

EVOLUTIO SECUNDUM THEOLOGIAM

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CONCLUSIONES GENERALES

We here endeavour to sum up the results of our study of the theological aspect of the origin of living beings in general, and of man in particular.

A. As to the origin of living beings in general, we consider that the Scriptural statement that this was due to secondary causes, i.e. to powers implanted in inorganic matter by the Creator, and the unanimous interpretation of this Scriptural statement by Fathers and Theologians up to the thirteenth century, cannot and must not lightly be set aside. It was set aside indeed by the Aristotelian Scholastics in the thirteenth century, but for reasons based upon the scientific and physical ideas of their time. That is to say, if the decrees of the Biblical Commission had been issued in the time of St. Thomas, the Angelic Doctor would evidently have maintained that this was a case in which "reason forbids, or necessity compels" us to abandon, the literal sense. But we are now convinced that the reason which led St. Thomas to abandon in this way the long-standing tradition of the Fathers as an erroneous one. How does the matter stand to-day? Science has shown that there is absolutely no evidence that spontaneous generation takes place now. But that does not prove that it could not take place if conditions were different, or that it did not take place at the beginning — in fact, there are many scientists who think this must have happened. In any case, as the scientific conclusion is rather of a negative character — that is, it does not prove that spontaneous generation never took place — we ourselves prefer to base our belief in the spontaneous generation of life at the commencement on theological grounds, i.e. the testimony of Scripture and Tradition.

As to the evolution of species, we consider that the scientific evidence, consisting as it does of so many converging lines, is sufficient to give a fairly high degree of certitude concerning the fact of, at any rate, some evolution, though opinions must necessarily differ as to the mode. And from the theological point of view, we consider that evolution is the only reasonable way of harmonizing our modern knowledge of the succession of geological epochs, with their flora and fauna, with the Scriptural statement that the earth produced all the present-day species.

B. MAN.

From the scientific point of view, there is so far no conclusive evidence that man has evolved. There are certain facts that seem to point that way, but we think we may safely regard the theory itself as a working hypothesis, or, better still, as an inference. But as an inference, it is very attractive. If, as we have said, all other species arose by some sort of evolutionary process, it is but natural that we should consider it likely that man was also in some way evolved, even though there may be no convincing scientific evidence as yet that he has done so. Indeed, science may never succeed in finding any decisive evidence on the point.

From the theological point of view, we must repeat that, in our own view, SCRIPTURE yields only a negative result. That is to say, Scripture neither teaches nor disproves the doctrine of the evolution of the human body.⁽¹⁾ This we infer on two grounds :

(1) Scripture does definitely teach that the soul is God's breath, i.e. comes directly from God, and philosophy confirms this by showing that an immaterial substance could not come from a material one, but must have been directly created by God.

(b)

- 1) Scripture constantly ascribes to God the results of the activity of secondary causes; hence the absence of any mention of secondary causes does not prove that such were not present.
- 2) The phrase in Genesis ii.7, "God formed the man dust from the earth" has an exact parallel in Genesis ii.19, "God formed all the animals from the earth." But we know from Genesis i. that the animals were all produced by the earth. Therefore we cannot prove that man was not produced by the active powers in nature.

As to TRADITION, several Fathers of great weight and standing, including Doctors of the Church, teach that man was formed, at least in part, by the activity of secondary causes. Other Fathers, it is true, regard the formation of Adam's body as peculiarly the work of God, but their Scriptural exegesis is faulty here, and moreover their view is explicitly rejected by other Fathers of great weight, including Doctors of the Church. The only Patristic text definitely excluding the co-operation of material causes in the formation of man is a worthless Homily wrongly ascribed either to St. Basil or St. Gregory of Nyssa.

The attitude of the SCHOLASTICS was at least in part a consequence of their physical and scientific theories.

CHURCH AUTHORITY has so far abstained from determining the question, which is therefore to all intents and purposes still an open one.

Many MODERN THEOLOGIANS are hostile to the theory, but their opposition would seem to be based upon a too literal interpretation of the Scripture, misunderstanding of the Patristic evidence, and an exaggerated notion of the effect of certain Roman acts, doctrinal and disciplinary.

C. EVE.

Here both Scripture and Tradition are so strong that we think no Catholic can hesitate. Moreover, we can show theologically that the origin of Eve from Adam was in every way fitting, given the elevation of man to the supernatural state. And in point of fact, we are inclined to think that it did not exceed certain more profound potencies of organic matter.

Having said this, we must emphasize that in the light of our modern theological knowledge a Catholic must admit more than one Divine intervention in the origin of man.

