

Vatican Representative says “Creationism is Useless”

From Fox News:

Comments by Robert Sungenis

VATICAN CITY — A professor at a Vatican-sponsored university expressed dismay Tuesday that some Christian groups reject the theory of evolution — implicitly criticizing the literal interpretation of the Bible.

Further emphasizing the official Catholic stance, a Vatican official restated the Church position that evolution is not incompatible with faith.

R. Sungenis: I don't know of any “official Catholic stance,” at least those taught in a papal encyclical or other high level teaching, that says “evolution is not incompatible with faith.” I do know of “official Catholic” teaching that say the universe was created ex nihilo. Vatican Council I states:

This sole true God...immediately from the beginning of time fashioned each creature out of nothing, spiritual and corporeal, namely, angelic and mundane; and then the human creation, common as it were, composed of both spirit and body (Denz 1783).

Some might say that the Pontifical Biblical Commission of 1909 allowed exegetes to interpret the word “Day” in Genesis 1 as more than a 24-hour period. Granted, but the PBC did not say anything about “evolution” being permitted. The PBC was more or less required to say that the Hebrew word YOM could be interpreted as more than 24-hours simply because YOM is used five different ways in the Old Testament, a few of which are more than 24 hours. So, while the PBC might have allowed an expanded definition of YOM based on linguistics, this cannot be interpreted as an endorsement of the theory of evolution. As noted above, there is not one “official” statement from the Catholic Church that has endorsed the theory of evolution or says that it is permitted to be believed by Catholics.

Both men spoke at a press conference ahead of a March event aimed at fostering dialogue between religion and science, and appraising evolution 150 years after Charles Darwin's landmark "On the Origin of Species."

The forum is being organized by Rome's prestigious Gregorian Pontifical University, which is highly influential in Vatican circles, and by the University of Notre Dame in the U.S. state of Indiana.

Popes going back to the mid-20th century have "recognized the scientific value of the theory of biological evolution," Gennaro Auletta, who teaches philosophy of science at the Gregorian, told reporters. "Greater understanding and assimilation of such subject matter by clergy and faithful has been hoped for."

"I would like to point out that unfortunately one cannot say that about the faithful of all Christian confessions, as media reports indicate," Auletta said.

Auletta appeared to be referring to stories about fundamentalist churches that maintain a literal interpretation of the Bible, including the belief that the world was created in six days.

Monsignor Gianfranco Ravasi told reporters that: "One thing is sure. Evolution is not incompatible with faith."

"Creationism from a strictly theological view makes sense, but when it is used in scientific fields it becomes useless," Ravasi said.

R. Sungenis: Of course, when the media gets a hold of this statement, it is made to sound as if Ravasi is saying that "creationism is useless" or that the Catholic Church "implicitly rejects the literal interpretation of the Bible." Ravasi said neither. Ravasi said that creationism makes sense theologically but not scientifically. That does not mean that creationism is now superseded by the "science" of evolution, no more than transubstantiation, which, from a theological standpoint, "makes sense," but from a scientific standpoint is "useless."

Why is transubstantiation "useless" to science? Because science can't explain it, so it is useless to bother with it. It goes against all the laws of modern science, and therefore it is either rejected or considered an anomaly. The same is true with creationism. How is science going to explain things coming into being instantaneously by nothing more than the word of God? Science hardly believes in God, much less would it be able to explain ex nihilo creationism. So I can understand why Ravasi says creationism is useless to science. Science has a very narrow view of the world. It only sees equations and natural processes. It cannot fathom anything outside of its narrow view, especially divine intrusion into this world.

On the other hand, if science would accept God and creationism as a starting point, it could then use its knowledge of science to support the commonsensical idea that it is impossible for things to evolve into higher order species by blind chance. It could also show the scientific evidence that supports creationism. For example, science could show the evidence for why the geologic column could have been created in a matter of weeks as opposed to million of years. The evidence is so abundant now that one would have to be a recluse not to know about it, that is, if one claims to be a scientist. But the problem is, scientists, including Ravasi and Auletta, refuse to consider such evidence. They have staked their claim on evolution and they have decided to ignore any other evidence that might contradict evolution. One only need point to the recent conference that the Vatican sponsored on November 8, 2008 on evolution. Only evolutionists were invited. When creation scientists asked if they could be part of the conference, the Vatican clerics refused.

The real problem is, of course, that the Vatican has, for the last few decades, set a policy of appeasement and ecumenism with science and other religions. The Vatican doesn't want to fight anymore. Instead of the thesis-antithesis approach to apologetics, the Vatican has entered into a Hegelian synthesis with science and religion. This is why John Paul II could pray with pagan religions in both 1986 and 2002, and it is why the present pope allows the Pontifical Academy of Science to promote evolution with impunity. Nineteen hundred years of Catholic apologetics has, more or less, been revamped so as to accommodate ideas from these two previous enemies of the Church. It's very sad to see. The Vatican is going the way of Israel in the Old Testament, appeasing the pagan nations around it instead of calling on God to defeat those nations. God's answer to Israel was their demise, and that is what will occur in the Catholic Church if it does not change its ways.

