that over generations organisms transformed into descendant populations of different kinds has been repeatedly suggested. Some of the ancient Greek philosophers held to such theories. Theories of evolution have been discussed by philosophers and theologians for ages. However, it was Charles Robert Darwin who laid the foundation of modern evolutionary theory. In his 1859 "book that shook the world," *On the Origin of Species*, Darwin theorized that all forms of life developed through the process of natural selection.

The theories of Darwin and other evolutionists about the origins of man have long been anathema to theologians – and to the RCC. Darwin's book and its adherents met with stark opposition from the RCC. The theory of evolution was seen to be in conflict with the biblical account of creation as recorded in the first chapters of Genesis.

It was anathema to others as well. In 1925, in Dayton, Tennessee, a high school biology teacher, John T. Scopes, was convicted for the crime of teaching the theory of evolution in a public school (the "Monkey Trial"). Teaching this theory violated state law because it contradicted the biblical account of creation. Scopes was fined \$100.00.

However, the tension has eased due to modified biblical studies from the late 19th century onward. Today most theologians hold that the doctrine that God created the world and made man in His own image, and the theory of evolution, do not stand in each other's way. The pope has gone on record as having joined the crowd.

The shift of the RCC has been slow and careful, even subtle. In 1950, Pope Pius XII wrote the Vatican's first sub-



Charles Darwin

stantive response to the theories of evolution in the encyclical, *Humani Generis*. (Encyclicals are pastoral letters written by a pope as an exposition of Christian belief and practice. Though they must be accepted by the Roman Catholic faithful, they are not regarded as infallible.) In *Humani Generis*, Pius XII said there is no objection to discussing evolution. He did, however, caution that the theory could play into the hands of communists eager to remove God from the equation.

The present pope has previously endorsed the 1950 encyclical. In his October 24, 1996, letter to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, he went a step farther. He said: "Today, nearly half a century after appearance of the encyclical, fresh knowledge leads to recognition of the theory of evolution as more than just a hypothesis." Although he wants to maintain that the spiritual soul is created by God without any means, the human body may well have had its origin in living material which pre-existed.

What brought the pope to these conclusions? He tells his flock in the letter. He writes:

It is indeed remarkable that this theory has progressively taken root in the minds of researchers following a series of discoveries made in different spheres of knowl-

edge. . . . The convergence, neither sought nor provoked, of results of studies undertaken independently from each other constitutes in itself a significant argument in favour of this theory.

It is indeed remarkable that the man who claims to be the Vicar of Christ has closed the Word of God – or, at best, lets ideas which have progressively taken root in the minds of researchers control his interpretation of the Word of God.

*Today most theologians hold that the doctrine that God created the world and made man in his own image, and the theory of evolution, do not stand in each other's way. The pope has gone on record as having joined the crowd.*

Ought we to be impressed by the fact that several scientific disciplines have come up with evidence of evolution independent of one another? John Paul is impressed by the "accumulation of facts" and by the "diversity of explanations that have been proposed as the mechanism of evolution." He has pushed the Roman Catholic doctrine of a distinction between nature and grace a step farther. According to him *theology* must explain the origin of the soul whereas *science* tells us about the origin of the body. His conclusion is: "The gospel and evolution theory do not mean the same thing when they speak about *life*."

John Paul has married the gospel to evolution theory. He's put his *imprimatur*, his "stamp of approval," upon the theory of evolution. In fact he is defending a form of theistic evolution. He has baptized a bankrupt theory. This is all the more surprising in light of recent devastating attacks on Darwinian belief (see, e.g., Phillip E. Johnson, *Darwin on Trial*: IVP, 1991). The RCC is trying to align itself with modern thought even as secular unbelieving scientists are growing increasingly critical of evolution theories.

Let us hold to the teachings of the Scriptures on this, as confessed so simply and beautifully in Article 12 of our Confession:

We believe that the Father through the Word, that is, through His Son, has created out of nothing heaven and earth and all creatures, when it seemed good to Him, and that He has given to every creature its being, shape, and form . . .

The Confession was written more than 400 years ago, and yet it speaks so clearly and biblically to the situation today. God has given to every creature its *being, shape, and form*. With these few words we say that both the reflection of the Ancient Greeks and the ideas of Darwin on the origin of man are dead wrong. With these few words we hold the line that the pope is dead wrong. The simple teaching of Scriptures declares the pope dead wrong.

Better to be 400 years behind the times holding the biblical line than huffing and puffing trying to catch up to the ever-shifting ideas of man!

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