- 1) There is first of all the creation and infusion of the rational soul. But this is hardly a "special Divine intervention." It rather belongs to the ordinary sphere of the Divine Providence.
- 2) Next, we have the raising to the supernatural state. This affected both the body and the soul.
- 3) Was there a Divine intervention in the formation of the un-supernaturalized body of Adam? If so, what was the nature of this intervention? Did it exclude the collaboration of secondary active causes? If such secondary causes were present, what were they? Further, was this Divine intervention a "special" one, or did it in some sense at least belong to the ordinary Divine concurrence?

These are all questions which Science answer. Scripture does not answer them completely and satisfactorily. Tradition is somewhat divided, and Church authority on the whole seems only to have laid it down that the formation of the first man was "peculiaris", which, as we have seen, might refer only to the origin of the human soul.

But on the whole, we are inclined to think that there may well have been a Divine intervention in the formation of the human body itself. We are led to this con-

clusion by the philosophic truth that the human soul can only exist in the human body, and such a body is specifically distinct from any other animal body. Accordingly, we think the formation of the human body may well have required a "special Divine intervention," at least to give it the last disposition necessary for the infusion of the human soul.

There is another line of argument which might be mentioned here. It is of faith that the whole of the present human race has descended from Adam, and all theologians would agree that when Adam was formed there was no other human being in existence. If we could be certain that there were never any other human beings who had existed before Adam's time, we might argue that the fact that one and only one human being was produced implies that such production was beyond the powers of created nature. For if nature could really produce human beings, or rather bodies calling for animation by human souls, it is difficult to see why only one should have come into existence. Accordingly, one might see in this an indication that a special Divine intervention was necessary, to give the embryonic body of Adam the last disposition required before animation by a human soul.

But the weakness in this argument lies in the fact that we cannot be absolutely certain that there were no human beings in existence before Adam. Theologians agree that the hypothesis of the existence of pre-Adamites who had ceased to exist at the advent of Adam is not unorthodox. And it does not seem altogether impossible that some such hypothesis may yet be of value in accounting for the many apparently imperfect types of humanity which recent archaeology has revealed. But once the existence of such pre-Adamites is allowed as a possibility, this argument for the necessity of a special Divine intervention in the formation of Adam's body is decidedly weakened. For 1) it would no longer be true that one and only one human being had ever been formed, and 2) if a special Divine intervention was required to form Adam's body, then presumably a similar Divine action was necessary for the formation of the bodies of the pre-Adamites, and it is difficult to find an adequate reason for such a Divine intervention, seeing that these beings were destined to disappear completely from the face of the earth.

However, whatever may have been the case with the pre-Adamites, supposing them to have existed, there are, as we have seen, other reasons which make it at least possible and perhaps even likely that there was some Divine intervention in the formation of Adam's body.

But while this Divine intervention may well have been a "special" one, in the sense that it took place only once, yet we are inclined to think that it may nevertheless have formed part of the ordinary Providence of God. The Creation was meant from the first to lead up to the formation of man, and as we shall see, there is every reason to suppose that creatures may have taken an active part in preparing for his coming. The creation of man was not an afterthought, or something added on to the Universe as God first intended it to be.

We now come to the question of the partial co-operation of created secondary causes in the production of the human body.

This is a difficult and delicate subject, but we very tentatively make the suggestion that it could be discussed under the three heads comprising the famous Scotist argument for the Immaculate Conception -- "potuit, decuit, ergo fecit."

1. Potuit. God could have made use of secondary causes, as instruments, in the formation of the human body. The abstract possibility is allowed, we think, by practically all responsible theologians, and so we need not develop this point.

2. Decuit. This may be thought to be the most debatable point of the three, but we think it is the easiest to answer, in virtue of what we have called the "Principle of Christian Naturalism". This principle may be expressed as follows: "God makes use of secondary causes wherever possible." This principle runs counter completely to the ideas of those theologians who argue that because God must have immediately created the human soul, He must also have formed immediately the human body. The principle is such an important one that we must develop it a little.

As St. Thomas points out in his masterly treatment in Contra Gentes, Book III, c.69, if God has given being to created things, He must also have endowed them with activities, and further, if He did not make use of these activities so far as possible, He would be acting against His own Divine Wisdom. Here are two passages from the Angelic Doctor:

"Quod dat alicui aliquod principale dat eidem omnia quae consequuntur ad illud, sicut causa quae dat corpori elementari gravitatem dat ei motum deorsum. Facere autem aliquid actu consequitur ad hoc quod est esse actu, ut patet in Deo; ipse enim est actus purus, et est prima causa essendi omnibus, ut supra (I,c.10 et 13; II,c.15) dictum est. Si igitur communicavit aliis similitudinem suam quantum ad esse, in quantum res in esse produxit, consequens est quod communicavit eis similitudinem suam quantum ad agere, ut etiam res creatae habeant proprias actiones."