Quoting the late Pope John Paul II, Ravasi said that "evolution can no longer be considered a hypothesis."

R. Sungenis: Evolution was never advanced a "hypothesis" by the scientific community, ever since Darwin. It was always considered a "theory," because scientists believed they had at least some evidence for its reality. A "hypothesis" is a conjecture, a possible solution, but one that is not dependent on evidence. So, in effect, John Paul II really didn't add anything to the discussion, although the news media, hungry for any concession from the Catholic Church, reported otherwise.

Pope Benedict XVI warned last week against fundamentalists' literal interpretations of the Bible.

The pontiff told a gathering of intellectuals and academics in Paris that the structure of the Bible "excludes by its nature everything that today is known as fundamentalism. In effect, the word of God can never simply be equated with the letter of the text," Benedict said.

R. Sungenis: Here is an excerpt from Pope Benedict's speech at Collège des Bernardins, Paris on Friday, 12 September 2008:

"We may put it even more simply: Scripture requires exegesis, and it requires the context of the community in which it came to birth and in which it is lived. This is where its unity is to be found, and here too its unifying meaning is opened up. To put it yet another way: there are dimensions of meaning in the word and in words which only come to light within the living community of this history-generating word. Through the growing realization of the different layers of meaning, the word is not devalued, but in fact appears in its full grandeur and dignity. Therefore the Catechism of the Catholic Church can rightly say that Christianity does not simply represent a religion of the book in the classical sense (cf. par. 108). It perceives in the words the Word, the Logos itself, which spreads its mystery through this multiplicity and the reality of a human history. This particular structure of the Bible issues a constantly new challenge to every generation. It excludes by its nature everything that today is known as fundamentalism. In effect, the word of God can never simply be equated with the letter of the text. To attain to it involves a transcending and a process of understanding, led by the inner movement of the whole and hence it also has to become a process of living. Only within the dynamic unity of the whole are the many books one book. The Word of God and his action in the world are revealed only in the word and history of human beings."

R. Sungenis: I think the pope's words here are basically sound, but there is at least one element that troubles me, especially in light of the fact that the Pontifical Biblical Commission also chided "fundamentalism" in its 1993 essay on biblical interpretation. Here is the problem. There is a tendency among Catholics nowadays to go to the opposite extreme of fundamentalism, the very thing about which Pius XII warned us when he

allowed the use of Historical Criticism into Catholic hermeneutics in his 1943 encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*.

Most Catholic exegetes today are quite liberal. They have bought into all the liberal theories about form, redaction, and source criticism that non-Christians have used against the Bible for the last three centuries. Whereas it is true that the “fundamentalist” holds to what Pope Benedict says is “the letter of the text,” most Catholic exegetes have decided that the biblical text hardly holds any “letter” at all. Everything from myth to fiction to errors to personal opinions have been foisted on the Bible in the name of “exegesis in light of the culture of that day.” It has gotten to the point where the Catholic layman hardly knows what to believe as true from the Bible any more, since he is constantly being told that this or that part of the Bible is not true or is in error. Although the “fundamentalists” go off the track in many cases (mainly because they don’t have a tradition to fall back on or a magisterium to lead them), at least they believe in the basic concept that the Bible can be trusted when it speaks on any subject it asserts as true. So which is worse: fundamentalism or liberalism?

Moreover, I don’t think it is fair of the pope to characterize “fundamentalists” (at least the vast majority of them) as people who are so focused on the “letter of the text” that they can’t see the whole of Scripture or life itself. Many of these people, as even *Lumen Gentium* teaches, personally seek for Christ and have Him as a vital part of their lives. Most of them trust Scripture implicitly to lead them to Christ, even though their interpretations of the more difficult or esoteric passages are sometimes erroneous.

Going deeper, let’s stop and think how the term “fundamentalist” originated. It originated in the early 1900s as a conservative Protestant movement against liberal Protestants who denied the basic “fundamentals” of the Bible, namely these five:

- (1) the Virgin Birth
- (2) the deity of Christ
- (3) the inspiration of Scripture
- (4) the resurrection of the body,
- (5) the Second Coming of Christ.

The liberal Protestants made a caricature of the conservative Protestants by calling them “fundamentalists” for believing in these five fundamental truths, truths they obtained from reading the “letter of the text” in Scripture. But the truth is, these “fundamentalists” were absolutely correct in their “fundamental” reading of the “letter of the text,” at least regarding these five essential truths of the Christian faith. And aren’t these five truths the

very things that we Catholics affirm every time we say the Nicene Creed at Mass? So, in the mind of liberal Protestants, we Catholics who recite the Nicene Creed are also “fundamentalists.”

But we are fundamentalists not only in the eyes of liberal Protestants, but often in the eyes of liberal Catholics, since it is liberal Catholics (many of which wrote the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s essay in 1993) who question or modify some of these five essential biblical truths. Fr. Raymond Brown (d. 1998), for example, although being rather cagey in his words by expressing his doubts about these doctrines with interrogatives, nevertheless, doubted many of these “fundamentals,” and it is no surprise the Fr. Brown continually tried to exonerate his views by calling Catholic conservatives who pointed out his aberrations and questions of the Catholic faith “fundamentalists.” All in all, Fr. Brown was about as close to heretical teachings as a Catholic could be without actually falling into heresy.