"Contra rationem sapientiae est ut sit aliquid frustra in operibus sapientis. Si autem res creatae nullo modo operentur ad effectus producendos, sed solus Deus operetur omnia immediate, frustra essent adhibitae ab ipso aliae res ad producendos effectus."

This theory of God's use of secondary causes becomes all the more luminous when we remember that all secondary causes must be regarded ultimately as His instruments. He is the great First Cause, and from Him comes all that has being. Created things would not exist if He did not give them being; they could not produce any effect if He did not concur with their activities and powers. Created agents, then, are instruments in the hands of the Deity.(1)

But it is also true that there are grades in this instrumental causality. Thus, there are some created agents which themselves make use of others, and moreover, the effects they produce by means of these instruments are proportioned to their own natural powers as created causes. On these grounds they may truly be said to be, in the created order, the principal causes of the effects produced. Thus a sculptor is the principal cause of the statue he carves with a chisel, and again, human parents are the principal causes of their children. These effects cannot strictly be attributed to the instrumental causes employed, though these are active through them, for the effects are not proportioned to the proper activity of these instruments. Thus we cannot say strictly that a chisel has produced a statue, or that the embryonic forms have generated the human child.

(1) See the excellent exposition and development of Cajetan's conception of a permanent instrument in Dorlodot, Darwinism, p.119.

(e)

There are other cases in which created agents do indeed make use of others, yet the effects are out of proportion even to the activity of the created "principal" causes. In such cases the effects cannot strictly be attributed to the created "principal" causes, but only to the true principal cause, which may have to be sought outside the created order, in God Himself. This would be the case in the hypothesis of spontaneous generation, as also in that of the evolution of species in general, and of man's body in particular. The production of the first human body was an effect out of proportion to any organic cause then existing on the earth, for the human body is specifically different from, and superior to, any other body, as we remarked on p.86. Hence its production, though brought about through the instrumentality of created organic causes, could not strictly be attributed to those causes, but (inasmuch as we have good reasons for excluding angelic agency) only to God Himself. Thus the production of the first human body could properly be said to be due to a "special" display of Divine activity, or a "special Divine intervention" if that phrase is preferred, and yet it would remain true that secondary organic causes co-operated in its production. And inasmuch as the whole creation was meant to lead up to man, we think it in every way fitting that God should thus have made use of secondary causes in the formation of Adam's body.

Lastly, if anyone should think that the suggestion that God acts through secondary causes wherever and whenever possible is not consonant with the Divine dignity, we suggest that he should read and reflect on the wonderful chapter of St. Thomas in the Contra Gentiles, III, c. 77, "Quod executio divinae providentiae fit mediantibus causis secundis." Space will not allow us to transcribe it here. Or again he might reflect upon the profound philosophy contained in the remark of Mother Carey in Kingsley's Water Babies: "I am not going to trouble myself to make things... I sit here and make things make themselves" (p. 228).

3. Fecit? We put a mark of interrogation here deliberately. We ourselves are inclined to conclude, on the theological grounds just outlined, that nature did co-operate in the formation of Adam's body. There are two reasons, however, which counsel prudence in this matter.

The first is the attitude of Ecclesiastical Authority. After all, a Catholic does not assent to a doctrine simply because he thinks it is explicitly taught in Scripture or Tradition, but because it comes to him on the authority of the Church, the Divine Teacher sent by God to man. The Church guarantees that the doctrine in question is really contained in Scripture or Tradition. After all, it belongs to the Church alone to interpret both Scripture and Tradition. A private interpretation of the Scriptures may easily be erroneous, and as to the Fathers, some of these held opinions which were not approved subsequently by the Church. St. Augustine leaned towards Traducianism, St. Gregory of Nyssa toward Restitutionism, and so on. Should the Church decide that Adam's body was formed immediately and exclusively by God from inanimate matter, a Catholic author who had hitherto held the contrary would at once wholeheartedly admit that his own interpretation of Scripture had been incorrect, and that those Fathers whose ideas he adopted and developed were not safe guides in the matter. The Church has, it is true, not yet decided the question, but it is always possible that she might see fit in her wisdom to do so some day, and hence the need for caution in the matter.

Secondly, we have the hostile attitude adopted by so many modern theologians. We ourselves think that this attitude is a mistaken one, and cherish the hope that a re-consideration of the matter may lead them to take a wider view, as has happened in the case of the evolution of species in general. But so long as theological opinion remains what it is, a Catholic would do well to hesitate before adopting definitely a view to which so many authors are opposed.

Accordingly we think it on the whole preferable for a Catholic to suspend his judgment on the matter at the present moment, or at least not to give any unqualified assent to the evolutionary hypothesis. And so we end on a note of interrogation: "Fecit?"

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