For evidence of Fr. Brown’s unorthodox treatment of Sacred Scripture, consult these articles on our website:

<http://www.catholicintl.com/epologetics/articles/pastoral/fr-ray-brown-print.htm>

<http://www.catholicintl.com/epologetics/articles/bible/discussion-inerrancy-print.htm>

One more remark on “fundamentalism.” Historically speaking, who has been the most “fundamental” in its biblical interpretation, the Protestants or the Catholics? Actually, it’s the Catholics. How many Protestant denominations do you know that interpret the words “This is my body” in Matt. 26:26 according to the “letter of the text” and conclude that, regardless what the culture or science says, Jesus taught that the bread becomes his actual body? How many Protestant denominations interpret the words of John 3:5 “Unless a man is born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” by concluding that Jesus was adhering to the “letter of the text” and meant that the actual water is the means of grace? Hardly any of them. The only ones that interpret Scripture in this rather “fundamentalist” way are the Protestant denominations that were the closest in time to Catholicism (e.g., Luther, Anglican). The rest of them became much less “fundamentalist” (in the sense of the literal “letter of the text”) as time went on. Today, most of them laugh at the Catholic “fundamentalist” interpretation of Matt 26:26 or John 3:5. Regarding “fundamentalism,” if by it we mean a literal-based hermeneutic, history has shown the Catholic Church to be much more “fundamental” than Protestant churches. It is only within the last few decades that theologians of the Catholic Church (not the magisterium in any official sense) have departed from literal interpretation.

In the end, each of us makes a choice what Scripture verses will be interpreted literally and what verses will be interpreted non-literally. The decision as to which set of verses one

interprets literally will usually determine the Church or denomination one belongs to. Following Augustine and Pope Leo XIII's affirmation of Augustine's teaching in *Providentissimus Deus*, the Catholic rule is: unless there is some good reason not to interpret Scripture literally, we are obliged to do so.

Of course, the departure from literal interpretation of the Bible has its seeds in the Galileo and Darwin issues when it was decided that, because of the advances of science, biblical interpretation had to change to accommodate science, since science claimed that a literal interpretation of Scripture was now incorrect (e.g., Fr. Raymond Brown was an ardent evolutionist). Modern science, of course, proved no such thing, but unfortunately, its complicated formulas and obtuse mathematical equations made the average person cower in fear to the scientist. The common belief is that the scientist, because he is so smart and does his work objectively, must know something we don't. Nothing could be further from the truth. Science is not objective. It is about 50% objective and 50% subjective. In any case, modern science has become the god of this world. Whatever it says, regardless of the lack of proof, people accept, including many in the Catholic Church. As scientific historian Paul Feyerabend says about the Catholic Church:

“It is a pity that the Church of today, frightened by the universal noise made by the scientific wolves, prefers to howl with them instead of trying to teach them some manners (*Farewell to Reason*, p. 260).

He adds that in the scientific community,

“...the idea of free and independent research is a chimera.” With regard to “scientific knowledge-claims,” Feyerabend notes: “...we have seen that even the liberal climate of the modern age has not prevented scientists from demanding the same kind of authority which Bellarmino possessed as a matter of course but exercised with much greater wisdom and grace.”

Regarding the Church's “howling with the wolves,” he adds:

“In 1982 Christian Thomas and I organized a seminar at the Federal Institute of Technology in Zürich with the purpose of discussing how the rise of the sciences had influenced the major religions and other traditional forms of thought. What surprised us was the fearful restraint with which Catholic and Protestant theologians treated the matter – there was no criticism either of particular scientific achievements or of the scientific ideology as a whole” (ibid).

Fox News continues:

Benedict, in a book published last year, praised scientific progress, but cautioned that evolution raises philosophical questions that science alone cannot answer. In the book, he stopped short of endorsing what is known as "intelligent design."

Intelligent design proponents believe that living organisms are so complex they must have been created by a higher force, rather than evolving from more primitive forms.

Vienna Cardinal Christoph Schoenborn, an influential cardinal considered close to Benedict, has condemned a U.S. federal court decision that barred a Pennsylvania school district from teaching intelligent design in biology class.

Schoenborn has said he wants to correct what he says is a widespread misconception that the Catholic Church has given blanket endorsement to Darwin's theories.

R. Sungenis: Since then, however, Schoenborn has waffled on his stance, but at least he voiced his opinion for Intelligent Design at one time. The sad part of this is, Pope Benedict has yet to follow suit. It is one thing to be pro-evolution (as the pope is) but it is quite another not to at least give scientific respect to Intelligent Design, for all it is saying is that there must be an Intelligence behind all that we see in the universe. But the Vatican is so dominated and frightened by the gods of science today that it can't even admit the obvious. How sad. But this is what ecumenism without boundaries will do every time. Ecumenism is good to make friends, but it is devilish when it is used to make Catholic teaching.